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Effectiveness of graduate programmes in assisting graduates to become work ready

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Effectiveness of graduate programmes in assisting graduates to become work ready

Boledi Audrey Seima

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

Johannesburg, 2012

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to evaluate the effectiveness of graduate programmes in assisting graduates to become work ready. The objective of the graduate programme that the research focused on was to accelerate the development and competence of new graduates to become value adding employees on completion of the programme.

The business case for graduate programmes is instigated and supported by the dynamic and competitive nature of the contemporary workplace, which has resulted in a widening gap between knowledge gained through higher education and the requirements of the workplace. A purposive sample of 16 respondents consisting of eight graduates and eight managers were interviewed and a content analysis carried out.

The graduate respondents included graduates from two of the latest and largest Deloitte intake groups, the groups of 2007 and 2008. The manager respondents included project managers who were involved in the management of the graduates as well as business analysts on completion of the programme.

The key findings of the study revealed that both the managers and the graduates believe that the Deloitte Graduate Programme leads to work readiness. However, both parties felt that the programme can be further enhanced by controlling and measuring the on-the job experience that the graduates get exposed to, to ensure that meaningful learning can be guaranteed for all graduates. The respondents also felt that the design of the Enterprise Resource Planning qualification could be modified to cater for the different career path interests of the various graduates instead of only focusing on ERP modules. The results of this study confirm that graduate programmes have a key role to play in closing the gap between higher learning and the workplace if designed and managed appropriately.

DECLARATION

I, Boledi Seima, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Boledi Audrey Seima

Signed at ……

On the …….. day of …… 2012

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my parents who believed in education and worked very hard to embed the culture of learning in our household growing up.

- My late father, Alfred Phuti Mantsho, who passed away on the 20th of August 2011. I know you will be proud!!! Even in sickness you encouraged me to keep going.
- My mother, Pinkie Mantsho, thank you for the motivation and the regular checks to make sure that I was on track with my deadlines despite the challenges of 2011. I know you too are very proud.

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Most importantly, I would like to thank my husband Motlatjo Seima for his unconditional support and understanding through the rough three years of my MBA. Without your support this would not difficult to achieve. To my son Moeletji the *'MBA baby'* who had to forgo some of my attention as a result of my school work – thank you for always keeping me in touch with life's bigger picture. You made the MBA challenging but not impossible.

I would also like to acknowledge and sincerely thank the following people:

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- Mpho Diko, my MBA colleague and friend. Thank you for the extra lessons on those challenging courses, the weekends spent together preparing for exams, the End Note lessons and many more. This MBA would have been a serious challenge without your assistance and support.
- All my other friends for their understanding – I hope I haven't been completely written off after my limited social availability over the last three years.
- To Ursula Fear who welcomed my research initiative into the Deloitte Graduate Academy with open arms. Thank you for your support, willingness to share information and honest thoughts.
- To Sally Downie, my manager who was always understanding when I had to take time off during 'crunch' time. Thank you for your support and understanding.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a graduate programme on its objective to assist graduates in South Africa to become work ready.

1.2 Context of the study

The global context in which business is conducted has undergone fundamental changes in the past half century, in particular the proliferation of electronic communication over the past 20 years has ushered in seismic changes (Cogburn, 1998). It is in this environment that post-industrial economies are described as being global, competitive and knowledge driven. Additionally, a strong argument is being introduced that knowledge is increasingly becoming an important factor of production, surpassing even land, labour and capital in importance (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).

Furthermore, there have been significant changes in the labour market over the past 20 years, resulting in an increasingly complex workplace (Raybould and Sheedy, 2005). A number of studies have argued that higher education has failed to keep up with these changes and complexities and as a result the labour market is flooded by new graduates who are not equipped with the right skills to tackle the world of work (Coll and Zegwaard, 2006; Connor and Shaw, 2008; Little, 2008). Literature in this area suggests that producing employable and work ready graduates should be further prioritised in order that organisations can deal with increasing global competition (Cogburn, 1998). The concerning consensus is that higher education is producing many more graduates than previous years, but most of them lack the experience and skills required by employers in business (Knight and Yorke, 2003; McDermott, Mangan and O'Connor, 2006).

This challenge has resulted in a growing interest in work integrated learning programmes, commonly known as graduate programmes. There are different types of graduate programmes such as internships, apprenticeships, learnerships and graduate training programmes. According to Friga, Bettis and Sullivan (2003), these programmes are a growing area of interest internationally as they fulfil a purpose to bridge the gap between higher education training and the reality of the contemporary job market.

The business case for these programmes is that employers get competent, work ready and balanced graduates, with classroom based instruction and extended periods of relevant experiential learning in a real work environment. In light of the above, this research evaluated the effectiveness of a graduate programme within a multinational consultancy on its key objective of preparing graduates to be productive in the shortest possible time. The four objectives of the DGA are highlighted below. This study was only focused on the first objective; the three remaining objectives of the DGA did not form part of this study.

Objectives of the DGA

1. To fast track the graduates to impact the bottom line in the shortest possible time;
2. To offer structured and co-ordinated training and thereby minimise training costs;
3. To assist businesses to comply with legislation and the various business charters; and
4. To assist the transformation drive by delivery of competent high level black skills.

(Deloitte Graduate Academy brochure, 2009, p. 2)

1.3 Problem statement

The main research problem was to evaluate the effectiveness of a graduate programme against the objective set of bridging the competency gap between knowledge gained through higher education and the requirements of the workplace. This research was undertaken within a South African based multinational consultancy firm, Deloitte Consulting.

1.4 Significance of the study

The study fills a gap in current literature that despite the increased popularity of graduate programmes, a lack of qualitative research validating the effectiveness of these programmes exists (Little, 2008). Furthermore, although South African institutions of higher learning offer work based learning as part of their curriculum, the success rate regarding the level of work readiness of the graduates produced is not made known. This is possibly due to the fact that South African literature on graduate programmes is very limited.

The DGA was established in 2005 as an additional service offering by Deloitte Consulting. The academy was created to accelerate skills development and equip the graduates with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to succeed in the workplace. The DGA currently offers the following services:

- Consulting advice to other organisations on how to establish an in-house graduate academy; and
- A self-run one year graduate programme that is designed to develop new graduates on behalf of various clients to prepare them for the world of work.

The latter is commonly referred to as the ‘make to order’, as clients provide the DGA with specifications so that they can recruit and develop graduates on their behalf. The recruited graduates are contracted by the DGA for a period of 12 months, the first three being solely at the DGA doing academic classroom based learning and the remaining nine with the respective employer organisation doing on the job learning. Following successful completion of the

DGA programme, graduates may be offered employment by the employer organisation, however, permanent employment is not guaranteed. The graduates receive a stipend which is incrementally increased each time they complete the specified number of unit standards successfully. (Fear, 2011).

The DGA has three key stakeholders: the academy, the clientele (various employers) and the relevant SETA. For the purposes of this study the client will be Deloitte Consulting.

The graduates are enrolled in a learnership under the relevant SETA structures for the following qualification: National Certificate - Business Consulting Practice (SAQA ID: 48874). This is a level five qualification on the National Qualification Framework (NQF) level, consisting of 22 unit standards, three fundamental, 14 core and five electives. The formal learning programmes are aligned with the NQF resulting in credits or a full qualification through the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

The training for the programme is structured to focus heavily on work experience combined with relevant and appropriate theoretical knowledge. The purpose of the qualification is to provide graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge to enter the field of business consulting within the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) environment. The qualification is aimed at graduates with first degrees. Throughout the programme, the graduates are continually managed by the DGA and assessed by registered assessors from the SETA. In addition, the graduates are allocated mentors and coaches in the workplace so that their development can be closely monitored to meet the day-to-day demands of the modern workplace (Fear 2011).

The study is expected to contribute towards understanding whether there is value in employers and graduates investing their time and money in graduate programmes. Therefore this study will provide guidance to the following stakeholders that have an interest in the success of graduate programmes:

- **National government**: To improve the education of the youth and ultimately the economic prosperity of the country (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).

- **Employers**: To establish the return on investment of the programmes in light of the fact that many resources are invested in these programmes (Arnold and Davey, 1993). Furthermore, can graduate programmes, when implemented successfully, accelerate the development of new graduates and therefore introduce an advantage in this competitive and global economy (Knight and Yorke, 2003)?
- **The Deloitte Graduate Academy**: To establish whether previous managers and graduates consider the academy a worthwhile investment.
- **Graduates**: To understand if graduate programmes will improve their employability and skills (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).
- **Institutions of higher learning**: Could institutions of higher learning leverage from the findings of similar studies to adjust their curriculum to the ever evolving needs of the dynamic workplace?

1.5 Delimitations of the study

- This study was limited to evaluating the participants that were part of the DGA.
- The study was limited to consultants within the Strategy and Innovation business unit that successfully completed the programme through the DGA in the years 2007 and 2008. These groups are knows as the DGA 7 and DGA 8 respectively.
- The study was limited to evaluating the DGA on its first objective, namely, to fast track the graduates to impact the bottom line in the shortest possible time. The three other objectives of the DGA did not form part of this study.

1.6 Definition of terms

Assessment: “The process of collecting evidence of graduates’ work to measure and make judgments about the achievement or non-achievement of specified National Qualifications Framework standards or qualifications” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Assessor: “A person who is registered by the relevant ETQA body to measure the achievement of specified National Qualifications Framework standards or qualifications” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Core learning: “Compulsory learning required in situations contextually relevant to the particular qualifications” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

A credit: “The value assigned by the Authority to 10 notional hours of learning” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Critical cross-field outcomes: “Critical Cross-Field Outcomes (CCFO) refer to those generic outcomes that inform all teaching and learning. For example CCFOs may include working effectively with others as a member of a team, and/or collecting, analysing, organising and critically evaluating information” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA): “Body accredited in terms of Section 5 (1)(a)(ii) of the SAQA Act, responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of national standards or qualifications, and to which specific functions relating to the monitoring and auditing of national standards or qualifications have been assigned in terms of Section 5 (1)(b)(i) of the Act” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Elective Unit Standard: “A selection of additional credits at the (level of the National Qualifications Framework specified), from which a choice may be made to ensure that the purpose of the qualification is achieved” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Exit level outcomes: “The outcomes to be achieved by a qualifying graduate at the point at which he or she leaves the programme leading to a qualification and achievement of which entitles the graduate to a qualification” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Fundamental learning: “That learning which forms the grounding or basis needed to undertake the education, training or further learning required in the

obtaining of a qualification and 'fundamental' has a corresponding meaning" (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Graduate Programme: "A programme of study that combines classroom based instruction with one or more periods of relevant experiential learning in an authentic work setting to develop graduate competencies in order to produce graduates who are more 'work ready'" (Coll and Zegwaard, 2006).

Learnership: "Refers to a learning programme where the graduate spends some time learning theory and some time learning practical skills in a workplace. It leads to a qualification registered on the NQF" (www.saqa.org.za, 2012). "A route to a nationally recognised qualification that relates to an occupation and consists of a structured learning component and practical work experience" (Davies and Farquharson, 2004, p.21).

National Qualification framework (NQF): "That statement describing a particular level of the eight levels of the National Qualifications Framework" (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Outcome: "Contextually demonstrated end product of the learning process" (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Qualification: "The formal recognition of the achievement of the required number and range of credits and other requirements at specific levels of the NQF determined by the relevant bodies registered by SAQA" (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Registered: "Officially registered (recorded) in terms of the National Qualifications Framework" (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA): "A body responsible for the organisation of education and training programmes within a specific sector" (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Sector: “A defined portion of social, commercial or educational activities used to prescribe the boundaries of an Education and Training Quality Assurance body (ETQA)” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA): “The body responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, established in terms of the SAQA Act no. 58 of 1995” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Unit Standard: “Registered statement of desired education and training outcomes and its associated assessment criteria together with administrative and other information as specified in the regulations” (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

1.7 Assumptions

The following assumptions have been made regarding the study:

- The sample will be willing to share information on the effectiveness of the graduate programme.
- The total number of respondents will be sufficient to gain adequate data.

