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*AN EXPLORATION OF GRADUATE TRAINEE'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR
PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT IN A SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATION.*

BY

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. All references, citations and ideas have been acknowledged by the original author. This study is submitted for the degree of Master of Social Science, Industrial Psychology Degree, University of KwaZulu-Natal. The work presented has not been submitted for any previous degree or examination in another University.

Signature:

Celukuthula Makhoba

Date:

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I dedicate this piece of work to my late Grandfather, Mr Benjamin Thamsanqa Nyandeni and my late friend Amandla Madiba. May your beautiful souls continue to rest in eternal peace.

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ABSTRACT

While research on the Psychological Contract has received much attention in aiding a better understanding of employment arrangements, few empirical studies have sought to understand how Graduate employees in their first year of employment create their psychological contract using Schema Theory as the Theoretical Framework particularly in the context of South Africa. To address this, the aim of the present study sought to understand the pre-entry expectations that Graduate Trainees held about employer-employee obligations and the extent to which these expectations informed how they experienced their psychological contract within the first year of joining the Nestlé Future Talent (NFT) Graduate Development Programme in a South African-based organisation (Nestlé South Africa). In doing so, the study adopted a qualitative research approach, rooted within an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) paradigm. Six Graduate Trainees were purposively sampled from the company's Graduate Development Programme and in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. These interviews were individually audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using the six stages of IPA. From the research findings the following five themes emerged: (1) *Graduate Trainee's pre-entry expectation of employers*, (2) *Graduate Trainees' perceptions of anticipated Employer's expectations of them*, (3) *Graduate Trainees' post-entry experiences in Nestlé South Africa*, (4) *Graduate Trainees' socialisation processes and sources of information* and (5) *Graduate Trainee's perceptions of unmet expectations*. Findings revealed that Graduates Trainees held a rudimentary anticipatory psychological contract shaped by social and professional norms before being hired into the company's graduate development programme. The findings also suggest that pre-entry encounters with the organisation in the form of campus recruitment initiatives seem to shape organisation-specific expectations in which some graduates note how information gleaned from these initiatives seemed to be inconsistent when compared with their experiences of employment since joining the organisation. Another finding, spoke to Graduate Trainees early encounters with Senior Graduates in the business and revealed the complex cognitive process of sense-making in which they sought information to better understand themselves as novice employees hired in the same graduate development programme.

Keywords: Graduate Trainees, Psychological Contract, graduate development programme, interpretive phenomenological analysis, South Africa.

TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1. Introduction and Background to the study	1
1.1 Problem Statement	3
1.2 Research Aims and Objectives	6
1.2.1 Aim	6
1.2.2 Specific Objectives	6
1.3 Research Questions	6
1.4 Delimitation	7
1.5 Chapter Summary	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Graduates and Graduate Development Programmes	9
2.3 The Nestle Future Talent Graduate Development Programme	9
2.3.1 The NFT Graduate Programme Purpose and Scope	9
2.3.2 Recruitment Strategies of Graduate Trainees	10
2.4 Introducing the Psychological Contract	13
2.4.1 Defining the Psychological Contract	14
2.5 Nature of the Psychological Contract	16
2.5.1 Multiple Psychological Contracts by Individual Graduates	16
2.5.2 Beliefs as integral to Psychological Contracts	16
2.5.3 Psychological Contracts Are Perceptions of Exchange	17
2.5.4 Psychological Contracts as Expectations	17
2.5.5 Psychological Contracts Guides Attitudes and Behaviours	18
2.5.6 Psychological Contract Content	18
2.5.7 Psychological Contract Formation	20
2.6 Breach and Violation of the Psychological Contract	24
2.7 Empirical Research on the Psychological Contract	26
2.8 Theoretical Framework: Mental Model of Employment (Schema Theory)	28
2.8.1 Cognitive Schema	29
2.8.2 Types of Schemata	29
2.8.3 Empirical studies making use of Schema Theory	30

2.9 Chapter Summary	32
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	33
3.1 Introduction	33
3.2 Research Paradigm (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis)	33
3.3 Research Design	34
3.4 Sampling of Research Participants	36
3.5 Data Collection	37
3.6 Research Procedure	38
3.6.1 One-on-One interviews	39
3.6.2 Study Participants	39
3.6.3 Role of the Researcher (reflexivity)	40
3.7 Data Analysis	40
3.7.1 Transcription Process	40
3.7.2 Interpretation Process	41
3.8 Reliability and Validity	42
3.8.1 Credibility	43
3.8.2 Transferability	43
3.8.3 Conformability	43
3.8.4 Dependability	44
3.9 Ethical Considerations	44
3.10 Conclusion	45
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	46
4.1 Introduction	46
4.2 Summary table of main themes and sub-themes	46

4.3 Results: Graduate Trainees’ Pre-entry expectations on Employer’s obligations to them	47
4.3.1 Work-Life Organisation	47
4.3.2 Financial Rewards	49
4.3.3 Career Development	50
4.3.4 Culture Fit	51
4.3.5 Wellbeing (Mental and Physical)	52
4.4 Graduate Trainees’ Perceptions of Anticipated Employer’s	53
4.4.1 Continuous Learning	53
4.4.2 Hard Work	54
4.5 Graduate Trainees’ Post-entry experiences at Nestle	55
4.5.1 Workplace Transition	55
4.5.2 Support for Graduate Trainees	56
4.6 Graduate Trainees’ Socialization processes and sources of Information	58
4.6.1 Human Resources Processes	58
4.6.1.1 <i>Campus Graduate Activations (Recruitment Processes)</i>	58
4.6.1.2 <i>Learner Activity Manual (LAM)</i>	60
4.6.2 Organisational Agents	61
4.6.2.1 <i>Line Manager</i>	61
4.6.2.2 <i>Senior Graduate Trainees</i>	62
4.7 Graduate Trainees’ Perceptions of unmet expectations	63
4.7.1 Revise Expectations	63
4.7.2 Negotiate Expectations through Communication	64
4.7.3 Intentions to Leave	64
4.8 Chapter Summary	65

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	66
5.1 Introduction	66
5.2 Themes and subthemes	67
5.2.1 Graduate Trainees' Pre-entry expectations of Employers obligations	67
5.2.2 Graduate Trainees' Perceptions of anticipated Employer's	71
5.2.3 Graduate Trainees' Post-entry experiences at Nestle	73
5.2.4 Graduate Trainees' Socialization	75
5.2.4.1 Human Resources Processes	75
5.2.4.2 Organisation Agents	77
5.2.4.3 Line Managers	77
5.2.4.4 Senior Graduate Trainees	78
5.2.5 Graduate Trainees' Perceptions of unmet expectations	79
5.2.5.1 Revise Expectations	79
5.2.5.2 Negotiate Expectations through Communication and	79
5.2.5.3 Intentions to Leave	79
5.3 Theoretical Framework and Research Findings	80
5.4 Summary	83
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS	84
6.0 Introduction	84
6.1 Practical Implications	84
6.2 Limitations of the study	86
6.3 Opportunities for Future Research	86
REFERENCES	88
APPENDICES	101

Appendix A: Interview Guide	101
Appendix B: Gatekeepers Letter: Nestle	103
Appendix C: Information Sheet and Informed Consent	104
Appendix D: Ethical Clearance	108
Appendix E: Turnitin Digital Report	109

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

Figure 1: Recruitment Strategies of Graduate Trainees	11
Figure 2: Graduate Recruitment Marketing figure	12
Figure 3: Graduate Recruitment Spend on Marketing	13
Figure 4: Organisation's Promises to the Employment Exchange Arrangement	68
Figure 5: Employee Promises	72

Tables

Table 1: Formation Phases of the Psychological Contract	21
Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants	39
Table 3: Summary Table of Main themes and sub-themes	46

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

1. Introduction and Background to the study

The Psychological Contract Theory derives much of its theoretical basis from Social Exchange Theory (Montes et al., 2015). Its theoretical underpinnings suggest that social relations consist of unspecified obligations and unequal power dynamics (Eshoj, 2012). Early scholars within the field of organisational behaviour (Argyris, 1960, Levinson et al., 1962 and Schein, 1965, 1978) applied the concept to an organisational setting and the term 'Psychological Work Contract' was born (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2008). The concept 'Psychological Contract' concerns how individual's beliefs shape their judgment, attitudes and informs behaviour in an exchange arrangement (Montes et al., 2015). Thus, the psychological contract represents a central framework in the analysis and understanding of exchange relationships (Sherman & Morley, 2015).

An individual's psychological contract is a representation of his or her own beliefs regarding the mutual obligations within the context of employment between them and the employer (Van der Smissen et al., 2013). Rousseau (2011) stated that "Psychological Contract Theory represents the employment relationship in terms of the subjective beliefs of employees and their employers" (p. 193). Gresse (2015) alluded to the function and the importance of the psychological contract in employment relationships. The psychological contract is thus critical in reducing insecurities inherent in any given employment relationship. The employment relationship encompasses vast elements which are not all addressed in formal and written contracts. Therefore, the psychological contract exists to bridge the gap between individual and organisational perceived obligations. Furthermore, the psychological contract is idiosyncratic in nature and Gresse (2015) asserted that each employee holds a unique account of their psychological contract which is informed by their expectations and reciprocal obligations towards the organisation.

A prominent contributor to the field of psychological contracts is the author and researcher Denise Rousseau. Rousseau (1995) defines the psychological contract as an employee's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of the exchange agreement with the employer. Rousseau (1995) stated that employees hold subjective beliefs which operate as mental schemas experienced at an individual level. These schemas reflect their perceptions of the exchange

relationship which serve as useful knowledge structures that informs how individual employees interpret employer's actions and shape employees' attitudes and behaviour towards the organisation (Sherman & Morley, 2015). Therefore, such schemas are critical in the understanding and management of employee – employer relationships (O'Donohue et al., 2018).

The psychological contract as an abstract concept can thus be applied in the context of employment relationships specifically to study Trainee Graduate employees' perceptions of the exchange relationships within an organisation. To this point, psychological contracts can serve as a useful framework to understand the relationship between the organisation and the newly hired graduates upon organisational entry. The aim of this study is to unpack early employment arrangements as these are likely to reflect Trainee Graduates' initial and most influential expectations argued to guide future attitudes and behaviours.

Hattori (2018) noted that it has become a general trend for organisations to hire university graduates as permanent employees. According to Supraptono et al. (2018), graduate work experience programmes such as internships play a significant role in equipping graduates with the necessary skills required by the industry. In South Africa, organisations have adopted a similar trend in hiring university graduates into various entry-level positions. Graduate vacancies were said to have increased by 6.1 per cent in the year 2019 compared to numbers recruited in the year 2018, according to the South African Graduate Employers Association's (SAGEA) Employer Benchmarking Survey (2018). According to the SAGEA Employer Benchmarking Survey (2018), about three-quarters of South African employers (who participated in the survey) hired graduates to meet their equity targets. The appointment of graduates can be viewed as a nuanced response to South Africa's historical past and aims to give the youth of the country work exposure and experience.

Over and above, more organisations are beginning to realise the added value of graduate programmes as vehicles for developing technical skills and behavioural competencies to ensure continuity in the business by meeting managerial succession requirements. Some 44 per cent of employers indicated that their primary purpose in recruiting graduates was to hire them for their leadership development programmes or graduate development programmes (SAGEA Employer Benchmark Survey, 2018).

This study was conducted in Nestlé South Africa (S.A.) as an employer of graduates for their graduate development programme; the Nestlé Future Talent Programme. Nestlé S.A. is committed to graduate skills development through graduate development programmes and other similar initiatives. They therefore recruit graduates with the best fit to their culture and values aligned to the vision to be recognized as a preferred employer.

Nestlé S.A.'s two-year graduate programme is consistent with the findings of the SAGEA Benchmark report of 2019, which indicates that graduate development programmes are offered on average for a period of two years. (Nestlé S.A. was also one of the many organisations who participated in the SAGEA Employer Benchmark survey). During this period, graduates are developed to create a pool of skilled candidates for permanent absorption anywhere within the organisation, as determined by the graduate's acquired expertise and business requirements. Hattori (2018) noted that the hiring of graduate employees is seen as a mere formality whereby organisations take advantage of the fact that graduates tend to have little or no prior experience to rely. This view is consistent to that of Sherman and Morley (2015) who argued that novice employees tend to develop expectations about employer-employee obligations based on information received from the hiring organisation, given that they have little prior organisational experience to depend on. According to Hattori (2018) it is seldom that the terms of the exchange relationship are explicitly discussed between the two parties at the beginning of the employment relationship. Therefore, an early assessment of the psychological contract formation process of Graduate Trainees will reveal their early expectations and will inform the employer of the likely behaviours and attitudes of the graduate employees, an important aspect to focus on from the onset as argued by Sherman and Morley (2015).

1.1. Problem statement

Many organisations today are focusing on creating entry-level positions to attract young graduates to develop and retain key talent (Gresse, 2012). These entry-level positions are important to develop a pool of candidates from which the organisation can conveniently source talent from to meet its labour needs and managerial succession requirements. Inadvertently, these employment opportunities seem to address issues of graduate unemployment. It is thus evident that there are deliberate efforts to match graduate skills with the requirements of jobs available in the employment market based on the respective programmes' purpose and scope. South African organisations use various platforms to achieve these goals through i.e., graduate development programmes, internships programmes, learnerships, the YES4Youth programme

and other similar development programmes aligned with other skills development initiatives in the country. These initiatives are twofold, firstly, to increase the employability of graduates by closing the disjuncture between competencies and skills produced by the education institutions and that of labour employment needs (Mncayi & Dunga, 2016; Mseleku, 2022). The mismatch theory of unemployment emphasises the disconnect between the skills possessed by job seekers (e.g., graduates) and that required by employers (Birchenall, 2011). Secondly, it aims to advance the equality status of previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa by affirming employment equity actions across workplaces e.g., that of the Nestlé Future Talent Development Policy of 2013. Through campus graduate recruitment activities and graduate media outreach initiatives, Nestlé S.A. strategically positions the organisation as the preferred employer of choice in order to attract potential Graduate Trainees into their Graduate Development Programme to align with their Nestlé Future Talent Development Policy (2013).

Through the use of multiple platforms organisations are afforded opportunities to voice and emphasise the benefits of being employed within their respective companies (Eshoj, 2012). These outreach initiatives seem to subtly influence potential graduates' expectations of employment with the organisation. These recruitment efforts seem to also impact potential graduates' beliefs of the employment arrangement that would crystallise when they eventually enter the organisation as Graduate Trainees (Knapp & Masterson, 2018) It can therefore be argued that these avenues and processes in attracting graduates creates a plethora of expectations of the organisation, as a place of work. Eshoj (2012) warns that this type of managed communication often leads to unintended consequences. The researcher believes that the eagerness of organisations to create a unique employer brand experience, risks creating expectations they will not be able to fulfil once talent has entered the organisation. These sets of expectations are referred to as the Psychological Contract (Marković et al., 2014).

According to various authors, unrealistic pre-entry expectations can be problematic for employer-employee relationships when the expectations are unmet as the psychological contract is then likely to be impacted negatively i.e., either violated or breached (Harvey & Harris, 2010; Eshoj, 2012; Gresse, 2012; O'Donohue et al, 2018). This, according to Ochse (2005) is prevalent among university students who seem to demonstrate high levels of psychological entitlements prior to entering the world of work. This view is also echoed by Gresse and Linde (2021) who found in their recent study that final year university students had an already developed mental schema informed by their psychological entitlements.

Prior research regarding psychological contracts has focused primarily on the consequences of the psychological contract such as psychological contract breach and violation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Paul, Niehoff, & Turnley, 2000), while little attention has been paid to the processes and notions involved in forming the psychological contract, especially among newcomers to an organisation. Only recently have researchers acknowledged the need to explore the formation and development of psychological contracts (Tomprou & Nikolaou, 2011; Adams et al., 2014; Sherman & Morley 2015; Hattori, 2018, Gresse & Linde, 2021). This point is further emphasised by Sherman and Morley (2015) who argued that “while much is known about the consequences of the psychological contract, comparatively less is understood about how the contract is actually formed in the first place” (p. 160). There seems to be a dearth of studies that have sought to understand how new Graduates Trainees form their psychological contract upon organisational entry. Gresse and Linde (2021) argued that “the formation of the psychological contract is mainly linked to the organisational entry process” (p. 30). It is therefore important to explore the antecedents of the psychological contract to better understand how it should effectively be managed from the onset (O’Leary-Kelly et al., 2014). Furthermore, there seems to be little evidence of empirical research that have investigated psychological contract formation in the South African context. This is particularly relevant when considering the various efforts of graduate development initiatives that seeks to equip graduates with the necessary skills and competencies to improve their overall employability, which inadvertently also creates the expectation of securing employment upon completing the graduate development programme.

Few studies have attempted to explore the perceptions and experiences of Graduate Trainees hired in these graduate development programmes in the South African employment context, including Nestlé S.A. It should be noted that most Graduate Trainees at Nestlé S.A. tend to leave during or upon the completion of their graduate development programme. In a study by Baldry (2016), the researcher sought to investigate reasons of Graduate unemployment in South Africa and found that employed graduates noted underemployment to be a factor. This the respondents noted that underemployment simply meant “the under-utilisation of their skills as opposed to being underemployed by their utilisation of time” (Baldry, 2016, p.789). As such, this tends to cause frustration to the Graduate which increases their likelihood to exit the organisation, with or without alternative employment.

The aim of the study was to understand the pre-entry expectations that Graduates Trainees held about employer-employee obligations and the extent to which these expectations informed how

they experienced their psychological contract within the first year of joining the Nestlé Future Talent Graduate Development programme. This qualitative exploration of the perceived psychological contract among Graduate Trainees from a formative perspective, is likely to inform the effective management of the desired or undesired attitudes and behaviours by the Trainee Graduates from the onset.

1.2. Research aims and objectives

1.2.1. Aim

The aim of the study was to understand the pre-entry expectations held by Graduates Trainees about employer-employee obligations and the extent to which these expectations informed how they experienced their psychological contract within the first year of joining Nestlé South Africa.

1.2.2. Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this research were to:

- Understand the role of pre and post-employment experiences on shaping the content dimensions of the psychological contract.
- Explore the extent to which information emanating from organisational processes (HR processes) and agents (manager and team members) shape the development of the psychological contract.
- Understand graduate trainees' interpretations of employment experiences at Nestlé S.A. and the meanings attached to these interpretations.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the research:

- What is the role of pre and post-employment experiences in shaping the content dimensions of the psychological contract?
- How does information emanating from organisational processes (HR processes) and agents (managers and team members) shape the development of the psychological contract?

- What are graduate trainees' interpretations of experiences of employment at Nestlé South Africa and the meanings attached to these interpretations?

1.4.Delimitation

In the attempts to produce accurate research knowledge, a brief delimitation is needed for this study. The scope of this study was limited in exploring the concept of psychological contract from an internal perspective, at the moment when Graduates Trainees join Nestlé South Africa. Therefore, the psychological contract was examined at its formative stages and during organisational entry. It focused on the interface between the graduate employee and the new organisation that include recruitment initiatives, post-entry socialisations and experiences. Therefore, taking an internal perspective (post organisational entry) in exploring the formative stages of the psychological contract will help to understand newcomers' early expectations of perceived obligations towards the organisation.

Much of the research in this field have examined the fulfilment, breach and violation of psychological contracts. However, the current study sought not to explore the consequential outcomes of the psychological contract as this was not the focus as set out in the problem statement. This study sets out to examine the formative stages of a set of expectations (known as the psychological contract) new graduate employees have towards Nestlé S.A. as an employer upon organisational entry. However, the segment 'graduate employees' is too broad to examine and will be narrowed down to only Graduate Trainees. Graduate employment opportunities offered by Nestlé S.A. differ in scope and purpose. The Graduate Development Programmes, for which Graduate Trainees are hired, serve to ensure a steady supply of skilled talent to meet succession requirements. This particular segment of employees was chosen deliberately to explore the formative stages of Graduate Trainee's psychological contract formation to ensure that the study adds value by informing talent acquisition and talent management practices in the organisation.

1.5.Chapter Summary

The chapter presented in this section briefly outlined the aim of the study as well as its problem statement. A brief delimitation which spelt out the focus of the study was highlighted to emphasise its scope. Lastly, a detailed account of the study participants was also presented to highlight which participants were selected and the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participant selection.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010) were of the view that the primary purpose of a literature review in a given research study is to frame the problem under study and to identify relevant concepts, methods and techniques to position the study. Arshed and Danson (2015) argued that a literature review is the most important chapter in the thesis as this exercise affords the writer the opportunity to critically review the existing body of knowledge in order to extract the main points, findings and identify in building a coherent argument to frame the proposed study.

Therefore, the following chapter presents the reviewed relevant literature in the effort to expand existing knowledge of the research field. The intention was also to create an understanding of the explored relevant theoretical concepts in order to unpack insights into the formation process of the psychological contract of new Graduate Trainees.

The chapter firstly presents some background regarding graduate programmes. This is followed by a section on the psychological contract. It is introduced as a concept and includes an in-depth exploration of its origins, how previous authors have defined it and most importantly, its formation process in the context of exchange arrangements. The current study sought to explore the formative stages of a set of expectations (known as the psychological contract) newly hired Graduate Trainees have towards Nestlé S.A as an employer upon organisational entry. Aligned to the aim of this research study, an emphasis was placed on the formation process of the psychological contract to better understand the existing knowledge in this regard but also to identify gaps in the existing knowledge base. A perusal of past and current literature reveals that there is a dearth of studies on the identified gap that this study will attempt to address.

The last section of this chapter presented Schema Theory, the theoretical framework in which the study is embedded and also supports the theory of Psychological Contracts, the main focus of this research study. The aim was to introduce and describe Schema Theory which helped to explain the formation processes of psychological contracts.

