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GRADUATE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND SATISFACTION LEVELS OF GRADUATES IN TWO LARGE SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATIONS

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Graduate development programmes and satisfaction levels of graduates in two large South African organisations

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Abstract

Graduate development programmes have increasingly become part of South African businesses in order to acquire and retain the best talent pool. However, there is a great need for research in this area in South Africa. The current research study is a replica of McDermott et al's (2006) Irish study, contrasting organisations that have a graduate development programme in place against those that do not.

The current study was undertaken to assess satisfaction levels of graduate development programmes from a sample of graduates (N=63) from two large South African retail organisations. A survey questionnaire was administered and four interviews were conducted with the graduates.

The findings of the research indicate that graduates, who have been part of a graduate development programme for 13 months or longer, showed dissatisfaction. Many attributed this dissatisfaction to non-recognition for the job, a lack of feedback on their performance, inadequate responsibility with tasks, a lack of prospects for advancement, underdevelopment of competencies, poor salaries, supervisors not understanding their skills requirements for the job and poor job security.

In addition, the following job features were viewed as important contributions that an employer can offer graduates: "stimulating and challenging work", "good opportunities for advancement" and "good salary and benefits".

This research study also provides significant recommendations for organisations wanting to implement, or currently utilising, a graduate development programme.

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1. Introduction

Graduates are hired to provide organisations with a pool of potential managers and to enhance succession possibilities (Garavan, 2007). However, graduates are costly to hire and develop, even though their skills are increasingly demanded by organisations (Baruch, 1999). This source of talent management has led organisations to hire future stars (Garavan, 2007). "Fast track graduates", "high fliers", or "high potential" university graduates are recruited into an accelerated development programme (Viney, 1997), generally named graduate development programmes, graduate recruitment programmes or graduate accelerated programmes. The intention of these programmes rests on the premise of the graduate reaching a senior management position in less time than a non-fast track or non-managerial graduate (Viney, 1997). Such graduate stars symbolise a special category of human resources, which is capable of contributing towards the strategic success of an organisation (MacKenzie-Davey and Arnold, 1994).

Graduate development programmes (GDP) are used to raise an organisation's capital (McDermott et al., 2006), which enables an organisation's growth and constant innovation (McDermott et al., 2006). Blough (1966, pg 5) affirms that "given the changing competitive landscape, twentieth century businesses need young intellectuals today." Many researchers acknowledge that years later the same logic is still required and is viewed as a fundamental source to competitive advantage (Brown, 1998). Hence, there is a need to pay more attention to knowledge work and the people undertaking such work. Generally, graduates are categorised as knowledge workers and hence are differentiated by some organisations by their participation into formalised graduate development programmes.

Despite the significance of this skills strategy to South Africa's national economy and its benefits to an organisation, there has been no research conducted directly in the area of graduate development programmes in South Africa. The current study is a replica of McDermott et al.'s (2006) Irish research which was a comparative study between an

organisation that had a graduate development programme present against another that did not.

However, for the purpose of this study, the sample was drawn from two large South African organisations that have an intensive GDP present. Further, the current study will examine the perceived progress of graduates who are recruited into these graduate development programmes in both organisations and assess their expectations and corresponding satisfaction levels. This study will review the literature on graduate development programmes and job satisfaction. The methodology of the study will then be described, followed by the results, discussion and recommendation chapters.

2. Literature Review

Overview of Graduate Development Programmes

Graduate development programmes (GDP) have gained momentum in South Africa in order for companies to acquire the best talent from academic institutions and expose them to many facets of their business in order to fast track a graduate into a future management position. These programmes place the graduate within a GDP for a twelve or thirty-six month period of intensive on-the-job training. Organisations have numerous rationales for introducing such programmes, including developing graduate competencies, enhancing commitment, achieving high levels of managerial competence and ensuring career progression within the organisation (Garavan, 2003).

According to Coupland (2001), organisations invest significant resources in the development and career management processes for high potential graduates. These programmes were common in large, bureaucratic and stable organisations during the 1960s and 1970s, which typically targeted the brightest new college graduates for accelerated career development (Larsen et al., 1998). This led the new recruits to move through a series of positions and various training experiences as they were promoted to middle management and top executive positions (Cox and Cooper, 1988). However, the 1980s led many organisations to cut costs, create flatter organisational structures and downsize, which led to graduate development programmes constantly being revised in order to meet changing organisational needs (London and Stumpf, 1982). As a result, graduate trainees were not required in large numbers as there were fewer opportunities for promotion (Larsen et al., 1998). In addition, rapid technological changes led to less predictability about future skills requirements (Larsen et al., 1998) and the effectiveness of these programmes became questionable (Clark, 1992; Kovach, 1986; Thompson et al., 1985). As Viney et al. (1997) claims, organisations previously recruited top talent in large numbers in order to meet short-term succession planning goals, and longer term (senior) managerial needs (Herriot, 1992). Therefore, only a few graduates achieved senior management positions. This career management practice demonstrated that it was from

this pool that the top management talent emerged (Viney et al., 1997). Traditional graduate employment focused on the opportunity for continual, onward and upward career progression (Viney et al., 1997). This led to graduates being given privileged access to the requisite training and experiences necessary to fulfil the expectation of senior management positions. However, with the restructuring, downsizing and de-layering that persisted in the 1980s, hierarchical career paths became blurred, and, in a number of cases, no longer exist (Nicholson and West, 1988).

Despite the academic debate around the organisational and economic dynamics that suggest the demise of high-flyer programmes, career development programmes still constitute the backbone of career management in many large organisations (Larsen et al., 1998). Larsen et al. (1998) suggests that graduate development programmes have a practical and theoretical significance. Firstly, their persistence, despite dramatic organisational changes, raises significant questions relating to the choice of career development strategies. Secondly, these programmes represent an interesting example of an organisationally moulded career system, depicting, in many cases, explicit objectives with regards to screening talent, developing managerial competence and the emergence of a stock of high potential managers for future jobs. Lastly, organisational changes common to organisations signify that alternative career development concepts require research and practical experiments. This can lead to career development initiatives being effective, efficient and beneficial to the organisation and its employees.

Viney et al. (1997) states that the traditional graduate employment deal has been replaced by a "new deal", which is different, considering that organisational restructuring has resulted in the stripping away of managerial levels, and blurring the traditional routes to the top of the ladder. Therefore, the new graduate deal has no vertical progression, with less guarantee that the graduate will be managed through the levels in order to arrive at a senior position at some point in the future (Viney et al., 1997). However, fast track graduates traditionally enter employment with high expectations, particularly with regards to their rate of career progression (Arnold and MacKenzie-Davey, 1992).

This has been reinforced by company promises to provide future opportunities which depict traditional, bureaucratic notions of onward and upward progression (Williams, 1984).

In the traditional programme, graduates would enter a fast track management programme which would last for two years. During this time, graduates would be allowed to orient themselves to the world of business, develop basic skills and move around the organisation to try out different roles (Viney et al., 1997). Further, within the first few years, a graduate would not be expected to make a significant contribution to the business, but rather to spend time being trained and developed. It would only be much later that the organisation would expect the graduates to develop an understanding of the business and identify an area of interest in which they feel they could make a significant contribution (Viney et al., 1997). With senior management monitoring their careers in the following years and extensive training being offered, generally, a managerial position could be achieved within five to ten years, depending on the nature of the organisation's business (Viney et al., 1997).

However, the new employment deal reflects three significant changes to the employer-employee relationship (Viney et al., 1997). Firstly, organisations are no longer willing to allow for extended induction periods, as there has to be a contribution from the graduate from the first day of work. Secondly, organisations are more likely to talk about opportunities to develop core skills, increase marketability or develop employability, rather than a fast track career. Thirdly, progression is linked to performance against business objectives, leading to greater equality in the treatment of all employees rather than privileged access to training and development opportunities. The consequence of this new emerging employment of graduates requires substantial revision of their needs in order to prevent personal disappointment in their early careers (Herriot et al., 1993). Yet, organisations who pursue to retain, and grow from within the pool of high functioning staff who are capable of reaching senior management positions, need to take cognizance of the continuous matching of the organisations' and individuals' needs (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995).

