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The lived experiences of African women transitioning from professional services firms to corporate environments

Gerlind Smith

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

Supervisor: Dr Hilary Geber

Wits Business School, Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to explore the career experiences and career transitions of African women Chartered Accountants in the South African business environment where employment equity of race groups is sought. The international pursuit of gender transformation at the executive level, together with the South African employment equity targets, makes professional African women a key group for employers. Their lived experiences and career transitions challenges were the focus of this study.

Qualitative research was deemed the most suitable approach to obtain depth of understanding of an area that has not previously been researched. Semi-structured interviews provided insight to participants who experienced transitions within professional services firms (PSF), returned to PSF, and transitioned out of PSF to other corporates. Since career transitions of this group of professionals did not appear in the literature, a theoretical framework of related literature was derived, which informed the development of a semi-structured interview guide.

Sixteen interviews were conducted with participants from South Africa's Gauteng province. Participants fell into four groups: those who remained in PSF, those who returned to PSF after having left, those who left and were at a managerial level, and finally, those who had left and were at executive levels.

Interviews, with permission of the participants, were recorded, transcribed and analysed using ATLAS.ti software. The analysis resulted in 145 codes, 23 categories and 10 themes.

The increase in black women professionals in organisations is slower than would have been expected, with monitoring emphasis placed on overall racial transformation rather than gender-specific change. This research found that African women CAs experienced being regularly targeted by recruiters and employers for positions. Participant career transitions were found to be impacted by South Africa's employment equity legislation, resulting in career fast-tracking initiatives and being targeted as new

hires by organisations. Participants' lived experiences highlighted that their first transition into the work environment established a basis for comparison when experiencing subsequent transitions. Career transition challenges experienced include racial tensions resulting from perceived fast-tracking, organisational unpreparedness in assisting newcomers, and a lack of role models and structured support. Tenure is impacted by ineffective transition experiences. Organisations lack sufficient programmes to cater to the unique challenges faced in these career transitions. Thus, coaching is proposed as a suitable intervention. Family backgrounds, role models and other significant networks are not generally available as support resulting in a need for coaching. Based on different types of transitions identified in the study, a model was developed to guide business coaches in assisting future clients in preparing for transitions, going through career transitions, as well as establishing themselves within new organisations.

Further research should take in a wider sample, as this study was limited to participants within Gauteng. Studies focussing on other professions such, as the legal, medical and engineering profession, are recommended to establish the lived experiences of African women's career transitions.

DECLARATION

I, Gerlind Irene Smith, 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 Management (Business and Executive Coaching) in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Gerlind Irene Smith

Signed at Parktown, on the ……. day of February 2017

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my family who have supported me throughout this journey: my husband Roger, my son Alex, my daughter Hayleigh and my mother Rosi, who set the example for life-long learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the people who have supported me, encouraged me and stood by me during the two years of this research.

To the individuals who agreed to participate in the research, shared their experiences so willingly and gave so generously of their time, I am very grateful. Without you this work would not have been possible.

To my supervisor, Dr Hilary Geber, goes a big thank you for patiently reviewing my work, being a sounding board and providing valuable guidance.

Dr Kerrin Myres, for providing an excellent foundation to conducting research and keeping our entire cohort on track, I am immensely thankful to you.

Roger, my husband, and my children, Alex and Hayleigh, I thank you for giving me the space to achieve this milestone, for encouragement to persevere, and for endless cups of tea. I could not have done it without you.

My mother, who has always encouraged my siblings and me to broaden our minds, and for always being so supportive, I am truly thankful.

I appreciate the time my employers have allowed me to pursue my studies and giving me flexibility over the two years.

Thank you, Toni Muir, for your detailed editing of my work.

And finally, a thank you to my MMBEC cohort for sharing the pain and struggles and for being a motivating group.

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GLOSSARY

Terms and abbreviations used in the report are defined below:

African	The use of the term African in the report means individuals of the African race, and excludes White, Indian and Coloured South Africans.
Afrikaans	One of South Africa's 11 official languages, broadly used in certain business sectors, particularly during apartheid years.
B-BBEE	The fundamental objective of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act as defined by the Department of Trade and Industry (dti) is to advance economic transformation and enhance the economic participation of black people in the South African economy.
CA(SA)	Chartered Accountants (CAs) of South Africa is the designation used by individuals who have met all the requirements to qualify as a chartered accountant and are registered with SAICA.
EAP	The Economically Active Population which includes people from 15 to 64 years of age who are either employed or unemployed and seeking employment (CEE Report, 2014).
EEA	Employment Equity Act (EEA) is the legislation which drives the equal employment opportunities within organisations. The Act applies to all employers and workers and protects workers and job seekers from unfair discrimination.
Employment Equity	Employment Equity (EE) is the approach to achieving equity across all spheres of employment, to redress the inequalities of the past.
Fast-tracking	An organisational practice of accelerated promotions of certain individuals or groups to achieve organisational targets of representation at pre-defined grade levels.

Onboarding	The process organisations put in place to welcome, orientate and integrate newcomers into the organisation. An onboarding process extends well beyond the first few days.
PDI	Previously disadvantaged individuals (being Africans, Coloureds, Indians, white women and the disabled).
PSF	Professional Services Firms.
SAICA	South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) is the regulatory body for CAs in South Africa. Prerequisites to registration as trainees, training regulations and qualifying exams are set by SAICA. Qualified individuals become registered members and are governed by the SAICA code of ethics.
Senior management	Senior Management, as per the Department of Labour, includes individuals who would manage managers and implies high levels of experience.
Taxi	A mini-bus people transport that travels on pre-determined routes rather than carrying a single passenger from an individually selected point of departure to a selected point of destination.
Traditional expectations	South Africa has numerous African cultural groups, each having their own unique customs and practices. The traditional expectations referred to in this study refer to generic expectations of women to provide support to extended family members as well as the role of the woman to attend to all domestic responsibilities in the family. These expectations are more strongly embedded in rural environments. Urbanisation results in increased isolation from the core family.
Top management	The Department of Labour reporting through the Commission for Employment Equity requires employers to differentiate between senior and top management. Top management would be the level at

	which key decisions are taken and would include employees at board level

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to understand the implications for coaching practice to support career transitions from professional services firms (PSF) into the corporate world based on the life experiences of individuals who have made that transition.

1.2 Context of the study

Professional services firms provide a solid training ground for graduates to qualify as chartered accountants (CAs) (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2005). Well-structured onboarding (socialisation) programmes help the graduate find their feet and job requirements are clearly established. Support is offered throughout the training and qualification process. With an imbalance of high unemployment and a high degree of skills gaps, skilled resources are in high demand in the labour market (Horwitz, 2013). Highly trained professionals, or knowledge workers, such as CAs are included in the skilled resources group (Kaiser, Kozica, Swart, & Werr, 2015).

South Africa's history, from pre-apartheid and apartheid years, has left a significant shortfall of ownership, executive and senior management representation in corporates from the African, Indian, and Coloured population groups (Booysen, 2007). The Employment Equity Act (EEA) and Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) challenge South African corporates to meet targets which require the employment and retention of women and previously disadvantaged groups. Qualified accountants are important resources within an economy, and particularly black CAs are a critical skill which is in short supply (Republic of South Africa, 2011).

Africans, and more particularly African women, continue to be under-represented in executive and senior management positions in South African companies some 20 years' post democratisation. Only 21% of top management positions are held by women as highlighted in the report by the Commission for Employment Equity (CEE)

(Republic of South Africa, 16th CEE Annual Report, 2016). African executives in top management roles, the report reveals, show a paltry increase of 5% (15% to 20%) from 2003 to 2013, while a slightly better increase from 14% to 23% is seen at senior management levels. The 2016 report (Republic of South Africa, 16th CEE Annual Report, 2016), reflects that Africans make up only 14.3% of the overall top management positions. Africans at senior management have only reached 21.2% of the overall senior managers. No commentary is made in the report to explain a drop of almost 10% of Africans at top executive roles from the prior year. Africans as a percentage of the economically active population remain hugely underrepresented in top management and senior positions. African women remain scarce, for example only 5% of the approximately 41,100 South African CAs are African women (SAICA, 2016).

Despite legislation such as the EEA and the establishment of B-BBEE, progress is slow (Booysen, 2007). South Africa has an oversupply of unskilled labour and a shortage of certain skilled and professional categories of labour (Horwitz, 2013). Corporates are required to attract, develop and retain women to grow them into senior roles. This raises the question of how professional African women experience the current labour market and what challenges they face as they take up opportunities arising from the drive within corporates to meet employment equity (EE) targets.

Fast-tracking promising individuals into senior positions is not always carried out with a full understanding of support required to ensure the success of the fast-tracked appointee. Wasylyshyn (2003) makes the point that high potential individuals get offered advancement more quickly and need to be offered high impact development sooner. Wasylyshyn (2003) adds that coaching for personal development is often linked to career transition issues. It would be in the interest of organisations to obtain insight into the experiences of individuals who have made career transitions to incorporate these learnings into programmes contributing to return on hire investments.

Executive coaching as a leadership development tool is growing in acceptance (Wasylyshyn, 2003). It is proposed that expanding on executive coaching by applying

it to the period of transition would support both the requirements of the individual and the hiring organisation.

1.3 Significance of the study

The study fills a gap in that it addresses an area that has not yet been fully researched. Some research on the gender aspect within accounting firms is available, (Anderson-Gough, et al., 2005; Kokot, 2015; Kornberger, Carter, & Ross-Smith, 2010; Lupu, 2012), but not specifically focussed on the South African environment. A historical perspective on the first black CAs in South Africa by Hammond, Clayton, and Arnold (2009, 2012) provides some insight into challenges and obstacles to their entry into the profession. Given South Africa's transformation efforts, this makes it an interesting area for research.

The main body of research on career transitions has been focussed on first-time job entrants and their socialisation processes into the work environment (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Gruman, Saks, & Zweig, 2005; Jones, 1986; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Limited research is available on transitions of experienced hires (Carr, Pearson, Vest, & Boyar, 2006; Milligan, Margaryan, & Littlejohn 2013) and remains an area for research (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007). Cabrera (2007) touched on the return to the workplace after a period of absence; however, specific research on the transition from PSF into corporates was not found.

The findings of this research benefit corporates in their development planning at the critical juncture of key experienced hire entry into the organisation and contribute to return on investment (ROI) of appointments. Benefit may also be derived by human resource teams in PSF to limit turnover of qualified African professionals. Executive coaches equally benefit from the research findings in tailoring their coaching interventions to focus on dealing with the challenges faced. Individual coaching clients derive a benefit in being better supported in their career transition and becoming effective in their new roles.

1.4 Problem statement

1.4.1 *Main problem*

Understanding the lived experiences of African women professionals making the transition from PSF to corporate organisations.

1.4.2 *Sub-problems*

The first sub-problem is understanding the lived experiences within a PSF.

The second sub-problem is understanding the lived experiences in the corporate environment.

The third sub-problem is the transition challenges from PSF to corporates

The final sub-problem is identifying the implications for the coaching practice to support transitions into corporate roles.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

This study focusses specifically on African (black) women as it is expected that due to their scarcity in the market, their experiences are different from the qualified accountants of other demographic groups.

The research is limited to CAs who have had their training in accounting firms as representatives of the PSF. The study is limited to the geographical area of Gauteng.

1.6 Assumptions

The research approach assumed that sufficient participants would be found to provide the required insight; that participants would be willing to participate in interviews; and that such participation would be made in an open and honest manner to reflect their experiences and perspectives.

The assumption that there would be sufficient respondents was based on:

- SAICA's published number of registered African women qualified CAs.
- The existence of two relevant South African associations, namely the African Women Chartered Accountants (AWCA) and the Association for the Advancement of Black Accountants of South Africa (ABASA). Both associations are active in the advancement and interests of black accountants.

Contact with the above associations was assumed to provide access to potential participants, though only the contact with ABASA resulted in access to participants.

To elicit open and honest respondent participation it was important to approach participants respectfully and provide them with sufficient background as to the purpose of the study, as well as sufficient opportunity for reflection on their lived experiences.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A review of the existing literature creates perspective for the research question by understanding the body of knowledge that has been developed by previous researchers, and to highlight gaps in the body of knowledge.

2.2 Overview of the topic

The review of literature covers areas which provide context and to highlight what is already understood about the research topic. To provide background to the topic, several diverse topics needed to be reviewed. For clarity of how they fit together, a high-level structure is shown in Figure 1 below. A more detailed figure is shown at the end of the literature review:

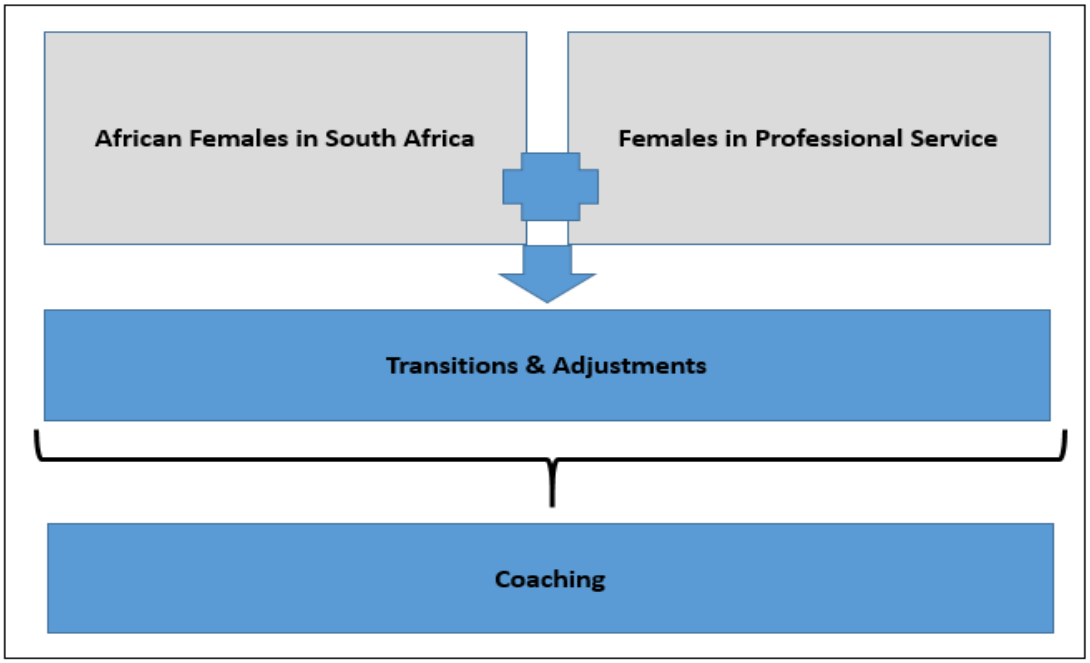


Figure 1: High-level conceptual framework to the Literature Review

The following areas are covered in this review: an overview of South African employment history, the achievements to date in the development of black CAs in South Africa, the gender debate within the accounting profession, career theory, the processes and challenges related to career transitions, how coaching has been applied in career transitions, and the how coaching could support successful career transitions.

2.3 African women in corporate South Africa

A brief background to the EE figures of South Africa, specifically in the field of CAs, is required to give context to the research topic to understand how this gives rise to career transitions.

2.3.1 *Historical background to employment equity practises*

With the advent of democratisation, the South African labour market has been challenged to redress the employment inequalities resulting both from the apartheid era, as well as the contribution of South Africa's colonial history to racial inequality (Hammond et al., 2009). In the years from 1948 to 1994, government policy deliberately restricted access to quality education and employment to the white population and excluded other population groups (Myres, 2013). The new democratic government of 1994 inherited a country with an educational backlog for non-whites and a large part of the economically active population being unskilled. A further challenge was an almost exclusively white executive and management structure, and economic ownership in the hands of white South Africans (Hammond et al., 2009).

To achieve equitable distribution of wealth and active participation in economic activities, a range of legislations and guidelines were introduced (Booysen, 2007). Significant among these were the Employment Equity Act of 1998 (EEA), and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 (B-BBEE). The EEA (1998) makes distinctions between white males and previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs) from the designated groups (Africans, Coloureds and Indians, white women and the physically disadvantaged). In 2007, the Department of Trade and Industry (dti)

gazetted the Codes of Good Practice, which brought into play Transformation Sector Charters (Sector Charters). These charters provide industry-specific guidelines for transformation targets. A scoring mechanism measures an organisation's progress against ownership, management, EE, investment in development, and corporate social responsibility. An independent annual review accredits organisations with a BEE contributor status, used in the awarding of work, tenders and investment, making BEE achievement important to the economic success of companies. Regular amendments to EEA, and the promulgation of the Employment Equity Regulations Act in August 2014 (Republic of South Africa, 2015), signify that sufficient progress has not been made and that the pressure for transformation remains.

2.3.2 *Progress in employment equity*

The annual report published by the Commission for Employment Equity (CEE) remains the most accurate source of information on the progress made on EE (Booysen, 2007). This report compares employment statistics by race and gender, as well as the percentage of the economically active population (EAP) in employment. The EAP presented in the report is drawn from data supplied by Statistics South Africa and is shown in Figure 2 below (Republic of South Africa, 2016):

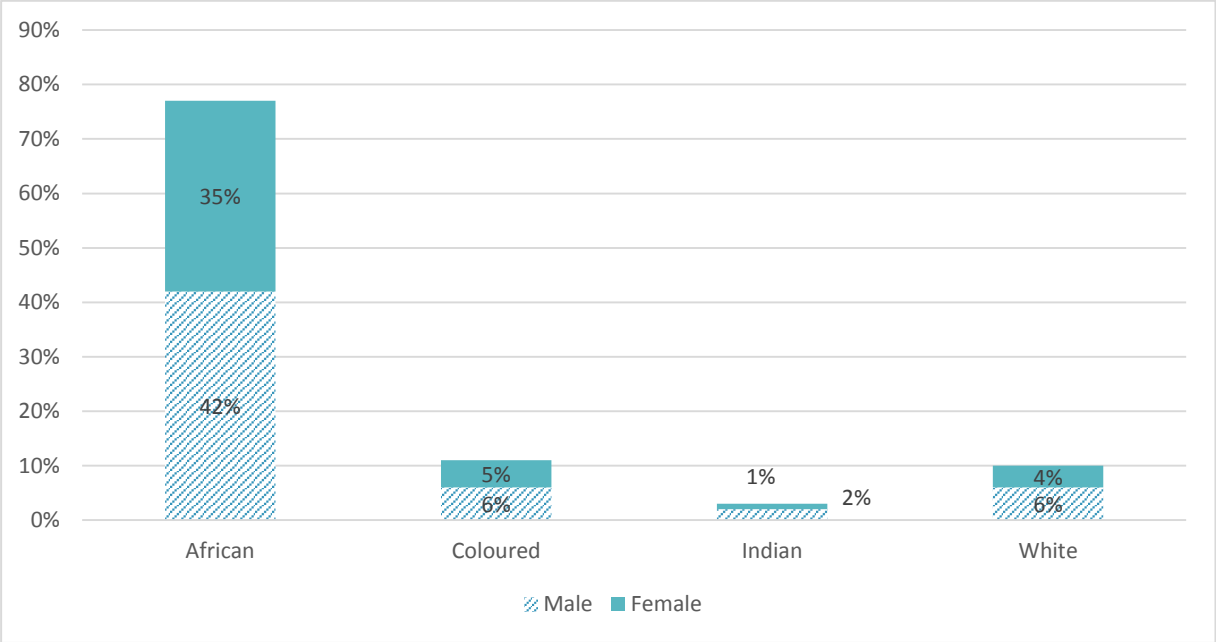


Figure 2: Race and gender as a percent of the economically active population in South Africa 2015 (sourced and adapted from the 16th CEE Report, 2016)

Figure 2 reflects that in the 2016 CEE Report, Africans represent 77% of the total EAP. Yet, after 22 years of democracy, 69% of top management is white (up 6% from the 2014 report) and the gender distribution at top management remains heavily weighted towards males at 78.6% (see Figure 3 below). Marginal improvement is seen at senior management level, with women at 32%. In the 2014 CEE Report (Republic of South Africa, 2014), only 6.3% of top management and 8% of senior management are African women. Overall, 28.4% of all permanently employed individuals are African women (Republic of South Africa, 2014). The same top-line statistic could not be ascertained from the 2015 and 2016 CEE reports, as the reports no longer reflect that level of detail.