2.2. Graduates and Graduate Development Programmes.

In chapter one, we introduced Graduates Trainees who were hired into the Nestlé' Future Talent (NFT) Graduate Development Programme as our primary participants for this study. The reason for this was highlighted in the preliminary introduction, wherein we indicated that there seemed to be a general trend for organisations to hire inexperienced university graduates as permanent employees (Hatorri, 2018). This trend was also seen locally, as information from the South African Graduates Employers Association Survey (2018) indicated a steady demand for the hiring of graduates into the graduate development programmes of companies such as Nestlé S.A. This demand is argued to increase in future.

There are various reasons that have been cited in the literature that account for this demand. The graduate development programmes, as many organisations have defined them, is seen as a talent sourcing channel through which organisations source specific talent to meet key talent requirements in their respective organisations and for alignment with the different markets in which they operate. This pool of talent is thus put on an accelerated developmental pathway/programme to develop specific skills to meet business talent requirements.

2.3. The Nestlé Future Talent Graduate Development Programme

2.3.1. The NFT Graduate Programme Purpose and Scope

Multinational organisations like Nestlé are aware of the labour constraints that exist in the South African labour market that might pose a significant threat to its operations. Hence, establishing a functional graduate development channel is one way to deliberately respond to the challenges associated with a shortage of skilled labour in the South African labour market, a legacy of the Apartheid Government in South Africa (Daniels, 2007; Twalo, 2010). As such, the company established the Nestlé Future Talent (NFT) Graduate Development Programme as a “vehicle of developing deep technical skills and ensuring a sustainable Nestlé leadership pipeline” (Nestlé Future Talent Development Policy, 2013, p.2).

The fundamental purpose of the NFT graduate development programme is twofold. Firstly, to be responsive to a historical context that seeks to redress employment inequality in South Africa in that it purposefully advances the equality status of previously disadvantaged groups (Black Africans, people living with disabilities and women) by giving preference to qualified graduates in employment opportunities and further, to align with their ambition to be recognised as a preferred employer and preferred corporate citizen (Nestlé Future Talent Development Policy, 2013).

Secondly, unlike other graduate workplace experience programmes that aim to advance the employability of graduates through internships programmes (Pool & Sewell, 2007, Nesaratnam et al. 2018; Mseleku, 2022), the NFT Graduate Development Programme serves a specific purpose to the business in that there is a deliberate effort from the employer to prepare young talent to acquire job related skills and knowledge for future business needs, i.e., as part of their succession strategy. According to the SAGEA Employer Benchmarking Survey (2019), 39% of employers who participated in the survey, hired graduates to be part of a leadership development programme that would feed into the succession pipeline of the business.

During the two-year development period, Graduates are exposed to the full extent of the business through a Career Development Plan, also known as a Learner Activity Manual (LAM). This is a working document that is used to review the gaps between the graduate's current capabilities and the requirements of the development plan. In addition, the LAM contains the development activities and outcomes a Graduate Trainee needs to fulfil in order to successfully complete the Graduate Development Programme.

Furthermore, Graduate Trainees are employed on a fixed term contract and are also made aware of the fact that their placement after the completion of the NFT graduate programme is not entirely guaranteed, rather conditional on there being a suitable vacancy and their performance over the duration of the programme (Nestlé Future Talent Development Policy, 2013). However, some 62% of the companies who participated in the survey indicated that they had a formal programme in place for graduates who successfully completed their graduate development programmes (SAGEA Employer Benchmarking Survey, 2019).

2.3.2. Recruitment Strategies of Graduate Trainees

The NFT graduate development programme is a corporate programme sponsored by the Nestlé in Market Committee (NimCom) and managed by the Nestlé ESAR Human Resources (Nestlé Future Talent Development Policy, 2013). The HR talent and acquisition team is responsible for the sourcing cycle that focuses on inexperienced talent. Their mandate is to source graduates who meet the following requirements:

4.7 Graduate: A fixed term employee who meets the following requirements:

- 4.7.1 Be a qualified graduate with a Bachelors or Bachelor of Technology Degree;
- 4.7.2 A South African Citizen; or have South African permanent residence;
- 4.7.3 have no more than 1-year relevant full time work experience;
- 4.7.4 Preferably not participated in another Trainee Development programme or Internship;
- 4.7.5 Preferably not graduated more than 2 years prior to year of application.

The HR team is tasked with the responsibility to make use of effective ways of attracting and recruiting Graduate Trainees for the various functional areas of the business wherein the graduate will be placed i.e. *Supply Chain, Generating Demand, Technical and Production, Human Resources, Finance & Control, Corporate Communications and Public Affairs*, etc. These are classified as the core and support functions of the business in which the company focuses most of its talent management efforts. Roles in these functions are somewhat critical to business operations and often viewed challenging to replace, when experienced talent exit the business. According to the Sector Skills Plan for the Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector 2021/22 Report (2020), there seems to be a general increase in Hard To Fill Vacancies (HTFV) for critical skills in the sector. Thus, the graduate development programme is one way to effectively bridge the talent gap wherein it fast tracks the development of the required skills among Graduate Trainees to meet the business operational needs.

The Nestlé Graduate Development Programme sources graduates from all top South African universities that meet the programme's criteria and aims to retain this talent, following the two-year development period. One of the company's recruitment strategies is to conduct campus recruitment activities across various institutions of Higher Learning and Training in South Africa in order to create brand awareness of its Graduate Development Programme. According to the SAGEA Employer Benchmark Survey Report (2019) about 34% of the organisations use on-Campus Events as a marketing strategy in order to create awareness of their respective graduate programmes. This, according to the survey, is one of the most effective strategies to motivate graduates to apply for the company's graduate programme. This platform affords the companies the opportunity to position its brand value proposition, which talks to the company's values, the programme structure and offerings. In addition, to offer testimonies from second year Graduate Trainees about their experiences of employment in the respective Graduate Development Programme.

However, it must be noted that this study focused on the company’s recruitment practices before the COVID-19 global pandemic when virtual interactions were minimal. The COVID-19 pandemic limited face-to-face interactions, owing to the restrictions in movements and mass gatherings imposed by the South African government (Stiegler, & Bouchard, 2020). Therefore, in this study, it was our intention to understand the importance and role played by the face-to-face interactions of their Campus Events with potential graduates at various university campuses. In fact, the data for this study was collected before the COVID-19 global pandemic, which speaks to this recruitment process.

Figure 2

Graduate Recruitment Marketing, 2019, p. 27

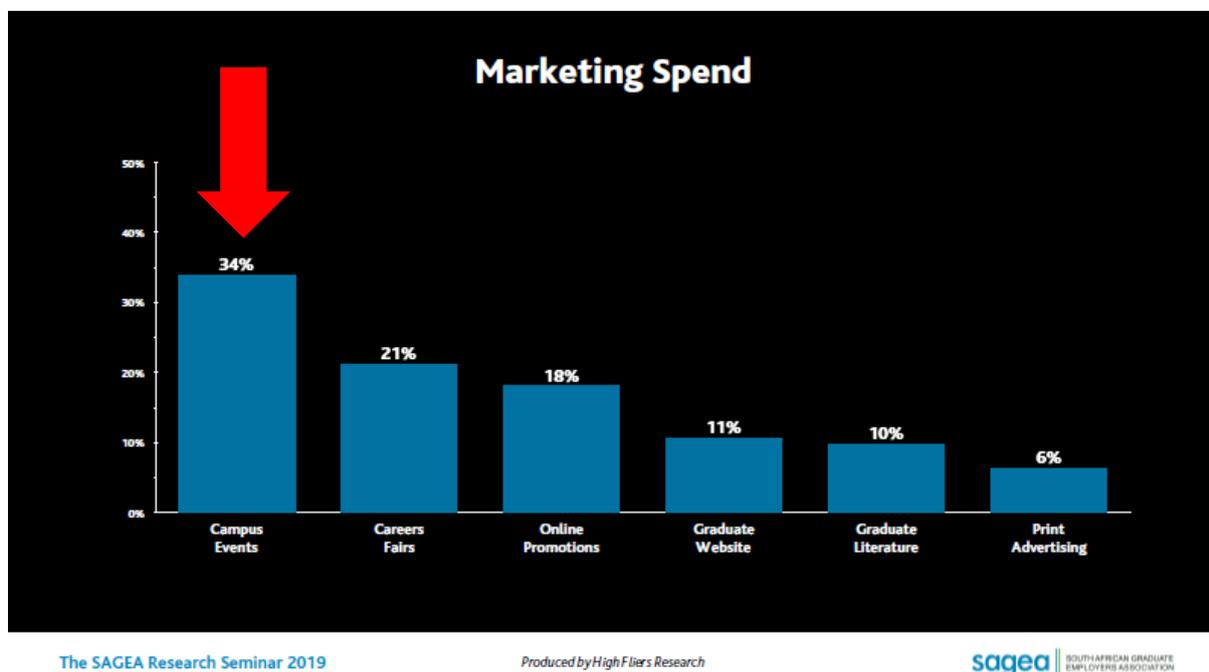
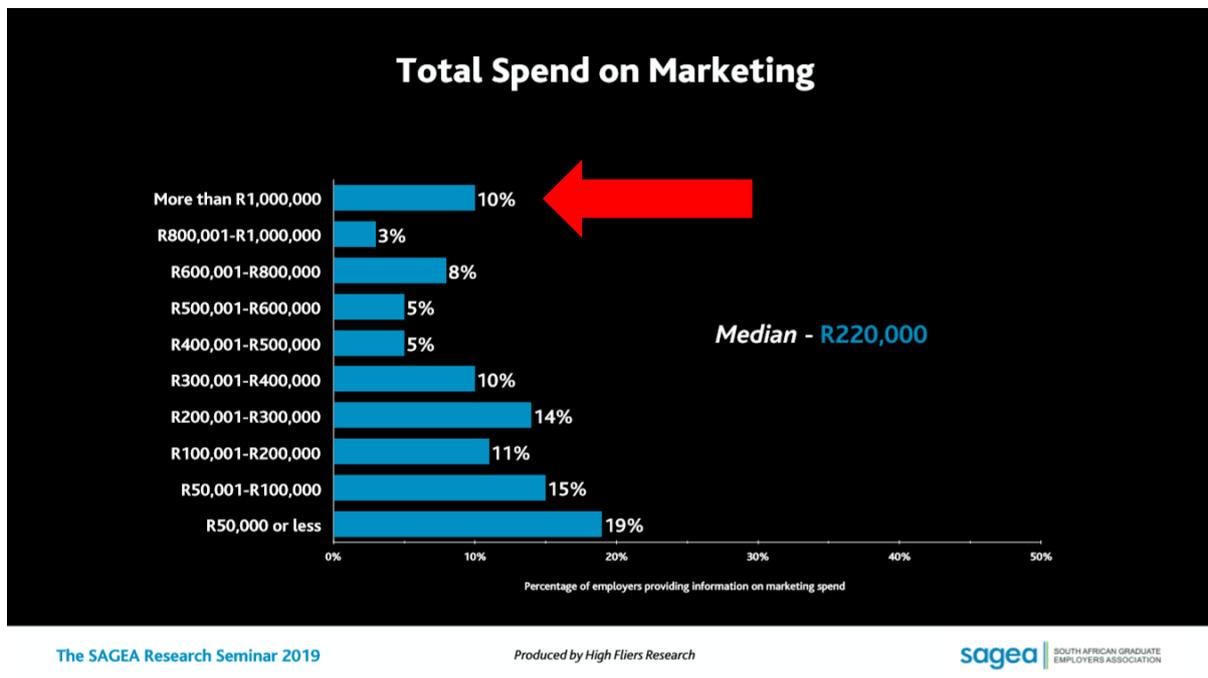


Figure 2 indicates that about 34% of the companies that participated in the survey opted to use Campus Events as a medium of advertising and/or marketing for their respective graduate development programme, which is significantly higher when compared to the other mediums of marketing, i.e., print advertising, which accounts for 6% overall.

Figure 3

Graduate Recruitment Spend on Marketing,



About 10% of employers of graduates who participated in the survey reported to have spent in excess of (R 1 000 000) one million rand in graduate marketing programmes alone (SAGEA Employer Benchmarking Report, 2019). As such, it is sufficient to note that the company acknowledges the value played by these recruitment initiatives. Therefore, it is important to unpack the role of this recruitment process (Campus Events), i.e., the extent to which these Campus Events informed potential graduates about the company’s Graduate Development Programme offerings.

2.4. Introducing the Psychological Contract

There is consensus that the concept of the psychological contract has been instrumental in understanding employment relationships (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008; Linde, 2007; Shore et al., 2012; Gresse et al., 2012) since it was first introduced by Argyris in 1960 (as cited by Gresse et al., 2012). Since then, the concept has evolved to accommodate changes inherent in employment patterns across all spectrums of employment relationships. A significant observation is that the psychological contract is a context dependent concept and that those who have attempted to define it have offered different views on how it should be conceptualised. Argyris is said to have championed the development of the psychological contract by applying the concept to a work setting dating back as far as the 1960’s (as cited in

Gresse et al., 2012). The concept gained significant traction and eventually attracted the interest of Levinson et al., (1962) who further explored the concept. The authors believed that in any given employment relationship there exists expectations about the mutual obligations between an employer and an employee. This view was recognised in Rousseau's (1989) seminal paper titled "*Psychological and implied contracts in organizations*" (p. 121). Rousseau offered a more comprehensive conception of the psychological contract which has since been widely accepted and adopted by many scholars in the research field. The author defined the psychological contract from an individual's perspective and argued that the "term psychological contract refers to an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another part" (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123). As such, this definition of the psychological contract presents a central framework in understanding the psychological contract from a unilateral point of view as it affords researchers the opportunity to explore how different individuals in an employment relationship experience it.

2.4.1. Defining the Psychological Contract

Building on the section above, it is essential to provide a comprehensive discussion on prominent contributors who have defined the psychological contract. The aim was to find a definition to be adopted throughout the entire study. As such, the researcher is cautious not to include definitions from all scholars who have attempted to define the concept, instead only certain definitions were chosen deliberately and are presented for further discussion. The position taken here is to present the psychological contract within a chronological time span in order to illustrate how perspectives were formulated.

A perusal of the relevant literature reveals that there is currently not one universally accepted definition within the field that neatly captures the psychological contract from both a conceptual and operational point of view. Instead, diverse perspectives regarding the nature of the psychological contract are noted (Eshoj, 2012). Early scholars such as Levinson et al. (1962) were among the first to present a definition of psychological contact. They defined it "as a series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be dimly aware but which nonetheless govern their relationship to each other" (as cited in Cullinane & Dundon, 2006, p. 114). This definition took a bilateral perspective which argued that both parties (employer and employee) formed expectations towards each other's behaviours.

Later definitions drifted away from this perspective to view the psychological contract as something experienced at an individual level. Rousseau (1989) is said to have championed this unilateral perspective where she advanced the following definition of the psychological contract namely “the term psychological contract refers to an individual’s beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party” (p. 123). Building on this definition, Rousseau (2001) incorporated some elements which sought to address limitations in her previous definition. She argued that psychological contracts “comprises subjective beliefs regarding an exchange agreement between an individual and, in organisation typically, the employing firm and its agents.” (p. 512) and to this day, this definition is mostly cited by research scholars as the most comprehensive in the research field.

However, Rousseau’s (2001) definition came under a lot of criticism mainly from Guest and Conway (2002) who counter argued that her definition focused on the psychological contract as being experienced at an individual employee level and in the process neglected to take an organisational (employer) view in the exchange relationship. The duo advanced a definition that took both the employee and employer’s perspective into account. Guest and Conway (2002) defined the psychological contract as “the perceptions of both parties to the employment relationship – organisation and individual – of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in the relationship” (p. 22). This was a significant moment mainly because such opposite views meant that the research field was growing to bridge the gaps in areas where there wasn’t enough clarity on the concept. Secondly, this meant that that research scholars could have a variety of conceptual and operational definitions to choose from depending on the position from which they sought to address the concept. The current study supports Rousseau’s (2001) definition mainly because the researcher intended to explore the psychological contract of Graduate Trainees from an individual perspective to give an individual analysis of how each Graduate Trainee experiences the psychological contract with the organisation. The focus was on exploring individual Graduate Trainee’s beliefs as well as expectations of the employment exchange relationship, though recognising that the employer holds certain implied expectations regarding the relationship. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that Rousseau’s definition has enhanced an understanding of the psychological contract and influenced notions on the individual employee’s attitudes and behaviour in exchange relationships (Naidoo et al., 2019).

2.5. Nature of the Psychological Contract

As indicated in the preceding section, research scholars have diverse opinions regarding the nature of the psychological contract. Although some research scholars have similar views of the central antecedents of the psychological contract, there is not consensus on this. However, it must be noted that some prominent scholars have attempted to address this by reviewing relevant literature on the concept and have presented a detailed account of the nature of the psychological contract (Sutton & Griffin, 2004).

In this section we will draw heavily on the recent work of Knapp and Masterson (2018), who in their analysis, have attempted to clarify key components that constitute the psychological contract theory. Knapp and Masterson (2018) asserted that the psychological contract contained five key assumptions: “(1) individuals can have many different psychological contracts, each with a different party; (2) psychological contracts are beliefs; (3) psychological contracts are about exchange; (4) psychological contracts are perceived promises; and (5) psychological contract terms guide attitudes and behaviours.” (p .4). For the purposes of this study, each of the concepts is discussed in detail below and then localised in the context of graduate employment.

2.5.1. Multiple Psychological Contracts by Individual Graduates

According to the psychological contract theory, psychological contracts can be seen as an individual’s system of beliefs regarding the obligations that exist between themselves and exchange partners (Rousseau et al., 2016). What is evident from this definition is that the concept is not limited to understanding the relationship that exists between an individual and a single entity. Rather, it suggests that it can be applied to the individual’s relationships with multiple parties, with each relationship representing a unique psychological contract. In the context of this study, Graduate Trainees potentially have separate psychological contracts with each of the individuals and groups with whom they interact with during pre- and post-organisational entry (e.g., the recruitment team, functional line managers, and colleagues). Thus, any of these relationships serve as an initial stage in which the formation of the psychological contract can take place.

2.5.2. Beliefs as integral to Psychological Contracts

Following a definitional limitation to Rousseau’s (1989) conception of the psychological contract, Rousseau added an important component to provide further clarity in their paper titled

'Schema, promise and mutuality: The building blocks of the psychological contract' (Rousseau, 2001). The scholar defined the concept as “comprising subjective beliefs regarding an exchange agreement between an individual and, in organisation typically, the employing firm and its agents.” (p. 512). This conception further entrenched Rousseau’s unilateral perspective which positioned the concept as something that is experienced at an individual level. As an abstract concept, the psychological contract exists in the mind of the individual. It represents a reflection of an individual’s perception of the exchange relationship (Knapp & Masterson, 2018). Conway and Briner (2005) argued that psychological contracts are an intrapersonal phenomenon that could be best understood from a unilateral level of analysis. Rousseau et al., (2018) viewed psychological contracts as individual’s subjective beliefs that form when an individual observes and makes assumptions about the employment deal. In line with the objectives of the study, the best source of information regarding work-related psychological contracts is the Graduate Trainees in the employment of this organisation.

2.5.3. Psychological Contracts Are Perceptions of Exchange

Common in most definitions of the psychological contract is the constant realization that the concept reflects the “perceptions of the exchange relationship”. This suggests that parties in an employment relationship recognize an obligated contribution in an exchange setting in order to elicit a certain response (Knapp & Masterson, 2018). This recognition operates at an individual mental level and reveals the perceptions of the exchange relationship. This basic assumption draws heavily from the theory of reciprocity and social exchange that implies that obligations to a relationship are interconnected (Conway & Briner, 2005; Coyle-Shapiro, & Parzefall, 2008). Rousseau et al., (2015) mention that when newcomers join a new organisation, they tend to have preconceived perceptions about their obligations to the employer (e.g. loyalty, operate in the best interest of the organisation) and their employer’s corresponding obligations to them (e.g. development opportunities). However, the contents of the exchange relationship are relative to the type of psychological contract. Perceived employer obligations from recruiters generally form the initial stage of the psychological contract, however they tend to have less impact than do their post-entry experiences (Tomprou & Nikolaou, 2011).

2.5.4. Psychological Contracts as Expectations

Another basic assumption that underpins the psychological contract is that it reflects an obligation of a perceived promise (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Rousseau, 1995). This simply

means that individuals believe that they and the exchange partners have obligated themselves to a set of exchange terms (Knapp & Masterson, 2018). As such, psychological contracts are central to exchange expectations. Research on psychological contracts among university students suggest that when expectations are met and fulfilled, this tends to be an important predictor of satisfaction and retention (Koskina, 2013). When these expectations are perceived as promissory in nature, this is likely to magnify the relationship to specific outcomes such as behaviours and attitudes towards the organisation (Knapp & Masterson, 2018).

2.5.5. Psychological Contract Guides Attitudes and Behaviours

This basic assumption of the psychological contract is important in that research scholars often pay particular attention to the outcomes (behaviours and attitudes) of how individuals in an exchange relationship come to behave and act the way they do. The psychological contract offers a framework to help researchers understand the exchange relationship by exploring the fundamental building blocks that inform the relationship. These building blocks are referred to as the contents of the psychological contract which inform attitudes and behavior of the exchange relationship (Yusof et al., 2017).

Various authors state that the contents of the psychological contract include the inducements individuals expect to receive from the other party and the contributions the individuals believe they are obligated to provide to receive those inducements (Rousseau et al, 2018; Conway & Briner, 2005). However, the contents of the exchange relationship are highly influenced by the type of psychological contract (relational or transactional) that exists between the exchange partners. Furthermore, the contents of the exchange relationship guide individual behaviours and attitudes. Simply put, contributions of the exchange relationship serve as behavioural goals as individuals strive to achieve these in order to receive the expected benefits (Gresse, 2018). Therefore, these early deals are important because they represent Graduate Trainees' initial and strongest expectations guiding future attitudes and behaviours. This view is consistent to that of Coyle-Shapiro (2002) who argues that for employees to engage in desirable behaviours (e.g., organisational citizenship behaviours) there must be an anticipation of a future expected benefit (e.g., developmental opportunity).