Therefore, this poses important questions for the organisation:

1. How to attract the best graduates?
2. How to train and develop them to maximize their contribution to the goals of the business?
3. How to retain them?

Characteristics of graduate development programmes

Graduate development programmes can de defined as a systematic method to socialize, develop and screen a group of employees who have been identified as having potential for quick promotion to top management positions (Cox and Cooper, 1988), and the aim can also be to develop senior specialists (Osterman, 1996). The underlying premise is to develop a stock of highly competent and committed employees capable and willing to assume future managerial jobs and other key positions within the organisation (Miller, 1984). An important component of the graduate development programme is the assignment of graduates to tasks or jobs that are designed to enhance managerial competence (Larsen et al., 1998). Systematic job rotation is part of the career development programme. This allows the graduates to gain competence in various areas of the business in an allocated period of time. Further, graduates are enrolled into special training programmes and mentoring systems, and they may be exposed to specially designed performance appraisal systems such as 360-degree (multisource) performance ratings (Moulton and Fickel, 1993). Structured activities are included in the graduate programme, and it resembles a formal career ladder system (Gutteridge, 1986). Larsen et al. (1998) state that there is no substantive difference between fast track programmes and other developmental programmes for employees, but the intensity and formality of the training activities, selectivity pertaining to who is permitted to enrol, and the elitist perspective on the development process, make graduate development programmes distinct.

From a graduate perspective, the graduate programme, as stated by Garavan (2003), is treated with "certain impermanence" as it is used as a "testing ground" or "one step in the overall career path". According to Pearson (2001), employers seek graduates who are primed for work, have the ability to communicate, share their skills and appreciate their place in a wider organisation and its business. Graduates, on the other hand, seek jobs that develop their competence, confer status with commensurate pay and put them on track towards further career development.

McDermott et al. (2006) reflects some interesting findings that the current study hopes to evaluate within the South African context. Firstly, on graduate development programmes, graduates appear to be less satisfied than their counterparts in organisations with no such programme. Secondly, organisations with graduate development programmes expect to retain the graduate in the long-term. Graduates, however, view the graduate development programme as a quick way to obtain career advancement within an organisation and see this as a stepping stone to move onto more favourable opportunities (Kandola et al., 2006). This can have a detrimental effect on the long-term career prospects of the graduate (McDermott et al., 2006). Graduates often experience significant frustration with these programmes (Kovach,1989) as too much emphasis is placed on training activities and on developing technical competences at the expense of a wider understanding of the organisation's strategies, culture and values (Doherty,1996). Hence, the needs of the graduates are not taken into consideration (Schein, 1964), as they are given too much responsibility too soon and experience a lack of insight into their own skill levels to do a practical job (Hermanson et al., 2002).

However, Garavan (2003) asserts that graduate development programmes do have a positive side, as these programmes enable graduates to quickly develop insights into the world of work and their career prospects (Edwards, 1991), facilitate the development of core managerial competencies (Doherty, 1996), enhance self confidence, job knowledge and managerial skills (Jones, 1986) and help graduates integrate into the work environment, develop maturity and facilitate a strong performance contribution to the organisation (Doherty and Horsted, 1995).

Arnold et al. (2002) highlights that career development is given more attention in small organisations, with less than 250 employees, as compared to larger organisations where career development is often experienced as restricted and/or unclear (Arnold and Davey, 1999). There are no clear guidelines given to graduates about the graduate development programme (McDermott et al., 2006). In addition, there is a presence of ineffective communication between graduates and the graduate development team and at times these graduate programmes are not mirrored as an overall corporate strategy, which often has unclear guidelines for management (McDermott et al., 2006). The connection between development and retention is stronger than ever and graduates turn to the organisation to provide them with growth and learning opportunities (Garger, 1999). Further, high performers often perceive development as a benefit they are entitled to.

This study is conducted within a South African context where the unemployment rate is high (Daniels, 2007). Skills shortages in various sectors are recognised as a major problem (Daniels, 2007) and the government has initiated policies like the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) and the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) in order to combat the shortage of skills and unemployment problem.

Overview of the GDP in the two South African organisations

This section will provide a description of the graduate development programme in each organisation. The organisations will be referred to as Organisation 1 and Organisation 2. Organisation 1 offers an eighteen month long structured formal graduate training programme, which comprises of four months of in-store training, where the graduates of the organisation experience the core business of the organisation. This allows them to gain first-hand knowledge on the retail industry and interact with customers. For the remaining fourteen months the graduate is given a position in the organisation in which he or she must function effectively with on-the-job training. However, there are a number of training courses that are conducted both internally and externally during this time. On completion of the eighteen month training period, the graduate has to remain

within the organisation for a further twenty-four months and function in a position that has been identified by the organisation. The organisation seeks graduates in the areas of retail buying, merchandise planning, marketing, auditing, human resources or fashion designing. The intake number of graduates varies each year, based on the requirements of the business. The graduate development programme has delivered approximately forty-five graduates into the business over the past three years.

Organisation 2 has a three year intensive graduate development programme, which exposes the graduate to various facets of the business. The core skills that are required by the business are graduates with qualifications in retail, auditing, human resources, supply chain, and management. There is an induction process of two months, allowing the graduate to become familiar with the structure of the organisation. An emphasis is placed on on-the-job training, which is specific to an area of specialisation. For example, a Human Resource graduate will be placed in a mainstream two month induction process and thereafter receive on-the-job training specifically within recruitment and selection, training and development, or performance management. The organisation has a highly specialized Human Resources division that conducts all training programmes for the GDP. The organisation has an intake of approximately 10-20 graduates per year, but this varies based on the core needs of the business.

The graduate programmes of these organisations are similar with regards to being very structured and specific in their training. Furthermore, in both organisations the graduate has to fulfil the obligation of remaining within the organisation for a specific time, as set out in the contract. Both organisations had high turnover rates of graduates. However, differences were noted, for example, Organisation 1 had previous graduates assisting new graduates, like a buddy system. However, the main difference was the total intake of graduates per annum, as Organisation 1 took more graduates than Organisation 2, which was attributed to the needs of the business.

Theoretical Framework

This research is guided by Steer's Theory of Organisational Commitment. The objective of a graduate development programme lies in challenging the individual orientation of new graduates, to develop in them a spirit of co-operation and company loyalty, to instil in them the ethos of the company and to sensitise them to the duties and responsibilities expected of them when they become managers in the future (Okazaki-Ward, 1993). According, to McDermott et al. (2006), these dimensions translate into organisational commitment. However, Capelli (2001) argues that the older pattern of loyalties to large firms, which provide elaborate developmental programmes, will not lead to a long-term commitment by graduates. He suggests that various methods of retention, tailored to groups of employees, ranging from forms of compensation to flexibility and career opportunities, can influence graduates to either remain with, or leave an organisation (Capelli, 2001).

Organisational commitment is defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation (Steers, 1974). This refers to:

  (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values (Putti et al., 1990),
  (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation (Putti et al., 1990), and;
  (c) a strong desire to maintain membership of the organisation (Putti et al., 1990).

Steers (1977) developed a model which focused on the relationships between the characteristics of the individual, job characteristics and work environment characteristics with organisational commitment. The more a person identifies psychologically with the job, the higher the job satisfaction appears to be and inextricably the higher the organisational commitment will be (Steers, 1977). Rosseau (2001) indicated that a psychological relationship exists between the employer and employee, and that the individual's belief is that the agreement is mutual. The "building blocks" of the psychological contract include promise and mutuality (Rosseau, 2001). Dessler (2001)

suggests that commitment is not just based on the goals and values of the organisation but also on a commitment to stay in the organisation. Research conducted in the area of organisational commitment indicates a strong relationship between lack of organisational commitment and turnover (Jaros et al., 1991), as well as links between high levels of organisational commitment and motivation and job satisfaction (Mathieu and Zajaz, 1990). Further, it has been proven that organisational commitment reduces turnover rates and absenteeism (May et al., 2002).