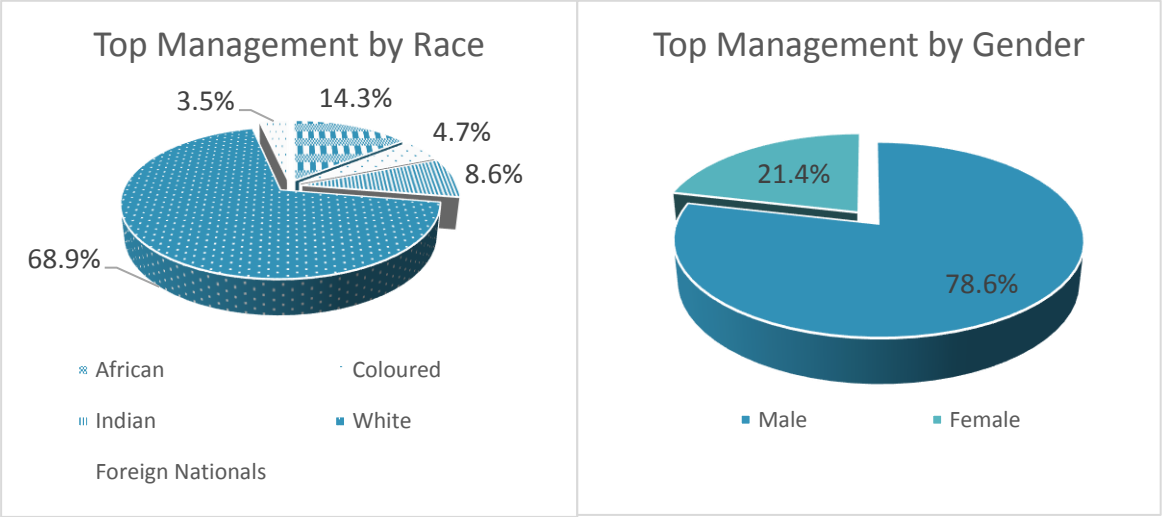


Figure 3: Top management by race and gender (16th CEE Report, 2016)

In Table 1 below, the period from 2003 to 2016 shows growth in African representation at the top and senior management levels up to 2013, and a decline in the three-year period to 2016. From 2015 onward, the CEE report no longer includes detailed gender statistics. Overall, a slow growth of Africans at top and senior management is evident.

Table 1: Change in occupational level by race and gender

Occupational level	African % by level			Women % by level		
	2003	2013	Change	2003	2013	Change
Top Management	14,9%	19.8%	4.9%	14.6%	20.6%	6%
Senior Management	14.2%	23%	7.8%	22.3%	29.9%	7.6%
Professionally Qualified	39%	38.4%	-0.6%	36%	43%	7%
Skilled Technical	42.1%	59.2%	17.1%	44.2%	47%	2.8%
	2003	2016	Change	2003	2016	Change
Top Management	14.9%	14.3%	-0.6%	Not reported		
Senior Management	14,2%	21.2%	7%	Not reported		
Professionally Qualified	39%	41.2%	2.2%	Not reported		

Skilled technical	42.1%	58.8%	16.6%	Not reported

The 2016 CEE Report reflects white males as the most favoured group for recruitment (42%) and promotions, but that recruitment of African (9.7%) and White (10%) women is beginning to equalise (Republic of South Africa, 2016). The overall statistics reflect an under-representation of Africans and women in employment numbers, especially at top and senior management, with improvements being extremely slow.

2.3.3 *Employment equity and gender*

As revealed in the previous section, statistically, women across race groups in South Africa remain under-represented at all occupational levels except the skilled technical level (see Table 1). Booysen (2007) indicates that pressure would remain over the coming years to increase the level of women at all occupational levels.

Globally, gender transformation at top and senior management is receiving attention. To achieve growth of women at executive levels, several European countries have legislated boardroom quotas, including Norway (as the front-runners), Spain, France, Italy, Iceland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and most recently, Germany (Smale & Cain Miller, 2015). Gender diversity in employment makes business sense, as limiting the number of women in an economy cuts growth potential, as you are only using a portion of your talented people (Grant Thornton International, 2015).

Bernardi, Bosco and Columb (2009) explored the connection of ethics and gender diversity and found that the percentage of women on boards of companies listed among the most ethical companies was significantly higher than the percentage of women on the Fortune 500 listing. Having more women on boards, Bernadi et al. (2009) reason, automatically brings greater diversity and variety in perspective, and hence more independence in decision-making and bringing different perspectives. Bernadi et al. (2009) caution that their findings could be influenced by more ethical companies hiring more women onto their boards.

The different leadership styles women adopt, such as a more democratic or participative style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990), bring a more balanced view to decision-making. Singh (2007) highlights that an executive board representative of the demographics (race and gender) is more attuned to its customer and supplier base. The greater network of the board is expanded through a less homogenous group of directors which, if all white male, would likely have overlap in their networks (Singh, 2007).

The literature and published statistics evidence that the pressure for both race and gender transformation in South Africa remains (Booysen, 2007; CEE Annual Report, 2014, 2015, 2016). The progression of African women into senior management ranks and top management in South African corporates is closely monitored, as can be seen from the CEE Annual Report. Investment in leadership development through coaching this talent pool would be of value to organisations.

2.3.4 *Progression of African CAs*

The CA(SA) designation (Chartered Account, South Africa) appears frequently when reviewing the members of corporate boards. A SAICA (2014) analysis of directorships of companies listed 29.9% of all directorships as CA(SA) qualified. This finding indicates a strong preference of corporates in appointing individuals to their boards whose training includes such competencies as business strategy, ethics, governance, communication, auditing, and accounting (SAICA, 2014).

Hammond et al. (2009) traced the difficult and slow entry of Africans into the CA profession in South Africa, beginning with Wiseman Nkhulu, the first African South African CA to qualify in 1976. By the year 2000, the number of African CA(SA) had only reached 220. Hammond et al. (2009) reveals the social closure created by apartheid (exclusionary practices) to Africans entering the profession. The slow increase after democratisation is attributed in part by Hammond et al. (2009) to the fact that although racial criteria barring entry into the profession were removed, the

application of individual merit as criteria to profession entry became exclusionary. This, Hammond et al. (2009) explain, was that inequitable educational background through poor schooling, poor housing and absent parents because of migrant labour policies negatively impacted a large part of potential entrants who were not able to compete fairly on 'merit'. Other factors contributing to the slow growth were language and cultural barriers, including exclusions from social activities (Hammond et al., 2009). These were in addition to the challenges of the profession itself – educational funding, demanding university requirements, obtaining placement with a firm to do articles, passing qualifying exams, and proving one's abilities in the workplace (Hammond et al., 2012).

Even when hired, African trainee accountants faced barriers to obtaining the requisite work experience by not being placed in jobs, often due to resistance from clients to have black people on jobs, and sitting idle within offices (Hammond et al., 2012). As black ownership of businesses was largely prohibited in the apartheid regime, the absence of black clients where black trainees would have been more welcome contributed to the challenge of obtaining requisite experience (Hammond et al., 2012).

The SAICA membership statistics (SAICA, 2016) suggest that progress is being made in the number of African CA(SA). Access to education is increased through initiatives such as the SAICA initiated Thuthuka Bursary Fund (TBF) (funded by accounting firms and other corporates) and contributes to the number of Africans qualifying as CA(SA) (SAICA, 2015). Table 2 reflects an increase of African women CA(SA), growing from 93 in 2002 to 2,160 in September 2016 (SAICA, 2016). However, this represents only 4% of the total CA(SA) population.

Table 2: African Women CA(SA) statistics (SAICA website, 2016)

Year	African women CA(SA)	Total CA(SA)	African women % of total CA(SA)
2002	93	2093	0.4%
2003	122	21856	0.6%
2004	156	23079	0.7%

2005	208	24326	0.9%
2006	272	25655	1.1%
2007	344	26915	1.3%
2008	442	28131	1.6%
2009	604	29671	2.0%
2010	793	31602	2.5%
2011	969	33167	2.9%
2012	1132	34600	3.3%
2013	1334	36113	3.7%
2014	1621	37834	4.3%
2015	1721	38475	4.4%
2016	2160	41100	5.3%

The poor representation of African women at top and senior management as seen in the CEE report, linked with the SAICA JSE report findings on directorships (SAICA, 2014) creates a gap and suggests that African women CA(SA) would be attractive to corporate BEE-driven recruitment strategies. The trend that black women already outnumber white women holding positions on corporate boards by 7% (SAICA, 2015) would support that assumption. In the SAICA report, ‘black’ includes the wider group of African, Indian and Coloured women, and this statistic is therefore directly comparable to the CEE reports. SAICA (2015) adds that some individuals may sit on more than one board.

The literature reviewed highlights the challenges of EE in the South African labour market and emphasises that the pressure for transformation remains. Although corporates need to fill their leadership pipelines, little appears in the literature about where recruitment efforts are targeted. A PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) (2008) report which reveals high female turnover is not specific to South Africa. Understanding the life experiences of African women professionals who have made career transitions, and exploring how initiatives such as coaching could be significant in supporting them in their careers, would add to the body of knowledge

2.4 Challenges experienced by women accountants in PSF

Women represent more than 50% of accounting sector employees (Wooten, 2001), and for this reason make up an important resource for leadership progression. In South Africa, women make up 35% of total CA(SA) (SAICA, 2016). Women's representation at leadership remains rare (Lupu, 2012) and job exits mid-career remain high. Gaining an understanding of the professional, organisational and personal environments women accountants encounter may provide a background to the obstacles women in PSF face that contribute to them leaving and consequently transitioning to other corporates.

2.4.1 *Challenges at the professional level*

'Becoming a professional is a complex accomplishment which involves …a wide array of formal and informal norms which have to be both taught and learned' (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2002, p. 41). The socialisation process of professional accountants extends beyond the work that needs to be done to, more importantly, what behaviours are expected by members of the profession (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2001; Grey, 1998). The development of the professional identity of accountants begins on entry into accounting firms, argue Anderson-Gough et al. (2001), influencing the conduct, image projected, the way the work is to be performed, the perception of the importance of the client (Grey, 1998), and their understanding of the importance of time in the profession. These are all seen as marks of the professional. Professionalism further extends to the management of time and appropriate socialising, and even bringing the correct level of enthusiasm for one's work (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005). This understanding appears common across the profession, as seen by the results of a study of trainees' experience across two large firms by Anderson-Gough et al. (2001), where trainees quickly learned what was expected of them as professionals.

Kirkham and Loft (1993), in outlining the history of the professional accountant, highlight that the accountant was not always viewed at the level of professionalism as

were the medical and legal fields. The development of the accounting profession involved an effort to differentiate themselves from other similar activities such as bookkeepers and clerical roles. The professional accountant was differentiated from other roles by 'not being' a bookkeeper or clerk. This, Kirkham and Loft (1993) explain, required specific conduct and ways of working that would differentiate them as professionals. The historically male profession of the CA initially only included women in administrative support or internal support roles (Kirkham & Loft, 1993; Kornberger et al., 2010). The constructs on which the profession is built, such as time and the role of the client, as well as accounting as a gentleman's profession, have led various writers to refer to it as a 'gendered' profession (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005; Kornberger et al., 2010). Kornberger et al. (2010) suggest that practices such as performance assessments or promotion processes may seem to be gender neutral, but because they determine only one way of being valued, i.e. fitting with organisational ideals (Anderson-Gough et al., 2002), they cannot be gender neutral.

Those in authority in accounting firms, Wallace (2009) contends, are expected to exhibit values and behaviours which are generally regarded as masculine, such as being rational, objective, efficient, having a strong goal-orientation, being sharp and decisive. These are separate from the ability to do the technical work required. The early socialisation process into the profession as graduates achieves that both men and women entrants learn what the organisation expects both of work and the conduct expected (Anderson-Gough et al., 2002), and that this is the way of the profession.

The number of women in the auditing profession has grown, with entry-level joiners being balanced across genders on a 1:1 ratio (Broadbent, Kirkham, Dambrin & Lambert, 2008; PwC, 2008). Yet, women in leadership roles in PSF remain rare (Kokot, 2015; Lupu, 2012). Furthermore, retention of women at senior levels remains a struggle (Kornberger et al., 2010).

If the years across which gender practices in accounting have spanned and the countries and organisations within which research has been carried out are considered against the number of senior positions held by women in accounting firms, then the

likelihood of women continuing to transition out of PSF into other opportunities remains (Kaiser et al., 2015; Lupu, 2012).

2.4.2 *Challenges at the organisational level*

The challenges for women in the 'gendered' profession of accounting, are most clearly seen in the organisational setting, with long hours and poor work-life balance; informal barriers to obtaining knowledge on how the organisation works; obstacles to the progression through male leaders subconsciously selecting someone most like themselves for progression (PwC, 2008); and lack of women as mentors and role models (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005; PwC, 2008).

The construct of time as a limitation to progression of women

Time, apart from the people employed in firms, is the most valuable resource for the PSF as the foundation of its revenue. Time management practices are in place to record every hour worked in order that clients can be billed (Kornberger et al., 2010). Success and profitability is measured through the number of hours billed and commitment is traditionally measured through the hours worked and time spent building client relations. It follows then that the individuals who show commitment in time are most likely to progress (Kornberger et al., 2010). Long hours of work are the norm and are expected. After-hours socialising and building client relationships are expected and result in a blurring of private and working time (Anderson-Gough et al., 2001). Promotional aspirations lead to time becoming a platform of competitiveness among colleagues (Anderson-Gough et al., 2001), particularly as the competition for fewer senior positions increases as a natural funnelling of the hierarchy.

It is at the level of becoming or having been a manager that the highest turnover of women accountants is experienced (Kornberger, Justesen, & Mouritsen, 2011). This is because it is at this level that time inputs required to progress begin to conflict more intensely with other responsibilities.

Flexibility programmes

The increasing complexity of women's roles with the addition of home and childcare, coincides with promotional opportunities into senior roles becoming more competitive, suggesting that the requirement for a high time commitment becomes a barrier to progression for women with family responsibilities (Kornberger et al., 2010).

The PSF, in recognition that retention of their women talent makes good business sense, and in response to legislative, professional associations and competitor pressures, has responded with women-friendly policies and practices as well as flexible work initiatives (Wooten, 2001). Kornberger et al. (2010) caution that flexibility programmes may not achieve what they set out to do. Perceptions of respondents on flexibility programmes highlight the following:

- Flexibility does not mean less work – the same work must be done but with flexibility around times more suitable for the individual, yet it was perceived by others as working less.
- Client interaction increases at senior levels, which brings with it restrictions to client working hours and times suitable to the client. Opting for flexible arrangements creates the perception of lack of commitment to the client.
- The organisational culture places value on visibility through presence in the office. The women working off-site experienced that this created a perception of being less committed and not serious about one's career.
- Working in the office or at clients after hours create opportunities to build networks and sponsors, leading to reinforcing the male network ('boys' club').

Gender challenges in the profession may well differ across cultures, as reported by Kokot (2015), where in a study of female Partners in Germany and the UK, the German respondents accepted it as a given that a choice between career and motherhood should be made. The UK respondents, however, reported that constraints remained and that equality had not yet been achieved, and that many had experienced direct sexism (Kokot, 2015). Virginia Schein (2007) confirmed earlier findings that across

countries (Germany, UK, China, Japan), managerial attributes are still described in characteristics ascribed to males.

Access to internal mentorship and sponsorship

The upward progression for individuals within the PSF is largely dependent on having a more senior person provide mentorship and career sponsorship (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Blair-Loy (1999), in her research on career patterns of executive women in finance, highlights the example of a female Partner who, even at the partnership level, felt an exclusion from mentoring, which her male colleagues enjoyed. She explained this as men more naturally mentoring other men because people like being with people more like them.

Higgins and Kram (2001) outline that mentorship should not be seen in a purely rigid form of a single relationship but rather as a range of relationships that lie in the broader social network of the individual. The prevalence of this among women in PSF was not found in the literature.

2.4.3 *Specific challenges for African women accountants*

Women in South Africa have stood in second place to men historically, where past regimes advantaged men over women (Mathur-Helm, 2005). The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) notes in its 2013-2014 Annual report that despite a constitution committed to gender equality, “South African society remains deeply entrenched in patriarchy” (CGE, 2014, p. 6). Gender stereotypes and barriers experienced by women in a study by Hofmeyr and Mzobe (2012) revealed low confidence, the ‘old-boys club’, women pulling each other down, gender stereotypes, lack of mentors, women’s dual roles, and societal factors, among others.

The challenges and barriers for black women, as Booysen and Nkomo (2010) point out, are added to by the double stereotypes that they face. While white women face the gender barrier, black women experience both race and gender challenges as barriers for advancement (Mathur-Helm, 2005). Race and gender, they contend, need

to be seen together as factors influencing organisational subordination and privileges. Booysen and Nkomo (2010) reflect that black women in management draw on the cultural notion of the strong black woman.

Traditional lifestyles expecting subservience of women and the extended family system has created greater challenges for African women (Mathur-Helm, 2005). Single parenting and traditional expectations to support the extended family, both in family duties and financial support, create additional pressures on top of those brought by the profession itself. The absence of mentors and role models who can provide guidance on dealing with these pressures is often mentioned as a barrier for women to progress in corporates (Hofmeyer & Mzobe, 2012). The rarity of African women CAs indicates that the African woman CA has even less chance than her white counterpart of a role model and mentor.