2.4 Psychological Contract Content

In the process of recruiting graduate employees to join the organisation, individual graduates have a set of preconceived expectations that speaks to their own anticipated contributions (e.g., loyalty, hard-work) and their employers' corresponding obligations to them (e.g., development

opportunities, market-related salary package) before organisational entry (Soomro et al., 2016). These sets of contributions - both individual and organisational, are generally referred to as the contents of the psychological contract. The expectations that individual Graduate Trainees hold is influenced by a variety of factors. These expectations are said to manifest differently for each individual graduate as and when they join the organisation, as argued by Gresse (2018). This is particularly important to note for the purposes of this study, that Graduate Trainees are likely to hold different expectations even though all are employed within the Graduate Development Programme.

Expectations that Graduate Trainees have towards their first employer begin as a tacit ideal shaped by a variety of factors. They expect these kinds of ideals to crystallise when they eventually join the organisation. The factors that shape the kind of ideal employment relationship include what Rousseau (1995) termed the four influences of other contracts, namely, the “social contract (this includes the labour legislation and other societal norms), the legal contract (this is the formal employment contract), the normative contract (this usually is the norms of the groups the individual associate with), and the implicit contract (this includes the background as well as personal characteristics of the individual)” (as cited in Gresse, 2013, p. 2). Key to note about these contracts is that they do not influence the individual’s ‘ideal’ simultaneously, instead each ‘contract’ has a significant bearing on the kind of ‘ideal’ the Graduate Trainees is likely to have during significant moments in their lives. The ‘ideal’ then becomes imbedded as an expectation and forms a backdrop in which all future attitudes and behaviours with significant exchange partners are assessed upon organisational entry as outlined by Soomro et al. (2016)

The expectations that a potential Graduate Trainees have towards their first employer are fine-tuned when the potential employees interact directly with their organisation of choice. It has been argued that during the recruitment process, recruiters represent the organisation’s value proposition and through communication, a perceived employer’s promise is communicated to the potential employees that impacts the initial structure of the psychological contract (Adams et al., 2014). Rousseau et al. (2016) notes that during this stage “neither employee nor employer can spell out all the details of what might be an indefinite employment arrangement” (p. 2). As a result, the psychological contract evolves over time to accommodate for new salient information experienced at the post organisational entry stage. These post-entry experiences from the early socialisations and human resources practices tend to have a stronger impact on the development of the psychological contract than the pre-organisational aspects.

The terms (i.e., contents), sometimes referred to as the dimensions of the psychological contract, denotes the perceived obligations of the exchange relationships (Sherman & Morley, 2015; Adams et al, 2014). These dimensions include individual perceptions of the obligated contributions they need to make to the organisation in return for the obligated incentives by the organisation (Rousseau et al., 2016; Soomro et al., 2016). These sets of organisational and individual obligations tend to affect how parties in an exchange relationship feel and behave towards each other. For example, an employee may volunteer to take on extra work in anticipation of future rewards (i.e., promotion). The contents of the psychological contract have received considerable attention in previous studies (Phuong & Hieu, 2015; Soomro et al., 2016). Moreover, emerging studies have extensively focused on addressing the anticipatory psychological contract of university students with the intention of understanding graduate students' beliefs about future employment relationships (Gresse & Linde, 2021; Marković et al., 2014.) However, relatively few of these studies have addressed the contents of the exchange relationships upon organisational entry among Graduate Trainees and their respective organisations (De Vos et al., 2009). It is assumed that newcomers hold a rudimentary psychological contract at the beginning of the employment phase which Sherman and Morley (2015) describe as an 'imperfect schema' (p.14). According to the authors "this schema is an important function at organisational entry for the new employee, guiding them through the early stages of the socialization process" (Sherman & Morley, 2015, p.165). This suggests that the individual's schema serves as a useful backdrop for assessing all future interactions with multiple partners.

2.5. Psychological Contract Formation

To understand the formation process of the psychological contract, we will draw on Rousseau's (1989) definition of the psychological contract to explain how it emerges for individual employees in an exchange arrangement. Rousseau (1989) opines that the psychological contract emerges when "an individual perceives that the contributions he or she makes obligate the organisation to reciprocity" (p. 124). However, these individual perceptions are highly informed by significant factors that each individual employee is exposed to as discussed in the preceding section.

There is a general consensus among research scholars that the psychological contract is formed through "various phases and anchored in different individual preconditions and exposures"

(Eshoj, 2012, p. 29). Rousseau presented a linear and simple framework that has been instrumental in understanding how the psychological contract is formed and presents ways of influencing the psychological contract from a management’s perspective. Table 1 depicts Rousseau’s (2001) conceptionalisation of the building blocks at different phases that constitutes the psychological contract.

Table 1

Formation Phases of the Psychological Contract

The focus of most psychological contract research

<u>Pre- employment</u>	<u>Recruitment</u>	<u>Early Socialisations</u>	<u>Later Experiences</u>	<u>Evaluation (Revision/ Violation)</u>
Professional norms	Active promise exchange	Continuing promise exchange	Intermittent promise exchange	Discrepant information leads to evaluation
		Active information seeking by workers/agents	Less active information seeking by workers/agents	Incentives/costs of exchange impact revision
Societal beliefs	Evaluation of signals by both firm and worker	Multiple sources of information from firm	Firm reduces its socialisation efforts	
			Changes often incorporated into existing psychological contract	

Note: Reprinted from “Schema, promise and mutuality: The building blocks of the psychological contract” by D.M. Rousseau, 2001, *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, 74(4), p. 512. Copyright 2001 by the British Psychological Society.

As shown in Table 1, the formation of the psychological contract occurs during four significant phases, namely, the pre-employment experiences, recruitment practice and experiences, early socialisations, and later experiences (post-entry) (Rousseau, 2001). Herriot (1992) makes a distinction between pre-employment antecedents and actual contact with the organisation and argues that an individual’s psychological contract between them and the exchange partner (organisation) is influenced by factors stemming from both the business and social environments. This distinction is further supported by Rousseau’s phases in the formation of the psychological contract as depicted in Table 1.

The recruitment process during the recruitment stage has a profound impact on the initial structure of the psychological contract (Adams et al., 2014). The recruitment process concerns the implicit exchange of promises and expectations between the employer and potential employee that gives the potential employee an indication of what is to be expected (Rousseau, 2001). During this phase, both the hiring manager (subject matter expert) as well as the recruitment human resources specialist, converse in discussions with the potential employee regarding information about the role (job content), organisational culture (values and priorities) and requirements (experience and knowledge). This organisation-specific information forms the base of new information for the potential employee on which pre-entry expectations are revised, negotiated or confirmed. However, with the advent of recruitment agencies and the tendency to outsource this process, this phase may be further complicated (Eshoj, 2012) and subsequently affect how the potential employee experiences the formation of the psychological contract with the potential organisation. It is however important to note that Nestlé South Africa, the organisation setting for this study, manages its own recruitment processes as it forms an important part of the organisation's identity.

Once the newcomer has joined the organisation, he or she is introduced through the process of socialisation with specific exchange partners (manager, team members etc.) as well as organisation-specific processes (HR policies and procedures). The process of socialisation further engenders a continuing process of information in relation to the promises as well as expectations, critical in the employment relationship (Rousseau, 2001).

Following the realisation that the psychological contract is dynamic, meaning it has the ability to change based on salient information, later experiences often confirm (with minor revisions and changes) the existing psychological contract. New information emanating from the organisation is incorporated into the existing psychological contract to shift an individual's perspective to align with the organisation's reality (Rousseau, 2001). Inexperienced newcomers often rely heavily on information gleaned from the new organisation while experienced newcomers tend to negotiate expectations based on past employment experiences (Sherman & Morley, 2015). Irrespective of whether the newcomer is experienced or a novice, any changes on the newcomers' environment (e.g., promotion or retrenchment) will alter the conditions of the psychological contract, thus confirming that it is not a fixed nor a stable entity (Brooks, 2009).

The scope of this study was delineated to include the interface between the graduate employee and the new organisation which include the following phases as outlined by Rousseau (2001), namely recruitment interviews, post-entry socialisations and experiences to reveal how Graduate Trainees create their psychological contract upon organisational entry.

The post-employment phase encompasses the internal environment of the new organisation and all the factors that shape and influence an individual employee's belief system (Rousseau, 2001). Research on the formation of psychological contracts broadly divides the factors that shape psychological contracts into two categories namely individual and organisational factors (Sherman & Morley, 2015). Individual factors that inform the psychological contract have received considerable attention from previous research. As such, these studies have demonstrated the impact individual factors have on the contents of the exchange relationship. To this point, De Vos et al., (2009) argues that "individuals approach their future organisations with career motives that will affect the saliency of the obligations that form part of their psychological contracts" (p. 290). This suggests that individuals tend to focus more on obligations that align with their own personal aspirations rather than those of the exchange relationship. This may risk the organisation having employees with unrealistic pre-entry expectations which may not entirely align with organisational reality.

Organisational factors that inform the psychological contract have focused largely on post-organisational entry experiences of newcomers. These factors stem largely from Human Resources processes (i.e., recruitment or policies) and organisational agents (i.e., mentors or supervisors), who are important exchange partners in the formation of the psychological contract (Rucker, 2018). Thus, the focus is on the 'what' (processes) and 'who' (agents) employees perceive as central to the formation of the psychological contract. It is evident from the literature that the formation of psychological contracts may be informed by various factors such as pre-entry information about the organisation, individual differences, past experiences and post-entry social influences (Knapp & Masterson, 2018; Rucker, 2018; Tomprou & Nikolaou, 2011) as discussed in the preceding sections. Therefore, the study intended to understand the initial exchange partners Graduates Trainees identified as the sources (what and who) present during the formation of their psychological contracts.

Tomprou and Nikolaou (2011) distinguished between psychological contract formation and psychological contract development. The former refers to a process that takes place during the encounter stage of socialisation. It usually takes place during newcomers' first days at work

and lasts for a few weeks. During this stage, the employee transitions from being an outsider to an insider (i.e., newcomer) in which he/ she is confronted by the new organisational reality. The latter accounts for a longer period that can take up to a year, which may include an assessment of the psychological contract i.e., fulfilment, breach or violation thereof (Rousseau et al, 2018) that will be discussed in the following section. The intention of the study was not to evaluate the outcomes of the psychological contract over a longer period, but rather to understand the formation stage i.e., how it is created in the first place, particularly upon organisational entry.

2.6. Breach and Violation of The Psychological Contract

In this section the importance of the psychological contract evaluation process is addressed. The point is to highlight behavioral as well as attitudinal outcomes experienced at a later stage of the employment exchange relationship. Tomprou and Nikolaou (2011) argued that the evaluation of the psychological contract that consist of the following common outcomes i.e., psychological contract fulfilment, breach and violation of the contract, occurs as a function of post-entry experiences at a later stage with processes and significant exchange partners. During the development of psychological contracts, newcomers experience direct salient emotional events with significant exchange partners (managers, teammates) that provide contract-related information (Rousseau et al., 2016).

The evaluation process plays a role in informing behaviour and often signals an ending phase of the professional relationship between an organisation and an employee. This is often the case when the individual employee has experienced a breach or violation of their psychological contract (Rucker, 2018), which is common among employees (Conway & Briner, 2002). Research has focused largely on the consequences of contract breach such as employees' feelings, attitudes and behaviours (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2008). Most of these studies have applied Rousseau's (1989) definition of psychological contract breach when investigating the individual employee experience of organisation contract breach by failing to fulfill the anticipated obligations to the employee.

While the concepts of psychological contract breach and violation has been used interchangeably by scholars in the field, a clear distinction can be made. To explain this, we first draw upon Rousseau's (1989) definition of psychological contract breach. She defines it as "a failure of organisations or other parties to respond to an employee's contribution in ways the individual believes they are obligated to" (p. 128). Morrison and Robinson (1997) explained

that “breach is an employee’s cognitive realisation that the organisation or significant exchange partners in the exchange relationship have failed to uphold their expected obligations while violation is an emotional response attached to the contract breach” (p. 230). The scholars caution against viewing psychological contract breach and violation as mutually exclusive and argued that breach can trigger an emotional response (violation) with varying degrees. Cullinane and Dundon (2006) offered a contrary view and rejected the notions regarding psychological contract breach by authors such as Rousseau (1989) and that of Morrison and Robinson (1997) and proposed that an employee’s experience of breach (cognitive assessment) can be as a result of false expectations or what Gresse (2018) referred to as “unrealistic psychological entitlements” (p. 3) of the employment relationship. According to Ochse (2005) this phenomenon is common among university graduates. The organisation is therefore at risk of having employees whose expectations are not aligned to organisational realities. In this research, we have accepted both perspectives as discussed above as they indicate that a breach in one’s psychological contract may hold adverse attitudinal and behavioural outcomes in future. To this point, Tomprou and Nikolaou (2011) argued that “the organisation’s inability to fulfill contractual obligations might create a ‘reality shock’, which in turn can sow the seeds of future disengagements” (p. 344).

Irrespective of the causes of psychological contract breach, it is important that we understand the impact that it holds for the potential or existing exchange relationship. As mentioned above, psychological contract breach is a cognitive assessment by an individual employee regarding the failure to fulfil the expected obligations by the organisation or exchange partners while the perception of violation is the emotional state experienced as a result of contract breach (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). This violation can be seen on a continuum with each end representing a degree of violation that triggers different kinds of emotional, attitudinal as well as behavioural responses. Contract violation would include “emotional distress, feelings of betrayal, anger and wrongful harm that result from the individual’s perception that although they have kept their promises to another party, the other party has broken their promises to the individual” (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2008, p. 15). Eshoj (2012) noted that these behavioural and attitudinal responses may impact how individuals experience employment in the organisation which in turn may lead to reduced psychological well-being and increased intentions to leave the organisation.

Against this background a better understanding of the formation of the psychological contract of Graduate Trainees from the onset is necessary, particularly regarding ways to influence and

manage Graduates Trainee's psychological contract and related anticipated expectations. These are likely to curb the potential negative impact that psychological contract breach may have on the exchange relationships.

2.7. Empirical Research on the Psychological Contract

According to Rousseau et al. (2015) prior research on psychological contracts has been survey based, focusing predominantly on employee perspectives regarding the terms of the exchange relationship (i.e., content) (Herriot, Manning, & Kidd, 1997; Soomro et al., 2016) or the assessment of the psychological contract i.e., fulfilment, breach and violation (Bal et al., 2008; Bordia et al., 2015; Conway & Briner, 2002; Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Paul et al., 2000). The findings of research stem largely from the need to address the impact that evaluations of the psychological contract content have on employee resultant attitudes and behaviours. These studies have contributed extensively to the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence of psychological contracts which have further broadened our knowledge and understanding of the concept. However, much of these studies have focused mainly on addressing the outcomes of the psychological contract for older employees who have been with the organisation for a longer period (Kraak et al., 2017). Only recently have researchers appreciated the need to address psychological contract outcomes (i.e., breach) for newcomers during their first year of employment (Tatachari et al., 2015).

In South Africa, there seems to be a growing appreciation for the Psychological Contract concept and how it can be utilised to better understand employment relationships in different industries and for different professions. For example, Gorder and Ronnie (2017) explored the psychological contract of nurses in a private South African hospital to understand how employer–employee interactions impact their level of motivation. The findings suggest that “the psychological contract of nurses was balanced in nature in that it contained both relational and transaction elements” (Gorder & Ronnie, 2017, p. 62). Furthermore, they found that “motivation was a by-product of fulfilment which was enhanced by a combination of tangible and intangible rewards” (Gorder & Ronnie, 2017, p. 62).

In another South African study by Poisat et al. (2018) the researchers sought to “determine the influence of talent management strategies on the psychological contract and ultimately retention within the diverse environment of different generations, genders and ethnicity” (p. 1). They found that retention was informed by a significant correlation between work environment and the psychological contract while strong correlations were noted between talent

management strategies and generational cohort preferences. This is of great interest to the research community taken the diverse workforce that exist in organisation and to note how to effectively manage their respective psychological contract seems to be increasingly challenging for organisations.

The above-mentioned studies by Gorder and Ronnie (2017) and Poisat et.al, (2018) suggest that the psychological contract is an important concept that can be explored both qualitatively and quantitatively to gain insights to inform practices in the workplace.

A limited yet growing body of South African research studies regarding Psychological Contracts is noted and have mainly focused on students' relationships with academic institutions and graduates' anticipatory psychological contracts with future employers (Gresse, 2012; Gresse et al., 2013 Gresse & Linde, 2021). The latter study sought to understand the graduate–employer disconnect regarding the perceived obligations of future employment relationships and found that graduates displayed a pre-employment psychological breach, where graduates already anticipated contract breach before entering the organisation. This breach was mainly attributed to the entitlement disconnect perception which they had formed prior to joining the organisation

Another study, based in a different context, sought to investigate final year university students' beliefs about future employment relationships (Marković, & Stoilkovska, 2015). The aim was to examine the anticipatory psychological contract content of the future exchange relationships and the findings indicated that students reported stronger beliefs about employer inducements than about their own contributions to the exchange relationship in future work contexts.

A recent study by Gresse and Linde (2021), found that final year students at a South African University had a propensity to voluntary turnover intentions before entering the organisation. This according to the researchers was due to the entitlement disconnect perceptions which influenced their anticipatory psychological contract. It is evident that there seems to be a consistency in their findings across their previous research studies (e.g., Gresse, 2012; Gresse et al., 2013, Gresse & Linde, 2021). This suggests some level of validity of their research findings. What is noted, however, is that the research findings presented above relates to graduates and their perceptions of future employment and that findings seem to indicate that final-year students/graduates tend to hold unrealistic expectations/beliefs about their future employment relationship which in turn influence their career schema. However, a counter argument has been presented by Gresse and Linde (2020) who argued that these beliefs are not

necessarily based on the actual employment relationships, but rather stem from social and normative influences.

There is consensus that this research knowledge is growing particularly in the context of South Africa. As the literature has suggested, many researchers in the field have sought to address the psychological contract from various positions, as seen in the detailed analysis above. Furthermore, just recently, Gresse and Linde (2020) sought to “develop and validate an instrument that could measure the psychological contract expectations of graduate labour market entrees” (p. 1). This they believed “could enhance knowledge of the anticipatory psychological contract and psychological contract development” (Gresse & Linde, 2020, p. 1). This was an important endeavour which contributed to the development of a reliable and valid instrument for use in quantitative research within the South African context.

Given the above, it is clear that there is a need to understand the formation process of psychological contracts particularly at organisational entry by newcomers. Sherman and Morley (2016) argued that the existing knowledge on psychological contract formation is mainly theoretical and there seems to be a dearth of empirical studies in this regard. Furthermore, previous studies tend to focus mainly on final year students or graduate students’ future relationships with potential employers while neglecting the formation of graduates’ psychological contracts upon organisational entry. Rousseau et al., (2018) mentioned that “upon organisational entry, newcomers enter the creation phase, a time period in which pre-existing beliefs regarding the perceived obligations of the exchange relationship are fine-tuned based on environmental cues from observation and interaction with the organisation and its members” (p. 2). This further supports the need to better understand graduate trainees’ perceptions of their psychological contract formation at organisational entry.

2.8.Theoretical Framework: Mental Model of Employment (Schema Theory)

This study made use of Schema Theory to frame the formation of the psychological contract of graduate trainees, as novice employees, upon organisational entry. Schema theory informs the cognitive processes in sense making and is considered an appropriate theoretical framework to guide understanding of the formation of the psychological contract to improve insights into graduates’ sense making of environmental cues that will guide their actions as suggested by Louis (1980). Furthermore, Tomprou and Nikolaou (2011) stated that previous literature has neglected the formation process of psychological contracts while the focus was rather on explaining the “dynamics of breach and violation” (p. 346).

Following Rousseau's (1995, 2001) reconceptualization of the psychological contract, it is argued that Schema Theory is useful to unpack the subjective nature of psychological contract formation. The study aimed to explore the concept in depth to reveal the idiosyncratic nature of each Graduate Trainee's psychological contract as they commence formal employment with Nestlé S.A., the organisation in which the study is conducted.

2.8.1. Cognitive schema

Bielenia-Grajewska (2013) briefly defined cognitive schemas as “a set of ideas related to cognitive structures that help individuals to order, present, evaluate, and apply human knowledge and skills by dividing available information into meaningful units.” (p. 675). This “constructivist approach, is believed to be useful in everyday life encounters as it helps individuals organise past experiences in order to make sense of new situations” (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2013, p. 675).

In essence, cognitive schemas (schemata) are abstract mental constructs that act as a frame of reference that guide interpretations of information, expectations and actions about a given stimulus (a person or situation), and thereby simplifying the process of sense making of events and situations (Sherman & Morley, 2016; Wei et al., 2017). Schemas (schemata) are essentially a coherent set of connected beliefs about something that might be considered important to an individual (Rousseau, 2001). Therefore, individuals use schemas to cognitively organise their experiences and to make sense of new events and situations (Gresse & Linde, 2021; Sherman, 2012, Sherman & Morley 2016).

Types of Schemata

Cognitive schemas suggest that there are four types of schemas namely self-schemas, person-schemas, scripts or events schemas and person-in-situation schemas (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2013; Sherman, 2012). For the purposes of this study, the scripts or events schema model was considered appropriate to frame an understanding of how new Graduate Trainee employees make sense of a specific situation i.e., the employment relationship as they commence a formal employment agreement in an organisation.

According to Bielenia-Grajewska (2013), script or event schemas consists of information that informs a typical sequence of events in a given situation. This according to Sherman (2012) informs the individual on how to respond to a particular stimulus in a given event or situation. For example, Rousseau (2001, p.513) explained how one would interpret “blowing out

candles” at a birthday event. Generally, one would expect to see applause from the audience in response to the event. A script schema provides the person with information about the expected sequences of events that informs appropriate individual behaviour in each situation.

Similarly, in an employment context, employees may hold scripts or event schemas that relate to employment relationships (Sherman, 2012). These employment script schemas may reveal an employee’s belief structure of what is expected to happen in an organisation and what is expected of them (Wei et al., 2017). The schemas help employees define what constitutes an ideal employment relationship and informs them on how to interpret and make recollections of promises inherent within the employment relationship. For example, how an employee interprets information about promotion within their organisation will depend on whether promotion is part of their schema for the employee-employer relationship.