Empirical research

Graduate development programmes

Unfortunately, insufficient research has been conducted in the area of graduate development programmes in South Africa. The South African Graduate Recruitment Association (SAGRA) conducts a number of surveys within organisations that have a graduate development programme. However, due to ethical issues and loyalty to their clients, this study was unable to include any of their data. Despite the lack of research in South Africa, a number of studies have been conducted in various developed first world countries.

Garavan (2007) examined assessment centre performance to predict subjective person-organisation (P-O) fit: a longitudinal study of graduates. The research aimed to contribute to the dimension of P-O fit by examining the potential of assessment centre performance to predict graduate P-O fit over time (Garavan, 2007). The study utilised a panel design and surveyed graduates at three points over a six year period. The underlying premise of the study was based on the notion that organisations expect high potential graduates to achieve superior performances and to demonstrate flexibility, loyalty and commitment to the organisation (Connor et al., 1990). The organisation, in turn, expects graduates to integrate quickly into the organisation's culture and structure (Fournier, 1998). Azjen (2001) suggests that a graduate's beliefs about the organisation will manifest in either positive or negative attitudes towards the organisation and will be influenced by

subjective criteria. Where high potential graduates perceive that there is a mismatch between their personal characteristics and those of the organisation, they are likely to engage in job search activities (Garavan, 2007). It is well established that the subjective perceptions of the P-O fit will influence whether a graduate stays in the organisation or not (Judge and Cable, 1997). Participants were drawn from four Irish organisations, employing five hundred and more employees (Garavan, 2007). The study had a response rate of 83%, where the average age of the participants was 23.8 years. The majority of the sample was male (n=57%). A total of 57% of graduates had no prior work experience on joining the graduate development programme (Garavan, 2007). The findings of the study indicated that assessment centre performance had predictive value over a six year period. Further, the assessment centre had a long-term value as a selection tool in the context of predicting P-O fit. The researcher asserted that further research should be conducted on the impact of subjective P-O fit on work adjustment and other outcomes, such as performance.

Garavan and Morley (1997) explored the expectations of high potential graduates and the factors that they perceive as influencing these expectations. They examined the socialisation processes that high potential graduates are exposed to once they join the organisation, and evaluated the adjustment and change processes which graduates experience and the outcomes of the graduate socialisation process. The study had a 75 % response rate, where graduates were identified from three organisations, a public utility company, an electronics company and a food processing company. The mean age of the respondents was 24 and 33% were female. The respondents had been with their respective organisations for, on average, 24 months and in their present position for an average of 14 months (Garavan and Morley, 1997). The study reflected some interesting findings. Firstly, the graduates indicated that the organisation's recruitment processes and publicity about the organisation were the most significant driving forces for their initial psychological contract. Secondly, many high potential graduates rated high pay as the most important expectation they had when joining the organisation (Garavan and Morley, 1997). In addition, the graduates also gave emphasis to the characteristics of the job and the organisation's career system. Thirdly, a significant number of the graduates received

formal orientation training and job coaching on joining the organisation (Garavan and Morley, 1997). Fourthly, the graduates experienced a wide range of processes during their training, the most significant of which were role ambiguity, the acquisition of new skills and clarification of the role of a graduate trainee. Lastly, the graduate socialisation outcomes were significantly influenced by specific graduate expectations, encounter, change and acquisition process (Garavan and Morley, 1997). In addition, their research provided implications for organisations in creating high potential graduate training programmes. These are:

(1) Organisations must consider the content of their publicity as it relates to graduate recruitment and the nature of their recruitment and selection processes.

(2) Organisations should not allow the creation of false expectations or ambiguity.

(3) Organisations need to have some knowledge of the expectations of graduates before the selection process. This can involve novel selection methods to elicit the graduate's expectations and see how they match up with what the organisation can provide.

(4) Organisations need to design systematic encounter processes which facilitate the examination of role ambiguity, conflict, stress and management development skills (Garavan and Morley, 1997). Job mentoring, coaching and orientation training are seen as effective methods to be utilized.

(5) Specific interventions can be utilised in producing positive socialisation outcomes. These are the formation of positive work relationships, participation in formal in-house graduate training and development opportunities, which clarify the graduate's role within the organisation, through career development and counselling.

The study by McDermott et al. (2006), which is the basis of the current study, focused on the perceived progress of graduates who have been recruited by organisations and their expectations and corresponding satisfaction levels assessed (McDermott et al. 2006). The objective of their study was to compare the opinions of graduates from an organisation that offers a graduate development programme (GDP) to graduates from an organisation that does not offer such a programme. Interviews were conducted with human resource

managers and 126 questionnaires were distributed to graduates (McDermott et al., 2006). With a response rate of 71%, the following findings emerged:

1. Despite GDPs having merit, they do not result in satisfied graduates.
2. Organisations that have a programme, have graduates who are less satisfied than those organisations with no such programme in place.

The results of their study indicated that graduates in organisations without a GDP experienced higher mean satisfaction levels in relation to thirteen job features. These features are: challenging work, interesting work, recognition for contribution, responsibility awarded, opportunities for advancement, development and training, relationship with management, salary and benefits, job security and role living up to expectations. Graduates on a graduate development programme experienced higher satisfaction levels for two of the thirteen factors: relationship with peers and working conditions (McDermott et al., 2006).

The study provided valuable recommendations, including the importance of monitoring graduate expectations and satisfaction levels, introducing short-term development plans, re-evaluating the terms of reference of the GDP and providing specific training for supervisors and or managers of graduates (McDermott et al., 2006). Moreover, to ensure that graduate development programmes play a positive part in organisational commitment of the graduate, they must be carefully developed and managed (McDermott et al., 2006).

Therefore, the current study evaluates satisfaction levels of graduates on a graduate development programme within the South African context. Graduate development programmes are a relatively new phenomenon in South Africa, where some organisations are investing heavily in the concept, whilst others are viewing it as a strategic move with regards to enhancing competitiveness. The Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) and the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) have put pressure on organisations to introduce programmes, like GDPs, to bridge the unemployment rate in South Africa. Furthermore, in South Africa, affirmative action policies and employment equity impact on recruitment and selection of graduates as it is

a requirement that the demographic intake on graduate development programmes must be representative of the general population.

Job satisfaction can be viewed as a significant factor for various aspects of work performance. In an investigation into the levels of job satisfaction of graduates in a graduate development programme, this study makes a valuable scientific contribution. Tett and Meyer (1993) describe job satisfaction as a person's affective attachment to his/her job, either in its entirety (global satisfaction) or with regard to particular aspects, defined as facet job satisfaction. Further, job satisfaction has been conceptualized and operationalised as both a global and multidimensional construct (Rothmann, 2008). On the global level, job satisfaction is considered as an employee's overall satisfaction with his or her job (Rothmann, 2008). On a multidimensional level, job satisfaction relates to the concerns of satisfaction with pay, supervision, company policy and the nature of work (Rothmann, 2008). In addition, job satisfaction consists of an extrinsic and intrinsic component. On an intrinsic level, job satisfaction is how people feel about the nature of the job tasks themselves, whilst extrinsic job satisfaction is how people feel about aspects of the work situation that are external to the job tasks (Hirschfield, 2000).

There have been a number of studies conducted in South African in the area of job satisfaction, but none focusing on graduates. However, some of this literature will now be reviewed. Rothmann (2008) conducted a study on the relationship between job satisfaction, occupational stress, burnout and work engagement as dimensions of work related wellbeing in a sample of members of the police force in South Africa. He used a survey design on a stratified random sample of 677 members from the North-West Province of South Africa. The Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire, Police Stress Inventory, Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale were used as the investigating instruments. The results of his study provided support for a four factorial model of work related wellbeing, consisting of the following dimensions: job satisfaction (indicating pleasure vs. displeasure), occupational stress (indicating anxiety vs. comfort), burnout (indicating fatigue vs. vigour) and engagement (indicating enthusiasm vs. depression). It was recommended by the researcher that

studies regarding the causal relationships between job satisfaction, occupational stress, burnout and work engagement should be conducted in other contexts. Further, it was suggested that longitudinal studies are deemed necessary to study these relationships (Rothmann, 2008).