The information on the evaluation of the graduate programme will be conveyed honestly and truthfully by the respondents. False information will have a significant negative impact on the study results.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature reveals that corporate organisations can gain a competitive advantage through employing the right entry level talent (Andrews and Higson, 2008; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). This then informs why organisations dedicate enormous amounts of time, effort and resources to the recruitment of new graduates through graduate programmes (Jaeger, 2003). It is therefore imperative for these organisations to have a view of the value they derive from such programmes. This chapter commences with an overview of the business case for graduate programmes and thereafter the research focuses on learnerships as an example of graduate programmes. Graduate competencies and the importance of transfer of knowledge in training are discussed next. The chapter concludes with an overview of key learning areas as well as the research propositions for this study.

2.2 Graduate programmes – background and rationale

2.2.1 Background

For the purposes of this study, graduate programmes are defined as programmes of study that combine classroom based instruction with one or more periods of relevant experiential learning in an authentic work setting to develop graduate competencies in order to produce graduates who are more ‘work ready’ (Coll and Zegwaard, 2006).

Different concepts are used to refer to work readiness. According to Harvey (2001), graduate employability can be referred to in many ways. He argued that employability is concerned with enhancing the capacity of graduates to find employment. He further said that employability is about graduates being better equipped and prepared for the world of work. For the purposes of this study we

will use a definition by Nabi (2003), who believed that work readiness is about ensuring that graduates possess the appropriate level of skills and attributes in order to become employable.

2.2.2 Background to management consulting

The focus for this study will be on work readiness within the management consulting environment. As a result this section will provide some background on work readiness in the context of management consulting at Deloitte Consulting.

Management consulting refers to both the consulting industry and the practice of helping organisations to improve their performance, primarily through the identification and analysis of existing organisational problems and the development of plans for improvement. Organisations may draw upon the services of management consultants for a number of reasons, including obtaining external or objective advice, and having access to the consultants' specialised expertise (Garavan, 2001). According to Kubr (2002), a consultant’s competence can be described in terms of personality traits, aptitudes, attitudes, knowledge and skills. These elements of competence are interlinked and influence each other.

In the case of Deloitte Consulting these competencies are reflected through the Deloitte global competency framework, which has 13 key competencies and a set of specialised competencies which are dependent on the individuals’ business units. This is graphically represented in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Global competency framework of Deloitte Consulting

(Deloitte Consulting brochure, 2011)

Business analysts within the Strategy and Innovation business unit of Deloitte Consulting are expected to display the following competencies, which are linked to the competency framework, to demonstrate that they are job ready.

The five desired outcomes are as follows:

- Understanding of how consulting operates and fits in with the wider Deloitte South Africa;
- Ability to build client service capability;
- Ability to build networks and work well in teams;
- Ability to work with the core software applications and technologies;
- Ownership of self-development.

Table 1 draws the link between the five desired outcomes for Strategy and Innovation's business analysts and the key elements of work readiness identified in the literature.

Table 1: Work readiness competencies

Deloitte Consulting framework	Work readiness competencies
Understanding of how consulting operates and fits in with the wider Deloitte South Africa	**Knowledge and understanding of the organisation**: the extent to which graduates understand how the organisation works (Arnold and Davey, 1994b). Employers want graduates who appreciate their place in a wider organisation and business (McDermott et al., 2006).
Ability to build client service capability	**Commercial awareness**: according to Coll and Zegwaard (2006), many employers want more balanced graduates who have a good understanding of the business environment and what it means to operate within such an environment. **Achieving results**: the extent to which graduates utilise their skills and knowledge in order to get things done (Raybould and Sheedy, 2005). According to Burke and Baldwin (1999), this is widely acknowledged to be the paramount concern of organisational training initiatives as evidence suggests that a substantial part of organisations' investment in training is often wasted due to poor learning transfer and trainee relapse. It is estimated that while American industries annually spend up to $100 billion on training and development, not more than 10% of these expenditures result in transfer to the job (Baldwin and Ford, 1988).
Ability to build networks and work well in teams	**Interpersonal skills**: the extent to which graduates are able to handle formal and informal interpersonal situations at work (Andrews and Higson, 2008). The literature review suggests that employers place high importance on interpersonal skills such as communication skills, team work, relationship building, self-confidence and creativity (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).
Ability to work with the core software applications and technologies	**Application of the Microsoft suite**: the extent to which the graduates can use the 'tools of trade'.

Deloitte Consulting framework	Work readiness competencies
Ownership of self-development	**Self-organisation and self-management**: the extent to which graduates understand how to tackle their work in an efficient and structured manner (Knight and Yorke, 2003). When hiring, employers generally value good evidence of ability to cope with uncertainty; ability to work under pressure; action-planning skills; readiness to explore and create opportunities; self-confidence; self-management skills; and willingness to learn (Raybould and Sheedy, 2005).

Based on Table 1 and for the purpose of this research, work readiness includes the following key elements:

- Understanding of the organisation;
- Commercial awareness – including the understanding of the consulting environment;
- Achieving results;
- Good interpersonal skills – including team work, networking skills, communication skills and self-confidence;
- Application of the Microsoft suite; and
- Self-organisation and self-management.

2.2.3 Rationale

The contemporary, changing and competitive landscape has rendered knowledge a key source of competitive advantage (Cogburn, 1998). This is why talent prerogatives have moved up the boardroom agenda and talent management is now recognised as an integral part of a long term business strategy by many organisations (Ready, Hill and Conger, 2008). In an attempt to have an edge over competitors, some organisations undertake to accelerate the development and competence of new graduates by investing in graduate programmes. Further to that, graduate recruitment and development forms one

of the most important feeders to the talent pipelines of many organisations (Doherty, Viney and Adamson, 1997).

The literature around graduate employability and graduate competencies suggests that organisations that are looking to benefit from their entry level talent are faced with serious challenges as the quality of graduates is not at the required standard, in particular with regard to work readiness (Boyatzis and Saatcioglu, 2008; Pauw et al., 2008). This is attributable to a number of factors:

- **Challenges with higher education**: Of prime concern is the inability of higher education institutions to impart the skills that employers require. According to Knight and Yorke (2003), the challenge with higher education is that the institutions tend to focus on imparting knowledge and pure academic skills while neglecting other social and general skills that have become critical for the graduates to easily assimilate into the workplace. Therefore, a gap in skills exists, regarding what higher education is producing versus what employers require. This is the business case for graduate programmes. The following quote captures this sentiment:

  > "The future workforce is here – and it is woefully ill-prepared for the demands of today's and tomorrow's workplace" (DiMartino and Castaneda, 2007, p. 9).

  However, Moreau and Leathwood (2006) cautioned that a focus on transferring knowledge to the graduates and pure academics is still necessary, more importantly for specialised vocations such as medicine, technology and science.

- **Historical background**: The second issue is the historical background of the country and the legacy of apartheid. The overall position of the African continent with regard to academic quality, as determined by international rankings of universities, is weaker when compared to other continents. A review of the international rankings of universities reveals that most African universities either do not achieve ranked status or have a low ranking (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2010). Given the impact that

apartheid has had on historically black schools in terms of quality of education as well as the eroded culture of learning, the above mentioned scenario is to be expected (Pauw et al., 2008). According to Govender (2007), this makes the recruitment of graduates even more difficult because despite an increase in the number of graduates available in the graduate pool, organisations are still competing for a relatively small group of individuals. This is mainly because the transition from poor quality schooling to tertiary education is a difficult one, and that from tertiary institutions to the workplace is even more challenging for graduates who are from historically black institutions.

These challenges were pointed out in a study conducted by Higher Education South Africa (HESA) and SAQA, representing all 23 public universities in South Africa, which highlighted South African graduates as lacking in the following areas:

- **Communication skills**: competence in spoken and written English or the oral presentation skills required by employers.
- **Knowledge and intellectual ability**: understanding of economic and business realities.
- **Workplace skills and applied knowledge**: ability to choose appropriate information to address problems and the ability to plan and execute tasks independently.
- **Personal and interactive skills**: openness and flexibility of graduates (Govender, 2007).

It is the challenges highlighted in the previous section that make graduate programmes necessary and appealing to employers as the skills gap between higher education and the workplace widens.

2.2.4 Benefits of graduate programmes

Graduate benefits:

- They ensure graduates are work ready by providing them with basic skills, such as writing and communication skills, that help them function better on entering the workplace.
- They offer comprehensive orientation about the organisation (Fear, 2011).
- They provide on the job training and access to coaches and mentors.
- They provide the graduates with access to a range of professionals and offer opportunities to build networks within the organisation (Knight and Yorke, 2003).

Employer benefits:

- New graduates provide an injection of new and different approaches in the organisation. Bringing in intelligent people with fresh ideas can give the workplace new life and this can serve as a competitive advantage in the working environment (Jaeger, 2003).
- New graduates bring enthusiasm and idealism. They are mostly inexperienced, but their new energy can give an organisation or a department a new vigour for daily challenges (Little, 2007).
- Graduates starting their first jobs have no pre-conceived ideas about what can and cannot be done. Employers have more scope to train them in the way that they want things to be done. Because they lack basic skills of how to function in the work environment, graduate programmes provide elementary tutoring in this regard (Jaeger, 2003).
- Graduate programmes assist businesses with compliance with legislation such as the Employment Equity Act and the Skills Development Act (Govender, 2007).

2.2.5 Challenges with graduate programmes

The literature review revealed that graduate programmes often breed graduates who are generally dissatisfied and unhappy when compared with their counterparts that go directly into entry level positions in different organisations (Arnold and Davey, 1994; Cranmer, 2006; McDermott et al., 2006). This often results in low motivation and lack of commitment towards the programme. However, according to Little (2006), this is due to the fact that sometimes these programmes are not designed and structured appropriately. In addition, the lack of clarity and unmanaged expectations on the graduates' part often results in the graduates taking a view that the programme is a hindrance and a time wasting process. According to Garavan and McGuire (2001) this can impact the effectiveness of the programme because there is a view, based on research, that argues that the more a person identifies psychologically with a job, the higher the job satisfaction appears to be and the higher the organisational commitment will be. A positive correlation has been established between organisational commitment and the reduction in the rate of employee turnover and absenteeism (Connor and Shaw, 2008).

Furthermore, studies that have investigated graduates' satisfaction levels with graduate programmes reveal that most of the graduates are generally frustrated with the programmes and regret registering on them (Friga et al., 2003; McDermott et al., 2006; Connor and Shaw, 2008). This was attributed to a mismatch of expectations between graduates and employers. A situation alluded to in a study, conducted in 1993 by Davison, Brown and Davison cited in Hodges and Burchell (2003), where in addition to being deficient of interpersonal skills, employers found graduates to have unrealistic expectations of the corporate world, such as rapid meteoric progression, their personal net worth and their contribution to the organisations. This correlates with a study by Connor and Shaw (2008) that identified the main causes of dissatisfaction as financial benefit, nature of work and opportunities for development. The abovementioned challenges make it difficult for employers to get graduates who have a good work ethic and positive attitude towards their work, attributes most sought after by employers (Hodges and Burchell, 2003). According to Little (2008), employer dissatisfaction with the graduates' attitude towards work could

be attributed to generational differences in attitudes to learning, work and careers.

2.2.6 Considerations and critical success factors

According to Cranmer (2006), before implementing graduate programmes organisations should consider the following:

- The return on investment that the organisation and the graduate will receive from the graduate programme.
- The purpose and the content to be included in the graduate programme. Organisations should be careful not to overload the graduates with development initiatives as that can hinder progress.
- Continually monitor the graduates' expectations and satisfaction levels.
- Communicate clear guidelines in relation to the graduate programme.

With regard to ensuring the success of these programmes, McDermott et al. (2006) pointed out that the following factors must be in place:

- Honest communication between the graduates and the graduate development team.
- The programme must not create inflated expectations about the jobs and career progress of the graduates.
- The programme must be mirrored with an overall corporate graduate policy with clear lines of management responsibilities.

Organisations need to tailor graduate programmes to match expectations of the graduates as well as the employers. Employers need to understand that graduates are no longer looking for long-term careers in organisations and graduates need to understand that employers want employees who contribute to the bottom line as early as possible. The focus of these programmes should therefore be on the here and now to ensure a win-win situation for both parties (Knight and Yorke, 2003).