2.8.1. Empirical studies making use of Schema Theory

There seems to be a growing number of empirical studies that seeks to understand how psychological contracts are created. While relatively few of these studies explore psychological contracts from a schematic perspective i.e., as mental models of employment, particularly of new employees as they begin employment with a new employer, some studies do see the value in using Schema Theory. The study of Sherman and Morley (2015) explored how “previous employment experiences and both individual and organisational sources of contract-related information differentially influence the formation of the emerging psychological contract in the new firm” (p. 1). An earlier study by Sherman (2012) also sought to understand the formation of the psychological contract of novice employees by adopting schema theory as the theoretical approach. In a recent study by Gresse and Linde (2021), the researchers explored the mental schemas of graduates’ anticipatory psychological contract before they commenced with formal employment. The findings of these studies provide insights into psychological contract formation using insights from schema theory.

Various authors (Rousseau, 1995, 2001; Sherman & Morley, 2015), argue for the need to study the formation of psychological contracts of new employees as they enter an organisation from a schematic theoretical perspective. As discussed, a cognitive contract schema refers to a mental model that structures an employee’s understanding and interpretation of mutual obligations and expectations in an employment context. One can argue that new employees i.e., Graduate Trainees may have limited or incomplete information from the onset about the nature of their employment relationships. The concept of schemas is useful to understand ‘how

psychological contracts can form and function when incomplete information exists regarding the other party's intentions or expectations" (Sherman, 2012, p. 13).

Considering that psychological contracts are a form of schemata, we contend that schemata are likely to provide new employees (Graduate Trainees) with important cues on how to deal with incomplete information related to their role and their broader relationships within the new organisation of employment. To this end, Sherman and Morley (2016) argued that Schema Theory is a useful paradigm to unpack the functioning of psychological contracts, particularly in relation to how information is used when parties come to an agreement.

Maia et al. (2019) maintains that a schema as a mental model of employment can explain how early experiences of employees with their organisations are used to form perceptions of future exchange obligations. They also "contend that when employers demonstrate the willingness to fulfil inducements of the exchange relationships in the early stages of the employment relationship, employees are more likely to capture those inducements within their schema; forming their perceptions of the employment relationship" (Maie et al., 2019, p. 5). However, Sherman and Morley (2015) were of the view that this does not only apply to the employer's obligations, but also to employee' obligations. They believed that when employees fulfil their obligations to the organisations, it becomes part of their schema of employment, which guides their beliefs of what they should contribute towards their organisations.

This study explored Graduate Trainees', perceptions and experiences of employment and how this informs the psychological contract with the new organisation. The mental model of employment formed the basis of this exploration as it sought to explain how perceptions of employment are formulated and incorporated into one's schema of employment. According to Sherman and Morley (2015), the inexperienced newcomer (Graduate Trainee) lacks work-related experience and has little or no work history in an actual professional work environment. Accordingly, they hold a basic schema of employment which is more amenable to the process of reconstruction through socialisation. Therefore, "the information provided by the organisation during the early stages of the employment relationship takes on a great significance for the novice recruit" (Bauer & Green, 1998 as cited in Sherman and Morley 2015, p. 165).

Psychological contracts in their very nature are subjective beliefs about obligations between exchange partners (Knapp & Masterson, 2018). These subjective beliefs about employer-employee obligations are idiosyncratic and only exist in the mind of the individual. Therefore,

the Schema theory as a mental model of employment, was a useful tool in understanding how these perceived exchange obligations are formed.

2.9. Chapter Summary

This chapter offered a critical review of existing literature to frame an understanding of the Psychological Contract Theory and its applicability to the current study. The reader is introduced to the concept of psychological contracts, and how various authors have conceptualised and defined it. It is evident in the literature that contesting views exist about the conceptual framework of Psychological Contract Theory as seen in various research publications. However, these contestations reveal efforts to overcome identified limitations. While conceptual clarity remains crucial, most of the contemporary research seems to lean towards addressing the concept from a unilateral perspective with the aim of revealing qualitative accounts of the psychological contract. This study took a similar stance and advances unpacking the psychological contract of Graduate Trainees from a subjective perspective. This unilateral perspective was central to our study as we aimed to unpack how each Graduate Trainee created their own psychological contract upon organisational entry. To enhance this exploration, Schema Theory was adapted as the theoretical framework for the study to gain a clear understanding of the contract formation process. The Schema Theory was succinctly explained and contextualised to gain a better understanding of how it relates to the current study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The following chapter sets out the research methodology used in the study. As a point of departure, a discussion of the philosophical foundation that underpins the entire research study is presented. This is followed by a detailed account of the study's research design, the sampling strategy, research instrument, data collection process and analysis. The last section addressed the trustworthiness of the research study.

The literature review, presented in chapter 2, informed the aims and objectives of this research study as it provided insights into the gaps in the existing literature on this topic. The literature suggested that the area of psychological contract is under-researched particularly in the South Africa context. Therefore, this study sought to explore Graduate Trainees' perceptions of their psychological contract in order to understand how their perceptions of employment are formed within the new organisation within their first year of employment. The mental model of employment as embedded in Schema Theory formed the theoretical basis of this exploration as it sought to explain how perceptions of employment are formulated and incorporated into one's schema of employment. Thus, the research aimed to extend the existing body of knowledge in this regard.

3.2. Research Paradigm (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis)

The current study adopted the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. According to Smith (2003) IPA is primarily concerned with individual subjective experiences and their perceptions of their social world. As such, IPA sets to explore in-depth individual experiences of a particular phenomenon to extract the attached meanings and to understand how individuals make sense of their lived reality i.e., their personal and social environment (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Flowers et al., (2009) noted that IPA is a "combination of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, where Phenomenology looks at how individuals perceive their experiences through subjective accounts rather than objective ones" (p. 12). Symbolic interactionism on the other hand, speaks to the process in which individual meanings are seen as a product of social interaction which occurs as a result of interpretation and sense-making (Mathias et al., 2014). IPA is an appropriate lens to explore in detail how individuals make sense of their social environment and the meanings attached to particular experiences. In

the process of uncovering these individual experiences and meanings attached, Flowers et al., (2009) noted that IPA involves “a ‘double hermeneutic’, and this refers to the interplay between participants’ interpretation of their experiences, and the researcher’s own interpretation of the experiences” (p. 12).

Pringle et al. (2011) noted that IPA as an approach encourages an organic flow of questioning wherein the process of ‘meaning making’ is derived by both the participant and the researcher. Flowers et al., (2009) argued that this process does not only look at what is said by the participant, but rather it questions the meaning of what is said (by the participant) in the larger context of their experiences. As such, the IPA approach enabled the researcher to enter the participants’ world to uncover Graduate Trainees’ early experiences that shape their psychological contract formation upon organisational entry and the meaning they attach to these employment experiences. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of Graduate Trainees’ subjective experiences that emerged during one-on-one interviews.

3.3. Research Design

Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010) noted that through a study’s research design, one is able to produce information needed to solve the problem statement within the given constraints. It is therefore imperative that the research design chosen is aligned to address the study’s problem statement.

Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010) begin by distinguishing between three class research designs and focused on their ‘structure’ of the research problem. The three classes include causal, descriptive and exploratory research designs. The problem structure determines the type of research design chosen. For instance, casual research designs are more appropriate in structured types of problems. In other words, an example would be, if the aim of the study is to investigate the causal relationships between variables, then a causal type of research design will be more suited, however a mere association between variables may not imply causality.

For this particular research study, a qualitative exploratory research design was chosen to ensure alignment between the problem statement and the study’s research design. The reason to choose the exploratory research design stems from the unstructured nature of the research problem. Mohajan (2018) noted that it is appropriate to choose this particular research design when the research problem is under-researched, as applied to this research topic.

While Mason et al. (2010) were of the view that the exploratory research design is synonymous to qualitative research methods, a general consensus among research scholars suggest that other research methods such as literature reviews can be included in exploratory studies. This study included a literature review, presented in chapter two, to gain an understanding of existing theoretical concepts relevant to the field of study. The literature review functioned as secondary data which formed the basis on which empirical primary data, through qualitative research methods, was gathered.

The study's primary data was gathered through face-to-face interviews with Graduate Trainees in their first year of employment based in a single organisation i.e. Nestlé S.A. This approach was a single qualitative case study which examined a single organisation in depth through an interview process (Hollweck, 2015). The desire to focus on a single case study was influenced by the need to study one group of people (Graduate Trainees) who are located within a particular organisation (Yin, 2011). Yin (2011) states that if the intention is to study a single group with homogeneous characteristics, "then a single case study is the best choice" (as cited in Gustafsson, 2017).

This study adopted a qualitative research technique, which is defined by Mohajan (2018) as a "form of social action that stresses on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals" (p. 2). This form of social action allows the researcher to "understand the social phenomena in their natural circumstances". In this context, the researcher tries to gain an understanding to the phenomena under study through individual experience in the attempts to make sense of the meanings attached to those individual experiences. It proposes to dive beneath the surface to extract the significant meanings attached to the study participants' lived experiences. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) also view qualitative research as a naturalistic endeavour, arguing that it aims can be useful in studying the lived experiences of people and societies in their ordinary settings. For this reason, the qualitative research approach is appropriate in scholastic settings as it as assists the researcher to uncover issues about the problem being explored and to gain a better understanding on the social experiences of people.

The qualitative research method was appropriate for this particular study as it explored Graduate Trainees' experiences of employment by Nestlé South Africa as the organisation. We contend that experiences of employment are different for each Graduate Trainee despite being hired into the same Graduate Development Programme at Nestlé S.A. These experiences are

based on each Graduate Trainee's sense-making of the employment relationship and the experiences of the environment within the organisation.

3.5. Sampling of Research Participants

In the efforts to obtain rich, in-depth information from the study's participants, purposeful sampling strategies i.e., "Criterion-I, which helps identify and select cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Palinkas et al. 2015), was used which entailed the deliberate selection of participants based on the purpose of the study (Neuman, 2006). Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique which Neuman (2006) defines as a method applied by a researcher "to make specific selections, where the researcher uses his knowledge to select participants who possess the characteristics, he/she is looking for" (p. 249). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the formative stages of a set of expectations (known as the psychological contract) among newly hired Trainee Graduate towards Nestlé S.A. as an employer upon entry of the organisation. As outlined earlier, the study was delineated to include newly hired Graduate Trainees who were in their first year of employment with this organisation. Therefore, the study's participants were chosen from those who were hired into a Graduate Development Programme, as highlighted in chapter two. The Graduate Trainees were chosen from different Business Units i.e. (Marketing, Sales, and Supply Chain) within the organisation. Graduate Trainees were chosen to satisfy the following criteria of inclusion.

- Had to be in their first year of the Graduate Development Programme,
- Must have obtained a relevant degree from a recognized institution of Higher Learning
- A South African Citizen/ has a permanent South African residency
- Must be between the ages of 20 – 35 years old.
- Preferably not participated in another Graduate Development Programme.

The study included six interview participants as a sample size. The motivation to select this sample size stemmed from the views of Smith et al. (2009) who argued that Interpretative, Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research studies "commit to smaller concentrated samples". Coyle (2014) mentioned that the average sample size for an IPA study was between one and twelve. After careful consideration the researcher chose to commit to a sample size of six which allowed for dedication to each individual case (Clarke, 2010).

Once ethical clearance (see Appendix D) was granted by the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Ref. No. HSSREC/0000032/2019) and written permission was granted by Nestlé S. A. to conduct the research study, the researcher approached Graduate Trainees and invited them to voluntarily participate in the research study. The process of organising interviews with Graduate Trainees was facilitated by the Talent and Acquisition Specialist who manages all graduate recruitment within the organisation. The Talent and Acquisition Specialist contacted and arranged for interviews to be held with each Graduate Trainee as he had direct contact with them. The selection occurred according to the criteria which the researcher had shared with him. His role was limited to this process and to book meetings for interviews with the participants as per their availability. Details pertaining to the study were shared with research participants regarding the aim and process of the study so that they could make informed decisions.

3.7. Data Collection

Before data collection commenced, an open-ended semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) was designed, informed by the literature review. These questions were carefully developed to enable responses that were aligned to the aims and the objectives and thus the research questions of the study. Smith et al. (2009) stated that the use of interviews allowed participants to offer “rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences” (p. 56). Neuman (2006) also added that interviews allow the researcher to listen and pose probing questions where necessary to the respondent in order to gain a deeper understanding of the participant’s social world and experiences.

Before commencing with the actual interviewing process, the interview guide was assessed for relevance and ease of use by conducting an interview with a Graduate Trainee, with similar characteristics to those of the chosen study participants. Attention was paid to verify whether the questions were appropriate and understood by the participant. The final interview guide was approved by the research supervisors for use in the actual interviewing of the study participants.

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the primary data for the study. These one-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the six interview participants (Graduate Trainee) at a time and place suitable to them. Interviews were conducted at the company premises. Five meeting rooms were identified and designated for interviews to be

conducted, all at the company premises. The first interview with Grad1 took place at Ideal room. The second interview with Grad2 took place at Madiba room, Grad3' at Tshisimane room, Grad4 and Grad6 at Recoffy room while Grad5's interview took place at Cremora room. These meeting rooms were ideal venues to conduct the interviews as they were free from any disruptions. Each interview lasted between 20 to 40 minutes.

Upon arrival at the organisation, a courteous meeting with the Head of Human Resources and the six participants was scheduled to first formally introduce the researcher as well as the reason for conducting the research. However, the Head of HR was already aware of the researcher's arrival as she had granted full consent through a gatekeeper's letter (see Appendix B) to conduct research at Nestlé S.A. The letter issued by the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal was presented to each of the selected Graduate Trainees before commencing with the interviews. Interviews were held with each individual Graduate Trainee in a quiet and private venue as discussed above at the company premises. Each individual graduate trainee was given an informed consent form (see Appendix C) in which their rights of participation was disclosed and given the opportunity to ask questions to their satisfaction. Each respondent gave full consent and indicated their willingness to participate in the study by signing the informed consent sheet. Finally, each respondent was ensured that nothing disclosed during the interview session would be linked directly to them and that their identities would be protected.

3.8. Research Procedure

The researcher had already identified the organisation (Nestlé S.A.) as his research site. The researcher had previously been employed by the organisation. He therefore shared his intentions to conduct research at this organisation to the HR director who gave him full permission to do so. The researcher wrote a formal letter requesting permission to conduct research with their employees, namely Graduate Trainees. A letter of authorization for the study, i.e., a gatekeeper's letter (see appendix B) was issued by the HR director granting full permission to the research to conduct the study. The letter was required for ethical clearance. Upon being granted full approval by the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (effective from the 20th of September 2019) field work in the form of data collection commenced.

3.8.1. One-on-one interviews

Neuman (2006) defines interviews as a “methods of gathering data or information using verbal examination which encompasses a set of pre-planned central questions”. For the purposes of this study, this method of data collection was imperative because it afforded the researcher the opportunity to “pursue precise topics relevant that may lead to focused and constructive responses”. Interviews were the sole instrument of data collection for this study and the interviewer opted for a face-to-face format with each graduate trainee who were in their first year of employment at this organisation.

The interview process began by introducing the purpose of the study. The interview participants were then given consent forms to sign. Permission to voice record the interview session was sought and each responded granted full permission. During the interview, the interviewer encouraged each responded to speak freely about their experiences of employment and emphasised to them to remain committed in providing responses relevant to the questions being asked.

3.8.2. Study Participants

As indicated above, at the beginning of each interview session, the participant was assured that their real identities will remain anonymous and will be protected by following the substantive and procedural considerations to its full extent. The researcher was committed to this ethical responsibility by obscuring their real identities in the data presentation section in which each respondent was allocated a pseudonym. In total, there were six participants (Graduate Trainees) that participated in the study. The following pseudonyms refer to the participants sampled from Nestlé South Africa.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Name	Gender	Race	Date	Venue	Occupation	Age	Tenure
Grad1	Female	White	09 Sept. 2019	Ideal	Grad 'Trainee	22	9 Mnt
Grad2	Male	Black	09 Sept. 2019	Madiba	Grad 'Trainee	24	9 Mnt
Grad3	Male	White	10 Sept. 2019	Tshisimane	Grad 'Trainee	22	9 Mnt

Grad4	Female	Indian	10 Sept. 2019	Recoffy	Grad 'Trainee	25	9 Mnt
Grad5	Female	Black	11 Sept. 2019	Cremora	Grad 'Trainee	22	9 Mnt
Grad6	Male	Black	11 Sept. 2019	Recoffy	Grad 'Trainee	24	9 Mnt

3.8.3. Role of the Researcher (reflexivity)

The researcher, having worked at Nestlé South Africa as a graduate himself, came in with the understanding that his past employment experiences with the organisation may influence his views and likely introduce bias in the subjective accounts of respondents during the interview process. The researcher was aware of his own feelings about Graduate Trainees employed in the Graduate Development Programme and took measures to ‘bracket’ (Creswell, 2013) out any preconceived notions that might exist. To achieve this, the researcher remained committed to the semi-structured interview guide which consistently guided the interviewing process in all six interviews. In addition, the interviewer interviewed two participants in a day, one in the morning and the other one in the afternoon over a period of three days. This was done to space out the interviews between the graduates to allow a time lapse in order to engage authentically with each graduate without being subjectively influenced by the accounts of the previous interview. During the interview process, the researcher would paraphrase and summarise the participant’s expressed views to ensure understanding and to clarify any uncertainties and discrepancies. This was done to further ensure that no personal biases and preconceived ideas would influence the graduates’ subjective accounts of their reality. This was a critical process in both data collection and in analysing the interview transcripts. It was important to extract the real meanings participants gave as opposed to the researchers’ own interpretations.

3.10. Data Analysis

3.10.1 Transcription Process

There were six audio-recorded interviews in total, each one was transcribed verbatim by the researcher. This process of transcription allowed the researcher to familiarize himself with the participants individual experiences in order to gain an initial understanding of each Graduate Trainee’s idiographic account (Smith, 2014). In addition, Smith et al. (2009), noted that non-verbal expressions such as “hesitations or significant pauses” (p. 82) can add much value to IPA research as this may suggest to the researcher relevant meanings participants may hold

around their experiences. As such, these non-verbal expressions were included in the transcriptions for further analysis.

3.10.2. Interpretation process

Following an iterative process, each interview transcript was analysed individually at all of the six stages as emphasised by Willig (2013). This iterative engagement with the data “allowed the researcher to comprehensively engage with the complex phenomenon by exploring and interpreting participants’ experiences from both the researcher and participant perspective” (van der Neut, 2020, p. 49). In other words, this process entailed a reflexive interpretation of meaning of individual accounts of each Graduate Trainee’s experience of employment from two subjectivities, wherein the researcher engaged in a process called, double hermeneutics (Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). The method of analysis and interpretation of this study was informed by the six IPA stages as highlighted by Smith et al. (2009).

Stage 1: During this stage, each of the six transcripts were read while listening to the audio recordings to encourage familiarity. During this phase no comments were made on the transcript. This was done to ensure that the transcripts were properly transcribed and that no errors were made during the transcription process (Flowers et al., 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). During the second phase of reading the transcripts, the researcher made initial comments on his notebook to capture his first impressions of what was said. The researcher read with the intent of capturing words as well as phrases used by the research participants that stood out in text, however, no attempts were made to make sense of what this meant in the larger context of the graduate trainees’ experiences of employment.

Stage 2: In the second stage, the researcher sought to extract and formulate emergent themes from the notes produced in stage one. While IPA attempts to explore themes, it differs from thematic analysis in that it offers interpretations rather than descriptions of these themes (Willig, 2013). This process offered the researcher opportunities to make comments of his own sense making process rather than what is note from the transcriptions. The initial notes made by the researcher from the gathered data were used to draw emergent themes to confirm “interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 129).

Stage 3: In the third stage, emergent themes were presented in order and connected to one another. In other words, these emergent themes were according to Smith (2014) clustered and grouped into identified sub-themes. The aim was to group the themes into possible conceptual

similarities and to establish possible relationships between the different themes (Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). These sub-themes were cross-referenced with each transcript (raw data) to check if they accurately corresponded with the data and to ensure that the essence of participants' described experiences was correctly captured (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013).

Stage 4: In this stage, the sub-themes identified in stage three were grouped into various 'super-ordinate' themes and were presented as super-ordinate themes. According to Smith et al., 2009 "each super-ordinate theme is paired with respective subthemes and coupled with relevant supporting quotes, alongside exploratory notes" (p. 96). The themes were then represented with excerpts from the transcripts to ensure they were grounded in the data. Any theme that wasn't represented in the data was removed.

Stage 5: This stage of the interpretation process involved the application of the aforementioned stages to each of the six transcripts. For each transcript, stages one to four were applied individually in an attempt to "treat the next case on its own terms and do justice to its own individuality" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 140). The researcher bracketed each transcript to pay attention to the ideographic nature of each account (Willig, 2013).

Stage 6: In the final stage, the emergent subthemes and super-ordinate themes together with the interpretations derived from each of the six interview transcripts were compared to each of the other cases (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). This process was aimed at looking for patterns across the individual cases to establish if any possible connections across cases exist (Smith et al., 2009). Themes generated in each transcript were compared and combined (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013) to form main themes to provide a consolidated portrayal of graduate trainee's experiences. Main themes were cross-referenced with each of the interview transcripts to ensure that graduate trainee's experiences were represented accordingly. The resulting themes were used to "illustrate the interpretative element of the dual idiosyncratic meaning-making process for researcher and participant" (van der Neut, 2020, p. 51). The findings of this interpretative process along with the identified main themes were presented in chapter four for further discussion.