Pienaar et al.'s (2007) study focused on investigating turnover intentions by role overload, job satisfaction and social support moderation, which was conducted on a random sample of 206 participants from a South African mining company. The study indicated that social support from colleagues served to influence the relation of employees' experiences of role overload to their turnover intentions. Further, organisations should safeguard against overloading their employees by assigning tasks to them which are beyond their level of knowledge, skill or ability (Pienaar et al., 2007). In addition, job satisfaction seemed to be the most robust predictor of turnover intention (Pienaar et al., 2007). The researchers recommended that research should be conducted on a more representative sample.

Hoole and Vermeulen (2003) conducted a study on job satisfaction among South African aircraft pilots. The study had a response rate of 8.60% (n=704). The results indicated that pilots involved in the area of passenger transportation and working for national airlines experience a higher level of job satisfaction than those in general and military aviation (Hoole and Vermeulen, 2003). Furthermore, large carriers offer a more "protected" environment for pilots, resulting in higher job satisfaction despite working long and irregular shifts (Hoole and Vermeulen, 2003). However, the study had a number of limitations; firstly the sample was dominated by white, male pilots, which reflected the status of the industry (Hoole and Vermeulen, 2003). Secondly, despite the results indicating that South African pilots are satisfied with their jobs, implying that job satisfaction must have a positive influence on their performance, no real measures of performance were included in the study (Hoole and Vermeulen, 2003).

Rationale

The current study investigates graduates' satisfaction levels of graduate development programmes. Literature indicates that despite graduate development programmes being seen as beneficial to the organisation, they can have a detrimental effect on the long-term career prospects of the graduate (McDermott et al., 2006). Graduates often experience significant frustration whilst on these programmes (Kovach, 1989). According to the National Skills Development Strategy of 2005-2010, the skills scarcity in the private and public sector has been documented. Therefore, many organisations have in place internships or graduate development programmes in order for young recent graduates, in various fields of study, to gain work experience. However, there are no South African studies that assess the effectiveness of these programmes. Therefore, the current research serves to fill the gap in this area of investigation.

Research questions

1. Are graduate expectations being met?
2. What are the levels of graduate satisfaction in relation to job features?
3. What are the levels of graduate satisfaction in relation to the presence of a graduate development programme?
4. Is there an influence of graduate satisfaction levels on organisation commitment?
5. Is there an influence of graduate satisfaction levels on graduate retention?
6. What is the significance of graduate career development in a large organisation?

3. Methodology

The current study incorporates similar characteristics of the original study by McDermott et al. (2006). The first author of the original study was contacted and informed about the current study.

Research design

The current study encompassed both a quantitative and qualitative research design, which was non-experimental and cross-sectional in nature. The quantitative methodology was employed and an exploratory survey was conducted. Quantitative research refers to a data collection process whereby "the researcher moves deductively from abstract ideas, to specific data collection techniques, to precise numerical information produced by the techniques" (Neuman, 2006, p.181). Quantitative data is organised through the use of statistical measures and quantitative research reflects on ideas prior to the data gathering period and links ideas and data through measurement procedures (Coolican, 1996; Kumar, 1999; Neuman, 2006). In addition, the research also incorporated qualitative methods, as interviews where conducted with a small number of graduates (n=4). Qualitative research provides "rich description, colourful detail" (Neuman, 2006.p.328). Further, the qualitative researcher interprets data by "providing them meaning, translating them or making them understandable" (Neuman, 2006, p.335). But the meaning provided to the data involves the point of view of the people studied (Neuman, 2006). The researcher "interprets the data by finding out how they define the situation, or what it means for them" (Neuman, 2006, p.335).

Sample

Sampling refers to the calculation or measurement of a part of the total population (Larson and Faber, 2000). The sample was drawn from two large leading retail organisations in South Africa, both of which are listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), which have a graduate development programme. One of the

organisations has its head office located in Durban, whilst the other is based in Johannesburg. Purposive sampling was used, as researchers use their special knowledge or expertise to select subjects (Berg, 1995) in order to identify these candidate organisations (McDermott et al., 2006). In addition, the study was limited to graduates who were employed solely for their graduate qualifications and had been employed by some graduate recruitment campaign. Individuals who became graduates whilst in employment and those who were employed for more than five years were excluded from the sampling frame (McDermott et al., 2006). Questionnaires were handed out to one hundred graduates in both organisations collectively. Of these, only 63 responses were received, thus representing a response rate of 63%.

Research Participants

Below is a table outlining the demographic make-up of the sample of the current study.

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	27	43
Female	36	57
Total	**63**	**100**
Primary degree		
National Diploma	16	25
Degree	39	62
Honours	03	05
B-Tech	05	08
Total	**63**	**100**
Further study		
Yes	05	08
No	58	92
Total	**63**	**100**
No. of employers as a graduate		
One only	52	83
Two or more	11	17
Total	**63**	**100**
Length of employment in current position		
0-12 months	30	48
13-26 months	27	43
27-40 months	04	07
41-53 months	01	01
54-60 months	01	01
Total	**63**	**100**
Currently on a GDP		
Yes	52	83
No	11	17
Total	**63**	**100**

Procedure

The researcher contacted the Human Resources division of both organisations where a letter was emailed to the graduate recruitment division, outlining the aims and objectives of the current research. Once permission had been granted, each organisation agreed to have a Human Resource Practitioner to serve as a "gatekeeper" with the following responsibilities:

(i)   The Human Resources Practitioner distributed the questionnaires to graduates who were recruited into the organisation as graduates, and,

(ii)   The Human Resources Practitioner only distributed the questionnaires to graduates who had joined the organisation within the past five years.

The questionnaires were handed to each graduate together with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the research. In addition, confidentiality and anonymity was outlined together with the notion that participation was voluntary. A drop-off box, for questionnaires completed by participants, was placed outside the foyer of the Human Resource office. The contact number and email address of the researcher was provided in case participants had any queries relating to the research process. Once the researcher received the completed questionnaires, an analysis of the responses was conducted. This provided the basis for the interview questions in order to get clarity on certain aspects of the responses by the graduates. An interview date was scheduled with randomly selected graduates (n=4) who had completed the questionnaire element of the research from Organisation 1 only.

Measuring Instrument

Exploratory interviews helped to guide the design of the research instrument (McDermott et al., 2006). Pilot testing had occurred during the questionnaire development process (McDermott et al., 2006). Piloting requires respondents to complete the questionnaire

and, in the process, the researcher takes note of any ambiguities and difficulties that are encountered (Foster and Parker, 1995). Based on the feedback obtained from piloting, minor grammatical and aesthetic adjustments can be made to the questionnaire (Foster and Parker, 1995).

The questionnaire comprised of three phases.

The first phase focused on a number of introductory questions pertaining to demographic details of the graduate, which varied from:

- Gender,
- Age,
- Type of degree obtained,
- College attended,
- Further studies,
- Studies were financially supported by the employer,
- Number of employers the participant had as a graduate,
- Length of employment with current employer,
- Current job title.

The second phase gave attention to the graduate's satisfaction and dissatisfaction in relation to work related factors (McDermott et al., 2006). A five point Likert scale was used, where 1=dissatisfied and 5=satisfied. The Likert scale refers to a scale through which "people express attitudes or other responses in terms of ordinal-level categories (e.g., agree, disagree) that are ranked along a continuum" (Neuman, 2006, p. 207). The Likert scale has a major advantage as it is simple, easy and quick to administer (Neuman, 2006). In addition, the Likert scale provides an accurate quantitative measure of a particular attitude and a person's opinion (Neuman, 2006).

The job features of the dissatisfaction/satisfaction scale included:

- Challenge and stimulation of the job,
- Feedback on performance,
- Responsibility awarded,
- Opportunity for advancement,

- Development and training,

- Working conditions,

- Salary and benefits,

- Relationship with peers,

- Job security,

- Role expectations,

- Relationship with management.

The third and final phase of the questionnaire required graduates to rank the top three criteria they felt were important for an employer to offer them and to assess the graduate development programme in their organisation (McDermott et al.,2006).