The risk of being viewed as token appointments highlighted by Booysen (2007) is a reality for African CAs, as organisations respond to EE pressures through fast-tracking candidates into more senior roles. Fast-tracking approaches rob the individual of the time required to develop their experience and confidence. Lucrative external offers are enticing and negatively impact the development of a strong psychological contract (Wöcke & Sutherland, 2008).

2.4.4 *Why women leave the professional services firms*

Wallace (2009) lists several reasons why women may leave firms prior to achieving partnership. These include perceived lack of promotional opportunities, personal conflicts such as family obligations, compensation issues, and offers from other organisations.

Gender stereotypes, as highlighted by Booysen and Nkomo (2010), may impact the decision to opt out as white and black male managers are less likely to attribute key managerial capabilities to women. Booysen and Nkomo (2010) found, however, that black women are more likely to attribute successful managerial capabilities to other women – they see themselves as capable of doing managerial work and progressing.

An interesting outcome, note Booysen and Nkomo (2010), is that the black male group was least likely to attribute managerial capabilities to women.

The findings above are echoed in an article published by AWCA (African Women Chartered Accountants), which indicated that as many of 45% of women CAs want to resign from their current jobs (AWCA, 2015). Reasons for this include that they feel isolated, that they need to work harder than males to get the same recognition, and that they need to adopt male characteristics just to be taken seriously.

The impact of EE drivers on the psychological contract African women develop with their employers was considered by Wöcke and Sutherland (2008). The psychological contract refers to a reciprocal understanding between the employer and employee of what each contributes to the other. To retain competitive advantage, the emotional connection employees feel to the organisation is key (Wöcke & Sutherland, 2008). When psychological contracts are broken, i.e. where the employee feels that they are not receiving the agreed value from the organisation, turnover is a common outcome. Likewise, Wöcke and Sutherland (2008) highlight that external factors such as legislation may impact the psychological contract from the employee perspective (Wöcke & Sutherland, 2008). Africans had a more positive perception of the impact of EE legislation than whites, but also demonstrated the highest intent to leave and lowest level of loyalty to their current employer. The implication is that black women CAs may leave simply for a more lucrative offer. This would mean that receiving organisations would need to invest in suitable retention efforts, which could include coaching.

A further consideration for individuals staying in organisations could be the degree of organisational embeddedness achieved (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Ng & Feldman, 2007). Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski and Erez (2001) identify link, fit and sacrifice as the three factors around organisational embeddedness, explaining links to be both the formal and informal relationships or connections the individual has formed with others or the organisation. Fit is explained as the comfort the individual has with the organisation in terms of values and culture. Sacrifice refers to the aspects the individual perceives as being lost when leaving the organisation. Sacrifice could

include ‘side bets’ such as investment in retirement schemes (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The literature reviewed does not mention ‘retention payments’, which some South African employers utilise to support their EE agenda. Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee and Mitchell (2012) posit that individuals from collectivist backgrounds tend more towards job embeddedness than those from individualistic backgrounds. Organisational and job embeddedness were found to be negatively related to turnover (Jiang et al., 2012).

Several career theory authors propose that the desire for more flexible careers may contribute to transitions. This aspect is explored in more detail in the next section.

To conclude, the literature provides insights into the challenges at the professional and organisational level for women in accounting firms, as well as challenges for African women in accounting firms, and how these challenges for women may result in decisions to either remain in the PSF, to leave and transition to a new environment, or to opt out of the formal work environment altogether. Career theories around the traditional or boundary-less careers provide insight both into the experiences in the accounting firms and into the motivation to transition into other organisations. Although some career research was carried out with women accountants (Richardson, 1996), this does not provide real insights into the career experiences of African women.

While much has been written about EE and gender equality, a gap exists in the literature which focusses specifically on African women in PSF and how they may be motivated to make career transitions.

2.5 Career theory as it links to career transitions

Career theories highlight the progression from the traditional or organisational career (Arthur, Claman, & DeFillippi, 1995) in which careers were static and limited to one or two organisations, to the new careers such as the intelligent or boundary-less career (DeFillippi, & Arthur, 1994). Economic changes coupled with progressive social changes worldwide, from post the second world war period to current (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010), brought about organisational changes with flatter structures and less guarantee of permanence in employment (Sullivan & Baruch,

2009). Increased globalisation, technological advances, increased mobility and diversity in the workplace (Burke & Ng, 2004), have further contributed to this shift. Baruch (2004) explains that early on, career was the responsibility of the individual, which then shifted to organisations, and more recently back to the individual. This accords with DeFillippi and Arthur (1994), who explain that career patterns emerged with emphasis having shifted from the organisation to the individual building a portfolio of skills transferable from one employer to other employers (Baruch, 2004). Longer term upward mobility within organisations has become more limited and progression as a reward for tenure has diminished (Baruch,2004). Generational differences in expectations of career mobility (Twenge et al., 2010) have also contributed to a shift in career patterns. Consequently, Sullivan and Arthur (2006) describe careers as having become boundary-less in mindset as well as physical mobility.

Career theories highlight that individuals may prefer more flexible careers and grow their managerial careers through inter-organisational moves (Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012). As a departure to the traditional linear career, the concept of the boundary-less career (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) was developed. Various explanations have been offered to explain boundary-less career patterns and directionality of careers. The protean career (Hall, 1996) refers to a self-directed career in which individuals continually reshape their skills and knowledge to fit into changing work contexts within and across organisations (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The kaleidoscopic career model (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, in Cabrera, 2009) emphasises the importance of challenge, balance and authenticity in career choices. McCabe and Savery (2007) propose the concept of 'Butterflying' as an emerging career pattern and extension of the boundary-less career, where an individual takes charge of her career but 'flutters' between different sectors to build up her experience, in this way progressing her career. Although career theory literature tends to agree that careers have changed and that increased mobility is desirable (Chudzikowski, 2012), its actual prevalence remains a matter of debate (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh & Roper, 2012). Culpin et al. (2015) in a study linking generational cohorts to career theory concluded that the traditional linear career model remains and that, while sought after by a newer generation of workers, the pace at which they expect progression has increased.

In reviewing the career patterns of women in the accounting profession, Richardson (1996) differentiates between four career progression patterns seen in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Career patterns (Richardson, 1996)

Career Pattern	Description
Fast linear progression	A relatively high rate of mobility or promotion coupled with significant remuneration increases. Career progression is structured with job changes being career motivated.
Slow linear progression	Progress is upward but at a slower pace and remuneration increases are smaller. Job changes are not always career motivated.
Downward progression	The trend is to move to less responsible/well-paid jobs or unable to find jobs after a time of being unemployed.
Static or transitory careers	There is no real career focus or progression or the person has been in the same job for years without promotions.

Richardson (1996) found that male accountants largely fell into the first category of fast linear progression, while women fell more frequently into the latter two. Where women fell into the second category, they tended to earn more than their male counterparts.

Clarke (2013) argues that although much has been written about the new 'flexible careers', the organisational career remains a valid career form where people continue to move up within organisations. Professional accounting firms still have a reasonably clear and transparent hierarchical structure (Lupu, 2012). New entrants are largely made up of graduates who complete a period of traineeship (Kaiser et al., 2015). In South Africa, this is mostly a period of three years during which qualifying examinations are written. Post the training period, progression is upward based on merit, which Lupu (2012) refers to as an 'up or out' model. Kornberger et al. (2011) also comment that transition to partnership is only achieved through a continual, linear move up through the manager ranks. The conflicts of home and work and the disadvantages of and

negative perceptions created from taking up flexible programmes appear to result in decisions of women to ‘opt out’.

The linear career model itself appears to represent challenges for women in PSF, where gender factors such as mentoring and sponsor roles, time commitment and promotion processes begin to play a role (Kaiser et al., 2015). The funnel for progression narrows and competition for those roles increases.

The decision to transition out of PSF must be considered against the career theory explanations of moving away from linear progression to a variety of roles either in the same industry or across industries. The move away from a linear career-path environment to the open world of commerce where a range of career directionality such as lateral, upward, downward is prevalent represents moving to less guaranteed employment and uncertainty of internal progression (Culpin et al., 2015).

The link of career theory to progression of African women in PSF where the external environment has changed was not found in the literature. One perspective to consider is how the linear upward progression as a reward for loyalty (Chudzikowsky, 2012) applies to African women in PSF. The other perspective to consider is how career theory applies as Africa women CAs transition beyond PSF.

2.6 Transition challenges

Career transitions can be defined as significant changes both in the context of work and/or in role requirements (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Ibarra, 2004). These include institutionalised change in role, such as internal progression through promotions and internal transfers within an organisation (Ibarra, 2004), as well as moving to a new organisation. The increasing ‘boundary-less’ nature of careers (DeFillippi, & Arthur, 1994) is seen in professionals moving to organisations beyond their first employer. Chudzikowski (2012) refers to each move across a boundary as a career transition, and distinguishes between three forms of boundaries being crossed, resulting in organisational transitions (across organisation as), functional transitions (different roles), and hierarchical transitions being vertical transitions.

When professionals transition into corporate environments, it is in the interest of both the individual and the organisation that the transition is successful. No specific literature was found that highlights the type of organisations African women CAs join after their training period.

The next section of the literature review turns to the body of knowledge surrounding transitions into organisations. Understanding how organisations socialise or 'onboard' new joiners into their new organisation; antecedents to adjustment; and the adjustment outcomes will be included.

2.6.1 *Organisational culture and climate considerations for the newcomer*

Organisational culture is a pattern of shared assumptions, beliefs and values that have developed or evolved to help individuals understand how the organisation functions, thereby contributing to the organisational success and outcomes (Ross Wooldridge & Minsky, 2002; Schein, 1989). Schein (1989) indicates that this would be taught to newcomers as the correct way to think, act and feel. Ross Wooldridge and Minsky (2002, p. 3) explain organisational culture as "why things happen the way they do".

A different but related concept is organisational climate. The understanding of organisational climate has evolved over many years from being defined as the enduring organisational characteristics that are perceived by its members (Forehand & Gilmer, 1964) to differentiating between static organisational attributes and individual perceptions thereof, referred to as psychological climate (James & Jones, 1974). The assumption is that individuals in an organisation will make sense of the processes, policies and procedures in their organisation in psychologically meaningful terms, and that climate refers to the themes that guide everyday behaviour (Ross Wooldridge & Minsky, 2002). Organisational climate would generally be assessed quantitatively through climate surveys (Rentsch, 1990).

The prevailing organisational climate impacts the integration of the newcomer (Wang, Kammeyer-Mueller, Liu, & Li., 2015). Organisational climates that Wang et al. (2015) include in their model are the ethical climate, a climate of warmth which is supportive of co-operation and participation, a climate supportive of growth and innovation, and finally a climate of achievement and hierarchy. Specifically, supportive to newcomer integration though, Wang et al. (2015) identify a climate that is supportive of employee development as well as a climate conducive to knowledge exchange.

South African corporates largely follow a euro-centric model and such organisational cultures may present challenges for African women if diversity awareness is lacking in the organisation (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). Horwitz and Jain (2011) point out that white male-oriented organisational culture is still characterised by lack of communication and to some extent by white employees' fear of being displaced, creating challenges for the achievement of EE in the organisation. While affirmative action (AA) has promoted female entry into organisations, barriers within organisations have restricted women's progression into and beyond senior management roles (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

2.6.2 *Factors contributing to successful transition outcomes*

The transition from their previous familiar roles into a new unknown organisation is key to the longer-term success of the newcomer. "Organizational entry is one of the most important phases of organizational life" (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; p. 1).

The expected outcomes of an effective socialisation process should be the successful adjustment of the newcomer in the longer term (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), resulting in organisational commitment, where the individual is engaged and believes in the organisational goals and values, and positively commits her energies to work. Less positive outcomes would be a state of work withdrawal or turnover. In work withdrawal, the newcomer disengages, made visible through behaviours such as poor work performance, late coming, or non-participation in organisational activities. The individual remains as part of the workforce but does not make the intended

contribution. Turnover is the least desirable outcome, with the newcomer resigning and leaving the organisation before any real return on the investment of hiring is seen (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003).

Several factors have been researched and play a part in the transition process. Newcomers to organisations are required to absorb and master not only the new role they have taken on but also the context of their new environment. Wang et al. (2015) identified that the context for newcomer socialisation can be separated into the formal organisational practices, the organisational climate, and the socialisation agents. Each of these impact the integration of the newcomer into the organisation. In addition, the newcomer's socialisation per Wang et al. (2015) requires both the adjustment content – being 'what' newcomers need to know about the organisation, but also the adjustment process of 'how' they seek information, build relationships and manage themselves.

More proximal outcomes of newcomer adjustment would be task mastery, role clarity, integration into the work group, gaining organisational political knowledge (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), and job satisfaction (Gruman et al., 2006). Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) found that the achievement of role clarity, work group integration, task mastery, and political knowledge all positively related to longer-term organisational commitment.

2.6.3 *Organisational socialisation practices*

Organisational socialisation are methods that employers use to help newcomers adapt to their new environment (Allen, 2006). Most studies on organisational socialisation tactics make use of, or build on, the six-dimensional typology put forward by Van Maanen and Schein (1976). This typology offers six tactics which, on the one extreme take an approach which is collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture based, while on the other extreme the approach is individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture based (Van Maanen & Schein, 1976). Collective socialisation takes place in a group; formal indicates the degree to which a formalised

process is in place; and sequential refers to providing the newcomer with clear sequential steps. The fixed tactic socialisation activities follow a pre-determined timetable, and in the serial tactic, the organisation provides the newcomer with an experienced person to help socialise them rather than leaving them to their own devices. Finally, investiture provides positive social support based on the recognition and acceptance of the newcomer's personal characteristics and identity (Van Maanen & Schein, 1976).

Jones (1986) groups the tactics into institutionalised socialisation (collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture) versus individualised socialisation (individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture). Jones (1986) contends that each approach has different outcomes, such as the institutionalised approach reducing uncertainty for newcomers, it results in the compliance of newcomers with the status quo of the organisation. While the individualised approach provides less clarity, it allows greater freedom, and role innovation for the newcomer (Wang et al., 2015). The serial and investiture tactics, i.e. the social tactics, were found to have a greater impact on the integration of new joiners than the context tactics (Jones, 1986). They are also found by Saks, Uggerslev and Fassina (2007) to best predict the adjustment outcomes.

The application of institutionalised socialisation as used in many Human Resources (HR) practices contributes to work commitment, organisational identity and role clarity, and also reduces stress, role conflict and the intention to resign (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). Individualised socialisation tactics were found to positively contribute to work performance, but conversely, the institutionalised approach did not negatively impact work performance (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). Providing formal processes through programmes and relationships with colleagues, superiors and leadership were found to contribute positively to newcomer adjustment (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003).

Ashforth and Saks (1996) point out that organisations would need to consider the suitability of the selected socialisation tactics for their environment. As job changes occur more frequently today than before (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo & Tucker,

2007), a model outlining the antecedents and outcomes of socialisation practices is put forward by Bauer et.al. (2007). They propose that antecedents can be divided into newcomer's information seeking and the actual organisational socialisation practices. The newcomer adjustment is made up of role clarity, self-efficacy and social adjustment. Positive outcomes include performance, job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation, and intent to stay, whereas a negative outcome is termination. Allen (2006) lists three socialisation stages: the anticipatory stage (preparation for the change), the encounter or accommodation stage (the entry into the new organisation), and the adaptation or role management stage.

2.6.4 *Expectation clarity for the newcomer*

The supportive climate described by Wang et al. (2015) during the time of entry would include creating role clarity for the newcomer, and would support the individual's adaptation into the role (Allen, 2006). The achievement of role clarity would be dependent on socialisation activities as well as the adaptability of the newcomer.

Bennett (2015) highlights that career transitions take place in a turbulent world, with organisations continuously having to adapt to changing environments. This increases the degree of uncertainty for individuals transitioning into senior positions. Developing a capability for dealing with uncertainty is required of the individual for personal growth and for identity formation (Bennett, 2015). The organisational context could play a role in how a newcomer experiences uncertainty.

Kornberger et al. (2011) explored the challenges for professional accountants who remained in practice and became managers. Such individuals, although remaining within their firms, experienced transitions resembling a rite of passage. They were required to establish a new identity for themselves as managers. Most found the transition extremely unsettling as the focus of what was required from them shifted dramatically. They had to 'negotiate the inherent conflicts of interests' (Kornberger et al., 2011, p. 522) between clients, trainees and Partners. The expectation of the continued linear progression seemed to be replaced, at least for a time, with a feeling

of drowning or falling into a black hole. In their new roles they had to focus on a myriad of tasks ranging from project management to administrative matters, client relationships, and managing junior staff. To survive and become successful they resorted to game playing and politicking (Kornberger et al., 2011).

Given that the promotion experiences of accountants remaining in practice can be a stressful transition (Kornberger et al., 2011), it could be expected that their counterparts who move into new corporates undergo a similarly stressful adjustment period.

2.6.5 *Socialisation agents*

The literature on newcomer socialisation includes the colleagues, clients and superiors (leaders) as key to the new person.

These groups of people play a key role in achieving task mastery, role clarity, feeling part of the group and gaining organisational political knowledge (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Newcomer anxiety regarding reaching out to others for assistance or knowledge, as indicated by Wang et al. (2015), may be due to a fear that they are ignorant or burdensome to others. In such instances, Ostroff and Kozlowski (1993) observed, however, that the newcomer follows a more covert approach through the observation of others, and as such they remain important.

Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) highlight that where leadership took an active part in socialisation (serial tactic), political knowledge was positively impacted, and the acquisition of political knowledge related positively to a lower risk of turnover.

Sluss and Thompson (2012) include social exchange theory into newcomer adjustment by drawing attention to the value of the supervisor – newcomer relationship in achieving person-job fit, supporting the importance of others in the process.

2.6.6 *The role of the individual in the socialisation process*

While much has been written on the organisational factors and tactics and socialising agents for newcomers, far less has been written from the perspective of the newcomer and the role she plays during her integration into a new organisation.

Ashford and Black (1996) considered the feeling of loss of control by newcomers to organisations as important in the behaviours individuals would employ to regain control and make sense of their new environment. They found that individuals with a greater need for control more actively networked and communicated during their first six months in new jobs. They found, however, that information seeking did not correlate positively with job satisfaction.

In their study of new joiners across seven organisations, Kammeyer and Wanberg (2003) explored the effects that newcomers with a proactive disposition (described as self-driven sourcing of information and learning about the job) and environment had on reaching the desired state of organisational commitment. They found that a proactive personality related positively to task mastery, group integration and political knowledge. The pro-activeness the newcomer brings would impact the socialisation process not only through the acquisition of knowledge but also in what Wang et al. (2015) refer to as self-control and relationship tactics.