3.11. Reliability and Validity

Validity and reliability are vital requirements in both quantitative and qualitative research. According to Golafshani (2003) the need to scrutinise and question qualitative findings is primarily since qualitative studies produce subjective and contextual data. As such, qualitative researchers need to take cognisance of this fact and ensure that their research findings are

grounded in valid and reliable data. The findings must depict a true reflection of the data collected and must be “believable, consistent, applicable and credible” so that others can make good use of them (Golafshani, 2003, p.598). In the context of qualitative research, reliability simply means that the research will, over repeated occasions, produce the same results while validity on the other hand denotes the ability of the research to produce accurate findings (Smith, 2003. Guba and Lincoln (1985) proposed the following strategies as central in ensuring trustworthiness of a qualitative research study. These are discussed under the following subheadings below.

3.11.1. Credibility

Credibility is one of the factors to be considered when conducting a qualitative study to ensure that the findings are trustworthy (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). If the study is credible, it simply means that it has satisfied the question of “how congruent are the results with reality”. This study ensured credibility through prolonged engagement with the participants in each of the interviews. The researcher established rapport and encouraged respondents to speak freely about their experiences while staying committed to answering the questions being asked to reflect their lived experiences of employment in Nestlé South Africa.

3.11.2. Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of the research findings to be applied in other similar contexts (Blanche et al., 2006). The researcher also used purposive sampling as a technique to select individuals (Graduate Trainees) that would meet the criteria of the study. In this way, the researcher can gain insights based on the research questions of the study. Participants are chosen based on their knowledge and/or experience that relates to the research topic. Therefore, the study sampled Graduate Trainees that were hired into the Graduate Development Programme for a period of not more than a year. As such, Graduate Trainees were chosen purposively, thus when making use of a similar sampling strategy for all participant it can be assumed that the research would generate the same results if transferred to a different context (Anney, 2014).

3.9.3. Conformability

Blanche et al. (2006, p. 90), defines conformability as “the state where the research findings can be confirmed or corroborated by others [and] it is the extent to which a researcher is aware of or accounts for individual subjectivity or bias”. First the researcher was aware of his position

and “bracketed” his own views during the interview process. He treated all the participants in the same manner and also did not allow his own biased views to interfere with the interview process. Secondly, the researcher kept all records (audio recordings, interview transcripts, information sheets, as proof and should evidence be sought, it can be readily available for reference.

3.11.4. Dependability

Dependability denotes to the consistency of results. This simply means that should all the conditions be the same of repeating the study (context, participants, and method of data collection) the study will yield similar results (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This study ensured dependability through using the same method (face-to-face interviews) to ascertain data from the participants. A generic interview guide was used with each participant to guide the flow of the conversation between participant and researcher and to ensure some level of consistency regarding key focus areas for exploration across the different interviews with each Graduate Trainee. The researcher remained committed to upholding procedural ethics (confidentiality and anonymity) to encourage the interview to flow freely.

3.12. Ethical Considerations

To remain committed to the ethical responsibility of conducting research with human subjects, the study participants were required to read the detailed informed consent form (information sheet) pertaining to the details of the study. They were asked to give full consent in the form of their signatures. The information sheet contained information pertaining to the aim and the purpose of the study, which was read verbally and explained to each participant prior to commencing with the interviews.

The researcher stressed the importance of maintaining confidentiality by encouraging participants to speak freely about their experiences without fearing breach of confidentiality. In the information sheet, privacy was also explained to each participant and what it meant in the context of this study. Privacy was ensured to each participant in that each participant’s real identity was obscured (with pseudonyms) and that only a select few individuals (involved in this study) will gain access to the data (e.g. research supervisor).

Furthermore, participants we made aware that the choice to participate was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage for whatever reason. It was categorically stated in the information sheet that the study was for academic purposes and that it was of no

direct benefit to anyone. All participants of this study granted full permission to voluntarily and willingly participate in the study and all interviews were completed successfully.

3.13. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter offered a comprehensive description of the methodology adopted for this study and justifiable reasons for the choices made regarding the research paradigm, research design and data collection procedures. The researcher offered a comprehensive description of and rationale for using IPA as the method and why it was appropriate in giving rich idiographic accounts of Graduate Trainee's perceptions of employment in this organisation. The steps taken to gain permission to conduct the study (see appendixes attached) were also outlined to ensure that the study was grounded in ethical practice. The process of data collection was carefully explained, and the efforts taken to ensure data quality and the open sharing of deep insights by the participants. In addition, the researcher also highlighted his reflexive approach and efforts taken to uphold the integrity of participants' accounts of their experiences. The ethical considerations adhered to as standard practice for research were explained as well as efforts to ensure the overall quality of the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

This research study employed a qualitative research design. Neuman (2006) noted that qualitative research designs are particularly useful when researchers intend to make sense of individual lived experiences as well as the meanings they give to those experiences within their natural context. This chapter presents analysed data that was collected through a single session using face to face semi-structured and open-ended interviews. A discussion of the themes was based on the intention of the researcher to produce a rich perspective by drawing comparisons (similarities or differences) in individual's accounts of their experiences of employment in this organisation. The study approach and analysis of the findings was rooted within the theoretical framework that informed the study; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as presented in chapter three. IPA guided the extraction in each of the six transcripts to develop themes.

4.2. Summary table of Main themes and sub-themes

Theme 1	Graduate Trainees' pre-entry expectations of employers' obligations to them
	Subtheme 1: Work-life Integration Subtheme 2: Financial Rewards Subtheme 3: Career Development Subtheme 4: Culture Fit Subtheme 5: Wellbeing (Mental & Physical)
Theme 2	Graduate Trainees' perceptions of the Employer's expectations of them
	Subtheme 1: Continuous Learning Subtheme 2: Hard Work
Theme 3:	Graduate Trainees' post-entry experiences at Nestlé S.A.
	Subtheme 1: Workplace Transition Subtheme 2: Support for Graduates
Theme 4	Graduate Trainees' socialization processes and sources of information
	Subtheme 1: Human Resources Processes Subtheme 2: Organisational Agents

Theme	
5:	Graduate Trainees' perceptions of unmet expectations
	Subtheme 1: Revise Expectations
	Subtheme 2: Negotiate Expectations through Communication
	Intentions 3: Intentions to Leave

4.3. Results

4.3. Graduate Trainee's pre-entry expectations on employers' obligations to them

Responding to the question regarding their perceptions of employment as graduates entering the employment environment, Graduate Trainees shared the aspects that formed part of their pre-employment expectations towards their first employer. These dimensions varied with each participant, revealing their own content dimensions, the degree to which these were important and reasons why they were important to them. The 'expectations of employers' obligation to them suggest the following subthemes: (1) *work-life integration*; (2) *financial rewards*; (3) *career development*; (4) *culture fit* and (5) *well-being (mental & physical)*. These subthemes suggest that they are not mutually exclusive, however, each form an integral part in revealing graduate trainees' belief system about the concept of work from an expectations point of view.

4.3.1. Work – Life Integration

This subtheme refers to the desire of an employee to work for an organisation that provides provisions for work-life integration. Some Graduate Trainees expected the normative 8am to 5pm work environment. While some Graduates responses revealed a desire to work for an organisation that valued work-life integration for its employees irrespective of tenure in the organisation. Flexibility was expressed as a pre-employment expectation so to accommodate commitments outside the workplace as some graduates had other commitments prior to joining the Graduate Development Programme at Nestlé South Africa. For example, **Grad5** and **Grad3** who had enrolled for an Honour's degree in Marketing and Supply Chain Management respectively, as full-time students at a South African University.

Rousseau (2009) mentioned that employment trends in recent times have changed to accommodate a greater need for the employer to increase flexibility.

Typically, the employment contract in which the employees enter the organisation make provisions for working hours in the workplace and ordinarily employees are expected by law to comply with those work hours. However, Nestlé S.A. has set provisions of flexible time,

which suggest options that an employee can exercise e.g. working remotely and staggering shift patterns, depending on the condition of employment relevant to the employee.

Some of the Graduate Trainees expressed that, prior to joining a corporate environment, they expected structured types of work environments that included strict 8am to 5pm working hours with no room for flexibility. This perspective of a corporate environment, they believed, was shaped by society's portrayal of work. A participant shared her opinion of this:

"I feel like that's how society portrays work, you know, it can be like from the media, from movies to how your parents talk about work, from the older generation, do work that's eight to five jobs, you work for the same company for twenty-five years, doing the same thing. You know your perceptions are created about work." (Grad1).

Grad2 and Grad3 expected the normative 8 am to 5pm working environment.

"So, I expected normal 8-5 kind of job" (Grad3).

"Just walk into the office, couple of hours, eight, nine hours, done! You know?" (Grad2).

For instance, the quote below from **Grad1**, illustrates how the perception of a corporate environment would look like.

"Some of my expectations was of course going into a corporate company, a very corporately environment, not very flexible, it does not necessarily mean negative things, but I did not think it would be flexible, very much structured, from eight to five. Do your job, go home." (Grad1).

This was expressed as a concern as some of them expected some sort of flexibility so as to accommodate for responsibilities outside the work context. The same sentiment was shared by **Grad3 and Grad5**, who also expected some flexible time to accommodate their studies as they were currently completing their honour's degree and would need some time off to attend to their studies.

"As a student I was also expecting that companies hiring students offer study leave and flexy time to accommodate us students" (Grad3).

"I also expected them to understand that I'm studying full time. So, when I started working, I was doing my Honours full-time" (Grad5).

Even though the criteria for selecting graduates for the Graduate Development Programme stipulates that a Bachelor's degree in the field of study is a minimum requirement, a few Graduates Trainees revealed they were pursuing postgraduate degrees to increase their employability in the market.

4.3.2. Financial Rewards

The second subtheme associated with Graduate Trainees' expectations of their first formal employment was financial rewards. Almost all of them expressed that they were interested in a job that offered an attractive 'Cost to Company' package with a good basic salary and additional benefits. This was cited by the Graduate Trainees as an expectation that grew once they started to actively search for companies to work for. For instance, **Grad4** mentioned that she considered "pay" as one of the factors to look for besides just looking at the best company to work for:

"Besides working for a top agency, another factor for me, the money, the pay and the benefits" (Grad4).

"I expected to have some benefits, like medical aid, pension/provident fund" (Grad3).

Grad2 expected that there would be congruence between qualification i.e., completed degree and the salary and benefits he would earn.

"I can't wait to get my first job, you know, R 40 000 salary. I've got a degree so I'm gonna get a job immediately after I'm done with school" (Grad2).

In addition, some of the other graduate trainees drew on the realities of their prior experiences when they were looking for a job and mentioned that finding a job was not as easy as they had expected it to be. The following quote is illustrative of this as **Grad2** reflected:

"Lecturers make it seem like, the minute you're done, you get a job, you walk into a job. It's not like that, they make it seem like companies are going to be fighting for you, you know, Nestlé fighting for you, Unilever fighting for you, Banks fighting for you. It is not like that, it's actually the other way around, you are fighting to just you know, get that chance to, you know, prove yourself to be in the workplace" (Grad2).

4.3.3. Career Development

Graduates expected a structured graduate development plan in the workplace and expected a direct transfer of skills by a mentor or experienced peer. **Grad5**, explicitly expressed her desire to have someone, in the form of a mentor who would impart skills set to help her progress in her career.

“I wanted someone to be active in my learning and development to have that mentor, coach, who would show me... and I wanted to be in the grad programme, were I actually came out with something, a certain skill set that will help me progress in my career, and in my life” (Grad5).

“...and I expect mentorship when I’m given work” (Grad6).

Even though becoming a manager in future was seen as a long-term goal, **Grad4** stressed the importance of having someone to guide them throughout their career.

“I feel like in time, yes, we all want to become managers, however, ...but I want to be able to actually lead and actually manage. So, I felt that I need to have mentors, to be developed” (Grad4).

The biggest concern that Graduates Trainees had was being in a graduate development programme that would not expose them to adequate growth. They shared common sentiments such as wanting to be entrusted with responsibility and to do work that was meaningful. **Grad 1** believed that prior to joining Nestlé South Africa she expected to do “*admin work, like stuff that people don’t really want to do*”. **Grad1** and **Grad6** shared the following:

“From my expectation I also thought that you do small jobs you know, you wouldn’t have a lot, of let’s say responsibility. People wouldn’t trust you with like the big things” (Grad1).

“I feel like what is important to me is to be exposed to the entire business, give me real tasks, not just sloppy things, real activities” (Grad6.)

However, in hindsight, they believed that this was a misconception of the type of work a typical graduate is exposed to in the actual work environment.

Grad4 noted that she is a Supply Chain graduate hired in the Sales category of the Graduate programme. She mentions how this is a different field altogether and would have expected direct guidance and support. Below she reflects:

“But in terms of development, it's not what I expected. Maybe, it's my perception of how it should be meet, maybe I'm a bit off! I just feel like I obviously wanted to have structure. I wanted to be able to communicate with my Grad coordinator, for him to give me feedback and to let me know if I'm on check. For example. I'm a Supply Chain Graduate but working in Sales, it's totally new for me. So as much as you tell me learn A, B, C - I can go on out to the field and learn A, B, C, D in theory. But how would I know that this is right? However, what I expect is for us to have a conversation and we can discuss – show me! Like that was great but next you should consider doing it this way” (Grad 4).

4.3.3. Culture Fit

Another subtheme that emerged that reflected Graduate Trainees' expectation towards their first employer was that of culture fit. Culture fit was seen as an alignment between one's personal values and that of the employing organisation. Some Graduates Trainees' responses showed that they valued working for an organisation that fostered a culture of inclusion and diversity. The quotes below illustrate their perceptions of a workplace viewed as culture fit.

“I was doing a lot of research regarding the companies that I wanted to work for and I think for me, one of the biggest factors that I was looking for was culture fit. I felt for me, corporate culture is really important, I really was looking for a place where I can fit in, a sense of belonging. Those were really key priorities when I was looking for a job or graduate programme” (Grad6).

“I wasn't expecting Nestlé to give me as much as I thought they would. Not materialistic things, but in terms of the culture and how they welcomed me in the company” (Grad3).

The architectural aesthetics of the organisation was also an important aspect a graduate considered. **Grad2** believed that the physical appearance and what the organisation offered mattered to him. The following quote reflects this point:

“But to me those are some of the things that actual mattered when I came in for my interview, just to see the aesthetics of the building on the inside. Just like, okay, I want to work here, you know, even walking into the meeting room, where I had my interview, just see the walls and everything and like, okay, cool, this is really cool. This is the type of space I want to be in just feels refreshing, you know,” (Grad2).

It is evident that cultural inclusion encompasses not only the abstract cultural elements as we know them but also the physical appearance that could potentially appeal to graduates. Graduates do not only respond and relate to what is said, but also to what is observed.

4.3.4. Well-being (Mental and Physical)

Another sub-theme that was mentioned by the Graduate Trainees was safety and well-being. Few of the Graduate Trainees mentioned that in their job searches they paid attention to the organisation's safety position and employee well-being as outlined in the interview excerpts below. **Grad 1** shared the following views about her expectations about safety.

“We know that Nestlé has won the number one top employer in South Africa so that's what attracted a lot of people and at the end of the day the organisation is about the people. So, I think for me that was my main concern when I started applying for jobs, I was looking for a company that cared about their employees and had a system that was oriented around caring for those employees, making sure that they are working in an environment that is good for them that has to do with like physical safety, mental health safety and all those things” (Grad1).

“I just wanted a better working environment, like an environment that I feel like I enjoy. And you know, and we feel like the employer actually cares about the well-being of the employees, you know. Not just... from a safety point of view, but also from a mental health point of view. And that's something that Nestlé have been stressing, and even when I have these convos(conversations) with my friends about where they work, not many companies actual care about the mental health of employees - and that's where I feel like Nestlé has the upper hand, because the fact that Nestlé talks about it, means they know that it is an issue, and it is a growing issue. Now, amongst many people, mental health is very important” (Grad2).

4.4. Graduate Trainees' perceptions of anticipated Employer's expectations of them

Another theme that emerged referred to Graduate Trainees' perceptions of employers' expectations of them upon commencing formal employment with their first employer. In other words, this theme addresses graduate trainees' perceptions of what they should reciprocate in the exchange relationship. This theme is anchored in two subthemes namely (1) *Continuous*

Learning and (2) *Hard Work*. Most graduates appreciated that employers in general held certain expectations towards employees which were over and above formal written rules. However, they believed that these were important to assist them in making sense of the environmental cues. Each of the subthemes is presented in detail and draws from the graduates' responses to explain the themes under discussion.

4.4.1. Continuous Learning

Most Graduate Trainees noted that they perceived the engagement in continuous learning to be an employer's expectation of them. They therefore believed that part of what they needed to uphold and are obligated to contribute to the Graduate Development Programme, was the ability to acquire as much knowledge as possible that would enable them to meet the demands of the development programme. This they believed was beneficial for their development considering that they are on a programme that seeks to develop talent for key positions in the organisation. Furthermore, by ensuring that they have the desired skills and abilities which will accelerate their state of readiness to assume a permanent role upon completion of the graduate development programme. Acquiring the necessary knowledge through various learning opportunities, had a direct impact on developing the desired capabilities needed to deal with the complexity of the various roles they were hired into. Secondly, Nestlé operated in a fast-paced environment and acquiring the necessary capabilities will increase their chances of being considered for a permanent position in the organisation.

The Graduate mentioned that upon joining Nestlé the environmental cues were crucial as it informed them of what was expected of them as Trainees in the development programme. Most of the Graduate Trainees shared how they responded to these cues, in particular to what they needed to focus on and how these expectations were incorporated to create perceptions of the employment relationship. The below quote from **Grad2** reflects:

“It is a very difficult question, but really very interesting question. But at this point, because I am very inquisitive and I ask, you know, I go to my line manager, go to people that expect things from me and ask them if I'm meeting expectations, or what is that they are expecting of me? So, I kind of know, per se, so for now, what they are expecting is just to learn, at this stage. Nestlé are expecting us just to learn and to grasp the ways of working. Which is what I'm doing and it's going well. But I like to challenge myself, like, I want to surpass just learning, I wanna do. And that's what I'm acting towards, you know, that's what I do on a daily basis, not just learn, you

know. Just, I need to go beyond expectation, I wanna do more than what they expect me to do and I'm doing that, and it's going well” (Grad2).

” I’m expected to learn and to give my input and just contribute to the whole team dynamics and that's what they want from our side, to not just be there, for the sake of being there.” (Grad5).

“They expect me to perform but also learn, interact with the company and not just be another brick in the wall. They expect all graduates to get out of their comfort zone and ask questions and learn and go into different functions which is not all necessarily at head office because as a Supply Chain graduate, I have been to the factory, to the Warehouse, so they want graduates to get the feel of the entire Supply Chain” (Grad3)

“So, I see a lot of Graduates who come here from varsity, and you have a picture, perception of you know, what this thing is gonna be like. And then it actually turns out not to be that. But what I've learned here is that there is an expectation to make most of what currently is. In line with what you had with visions, just really, I feel like I have been pushed out of my comfort zone.” (Grad6).

Another Graduate Trainee noted that the environment is conducive to fostering a culture of learning. Grad3 reflects that the Graduate Development Programme is structured in such a way that it enables him to learn and grow.

“I feel that the structure of the Graduate Programme is structured in such a way that you can grow, learn these things all the way. I think they’ve put much thought behind the Programme to ensure that as a graduate you get the most out of it. And the environment itself allows for that to happen” (Grad3).

4.4.2. Hard Work.

On the question of what graduates thought they should contribute to the employment relationship; their responses suggest an additional subtheme that speaks to “putting in the hard work”. One might argue that this subtheme is indicative of the type of relationship that exists for graduates, however, working hard seems to suggest an overarching work ethic that graduates perceive to be a crucial element in the employment relationship. None of the Graduate Trainees in their attempts at answering this question sought to provide a dichotomous perspective in this regard. For example, working hard versus working smart, which seems to be a contested debate nowadays. Instead, they offered additional information to substantiate

their responses given that they were hired on a two-year development programme and what it means for them in this period.

“To work hard, to bring about change to be... (Pause) Because I mean, always Nestlé operates in a specific way and that changes our thinking. Yeah, to be the best with Nestlé that you can be and above all have to work harder, just as you can. To do things differently” (Grad4).

“In general, working hard and contributing to the bigger organisation even if you are giving a little bit, you know that, that contributes to the bigger things, just loyal, ambitious and hardworking employees that are looking at contributing to the organisation’s goal, not just their own” (Grad1).

Grad6 stated that he was aware that many individuals had “high expectations” of him and one therefore needs to take initiative and work hard to become more visible in the organisation.

“What I’ve learned is that there’s been high expectations from a lot of people... so, take initiative, and really push yourself, do things, you know?” (Grad6)

4.5. Graduate Trainees’ post-entry experiences at Nestlé

This theme pertains to graduate trainees’ early employment experiences of Nestlé. Given the point in time when the interviews were conducted, Graduate Trainees gave a retrospective account of their early experiences of employment regarding the workplace transition and the support available to graduates as they commenced formal employment for the first time. These two subthemes i.e. (1) Workplace Transition and (2) Support for Graduates are addressed below.

4.5.1. Workplace Transition

The transition from the University environment to the workplace required the Trainee Graduates to adjust to bridge the gap. A few Graduates Trainees noted that this transition was huge particularly due to the fast-paced nature of the work environment while also acknowledged that it was beneficial to their learning experiences.

“um I think coming from varsity to now, I think it’s different, from the varsity environment -the student-oriented kind of jobs I had before, there’s a huge transition because you have to keep up with the environment. I don’t know whether it’s different stream by stream, but I feel like the stream I’m in is very fast paced. you must learn

quickly. Kind of you gotta swim whether you like it or not - I feel like that's how it feels. But it's also beneficial because you learn a lot. You question yourself sometimes but at the end of the day you know this is good for you. It's a win-win... Sometimes you feel like you are not winning but you'll get there, you keep going and I feel like at the end of the day, you'll be good." (Grad1).

"So, during my undergrad I worked for a family business, but coming out of my undergrad into a company, my first proper employer, it was very scary in the beginning because you had to come out of your comfort zone. So, I learnt to get out of my shell and communicate a bit more with people and interact more." (Grad3).