2.3 Regulatory framework

The points highlighted previously with regard to the competency gaps of graduates makes the business case for graduate programmes very clear. However, to fully understand and appreciate graduate programmes in South Africa, it is useful to understand the regulatory framework that governs the graduate programmes in the form of learnerships.

2.3.1 South African Human Resources Development (SAHRD) Strategy

The SAHRD strategy provides the regulatory framework that governs the country's human resource development initiatives. The strategy aims to increase the overall level of skills in the country; to increase access to learning; to improve the quality of learning; and to ensure that the learning system is more responsive to the needs of commerce and industry (Mahanyana, 2003). This strategy was put in place by the South African government, conscious of the holistic challenges arising from the country's development agenda such as poverty, income inequality and demographically structural unemployment. This framework encourages business, labour, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the academic sectors of South African society to partake in the national human resources development drive to "maximise the potential of the people of South Africa" (HRD-SA, 2003, p: 7). This collective national approach is also recognised by Boyatzis and Saatcioglu (2008) as the right approach for improving the economic prospects of the country.

2.3.2 Skills Development Act and Skills Development Levies Act

The Skills Development Act and the Skills Development Levies Act were promulgated to encourage corporates to participate in the national human resource development drive through incentives. Part of the reason for this legislation was because of the challenges posed to national cohesion by the economic disparities such as structural unemployment. The structural unemployment was, *inter alia*, informed by the shift in economic activity from the

primary to the secondary and tertiary sectors which are more knowledge-intensive. This shift in economic focus has locked out a significant portion of the population who possessed neither the skills nor the qualifications from economy due to lack of the required competencies (Davies and Farquharson, 2004). Therefore, addressing the skills gap remains a priority for both the public and private sectors.

For the purpose of skills development and quality assurance, the South African economy has been divided into various sectors. All companies and registered employers are required to pay an annual Skills Development Levy, based on their total remuneration bill. In addition, each of the defined sectors was required to establish a SETA. It is the role of each SETA to formulate a sector skills development strategy and to disburse grants collected from the Skills Development Levies back to employers, for the purpose of funding approved skills development programmes. SETAs are measured on the successful transformation of the skills base in their sectors through the implementation of targeted learnerships (Pauw et al., 2008).

2.4 The Learnership concept

As stated in Chapter 1, there are different types of graduate programmes. This section draws comparisons between the different types; however, the focus is on learnerships as the graduate programme that was researched is based on a learnership model. This study will adopt the SAQA definition of a learnership:

> "a learning programme where the graduate spends some time learning theory and some time learning practical skills in a workplace. It leads to a qualification registered on the NQF" (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

The NQF website (www.nqf.org.za, 05 September 2012) describes the NQF as a bridge which "connects communities and allows people to flow" while supporting the economic and social development of a community. This is because the NQF consists of levels and qualification classifications ranging

from highest to lowest as provided by SAQA. SAQA published revised level descriptors to be used in the development, generation and evaluation of qualifications for registration on the NQF and these came into effect on 1 December 2011. Instead of an eight-level framework, a 10-level framework was introduced. The introduction of the 10-level framework ungroups some qualifications, enabling clearer distinction. Only the NQF levels have changed, not the qualifications themselves and therefore course content and material for different qualifications remain unaffected.

Learnerships in South Africa were introduced in 1998 by the promulgation of the Skills Development Act of 1998. Although modelled on the apprenticeship tradition, there are some important differences. Unlike apprenticeships which apply to selected trades, learnerships apply to any occupation. Furthermore, a learnership must culminate in a qualification registered by SAQA according to the NQF (Davies and Farquharson, 2004).

Key Characteristics of Learnerships:

- Learnerships are different from the 'course-based' approaches of the past in that they focus "not on what is presented to people, but on the processes by which they learn to become competent" (Vorwerk, 2002b, p. 14);
- Learnerships consist of a structured learning component;
- Learnerships include practical work experience of a specified nature and duration; and
- Learnerships lead to a qualification that is registered on the NQF which relates to a specific occupation (Davies and Farquharson, 2004).

The three core criteria for quality training and learning practices in the workplace, as defined by the National Skills Board Regulations (NSB) of March 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998), and to which all learnership programmes are required to adhere, are:

- **Applied competence**: the ability to put into practice, in the relevant context, the learning outcomes acquired when obtaining a qualification.

- **Integrated assessment**: assessment that permits the graduate to demonstrate applied competence, which uses a range of formative (interim) and summative (overall) assessment methods.
- **A qualification**: a planned combination of learning outcomes that has a defined purpose or purposes, which is intended to provide qualifying graduates with applied competence and a basis for further learning (Pauw et al., 2008; Vorwerk, 2002b, p. 14).

2.5 Competency gaps between higher education and the workplace

2.5.1 Introduction and background

The literature review on the competency gap between higher education and the job market revealed that entry level skills in the job market have moved from cognitive to emotional skills (Hodges and Burchell, 2003; Jaeger, 2003; Andrews and Higson, 2008). Some studies even indicate that the type of degrees possessed by graduates are not significant in the labour market any more, with the exception of specialised vocational training such as medicine. According to Moreau and Leathwood (2006) nearly two-thirds of vacancies on offer are open to graduates from any discipline. This reflects the fact that employers are looking for transferrable skills in graduates which can be obtained during study and periods of work experience, rather than just degree-specific knowledge.

This view goes against the fact that higher education has a history of preparing students for jobs in specific professions, focusing on imparting the latest theory and research in the specific field (Jaeger, 2003). More recently, universities across the globe are increasingly under pressure to produce highly skilled graduates who are able to respond to the dynamic and complex needs of the contemporary workplace. Simply put, higher education is seen to be falling short with regard to producing graduates who possess the competencies that are

deemed essential for graduates to be successful in the workplace (Boyatzis and Saatcioglu, 2008).

It is because of this competency gap that internationally employers support cooperative education as a means to bridging the gap between formal studying and the workplace (Knight and Yorke, 2003).

2.5.2 What is a competency?

Boyatzis (1982) and, Spencer and Spencer (1993) define competency from an industry perspective as an underlying personal characteristic of an individual that facilitates superior performance in a given situation. Garavan and McGuire (2001) see competency as related to the manner in which individual attributes such as knowledge, skills and attitudes are drawn on in performing tasks in a specific work context – resulting in overall job performance.

This study will adopt the definition of competency as put forward by Garavan and McGuire (2001) as the research seeks to evaluate the extent to which the graduates use the skills they should have learned in the graduate programme.

2.5.3 Important competencies in graduate programmes

A number of studies in the area of graduate competencies attempt to rank the competencies that are deemed essential by employers. In a study by Hodges and Burchell (2003), which interrogates the competency gap between importance and performance of business graduates from the point of view of the employer, the top competencies in descending order of importance, are as follows:

- Ability and willingness to learn;
- Energy and passion;
- Teamwork and cooperation;
- Interpersonal communication;
- Customer service orientation;

- Order, quality and accuracy;
- Flexibility;
- Problem solving;
- Achievement orientation; and
- Initiative.

The importance of these competencies is supported by other similar studies by Garavan and McGuire (2001), Cranmer (2006) and Andrews and Higson (2008), even though the ranking differs slightly.

An important factor to note on the competencies is that the eight top competencies are what could be considered behavioural competencies as opposed to cognitive competencies. Operational awareness, impact and influence on others were considered least essential for graduates early in their careers (Jaeger, 2003). According to Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell and Lay (2002) it is likely that the lack of emphasis placed on such hard skills indicates that these are considered a ‘given’ and/or that any deficiencies can be ‘fixed’ through further training/education, whereas soft skill deficiency may be seen as less easily overcome.

Similarly, in discussing the findings of the study, attention will be confined to the top ten competencies as listed above. In order of performance, the findings were revealed as follows:

- Ability and willingness to learn;
- **Computer literacy**;
- Energy and passion;
- Teamwork and cooperation;
- Achievement orientation;
- **Self-confidence**;
- Flexibility;
- **Analytical thinking**;
- Interpersonal communication; and
- **Self-control**.

The competencies in **bold** are those that were not in the initial top ten of most important competencies as seen by the employers, moreover, customer service orientation, order quality and accuracy, problem solving and initiative are competencies that fall outside the graduates' top ten performance areas. In addition, graduates' strong performance areas are not congruent with competencies considered important by the employers, with the notable exception of ability and willingness to learn and energy and passion. It can thus be said that this is an identifiable competency gap which contrasts with the fact that employers place greater emphasis on the importance of soft skills that perhaps the traditional undergraduate studies, still focused on imparting technical knowledge, are not geared to provide (Hodges and Burchell, 2003).

According to Jaeger (2003), research results indicated that a combination of knowledge, skills and generic traits such as intelligence are the best indicators of individual competence. This view is supported by Boyatzis and Saatcioglu (2008) who argued that there is a set of competencies that are seen to predict outstanding leaders, managers or professional performance. These competencies include abilities from all of the following three clusters:

- Cognitive skills;
- Emotional intelligence; and
- Social intelligence competencies or interpersonal abilities.

The challenge with the abovementioned view with regard to higher education is attributed to the fact that the education system is focused on developing core content proficiency around cognitive intelligence while neglecting the other two clusters (Garavan and McGuire, 2001). According to Knight and Yorke (2003), this is one of the biggest challenges as researchers have recognised the connection between emotional intelligence and job performance, job satisfaction and organisation commitment. Regrettably higher education institutions are not including this in their curricula.

To conclude, Jaeger (2003) noted that formal credentials are a less reliable guide to success in post-industrial society. Personal qualities are more

important than professional discipline, possession of specific credentials, and mastery of specialised knowledge or even expert skills. This is however downplayed by Moreau and Leathwood (2006), who cautioned not to overstate the shift from academic credentials towards skills and personality as that is primarily applicable to general management and service occupations, not to specialised professional and technical occupations. In addition, the influence of culture on personal attributes should not be neglected (Moreau and Leathwood 2006).

2.6 Learning Needs Analysis

The importance of conducting a thorough needs analysis is well accepted in the training literature (Thomas, 1999). A properly conducted needs analysis yields information useful to the development of instructional objectives and training criteria. However, according to Saari (1998), only about 27 per cent of companies have proper procedures for determining the training and educational needs of their staff. Could it be that the initial failure to correctly diagnose the training requirements by conducting a needs analysis exercise would, as a foregone conclusion, cause a miscarriage of the transfer of learning as the ultimate goal? A proper needs analysis of the organisation would have to be aligned with the organisational strategy as this would intertwine the success of the organisation with the training needs of the employer and thereby eliminate obstacles in the transfer climate (Campbell, 1995). This of course assumes that the organisational strategy would enjoy the buy-in of management and therefore the environment would support the transfer of learning, which in turn would be informed by the needs analysis aligned with the same strategy.

Successful completion of the needs analysis within the process will inform the basis of the design of training. Campbell (1995) suggested the following guidelines in the design of training as those that could be most useful:

- The instructional events that comprise the training method should be consistent with the cognitive, physical, or psychomotor processes that lead to mastery;
- The graduate should be induced to produce the capability actively (e.g. practice behaviours, recall information from memory, apply principles in doing a task). The more the active production the greater the retention and transfer;
- All available sources of relevant information should be used and feedback should be accurate, credible, timely, and constructive;
- The instruction process should enhance trainee self-efficacy and trainee expectations so training will be successful and lead to valued outcomes. For example, training should begin with simple behaviours that can be mastered easily and then progress to more complex behaviours as trainees become more confident; and
- Training methods should be adapted to differences in trainee aptitudes and prior knowledge.

This led to outcome assessment becoming a buzzword of the 1990s. According to Harden (1999), that process is important if organisations are to be clear about what their training programmes are for and on which issues the participants will be judged. In addition, he stated that learning outcomes are increasingly used as a focus for curriculum planning and as a result it is important how they are conceptualised and presented.