Statistical analysis

The present research used several statistical techniques in order to interpret the raw data. This was carried out with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program which analysed the information gained from the questionnaires. SPSS is a program comprising of a set of instructions for doing statistical analyses. *Descriptive statistics* determined the mean scores of the satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels (phase two of the questionnaire). Descriptive statistics describe the variable so that meaningful information can be extracted from it (Neuman, 2006).

Comparison of rankings on "What graduates perceive as important" (phase three of the questionnaire) refers to ordinal data resulting from the categories of classification being based on a rank ordering (Black, 1999).

A *one sample t-test* was utilised for the examination of the difference of the mean from a sample (Howell, 1992). Four criteria must be met in order for any t-test to be performed:

(1) the subjects in the group or groups must be randomly and independently sampled,

(2) groups must be independent,

(3) the population variances must be homogenous, and

(4) the population sampling must be normally distributed.

The present study did fulfil these requirements. An independent sample t-test was conducted to elucidate differences in satisfaction levels amongst graduates.

Non statistical analysis

Additional comments of the graduate development programme meeting the needs or expectations of the graduate were explored by means of open-ended questions on the questionnaire and part of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted. This provided the researcher with valuable information on the strengths or weakness of the GDP within Organisation 1.

The qualitative data used content analysis, which is a "technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics within text" (Hardy and Bryman, 2004). One of the most common approaches to content analysis is *thematic analysis*, where a coding scheme, based on categories, is designed to capture the dominant themes within the text (Hardy and Bryman, 2004).

4. Results

The results obtained from the analysis of the data are presented in this chapter.

Table 2: *Descriptive statistics of Gender for the Biographical Questionnaire*

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	27	42.9	42.9	42.9
	Female	36	57.1	57.1	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Sixty-three participants from two organisations were sampled. Within this sample 27 (42.9%) were male and 36 (57.1%) were female.

Table 3: *Descriptive statistics of Age for the Biographical Questionnaire*

Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-24 years old	45	71.4	71.4	71.4
	25-29 years old	17	27.0	27.0	98.4
	30 or older	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Of the sixty-three participants, 45 (71.4%) were between the ages of 20-24; 17 (27%) were between the ages of 25-29; and 1 (1.6%) was thirty years of age or older.

Table 4: *Descriptive statistics on Gender and Age for the Biographical Questionnaire*

Gender * Age Crosstabulation

Count

		Age			
		20-24 years old	25-29 years old	30 or older	Total
Gender	Male	21	6	0	27
	Female	24	11	1	36
Total		45	17	1	63

Twenty-four females (N=24), were within the age group of 20-24 years of age as compared to twenty-one males (N=21) who fell within the same category. One female (N=1) was thirty years or older.

Table 5: *Reliability of the construction for the satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.850	13

Table 6: *Item statistics for the satisafction/dissatisfaction scale*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q5	3.37	1.097	63
Q6	2.62	.941	63
Q7	2.75	1.062	63
Q8	3.65	.986	63
Q9	2.86	1.060	63
Q10	2.87	1.070	63
Q11	2.78	.958	63
Q12	3.98	.871	63
Q13	1.87	.751	63
Q14	2.49	1.014	63
Q15	4.16	.919	63
Q16	3.24	1.160	63
Q17	3.06	1.134	63

Table 7: *Total item statistics for satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale*

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q5	36.33	52.194	.503	.840
Q6	37.08	53.139	.536	.838
Q7	36.95	52.272	.519	.839
Q8	36.05	51.691	.614	.833
Q9	36.84	51.458	.578	.835
Q10	36.83	53.759	.412	.846
Q11	36.92	53.784	.475	.842
Q12	35.71	55.046	.431	.844
Q13	37.83	55.759	.450	.844
Q14	37.21	51.360	.618	.832
Q15	35.54	54.865	.416	.845
Q16	36.46	50.575	.573	.835
Q17	36.63	52.429	.466	.843

Table 8: *Scale statistics of satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale*

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
39.70	61.375	7.834	13

A reliability analysis was conducted for the satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale. The desired level for Cronbach's Alpha is between 0.7 and 0.8. The Cronbach's Alpha for the 13 items was 0.850, which was very good. It can therefore be assumed that the data from the scale is reliable.

Table 9: *Frequency levels of Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction*

Item	Total dissatisfaction	Dissatisfaction	Neutral	Satisfied	Total satisfaction
Q5	4.8	23.8	11.1	50.8	9.5
Q6	4.8	**50.8**	27.0	12.7	4.8
Q7	9.5	**41.3**	15.9	31.7	1.6
Q8	.0	20.6	9.5	54.0	15.9
Q9	3.2	**46.0**	20.6	22.2	7.9
Q10	6.3	**39.7**	19.0	30.2	4.8
Q11	.0	**54.0**	19.0	22.2	4.8
Q12	1.6	6.3	9.5	57.1	25.4
Q13	30.2	**55.6**	12.7	.0	1.6
Q14	7.9	**58.7**	15.9	11.1	6.3
Q15	1.6	4.8	11.1	41.3	41.3
Q16	7.9	23.8	14.3	44.4	9.5
Q17	4.8	**38.1**	11.1	38.1	7.9

*N=63
*Items in bold indicate high significant percentages

The table above indicates the percentage of responses that ranged from total dissatisfaction to total satisfaction. Higher dissatisfaction levels were experienced in relation to eight of the thirteen job features of the scale. The following summary includes high significant percentages for dissatisfaction levels amongst graduates. The results indicate that 50.8 % of the sample was dissatisfied with item 6, **recognition for the job**. Further, 41.3% stated that they were dissatisfied with **feedback on their performance** (item 7)**.** 46% of the sample was dissatisfied with item 9, **adequate responsibility** to undertake the job. A further 39.7% indicated that they were dissatisfied with the **prospects for advancement** (item 10) in their organisation. In addition, 54.0% of the sample stated that their dissatisfaction was due to their **development of competencies** (item 11)**.** Moreover, 55.6% suggested that they were dissatisfied with item 13, **salary** and 58.7% were dissatisfied with their **supervisor understanding their job skills** (item 14). A further, 38.1% were dissatisfied with the organisation in offering **job security** (item 17)**.**

Table 10: *Descriptive statistics for the Dissatisfaction/Satisfaction scale*

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
satisfaction_Total	63	21.00	65.00	39.6984	7.83424
Q5	63	1	5	3.37	1.097
Q6	63	1	5	2.62	.941
Q7	63	1	5	2.75	1.062
Q8	63	2	5	3.65	.986
Q9	63	1	5	2.86	1.060
Q10	63	1	5	2.87	1.070
Q11	63	2	5	2.78	.958
Q12	63	1	5	3.98	.871
Q13	63	1	5	1.87	.751
Q14	63	1	5	2.49	1.014
Q15	63	1	5	4.16	.919
Q16	63	1	5	3.24	1.160
Q17	63	1	5	3.06	1.134
Valid N (listwise)	63				

From Table 10, it is evident that graduates were satisfied with the following dimensions: **adequately challenged** (item 5); **finding their work interesting** (item 8)**; their work conditions** (item 12); **relationship with their co-workers** (item 15) **and the role living up to their expectations** (item 16)**.**

One of the objectives of the study was to determine whether there were any significant differences in satisfaction levels between the graduates in a graduate development programme from the two organisations. A t-test was used for this analysis.

Table 11: *Group statistics for graduates from the two organisations*

Group Statistics

	Organisation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
satisfaction_Total	Organisation 1	32	40.9063	10.13572	1.79176
	Organisation 2	31	38.4516	4.18600	.75183

Table 12: *Independent Sample T-test for satisfaction/dissatisfaction amongst graduates from the two organisations*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		t-test for Equality of Means							
										95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
satisfaction_Total	Equal variances assumed	10.475	.002	1.249	61	.216	2.45464	1.96544	-1.47550	6.38478
	Equal variances not assumed			1.263	41.546	.214	2.45464	1.94310	-1.46797	6.37725

An independent samples t-test was performed to examine the mean differences between the two organisations and their reported scores on the satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale. The Levene's test for equality of variance was significant F (61) =10.475, p=0.002.) Therefore we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that equality of variance has been violated. Unequal variances are assumed. There was no significant difference between the two organisations and the scores on the satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale (d.f. =41.546, t=1.263, p=0.214).