Career adaptability as a construct in career theory refers to the individual's readiness to cope with the predictable aspects of taking on the work role and coping with rapidly changing contexts (Öncle, 2014; Savickas, 1997). Career adaptability provides the resilience needed in building a career (Porfeli & Savickas, 2012). Zacher (2016) observes that the impact of daily individual characteristics such as being open to experience and conscientious, and job characteristics such as being challenged and having autonomy, relate positively to career adaptability. A positive correlation of career adaptability to career satisfaction, which in turn was indicative of low turnover intentions, emerged from a study by Chan and Mai (2015) among lower ranking employees. Within a South African context, blacks were found to have higher career adaptability than whites (Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015), which was suggested to be linked to

EE-driven opportunities. The career adaptability studies provide some insight into the role that the individual's resilience may play in effectively adapting to a new job environment.

Focussing on the process of transition, a study by Bennett (2015) found that executive newcomers experienced uncertainty as an emotional state which included discomfort, self-doubt, apprehension, frustration or even feeling energised. Bennett (2015) identifies two types of personal uncertainty: identity uncertainty, described as manifesting as self-doubt; and anticipatory uncertainty, described as a worry in the present of a potential future threat. Bennett (2015) observes that the discomfort created by the uncertainty motivated executives towards sense-making to reduce the discomfort. Individual differences were noted between the intensity of discomfort and individual responses in dealing with it (Bennett, 2015).

Noticeable in the literature on newcomer socialisation is that most studies have largely focussed on graduates or first-time job entrants. The socialisation process for experienced newcomers has not received as much attention. It can be expected that organisational 'onboarding' programmes focus more heavily on the graduate socialisation process. Later career transition studies have focussed more on the effects of the individual in transition, as reflected in the study by Bennett (2015).

In summary, a wealth of literature is available on organisational context and socialisation processes and agents. A great deal of research literature on gender within organisations is available, yet literature on the role transitions of women at the experienced hire level in general has received little attention and indicates a gap in the body of knowledge. Linking gender and race to career progression highlights an even greater gap in the literature. The role of coaching in the socialisation and career transition has likewise received little attention. This is covered in the next section.

2.6.7 *Specific challenges for African women in transitions*

No specific literature was found that set out the challenges for the African woman in her transition to a new corporate role. The decision to move to a new organisation

would be a significant occasion and with it would come specific expectations of the new work environment.

Myres (2013), in researching prohibiting factors for black executives in South Africa, identifies several key factors affecting the male respondents. Although the study included only men, these factors may well be experienced by African women transitioning into a new corporate role. Negative cultural effects at organisational level, such as persistent racism, as well as the negative impact of black cultural expectations of respecting one's elders, were experienced by black executives. More positive experiences included organisational cultures that were welcoming and supportive. Added to the challenges were perceptions of tokenism and the expectation that black executives cannot perform. Access to mentorship and risks of not having gained sufficient experience were also mentioned.

To conclude, the literature provides background on socialisation practices in organisations and an understanding of theories around organisational culture and climate. Factors such as socialisation agents for newcomers, the importance of expectation clarity, and the role of the individual in career transitions provide some insight into what may generally need to be considered for career transitions. Yet, a gap exists in the literature on the career transition challenges and success factors in such career transitions for professional African women. The proposed research would add to the body of knowledge by specifically understanding the experiences of the professional African woman.

2.7 Coaching during career transitions

The practice of coaching has grown significantly since the early 1990s, as can be seen in the growth of both the number of practitioners and the aggregated estimated annual revenue from coaching, at $2 billion as reported by the International Coaching Federation (2012). Research in this area has shown growth, with several periodic reviews of literature being carried out by Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011); Grant,

Passmore, Cavanagh, and Parker (2010); Passmore and Gibbes, (2007); Feldman and Lankau (2005), and Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001).

Drawing on the literature, executive coaching is a results-oriented, systematic process, achieved through the coach client relationship (Stout-Rostron, 2009) through which the client's behaviours, awareness and attitudes are enhanced to optimise the client's goal-attainment for self and organisational success (Theeboom, Beersma, & Van Vianen, 2013).

Two groups of business coaching clients are identified by Feldman and Lankau (2005), the first being executives who have been high-performers but who are not performing optimally in their current role; and the second, individuals at management level who have been identified as having the potential to progress further. The African woman CA who is new to an organisation could fit into either of these two categories, i.e. high performers who have changed environment and working sub-optimally, and/or individuals with potential to grow into leadership roles.

Executive coaching, in comparison to mentoring, is of a shorter-term duration, ranging across several months (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Measuring the effectiveness of coaching in the short term, argue Theeboom et al. (2013), takes a too-narrow view as the impacts are more long term. Distal outcomes of coaching have been shown to be in the areas of performance and skills, well-being, coping, work attitudes, and goal-directed self-regulation (Theeboom et al., 2013).

2.7.1 *Coaching frameworks and models*

Sunny Stout-Rostron (2009) outlines questioning frameworks which are at the heart of the relationship between the coach and the client. It is through the techniques of questioning and listening that learning and change is facilitated for the individual. The question frameworks provide a structure that Stout-Rostron (2009) describes as 'linear progressive and visible' (Stout-Rostron, 2009, p. 56).

Coaching models are the tools from which a coach selects to have the most suitable outcome for the client. Coaches who have a good understanding of the different models can select tools which facilitate learning, insights and behaviour change most effectively for a session and/or the entire coaching relationship (Stout-Rostron, 2009). Kahn (2014) emphasises that the coach should not be restricted by specific theoretical frameworks but should be able to respond to the specifics of the situation drawing from a range of theoretical areas.

Franklin and Doran (2009) tested the Preparation, Action and Adaptive Learning (PAAL) Model for students transitioning to university. The PAAL model is based on the premise that individuals need to be motivated to take proactive steps or actions through which they learn adaptive ways to meet their objectives. The use of this model was compared to what Franklin and Doran (2009) describe as Self-Regulation, being the more traditional approach of goal-setting, solving problems to develop the skills to self-regulate. While both approaches resulted in increased self-efficacy resilience, the PAAL approach resulted in a positive increase of the ability to make balanced decisions, having a growth mind-set, hope, and self-compassion. The qualities or skills which were increased in the above study are potential factors in adapting to a new work environment and achieving success, to the extent that they deal with a positive mind-set. The outcomes of the Franklin and Doran (2009) study demonstrate how skilled coaches who can draw from a range of theoretical models can impact a specific situational requirement.

Few models have been specifically linked to the management of transitions. Bennett (2015) proposes a comprehensive model to coach leaders through uncertainty, making sense of uncertainty, determining strategies and actions and adapting. The process of transitioning and establishing a new identity is a longer-term process that begins before the job change and continues for some time afterwards (Ibarra & Barbalescu, 2010). Their study focussed on the role that narratives may play in establishing a new identity during transitions, rather than the role coaching could play in establishing the new identity.

2.7.2 *The role of coaching in career transitions*

There is a wealth of literature on organisational socialisation processes, yet this is heavily weighted towards the socialisation of graduates. The African women's initial transition from student into the PSF would likely have followed processes that focussed on the professional identity and conduct, the importance of time, and the importance of the client (Anderson-Gough et al., 2002; Kornberger et al., 2010). Understanding later career transitions, either intra-organisational or inter-organisational, has received less attention.

Literature on the nature of later career transitions and organisational socialisation at the time of later career transitions is not as abundant, and it is important to understand how the professional woman experiences her transition into a corporate environment.

Wasylyshyn (2003), in posing the question about who is likely to benefit most from executive coaching, concludes that primarily it is executives as well as high-potentials, and that the willingness to engage in the coaching process impacts the outcome. Kahn (2011) contributes that the coach is required to focus the coaching approach to the organisational reality and that three dimensions are of importance in coaching, namely the individual, the coaching relationship and the environment.

The literature on socialisation of newcomers has shown the link between effective newcomer adjustment and a supportive environment, and has highlighted the importance of socialisation agents. The involvement of leadership in the transition process was shown to have a positive impact (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Wang et al. (2015) comment on the 'what' and the 'how' of newcomer adjustment. It is in the 'how' of socialisation that executive coaching could positively impact adjustment phase for the newcomer with benefits to both the organisation and the individual.

Due in part to the rarity of the African woman accountant (SAICA, 2016) but also her significance in the corporate leadership pipeline, she would be a critical hire for organisations. Establishing a strong psychological contract with the newcomer (Wöcke

& Sutherland, 2008) would be beneficial to adjustment and retention, and executive coaching could contribute in this area.

The newly transitioned individual finds herself in a new environment where there is much to learn. Uncertainty (Bennett, 2005) and performance anxiety (Myres, 2013), may arise, and providing a safe environment in which she can express the challenges she is facing may better result in successful adjustment. Avey, Luthans and Jensen (2009) acknowledge the stresses experienced in the workplace and suggest that the construct of psychological capital may provide better insights into employee stresses and support job satisfaction and reduce the intention to leave. The specifics of the organisation and the new environment in which the newcomer finds herself speaks to the importance of coaching the individual within the organisational realities (Kahn, 2011).

The literature on socialisation in the adjustment for newcomers positively links task mastery, role clarity, group integration, job satisfaction, and context of the new environment (Wang et al., 2015) to successful adjustment, as seen through job satisfaction (Gruman et al., 2006) and organisational commitment. Less effort is put into the experienced newcomers on the assumption that they have previous work experience (Carr et al., 2006). However, as has been shown by Theeboom et al. (2013), positive outcomes can be achieved through coaching, as shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Positive coaching outcomes (Theeboom et al., 2013)

Performance and skills: measured through objective outcomes such as individual performance improvement, as well as more subjective outcomes as expected behaviour required.
Well-being, such as health, need fulfilment and affective responses.
Coping, including the ability to meet with current and future stresses and expectations, self-efficacy and mindfulness.
Goal-directed self-regulation is achieved with the individual's ability to set the correct goals, being empowered to attain them, and the capability to evaluate the success of goals.

There is a link between the literature on coaching outcomes and the requirements for newcomer adjustment, which would suggest that coaching has a role to play in the transition process.

Respondents, in a study on the progress of women in organisations, revealed that around two-thirds of respondents indicated that they sometimes seriously wanted to leave the corporate world. Coaching is suggested as a potential measure to retain and support the progression for women into leadership in corporates (Hofmeyr & Mzobe, 2012).

While studies highlight various benefits of coaching, the coaching literature reviewed does not make a direct connection to how this could positively impact career transitions of the African woman coming from the PSF environment. A gap exists in the body of knowledge relating to the impact coaching may have on individuals before, during, and after a career transition to aid a successful transition. This research project contributes to the field of executive coaching and highlights the lived experiences of professional African woman accountants.

2.8 Conclusion of Literature Review

To conclude the literature review, Figure 4 below provides a conceptual summary of the areas covered.

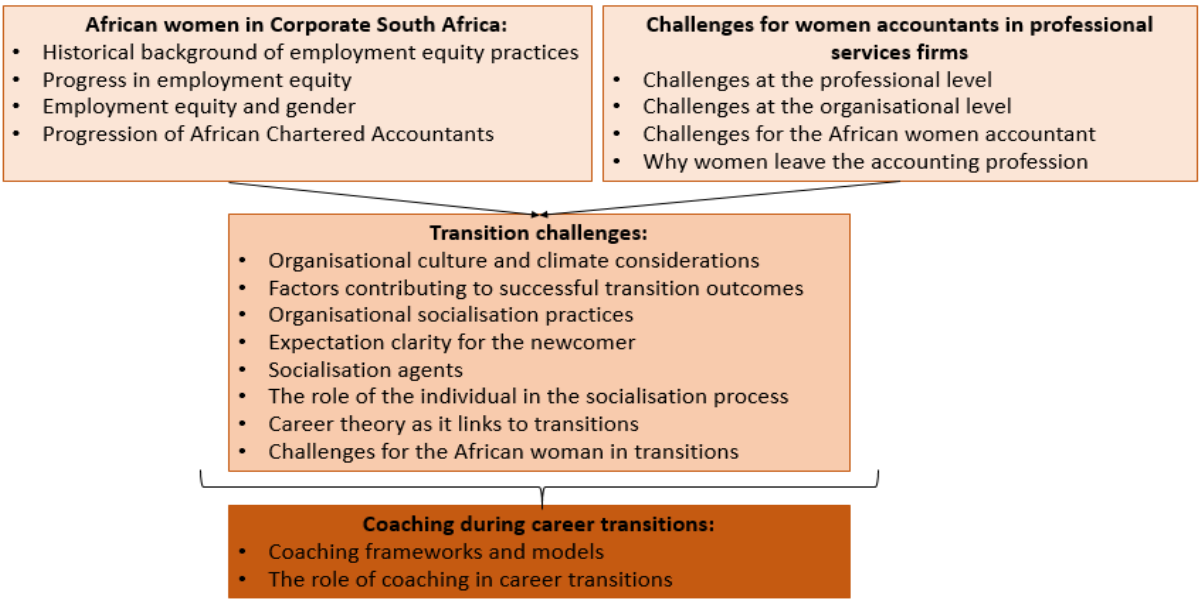


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework of the Literature Review

A review of the literature has shown how racial discrimination of the past has impacted the employment landscape of organisations in South Africa, and that the effects of the past are still a reality today. The growth of African numbers at top management and senior management has been slow, and pressure for progress remains. The growth of female numbers, particularly African women, at top management and senior management levels paints an even gloomier picture.

CAs make up a significant number of directorships on corporate boards. Their professional development is achieved during their initial socialisation process when they join PSF and through the training they undergo. The growth of qualified CA(SA) has not been without difficulties and the literature shows the historical obstacles to Africans qualifying as CAs. Improvement can be seen in the growth of African CA(SA) over the last 20 years, yet the number of African women CA(SA) has only reached 4% of the total registered CA(SA) population. With the South African pressure for transformation of organisations remaining, and global pressures for gender equality on boards, the African woman CA(SA) is likely to be an attractive target hire for corporates while at the same time remaining a key resource for PSF to retain.

The gender challenges within PSF have been reviewed and it has been highlighted that the profession is built on masculine characteristics, and that poor progression for women into partnership and senior roles remains. Gender and organisational challenges, such as a linear progression model, contribute to attrition of females from PSF.

These factors contribute to the African woman's likely transition into other corporate environments where, as seen from the literature, socialisation practices and onboarding practices for more experienced hires are less structured than for graduate hires. The newcomer experiences and the support obtained from the new organisation have been seen to be positively related to adjustment, job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and lower risk of quick turnover.

The challenges that the African woman is likely to experience in moving to a new organisation potentially include racial prejudice, a climate which is not supportive of integration, and potential lack of mentors, as well as personal factors of juggling home and work. Specific research on the transition experience were not found.

Coaching has been shown to have positive effects on some of the factors which are also a requirement for newcomer adjustment, but specific studies on coaching for career transitions from a PSF environment to a corporate environment were not found.

This study addresses a gap in the body of knowledge on the experiences of the African woman transitioning from a PSF environment to a corporate environment and to establish the implications of this for coaching practice. In the next chapter, the research approach taken is discussed in further detail.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research methodology used to address the research problems stated in the previous sections. It outlines the research paradigm and describes the design approach of research. A discussion on the research population, the data collection procedures and the method of analysis are covered. Expected limitations are provided, validity and reliability of the research, as well as ethical considerations conclude this chapter.

3.1 Research paradigm

The research objectives suggested an interpretivist approach and therefore a qualitative study was conducted to gain insight into the lived experiences of the research participants (Ponterotto, 2005).

The ontological dimension of the interpretivist paradigm is that the social reality for the individual is subjective and the intended data collection approach was therefore based on the individual's experience of their social environment (Ponterotto, 2005). Individuals construct their reality based on their experiences (Creswell et al., 2007a). From an interpretivist paradigm, the epistemological stance would be more subjective and transactional or participatory (Creswell et al., 2007a). The experiences of the individual can only be understood from their point of view, and their description of their experiences through participating in research enriches the understanding of their lives.

Career transition experiences form the context of the research study, and through the interpretive stance the meaning attributed by individuals to their experiences can be lifted out (Creswell et al., 2007a; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2011).

3.2 Research design

The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the lived experiences of research participants in the context of career transitions. Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, and

Morales (2007b) highlight the suitability of a narrative approach in understanding individual life experiences. The experiences of individuals can best be understood by collecting their stories related in their own way and analysing them. Haynes (2006) contends that the narrative approach helps make sense of the lives of individual in their unique situations but also links them back to broader aspects of humanity. The pure narrative approach takes the spoken or written texts or stories of a small number of research participants for analysis (Creswell et al., 2007b). This research uses the term narrative as meaning the participants' self-report responses to a set of broad questions about their lived experiences. Analysis of responses is made at the individual rather than collective level.

Respondent triangulation is achieved through interviewing participants who have made the transition from PSF organisations to corporates at mid-management and executive levels, those who have remained within PSF, and those who returned to PSF after having left for corporate jobs.

3.3 Population and sample

Population

The sample for the research was drawn from the black South African female CA(SA) population who are registered with SAICA, and currently employed in corporates or public practice accounting firms in the Gauteng province of South Africa. All research participants are South African nationals educated in South African schools, and who graduated from South African universities.

Sample and sampling method

The sample of research participants are all African women who have qualified as CA(SA) and are working in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Identification of the participants had been planned to be facilitated through AWCA (African Women Chartered Accountants), whose member base comprises a large portion of the target

population. However, the contact that had been established with AWCA went on maternity leave and instead a contact at the Association of Black Accountants South Africa (ABASA) was leveraged. ABASA was established in 1985 to promote the interests of blacks in the accounting profession (ABASA, 2016). Respondents were also identified through a recruitment organisation specialising in placements of CAs, while respondents currently within PSF were identified from the author's own network.

To achieve maximum variation in the sample, four distinct respondent groups (see Table 5 below) were selected for participation. Given a defined target population with specific experiences, a purposive sample size totalling 16 provided both sufficiency and saturation (De Vos et al., 2011).

Table 5: Respondent groups

Participant Group	Description of respondent type	Number sampled
Group 1	Respondents who remained in public practice	4
Group 2	Respondents who transitioned out but returned to public practice	3
Group 3	Respondents who transitioned and hold mid-management positions	4
Group 4	Respondents who successfully transitioned and held executive roles at the time of the interview	5

Description of the participant groups

Group 1 is made up of four participants who remained with PSF. Two have progressed to partnership with 10 and 12 years' service respectively. Two participants are at the level of director, being the level just below Partner, and both are in their eighth year with their firm.

Group 2 is made up of three participants who left and subsequently returned to PSF. The criteria for placing participants in this group was that they needed to have returned

to PSF since completing their training contract. The first participant in this group left to join a bank and returned to PSF within a period of less than six months and is now a senior manager in her firm. The second participant remained in her firm for 18 months after her training contract, left for the academia and a role in an international accounting body, before returning to PSF as a senior manager. The third participant in this group left 18 months after her training contract, joined a bank for 16 months, joined a different PSF for another two years before joining a different bank to the first for 19 months, and at the time of the interview had resigned and was about to re-join her original firm.