2.6.1 Design of the DGA qualification

In the case of the DGA, the qualification was designed in 2003 with the intention of building a bridge between higher education and the workplace. The process of designing the unit standards and the qualification was facilitated by the Services Seta through a Standard Generating Body (SGB) to gain input from various stakeholders. The SAQA website defines an SGB as:

> "A body registered in terms of the SAQA Act, responsible for establishing education and training standards or qualifications, and to which specific functions relating to the establishment of national standards and qualifications have been assigned" (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

This body is made up of industry experts, academics, SETA representatives, as well as the management team of the DGA (Fear, 2011).

This process was put in place to ensure that the qualification being assembled has a business case and adheres to the SAQA requirements of a qualification. In the event that the qualification is approved, it is valid for three years. The qualification has to be reviewed every three years to ensure relevance of the content and programme. The qualification under discussion was reviewed once in 2008 and is up for review again in 2012 (Fear, 2011).

2.7 Transfer of training/learning

Considerable evidence suggests that a substantial part of an organisation's investment in training is often wasted due to poor learning transfer and trainee relapse (Burke and Baldwin 1999). Transfer of training or transfer of learning as defined by Baldwin and Ford in 1988 is the degree to which trainees apply the knowledge, skills, and behaviours learned in training, to their jobs. This definition carries with it two intrinsic deliverables as preconditions to transfer of learning; in logical order, learning and application.

Relapse Prevention (RP) and supportive transfer climates are recognised as some of the influences that can potentially assist in enhancing successful transfer of learning. Whereas RP is a self-management technique, lapse is defined as the re-emergence of a tendency that may or may not result in relapse, the key determinant being the individual's response to the lapse. The important point for discussion is the maintenance of the change in behaviour brought about by the training or learning, failing which a relapse could occur. The environment wherein the battle to retain behaviours introduced by learning

or training unfolds is a secondary concern. If, as an example, the corporate culture and environment is one that does not encourage innovation, it would be an adverse environment for trained creators and innovators to thrive. It is therefore the hypothesis that the effect of RP on transfer of learning will vary in accordance with the transfer climate. Put differently, advanced RP methods will produce higher learning transfer in the least supportive environments as the challenges would be greater (Burke and Baldwin, 1999).

In addition Harden (1999) pointed out that specifications of outcomes should be expressed in such a way that they achieve the following:

- Reflect the mission and vision of the institution as perceived by the various stakeholders;
- Are clear and unambiguous;
- Are specific and address defined areas of competence;
- Are manageable in terms of number of outcomes;
- Are defined at an appropriate level of generality;
- Assist with development of ‘enabling’ outcomes; and
- Indicate the relationship between the outcomes.

Feldman (1989), also pointed out that training can either be cognitive or behavioural and is sometimes both, and giving the wrong training to the wrong people will not yield the correct transfer of learning.

> “When the diagnosis of the recruits’ strengths and weaknesses is inadequate, many organisations will provide training at the lowest common denominator, resulting in sub optimisation of training effectiveness” (Feldman, 1989, p. 21).

Feldman (1989) described a three circle model for classifying learning outcomes as demonstrated in Figure 2 below.

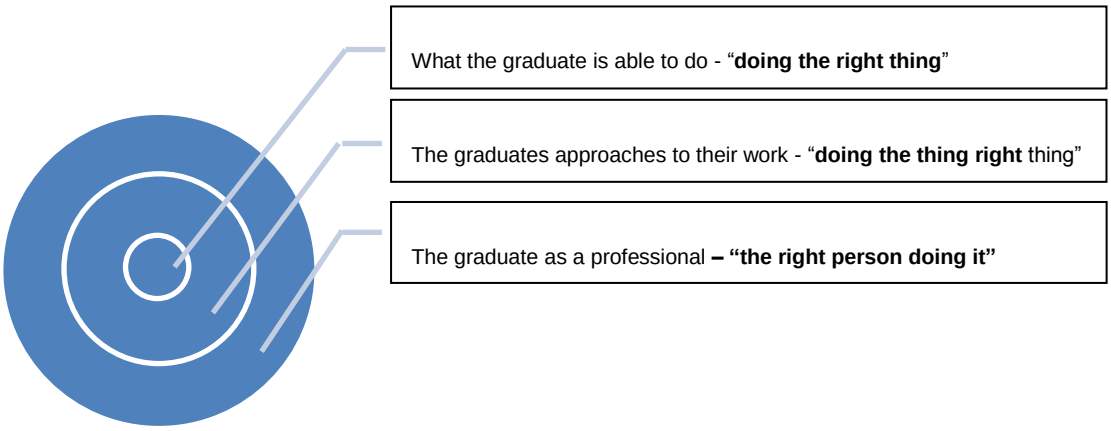

Figure 2: The three circle model for outcome based education

(Feldman, 1989)

- The inner circle represents what the graduate is able to do. This can be equated to technical intelligence.
- The middle circle represents the way the graduate approaches the tasks in the inner circle. This can be thought as of doing the thing right and includes academic, emotional, analytical and creative intelligence.
- The outer circle represents development of the personal attributes of the individual. 'The right person doing it' equates to personal intelligence.

This forms a good basis for the development of learning outcomes in education. Feldman (1989) further confirmed that emotional and personal competencies play a far larger role in superior job performance than technical expertise.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature review highlighted the observation that the transition from higher education to the workplace is a challenge. Although interventions such as graduate programmes are sometimes put in place to ease this transition, these graduate programmes are not without their challenges, from the employer's and the graduate's perspective, and it was revealed that some graduates are not satisfied with the result of being on these programmes and that employers are not always happy with the graduates that they get from these programmes.

As pointed out by Knite and Yorke (2003), it was revealed that good learning environments can improve the odds of groups of students becoming more employable, but they do not guarantee that any individual will become more articulate, emotionally intelligent and self-motivating. In addition, the literature discussed herein reflects that the development of the skills is reliant not only on the individual and the training methods employed, but also on the climate in which they take place. To illustrate the point further, graduates are less likely to succeed in their learning and training if it occurred in a high pressure, narrow deadline environment, wherein paramount importance is attached to immediate client delivery. A thorough needs analysis as well as the design of the programmes outcomes will influence the manner in which transfer of training takes place.

2.8.1 Proposition

Effective graduate programmes assist graduates to become work ready.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology that was used to conduct the research. Firstly, the literature around qualitative research will be discussed, followed by a review of the research design and research instrument to be used. Secondly, issues of data collection and analysis in relation to this study will be provided, followed by a discussion on the validity and reliability of this study.

3.1 Research methodology

This study used a qualitative methodology in order to gather the appropriate data for the research propositions. According to Berg (2001), a qualitative research approach is one in which the researcher makes knowledge claims based on multiple meanings of individual experiences with an intent of developing a theory or pattern or advocacy . The researcher collects open ended data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data.

The disadvantage of using a qualitative research method in this study is that the study will not be easy to replicate. The results are not quantifiable or verifiable, and objectivity may be difficult to achieve because of the researcher's involvement (Punch and Punch, 2005). However, Sandelowski and Barroso (2003) argued that the one major advantage of a qualitative research method is that objectivity and validity can be enhanced by research design.

On the basis of the nature of this study, qualitative research methodology was suitable because it facilitated an in-depth understanding of the issues under discussion. It's flexibility also allowed the researcher to take account of the unanticipated feedback from the participants (Babbie, 2007).

3.2 Research Design

Research was undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of a graduate programme at a multinational consultancy. The research used semi-structured

interviews to collect data from line managers as well as the business analysts to evaluate the extent to which the programme's objectives were met.

The study used semi-structured interviews for the following reasons:

- The researcher was interested in the understanding, knowledge and insights of the respondents (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2003);
- Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask follow up questions and probe and expand respondents' responses where appropriate (Willig, 2001); and
- The researcher aimed to explore the dynamics behind the graduate programme rather than merely focus on the outcomes (Silverman, 1997).

The researcher was mindful that the interviews could be time consuming. The researcher had to make a conscious effort not to influence the respondents. It will not be possible to replicate and generalise this study as it was based on a small sample within a specific context. (Sandelowski, 1995).

3.3 Population and sample

3.3.1 Population

The population of this study comprised first year business analysts that had successfully completed the business consulting unit standard through the DGA. The analysts' line managers/project managers were also interviewed to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme against the research propositions. Interviewing line/project managers as well as the business analysts provided for richer input from both sides (Berg, 2001).

3.3.2 Sample and sampling method

The researcher used purposive sampling. The advantage of purposive sampling, according to Babbie (2007), is that the researcher may select the sample based on his/her knowledge of the population and the aim of the

research. This is further supported by Yin (1994), who pointed out that this is important as well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation. It is for this reason that the researcher was confident that a sample consisting of a total of 16 respondents – eight managers and eight business analysts – would provide sufficient information to evaluate the effectiveness of the graduate programme. This is represented in Table 2.

The researcher selected business analysts that met the purposes of the study: only those business analysts that had been hired into a consulting environment were suitable. This was the most appropriate approach due to the researcher's prior knowledge and experience within the consulting environment. The selection of the managers was based on them having managed entry business analysts for a continuous period of a year following completion of the programme. All participants had to be willing to participate in this study. The names of the participants will not be revealed to maintain their anonymity (Sandelowski, 1986).

Table 2: Profile of respondents

Description of respondent type	Number to be sampled
Manager	8
Business analyst	8

3.4 The research instrument

A semi-structured in-depth interview schedule was put together to collect the data. Themes linked to the research propositions were explored in face-to-face interviews with respondents. This approach was chosen primarily for the flexibility it allowed the researcher, while still adhering to a basic structure (Willig, 2001). This allowed the researcher to probe in detail where appropriate. The researcher put together a list of evaluative questions to be able to establish the level of effectiveness of the graduate programme (Berg, 2001).

3.5 Procedure for data collection

The data were acquired from primary sources. This was achieved by means of an empirical study. In any interview situation, the role of the researcher is critical and researcher bias unavoidably occurs to some extent (Berg, 2001). However, objectivity was maintained by adhering strictly to the interview protocol. One of the advantages of face-to-face interviews is that it allowed the researcher to ask complex questions as the opportunity to provide clarity if needed existed (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2003). Willig (2001) pointed out that the researcher must however guard against influencing the respondents as the method is considered to be friendly.

The researcher asked the permission of the respondents to record the interview beforehand. Hand written notes were also taken and the researcher expanded on them after each interview. The researcher was aware that note taking during the interview might make it difficult for the interviewer to establish a rapport with the interviewees (Willig, 2001). The interviews were designed to last for approximately one hour.

The researcher also used data from the graduates' performance review sessions and the graduates' assessment forms from the Deloitte Graduate Academy.

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

The data from the interviews were analysed and interpreted using content analysis with the following sequential approach:

1. Categorise data – the researcher used grounded theory to identify analytical categories and themes from the interviews (Punch and Punch, 2005);
2. Interpret single instances;
3. Identify patterns; and
4. Synthesise and generalise (Silverman, 1997).

Data collected from the interviews were analysed according to thematic occurrences. The researcher identified patterns in the data based on the frequency with which specific themes recurred in the interview feedback. This pattern matching logic also helped to strengthen the internal validity of the research (Ratcliffe, 1983).

Information from interviews was then tabulated according to the frequency and ranking feedback obtained from respondents. Interpretation of the data were validated by confirming findings and assumptions with respondents where appropriate (Ratcliffe, 1983).

3.7 Limitations of the study

This study was limited to one graduate programme in a multinational consultancy. The findings of this study could only ascertain the effectiveness of the graduate programme of that population. It will not be possible to generalise to other graduate programmes nor to populations outside this organisation (Silverman, 1997).

There is also a possibility that some respondents may have ulterior motives motivated by dislike, distrust or desire to sabotage.

Due to the respondents' familiarity with the researcher, some respondents may have suffered from acquiescence response bias.(Punch and Punch, 2005).

3.8 Validity and reliability

Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it was intended to measure. Validity can take many forms, such as face validity, content validity, construct validity, and internal and external validity (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2003).

Reliability relates to the accuracy of the measuring instrument and is an evaluation of the accuracy and precision of the measurement procedure that

was conducted. Phrased differently, reliability is the consistency with which a measuring instrument yields a certain result when the entity being measured has not changed (Ratcliffe, 1983).