Table 13: *Group statistics for Length of current employment on GDP and satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels*

	C/Emp	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
satisfaction_Total	>= 13	33	41.6667	8.92212	1.55314
	< 13	30	37.5333	5.84119	1.06645

Table 14: *One Independent Sample T-test on Current Length of Employment on a GDP and satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
satisfaction_Total	Equal variances assumed	1.122	.294	2.152	61	.035	4.13333	1.92085		.29236	7.97431
	Equal variances not assumed			2.194	55.640	.032	4.13333	1.88403		.35863	7.90804

One further independent samples t-test was run to compare the current length of employment on a graduate development programme and the scores on the satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale. The Levene's test for equality of variance was not significant F (61) =1.122, p=0.294). Therefore, equal variances can be assumed. The t-test compared employees who had been employed at the organisation for 13 months or less, and employees employed for longer than 13 months and their scores on the satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale. There were significant differences between employees who had been employed at the organisation for 13 months or less and employees who had been employed for longer than 13 months when comparing their satisfaction/dissatisfaction scores. (t=2.152, d.f. 61 p=0.035). When comparing the mean scores it can be shown that employees who had been employed at the organisation for 13 months or less were more satisfied (M=41.67) than employees who had been employed for longer than 13 months (M= 37.53).

What graduates perceive as important from an employer

Participants were further asked to rank three items, in descending order of preference, on what they perceived as most important for an employer to offer. Table 10 illustrates the responses from graduates with regards to the items.

Table 15: *Comparison of rankings*

Job Feature	Preference one (Most Important)	Preference two (More Important)	Preference three (Important)
A sense of achievement	03	02	05
Recognition for contribution	05	06	06
Stimulating and challenging work	**21**	10	07
Being given responsibility	02	03	03
Good opportunities for advancement	07	**23**	07
Development & training	04	01	04
Good match of my competencies (qualified skill) to job role	05	01	0
Good relationship with management	0	0	01
Good working conditions	0	02	01
Salary & Benefits	08	08	**25**
Good relationship with employees/peers	02	02	0
Job security	06	05	04

Levels of graduate satisfaction in relation to the presence of a GDP

Graduates were asked to comment on the utilisation of the graduate development programme in their organisation. Further questions were asked to confirm if they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the current programme. The majority of the sample (n=52) indicated that they were currently on a graduate development programme. However, 17% (n=11) stated that they had completed a graduate development programme within their organisation within the past five years. From the number of graduates who had completed a graduate development programme, 45% indicated (n=5) that they were not satisfied with the programme after completion. A further, 18% (n=2) were both satisfied

and dissatisfied with certain aspects of the graduate development programme on completion. Only 27% (n=3) were satisfied with the programme. In addition, only 9% (0.1) had no clear decision. Moreover, 52 % of the participants currently on a graduate development programme were not satisfied.

In order to clarify and provide a detailed account of the quantitative data collected, semi-structured interviews were conducted. A total number of 4 (N=4) graduates were voluntarily selected from Organisation 1 for this process. The interviews were approximately twenty minutes for each graduate. The issue of anonymity and confidentiality were firstly discussed with each interviewee. Interviewees are referred to as A, B, C and D in the interview report for confidentiality purposes. The findings from the interviews are arranged in the following themes:

1. Structure of the graduate development programme
2. Career opportunities
3. Mentor/Coach
4. Social interaction
5. Misconception about graduates

These themes will be explored in the discussion chapter of the study.

5. Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to assess graduates' satisfaction levels with the graduate development programmes.

Overall, the results indicate that graduates who were on a graduate development programme were not satisfied (52% of the sample). They highlighted that the organisation did not consider their needs and focused primarily on the organisation's goals with regards to placement, structure and career opportunities. Graduates were expected to fit in. McDermott et al. (2006) indicated that organisations lack understanding of graduate's expectations, apart from the application, psychometric test and the interview. Expectations which are not met are a common cause of dissatisfaction and lack of commitment (Sturges and Guest, 1999).   Further, the expectations of graduates are often different to those of employers as a result of their education process and social experiences (Garavan and Morley, 1997). Many graduates of the current study viewed the training as too long and irrelevant, autonomy of work as low and salary as poor. The most important job features that graduates felt that an employer could offer them were a stimulating and challenging work environment. In addition, good opportunities for advancement and higher salaries and benefits were viewed as beneficial.

Duration and value of the programme:

Many graduates felt that the graduate development programme was under-developing them in certain areas as it was too rigid. Many graduates suggested that they were given administrative work that did not allow them to express their creativity and expand on their social skills. Some were of the view that the graduate development programme did not provide learning relevant to the job and that the programme was not challenging. In addition, a number of graduates were unsure of their career path and whether their career needs would be taken into consideration. Arnold and Mackenzie Davey (1999) suggest that career development is often restricted and/or unclear in larger organisations. This can be attributed to the uncertainty linked to the organisational needs to chart out prospective career paths and steer people through precise developmental sequences (Mirvis and Hall, 1996). Further, many graduates stated that the initial stages of the graduate development

programme were not explained clearly to them. This is attributed to larger organisations not having the time or proper structures to oversee the graduate development programme (Larsen et al., 1998). Miscommunication is evident between the graduate development team and the graduates (McDermott et al., 2006) and unfamiliarity by management for the graduate development programmes operation at different levels (McDermott et al., 2006). In addition, the Human Resource Department was solely responsible for the GDP, in terms of conveying information and, in some instances, conducting performance assessments. Hence, graduates did not have mentors or supervisors to manage and provide feedback on their performance. Interestingly, graduates of this study that had been employed for 13 months or longer were dissatisfied with the feedback on their performance. Larsen et al. (1998) concurs that this is due to human resource managers and representatives of the top management team experiencing trouble getting sufficient valid and detailed feedback about the performance of each individual participant on the graduate development, as the superior of the graduate finds the task onerous and may pass the problem onto another supervisor next in line. Connor et al. (1990) reported that graduates perceive a lack of feedback and low levels of supervision as significant disappointments. The benefits of the graduate development programme by those graduates that were satisfied (N=20) were attributed to: being adequately challenged, finding their work interesting, their work conditions were good, relationships with their co-workers were favourable and their work role satisfied.

The results of the study indicate that those graduates who were employed for 13 months or longer on the graduate development programme also experienced higher levels of dissatisfaction. Job satisfaction declines with an increase in tenure as the job may become boring for the employee (Saul and Hunt, 1975). The dissatisfaction amongst graduates of the study may be attributed to gaps in the recognition for the job, feedback on their performance, adequate responsibility with tasks, prospects for advancement, development of competencies, salary, supervisor understanding their job skills and job security (Refer to Table 9 of the Results chapter). This supports Pearson's (2001, p.151) statement that "graduates want jobs that exercise their abilities, confer status and commensurate pay, and a route for career development as compared to the employer who

seeks graduates primed for work, able to communicate, share their skills and appreciate their place in a wider organisation and its business". Ulucay and Cuthbert's (1992) study indicated that dissatisfied graduates in their current job had the "intention to leave culture" due to the nature of work, poor opportunities for career development, financial benefits, training programme, support given by line managers and feedback on performance. However, Hermanson et al. (2002) provided an alternative view that graduates are dissatisfied because they have unrealistic expectations, for example wanting too much money, receiving responsibility too soon and a lack of insight into their own skill levels to do a practical job.

The respondents of the study ranked the top three features in descending order, for an organisation to offer them: "stimulating and challenging work", "good opportunities for advancement" and "good salary and benefits". Low rankings were given to "relationship with management", "good working conditions" and "relationship with peers". A comparison of these rankings is presented in Table 15 of the Results chapter. These findings are in line with the previous studies conducted by McDermott et al. (2006), Arnold et al. (2002) and Sturges and Guest (1999). In line with these research studies graduates consistently need challenging work to ensure satisfaction (McDermott et al., 2006). Further, in relation to advancement, extrinsic rewards such as promotion and pay lead to job satisfaction (Drummond and Stoddard, 1991). However, Garavan and Morley (1997) identified salary levels, career planning and counselling as the most important initial expectations for graduates when joining an organisation.