Group 3 has four participants who all left PSF and at the time of being interviewed were in junior to middle-management roles in commerce. The first participant stayed on with her firm for one year and left to join a bank. She is still with the bank after two years. The next participant remained for two months after her training contract before joining a bank for 18 months. She left the bank to join a private equity company and at the time of the interview was moving into her own private equity company. The third participant remained with her firm for four months before joining a bank for two years. Since then she has held a financial controller position for two years, a finance executive role for three years, and at the time of interviewing was nine months into a new executive role. The fourth participant remained with her firm in a non-audit role for a year before joining a bank where she has been for eight years. At the time of the interview she was on maternity leave.

Group 4 has five participants who left PSF at various points in their careers and have progressed to senior roles. The first participant remained with her firm for several years and progressing to partnership. She left after having been a Partner for almost six years to take up a finance executive role in commerce. At the time of the interview she was taking a sabbatical. The second participant stayed on with her firm for 18 months and left at the level of manager. She spent one year in a corporate finance role, three years in a financial manager role, and has 10 years' service at her third employer since qualifying, and holds a finance executive role. The third participant remained for five years after her training contract and spent one year in a commercial finance role before starting her own company. At the time of the interview she was several months into a

new role as financial director. The fourth participant remained in her firm for three years after qualifying, became an investment project manager for five years and has been an investment principal in a private equity company for two years. The final participant in this group has some overlap with Group 2 as she has worked for three audit firms, joining the second after completing her training contract, then spending three years in an internal audit role in commerce, two years in another company in a financial role before joining the third audit firm as senior manager. After less than two years she joined an investment company for six years, where she was first a group financial manager and then moved to another division where she became the group financial director. She left for a finance executive position, where she spent a year. At the time of the interview she held two non-executive director roles.

Demographic profile of participants

Educational background at secondary schools ranged from public rural schools (funded by government) to private schools in rural settings, to public schools in large towns, and finally city schools either private or public. Twelve participants attended urban schools, with three attending private schools. Four participants attended rural schools, of which two were private schools and the other two were public schools. A wide range of universities were attended, with 12 participants graduating and obtaining their Certificate in the Theory of Accounting (CTA), a postgraduate qualification which is a prerequisite to writing the board exams of SAICA at the large city universities. The four remaining participants completed this qualification at UNISA, a distance learning university.

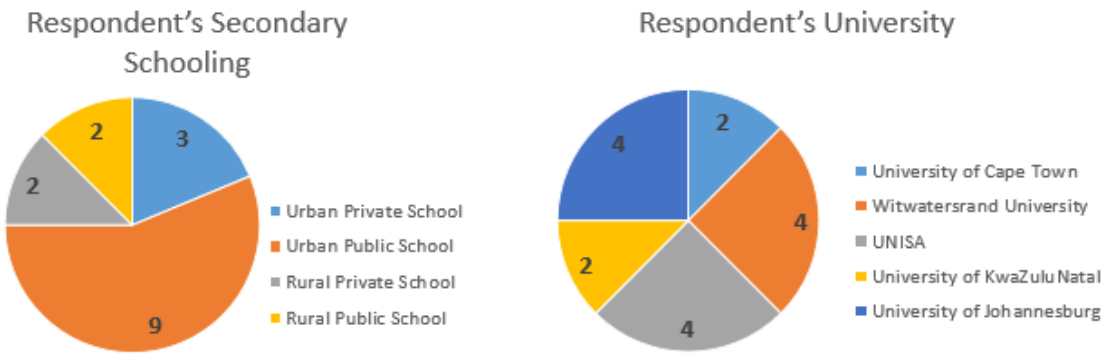


Figure 5: Respondents' educational background: school and university

Of the participants, seven have children, and nine do not have children. Seven participants are married and nine are single. With three being single mothers, a direct correlation between motherhood and marital status should not be assumed.

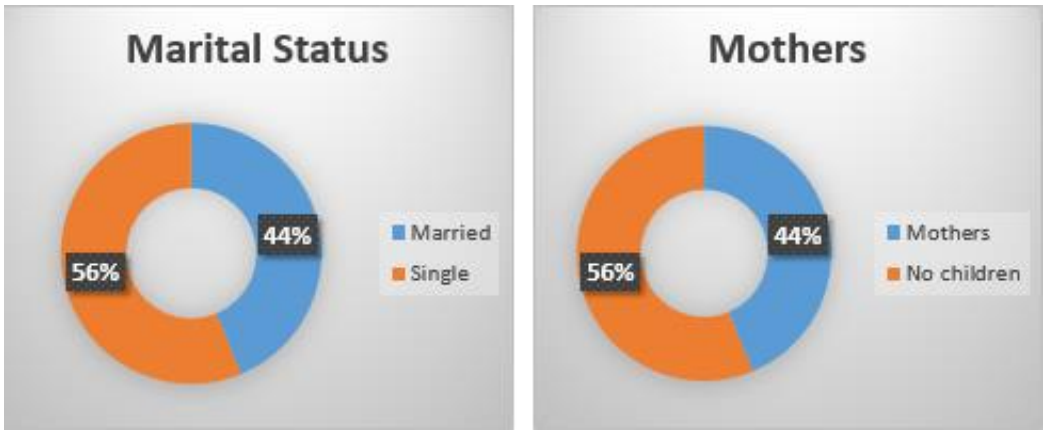


Figure 6: Respondents' marital status and motherhood status

Qualifying year

Participants in this research mostly qualified in the period from 2000 to 2012, with one participant qualifying before 2000. Figure 7 shows that the majority qualified from 2006 to 2012. Qualification is deemed as the year in which they became eligible to register as a CA(SA).

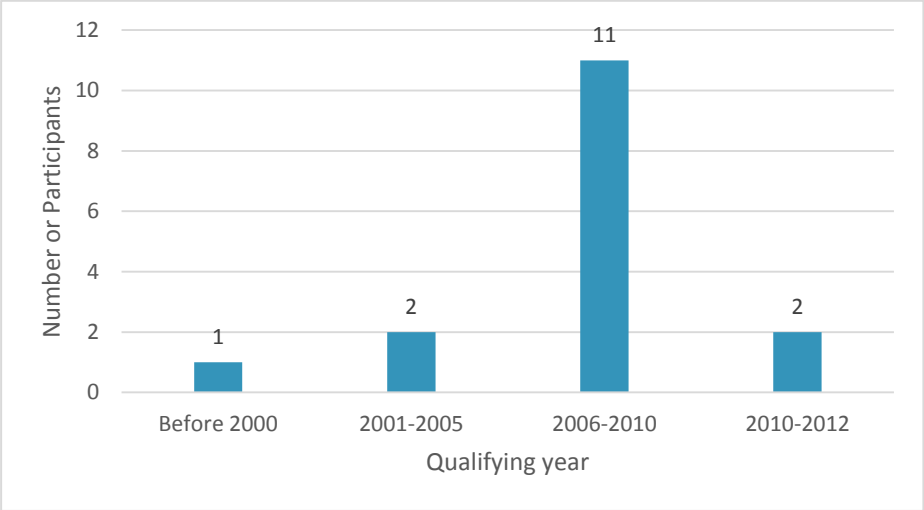


Figure 7: Year of qualifying as CA(SA)

Time at firms

Table 6 below reflects the number of years the participants spent at PSF versus other employers. Where participants had more than one period of employment at PSF, this is reflected as different terms.

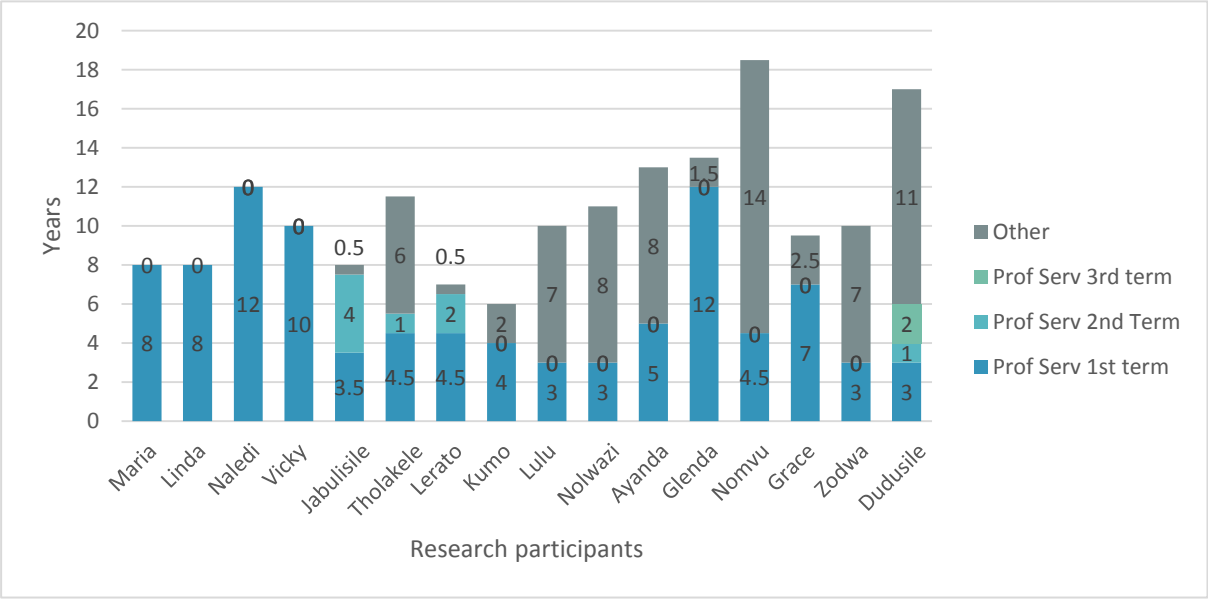


Figure 8: Participants' tenure in PSF and other organisations (participant names are fictitious for anonymity)

Table 6: Time period spent in PSF

Time at firms
4 remained at firms and have been employed between 8-12 years
5 left on completing their training contract (2 of these returning to firms)
5 remained for periods ranging from 12-18 months (1 returned)
2 remained for several years, and leaving at the level of Senior Manager and the other as Partner

Progression within firms

Job grades across firms are reasonably consistent after articles. The first managerial role is split by some firms into grades of assistant manager and manager, followed by senior manager, then director (or associate director in some firms), and finally partnership. Table7 below shows the highest level each participant had progressed to within their firm.

Table 7: Progression level in professional services firms

	Trainee	Assistant Manager/Manager	Senior Manager	Director/ Associate Director	Partner	Left
Group 1				2	2	No
Group 2			3			Yes/returned
Group 3	2	2				Yes
Group 4	1	1	2		1	Yes

3.4 The research instrument

A semi-structured interview instrument was used to guide and prompt the narration by the participants of their lived experiences (De Vos et al., 2011; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Additional discussion prompts were prepared to assist the interviewer

to fully cover the research topic, while allowing participants to respond freely on their own experiences. This approach allowed the participants to relate their experiences in the order that came most naturally to them. The responsiveness of the interviewer is a key factor in qualitative research, as explained by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002).

The interview instrument was designed using open-ended questions to elicit full interviewee responses. The sequencing of questions aims to guide the narrative responses through a chronological path. Narrative inquiry, which can be used for larger samples but is generally associated with a smaller purposive sample (Saunders et al., 2012) was found useful for the interviews.

The research instrument (Appendix B) was included in an interview protocol pack comprising:

- Introductory letter (Appendix A) – which was mailed to the respondent before the interview to confirm the purpose of the interview and logistical details;
- Consent letter signed by participants (Appendix C);
- A biographical sheet to collect relevant respondent demographic information (Appendix B);
- Outline of the interview process; and
- The interview instrument of broadly themed questions with discussion prompts aimed to maintain focus on the theme of the interview, but to allow respondents opportunity to share their experiences in their own way (Appendix B).

3.5 Procedure for data collection

Frankel and Devers (2000) caution that regardless of how structured the interaction is or what instrument is used, the data must be collected in such a way that meaningful analysis is possible.

The data of this research was collected through interviews at venues suitable for the participants. These were at their own place of work, at a venue arranged by the interviewer, or a mutually agreed venue to ensure both comfort and privacy for the

interview. The purpose and the method of research was explained prior to each interview. Permission was granted by all respondents for interviews to be recorded. Recorded sessions were transcribed for analysis. In addition to recordings, field notes were taken to record observations, keep an overview of what had been covered and to have clarity on any areas still to be questioned (Creswell et al., 2007a). Field notes, caution Frankel and Devers (2000), must be written in such a way that differentiation can be made between what respondents said and what the interviewer observed.

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

Mello (2002) proposes that narrative data should be looked at both reflectively as well as analytically. Reading the narratives multiple times allows the researcher full insight into the related stories. Once transcribed, each interview was read several times prior to analysis. Where transcripts were unclear, recordings were listened to for clarification. The analysis for this study included analysing the content of transcript texts into themes and patterns across the stories of different participants. The raw data was analysed systematically, using ATLAS.ti software, to provide insights into the situation (Basit, 2003). The conventional content analysis approach described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) was used. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) indicate that this approach is useful when existing theory is limited. As not much research was found on career transitions from PSF, this approach was deemed appropriate.

The conventional content analysis requires that the data is carefully reviewed and that key thoughts or concepts arising from the research material are given codes. Through ongoing analysis the codes are sorted into categories, and the categories sorted into clusters for further interpretation. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) recommend that where limited theory exists, codes are not pre-set before the research begins.

Mello (2002) further recommends that a comparison of the differences in participants' stories is useful to understand any contrasting perspectives. This approach was useful particularly in drawing comparisons from the respondent group who remain in PSF to

the group who moved into corporates. Triangulation of the respondent groups assisted with gaining more comprehensive data analysis (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000).

3.7 Limitations of the study

The research was heavily reliant on active respondent participation. The potential limitation of respondents being hesitant to share or less able to articulate their experiences (Morse, 2000) did not arise. No participants withdrew from the research and freely provided their experiences. Meeting the targeted population size was achieved despite some unsuccessful approaches to intended participants.

The sample was drawn from the active working population and did not target individuals that may have opted out of the full-time permanent corporate labour market altogether. One participant revealed at the time of the interview that she had recently left the corporate world, which provided some insight into her reasons. Further experiences of transition out of corporates would have added to the richness of the data, as it would enhance the understanding of factors contributing to their departures from the corporate world.

As the study is qualitative in nature, results relate to the themes emerging from respondent narratives. Other than a review of response density per code, results cannot be reflected in a numeric analysis, as in quantitative research, which could be generalisable to a broader population.

3.8 Validity and reliability

All research requires rigorous steps to ensure that the outcomes of the study can be scientifically accepted. Achieving reliability and validity is not as easily achieved in qualitative research as in quantitative research, and terms such as credibility, trustworthiness and dependability have been proposed as alternatives to establish rigor. Morse et al. (2002) suggest, however, that the use of verification strategies in qualitative research supports the attainment of reliability and validity.

Since the researcher is closely involved with the research participants, subjectivity is a risk that needed to be addressed (Morse et al., 2002) in the research preparation as well as while conducting the research.

External validity

External validity within research is the extent to which the findings from a study can be generalised to other relevant contexts or groups of people (Saunders et al., 2012). The proposed research targets a specific group of individuals to understand their experiences of career transitions. The findings may be of interest to organisations employing professionals from other backgrounds, such as legal firms or broader PSF, and take the findings into account for the consideration of coaching programmes. Direct generalisability is not recommended without ensuring full reliability from differing contexts through additional studies. Such studies may focus on participants from other professions, may include men, or focus on a broader geographical area.

Internal validity

Internal validity is achieved if a causal relationship between the questions and the responses can be established (Creswell et al., 2012). Morse et al. (2002) highlight that researcher responsiveness throughout the research is essential. To achieve this, the interview questions used were sufficiently broad to elicit narrative responses of their unique personal experiences. The broad framework of questions remained the same for all respondents, which provided internal validity by clearly setting out the contextual areas for respondent narration. For a successful narrative approach, a degree of flexibility is essential to respond with follow-up or adapted questions to fully explore the experiences. Being mindful of the purpose of the questioning and remaining within the broad parameters of the instrument mitigated against the risk of not achieving internal validity.

The process of correctly collecting and analysing the data and coding the interview transcripts ensured correct interpretation of the data collected.

Reliability

The extent to which the research can be relied on, or the dependability of the research is referred to as reliability. If future researchers conduct a similar study, their research would provide similar findings. Dependability is enhanced if more than one analytical approach is used for narrative data (Mello, 2002). In this research, analysis of interviews was combined with participants' demographic information, and narratives were carefully read prior to analysis. Using correct sampling techniques to approach saturation, and the use of participant triangulation, adds to the reliability of the study. In this study, the triangulation across four participant groups provided insights across a range of transition experiences and the emergence of similar themes points to achievement of saturation (refer to Appendix E for code categories and code density by participant group).

3.9 Ethical considerations

The research was conducted in line with ethical standards. Dealing with lived experiences of individuals requires a high level of integrity to ensure confidentiality is upheld and that no participants are harmed through the research. Research participants voluntarily participated in the research and informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews being conducted. Interview participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time prior to publishing. The right to respondents' privacy was respected and all participants have been anonymised in the presentation of the research findings by giving them fictitious names. To be transparent with respondents as to the stated purpose of the research topic, they were invited to receive a copy of the final published report (De Vos et al., 2011).

In the following chapter, the research findings from the participant interviews are presented.

4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The data findings from the individual interviews are discussed in the following two chapters. The emergent themes from the interviews fall into two broad underlying experiences of the interview participants, namely the experiences within PSF and those outside in other corporate settings. The period of CA articles (or the training contract) was prominent in participants' narratives and later accounts of career transition experiences were often compared to earlier experiences within PSF. The first findings chapter, Chapter 4, presents the findings that relate to the lived experiences in PSF – both during articles and later. In the second findings chapter, Chapter 5, the findings on the experiences of those who left the PSF are discussed.

Comparisons between the triangulated participant groups are made where it is relevant, appropriate and meaningful. In the presentation of findings, the participant groups are referred to as Group 1 (remained in PSF), Group 2 (left and returned to PSF), Group 3 (left PSF and were in mid-management positions) and Group 4 (left and held senior management or executive positions at the time of the interview). To convey the personal lived individual experiences of participants, quotes from their narratives will be used to emphasise and give them a voice (De Vos et al., 2011). Fictitious names have been given to participants to ensure anonymity.

4.1 Introduction to findings: description of qualifying as CA(SA)

Qualifying as a South African CA requires the completion of an undergraduate programme and a post-graduate degree, the Certificate in the Theory of Accounting (CTA), at a SAICA-accredited university. The trainee accountant then joins a registered training provider such as PSF, at which three practical years are completed and two qualifying exams are written before becoming a CA(SA). Trainee accountants must acquire a set of competencies, determined by SAICA, through work experience and training courses before the training contract is signed off.