3.8.1 External validity

External validity is the extent that study results may be generalised to other situations, and the extent to which the conclusions drawn can be generalised to contexts beyond the immediate study (Yin, 1994).

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study was to establish a detailed view of what line managers and graduates perceived in terms of whether graduate development programmes met their objectives. Since a purposive sample was chosen in this study and since the sample size was relatively small, it was not possible to generalise the perceptions of research participants across any population (Punch and Punch, 2005).

3.8.2 Internal validity

Internal validity is the extent to which its design and the data that it yields allows the researcher to draw accurate conclusions about cause-and-effect and other relationships within the data. Internal validity is of primary importance in experimental and other causal research (Ratcliffe, 1983).

Internal validity is the freedom from bias in forming conclusions in view of the data. Bias was excluded from this study (as far as possible) by not prompting for “the right answers” in both the interview and in construction of the questionnaire (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001).

3.8.3 Reliability

Reliability refers to the probability that similar research conducted in future will result in similar outcomes (Berg, 2001). The researcher focused on consistency

of approach with regard to data gathering, analysis and interpretation, in an effort to improve reliability.

The objective of the reliability test is to ensure that if a later investigator follows exactly the same procedures and conducts the same research again, the same findings and conclusions will be reached. The emphasis is on repeating the same process in its entirety, not on replicating the results of the interviews. Thus the procedures followed in this study will be documented in detail (Yin, 1994).

The questionnaire administered to the respondents was evaluated by a competent panel that made appropriate recommendations to ensure that the research tool allowed the researcher to collect data that were useful for answering the research question. In addition, the researcher used triangulation to corroborate the feedback from the interviews. The researcher used the graduates' assessment forms from the academy as well as their performance feedback documentation from the employer during their 1st year.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The presentation of the results of this study is based on the responses provided during the semi-structured interviews conducted with the Strategy and Innovation consultants who had been part of the DGA in 2007 and 2008. A similar research tool was used to interview the project managers in whose teams the DGA graduates were placed for the experiential on-the-job learning. The questionnaire headings, which were similar for both the consultants and the project managers, are again presented below for further clarity.

- Identification of the seven top competencies of the qualification (open-ended question).
  - The one unit standard that can be dropped from the qualification.
- Work readiness relating to the top competencies (open-ended question).
- Improving the effectiveness of the graduate programme to promote work readiness (open-ended question).
  - Design and structure.
  - Supportive structures.
- Additional factors that impacted the graduates' level of competency.
  - The working environment (probe).
  - The workload (probe).
  - The project managers (probe).
  - The team members (probe).
- Transfer of learning (open ended question).
  - What is lacking (probe)?
  - What makes it successful (probe) ?
- Expectations versus results (open ended question).

Where appropriate a graphical representation of the results will be provided, failing which a short summary of the results will be presented.

4.2 Demographic profile of respondents

The DGA programme is comprised of 22 unit standards, which as previously indicated, are divided into core, fundamental and elective units. The graduates are required to complete all three fundamental unit standards and seven additional core unit standards during the first three months while being instructed by the DGA. The remaining unit standards are completed during the remaining nine months while actively employed as part of a team working on a real project.

A unit standard is defined on the SAQA website as:

> "A registered statement of desired education and training outcomes and its associated assessment criteria together with administrative and other information as specified in the regulations" (www.saqa.org.za, 03 February 2012).

Interviews were conducted with eight consultants and eight managers who were part of the Strategy and Innovation business unit. A schedule of the interviews is included at Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3: Interview Schedule – Former DGA Graduates

Former DGA Graduates			
Participant Number	**Participant Role**	**Date of Interview**	**Place of interview**
1	Consultant – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
2	Consultant – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
3	Consultant – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
4	Consultant – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
5	Consultant – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
6	Consultant – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
7	Consultant – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
8	Consultant – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg

Table 4: Interview Schedule – Managers

Managers			
Participant Number	**Participant Role**	**Date of Interview**	**Place of interview**
1	Lead – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
2	Lead – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
3	Exec Lead – Strategy & Innovation	January 2012	Johannesburg
4	Lead – Strategy & Innovation	February 2012	Johannesburg
5	Lead – Strategy & Innovation	February 2012	Johannesburg
6	Lead – Strategy & Innovation	February 2012	Johannesburg
7	Exec Lead – Strategy & Innovation	February 2012	Johannesburg
8	Exec Lead – Strategy & Innovation	February 2012	Johannesburg

4.3 Results pertaining to the Proposition

<u>Proposition</u>: Effective graduate programmes assist graduates to become work ready.

4.3.1 Identification of the seven top unit standards of the qualification

Eight graduates and eight managers were interviewed and the results are presented in Table 5 and Table 6 with similar or related unit standards clustered into eight groups:

Table 5: Most useful and least useful unit standards identified by the graduates

Key	
*	Most useful unit standards
x	Least useful unit standards

UNIT STANDARD TITLE	Unit Standard Ranking by the Respondents								Unit Standard Categories
	R 1	R 2	R 3	R 4	R 5	R 6	R 7	R 8	
Contribute to project initiation, scope definition and scope change control	*	*							Project Management
Identify, organise and co-ordinate project life cycle phases for control purposes	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Apply and explain knowledge of the transactions within an ERP module			x			x	x	x	ERP
Assist in the configuration of an ERP module	x		x			x		x	
Demonstrate and apply a basic knowledge of ERP solutions and modules	x		x			x		x	
Apply and explain the generic business process and value chain model					*				Business Process
Apply the process of lead generation									
Assist in researching the problem and the solution within a consulting context	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Research
Observe and record the findings of a business requirements gathering session	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Develop a consulting service ethic					*		*		Consulting
Know the client within a consulting contract	*	*	*	*		*		*	
Understand and apply the concept of the consulting service as a product					*			*	
Understand the business of consulting	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		
Use the writing process to compose texts required in the business environment									Communication
Analyse and communicate workplace data			*	*		*		*	
Apply workplace communication skills		*	*	*		*	*	*	
Populate documentation templates									Admin
Apply principles of knowledge management to organisational transformation									Electives
Apply the basic principles of issue management	*	x							
Apply the principles of change management in the workplace									
Provide administrative support within a consulting context									
Support post-contract service and client follow-up			x	x	x				

Table 6: Most useful and least useful unit standards identified by the managers

Key	
*	Most useful unit standards
x	Least useful unit standards

UNIT STANDARD TITLE	Unit Standard Ranking by the Respondents								Unit Standard Categories
	R 1	R 2	R 3	R 4	R 5	R 6	R 7	R 8	
Contribute to project initiation, scope definition and scope change control			*	*	*			*	Project Management
Identify, organise and co-ordinate project life cycle phases for control purposes	*	*				*			
Apply and explain knowledge of the transactions within an ERP module		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	ERP
Assist in the configuration of an ERP module		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Demonstrate and apply a basic knowledge of ERP solutions and modules		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Apply and explain the generic business process and value chain model	*	*	*					*	Business Process
Apply the process of lead generation									
Assist in researching the problem and the solution within a consulting context	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	Research
Observe and record the findings of a business requirements gathering session	*		*						
Develop a consulting service ethic				*	*	*	*		Consulting
Know the client within a consulting contract	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	
Understand and apply the concept of the consulting service as a product				*	*	*	*	*	
Understand the business of consulting	*	*	*		*	*	*		
Use the writing process to compose texts required in the business environment	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	Communication
Analyse and communicate workplace data		*		*	*	*	*	*	
Apply workplace communication skills									
Populate documentation templates									Admin
Apply principles of knowledge management to organisational transformation									Electives
Apply the basic principles of issue management									
Apply the principles of change management in the workplace		*							
Provide administrative support within a consulting context									
Support post-contract service and client follow-up	x								

Table 5 and Table 6 reflect that the graduates found unit standards under the following categories the most useful:

- Communication skills;
- Project management skills;
- Research skills; and
- Consulting skills.

The managers' results were similar to the graduates with one additional category: business process skills.

Table 7 shows a comparison of how the former graduates and the managers ranked the seven top unit standards. Their rankings were different; however both groups identified four unit standards in the top seven that were similar.

Table 7: Comparison of the seven top unit standards identified by the former graduates and the managers

unit standard ranking by managers				
	Ranking	UNIT STANDARD TITLE	Unit Standard Categories	Total
	1	Assist in researching the problem and the solution within a consulting context	Research skills	8
	2	Know the client within a consulting contract	Consulting skills	7
	3	Use the writing process to compose texts required in the business environment	Communication skills	7
	4	Understand the business of consulting	Consulting skills	6
	5	Analyse and communicate workplace data	Communication skills	6
	6	Understand and apply the concept of the consulting service as a product	consulting skills	5
	7	Apply and explain the generic business process and value chain model	Business Process skills	4

unit standard ranking by the former graduates				
	Ranking	UNIT STANDARD TITLE	Unit Standard Categories	Total
	1	Identify, organise and co-ordinate project life cycle phases for control purposes	Project management skills	8
	2	Assist in researching the problem and the solution within a consulting context	Research skills	8
	3	Observe and record the findings of a business requirements gathering session	Research skills	8
	4	Understand the business of consulting	Consulting skills	7
	5	Know the client within a consulting contract	Consulting skills	6
	6	Apply workplace communication skills	Communication skills	6
	7	Analyse and communicate workplace data	Communication skills	4

4.3.2 The unit standard that can be dropped from the qualification

Although the respondents were only requested to identify one unit standard that could be dropped from the qualification, both groups identified more than one unit standard and most of them were in the ERP category. It can be deduced from Table 4 and Table 5 that the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) related unit standards were the least popular and therefore those were the ones that the majority of graduates and managers would prefer to drop. A graphical representation of the results of the managers in Figure 3 reflect conformance with those of the graduates and the reasons are identical.

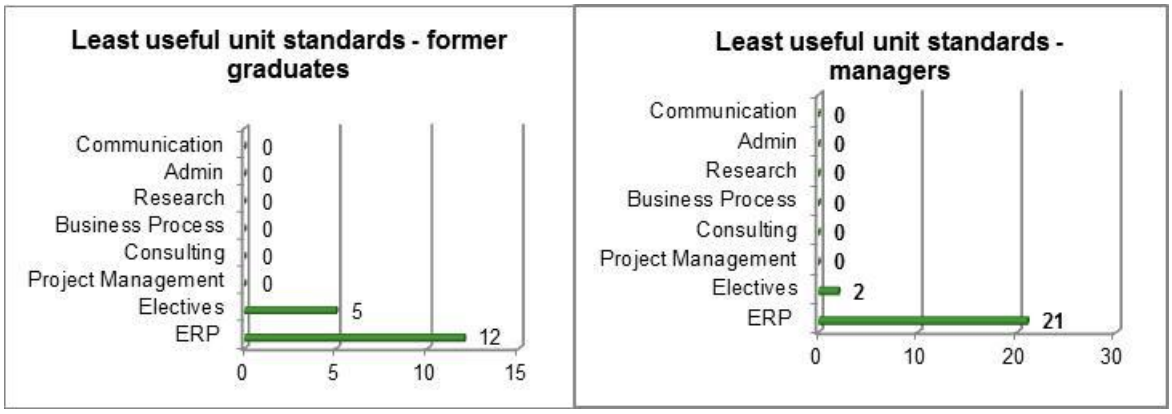

Figure 3: Least useful unit standards - a comparison between graduates and managers

The following were some of the reasons provided by the graduates:

- The majority of the graduates were absorbed into a Strategy and Innovation Business Unit and therefore ERP skills, specifically SAP skills, were not required and therefore did not contribute to their work readiness as such; and
- Given the dynamic nature of the technology landscape it was suggested that the skill acquired was unlikely to be revisited at a later stage because SAP as a system would in all probability have undergone changes. One of the respondents had this to say: “SAP related unit standards were not very useful if you were not pursuing the SAP field. SAP is an area that is constantly changing and evolving, there was therefore no point in teaching

SAP because by the time you are exposed to it there will be new updates on the system".