4.5.2. Support for Graduates Trainees

Most Graduate Trainees valued the support they received, which facilitated an easier and smoother transition into the workplace. They stated that the work environment was not rigid, which allowed them to work freely in their respective sections within the business and draw inspiration from their surroundings.

"You still have the same responsibility as an employee who has been here for more than five years and if you make a mistake, you make a mistake, it's not the end of the road. They are willing to understand... and help you fix that mistake and learn from it. They always want us to give them ideas for growth and improvement. So, they don't just consider us as graduates and put us aside, they actually take us in and make us work with others who have been working for ten to fifteen years. They take our inputs seriously as well." (Grad3).

"Nestlé is more - free, like you, you have the freedom to, to express yourself, especially for a guy like me, in the Marketing department, you have the freedom to express yourself creatively. There are always people willing to listen, there is no one on your back per se, you not being micro-managed, which is, which is... feels like a good thing, you know, people need to breathe as well, and I like this. It's a place of freedom, you know, because in the same breath, you are allowed to work from home, the fact that there is such a thing as working from home means, that doesn't really matter where you do your work, as long as your work is done" (Grad2).

In addition, **Grad2** mentioned that being a young person, this kind of freedom resonated with the kind of style of work he preferred.

“...and for the youth, for guys like me, I mean that that's amazing, I don't have to be at my desk the whole time. For me to go work at the canteen, and just take my laptop and go sit at the canteen and work. The fact that I'm not at my desk does not necessary mean, I'm not doing any work, you know. And, and, and that's for me, that's the major thing that I, that I like about Nestlé, it's just that freedom of you know, being yourself, you can be yourself and people are welcoming.” (Grad2).

Contrasting views were also expressed regarding available support. Below is a personal account of what **Grad5** experienced as a young graduate at Nestlé S.A.

“That's not the case with our generation. And unfortunately, they don't understand that. And we're in 2019, but it feels like Nestlé is stuck in 2002 because of the way they're doing things. They don't understand our generation, they think reading a textbook, or a blog about how millennials think, is how they are going to understand us. And it's not the case, they don't understand that it's not that we are disloyal. But at the end of the day, we need to get something out of Nestlé. So, if I'm not going to get what I want in terms of my learning and development in Nestlé, then I'll go where I will.” (Grad5).

Two of the six Graduate Trainees shared that they were excluded from participating in a key learning area without anything to do during the first few months. They stated that as new graduates they missed out on four to five months of Micro-Distribution, which was one of the learning components as per the Learner Activity Manual (LAM). Since the Micro – Distribution team had no capacity to include them, they were therefore excluded with no alternative tasks to complete to compensate for the loss of learning in that area.

“...and with the Sales programme, we missed out on a full four or five months in terms of Micro-Distribution, and we are Sales Grads, we're going to be part of the Sales Department and for someone in the Sales team to kind of just wash their hands- is opposite. ‘You'll see what you do’. It's disappointing, and because you would think that the Sales Department would contribute to our development.” (Grad5).

“For example, there was a specific set of skills that we were supposed to complete on the field, Micro-Distribution and unfortunately, the second Micro-Distribution team didn't want to take us in. So, number one, that makes no sense to me because, you guys (the company) recruited Sales Grads and you have a specific Department, and you are not going to take Sales Grads. So, we were just basically at the office, I didn't

know what to do, we kept on asking our Grad Coordinator, 'what should we do?' and he didn't really have a plan and kept asking different departments to take us" (Grad4)

One Graduate Trainee sounded concerned as she noted how they would be expected to occupy a role which they were not fully prepared for upon the completion of the programme.

"...at the end of these two years, we're going to be pushed into a role that we're not fully prepared for." (Grad5).

4.6. Graduate Trainee's socialization processes and sources of information

Graduate Trainees shared their experiences of their interface with Nestlé S.A. highlighting pre-entry encounters as well as post-entry early experiences through socialisation with key individuals/groups and processes that offered contract-related information. In addition, each Graduate Trainee reflected on their individual accounts of their socialisation and how information-seeking behaviors helped them to make sense of their position in this new organisation as first-time employees.

4.6.1. Human Resources Processes

4.6.1.1. Campus Graduate Activations (Recruitment Processes)

A few Graduate Trainees' responses referred to Nestlé S.A's graduate recruitment processes. **Grad6**, a Marketing graduate, mentioned that the direct exposure to Nestlé S.A. at his University campus helped him to gain insight into the kind of organisation that he would like to be associated with.

"I'm very honest about this, I didn't know anything about Nestlé, the corporate company. I knew the brand. So, until they did the activation at UJ and then that's when I met them, and I developed a great liking for them in terms of how they presented themselves. But most importantly, what I saw was the youthfulness in the people they came with, the (Marketing) Brand Teams represented by young and predominantly Black Graduate Trainees. So, I was like, okay, cool" (Grad6).

Most Graduate Trainees believed that they identified with the team that represented Nestlé i.e., demographics of team members e.g., being young and Black. These teams gave motivational talks and give talks on: "A Day in the life of a Graduate Trainee at Nestlé" in order to give insight into their experiences of employment as Graduate employees in the NFT Graduate Development Programme. The Recruitment Team also shared some of the career opportunities

that the company offered for graduates and the process of how to go about applying should they intend to pursue a career with the organisation. In light of these presentations, they believed that it would be easy for them to transition from university to the workplace environment. The quote below is illustrative of this:

“This is a company that I would like to work for and the type of case they presented - very interesting- you bring what we learned in varsity in real life, which was exciting.” (Grad6).

In contrast, one graduate reported never to have been exposed to any graduate campus recruitment initiatives. He felt that it would be difficult to transition from unemployment to a workplace, especially as he wouldn't know what to expect in his first job. All he knew about the organisation was what he had researched and was quoted saying: *“But it's very difficult, just, you know, making that transition from varsity to employment” (Grad2).*

Other Graduates felt that there was a misalignment between what was communicated or advertised about the Graduate Development Programme and the actual programme itself once they commenced working. They mentioned that during campus visits, HR sold a ‘wonderful programme’, but since joining Nestlé they have not yet experienced the programme as it was initially communicated to them.

“So, for example in terms of how the programme is advertised to start off with, it said to be - as if it's a rotational programme. For example, people (the company) came to our campus and spoke about the Programme and then you obviously have this expectation. But I feel that the way in which the programme is advertised and how it actually is after induction, is totally different. I feel like the communication between the Grad (Graduate) Coordinator and the actual business doesn't align. So basically, HR can set up this wonderful programme, I just feel, as like, it is unstructured since I started working here.” (Grad4).

4.6.1.2.Learner Activity Manual (LAM)

Graduate Trainees mentioned the importance of the Learner Activity Manual as it outlined the organisation's expectations of them regarding the required milestones that they needed to achieve in the two-year programme. Each graduate shared their perceptions coupled with their experiences of working in their respective divisions.

“Graduates have your Learner Activity Manual (LAM) so that would be like, that would be your first exposure to what people expect of you in terms of what you have to do, what you have to complete, what to basically have to do before this is over. It defines your growth that you have to follow” (Grad1).

“it gives you that guideline of what you should learn, what projects you need to have completed and the number of projects and skills that you should have developed and have learnt at a given time, in that specific function” (Grad3)

Other graduates believed that there is a disconnect between the Learner Activity Manual and what they actually do. They questioned whether the manual actually prepares them adequately for their different roles.

“Yes, Manual, but does it really prepare us for the job? I understand that there are certain concepts we need to grasp, but am I capable of filling that role? That's the thing that really bothers me, I don't think we're doing things that are in line with our roles, and understand that they might not be enough time to fully equip us with every single skill set for every single role. But we're getting bits and pieces here and there. And then, at the end of these two years, we're going to be pushed into a role that we're not fully prepared for.” (Grad5).

Other few graduates believed that they would have loved to receive the Learner Activity Manual during the induction period to assess whether they would be addressing the learning areas that were aligned to their career aspirations. Below is a quote from a Marketing Graduate Trainee:

“I wanna know the type of skills I'm gonna learn, the type of skills I'm gonna gain, the type of things that I'll be doing on a daily basis. Because as much as the organisation can be great, and everything, my personal career development also comes first, it was done, I need to know that this is the right move for me, you know, because there's certain things that I want to learn and learn them by a certain time. Because at the same time marketing is an ever-evolving industry, so you can get left behind. So those are the things that I just needed to know, you know, upfront, you know” (Grad2)

4.6.2. Organisational Agents

The results also pointed out that members of the organisation played an important part in transmitting contract-related information to the new Graduate Trainees. Graduates reflected on the interactions with members in the organisation whom they believed meaningfully informed the partners of the exchange relationships and were sources of information.

4.6.2.1. Line Manager

Graduate Trainees identified Line Managers to be important exchange partners in the organisation. They believed that the evaluation of one's performance occurs between them and their respective line managers. They noted that the Line Manager is an important party as he/she sets and tracks the organisation's expectations through the Personal Development Plan (PDP) aligned to the objectives of the Learner Activity Manual and other undocumented functional responsibilities.

"I feel like once you start working with your line manager, you guys need to develop like a work relationship before you can define those personal expectations. When I say personal, I don't mean like personal, but I mean like a work relationship and how they see you performing. So as the time goes on, I think it's how you develop a relationship with your line manager, then they will start to ingrain those expectations based on how they see you and what you're good at doing" (Grad1).

"My current manager from my current unit is very concerned about my development. We have those monthly check-ins where he assesses my progress, you know, 'you can improve here', and you want that criticisms especially now while you are young, you want to improve on all of those things" (Grad 4).

"So, one thing that my team does right, is really giving me a lot of responsibility and through being responsible, then it's in line with growing. So, I feel like that's what my Line Manager does right, really gives us tasks, not just sloppy things, real activities, I'm expected to carry out. And of course, she will be there for guidance, the most part she has really allowed me to sort of fledge, of course, there was guidance at the beginning. In the first few months before. I'm now managing quite a lot of activities by myself. For her, she's more on the background side, and coming in when needed" (Grad 6).

4.6.2.2. Senior Graduate Trainees

Most Graduate Trainees mentioned that they learnt a lot from second year Graduate Trainees regarding what it is like to work for the organisation. This they believed was helpful in them adjusting to their respective departments and/or functions. Graduates seemed to have actively sought specific information on the expectations of their respective roles. Information shared by second year Graduate Trainees helped them to make sense of the Graduate Development Programme. Below are excerpts from the interviews in this regard:

“Second year graduates even, telling us what they had expected and how it really was for them and how it’s going to be like for us - most likely in our streams (respective fields) that we chose. That was slightly helpful and through that it created our own expectation of ourselves. So, you look at what they’ve done. So, if they say to me: ‘It’s important that when you get into a Marketing programme, that you immerse yourself in all functions of Marketing, don’t just stick to one thing’. As such, if that’s what you commit yourself to, then, that becomes an expectation for yourself based on what someone else has said” (Grad1)

“Okay, so I have spoken to a few people - the Senior Grads, particularly in my field, Marketing. So, of course, I’d speak to them, you know, just find out like, how they are doing and what to expect, like, what are the daily activities that they would normally do. Because these are questions that I had during my induction month in Feb and no one seemed to have an answer for me, like I’d ask, you know, BEOs (Business Executive Officer) and Alfred (Talent and Acquisition Specialist), for instance, recruitment.” (Grad2).

“But currently, in supply chain and I find myself speaking to many of the second years a lot, just to guide me as to, if maybe I’m overreacting, or I need to work hard on this or how do I perhaps accomplish that type of thing. So, I think it is the second-year Sales grads that I align with.” (Grad4).

4.7. Graduate Trainees' perceptions of unmet expectations

Graduate Trainees shared their views about unfulfilled organisational expectations and their likely reactions in this regard. These are discussed in detail below.

4.7.1. Revise Expectations

The following are responses shared by most Graduate Trainee as possible reactions should their expectations not be met by the organisation.

"I feel like at the end of the day you need to be happy as a person, that's the foremost important priority. So, if my expectations aren't being met - first you need to ask yourself: 'Are my expectations realistic?' - You need to ask yourself that, you shouldn't look at it one sided." (Grad1).

"Okay. So, hypothetically speaking, let's say well I like digital Marketing, right? And now, there is no digital Marketing graduate programme at Nestle, rather the current Marketing programme as we know it, which does not really lead you towards a digital marketing role, but rather a Marketing Brand role. So, say, someone was mentoring me, or someone had given me the expectation that in a year or two, for example, I will be in a Digital Marketing role, but only to note that I haven't done as much to be ready for the digital marketing role, what would I do? Well, first thing I will do is, I do some self-introspection to see whether I did I learn enough? Or did I do enough? Did I speak up enough, or did I prove myself enough to say that this is the route I want to be in, you know, because it's very easy to expect things to go your way, but at the same time, you need to make sure that you are pushing your career towards the direction you want it to go." (Grad2).

In addition, one Graduate Trainee shared that she would continue working hard on the development goals of the Programme and will seek the necessary information for her to develop aligned to the longer-term goals that she has set for herself. The below quote was shared by **Grad4**:

"I am sure that I still follow things and do my best and work hard, and if somebody in the specific Department can't help me, I'll sure find someone else. So as long as I'm that person, I know I have these goals that I want to achieve in three years or five years' time, as long as I'm okay with that, I think I am the best person who can stir my own development" (Grad4).

4.7.2. Negotiate Expectations through Communication

Most Graduate Trainees opted for communication as a strategy to manage their expectations by communicating with someone whom they identified as central in the exchange relations. Most identified their line managers as individuals with whom they would negotiate those expectations with. The following are some of the views from the participants:

“So, for example, I'm big on communication, I like a lot of things important staff like communicating, so there was a certain time early in the year or couple of months ago, where I felt, like, for example, my manager is a very independent person. So, she likes carrying (doing) a lot of stuff by herself, and certain projects for set of meetings, and then she would not include me. Because she felt like I wasn't ready yet. So, we have these check-in meetings set. I mean, I've been here for a couple of months now just, just for visibility, and just being an observer, just to see what's happening. I actually told her, a very receptive manager, is really open to, you know, we have reflections where we sat, you know, and she would ask me, you know, how do you feel, how am I managing you? And then I told her that Actually, no, I, I feel like you could include more into 1, 2, 3 as possible learning and development areas, because I'm not going to learn by not being included. And she was like, actually, you know, I totally missed that, so I'm actually glad that you brought it up. But I think for me, I feel like we got it right in the beginning of the relationship, she is not my friend”. (Grad6).

“Number two, if people are not able to, based on my expectations, are not able to help me fulfil that, I'd have a conversation with my manager. Tell them this is how I feel and then they'll tell me what I need to do. I'll tell them this is what I did, you know, in order to develop myself or whatever” (Grad4).

4.7.3. Intentions to Leave

Graduate Trainees mentioned that leaving the organisation would be the last resort. Most of them mentioned key non-negotiable expectations from Nestlé S.A. such as learning and development and would decide to leave the organisation should these be unfulfilled. They believed that their own development, particularly at this point in their lives is a priority as it is aligned to their career aspirations.

“...if I am in a situation where I am putting in my all and meeting all their expectations they have of me and I’m not getting those back, I guess I will look another way and go on a new venture. That’s brutal honestly right there” (Grad1).

“And if I see that, I have been doing enough to work hard for the role, and the role still doesn't come, then just do what everybody, every other normal human being would do, which is you know, maybe start to look elsewhere for that role. Because at the end of the day it is about career development, Nestlé will always be here, you are growing old, you know. If that's what you really want to do as a person, then you should chase, chase, what you really want to do as a person” (Grad2)

“For me personally, if Nestlé doesn't hold up the part of the deal I'm gone. I'm not going to waste the time, I'm not going to try to negotiate, I'm gone, because it's actually two years. So, if you are not going to do it in these years, why would you do it the next year or two years down the line. So, for me personally, I'm gone. And that just brings me back to the eight months that I've been here. I've been here for eight months, and I cannot confidently say that I'm competent in a certain skill set, which is scary. I mean, four months, down the line, it will be a year. And I don't think I'm able to say that I'm competent in a certain skill set. That's a year never going to get it back. And I think, what, seven weeks ago, we were supposed to be in a camp site. But we spent nine weeks doing nothing. That's nine weeks of my life. I will never get back and they know” (Grad5).

Chapter Summary

The chapter focused on the presentation of findings aligned to the key themes and the respective related subthemes. The data reflect the participants individual responses that speak to their perceptions, attitudes and experiences of employment as graduates employed in the graduate development programme. The findings reveal how Graduate Trainees upon entering the organisation, engage in a cognitive process of sense-making, particularly to make sense of the unwritten obligations/expectations of the employment relationship. This is indicative of the creation phase of the psychological contract and is unpacked in more detail in the discussion chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5. Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the empirical findings as outlined in the preceding chapter. The findings were grouped into five overarching themes with relevant subthemes that speaks to the overall perceptions and experiences of Graduate Trainees as novice employees in Nestlé S.A. The first theme focuses on Graduate *Trainees' pre-entry expectations from the employer*. This theme uncovers Graduates Trainees' expectations of their first employer before entering their first employment. These expectations ranged from transactional elements (*Financial Rewards*) to relational elements (*Career Development*) of the employment relationship and seem to suggest ways in which organisations can effectively manage the employment relationship by considering these aspects from the onset.

The second theme addressed *Graduate Trainees' perceptions of anticipated Employer's expectations of them*. This fundamental theme looked at the obligations Graduate Trainees believed they have towards their employer upon entering their first employment. These include *Hard Work* and *Continuous Learning* viewed as essential in fulfilling the requirements of the Graduate Development Programme.

The third theme looked at uncovering *Graduate Trainees' post-entry experiences in Nestlé S.A.* This theme uncovers the role of early employment experiences of Graduate Trainees as they commenced formal employment in the organisation. These early experiences were grouped into *Workplace Transition* and *Support for Graduate Trainees*. These were discussed to explain how graduate trainees made sense of their new environment. It is important to note how these early experiences shaped Graduate Trainees' understanding of themselves in relation to their role within the Graduate Development Programme and the organisation at large.

The fourth theme looked at *Graduate Trainees' socialisation processes and sources of information* before and after they joined the organisation. This theme revealed how individuals and organisational processes provided contract-related information to Graduate Trainees. For example, the HR recruitment processes in the form of *Campus Graduate Activations* Impact Graduate Trainees' expectations before entry to Nestlé's S.A. Graduate Development Programme. This subtheme showed different narratives of graduates' experiences of these processes and how they used this information to navigate their employment in the organisation.

The last theme explored *Graduate Trainees' perceptions of unmet expectations*. In this theme Trainee Graduates shared different narratives of their evaluations of unmet expectations, although, common was the topic of career development and how it would be a factor to consider should the company fail to meet their end of the deal. The failure of the company to ensure that they enabled these opportunities would influence their attitudes and behaviours towards the company. It is evident from the research findings of this study that the evaluation process informs Graduate Trainees' attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation.

5.1. Themes and Subthemes.

5.2.1. Graduate Trainees' pre-entry expectations of employers' obligations to them.

Graduate Trainees revealed expectations in the form of employer's obligations to them. These obligations constituted the contents of the psychological contract, which revealed an employee's expectation of the exchange employment relationship (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010). In essence, these expectations were rooted in one's anticipatory psychological contract, which predated the employment relationship. Graduate Trainees cited the following pre-employment expectations as important psychological antecedents in which they would expect to see manifested in the employment setting irrespective of who their first employer was namely:

Subthemes

- Work –Life integration;
- Financial Rewards;
- Career Development;
- Culture Fit and
- Well-Being (Mental and Physical).

The Anticipatory Psychological Contract reflects an employees' future mutual expectations between themselves and potential employers (De Vos et al., 2009). Most Graduate Trainees believed that corporate environments of today should be able to provide these inducements to respond to the individual needs of the current generation when entering their workplace. Gresse (2012) noted that graduate adolescents lack professional experience and as a result have a limited or no frame of reference of an organisational setting. However, in this study and in support of De Vos et al., (2009), it seemed that Graduate Trainees had already had a

rudimentary mental schema which enabled them to determine their “choice of professional employment as well as norms to guide professional expectations of future employers” (p. 296).

De Vos et al. (2009) noted that employer’s obligations that are prominent in Graduate Trainee’s anticipatory psychological contract are likely to shape the development of the psychological contract of newcomers in an organisation. From a potential Graduate employee’s point of view, the psychological contract reveals what is assumed to be the organisation’s inducement to the employment arrangement i.e. an above average salary and/or more benefits and career advancement opportunities for the employee to reciprocate desired organisational outcomes e.g., employee commitment and engagement to the organisation (Greese & Linde, 2021). The below table is a summary of employer’s promises to the employment exchange deal as presented in a study by van de Ven (2004, as cited in Akinyemi, 2009, p. 641).

Figure 4

Summary of an Organisation’s Promises to the Employment Exchange Arrangement (van de Ven, 2004, as cited in Akinyemi, 2009, p. 641).

Organizational Promises		
1.	Career Development	Offering possibilities for development and/or promotion within the organization (such as possibilities for development, chances of promotion).
2.	Job Content	Offering challenging, interesting job content (such as work in which employees can use their capacities, challenging tasks)
3.	Social Environment	Offering a pleasant and cooperative working environment (such as good communication among co-workers, good cooperation within the group)
4.	Financial Compensation	Offering appropriate compensation (such as remuneration commensurate with the work, conditions of employment that have favourable tax consequences)
5.	Work-Private Life Balance	Offering respect and understanding for the personal situation of the employee (for example, flexibility in working hours, understanding of personal circumstances)

In this research study, Graduate Trainees mentioned that for their first employment, they expected employers to offer employment conditions that would accommodate for Work – Life commitments. Flexible time was expressed as a pre-employment expectation that would crystallise upon entering the employment phase. Rousseau (2001) mentioned that employment trends in recent time have changed and will continue to change. As such, there has been a greater need from the part of the employer to increase flexibility. This trend in particular speaks to the Graduate Trainee’s personal educational commitments outside the organisation. For example, two graduate were currently enrolled for an Honours Degree at a University to further their studies. This they believed was necessary as it would potentially add value to their role

and to Nestlé as a whole. As such, one Trainee Graduate noted how he expected his employer to offer employee – centric human resources practices (e.g., study leave) to accommodate for personal responsibilities regardless of tenure in the organisation.