4.2 First experiences: the training contract

The lived experience of the three years of articles training featured prominently in all participant groups. This section will discuss their collective experiences as newcomers to PSF. The challenges they faced, the positive experiences, as well as the learnings they took from their CA articles are also presented. Their joining period relates to the literature on socialisation and transitions, as reflected in Table 8:

Table 8: Socialisation literature

Socialisation tactics institutionalised vs individual	Jones (1986) Van Maanen and Schein (1976) Saks et al. (2007)
Socialisation agents	Ostroff and Kozlowski (1993) Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) Sluss and Thompson (2012)
Mastering the new role and organisational context	Ashford and Black (1996) Wang et al. (2015)
Newcomer adjustment content and process	Bauer et al. (2007) Wang et al. (2015)
Proximal vs distal outcomes; task mastery, role clarity, integration into work group, gaining organisational political knowledge, job satisfaction	Ashforth and Saks (1996) Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) Saks et al. (2007)
Identity formation	Kornberger et al. (2011)
Distinction between acquiring technical expertise and learning the behavioural aspects of being a professional	Anderson-Gough, Grey, and Robson (2001) Grey (1998)

The joining experiences of participants aligned with the institutionalised socialisation tactics described by Jones (1986). They joined as a cohort (collective), and participants

attended onboarding sessions that included formal technical training, guidance on how to dress (formal, sequential, and fixed), and they were assigned individuals to support them (serial and investiture). In addition to classroom training, technical expertise was achieved formally through learning on the job to acquire the mandated SAICA competencies. The SAICA trainee accountant competency framework provided clarity and structure for participants' development, although a few experienced it as a mechanical process of working through a checklist. Participants found that the classroom training provided equal opportunity to learn, while mandatory attendance ensured equal access to learning.

The formal training towards professional development included professional dress-code, which Nolwazi found helpful:

> They had training on how you must dress, how tight or how short it must not be in terms of the clothing. But I did notice that I needed to learn how to dress up.
> (**P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10: (8:8)**

The technical training helped to translate the theoretical learning from the academic environment to the working environment.

Supporting roles included having someone not too senior assigned as 'buddy', to assist with initial orientation. In other firms, newcomers self-organised and were assisted by groups from earlier trainee cohorts. Participants were frequently supported by a manager acting as coach, mentor or counsellor. The terminology for this role varied across the firms and is understood in the organisational context rather than the defined meaning within the literature. These individuals provided performance feedback, monitored job-assignments, and generally supported the trainee. Participants often worked on job assignments managed by their coaching/mentoring manager, in which case the role blurred into a mix of manager and manager-coach. On promotion to manager, the role of coach/mentor was performed by a partner. In some instances, the mentor/coach relationship remained intact as both parties progressed upward in the hierarchy.

The early experiences of participants highlight the distinction made by several researchers on the two aspects of becoming a professional: the acquisition of technical expertise and competence, and the specific behavioural aspects associated with being a professional (Anderson-Gough, et al., 2001; Grey 1998). Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) point to late-coming, poor work performance, or non-participation in organisational activities as aspects of ineffective socialisation. The difference in this study is that these behaviours resulted from participants' unique challenges rather than being individually motivated. These challenges included transport, working hours, performance expectations, language barriers, adapting to the organisational environment, and dealing with racial bias. These are summarised in Table 9 below and are discussed in the section that follows:

Table 9: Integration and adjustment challenges for trainee accountants

Challenges	Impact	Socialisation category	Personal adjustment	Support	Outcomes
Transport	Punctuality Team integration Work allocation	Professionalism Professionalism Technical expertise	Awareness Financial Delivery	Peers Managers Family	Adjustment Adjustment
Language	Isolation Offended/ hurt Work understanding	Professionalism Professionalism Technical expertise	Resilience, stand up for self, create awareness	None	Often unresolved Adjustment
Dress code	Appropriateness	Professionalism	Awareness	Formal	Adjustment
Diversity and race	Racial bias Strangeness Confidence	NA Professionalism Professionalism	Awareness, acceptance and resilience	None None	Often unresolved Adjustment Adjustment

Corporate challenges	Social activities Performance Feedback Systems Organisational language	Professionalism Prof and Technical Prof and technical Prof and Technical	Build relationships, learn openness and flexibility Openness to feedback, listening, stand up for self Acquire competence Understand language, learn to navigate internal protocols	Internal coach and mentors	Adjustment Adjustment Adjustment Adjustment
Theory to practice	Role clarity Practical skills	Technical	Learn, adapt, ask questions	Training Performance feedback, Formal competency framework	Adjustment

4.2.1. Personal background challenges

A common first challenge for seven participants was being unprepared for the nature of auditing work in terms of mobility. Financially constrained personal backgrounds precluded car ownership and participants struggled with transport at the start of their careers. Their unpreparedness included a lack of understanding that their chosen career differed from most other jobs in that it required mobility to and from several clients. South Africa lacks a good public transport system, requiring commuters to use either buses or minibus ‘taxis’ which travel between pre-determined points during peak hours, with limited off-peak services. Commuters must walk to points along the taxi or

bus route, queue, and must often take multiple taxis depending on their destination. Personal safety, especially when carrying a laptop computer, is at risk. Without owning a car, it is difficult to travel to clients and to shuttle between client and offices, and get home after hours. Maria describes her experience below:

> The first few months were a problem because I didn't have a car and mines (mining operations) are not in the city or where you can easily get to using public transportation. So, I had the journey of getting somebody to take me to the client. And that became very difficult because you are somehow relying on someone else and you must work late and then I would get home at 7 or 8 at night because I had to use public transport. **(P1: Transcript S1 Maria.rtf - 1:2 (3:3)**

Public transport restricted flexibility and punctuality, which impacted team relationships built on the expectation that audit team members remain until the work is done, often well beyond regular office hours. Managers, assumingly fearing that deadlines would be missed, assigned less complex work sections to team members with transport problems, thus limiting exposure to developing their technical competencies. Self-esteem suffered from being a burden to others for lifts. Grace relates how social integration into the team was impacted by the inability to attend after work events:

> The other trainees, when they received an invite to whatever function, some don't even have cars. So, you see it is an after-hours thing and it is obviously, not for me. Because I don't have a car. **(P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:11 (24:24)**

Participants who had their own transport from the start recognised the negative impact which the lack of transport had on their less fortunate peers. In acknowledgement of this challenge, some firms had prepared their trainees to make transport arrangements before starting work, and other firms arranged that staff meet at the office and travel to clients together.

This challenge in demonstrating the professional requirement of punctuality and working to deadlines was not found in the literature. This finding contributes to an understanding of the unique challenges of joining a profession from a socially disadvantaged background, where owning a car is not a given for a young graduate.

Many participants' parents had not worked in a corporate environment and consequently general business savvy was not something with which they entered the working environment. Kumo provides a description of the differences between her and another trainee:

> So culturally, I think if earlier on I got exposed to more professionals, I could have made a whole lot of difference when I got to the corporate world because there was this guy. His dad started a sugar company or something. His mannerism, the way he conducts himself like you can tell this guy is on his way to the top like he was groomed and bred in that way. He wore a suit to work every day … he was first year. But it was just the way he grew up. The way he speaks, he is very articulate. **P8: Transcript LM1 Kumo.rtf – 8:62 (302:302)**

Consequently, these skills needed to be developed by participants.

4.2.2 Cultural and language adjustment challenges

Participants highlighted unexpected language challenges when they were assigned to work at predominantly Afrikaans-speaking clients in Afrikaans-speaking teams (Afrikaans is a South Africa's language, compulsory in schools before 1994). No longer compulsory at school, it cannot be assumed that individuals are conversant in Afrikaans, yet it is still prominent in several organisations. The resulting language barrier brought confusion, exclusion from the team and feelings of isolation. Ayanda describes it as follows:

> And most people there were Afrikaans-speaking. And you go to like Rustenburg, a mine there, and the client also speaks Afrikaans. You end up being side-lined in terms of work allocation. You'll get smaller sections. Because the senior people who are responsible for that area of the business are more fluent in Afrikaans than in English. So, I guess it would just be not comfortable for them to interact with this young person, I mean, this young, black person. **(P11: Transcript LM4 Ayanda.rtf - 11:8 (8:8)**

Soma managers resisted allocating participants to clients where language was not a barrier. Maria relates the hurtful experience when a client assumed that she would not understand Afrikaans:

> On one of my clients, the client did not think that I understand Afrikaans, and she said something about me and I was there. And I understood! There were instances where I needed to be mindful firstly of my skin colour and secondly that the language might not always be English. (**P1: Transcript S1 Maria .rtf - 1:10 (15:17)**

The disadvantage of specific language competence in the work environment as part of the socialisation process was not highlighted in the literature and contributes to understanding specific challenges in the integration of newcomers in a country with multiple official languages.

Starting work exposed participants to diverse environments not previously experienced. Ayanda relates her experience of working with white people for the first time:

> It was a cultural shock because I grew up in Limpopo. I went to a school where everybody was black. There were probably two or three white teachers. They taught Afrikaans. Other than that, my interaction with other races, until that point, had been mostly black people. (**P11: Transcript LM4 Ayanda.rtf - 11:1 (8:8)**

The training contract, Nomvu relates, gave her the first exposure to Jewish people:

> It was more other than having ordinary white people, there were Jewish people and I've never interacted with Jewish people before. There were Afrikaans speaking people in the Eastern Cape that I knew, there were Indians, but people that were of Jewish religion? I hadn't interacted with those people. So, it's something that you didn't know. (**P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:7 (7:7)**

Depending on the size of the firm they joined or the time period of joining, participants found that as black trainees they would be a minority, ranging from only two black trainees in Nomvu's case, who qualified in 2000 in a smaller firm, to approximately 10 in Nolwazi's case, who qualified at a larger firm in 2007. Participants who qualified in later years did not refer to the number of blacks versus other race groups.

4.2.3 Adapting to the organisational culture

Learning to fit into the corporate culture required adjusting to a western working culture (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). Attendance of social events was expected (Anderson-

Gough et al., 2005), yet the style of the event, from catering to music and entertainment, were different to the African culture and taste, making participants feel misplaced. Grace opted to join the social committee to impact change. Participants who took opportunities to become involved in internal committees such as social, technical or cultural, gained valuable experience beyond auditing. They spoke of acquiring business skills, learning to speak better, learning to negotiate, becoming resilient and self-sufficient. The learning was not always immediate but became more calibrated through behavioural experimentation, as Lulu describes:

> I remember one of my first audit clients when I got my KPIs (Key performance indicators) "what are these things…?" It was like, "she needs to be more aggressive". And I was more aggressive in my next job. And then it was: "well, she's too aggressive". It was one of those things where you need to learn a bit about yourself and how to treat people and clients, deal with different clients, deal with easy clients. **P9: Transcript LM2 Lulu.rtf - 9:7 (13:13)**

4.3.4. Personal adaptability and relationships in becoming a professional

Across all four groups participants raised challenges requiring personal adaptability. This included learning to work in teams and dealing with clients. This required building confidence, learning to manage conflict, and developing the awareness of and resilience to the fact that being audited creates stress for clients. Linda explains:

> I've always been the shy introverted person and the challenges were the interaction, because I work in a team and I work with strangers and clients….it wasn't always good times. It was the first time that I had a client yell at me and it was ground-breaking for me. I remember going to the senior manager at the time and I just burst into tears because I'd never had to deal with something like this. **(P2: Transcript S2 Linda.rtf - 2:2 (3:3)**

Participants found that teamwork required learning to accommodate others, learning to toughen up, and becoming self-confident. Learning to reach out to others, Lerato explains, is key to being able to cope and master the work:

> I was extremely shy at that time. I just struggled from reaching out to the people that were around me, meet the manager or the senior of the job to say: "Help

> me out here". I got to toughen up. So, it was just developing that thick skin. I'd be lying if I said I know how I survived because it was survival. But I think I just got stronger and stronger. **(P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:10 (26:26)**

Participants highlighted the value of supportive relationships, particularly those that developed before joining the firm and helped to clarify expectations. Maria found it helpful to have spent university vacations working in the division she eventually joined. Vicky describes how an acquaintance assisted with her pre-joining orientation:

> The weekend before we were supposed to start work I called him and said 'Listen, I'm starting work on Monday but I just want to know a little bit more'. I asked him what is expected of me. We were here that Saturday before (I started work), me and him, in the building. I needed to know what the expectations of me as a first year, as a second year. What the things are that I need to know. What the things are that will stand me in good stead, making sure I do well in my articles. And that was a great experience for me. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:2 (5:5)**

Where firms had funded university studies, participants benefited from early relationships within the firms. Grace describes how student mentoring programmes provided by sponsors were helpful to her:

> I had the fortune of getting to build a relationship with the firm a lot sooner. I think what helped is that being a scholarship holder they aligned us with a partner. So, you almost felt that you had someone who was senior and quite authoritative in the firm that you can reach out to. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:2 (20:20)**

In contrast, an unsupportive manager in the first six months of her training period brought Glenda close to leaving for another firm. The ability to build relationships was beneficial to gaining exposure to the right type of work. Zodwa relates how building team rapport and good performance positively contributed to managers and partners booking her on future jobs.

> I had developed good relationships with some of the partners within our division and they trusted me to deliver on the certain things. So, you get given more responsibilities. **P15: Transcript LE4 Zodwa.rtf - 15:6 (15:15)**

Working with different people brought the ability to read others and understand that different people would have different expectations. Lulu describes the skill of adapting to different working styles:

> The fact that you have a different boss at every job was something I treasured because then you have a chance to start again. You have a chance to read people and understand what people's expectations are. And give people of yourself exactly what they need. **P9: Transcript LM2 Lulu.rtf - 9:8 (13:13)**

Frequently, participants spoke of the progressive nature of their adjustment where, after a tough first year, subsequent years become more enjoyable. Kumo speaks of an 'awakening' as she gradually 'got' the requirements for success:

> Towards the end of my articles, I think, that's where you realised that okay, you need to wake up. If you want to progress, if you want to have something rather ask for it than wait for it to be given to you. **P8: Transcript LM1 Kumo.rtf - 8:5 (37:37)**

Adaptability, building relationships, using relationships positively and improving interpersonal skills were key learnings for participants.

4.3.5. Work performance challenges

Increasingly complex job assignments during the CA articles provide the exposure needed to build the skill set and competencies required by SAICA. Job performance is evaluated by managers to determine competence. Poor job performance could impact future assignment to jobs by managers and resource planners. Participants learnt the need to monitor their job assignment bookings, challenge unexpected changes to their assignments and stand up for themselves to secure assignments that would stretch them. To obtain positive performance feedback, participants learnt the importance of clarity on task expectation as well as the expected standard of task completion. Without this understanding, negative performance feedback was unsettling and confusing, as Nolwazi relates:

> I didn't meet expectations. And then somebody comes and tells you that you are not good enough. It is just confusing. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:7 (16:16)**

Expectation clarity can result from successful socialisation practices but also from individual adaptability (Wang et al., 2015). Several participants described their experience of joining the working world as anything from mildly confusing to challenging, or simply just going with the flow.

4.3.6 Differential treatment due to race

Firms' attempts to integrate their black trainees contributed to the participant feeling different. Nomvu tells how the well-meant efforts by the firm to accommodate her led to discomfort with the gradual realisation that she received preferential treatment:

> There was an element of, I think I was protected, different. When all the other clerks were battling with the parking, *I* had a parking. I'm not sure whether there was a directive that was… you know you where, you know that probably without me knowing. **(P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:12 (11:11)**

Participant experiences ranged from firms with detectable strategies to successfully incorporate the African trainees into the firm, to those where little effort was made to understand their unique challenges. In some firms, participants found themselves holding together as a group of black trainees. Racial differentiation was felt when a black trainee would be assigned the simpler sections of work, or racial bias seemed to motivate better performance ratings for white colleagues.

The challenges experienced by the participant groups in joining their respective PSF as described above demonstrate the individual adjustments required to integrate themselves into the world of work at PSF.

4.3 The learnings achieved through the training contract period

Participants' experienced their training contract period as a time where they developed strong relationships with like-minded people, communication skills, business skills, people skills, team management skills, and self-management skills. They discovered their leadership capabilities, became resourceful, adapted to the organisational culture,

benefitted from the work experience, and were supported in their development and learning, as summarised in Figure 9 below:

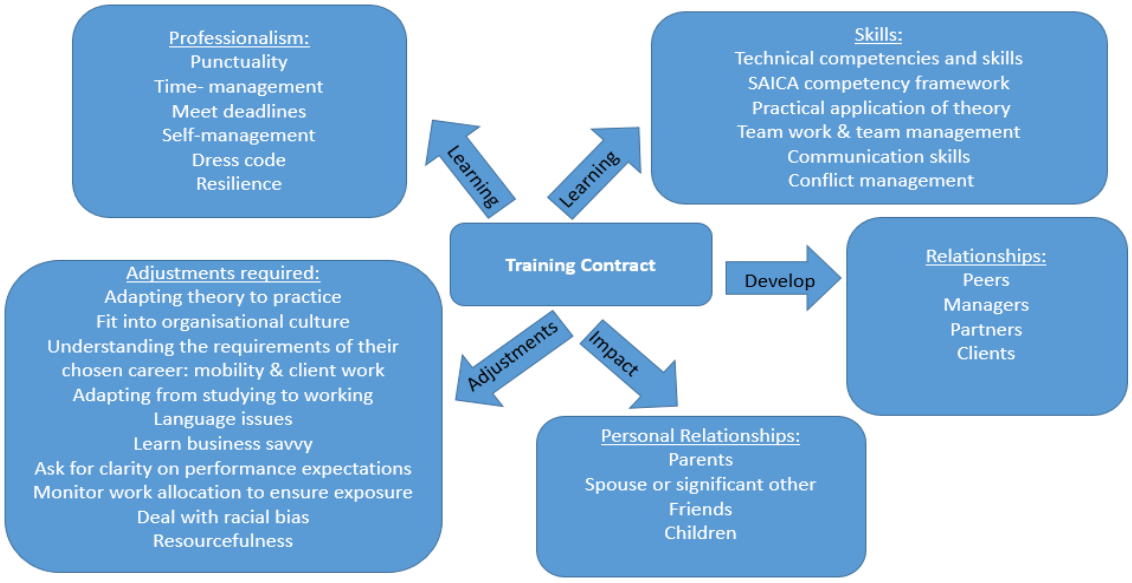


Figure 9: Summarised training contract developments, learnings and adjustments

Some participants regarded the training contract period as 'just a job': two participants voiced their experience of going through their training contracts without ever obtaining an overarching view of auditing, instead merely concentrating on the individual sections assigned to them. Lerato describes how it made sense to her retrospectively:

> I look back and having been an audit manager is probably where it all made sense what this career was all about. It was never clear how these bits and pieces come together until quite late in the process. **P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:3 (14:14)**

Vicky's upbeat comment below is representative of the positive sentiments expressed by several participants in reflecting on their training contract:

> I loved articles... the work side was challenging but the relationships I built from it are relationships I'm going to have for the rest of my life. Just being in an environment with people who are in the same boat as you, understand what is going on, and the difficulties you go through. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:7 (12:12)**

In summary, the training contract as a first transition into the workplace was characterised by learning to be professional and acquiring specific skills. Relationships played a key role both in supporting the transition as well as the need to build relationships with specific groups of people such as peers, managers, partner, and clients. Challenges were encountered that needed to be mastered or overcome.