4.3.3 Work readiness relating to the top competencies

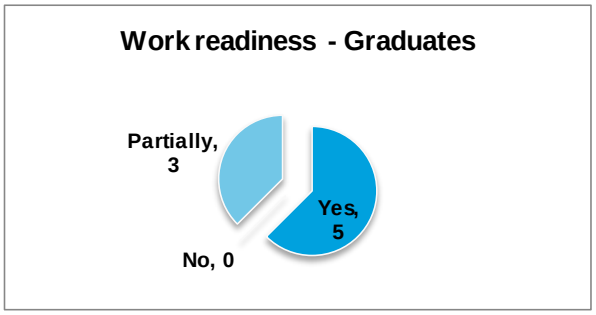

Figure 4: Perceptions of work readiness by the graduates

The majority of the graduates confirmed that the DGA had contributed to their work readiness and one of the respondents agreed with the literature review, saying: "the programme helped prepare me for work, most importantly with soft skills because I had a pure technical background. I was made aware of those additional things that make you a well-rounded consultant. I had none of that coming from varsity". The individuals who said they were partially prepared felt that their project exposure in comparison to the other individuals wascould have been better and as a result this impacted their level of readiness. This is graphically represented in Figure 4.

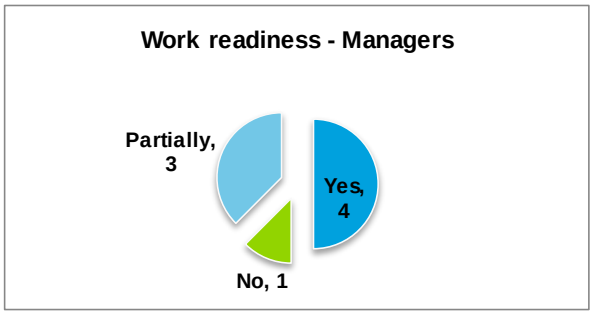

Figure 5: Perceptions of work readiness by the managers

The managers responded to the same question from a different angle, and one of the respondents stated: “The DGA is also important because it helps them understand what they enjoy, what they don’t enjoy, what they’re good at and not so good at so that they know where to focus. So many of them come out of varsity and they don’t know what they want to do. Typically, when I sit with young analysts to find out what they want to do they say that they would like to be exposed to a lot of different things so that they can find out what they enjoy doing”.

Another manager responded as follows: “The unit standard competencies do lead to work readiness because the graduates were competent in those basic areas. In instances where I had to train them the training was quick and not as intensive as the individuals that came in raw from varsity. I would take a DGA before taking someone straight from varsity any day – they already understand the business, and more importantly they understand what it means to be a consultant.”

Only one manager respondent out of the eight disagreed that the programme leads to work readiness, three respondents agreed partially and five respondents agreed completely. The disagreeing manager felt that the majority of the unit standards were too discipline specific as opposed to being generic, a profile that is required for a consultant. Further, at the DGA level a fair number of the graduates have not yet decided what career line to follow so care must be exercised not to ‘box’ them too early into one discipline or another. This is graphically represented in Figure 5.

4.3.4 Improving the effectiveness of the graduate programme to promote work readiness

The graduates and the managers offered a two-tier response regarding the areas of improvement for the DGA programme, design and structure and supportive environment.

4.3.5 Design and Structure

The first tier is on design and structure, the concerns raised on the design of the programme are reflected in Table 8 and Table 9, by the graduates and managers respectively.

Table 8: Design improvements suggested by the graduates

Shorten the length of the programme: • The programme is considered too long (1 year) and the lectures unnecessarily pedantic (four respondents).
Improve the level that the programme is pitched at: • This concern speaks to the one above, the programme was pitched at a level too low for graduates (three respondents).
Customise the programme based on the chosen career path of the graduates: • Importantly, the programme should be customised to the chosen career path of the graduates. An earlier discussion about SAP unit standards substantiates this concern. "When you are doing stuff that is not in line with your career path you lose interest and motivation". A suggestion put forward was that the DGA should rather develop a 'shopping list' of unit standards that their clients could choose from depending on the career path of their graduates (seven respondents). • Another suggestion put forward by three respondents was for the DGA to expose the graduates to their chosen field of business prior to the three month classroom based environment. This was a concern as graduates lack appreciation of the business world when coming straight from varsity and this makes certain concepts difficult to understand. This exposure will ensure that they can relate to taught concepts better if they are exposed to the workings of the corporate world before they are enrolled onto the programme. The current set up is to transit from the university lecture hall into a DGA classroom and then practical work exposure.
Payment of market related salaries for the graduates: • Most of the graduates felt that they were badly paid in comparison to their peers in different organisations. They indicated that this affects their morale and motivation.
Regular updating of the programme content: • Although the programme was generally considered to be good, the graduates felt that some parts of the programme could do with regular updates (5 respondents).

Table 9: Design improvements suggested by the managers

Enhance the recruitment and selection process of the graduates: • Notably the managers are concerned about the recruitment process. Their concern is primarily that the right candidates are recruited and are given the relevant on-the-job project management experience. This was a concern raised by most managers, particularly when comparing the DGA group of 2008 to the prior DGA groups. The consensus was that the group of 2008 was the best DGA group because they were recruited into the DGA when the world was experiencing an economic downturn. Employment opportunities were scarce and a lot of good quality graduates were struggling to find jobs. According to the managers, the good DGA candidates of 2008 was a reflection of the poor recruitment efforts in other years.
Put in place a retention strategy for the DGAs as part of talent management: • Linked to remuneration is the retention strategy, as Deloitte Consulting is only able to retain 50 per cent of the graduates who undergo the DGA programme in the year that they become consultants, and this is partially due to unmet salary expectations.
Pay the graduates market related remuneration: • Pay the graduates market related salaries to improve morale and acknowledge their skills (five respondents).
Provide the graduates with the appropriate project exposure and experience to maximise learning: • Structure the on-the-job experience in a manner that will guarantee that graduates actually learn while on projects. The DGA should contract with the business to ensure that this happens (five respondents).
Regularly update the content of the programme: • Update the content of the programme on a yearly basis to keep it relevant to the market (four respondents).

For both the managers and the graduates, there were not a lot of suggestions regarding supportive structures. There were a total of two from each group and the suggestions were very similar as can be seen in Table 10 and Table 11.

Table 10: Supportive structures improvements suggested by the graduates

Educate the business about the DGA Programme: • Educate and obtain management buy-in into the DGA programme (six respondents). • Improve communication between the business management and the DGA programme management (five respondents).
Manage the working environment to optimise learning: • Expose the graduates to the right projects and ensure correct learning takes place (five respondents)

Table 11: Supportive structures improvements suggested by the managers

Educate the business and the project managers about the DGA programme: • Managers who manage the DGA learners need to be made aware that "a free resource does not mean they have to do photocopying and boring admin work". They must be prepared to invest additional time on the learners to make sure that they give them the right exposure on the right projects to learn and grow (six respondents).
Manage the working environment to optimise learning: • This point is closely linked to the point above in that most managers felt that the learners needed specific types of projects in order to optimise their learning. "Consulting is a fast paced and high pressured environment, these learners must be exposed to projects that are medium sized and with timelines that are not too tight to allow project managers and other project members an opportunity to develop the graduates".

4.3.6 Additional factors that impacted the graduates' level of competency

- The working environment,
- Teamwork,
- The workload, and

- Project managers.

The responses regarding the additional faction impacting graduates competency are best captured by the raw and unedited responses of some of the graduates. The views captured in Table 12 and Table 13 represents a minimum of at least four respondents who concurred with that view.

Table 12: Additional factors that impacted the graduates' level of competency – graduates' perceptions

The working environment: • "The working environment was highly pressurised – this was good. This however differed for different individuals depending on the type of project and project manager."
Teamwork: • "The team members helped a lot because we could all learn from each other as we were from different backgrounds. The team work was also good practice for project work." • "The structure is great. It's like a bridge from varsity to the working environment. We learned a lot from each other and softened the blow of looking like an idiot with your managers because you could always ask your peers. We developed instant networks, developed time management skills – especially with project work and the fact that we often have to juggle more than one project at a time."
Workload: • "The workload was too much and impacted negatively on the quality of work produced."
Project Managers: • "The DGA management was very supportive and strict while we were still office based. They introduced the graduates to the people they needed to know to succeed. However there was minimal support once the graduates moved onto the business units, graduates were fully at the mercy of the type of project manager they got with minimal support from the DGA and limited understanding of what the DGA is about from the manager's side. The environment was too pressurised and fast paced and we struggled, but it helped in the long run since it mirrors the consulting world."

Table 13: Additional factors that impacted the graduates' level of competency – managers' perceptions

The working environment: • It is said, hire for attitude and train for skill. Four managers defined the consulting environment as having more to do with personality and attitude than qualifications. All managers agree that fit is important, either you are that person or you are not, being comfortable with juggling many balls at one time, being comfortable with knowing that you don't know and also knowing what you don't know.
Teamwork: • Teamwork is critical as most projects require some sort of scheduling, where to execute the next task depends on timely completion of the one before, so reliability is important across all teams involved. By having to work in groups at DGA level and being from different backgrounds and areas of undergraduate studies, the graduates get great exposure to leveraging off the knowledge of the team.
Work load: • Like graduates, managers have identified the work load as taxing but also remarked that this was a good preparation for the consulting environment as the workload does not get any lighter.
Project Managers: • The recurring theme regarding the project managers was the lack of proper communication regarding the capacity of the graduates. In instances where graduates were doing billable work on projects, the project managers tended to overemphasise the billable hours over the DGA work which was not billable.

4.3.7 Transfer of learning

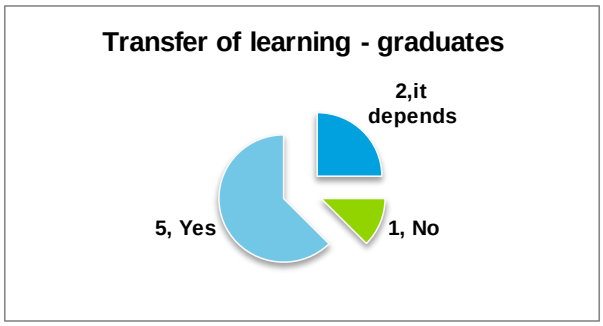

Figure 6: Graduates' perceptions on transfer of learning

Seven of the eight interviewed graduates confirmed that the programme resulted in some form of transfer of learning as can be seen in Figure 7. The main reason given was the learning structure of the programme which was contrary to university where students memorise and regurgitate without application to pass the exams. This involved constant assessment and the ability to apply learned information to solve practical problems driven by case study learning.

To quote one respondent, “It works better than textbooks, lectures and notes because you practically see it (learned information) being applied. Some concepts remain foreign concepts no matter how much you read about them”.

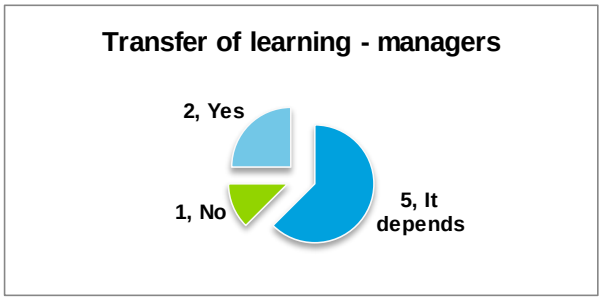

Figure 7: Managers’ perceptions on transfer of learning

The managers’ responses were similar to the graduates as can be seen in Figure 7. Seven felt that the programme does lead to work readiness even though five of those believed that it was mostly driven by what the individual wants to get out of the programme, hence the response – “it depends”.

One manager who believed that the programme does lead to work readiness had this to say; “I will give you an example that draws a direct correlation between work readiness and the programme. We lost two of our best graduates to an organisation that they did work for while they were DGA graduates”.

4.3.8 Expectations versus results

None of the graduates had expectations that were directly related to the programme or work readiness however, three main themes emerged from the expectations that the graduates had, namely:

- The DGA programme was a way of getting into Deloitte as an elite blue chip organisation;
- The DGA programme added a valuable dimension to the work readiness of the graduates (this was not expected); and
- The salary expectations informed by the perception of Deloitte being an elite corporate brand were not met.