Most Graduate Trainees also expected a job within the Graduate Development Programme that paid well with benefits. This was cited as an expectation that developed once they actively searched for companies to work for. For example, one Graduate considered pay as one of the factors she looked for besides just looking for the best company to work in. Montes et al., (2015) noted that when newcomers join an organisation, they tend to have preconceived notions (perceptions) about their obligations to the employer (Hard work) and their employer's corresponding obligations to them (Fair Remuneration). However, the contents of the exchange relationship are relative to the type of psychological contract. Financial rewards (fair pay, market-related salary package) as intrinsic to the graduate's anticipatory psychological contract reveals a transactional type of psychological contract. Coyle-Shapiro et al. (2008) categorise the contents of the psychological contract in terms of transactional and relational components. The former, refers to economic tangible aspects, while the latter involve social elements. Financial rewards are considered as intrinsic to the transactional psychological contract which precedes a graduate's employment experience with a specific organisation.

This pre-employment expectation develops gradually in one's life and unfolds as an ingrained expectation from a graduate's first employer. For example, one graduate shared that he had expected that there would be congruence between completing a degree and salary/benefits that he will earn. This he believed, was a perspective that was shaped during his studies by various parties including his lectures at the University.

Tomprou and Nikolaou (2011) also noted that pre-entry expectations are formulated during the anticipatory stage of socialisation. They stated that pre-entry expectations are formed by new recruits when they are still outsiders to the organisation about their anticipated experiences in the new organisation they are about to enter. Career Development was cited by most of the Graduate Trainees as an employment condition that would be essential once they entered the employment phase. The nature of the Graduate Development Programme per se, is the foundation for these expectations of the prospective psychological contract formation.

All Graduate Trainees expected a structured development plan in the workplace that would spell out a development pathway of key learnings to be achieved in their respective roles. They believed that the presence of a mentor (subject matter expert) who would impart the required

skills and knowledge would be necessary in achieving their developmental goals which in turn would prepare them to assume key market roles within the organisation in the near future. One graduate shared her perceptions of workplace transition and noted that it would be useful to have someone in the form of a mentor to guide her in applying the acquired knowledge in the workplace.

Most Graduate Trainees expressed concern regarding the type of work and responsibility a graduate employee would be entrusted with, noting that they wanted to be exposed to work that was meaningful and challenging. This finding was supportive of a study by van de Ven (2004) (as cited in Akinyemi, 2009, p. 641) in that new employees expected job content that would challenge them to utilise their technical competencies to the fullest. In this study graduates believed that this was necessary as their state of readiness at the end of the Graduate Development Programme would be assessed on their abilities to transfer their knowledge and skills to practice specifically related to their roles and responsibilities in assigned tasks.

A few Graduate Trainees mentioned that their job search process included finding a ‘best culture fit’ for their first employment. They expressed that they wanted to work for an organisation in which they would experience a sense of belonging. Culture fit as a pre-employment expectation implies a relational employer obligation, wherein the contents of the psychological contract are social rather than economic in nature (Coyle–Shapiro et al., 2008). In the earlier work of Rousseau (1990), it was found that relational employer obligations were associated with employee relational obligations such as loyalty and trust. One graduate stated that he valued materialistic things less than the kind of culture presented by Nestlé S.A. Another graduate also shared his initial interface with Nestlé and noted that the aesthetics of the building was an impression making moment for him and felt that such an environment would be conducive to fostering a creative and innovative mind-set.

Few graduate trainees highlighted well-being, both physical and mental as an important factor for consideration in their first employment. Graduates noted that Nestlé as an organisation had won the *TOP Employer Award in 2018*, which attracted many graduates to the organisation. The award was based on best employee practices inclusive of the health and wellness of employees. Coyle–Shapiro et al. (2008) noted that Psychological Contracts and Perceived Organisational Support (POS) are interrelated theories that draw heavily from Social Exchange Theory and thus can be used to explain behaviour in exchange arrangements. The Theory of Perceived Organisational Support as purported by Eisenberger et al. (1986) concerns how an

individual perceives the degree to which an organisation values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing. Nestlé as a Wellness Company represents the very essence of these antecedents and communicate messages about providing support services that speaks to mental health, through the services of ICAS (a counselling service provider) and physical safety in the workplace. Two graduates noted that for their first employment, they wanted to experience a safe working environment, to work for an organisation in which the employer cares about the wellness of employees, from both a physical safety and mental health point of view. One graduate mentioned that in doing his formal research on Nestlé, he came to realise that Nestlé emphasises the physical and mental health of its employees and therefore has a competitive edge over other organisations in terms of attracting employees whose values align with that of the organisation.

5.2.2. Graduate Trainees' perceptions of anticipated Employer's expectations of them.

Graduate trainees appreciated that employers had expectations of their employees over and above the formal written employment contract. These employer's expectations were evident early in the employment relationship and were represented by various personnel who transmitted salient information on the psychological contract. These included

Subthemes:

- Continuous Learning,
- Working Hard.

The very essence of the Nestlé's Graduate Development Programme speaks to a continuous development pathway, in which graduates are developed to acquire behavioural as well as technical competencies relevant to their roles in the business. In the two-year development programme, graduates are expected to not only learn but apply concepts as prescribed in the Learner Activity Manual (LAM). The LAM consists of guidelines with key learning outcomes in which the graduate is expected to learn and execute. Line Mangers form part of this learning process as they are entrusted with the responsibility to provide supervision, assign tasks and responsibilities and documents a graduate's progress in line with the objectives of the development programme. Therefore, most Graduate Trainees noted that in their first months at Nestlé, the common expectation was evident in that they were encouraged to learn and grasp the ways of working. Line managers fostered a culture of learning and encouraged graduates to share their learnings with the rest of the team. They were also challenged to contribute to their respective teams, to ask where necessary and to immerse oneself to fully experience

employment in their respective roles. For example, one graduate shared that his line manager exposed him to different functions of his business unit. Being in Supply Chain Head Office, he was able to experience working at a factory and at a Warehouse (Distribution Centre), which enhanced his overall learning..

In addition to Continuous Learning, Graduate Trainees also pointed out that hard-work and creativity were valued at Nestlé. Graduates recognised that Nestlé operates in a fast-paced environment, which demanded hard-work and creativity from employees. One graduate mentioned that during her first months at Nestlé, she noticed that Nestlé operated in a certain way and that the underlying expectation of employee behaviour involved the following: working hard and use creativity to contribute to the bigger picture of the organisation and demonstrate loyalty by acting in the best interest of the company.

The findings were consistent to that of (van de Ven, 2004, as cited in Akinyemi, 2009, p.641) who found the following to be employee promises to the organisation. The bellow table is a succinct summary of employer’s expectations.

Figure 5

Summary of Employee Promises (van de Ven, 2004 as cited in Akinyemi, 2009, p. 641)

Employee Promises		
1.	Effort and Performance	Willingness to make efforts to perform well for the organization (for example, making efforts for the benefit of the organization, doing good work both quantitatively and qualitatively, working well with co-workers)
2.	Flexibility	Willingness to be flexible in carrying out the work that needs to be done (for example, working overtime, taking work home)
3.	Loyalty	Willingness to continue working longer for the organization (for example, not accepting every job offer that comes along, working for the organization for at least several years)
4.	Ethical Conduct	Willingness to conduct oneself ethically towards the organization (for example, not making confidential information public, dealing honestly with resources and budgets)
5.	Availability	Willingness to keep one’s availability status at an acceptable level (for example, taking training courses that become available, keeping up with trade literature)

The Graduate Trainees noted that their obligations towards the employer seemed to have been informed by environmental cues/ information emanating from the organisation. First year Graduate Trainees at Nestlé noted their perceptions of obligations to be fundamental in shaping the prospective psychological contract post organisational entry, i.e. what one understands, apart from written obligations, to give and expect in the employment relationship. It is at this point where the psychological contract takes shape. Rousseau et al. (2016) found that when newcomers join an organisation, they tend to engage in effortful cognitive processes in which

they incorporate pre-entry beliefs as well as newly acquired organisational information (stemming from organisational cues) to form the psychological contract embedded in their employment schema.

5.2.3. Graduate Trainees' post-entry experiences at Nestlé.

Upon entering the employment phase, graduate trainees entered the creation stage of their respective psychological contracts. Sherman and Morley (2015) noted that “pre-entry experiences with the potential organisation such as interviews tend to have less impact on the initial structure of the psychological contract than do post organisational entry experiences” (p. 3). At this stage, Graduate Trainees are confronted with organisational cues that shape their reality of their experiences in the organisation.

Most Graduate Trainees noted a huge transition from university to the workplace environment. The work environment at Nestlé was fast-paced and required graduates to grasp the ways of working as quickly as possible. Few graduate trainees noted that there was a reality shock in terms of the student-oriented jobs they were used to while at university and the actual work done in their respective roles at Nestlé. One graduate equated the Nestlé work environment to swimming and noted that one had to always keep afloat. Having said this, they believed that these experiences were beneficial to their overall learning and that it would potentially add value in the long run.

Being a first-time employee, Graduate Trainees shared their early experiences at Nestlé. While they mentioned that the transition from university to the workplace was huge, the support provided to them during the initial stage of their employment facilitated a much easier transition than anticipated. Various authors (Louis, 1980; Rousseau, 1995) noted that organisational information include cues that reflect an employer's intentions of the employment arrangement, either implicit or explicit. Most graduate trainees noted that the support for graduates was apparent in the early phase of their employment as their contributions were valued, they were empowered with the same responsibilities as senior employees, and they were guided to learn from their mistakes. In addition, they felt that managers fostered a conducive work environment in which they were allowed to express themselves freely. One in the Marketing Division stated that Nestlé was a “place of freedom” as they were allowed to work from home provided that the work was done. Furthermore, he believed that being a young employee, this kind of flexibility aligned with his own preferred working style.

However, some graduates voiced different views with regards to organisation support. . Graduates Trainees in the Sales Division shared that they did not have the required support in the initial stages of their employment and that they missed out on four to five months of a learning area, Micro-Distribution, an important learning component in the Graduate Development Programme. They shared that the Micro-Distribution function team did not have the capacity to take them in, and they consequently missed out on that specific learning component. Graduates expressed disappointment as this focus area would have contributed to their learning and development in meeting the objectives of the two-year programme. Graduates also expressed frustration, stating that they were basically recruited with no proper plan in place nor a contingency plan to deal with such eventualities. What was more worrying was that at the end of the two-year graduate programme, their state of readiness to occupy a permanent position would be assessed against their performance in their respective LAM.

It is evident that support for graduates play an important role in assisting Graduate Trainees' transitions into the graduate development programme as reflected in the narrations of Graduate Trainees' experiences within the graduate development programme. The employer should take note of these experiences particularly because negative experiences tend to have unintended consequences that may potentially shape how graduates view the organisation as an employer. This is particularly important because research indicates that early experiences with the organisation tend to impact future attitudes and behaviours of employees (Sherman and Morley, 2015). For example, graduates noting that missing months of an important function posed the question of whether the organisation had properly planned to onboard them into the organisation's programme. By questioning their position in the organisation, especially during the early stages of the employment relationship, may potentially create doubt and could result in graduates seeking alternative employment.

Furthermore, graduates also believed that they would not be fully prepared for such a permanent role. Knapp and Masterson (2018) noted that Psychological Contracts reflect a perceived promise. This simply means that the individual believes that he/she and the exchange partner have obligated themselves to a set of exchange terms that are promissory in nature. Therefore, being a Graduate Trainee in the Sales Division creates an expectation that a graduates would be exposed to its various functions especially when these functions are explicitly addressed in the graduate's LAM. Research on psychological contracts among university students has suggested that an important predictor of satisfaction and retention is when expectations are met and promises are fulfilled early on in the employment arrangement

(Koskina, 2013). When these expectations are perceived as promissory in nature, this is likely to magnify the relationship to specific outcomes such as positive attitudes and related behaviours towards the organisation (Knapp & Masterson, 2018).

5.2.4. Graduate Trainee's Socialisation Processes and Sources of Information.

Graduate trainees shared their early working experiences in this organisation, through exposure and socialisation with key individuals or groups and processes that offered contract-related information. Each Graduate Trainee reflected on their individual accounts of their socialisation and how information-seeking behaviours helped them to make sense of their position as a first-time employee. The Human Resources processes and organisational agents informed the psychological contract.

Subtheme:

5.2.4.1. Human Resources Processes

Sherman and Morley (2015) noted that the organisation is the chief source of information for newcomers into an organisation. Potential employees rely on information emanating from the organisation to create perceptions of the employment agreement particularly for new, first time employees. The organisation's Human Resources processes are therefore likely to influence the formation of their psychological contract. Recruitment processes are said to create initial perceptions of the employment agreement. A few Graduate Trainees mentioned that their direct pre-entry exposure to Nestlé helped them to narrow their search for a particular kind of organisation they would like to join. They stated that they did not have enough knowledge of Nestlé as a corporate, until members representing Nestlé came to their respective campuses for graduate recruitment activations. One graduate was particularly struck by the Brand Teams that were young and predominantly Black professionals. In addition, the case presentations pertaining to their field of study sparked their interest and motivated them in joining Nestlé. These initial contact sessions created an expectation of what it would be like to work for Nestlé and revealed possible career pathways that would allow them to apply their study learnings in particular job areas upon joining Nestlé.

However, one graduate revealed that he was not exposed to any graduate recruitment programme at his university and believed that this is difficult for him to transition from being a graduate to an employee as he did not know what to expect in his first job. This supports the notions that pre-entry recruitment processes tend to have a direct impact on the formation of

one's psychological contract. Conway and Briner (2005) stated that the organisation can dictate the content of messages communicated to potential employees and thereby influence potential employees' experiences of employment once they enter the organisation.

Other graduates felt that there was a discrepancy between what was communicated about the Graduate Development Programme and the actual programme itself once they commenced working. They mentioned that the Talent Team (HR) "sold a wonderful programme" to them during campus graduate activations, but that they had not experienced the programme as it was initially communicated to them. The Graduate Trainees shared that HR made them believe that during the graduate programme they would be exposed, on a rotational basis, to various functions of their respective Business Units to experience a "holistic sense of working" in the organisation, which was also not the case. Eshoj (2012) warned that campus recruitment programmes as a means of attracting graduates often creates a plethora of expectations towards the organisation as a place of work. The researcher believed that this type of 'managed communication' brings about unintended consequences. The eagerness of organisations to create a unique employer brand are likely to create expectations they might not always be able to fulfil once talent entered the organisation. In the study of Gresse et al. (2013) aimed at understanding graduate-employer disconnect regarding perceived obligations of future employment relationships, found that graduates displayed a pre-employment psychological contract breach, where graduates already anticipated contract breach before entering the organisation. As such, organisations need to understand the impact of their 'managed communication' in shaping potential graduates' beliefs about what the organisation as employer is able to offer them.

Apart from graduate campus recruitment programmes, Graduate Trainees revealed that the LAM was an important document with explicit information on what graduates would be exposed to as part of their development plan in the two-year Graduate Development Programme. Most graduate trainees expressed that the LAM was their first exposure of what was expected of them in terms of work. Rousseau (2001) argued that consistent, explicit information emanating from clear sources allows the new employee to better understand the employment relationship.

On the contrary, a few Graduate Trainees believed that there was a disconnect between the LAM and what they actually do in their respective roles as they were not exposed to the relevant areas as per the requirements of the LAM. They therefore believed that they were missing out

on important learnings that would have prepared them better for their roles in the future. In addition, some Graduate Trainees mentioned that it would've been a good idea to translate the LAM into a Job Success Profile (JSP), which is basically a job description stating what is to be expected from a graduate on a day to day basis. One graduate in the Marketing division, mentioned that Marketing is an ever-evolving field, and thus one cannot afford to be left behind. Therefore, being exposed to the right areas was necessary for his learning and growth.

Subtheme:

5.2.4.2 Organisation Agents

Morrison (1993) mentioned that the organisation is represented by “organisational insiders” who help in the process of socialisation and acculturation of new members into the organisation. Tomprou and Nikolaou (2011) were of the view that these organisational agents transmit contract-related information and cues which equip newcomers with the ability to deal with organisational reality, to interpret events and develop opinions, attitudes and norms towards the organisation. In this study, Graduate Trainees identified two important organisational agents that transmitted contract-related information to them. Graduates reflected on their experiences of employment at Nestlé and noted that Line Managers and Senior Graduates were central parties in this process and assisted them to better understand their employment relationships.

5.2.4.2.1 Line Managers

Most Graduate Trainees identified their respective Line Managers to be important exchange partners in the organisation. They noted that their Line Managers set expectations through their development plans, in which performance agreements are set as objectives in key performance areas. A graduate's performance is tracked over a period of time in which he/she needs to have demonstrated a level of competency through a portfolio of evidence. De Vos and Buyens (2004) noted that supervisors are often responsible for a newcomer's performance in which they act as a proxy for the organisation and thus holds the power to influence how the psychological contract of the newcomer is created.

Most Graduate Trainees mentioned that their line managers are continuously involved in providing guidance and assess their progress regularly. At the beginning of their employment, their line managers entrusted them with various responsibilities for tasks resulting in them feeling confident to take on new tasks with minimal assistance. Guest and Conway (2002)

noted that how information is communicated to new employees is equally important as the content of the message. One Graduate Trainee noted that his line manager was explicit from the beginning that she would be involved in his development and fostered an environment that allowed the graduate to openly communicate to seek guidance when necessary.

5.2.4.2.2 Senior Graduate Trainees

Most Graduate Trainees also identified graduates in their second year of employment as important exchange partners at Nestlé. They identified with senior Graduate Trainees to help them better understand the employment relationship, in terms of what to give and receive as new graduates at Nestlé, with the view that their experiences are likely to be similar. Most importantly, they established relationships to seek information to deal with organisational reality. They mentioned that the information they received from second year graduates was useful in helping them to make sense of their position in the organisation and formed a sense of what to expect in future. However, Rousseau (1995) warned that information emanating from organisational agents can sometime be less trustworthy as employment experiences are unique and are experienced at an individual level. Therefore, experiences of employment cannot be the same for everyone. However, a common response among Graduate Trainees was that they sought to understand the how it was like working as a graduate employee at Nestlé. In addition, they wanted to understand more about expectations in terms of work content rather than how it was like working in their respective roles. First year Graduates Trainees were particularly concerned with the exposure to content areas in terms of their development plan. One graduate shared that information provided by her second-year graduate peers was useful as it helped her adjust in her new role. Graduates mentioned that they were proactive in searching for this information and that second-year graduates were always willing to provide them with the information and knowledge sought. Harris (1994) noted that sense-making as a cognitive process is generally understood to be naturally occurring for newcomers from organisational entry onwards. Louis (1980) defined sense-making as a process in which newcomers actively seek for information relevant to help them cope with their employment experiences in an organisational setting. Graduate Trainees as first-time employees are most likely to engage in this behaviour particularly as they lack work-related experiences and thus have limited cognitive employment schemas. Sherman and Morley (2015) found that novice employees tend to lack employment related experiences and often rely on information gleaned from the new organisation.

5.2.5. Graduate Trainees' perceptions of unmet expectations

Graduate Trainees shared their views and possible reactions should their expectations not be met by Nestlé. They offered a variety of views, each holding possible attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. Perceptions of unmet expectations reveal the evaluation process of one's psychological contract as a post entry function with significant exchange partners (Tomprou & Nikolaou, 2011). This process represents an employee's behavioural as well as attitudinal outcomes such as psychological contract fulfilment, breach and or violation. Graduate Trainees highlighted the following as possible reactions should their expectations not be met.

Subthemes:

5.2.5.1. Revise Expectations.

5.2.5.2. Negotiate Expectations through Communication and

5.2.5.3. Intentions to leave.

Most Graduate Trainees mentioned that they would consider revising their expectations to align with organisational reality. Ochse (2005) found that University graduates tend to have unrealistic expectations of their first employer. However, the results herein suggest the contrary. The majority of the graduate trainees considered taking both sides into account, stating that their expectations should match the realities of the workplace. In addition, they mentioned that they'd take an introspective position to assess if their expectations were indeed real or unrealistic. One graduate trainee in the Marketing division shared an example to say if his manager had promised to develop him for a Digital Marketing role and he ends up in a Brand marketing role, he would do introspection to assess if he had learned enough and did enough to satisfy the inherent requirements for the Digital Marketing role. This he believed was necessary, stating that he did not want to occupy a role for which he was not fit for.

Secondly, most Graduate Trainees mentioned that they would use communication to manage expectations of what they would like to see transpire in the course of their Graduate Development Programme. They believed that line managers are central to the exchange relationships and it was therefore very important to establish a communication platform between them to avoid miscommunication or misunderstanding of employment expectations. Graduates noted that they have check-in sessions with their respective line managers on a continuous basis to discuss progress, expectations and other matters intrinsic in the employment relationship. Hattori (2018) noted that it is rare that the terms of the exchange

relationship be explicitly discussed between the two parties at the beginning of the employment relationship. However, few graduate trainees expressed that they got it right from the beginning of the relationship. One graduate shared his early experiences of working with his line manager and noted that his Line Manager worked independently and only required him to just observe what the manager does and how they do it as part of his learning process. The Graduate approached the Line Manager and expressed his desire to be given work to do rather than just being a passive observer to which his manager agreed. He believed that being actively involved in ‘doing’ contributed notably to his overall learning and in looking back, he was glad for having approached his Line Manager in this regard.