From the current study, "stimulating and challenging work" was the most important factor. McDermott et al. (2006) indicate that previous research on graduates' satisfaction levels has consistently concluded that graduates require a challenging work environment in order to ensure satisfaction. Hence, in the current study, this may be a driving factor between graduates being satisfied or not on a graduate development programme. Salary may be viewed as an important factor by graduates, but the findings of the research suggest that graduates are dissatisfied with the reward for their services in their organisations as the starting salary was not perceived as being competitive. Salary may

be a driver of satisfaction levels in South Africa due to the current economic climate and the high unemployment rate, as the majority of the sample (N=51) were currently in their first job.

Exploration of graduate experiences on the GDP

1. *Structure of the GDP:*

All the respondents commented on the structure of the graduate development programme. Respondent B claimed that previously the GDP in Organisation One was for a period of twelve months, but was later extended to eighteen months. The purpose of this was questioned as the previous programme was also viewed as being too lengthy and detailed. In addition, all respondents commented that the Human Resource department of the organisation had their own objective with the GDP as compared to the divisions that they worked in. For example, respondent B indicated that graduates were aware of the miscommunication between the Human Resource department of the group and the divisional departments. It was further stated that one department in the organisation has decided to embark on its own GDP, as many a time graduates were called out of their divisions to attend training for a lengthy period and the stores were not satisfied with this. Respondents indicated that, when raising this issue, follow-ups were poorly responded to by the Human Resources department. Despite the respondents indicating that training was relevant to their job functioning, certain training elements were viewed as irrelevant. For example, graduates had on-the-job store training which was seen as too lengthy. Thereafter, according to respondent C, they returned to their positions in the stores and the content that they had learnt at the training session was never relevant. Respondent B indicated that after four months of stores training, the graduates were placed in their respective departments, which were not ready for them as there were no positions for them to commence work and they were merely 'floating around.'

2. *Career opportunities:*

Respondent A was of the opinion that there was an identifiable career pathway in the division and his aim was to work for at least five years in the organisation, with the view to some type of advancement. This was not viewed negatively, for the participant acknowledged that this was the only opportunity that had presented itself and, with the lack of opportunities for young college graduates, to stay in the organisation was seen as more beneficial economically. However, respondent B indicated that despite being on the GDP, some candidates, who had applied to the organisation, were at the same or a higher level than the graduate, despite both having the same level of experience. This was seen as unfair and rather disheartening regarding the attainment of some career advancement in the organisation. Respondent B and D indicated that they would leave the organisation if no career opportunity presented itself in the future. Moreover, Respondent A expressed the view that there was a bond to the organisation with regards to the contract of employment, as graduates had to remain a further two years within the organisation after the eighteen month period. Respondent D expressed the opinion that there was uncertainty regarding a long-term intention to remain within the organisation. Career opportunities were recognised within the organisation, but the respondent had not seen these materialise with previous graduates, who were part of the graduate development programme. Turnover was acknowledged by the respondents as being rather high, for a number of the previous graduates had left the organisation for better career opportunities. The respondents stated that if the organisation was investing so much into a GDP, they have an obligation to provide opportunities for the graduates, and as respondent D suggested, the organisation should take into consideration their needs. Roberts (2001) indicated that The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) poll in the United Kingdom undertook a survey in the year 2000 of 750 graduates in their first year of employment, which revealed that a motivated workforce focused on career development rather than pay. The report found that 40% stated that they would leave their current job for better career prospects and only 23% would move jobs for financial gain (McDermott et al., 2006). Graduates are no longer looking for long-term careers in one organisation - they have, according to Mayrhofer et al. (2005), post organisational career aspirations.

3. Mentor/ Coach:

All the respondents acknowledged that the buddy system was seen as beneficial in order for graduates to become familiar with the organisation and draw on the experiences of other graduates. The mentors were managers that were assigned to the graduates. However, respondent B had no mentor; hence there was no feedback and direction on his role and this was problematic in getting feedback on the work done. Respondent C expressed difficulty in having a coach that was from a different division. Respondent D indicated that he had no definite mentor; hence various people had to be approached within the organisation for direction. Furthermore, not having someone there guiding and supporting you led to poor feedback and learning had to be initiated independently by the graduate. This left respondent D feeling uncertain on the day to day activities that should be carried out. Interestingly, this respondent highlighted that it was limiting to be mismatched to a certain position, for example, a graduate had been capturing data for some time and disliked it and felt that his/her interpersonal skills were being under utilised. Similar to McDermott et al.'s (2006) finding, the organisations do not give specific tutoring to the supervisors/managers in the management of their graduate employees. Further, clear lines of communication with management on the overall capacity and value of the graduate programme is not discussed (McDermott et al.,2006).

4. Social interaction:

All the respondents acknowledged that it was difficult to constantly see the graduates who were initially taken onto the graduate development programme, as they were all working in different divisions of the organisation. Respondent C indicated that there were no team activities to enhance graduate interaction and performance. Respondent D stated that when opportunities did present themselves, some graduates would meet and discuss their experiences, which helped in coping with difficulties that presented themselves within the organisation. During the encounter stage, graduates need to form attachment relationships with many people in the organisation (Garavan and Morley, 1997). Organisational socialisation can mean the relinquishing of certain attitudes, values and

behaviours, or the acquisition of new skills, self-images, involvements and accomplishments (Feldman, 1980). Failure to adjust leaves the graduate with feelings of discomfort and this, combined with distress symptoms, may cause the graduate to leave (Nelson, 1990).

5. *Misconception about graduates:*

Respondent C suggested that despite the expectation held that graduates were sought after and valued, treatment from store employees differed, as graduates were treated like any other employee. However, respondent D indicated an opposite view and felt that graduates were seen as receiving preferential treatment and this led to many employees withholding information from the graduates that would help them perform well in their job. Respondent A and B suggested that they were treated as normal employees and expressed no real concern in this regard.

Drucker (1959) indicated that graduates fall into the category of knowledge work and are differentiated by organisations that have a formalised graduate development programme. However, Davenport et al. (2002) asserts that organisations resist the idea of segmentation of knowledge workers and that all employees are treated equally. Interestingly, Respondent C's views may be explained by Garger (1999), where high performers often perceive development as a benefit they are entitled to.

It is evident from the current study that both the organisations lack understanding of the expectations of graduates on the graduate development programmes. McDermott et al. (2006) gives emphasis to an important aspect for organisations implementing a GDP, which is that the psychological contract is a dynamic contract and organisations need to check the satisfaction level of graduates on a continual basis. Moreover, if the organisation fails to fulfil graduates expectations of work, which fosters commitment to their employer, this can lead to dissatisfaction and graduates leaving the organisation (Sturges and Guest, 1999). Therefore, it is imperative that organisations measure and

assess employee expectations before they commence a graduate development programme (Sturges and Guest, 1999).

6. Limitations

The current study did not consider the demographic variable of race, which was not part of the questionnaire. This may have added value to the study by generating information on how race may influence satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels amongst graduates. Given the past political history of South Africa, black graduates may be satisfied with graduate development programmes because of the lack of opportunities presented to them previously, and the graduate development programme may be viewed as a career opportunity.

Interviews should have been conducted in both organisations, as the qualitative data attained pertains to one organisation. Hence, generalisations cannot be made.

7. Recommendations

There are important recommendations that can be divided into a theoretical and practical component.

There is a need for more research to be done in the area of graduate development programmes in South Africa, as organisations in South Africa want to remain competitive by implementing and utilising graduate development programmes to have the best workforce. Based on the study's current findings, graduates are dissatisfied with these programmes and hence more research should be conducted in order to provide companies with recommendations in dealing with graduates who are experiencing dissatisfaction.

The practical implications of this study suggest that organisations must assess the reasons for wanting to implement a graduate development programme, along with the structure. This will provide not only the organisation, but graduates on the GDP, with clarity on their roles, functions and future career opportunities within the organisation. Similarly, this research adopts McDermott et al.'s (2006) stance that the resources to plan, design and implement a GDP must be evaluated, for implementing a GDP does not necessarily provide the basis for a satisfied graduate.