The managers’ expectations versus results in terms of skill set are best represented by Figure 8:



Figure 8: Managers' expectations versus results

4.4 Summary of the results

The results presented indicate that both the managers and the graduates believe to varying extents that the DGA programme leads to work readiness. However, the programme is not without its challenges when it comes to the content, design, structure, on the job experience and retention of the graduates. The next chapter will provide further detail around the interpretation of the results.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The analysis and discussion of the results will follow a similar structure and format to the questionnaire that was used with the consultants as well as the managers, to provide the reader with a logical, clear and coherent context from which the overall conclusions are drawn. This chapter will discuss the results presented in Chapter 4 with reference to the literature review discussed in Chapter 2.

5.2 Demographic profile of respondents

As stated in the previous section, the researcher interviewed eight consultants and managers within the Strategy and Innovation business unit that were involved with the DGA programme in 2007 and 2008. The researcher had not planned to exclusively interview candidates from the Strategy and Innovation business unit, however it became clear from early on in the interviews that the candidates' responses were heavily influenced by the business unit that they joined on completion of their qualification, as each business unit required different competencies. The four business units within the Deloitte Consulting practice are as follows:

1. Human Capital,
2. Strategy and Innovation,
3. Technology,
4. Business Process Services.

As a result, the researcher then chose to focus on the Strategy and Innovation practice to avoid compromising the validity and reliability of the study, as the sample was not big enough to draw comparisons between the various business units.

The researcher's original plan did not involve interviewing candidates from only two DGA groups: 2007 and 2008; however the researcher realised from the first few interviews that the responses of the respondents were also heavily influenced by the year in which they completed their qualification. As a result the researcher decided to interview graduates from two of the latest and largest Deloitte intake groups, the groups of 2007 and 2008.

Process of Analysis

The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse the data collected from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the graduates and the managers. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis helps identify, analyse and report on patterns or themes within the data. It helps the researcher organize and describe the data and sometimes can assist in interpreting various aspects of the research topic. The researcher started by transcribing the interview recordings individually to become familiar with the data as well as to start generating initial codes. This was done on a consolidated spread sheet per respondent and per question. The researcher then searched, identified and named the themes in order to come up with the first draft of the results.

The structure of this section will follow a similar pattern to the questionnaire, however this chapter will focus more on the discussion and analyses of the results presented and where appropriate, draw links with the relevant literature.

5.3 Discussion pertaining to the Proposition

<u>Proposition:</u> Effective graduate programmes assist graduates to become work ready.

5.3.1 Graduate Competencies

The results presented in the previous chapter indicate that the unit standard categories that focused on developing consulting competencies, basic research

skills as well as understanding business processes were viewed most favourably by the graduates.

One of the managers who was interviewed had the following to say regarding the consulting environment: “they (graduates) also have to be the right profile because consulting is a different environment and if your personality is not suited for that you will struggle. There is a type of person that works in consulting despite the skills. It is a way of thinking, they have to be resilient, flexible, creative, shouldn’t like too much structure and be able to think on their feet. Some consulting houses are more structured but Deloitte is not and as a result very daunting for the juniors because nothing is defined”. This view was congruent with what one of the graduates had to say “consulting is a different world, being good at what you do is not good enough. To be an effective consultant you have to do a whole lot more other than be good at your core competency. You need to be able to adapt quickly, learn quickly, be articulate and have a good presence in front of the client”.

Knight and Yorke (2003) observed that universities are concerned with the transfer of knowledge as pure academic skills to the detriment of social and general soft skills, which are emphasised as being important in consulting. Moreau and Leatherwood (2006), although not corroborating with but validating Knight and Yorke (2003), cautioned that for other disciplines or vocations like medicine, technology and science, transfer of knowledge as pure technical or academic skill is necessary and desirable. It can therefore be concluded based on the description of the consulting environment in the opening of paragraph of section 5.3.1 that consulting is not a rigid vocation or discipline. Importantly, the consulting environment allows for the two seemingly contrasting views to co-exist without prohibitive contradiction.

The qualification National Certificate: Business Consulting Practice (Enterprise Resource Planning), SAQA ID: 48874, has clusters of unit standards that make up consulting competencies as follows:

- Understanding the business of consulting;

- Understanding and applying the concepts of consulting services as a product;
- Knowing the client within the consulting contract; and
- Developing consulting ethics.

These competencies are more behavioural than cognitive and this resonates well with the literature review, in particular Rainsbury, et al. (2002), who postulates that hard skills are taken as given. In fact this view is supported by one of the managers who said "...we focus on recruiting top graduates for the DGA programme and we usually end up with a group of intelligent individuals who don't necessarily have the right soft skills and adequate training to optimally and efficiently apply their intelligence...".

Furthermore, a study undertaken by HESA and SAQA identified that South African graduates generally lack soft skills and business skills (Govender, 2007).

It is important to note that, although Appendix A shows all the available unit standards totalling 168 credits, the minimum number of credits required to achieve the qualification is 137. The remainder of the unit standards are additional elective unit standards that the graduates can choose not to complete.

5.3.2 Work readiness

As can be seen in Figure 3, of the eight graduate respondents, five affirmed that the programme enhanced their work readiness, whereas only three respondents said partially so. The partial respondents indicated that their agreement was conditional on whether a graduate was placed on the right project, with the right project manager and due consideration was given to the fact that the graduate was still on the DGA programme which itself had its own time demands. Simply put, the learning environment needs to be enabling for the graduates to learn, which will be discussed more comprehensively on the assessment of transfer of learning. In addition, the view from both graduates

and managers was that the drive for achievement by the graduate carried a lot of weight.

According to Jaeger (2003), the following competencies from the three clusters have been observed to predict outstanding professional performance:

- Cognitive skills;
- Emotional intelligence; and
- Social intelligence competencies or interpersonal abilities.

Garavan and McGuire (2003) advanced the position that higher education training is focused on developing content proficiency around cognitive intelligence and neglects the other two clusters.

It has been stated that the DGA programme recruits individuals with exceptional cognitive abilities who are then trained on becoming ‘all-rounders’. While there are reservations, it was agreed unequivocally by both the graduates and the managers, that the programme does enhance work readiness.

5.3.3 Effective Graduate Programmes

The literature review (Arnold and Davey, 1994; Cranmer, 2006; Little, 2006; McDermott et al., 2006) highlighted that graduate programmes are prone to breed graduates who are unhappy when compared with their counterparts who go directly into entry level positions. Little (2006) attributed this to poor design of the programmes, lack of clarity and unmanaged expectations on the part of the graduates. This can lead to the programme being negatively viewed, as a hindrance to progress, and thereby causing a withdrawal of commitment and low motivation.

The respondents stated that the DGA programme is too long, ERP unit standards don’t add any value and one of the managers indicated that he would have liked to have been involved in the design of the programme as managers know which competencies are required and thus which to develop. While the research does not allow for a conclusion that the programme is poorly

designed, there are structural issues that, if properly improved upon, may result in a more effective programme. Both managers and graduates agreed that the remuneration structure of the DGA graduates needs to improve to enhance the rate of retention.

One of the success factors of these programmes, as discussed by McDermott et al. (2006), is the return on investment that the organisation and graduates receive from the programme. Owing to salary expectations, Deloitte has failed to retain some of the top achieving graduates beyond a few years following completion of the DGA programme. Deloitte's competitors and even clients are hungry for the entry level skills of the DGA graduates and therefore graduates salary expectations remain a critical development area for Deloitte.

5.3.4 Critical success factors

Whereas Boyatzis (1982) and Spencer and Spencer (1993) define competency as an underlying personal characteristic of an individual that facilitates superior performance in a given situation, Caravan and McGuire (2001) describe competency as the manner in which individual attributes such as knowledge, skills and attitudes are displayed in performing tasks in a specific work context, both are behavioural expressions of competency. It is this behavioural understanding of competence which is better suited to evaluate the DGA programme as it is geared towards reproduction of learned competencies in a work environment.

The critical factors that impacted the level of the graduates competency were:

- The working environment;
- Teamwork;
- The workload; and
- The project managers to which the graduates were assigned.

5.3.5 Transfer of learning

According to Baldwin and Ford (1988), transfer of learning is the degree to which trainees apply, to their jobs, the knowledge, skills and behaviours learned in training. Further, Burke and Baldwin (1999) suggest that often investments made by organisations in training are wasted due to poor learning transfer and trainee relapse. It therefore becomes important to maintain the change in behaviour introduced by the learning and training, and bear in mind that the work environment could either be an enabler or a disabler. Harden (1999) points out that the specifications of learning outcomes should be expressed in such a way that amongst others they are:

- A reflection of the mission and vision of the organisation;
- Clear and unambiguous;
- Specific and address defined areas of competence;
- Manageable in terms of number of outcomes; and
- Defined at an appropriate level of generality.

While both graduate and manager respondents affirmed that transfer of learning does take place, a number of concerns have emerged from the questionnaires. The graduates found the work load of being a DGA learner and an employee - in particular when the requirements of the two responsibilities clashed - to be a hindrance. Furthermore, at times there seemed to be no communication between the employer and the DGA programme leadership. There are some managers who believed that on the job learning can never be substituted by any programme and therefore do not fully buy into the programme. Lastly, Deloitte as an organisation, does not seem to appreciate the role of the DGA programme, as analysts who had been through the programme were still subjected to stigmatisation years after completing the programme. This lack of input to its graduates eliminates the three top learning outcomes as put forward by Harden (1999), and threatens the successful transfer of learning considerably. The learning needs to be aligned to the competencies required for successful execution of the job tasks. The managers expressed concerns that although the abilities of the recruited graduates differ, the training programme

has remained unchanged. In particular, due to the 2008 recession many organisations were not recruiting and thus the DGA was able to attract a particularly high calibre of graduate but the programme was not adjusted accordingly and as a result, the programme fell into the Feldman (1989) trap. Feldman (1989) postulated that when the diagnosis of the recruits' strengths and weaknesses is inadequate, many organisations will provide training at the lowest common denominator.

It can be concluded that while the DGA does achieve the transfer of learning to ease the transition from higher education to the workplace, there remain areas of development as identified through the research and isolated by the literature review.

5.3.6 Expectations versus results

What were the expectations and whose expectations were they? Expectations from three stakeholders can be identified: the DGA programme (Deloitte), the graduates and the managers. It seems a logical conclusion to classify the expectations of the DGA programme to be the same as those of Deloitte as it was Deloitte who designed the programme. The expectations of the managers and graduates are represented in Figure 9 and thereafter assessed for congruency and also whether they were met.

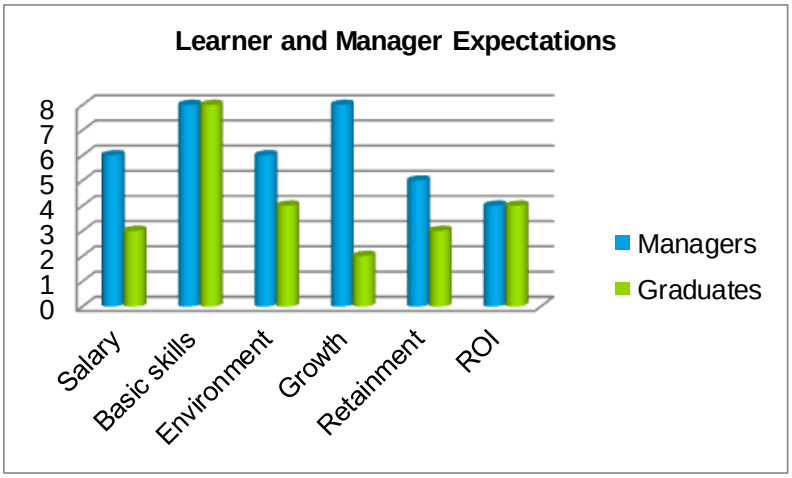

Figure 9: Graduate and Manager Expectations

With respect to graduate expectations, the researcher was able to observe the following from Figure 9:

- Three of the graduates had their salary expectations met;
- All of them agreed that there was transfer of basic business skills;
- Half of them felt the learning environment was enabling;
- Two agreed that the programme enhanced their growth prospects within Deloitte; and
- Half felt the programme was worth their time.