Lastly, Graduate Trainees noted that taking a decision to leave Nestlé would only be considered as a last resort. Most Graduates expressed that learning and development was an important aspect in terms of their growth during the two-year development programme. At the end of the development programme, the expectation is that they would be absorbed to occupy a permanent role within their respective Business Units. The Graduates desired to be developed and to acquire the necessary behavioural and technical competencies to satisfy the conditions as stipulated in the programme. However, most Graduate Trainees mentioned that should they feel that they were not being developed adequately to meet the programme standards, they would consider leaving Nestlé to seek employment elsewhere. They noted that the Graduate Development Programme itself creates an expectation of growth through relevant exposure and the expectation should therefore crystallise during the course of the development journey. Sherman and Morley (2015) asserted that the failure of the employer to uphold their end of the deal (expectations) leads to the breach or violation of an employee’s psychological contract. This breach and violation negatively impact the current employment relationship, thus causing an employee to engage in undesirable attitudes and behaviours such as voluntary turnover. Similarly, Eshoj (2012) found that these responses (behavioural and attitudinal) may impact how individuals experience employment in the organisation and may lead to “reduced psychological well-being, and increased intentions to leave the organisation” (p.8).

5.3. Theoretical Framework and Research Findings

The comprehensive model used in this study to understand Graduate Trainees perceptions of their psychological contract upon organisational entry is the Schema Theory (Rousseau, 2001), which was discussed in detail in the preceding chapters. Schema Theory as a mental model of employment was a useful tool to unearth Graduate Trainees’ psychological contract content

dimensions as well as sources present in the formation and development of their psychological contract as newcomers at Nestlé.

Rousseau (2001) noted that the formation of the psychological contract occurs during four significant phases, namely, (1) the pre-employment experiences, (2) recruitment practice and experiences, (3) early socialisations, and (4) later experiences (post-entry).

In this study it is evident that pre-employment experiences set the basis in which future expectations with potential employers are formed. In this case, Graduate Trainees lacked work experiences as they were hired upon exiting their respective Universities. However, Graduate Trainees had already formed employment expectations that constituted the initial structure of their psychological contract. Each Graduate Trainee shared their pre-entry expectations (financial rewards, work-life integration, career development, culture fit and well-being) as informed by their respective professional norms and other contextual factors. Rousseau (2001) referred to these pre-entry expectations as the anticipatory psychological contract, which exists in its rudimentary form and serves as the base in which the development of the actual psychological contract takes place once Graduate Trainees enter the employment phase. However, it must be noted that these pre-employment antecedents develop during the course of one's life and already exist as expectations prior to any interface with a potential employer.

The second aspect of the model is the recruitment phase, which is crucial as it impacts the structure of the psychological contract (Adams et al., 2014). Recruitment processes include, Campus Recruitment Programmes, contact interviews etc. The direct interface with the organisation forms organisation specific expectations, as potential employees are confronted with organisation-specific information. Graduates who were exposed to Campus Recruitment Programmes reported that this process was essential as it exposed them to a host of information about Nestlé as a corporate organisation. During campus visits Nestlé representatives shared their experiences of working in their respective roles, like those benchmarked for recruitment. Graduates expressed that this exposure added a perspective of what is to be expect should they join Nestlé.

However, Graduate Trainees who were not exposed to any of the Campus Recruitment Programmes reported generic expectations as informed by their professional norms and other factors. These Graduates seemed to be anxious of the new employment relationship and reported they did not know what to expect once they commenced working. It is thus evident

that recruitment programmes play an important role to novice employees particularly as a pre-employment condition as it affords the potential employee particular information that informs perceptions about the conditions of the new employment relationship.

The third aspect of the model speaks to post-entry socialisations and early experiences. (Rousseau, 2001) noted that once the newcomer has joined the organisation, he or she is introduced through the process of socialisation with specific exchange partners (manager, team members etc.) as well as organisation-specific processes (HR policies and procedures). Graduate Trainees identified their Line Manager and Senior Graduates as exchange partners of their respective psychological contracts. The process of socialisation further engenders a continuing process of information in relation to the promises as well as expectations intrinsic in the employment relationship. Graduates revealed that Line Managers set expectations of the employment relationship, while experiences shared by senior graduates helped them to make sense of the new environment.

However, as postulated previously, Graduate Trainees lack professional work experience and therefore rely on information 'gleaned' from the new organisation (exchange partners and organisational information) and through experience to form their employment schema. Sutton and Griffin (2004) noted that a newcomer's psychological contract only takes shape during the socialisation stage. In reference to the findings of this study, Graduate Trainees shared their early experiences based on workplace transition and support. Some graduates shared positive experiences, stating that the support enabled a successful future. Maia et al. (2019) found that when employers demonstrate the willingness to fulfil inducements of the exchange relationships in the early stages of the employment relationship, employees are more likely to capture those inducements within their schema and thereby forming perceptions of the employment relationship. On the other hand, a few Graduates Trainees shared negative experiences of the workplace transition and support that caused potential frustration. It is evident that the extent of inducement fulfilment is likely to motivate a desired or undesired attitudinal or behavioural outcome. Knapp and Masterson (2018) found that psychological contracts can be used as attitudinal and behavioural determinants.

Lastly, the model speaks to later experiences that hold an evaluative element, in which employees share their post-entry experiences that shaped the extent to which the psychological contract was fulfilled or not. Graduate Trainees shared their perceptions of unmet expectations, citing conditions which may potentially motivate certain behavioural and attitudinal outcomes.

These included revising expectations to align with organisational reality, negotiate expectations through direct communication or exit the organisation should expectations be violated or breached. Coyle-Shapiro (2002) argued that an ideal exchange relationship is one that is reciprocal in nature where employees engage in desirable behaviour (e.g., productivity) in an anticipation of a future expected benefit (e.g., developmental opportunity). As such, contributions of the exchange relationship serve as behavioural goals in which individuals strive to achieve in order to receive expected benefits (Gresse, 2018).

5.4. Summary

Chapter five presented a comprehensive discussion of the results to address the objectives of the research study. The discussion was informed by relevant literature to give a detailed analysis and contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Furthermore, the integration of the theoretical frameworks enabled the framing of the discussion of the research findings.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The study aimed to explore Graduate Trainees' perceptions and experiences of being employed in the NFT Graduate Development Programme, Nestlé S.A. The researcher employed the Psychological Contract theory to unpack the reciprocal expectations Graduate Trainees held towards their first employer.

The study highlighted valuable insights and practical implications to inform best HR practices. It is clear that policies and procedures that speak to talent recruitment, compensation and benefits as well as talent management are evident in Nestle S.A. Findings from this study may contribute to inform the development of practices to effectively manage the NFT graduate development programme.

Therefore, in this section the writer will address the findings and highlight the practice implications that emanate from the findings to improve the overall experiences of graduate trainees, both for existing and future talent. Furthermore, the limitations of the study will be addressed, and recommendations will be made for possible future research pertaining to the psychological contracts of graduates in a South African context.

6.1. Practical Implications

Research pointed out that graduates hold a rudimentary anticipatory psychological contract (Gresse & Linde, 2021). The researcher believes that this should be captured from the onset to better understand graduates' expectations of what they should contribute to and receive from the employment relationship with their first employer, particularly in fixed-term arrangements such as a graduate development programme. This will inform best practices in effectively positioning and managing the graduate development programme. To this point, Sparrow (1996) contends that employers must be aware of employee's psychological contract as it tends to impact the employment relationship. Sharman (2012) argued that "the more information the employer has about the expectation of the new recruit, the better positioned they are to effectively manage the employment relationship" (p. 210). Therefore, knowledge in this regard is necessary when developing HR policies and procedures.

The company's graduate development programme is an important channel for sourcing and developing talent required for the business from a talent succession point of view. It should be noted that organisations invest considerable financial resources towards sourcing the right

candidates for their respective graduate development programmes. It is said that on average, South African-based organisations spend about R220 000 on graduate activation programmes, with about 10% of these companies spending in excess of R1 000 000 in graduate marketing alone (South African Graduate Employer Association Benchmark Report, 2019).

It is therefore in the best interest for organisations when recruiting graduates to attract talent that would best fit their organisation and be retained for the purposes intended. It can thus be argued that capturing graduates' psychological contract from the onset, it is likely to reduce graduate turnover by attrition. Should organisations have a better awareness of individual expectations that impact employee behaviour from the beginning of the employment relationship, they may be in a better position to deal with these expectations. For example, if the organisation is aware that Graduate Trainees value relational elements (i.e., coaching and mentorship), as identified in this study, then the business will understand that by focusing mostly on transactional elements (i.e., financial rewards and benefits) may not be an effective way of managing Graduate Trainees' expectations. Consequentially, organisations may potentially bare the cost of graduate trainees exiting the graduate development programme prematurely.

Secondly the results of this study provided insights with respect to Graduate Trainees' experiences of early encounters (i.e., socialization) in the organisation. The study showed how graduate trainees are actively trying to make sense of their early employment experiences to possibly confirm, negotiate or align their expectations to organisational reality. This is particularly important for this study because sensemaking as a cognitive process reveals an individual's attempt to make sense of themselves within their natural context. In addition, Tomprou and Nikolaou (2011) noted that within the context of socialization "sensemaking refers to the attempts of a newcomer to cope with their entry experiences and in particular by attributing meaning to their employment relationship" (p. 346).

This finding supports existing research indicating that information sought in the early stages of the employment relationships tends to shape and informs subsequent attitudes and behaviours (Louis, 1990; Tomprou & Nikolaou, 2011). For example, new Graduate Trainees would engage senior graduates in the organisation to enquire about their current and past experiences of the same Graduate Development Programme. Therefore, it is important that employers understand how this shared information on employment experiences may potentially shape new Graduate Trainees' beliefs about employment when they first enter the organisation and how they may

also perceive themselves in terms of their own contributions within their respective roles. The sense-making process is a naturally occurring process and cannot be avoided as the new employee attempts to make meaning of themselves within the new employment context. However, it is important that information that is shared among senior and new Graduate Trainees is consistent to organisational realities but also with an awareness that employment experiences are unique.

Furthermore, it was also found that the information shared about the graduate development programme during university campus visits e.g., career fairs, was somewhat ‘exaggerated’ in the efforts to create a unique employer-value brand experience. According to the SAGEA Benchmark Report (2019), the average number of vacancies available in graduate development programmes for a single organisation is about 19 vacancies, while applications received on average was about 2100. Organisations are therefore often tempted to put their ‘best foot forward’ in their efforts to attract the best graduates to join their programme. It is evident that there is a ‘war on top talent’ and this may potentially explain the incongruence of information shared about the Graduate Development Programme and the actual experiences of graduates as they commence with the programme. Therefore, employers must be mindful that information that is shared about their organisation may shape graduates’ beliefs about employers’ obligations towards them. If obligations are perceived to be promissory in nature, potential graduate trainees may expect these obligations to crystalize once they enter the organisation.

6.2. Limitations of the study

While it is important to note that the study received adequate support from the Graduate Trainees who willingly participated in the research, the qualitative nature of the study and the fact that the study was only conducted in one organisation, limit the generalisability of the findings. This is well documented in qualitative research in that such research findings cannot be generalized to the entire population but can be seen as being indicative of shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

6.3. Opportunities for Future Research

It is evident that the concept of the psychological contract is an important framework to understand the parties’ perceptions to an exchange relationship. As demonstrated in the literature, this concept can be applied in any type of employment relationship to empirically unpack the reciprocal expectations a party holds of the other. In the very beginning of the

study, Rousseau's definition of the psychological contract was adopted to highlight the position in which I sought to address the question of how Graduate Trainees created their psychological contract upon organisational entry. The aim was to unpack the idiosyncratic nature of their perceptions of employment from a psychological contract perspective. This study provided various insights into this process from a unilateral perspective.

Therefore, future research focusing on a bilateral perspective in understanding the psychological contract of graduates and their future employers will be useful. Conway and Briner (2005) proposed that any future research attempts must take a position to address the reciprocal obligations of both parties (i.e., the employer and employee reciprocations to the exchange relationship). Sharman (2012) argues that "the question of which obligations are traded off against each other remains unanswered" (p. 214). This, the researcher founds to be consistent with the findings of his study. For example, this study ascertained Graduate Trainees' perceptions of the exchange relationship in that they expected the employer to provide career development opportunities in exchange for continuous learning and hard work. While the study aimed to unpack the subjective accounts of the individual Graduate Trainees, we acknowledge that perceptions of the employment arrangement must be unpacked from both the employee and the organisation's perspective to enable mutual and reciprocal efforts. This the writer believes will add value in the effective management of the Graduate Development Programme. Entry into the programme occurs on a contractual basis which will lead in all likelihood to permanent absorption into the organisation, depending on the overall performance of the Graduate Trainee and there being suitable opportunities. Therefore, understanding the perceptions from both sides will facilitate a better understanding of how to manage these employment relationships.

In addition, it is suggested that psychological contracts of graduates as new employees be investigated to take account of the shift in the natural context of work environments, particularly with reference to the accommodation for blended work environments and or remote working options owing to Covid-19 (Karani et al., 2021). Using the sensemaking process as a theoretical framework to unpack how graduates make sense of themselves within this new environment could inform research on how graduates as novice employees engage in this cognitive process in creating their psychological contract upon organisational entry. This is particularly important to note as the interviews for this study were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, which predates the blended type of work environments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview guide

Interviewee no: _____

Date: _____

Venue: _____

1. Introduction:

- a. Welcome interviewee; and
- b. Introduce interviewer.

2. Overview of the study:

“The purpose of this study is to explore the psychological contract of graduate trainees as a means of bridging the gap between individual and organizational perceived obligations, especially with a view to understanding the pre-entry expectations that Graduates Trainees held about employer and employee obligations and the extent to which these expectations informed how they experienced their psychological contract upon organizational entry.”

3. Anonymity:

Your name and identity will be anonymous and will not be published or disclosed in any manner; there will also be no discrimination against any person or group.

Please note that if you feel uncomfortable at any stage, you are welcome to stop me and end the interview.

Recording and recordkeeping: As the interviewer, I will use an audio recorder to assist me later in analysing the interview. Do you have any problem with the use of an audio recorder?

Key Questions:

Demographic Questions:

- What is your race?
- What is your gender?
- What is your age?
- What is your highest qualification obtained?
- What is your field of study?
- How long have you been in the employ of this Organisation?
- Is this position the Employee's permanent job?

1. Can you tell me, what were your expectations, in general, from your first employer?

- *(what informed your expectations? as a possible probe)*

2. Since joining (Nestlé) can you kindly tell me how have you experienced working for this organization?

- *(Possible probes [please take me through from the beginning, what does it mean to you?])*

3. Having been with the (Nestlé) for an X amount of time, do you still hold the same expectations you held before joining this organisation?

- *(Possible probes, [if yes/ no what has changed? or do you have a new set of expectations, informed by what?])*

4. Who have you identified to have made work-related promises to you regarding your expectations since joining this organization (Nestlé)?

- *(Possible probes [what was communicated to you and how did you make sense of that?])*

5. What is your likely reaction should your expectations be unmet/ met?

6. What expectations do you feel your employer has of you? (probe)

7. Any general comments that you wish to add?

Appendix B: Gatekeepers Letter

Nestlé (South Africa) (Pty) Limited
(REGISTRATION NO. 1916/001492/07)



B Andritz Division
Artisan Office Park
Bryanston 2021
PO BOX 50316 RANDBURG 2125
TELEPHONE (011) 514-8000
FAX (011) 514-8523

21st May 2019

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal,
Howard College Campus, Durban, 4041
School of Applied Human Sciences

Dear Celukuthula Makhoba

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This letter serves to confirm that Nestlé South Africa supports and accepts Celukuthula Makhoba's (213535043) request to conduct a research on the following topic: "*Graduate Trainee's perceptions of their Psychological Contract: A case study.*"

As a leading organisation within the FMCG industry, focused to create a place where people are inspired to serve with passion, our Human resources community endorses Celukuthula's research proposal. We recognize this as a value adding and potential solution finding opportunity which could contribute to his development and the business. We endorse that he selects Graduate Trainees within our employ who meet his study's criteria to participate in his study. Celukuthula will be working closely with our Talent Management and Acquisition Specialist in the name of Alfred Ngwenya to complete his research.

We at Nestlé, are pleased to host Celukuthula with the intention to launch this research project to its full implementation stage and look forward to any insights we can implement from his research.

We wish him all the best with his research project and trust that any support required during his time with us while completing his project will be provided.

Should you require any additional information, please feel free to contact myself (Tania Hector tania.hector1@za.nestle.com)



Head of Human Resources ESAR

Appendix C: Information Sheet & Informed Consent

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Celukuthula Makhoba (213535043), and I am currently completing my master's degree at the University of KwaZulu Natal. A requirement of my degree is to complete a research study. My study is about understanding Graduate Trainees perceptions of their psychological contract formation process.

You are being invited to participate in this research because of you are a graduate who has recently started work at Nestlé and can contribute to the understanding of graduates' beliefs about theirs and their employers' obligations. There will be no direct benefit to you if you participate in this research, but your participation is likely to help generate knowledge and greater understanding of graduates' expectations of employment in the corporate environment.

The research will take the form of semi structured interviews and I will arrange a time that is suitable to you. You can be assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality will be ensured through the interviews being available to the researcher and his supervisor only. Anonymity will be ensured by omitting any identifying characteristic, such as your name, or department. Your permission to record the interview is also requested. The findings of the research will be kept in the School of Psychology for a period of five years. The findings will be made available to you on completion of the study.

Please note that:

1. During the study or any publication action, the names of the respondents will not be disclosed.
2. The study population will consist of **Graduate Trainees** in the employ of the company.
3. Participation in the study will only be on a voluntary basis.

4. The interviewee has the right to stop and end the interview process at any time if they feel that the interviewer has made them uncomfortable or is biased
5. No **Graduate Trainee** will be victimised, nor be discriminated against (directly or indirectly).
6. Findings and recommendations will not be used to victimise or discriminate against any participant.
7. Findings of the study will be disclosed to any relevant party.
8. A semi-structured questionnaire will be used during the study.
9. Open-ended interviews will be held face to face.
10. Interviews will be recorded for any future reference.
11. Interviews will be transcribed
12. In view of the reliability issue of the study, all the interview questions will be asked in English.
13. Open-ended interviews held face-to-face will be audio recorded (using a suitable audio recording device). I Consent to having this interview audio recorded. Sign:.....
Date:.....

Sample selection

1. Research will be conducted on Graduate Trainees within the employ of the Organisation.
2. Purposeful sampling will be used to determine which Graduate Trainee’s will be included in the sample
3. Therefore, the sample will include Graduate Trainees who have been in the employ of the company for less than a year.
4. The researcher will obtain a list of all Graduate Trainees from the talent and Acquisition Specialist responsible for graduate employment to be selected from the list for interviews.

Recording and record-keeping

1. Interviews will be audio-recorded with the permission of the participants.
2. Transcripts will be made of every interview recorded.
3. Copies will be made of every interview transcript and such copies, as well as the audio recordings, will be securely held in safekeeping for any future reference.

Interview environment

1. Effort will be made to make the participants feel relaxed and comfortable during the interview.
2. The interviews will take place in the same location for all the participants.
3. The interview location will be selected to ensure minimal external influences and distractions, for instance ambient noise.
4. An attempt will be made to ensure that the conditions of the location are similar for all the interviewees, e.g., lighting and ventilation.
5. The interviewer will try to create a relaxed environment to reduce any possible stressors that the interviewee may experience, for instance the interviewer will be dressed casually.
6. Interviews will take place in a face-to-face mode.
7. Each interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

I can be contacted at:

Email: c12nyandeni@gmail.com

Cell: 0728699716

My supervisors are Dr Shanya Reuben and Ms Shaida Bobat who are located at the school of applied human sciences Psychology Department Howard College campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: Reuben@ukzn.ac.za

: Bobats@ukzn.ac.za

You may also contact the Research Office through:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

PrivateBagX54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 260 4557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

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 the research project.

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

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance



20 September 2019

Mr Celukuthula Makhoba (213535043)
School Of Applied Human Sc
Howard College

Dear Mr Makhoba,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00000322/2019

Project title: Graduate Trainees perceptions of their Psychological Contract: A case study

Full Approval – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 26 August 2019 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid for one year from 20 September 2019.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

Yours sincerely,



Rf Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)

/spm

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix E: Turnitin Digital Report



Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

Submission author: Celukuthula Nyandeni
Assignment title: General
Submission title: Draft Thesis
File name: Full_Thesis_2022.docx
File size: 416.75K
Page count: 86
Word count: 31,985
Character count: 179,185
Submission date: 11-Aug-2022 08:23PM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID: 1881445174

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

1. Introduction and Background to the study

The Psychological Contract Theory derives much of its theoretical basis from Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1955; Homans, 1950). In descriptive underpinning, suggests that social relations consist of reciprocal obligations and reciprocal power dynamics (Elsky, 2021). Early scholars within the field of organizational behavior (e.g., Stein, Levinson and Argyris) applied the concept to an organizational setting and the term "Psychological Work Contract" was born (Clegg-Stephens, & Parrotti, 2006). The concept "Psychological Contract" concerns how individuals' beliefs shape their judgment, attitudes and influence behavior in an exchange arrangement (Oswanson et al., 2015). Thus, the psychological contract represents a central framework in the analysis and understanding of exchange relationships (Sherman & Morley, 2015).

An individual's psychological contract is represented by his or her own beliefs regarding the mutual obligations within the context of employment between them and the employer (Van der Steen, Schalk, & Pries, 2015). Rousseau (2011) stated that "Psychological Contract Theory represents the employment relationship in terms of the subjective beliefs of employees and their employer" (p. 193). Grewé (2011) alluded to the function and the importance of the psychological contract in employment relationships. The researcher argued that the psychological contract is critical in inducing innovation intrinsic in any given employment relationship. The employment relationship encompasses two elements which are not all addressed in formal and written contracts. Therefore, the psychological contract exists to bridge the gap between individual and organizational perceived obligations. Furthermore, the psychological contract is idiosyncratic in nature and generally it would be expected that individual employees hold a unique account of their experiences of it. Grewé (2015) asserted that each employee holds a unique account of their psychological contract which is informed by their expectations and reciprocal obligations towards the organization.

A prominent contributor to the field of psychological contracts is author and researcher Denise Rousseau. Rousseau (1995) defines the psychological contract as an employee's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of their exchange agreement with their employer. Rousseau

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