In addition, there must be constant monitoring of the graduate on the GDP, with regards to career expectations and satisfaction levels. Organisations cannot ignore the importance of communicating potential career pathways for graduates within the organisation. The findings in this study indicate that graduates have independently identified their own career pathway, but were unsure if this is where the organisation would want them to be. Others were very uncertain of the career opportunities within the organisation, indicating that the value of the graduate development programme is questioned.

Furthermore, managers or supervisors need to be briefed on the content and process of the graduate development programme. In the current study, the managers of a particular division of the organisation had their own objective for utilising the graduate as compared to the objectives of the human resource department of the organisation. This

can lead to graduates being overburdened with their current work roles, attention to training and career development.

8. Conclusion

The current study reflected similar findings to McDermott et al.'s (2006) study of graduate development programmes in Ireland. The current study suggests that graduates on a graduate development programme are dissatisfied. This was more evident with graduates on a 13 month or longer graduate development programme.

In addition, many were dissatisfied with the following job features recognition; feedback on their performance, adequate responsibility with tasks, prospects for advancement, development of competencies, salary, supervisor understanding their job skills and job security.

Many graduates displayed uncertainty with regards to career opportunities within the organisations. As Kandola et al. (2001) asserts, graduates view GDPs as providing a platform for quicker career advancement and their frustrations emerge when they view the programme as hindering their progress.

Therefore, the current study provides organisations with insights into initiating more constructive graduate development programmes.

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Appendix 1

Dear Graduate

My name is Kavisha Chandrakassi and I am conducting research for obtaining a Masters degree in Industrial Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The research is based on graduate development programmes and satisfaction levels in a large multi-national South African organisation. It is imperative to conduct research in this area, as South Africa is placing immense emphasis on skills development, especially amongst young graduates.

Participation in this research entails completing the attached questionnaire and being involved an interview if you are randomly selected, where only 6 participants are required. However, only graduates who met the following criteria are to complete the questionnaire, the graduates whom where recruited as graduates into a graduate programme or part of a graduate recruitment campaign; and who joined the organisation within the past five years. Moreover, individuals who become graduates whilst in employment and those who have been employed by the same organisation for more than five years are excluded.

The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete, and the interview about 20 minutes. Participation is voluntary and no employee will be in an advantage or disadvantage for choosing to complete or not complete the questionnaire. However, you have to complete the declaration below for the purpose of ethics. If you choose to participate in the study, please complete the attached questionnaire as carefully and honestly as possible. While questions are asked about your work circumstances, your personal identity information such as name, I.D. number is not asked for as such you will remain anonymous.

Once you have answered the questionnaire, place the questionnaire in the envelope provided and deposit it into the sealed box allocated outside the Human Resources Office. I will conduct this collection of questionnaires at random intervals. This will ensure that no one will have access to the completed questionnaires. Your responses will be looked at in relation to all other responses. The data will be destroyed by the research supervisor of the study. Should you wish to view a summary of the results, I am willing to present the findings of the research to all participants by means of a focus group. This research will contribute towards evaluating and assessing grade development programmes and satisfaction levels amongst graduates and will propose interventions for the organisation.

I would really appreciate your co-operation in assisting me to complete this Masters research. I look forward to working with you. If you have any queries regarding the forms or the research process, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0723666005 or via email on kavisha.chandrakassi@webmail.co.za.

Kind Regards

Kavisha Chandrakassi   Shaaida Bobat

_____   _____
Masters students   Research Supervisor
School of Psychology   School of Psychology

Declaration of consent:

I,…………………………..(Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in this research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

…………………………………….   ………………………

(Please note that you can take time to read, understand and question the information before giving consent)

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR GRADUATES IN A GRADUATE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN A SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATION

With the following questions, I would like to gather some general information.

1. **Gender:** Place an 'X' in the segment relevant to you.

Male	
Female	

2. **Age:** Place an 'X' in the segment relevant to you.

Aged between 20 – 24	
Aged between 25 – 29	
Age greater than 30	

With the following questions, I would like to gather some information in relation to your own qualifications and employment.

3. **Degree:**

Please state your primary degree: _____

Which college did you undertake your degree at: _____

Year of Graduation: _____

Please state any further university qualifications you achieved following your primary degree:
_____
_____

Are you currently undertaking any further study? Place an 'X' in the relevant segment:

Yes	
No	

If yes,
Please detail the study being undertaken? _____

Is this study being supported financially by your employer? Place an 'X' in the relevant segment:

Yes	
No	

If yes, please detail the type of funding. Place an 'X' in the relevant segment or specify as necessary:

Employer pays all fees upfront	
Employer pays fees after successful completion of exams	
Other, please specify	

4. Employment:

How many employers have you had as a graduate? Please state number.

_____

How long are you with your current employer?

Years	Months

What is your current job role or job title?   _____

With the following questions, you are asked to evaluate certain aspects of your job and to evaluate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the respective job feature. Please circle the number which is the most accurate description.

5. To what extent are you satisfied that you are adequately challenged in your current role?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

6. To what extent are you satisfied that you get recognition for the job you currently undertake?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

7. To what extent are you satisfied that you receive feedback on your performance?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

8. To what extent do you find your work interesting?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

9. To what extent are you satisfied that you have been given adequate responsibility to undertake your job?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

10. Are you satisfied that there are prospects for advancement/promotion in your organisation?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

11. Are you satisfied that your organisation supports the development of your competencies (skills)?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

12. To what extent are you satisfied with your work conditions i.e. work environment, equipment etc.?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

13. To what extent are you satisfied with your salary?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

14. To what extent are you satisfied that your supervisor/line manager understands the skills that you bring to your job?

1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied   Satisfied

15. To what extent are you satisfied with the relationship with your co-workers?

```
1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied                                      Satisfied
```

16. **To what extent are you satisfied that the role you are undertaking is living up to your expectations?**

```
1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied                                      Satisfied
```

17. **To what extent are you satisfied that your organisation offers you job security?**

```
1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5
Dissatisfied                                      Satisfied
```

With the following questions, I would like to ascertain what you believe are the important factors for an employer to offer you and also your views on graduate development programmes.

18. **Please rank 3 items in your order of preference (No. 1 being the most important consideration) which you believe are important for an employer to offer you.**

Factor (select 3 only)	No	Rank
A sense of achievement	Q5	
Recognition for contribution	Q6/Q7	
Stimulating & challenging work	Q5/Q8	
Being given responsibility	Q9	
Good opportunities for advancement	Q10	
Development & training	Q11	
Good match of my competencies (qualified skill) to job role	Q11	
Good relationship with management	Q14	
Good working conditions	Q12	
Salary & Benefits	Q13	
Good relationship with employees/peers	Q15	
Job security	Q17	

19. Graduate Development programme:

Are you currently on a graduate development programme in your organisation? Place an 'X' in the relevant segment.

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

If yes:

(1) What is the length of the programme?

Years	Months

(2) Are you satisfied/dissatisfied with the programme i.e. is it meeting your needs and expectations? Please comment:

_____
_____
_____

If no:

(1) Have you completed a graduate development programme in the past within your current organisation? Place an 'X' in the relevant segment.

Yes	
No	

(2) If yes, what was the length of the programme?

Years	Months

Were you satisfied/dissatisfied with the programme i.e. did it meet your needs and expectations? Please comment:

_____
_____
_____

If don't know:

(1) Are you satisfied/dissatisfied with the absence of clarity in relation to a graduate development programme? Place an 'an 'X' in the segment relevant to you.

Satisfied	
Dissatisfied	

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.
The information provided by you is for confidential academic research purposes only.

Appendix 3

1. Can you describe the graduate development programme that you're part of?

_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Outline your experiences on the GDP, both positive and negative.

_____
_____
_____
_____

3. How beneficial has this GDP been towards your future career growth and development?

_____
_____
_____
_____

4. Have you found any limitations (weaknesses) on this GDP? Can you list them and suggest ways in which it can be overcome.

_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Do you view your career to remain within this organisation?

_____
_____
_____
_____