The researcher was able to observe the following from Figure 9 regarding the manager expectations:

- All but two managers felt the graduates were properly remunerated;
- All agreed that there was transfer of basic business skills;
- Six of the managers felt the learning environment was enabling;
- All the managers felt that the DGA graduates had great growth prospects within Deloitte;
- Five managers felt Deloitte was not retaining the DGA graduates whereas the other three felt Deloitte, while not retaining DGA graduates en masse, were retaining the right ones; and
- Half of the managers felt Deloitte was realising return on investment in the DGA programme.

Strong observations were recorded from one of the managers regarding poor return on investment pertaining to the DGA programme. According to the manager, the trend was that Deloitte loses 50 per cent of its DGA graduates 14 months after recruiting them and having taken them on the programme for 12 of the 14 months. This is attributed to Deloitte's failure to adjust the graduates' remuneration packages following completion of the programme in line with what the market is able to offer.

5.4 Conclusion

Proposition: Effective graduates programmes assist graduates to become work ready	**Proposition Accepted**

The results of this research indicate that it can be concluded that the proposition that effective graduate programmes lead to work readiness can be accepted. Both the managers and the graduates are in agreement although to varying extents. Both groups are of the opinion that the programme can be further enhanced to make it more effective: The flexibility of the programme to be customised, depending on the career that the graduates will be pursuing; and the structure and control of the on the job experience, which is currently left up to the respective employers to be improved. The key issue that emerged from the findings was that Deloitte is unable to retain most of these graduates once they are promoted to consultants. This is of serious concern as a lot of money is invested in the programme with minimal value derived from it. Although the recommendations will provide further detail on areas of the programme that can be enhanced, it is important to note that it is beyond the scope of this study to highlight things that the DGA should be including in the training towards the qualification. This is however an area that can be explored by another study.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In concluding this paper, observations and recommendations can be made to the following stakeholders:

- The DGA;
- Corporates;
- Graduates;
- Institutions of higher learning; and
- The Government.

6.2 Conclusions of the study

Most of the challenges with graduate programmes and graduate competencies discussed in the literature review were based on international studies. The findings of this research resonate with most of the issues that were revealed by the literature. In undertaking this research it became apparent that the majority of the literature on the graduate programmes, like the DGA, was prescriptive and generic. South Africa, in particular, has not matched the creation of SETAs with research into the effectiveness of these interventions. The research subject, strategy and innovation, is in itself a new discipline that has not fully matured, at least in South Africa. For example, the Actuarial Society of South Africa (ASSA) is actively involved in the setting of professional standards for actuarial professionals who practice in the country. ASSA has influence on the tuition offered by universities in the country. Similarly, the Financial Planning Institute uses practising financial planners to set the exams for aspiring financial planners. This ensures that the learning is congruent with the real working environment.

It follows, therefore, that the inability of higher education to produce work-ready graduates necessitates the overall existence of graduate programmes in.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 DGA

The DGA is losing graduates and falling behind on their return on investment, and of all challenges identified this needs to be remedied swiftly as the organisation loses about 50 per cent of its graduates once they become consultants. The inability to retain the graduates threatens the very survival of the DGA, as there is little sense in up-skilling and training these graduates only to lose them as they are about to become productive. Contributory issues like remuneration would, in the process, need to be discussed. Retention is paramount as it is the ultimate objective of the DGA that these trained graduates will develop and one day lead the organisation.

6.3.2 Corporates

Corporates can engage academia regarding the calibre of graduates produced by institutions of higher learning to highlight the obvious incongruence between the learned and required skills. Corporates need to realise that until the skills gap is bridged, hopefully by academia, they will have to invest in the up-skilling and training of at least their entry level employees through such programmes, hence careful thought and consideration should go into how these programmes are designed and structured.

6.3.3 Graduates

The graduates have a responsibility to research and understand the workplace, take advantage of the available career guidance platforms and identify suitable career paths.

6.3.4 Institutions of higher learning

Institutions of higher learning could pick up on the findings of studies like this to commence a conversation on how to realign the curricula to best meet the needs of the workplace.

The research as well as the literature has identified that the learnership programmes are an initiative driven by an organisation to bridge the skills gap of graduates between higher education institutions and the workplace. Put simply, higher learning institutions produce graduates with a skills deficit when it comes to the requirements of the workplace. Mastery of the theoretical subject matter is not sufficient and there is a case for application of the learned competencies in a real life situation.

6.3.5 Government

These findings could be the basis upon which to engage other stakeholders, notably government, to inject a new sense of renaissance into academia in order to meet the requirements of the national economy. The government has the ability to harness the strategic capabilities of all stakeholders, from business to academics, to develop a mission, vision and education strategy that is driven by measurable objectives from Grade 1 through to tertiary education. Education can therefore not continue to be education for the sake of it, but rather education with a purpose which is designed to enhance the economic wellbeing of the country.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

This study of evaluating the effectiveness of graduate programmes in South Africa is one of the first investigations of this nature in South Africa. This exploratory work lends itself to follow-up research. Suggestions for future research include:

- A quantitative research study to be completed on the same topic;

- A comparative study of different organisations on the structure, design and delivery of graduate programmes;
- A qualitative study with institutions of higher learning to get a view of how they can help to close the skills gap between tertiary education and the workplace;
- The influence of the graduates' characteristics such as the personality and ambition of the graduates to succeed on such programmes;
- A qualitative or quantitative study that that will evaluate the level of work readiness of graduates from higher education institutions in South Africa;
- An evaluation of the effectiveness of graduate programmes as an entry level talent management strategy; and
- A comparative study of the effectiveness of graduates who have been through graduate programmes and ones that have not been through a programme.

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APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A: Unit Standards for the business consulting practice qualification.

	ID	UNIT STANDARD TITLE	OLD LEVEL	NEW LEVEL	CREDITS
Core	13835	Contribute to project initiation, scope definition and scope change control	Level 4	NQF Level 04	9
Core	10131	Identify, organise and co-ordinate project life cycle phases for control purposes	Level 4	NQF Level 04	5
Core	115408	Apply and explain knowledge of the transactions within an ERP module	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	8
Core	115395	Apply and explain the generic business process and value chain model	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	12
Core	115399	Apply the process of lead generation	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	5
Core	115402	Assist in researching the problem and the solution within a consulting context	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	6
Core	115411	Assist in the configuration of an ERP module	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	12
Core	115400	Demonstrate and apply a basic knowledge of ERP solutions and modules	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	10
Core	115394	Develop a consulting service ethic	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	5
Core	115403	Know the client within a consulting contract	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	6
Core	115398	Observe and record the findings of a business requirements	Level 5	New Level Assignment	8

		gathering session		Pend.	
Core	115412	Populate documentation templates	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	8
Core	115397	Understand and apply the concept of the consulting service as a product	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	5
Core	115404	Understand the business of consulting	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	8
Fundamental	12153	Use the writing process to compose texts required in the business environment	Level 4	NQF Level 04	5
Fundamental	8662	Analyse and communicate workplace data	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	5
Fundamental	8647	Apply workplace communication skills	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	10
Elective	115405	Apply principles of knowledge management to organisational transformation	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	10
Elective	115401	Apply the basic principles of issue management	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	8
Elective	115407	Apply the principles of change management in the workplace	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	10
Elective	115406	Provide administrative support within a consulting context	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	5
Elective	115396	Support post-contract service and client follow-up	Level 5	New Level Assignment Pend.	8

APPENDIX B: Interview protocol

Setting the scene

The researcher will begin the interview by introducing herself and explaining the aim of the research. It will be explained up front that any information shared by the interviewee will be in the public domain should it be published in the research report. Respondents will be assured that their identity will be kept confidential.

In an attempt to enhance consistency, the research problem will be read out to each interviewee giving a brief background to the research and clarifying any potential misinterpretations regarding terminology.

APPENDIX C: Research Instrument – Managers

Question 1

Question one will focus on getting the managers to identify what they consider to be the seven top competencies in the entire qualification.

Of the 22 unit standards that are included in the qualification: National Business Consulting (attached), identify the seven that you believe are most important with regard to preparing graduates to contribute to the business as quickly as possible to the workplace. Please substantiate why that is the case.

- If you had to drop one, which one would it be and why?

Question 2

Question two will focus on gaining an understanding of whether the managers think that the competencies identified in question one are well developed by the DGA and whether those competencies lead to work readiness.

Do you think that the competencies identified in question one are well developed by the DGA?

- If yes, why?
- If no, why? And what do you think is lacking?
- Do you think that the competencies identified lead to work readiness?

Question 3

Question three will attempt to gain an understanding of what the managers think can be done to improve the effectiveness of the graduate programme.

What do you think can be done to improve the effectiveness of the graduate problem in promoting work readiness?

The following areas will be explored in detail:

- Design and structure of the programme (content and process)
- Supportive climate

Question 4

Question four will focus on the specific factors that the managers believe impact the level of competency of the graduates in addition to the unit standards completed.

What other factors impacted the competency level of the graduates on the programme?

- The working environment
- The workload
- The managers
- The team members

Question 5

Question five will gain an understanding of whether the managers believe that the programme ensures transfer of learning.

Do you think that the programme tries to ensure transfer of learning?

- If no, why and what do you think is lacking?
- If yes, what makes this successful?

Question 6

Question six will seek to understand the managers' expectations and assess the level to which their expectations are met by the graduates produced by the DGA.

What are your expectations of the DGA's graduates, given the fact that they spent a year on the programme being prepared for the world of work? To what extent were your expectations met?

- What were you satisfied with? Please provide examples of how the programme has helped specific delegates to perform better at work.
- What were you not satisfied with?

APPENDIX D: Research instrument – Business Analysts

Question 1

Question one will focus on getting the Business Analysts to identify what they consider to be the seven top competencies in the entire qualification.

Of the 22 unit standards that are included in the qualification: National Business Consulting (attached), identify the seven that you believe are most important with regard to preparing graduates to contribute to the business as quickly as possible to the workplace. Please substantiate why that is the case.

- If you had to drop one, which one would it be and why?

Question 2

Question two will focus on gaining an understanding of whether the Business Analysts think that the competencies identified in question one are well developed by the DGA and whether those competencies lead to work readiness.

Do you think that the competencies identified in question one are well developed by the DGA?

- If yes, why?
- If no, why? And what do you think is lacking?
- Do you think that those competencies lead to work readiness?

Question 3

Question three will attempt to gain an understanding what the Business Analysts think can be done to improve the effectiveness of the graduate programme in promoting work readiness.

What do you think can be done to improve the effectiveness of the graduate problem?

The following areas will be explored in detail:

- Design and structure of the programme (content and process)
- Supportive environment

Question 4

Question four will focus on the specific factors that the Business Analysts believe impacted their level of competency in addition to the unit standards completed.

What other factors impacted your level of competency other than the actual programme?

- The working environment
- The workload
- The managers
- The team members

Question 5

Question five will gain an understanding of whether the graduates believe that the programme ensures transfer of leaning.

Do you think that the programme tries to ensure transfer of learning?

- If no, why and what do you think is lacking?
- If yes, what makes this successful?

Question 6

Question six will seek to understand the graduates' expectations and assess the level to which their expectations are met by the DGA.

What were your expectations going into the DGA programme and to what extent were your expectations met?

- What were you satisfied with?
- What were you not satisfied with?

APPENDIX E: Consistency matrix

Research problem: The main research problem is to evaluate the effectiveness of a graduate programme against the objective set of bridging the competency gap between knowledge gained through higher education and the requirements of the workplace. This research will be undertaken within a multinational consultancy within South Africa.					
Problem	**Literature Review**	**Proposition**	**Source of data**	**Type of data**	**Analysis**
The main research problem is to evaluate the effectiveness of a graduate programme against the objective set of bridging the competency gap between knowledge gained through higher education and the requirements of the workplace.	(Arnold and Davey, 1994) (Raybould and Sheedy, 2005) (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006) (Coll and Zegwaard, 2006) (Connor and Shaw, 2008) (McDermott et al., 2006) .	**Proposition**: Effective graduate programmes assist graduates to become work ready.	- Semi-structured interview – see appendix A	Nominal data	Content Analysis