4.4 Transition experiences within firms: promotions, fast-tracking and returning to firms

The findings of this research reflect PSFs' efforts to retain newly qualified CAs through short-term international secondment offers and appointments in the firm as junior managers. Once retained, participants experienced fast-tracking strategies.

4.4.1 Secondment opportunities

Ten participants across all the groups had the opportunity to go on a short-term international secondment after their training contract completion. The significance of this experience was that for many it was their first time travelling out of the country. Despite the adjustment to working elsewhere, the short-term duration of secondments falls outside the scope of career transitions and is not detailed here. Interestingly, this triggered a desire in only one participant to work internationally, though visa restrictions prevented this.

4.4.2 Retention after articles

Towards the end of the training contract, firms begin a process of selecting the individuals to retain as managers, and individuals consider their options within or outside firms. Lee and Mitchell (1994) described turnover being triggered by either internally driven push factors, or the external forces and attractions as pull factors. Participant narratives indicate the push factor and pull factors relating to turnover after CA articles, as summarised in Figure 10 below:



Figure 10: Push and pull factors impacting turnover after articles

Figure 11 depicts the retention successes by PSF of participants with more than half of all participants remaining with their firms for at least some time after their training contract.

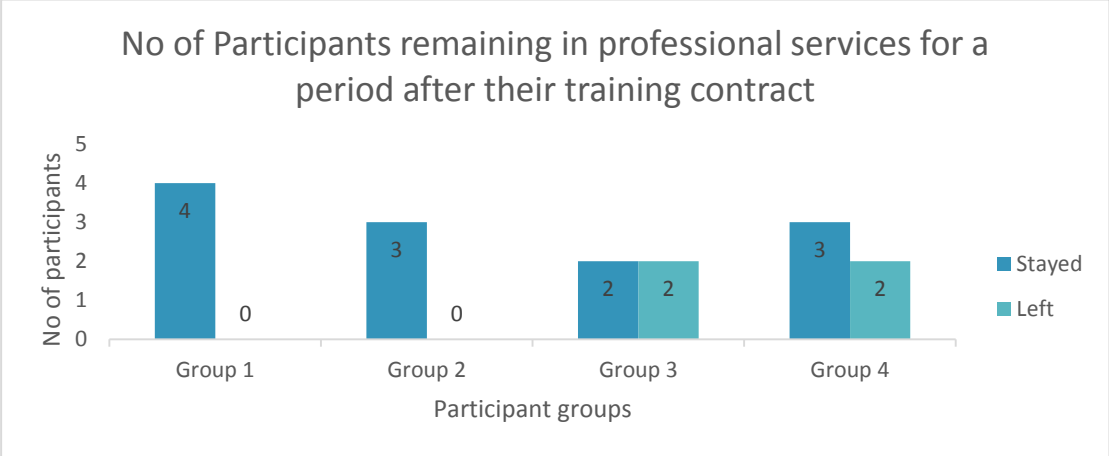


Figure 11: Number of participants who remained for a period immediately after their articles versus those who left

Eight participants in Groups 2, 3 and 4 stayed on: five remained for a period of eight to 18 months and two remained for two years or longer. The intent and motivation to stay or leave falls into five categories: clear intent to stay; intent to stay for the short term; vague intent to stay for the short term; clear intent to leave with clear alternative aspirations; and lastly, clear intent to leave with no clarity of future role. These are described in more detail below:

Clear intent to stay

Two participants in Group 1 fell into this category. Maria (Group 1) articulated a clear intent to stay in the long term and have a career in the firm. Maria reasons that she

enjoyed the work, identified with the employer brand, and valued her development in her training period:

> I always knew that I wanted to stay on in the firm. I really identified with the brand and I saw how I had developed in the three years and I wanted to stay with the brand and develop further. So even my friends knew that I was that girl who, when you would talk about going to banks, I would not be interested, as I really wanted to stay. **P1: Transcript S1 Maria.rtf - 1:13 (21:21)**

Intent to stay for the short term

With six participants, this represents the most common intent: two each from Group 1 and 4, one each from Group 2 and 3. Their reasons included the opportunity to gain managerial experience, extending their experience beyond audit, and an appreciation of the organisational environment. Glenda explains her decision to stay:

> My decision to remain in audit was firstly that I had not decided what I wanted to do outside of audit, but secondly, I felt that I would like to gain more experience in terms of managing people – being more rounded. It was more trying to learn those softer skills when I stayed on. **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:17 (11:11)**

A vague intent to stay in the short term

This was a soft option as the offer to stay presented a safe option until they had more clarity on career aspirations. This category represented four participants: two participants from Group 2, and one each from Group 3 and 4. Lerato describes that her focus on qualifying had excluded longer-term career thoughts:

> I think the one thing about the CA career was that it does not prepare you beyond qualifying. So, when I got towards the end of my third year all I knew was that I've reached… All you need to do is your three-year articles and then you're a CA. But nobody tells you what happens after that. **P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:20 (73:73)**

Intent to leave due to clarity on alternative aspirations

Three participants, two from Group 3 and one in Group 4, had clear alternative plans. These participants had opted for a career path outside audit – even if they had enjoyed

their three years, their long-term goals lay elsewhere. None of these returned to PSF. Lulu describes her experience:

> So, what should I do after articles? They made it very clear: “Okay, if you want to end up here (in private equity) you’ve got to get out of here (the firm) and do some leveraging position experience or corporate finance, give yourself two or three years and then you can get into private equity”. I automatically knew then that I can’t stay at the firm. **P9: Transcript LM2 Lulu.rtf - 9:27 (69:69)**

Intent to leave with no specific alternatives

This included feeling unchallenged or a dislike for audit work. Racial tensions, as experienced by Lerato, during articles pushed her to leave:

> Our firm had a lot of racial issues, racial tension. One of the initiatives was that my group took is that we had a sit-down with the leadership and put forward our issues. “If you fix them, we’ll stay”. By the end of articles, we still had the same issues. So, staying was not quite appealing... I don’t even want to stay here. I just want to get the hell out of here. **P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:22-23 (77:77)**

Remaining on after the training contract period overall appears to be a viable career option even if for a period after qualifying. Three of the participants who had no clear initial desire to remain on progressed to partner or senior manager.

4.4.3 The first transition to manager role

Twelve participants spent time with firms after qualifying and experienced their first transition into a manager role, (referred to as assistant manager by some participants). Becoming a manager meant having to learn to manage others, do the audit planning, interact more closely with partners, and deal with clients on a more direct level, such as having fee discussions. A significant step-up in expectation proved challenging and participants mostly felt unprepared for it. They indicated that between six to 10 months elapsed before they felt that they were coping. Maria describes the anxiety caused from being unclear on expectations:

> The first two months were: “I don’t know how to [do] this and I don’t know how to do that” and I started panicking because I felt I was not even doing what was

> expected, until I sat with my group leader and told him that I'm scared because I feel like I'm not doing what I'm expected to do. **P1: Transcript S1 Maria.rtf - 1:36-39 (51:51)**

Changed life circumstances coinciding with a promotion can add to transition challenges, as experienced by Jabulisile, whose work demands conflicted with her idealistic view of being the perfect wife. Long hours become inevitable as one tries to meet the new expectations and manage multiple teams, which leads to exhaustion. Jabulisile describes her experience:

> I was just exhausted. I was just exhausted. And I think also the transition from just being a senior to being a manager is massive. In terms of work it was being a manager to people who were just a year behind me... And then the people that I worked with – my support structure during articles was just not there. **P5: Transcript R1 Jabulisile.rtf - 5:21,23,25 (20:20-22)**

In contrast, a second group of participants found it an easy transition with good support. Kumo describes this period as an awakening, feeling positively challenged and beginning to see the bigger picture of auditing:

> I don't think I struggled in becoming a new manager. I had the right people that guided me to say, okay, what are your plans? What are you going to do this year? So, then I got more challenged. Then I got more involved. Then I felt alive. **P8: Transcript LM1 Kumo.rtf - 8:22 (98:98)**

A new manager's client portfolio, which ultimately determines the contribution the individual makes to profits of the firm, can impact the transition either positively or negatively. With many organisations having financial year-ends in December, the January to March period is a peak audit season. This coincides with the time when many newly qualified CAs are away on short-term secondments, returning when the busy season in the home office is tapering off. Consequently, those who remain in country are allocated client work, meaning that a return from secondment may leave the individual with no portfolio. On Vicky's return she had little work to do, which, she explains, impacted her sense of belonging and made her question the reason for her appointment:

> We came back, everyone was busy and working on deadlines, people were hectic and I sat in the office for two months. It was very frustrating for me and I was asking myself the question: 'Why am I back here? Why did these people hire me? I've been back for two months, I've got *one* client, yet everyone else that came back with me seems overstressed with too much to do. What does that mean? Am I just a black face? Why am I here?' **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:88 (25:25)**

The transition to the first manager role requires role clarity, expectation clarity, support, a sense of purpose through a defined client portfolio, and a balancing of changed life circumstances with work expectations.

4.4.4 Fast-tracked progression within PSF

PSF, in line with South Africa's employment equity laws, have race and gender employment targets. Participants related experiences of accelerated progression or fast-tracking in support of achieving equity targets and in support of retention strategies.

The promotion which followed the first transition into management was considered an easy transition by most participants, as it came with little or no change in expectation. Fast-tracking into this level was not mentioned. Subsequent promotions within the PSF however, included accounts of fast-tracking or accelerated progression. This was to job grades of senior manager and director on the one hand, and admission to partner on the other. Internal promotions to senior manager (SM) were experienced in Group 1, 2 and 4. Director promotions were seen in Group 1 only, while partnership admissions occurred in Groups 1 and 4.

In Group 1, Linda and Naledi spoke extensively about their experience of being fast-tracked and Glenda (Group 4) includes her account of being fast-tracked.

Linda experienced the transition to SM as challenging and almost burnt herself out. She needed to learn to delegate, which was re-emphasised when she was promoted to director. At this point, she had to learn to see the bigger picture, learn to sell the

firm's services, actively participate in job proposals, and expand her knowledge about the firm.

Accelerated progression shifted seniority and reporting relationship dynamics, particularly where seniority was gained over colleagues previously at the same level. Learning to deal with the resultant resistance in managing previous peers can be challenging, as Linda relates below:

> I have this senior manager who is now working underneath me... But in first year we started together. So (sigh), I got accelerated to senior manager and it *was* a challenge for him to report to me. And, ugh, it's … I'm just at the point where "This is the job, this is what needs to be done, let's just do it". **(P2: Transcript S2 Linda.rtf - 2:58 (28:28)**

Peers avoided addressing her promotion with her, the subject appearing to be taboo. Linda describes the discomfort and passive resistance to her new seniority:

> Comments from my peers? Not really. Not really, they don't… we don't speak about it, if I could say that. **(P2: Transcript S2 Linda - Copy.rtf - 2:63 (30:30)**

Shifting relationship dynamics were compounded where the accelerated progression coincided with a move to another division. New colleagues, often with longer tenure and deeper experience than her, and who do not know her capabilities, only see someone of colour being promoted ahead of them. Naledi felt isolated in an unwelcoming team. She relates the complexity when her move to another division coincided with her maternity and a promotion:

> There was a lot of animosity amongst the people… And, I said, "I don't blame them. I'd probably feel the same… 'here's this young girl, we don't know where she comes from, and everybody is holding her on a pedestal'" I'd say that was one of the hardest ones, you're in a new group/department, about 70% of the people, the staff are questioning whether you should be where you are… All the talk that 'you know she's an ACI, so this is what the firm needs'. **(P3: Transcript S3 Naledi.rtf - 3:53-54 (32:34)**

The author's research shows that fast-tracking was not limited to a single promotion experience but was repeated through progressive job grade levels. In Group 1, two participants relate progression ahead of their peers through the senior manager and to

the level of director. Naledi from Group 1 and Glenda from Group 4 experienced even more rapid progression, where promotions came at a fast rate. In Glenda's case the progression to partner skipped the previous grade entirely. Internal resistance and negativity to fast-tracked candidates extended to some partners within the firm. Naledi's reporting partner openly told her that he was unsupportive of her partnership nomination. Resistance to Glenda's promotion came from partners whose mentees were not promoted:

> Some people they had expected to make partner didn't make partner so even in the partnership group there was a bit of tension. **(P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:29 (21:21)**

Such rapid acceleration through the ranks leads to feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, awareness of needing to be resilient to the 'noise' that surrounds them, and the overt opposition to them. Then there is the pressure to live up to the expectation of those who have put their faith in them. An intrinsic struggle with self-belief is expressed in Naledi referring to herself as a 'young girl'. She responds with a fighting spirit to prove her capability in her comment below:

> Because even the negative noises, they do get to me, but at some point, I'll take them, you will say something negative about me, if I encounter you more often I'll take that and I'll want to do something. I'd use it as a motivation to get me to be better. **(P3: Transcript S3 Naledi.rtf - 3:116 (58:58)**

Linda felt driven to prove herself as worthy of early promotions and articulates an acute awareness that early promotions place one's performance at the scrutiny of others:

> It does put a bit of pressure on me because I know I have been accelerated quite a bit, but I also want to prove that I am competent enough for the job. It's not just because I'm black. And that's always what I challenge myself to do. **(P2: Transcript S2 Linda.rtf - 2:59 (28:28)**

Participants shared that internal people and external parties perceived her seniority purely through the employment equity lens rather than paying credence to her credibility, capability and potential. Naledi outlines her strong drive to perform and prove her worth:

> There was that noise, I will ignore it, but by ignoring it I will do so damn well that you're going to be ashamed to say what you were saying…you'd stop saying what you are saying, because if you say to people that have experienced me they will give you a positive outcome, you know: "What are you saying – have you actually experienced her? Because if you have experienced her, what you are saying just doesn't make sense". **(P3: Transcript S3 Naledi.rtf - 3:68 (41:41)**

In relating this Naledi was both emotional and angry. The pressure to perform and prove her worth to others is complex: on the one hand accepting that she has a lot to live up to, then intense irritation that others should question her worth, and finally the intensely personal drive to perform. Resilience to thoughtless comments from others lining progression only to employment equity is needed as these comments can be hurtful.

Glenda's fast-tracking to partnership coincided with being away on the firm's international leadership development programme for several months. This limited her experience at the senior manager level and her partnership nomination meant skipping a job grade entirely. Her account below introduces the ensuing anxiety:

> I had stayed at each level for about a year, when I then was promoted to senior manager and then I went to the global programme. That was probably being thrown in at the deep end. The promotions are coming quite quickly and then you also are out of the picture and when you come back there's also an expectation so that was the period that I felt the most anxiety. **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:75 (11:11)**.

Added to the anxiety was a great deal of self-doubt, which Glenda felt she could not share. She explains:

> I just thought if I do have doubts then people will just say: "Well, she's doubting herself so let's rather defer her for the partnership". I don't think I shared much... when I got back in March it would be partnership interviews and I hadn't even been a senior manager for a year because I had been away. **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:24 (17:17)**

Maria and Vicky were less vocal about accelerated progression but voiced experiences of feeling out of their depth at times and needing to achieve and perform at their new level. Maria explains:

> I still don't know what is expected of me. I think I compare myself to diretors who have been there for five years and I should be getting clients too, I should be doing this and I should be doing that, but in looking where they are I'm not giving myself an opportunity to learn day by day. **P1: Transcript S1 Maria.rtf - 1: (51:51)**

Participants in Group 2 similarly experienced the intense pressure to perform to prove themselves and not be found wanting in performance. One of these had been fast-tracked to senior manager and one had been re-appointed as senior manager.

The assumption that accelerated progression would be welcomed by recipients thereof may be challenged by the experiences of research participants. Vicky shares her mixed feelings in this regard:

> And it had taken time. When I was a senior manager that was when I started doing things like coaching and I had an accelerated development plan, and people had invested in me to get me to this point. And at times I felt 'great, I've finally made it!' and then I hated it! **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:51 (48:48)**

Nomvu was the only African woman CA in her firm and experienced the discomfort of preferential treatment to progress and retain her. Nothing was ever said directly to her or her peers, yet it became increasingly clear to her that she was being singled out. She describes her discomfort and the tension with her manager:

> When I was already post articles, I started to be uncomfortable because now it was not only about the people that were at the same level. The manager I was working with...I think she was not comfortable. Or it also made her unsure about herself, you know her status or she was not confident about herself. So, I felt then that I was a threat to her. Sometimes she would ask "Nomvu, how much are you earning?" Really? There were those kinds of questions which are awkward. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:27&28 (39:39, 41:41)**

Organisational power structures can be well established, so that a newcomer to a senior position is excluded from the inner circle where important decisions are being made. Participants, particularly in Group 4, discovered this reasonably soon after having been appointed. They found that meetings where they expected to contribute to a decision were ratification meetings of decisions taken elsewhere.

Group 3 participants were excluded above as they did not remain in PSF long enough

to experience fast-tracking.

The narratives of participants highlight that the accelerated progression of African female CAs within PSF is not uncommon. The acceleration takes the form of shortening the time traditionally spent at each of the manager job grades through to partnership. There is pressure to excel and to close the experience gap that would have developed within normal progression time-frames. Relationships with others are strained and include dealing with peer resentment and apparent taboos of discussing the fast-tracking. The individual feels a sense of isolation, loneliness, anxiety to perform and to live up to the role. The individual is required to tap into personal reserves of resilience and self-motivation to survive and grow.

4.4.5 Return to PSF

Group 2 participants all returned to PSF. At the time of interviewing them, one had been back at her firm for more than three years, one had been back for one year, and the third was serving her notice at her current employer to return to the firm at which she qualified, but had an earlier period of employment with another PSF. In addition, one participant in Group 4 had worked at three different PSF during her career and her experience is included in this section.

Transitioning back to a familiar environment where expectations are understood motivated the return. Returning to a structured and stable work environment balanced the understanding that long hours are expected to meet deadlines. Positive factors for returning included a fair degree of time flexibility that is afforded to the individual, the range of exposure and progression opportunities available in the PSF, and the alignment to individual interest and aspiration. Jabulisile articulates it as follows:

> We know now how things work. When I go back to the firm it will be the busy season and that's how it is. **(P5: R1 Jabulisile.rtf - 5:50 (56:56)**

Tholakele had realised that corporate work was not for her and found the clearly defined career path within the PSF attractive. Participants understood that a good client

portfolio supports aspirations to becoming a PSF partner. Tholakele explains her aspiration to becoming a partner:

> What matters to me is that I want to be the sort of partner that brings something to the table, a partner with substance... I don't want to be a window dressing type of person. **(P6: Transcript R2 Tholakele.rtf - 6:79 (93:93)**

The return to PSF was easiest for those returning to the same firm and the same office. They found that employment discussions were comfortable and welcoming, and that firm representatives showed a genuine interest in their return.

Tholakele returned to a larger office of the same firm and experienced the competitive nature in the larger office as an unexpected challenge. The audit methodology had changed during her absence, which added to new skills required. Developing new relationships and learning a new role was required with re-entry at a more senior level. She describes how the reality was more daunting than expected:

> You know they talk about steep learning curves? It's been like climbing a vertical wall for me, to be honest. **(P6: Transcript R2 Tholakele.rtf - 6:40 (68:68)**

Participants found they frequently had to respond to the curiosity of colleagues regarding their decision to return to the firm.

Those who returned on a more permanent basis all returned to the firm with which they had trained to qualify as a CA(SA). Given the small number of participants who made the return, this is a less frequent career choice.

4.4.6 Transition challenges in joining a different PSF

An interesting finding was the experience of two participants who had joined different PSF to those at which they had qualified. In both instances these firms were empowerment firms, meaning that they are black-owned, locally based South African firms rather than firms with strong international affiliations, such as the big four firms of PwC, KPMG, EY and Deloitte. Participants joined these firms hoping to positively contribute to the development of black CAs in South Africa. Contrary to expectation,

participants were challenged by significant organisational differences in these firms compared to their prior experience. They highlighted these as differences between emerging or developing firms and organisational maturity of the international firms. The differences lay in a less structured organisation, lower skills levels, non-standard audit methodology, and immaturity in learning and development, as well as staff performance management models and less robust quality standards. The transition challenges resulting from this were that, in addition to having to develop relationships and ensuring a good client portfolio, they needed to spend much more time coaching staff and developing control and quality standards than in their previous experience. The experienced qualified senior people were largely involved in preparing and presenting proposals to win work, which resulted in a thin layer of managers with some skills gap to perform work. Consequently, hours were long and support not readily available. Lerato explains her sense of confusion and feeling lost in the new environment:

> He said who's your mentor? I don't know. Who is my mentor? Was I supposed to find my own mentor? And so, then I got assigned (to one) but by this time I had been talking to this partner… And I just feel like there's no order. I don't know what is going on. I'm lost. **(P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:48 (194:194)**

Participants remarked within the empowerment firm's strong country political views were expressed. They noted a degree of hostility towards the larger firms which, Lerato explains, were referred to as 'the franchises'. Contributing their past experiences was often rejected:

> The franchises… This is the 'big four', what they would call them. You must understand that this is our culture and this is how we do it**. (P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:46 (180:180)**

The periods of employment in these firms were relatively short, with the first participant remaining for two years, and the other staying a year with each of the two firms she joined.

The author was unable to find anything in the literature that addresses this type of transition experience, which may be unique to countries where local organisations develop in competition to larger, multinational firms.

4.5 Mentorships in professional services

This section deals with support, coaching and mentoring experienced by participants in PSF. As described in section 4.1, the terms mentor, counsellor and coach were used interchangeably during the interviews, and reflected terminology used in participant's organisations. To avoid confusion between the terms, this role is referred to as the internal mentor/coach as distinct from the literature definitions of either coach or mentor. Participants from all four groups referenced such relationships, though comments from Group 1 predominated.

The relationship originated either by the mentor/coach being assigned to participants or by participant selection. The relationships were variable in success, with participants describing meaningful input from the assigned individuals. Not all relationships mentioned were successful and participant suggested that choosing one's mentor/coach is preferable to having one assigned.

Maria, who had a female mentor/coach, appreciated her mentor's tough, direct and no-nonsense manner. She describes how this relationship contributed to her growth:

> From there on she has been my support structure to get to where I am. I work a lot with her and she is not soft at all. I get no special treatment, in fact I don't think she treats me like she does other managers because I'd like to think that she has realised my potential. So, she pushes me to my potential and to do my best. **P1: Transcript S1 Maria.rtf - 1:6 (3:3)**

Naledi spoke positively of a white male manager who contributed to her professionalism by reminding her to think before reacting and learning to manage personality clashes. Beyond this, he provided advice and guidance on technical expertise.

When participants became managers, their mentor/coaches were partners. At senior levels the relationship more strongly resembles mentoring; however, technical guidance remained as a component of the relationship. Mentoring included a better work approach, learning to manage and juggle between work expectations of different partners, and improving delegation and prioritisation skills. Participants gained opportunities through introductions, exposure to other partners, and were constructively 'pushed' into assignments that would stretch them. Mentor/coach partners helped develop appropriate communication skills, such as what to say and when, and when it is better to say nothing at all. The partner mentors provided useful introductions into their own networks.

Two participants, from group 1 and group 4 spoke of their mentor/coach in terms of a father figure. One relationship was more distant, built on trust and being given objective and independent advice, while the other relationship was much closer and they worked together on many client accounts. Significant to this relationship was that the mentor believed in his mentee, was readily available, saw her holistically, and, in recognising her strengths, guided her to leverage these. Other mentor/coaches willingly shared knowledge and experiences. Opportunities for this arose, for instance, while driving to clients. Naledi comments on how this impacted her decision to make a career with the firm:

> That was a second intervention of how a mentor helped me decide; where somebody sat down and said: "What do you want out of life? Have you ever thought about... don't make a decision on a whim – give the firm a chance". **P3: Transcript S3 Naledi.rtf - 3: (30:30)**

The trust that developed formed a foundation for relationships to endure beyond the employment period. Two Group 3 participants, as can be seen from Zodwa's comment below, found that, even after leaving the firm, contact with early mentors remained intact:

> I think to know that someone believes in you is all you need for you to work even harder not to disappoint that person. He was one of them and there were other partners, one of whom I still chat with even now. **P15: Transcript LE4 Zodwa.rtf - 15:10 (39:39)**

Mentor demographics included male and female, white and African, and several organisational grades. No direct correlation between demographics and relationship effectiveness was found. At the partner level, mentor/coaches were mostly white but at least three African male mentors were mentioned. Women mentor/coaches were either managers or partners. No gender or ethnicity preference in mentor/coach was highlighted by participants. To underpin the diversity found in relationships, Naledi added her dislike of being paired up with someone who is like you. Mentors being too careful about being politically correct was also found to be unhelpful. However, Jabulisile comments that a black mentor/coach can contribute positively, based on his own experience:

> Because they think black people don't know what they are doing, so he'll say "You need to show that you are a strong manager because I know you are. So, when we are in that meeting you need to ask questions, you need to do this". And I appreciate that because it helps me a lot. **P5: Transcript R1 Jabulisile.rtf - 5:11 (8:8)**

Participants felt that getting along meant that the mentor/coach took more of an interest in them. Relationships were more significant where the individual had chosen her own mentor or where the mentorship relationship developed through exposure in the work environment.

Partners played a key role in the professional development of participants. A white Afrikaans male partner, reputed to being tough to the extent that people were quite wary of him, was hugely instrumental in Linda's professional development. He pushed her out of her comfort zone, instructed her to network at client meetings and tasked her to run client meetings. His intolerance of dwelling on errors taught her self-reliance in identifying and correcting whatever had gone wrong. She spoke highly of the impact he had on her growth.

Working with more than one partner, as is generally the case in the audit environment, gave participants in Group 1 the advantage of exposure to a variety of people, each with their own expectations and different priorities. Most partners provided feedback that was honest and direct, and exacting expectations of technical expertise.

Partners played the role of mentors, career champions and sponsors, father figures, and supportive roles. In Group 1, three participants experienced manager mentor/coaches from whom they learnt a great deal. Each of the four participants had a main individual at partner level (two male and two female) who took an interest in them. In addition, all four mentioned that there was extended support to them from multiple people. They used terms such as “flying my flag, invested in me, we respected and understood each other, people looking out for you, pushed me, walked the journey with me” when describing their internal firm relationships.

In Group 2, only one participant, Jabulisile, echoed the relationship experiences of Group 1. The other two participants had spent too much time away from the firm and had not yet established similar relationships.

Of the participants in Group 3, two participants mentioned early manager mentor/coach relationships of which some were effective and others less so. Three participants developed a stronger relationship with individual partners. Lulu spoke of a partner who had a key impact on her from early on, and this mentor relationship has lasted. Both Lulu and Kumo spoke of a larger supportive environment in their firms.

Finally, in Group 4, Glenda, who had the longest tenure before leaving her firm, had an early strong mentoring relationship with a partner. Of the remaining four participants, two mentioned having relationships with partners that were appreciated, and the final two mentioned purely functional relationships.

In summary, the findings showed that participants experienced a structured approach to internal support within PSF, with some surprising relationships in terms of the demographics of mentors.

4.6 Turnover reasons

The earlier section on intent to stay after articles dealt with the period immediately after qualifying. In this section, the focus is on later decisions to leave PSF. The literature on job turnover has focussed on employee demographics, with females less likely to

change jobs than males, and in South Africa, blacks being more inclined to change jobs. Wöcke and Heymann (2012) found that educational level is more strongly related to career mobility than race.

It was interesting to find that even participants in Group 1 who had remained at PSF, had moments during which they considered leaving. When Maria was promoted to senior manager, the hours were long and she felt unchallenged, and that she had lost who she was.

> "That talk" happened when I became a senior manager, because I had reached a point where I felt I was stagnating. And there was not much progression personally for me. Not what the firm was giving me, and I needed to get out of that comfort zone and to decide if is this what I still want to do or explore other opportunities out there. **P1: Transcript S1 Maria.rtf - 1:14 (21:21)**

Uncertainty on audit as a career were factors for both Linda and Naledi at earlier points in their career. Vicky describes her re-evaluation of her career choice at various intervals:

> Partnership for five years and then I will begin to think about it. I don't know. I'm finishing my third year as partner so I have two more years – I think about it now, but I just have not decided what happens at the end of five years. Not sure where I go from here. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:80 (75:75)**

The participants in the other groups all left either temporarily or permanently for a wide variety of reasons. The most common reason was simply to explore other opportunities, as shown in Table 10 below:

Table 10: Reasons for exiting PSF

	Audit and/or environment	**Explorative, career path uncertain**	**Personal reasons**	**Clarity on career path**	**Unqualified, not offered to stay**
Group 1	NA	NA	NA	NA	0
Group 2	1	1	1	0	0

Group 3	1	1	1	1	0
Group 4	1	3	0	0	1
Total	3	5	2	1	1

Glenda, who left after a few years as partner, explains it as follows:

> Just as much as I had enjoyed the firm and the last few years of being a partner, I felt that I could see my trajectory in the firm, but also felt that I've always wanted to be an FD or CFO for a listed entity, to be able to get those skills. **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:48 (35:35)**

In summary, the narratives show that the reasons for leaving the PSF for the African females interviewed ranged from personal reasons of travel, family commitments or having better control over her life, to a desire for a career change, to a curiosity to exploring other options. Although racial tensions were a key factor in one resignation, the reasons provided by the research participants did not specifically highlight reasons that would significantly distinguish their departures from other demographic groups.

The following chapter will present the findings on transitions into banking institutions and other corporates.

5. TRANSITIONS TO CORPORATES

In this chapter, the findings of transitions from PSF to corporates will be presented, highlighting both the transition challenges as well as other challenges faced within organisations. The role played by recruiters in making transitions is included, as well as movement between corporates and other roles, together with the challenges presented. Group 1 participants remained with the PSF, and for this reason are excluded from this section.

5.1 Transitions from PSF to banks

This section focusses on the transition from PSF into the banking sector, which was found to be the first corporate destination for eight of the 12 participants from Groups 2, 3 and 4.

The emerging aspirations and the explorative nature of job changes, as described in the previous chapter, resulted in many of the research participants joining banks as a next career step. Group 2 participants joined banks without it having been a specific career goal or having clarity on the impact on their future career. They joined banks on a temporary basis, or based on expectations created by recruiters. Jabulisile relates one recruiter's promises:

> And he told me: "People here want that. You'll have someone there who'll make sure you are stimulated. There is a lot to do at the bank". **P5: Transcript R1 Jabulisile.rtf - 5:30 (36:36)**

One Group 3 participant had specifically decided on joining a bank as part of her career plan and was deliberate and clear on her move to banking. She was the exception, as the remaining Group 3 participants were attracted to banks by the prospect of regular working hours, more family time, and a sense of control over her work. Long-term career goals were unclear, actual role on joining was often unclear, and understanding of career opportunities in different banking divisions was also unclear. Lerato relates her experience with the bank below:

> I still had no exposure as to what a bank is about. I started engaging with agents. So, there was the role at xxx bank – wonderful job spec – for me that looked like an opportunity to finally get into the banking space. That division was going to expose me to all different areas of the bank. That is what I understood this role to be. That was the attraction to this role. Unfortunately, I walked into this role and I find myself consolidating Excel spreadsheets and systems, reconciling systems. **P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:28-96 (119:119)**

Ayanda in Group 3 had not aspired to joining a bank but did so as a feasible next step to use the experience she had gained in a non-audit division at the firm after her articles.

Only one of the Group 4 participants joined a bank and for a short period of less than six months only, and as a second choice when other opportunities aligned to her aspirations were unavailable. The transition to a strict hierarchical banking environment stifled her and she returned to her firm for a non-audit role with more challenge.

Positive and negatives of experiences at the banks

Employment at the banks provided exposure to a wide range of experience through rotation programmes, regular working hours, and for some, the development of supportive relationships. Less positive were the challenges experienced in banks. The CA programmes in banks lacked organisation, structure and clarity, and the promised rotations to different areas in the bank were poorly planned and generally not well managed. Work often lacked challenge, progression was unclear, role was lacking, and participants struggled with building supportive relationships. Tholakele describes the lack of challenge:

> I felt like it wasn't what I wanted to do, because you get a space in the office, you get a desktop, and all you do every day is looking at spreadsheets and reports. **P6: Transcript R2 Tholakele.rtf - 6:65 (19:19)**

Jabulisile's comments on her experience of the impact of the structure on a culture of relationships and career progression clarity:

> I think there wasn't much of a culture there. It's a very flat structure. I think it's difficult for people to be supportive of each other because it's so flat. You know you get like a desk. And then there's 15 people and only one manager. And then

> that manager is waiting for someone somewhere up there to move on. **P5: Transcript R1 Jabulisile.rtf - 5:75 (44:44)**

Lulu's experience below adds to the lack of clarity regarding progression:

> At the bank, everything is very flat. You just sort of work and you don't know if it is getting (you) anywhere. And I think if you get a promotion it's like okay, but you had people there for 12 years and still not a director. And then you have people who are there for four years and they are directors. So, nobody ever knew how this worked. **P9: Transcript LM2 Lulu.rtf - 9:54 (111:111)**

Lulu experienced gender as a barrier to building strategic relationships that support progression. She explains that to get ahead, extra-mural activities factored into critical relationships, and as these included activities like cycling and golf, she was excluded. Women had historically mostly filled administrative roles in the division and were assumed not to participate in after-hours events.

Managers were found to be relatively uninterested in participants' careers. Lerato became frustrated when, feeling unchallenged, she approached her manager to explore other opportunities in the bank, and was advised to remain in the role for two years to learn about the bank.

Nolwazi took a different approach and she shares how she dealt with the change from the highly structured PSF programmes to a less structured environment within the banks by taking ownership of her development and drawing on personal resilience:

> I needed to decide where I'm going to start. Then they introduced me to the first one (manager) but the rest of them I met all of them. I just would call them up and say: "I'm this young CA." This is *my* programme. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:35 (133:133)**

The banking positions and opportunities that they had been enticed into, often by recruitment agencies, failed to deliver, and the role failed to materialise into a long-term fit for participants. Nolwazi accounts how this influenced her decision to leave:

> Then at the end of the 18 months it was a bit of a light-bulb (moment) and it was a shock to the system when I got to the end of 18 months and I realised that maybe actually I don't want to be in the bank. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:113 (137:137)**

Leaving banks

Despite the large percentage of participants joining banks, only three of the eight participants were still employed at banks at the time of the interviews. Of these one had already resigned, the other two were actively thinking of leaving. Kumo explains how her tenure at the bank is nearing its end:

> I want to move out of banking. I'm working on it. It might take longer than I'd like to. I want to go for a medium-sized company. I'm more a business person now. I would like to go and do and work in the operational side of life and do different things. **P8: Transcript LM1 Kumo.rtf - 8:65 (310:310)**

The employment period in banks was found to be relatively short, with the average period being one to two years, and only one participant with tenure longer than two years, as depicted in Figure 12 below:

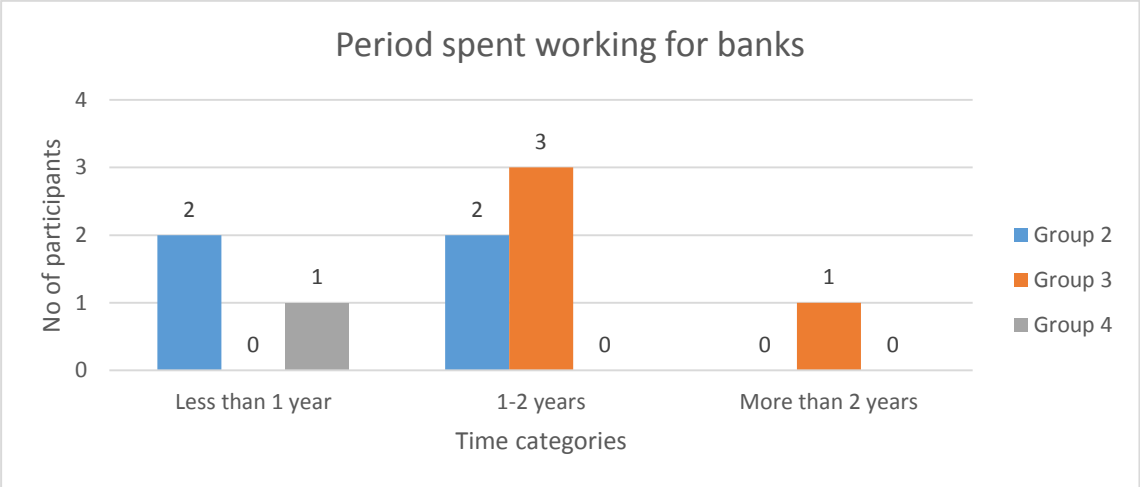


Figure 12: Time period spent working for banks

A general dissatisfaction with the overall experience and a recognition that this was not a long-term career solution was the underlying reason for resignations from the banks.

No literature highlighting banking as a natural next step for qualified accountants could be found, and the findings of this research may contribute to an understanding of the first transition out of professional practice.

5.2 Career transitions to corporates

This section deals with the reasons for taking new roles, the experience of the transition, transition challenges, and organisational dynamics faced.

Individuals are differently motivated to take on new roles, where push factors (Lee & Mitchell, 1994) include dissatisfaction with the current role, being driven by their own need to experience something new towards continued growth, and desire for career progression elsewhere. Pull factors, such as the attraction of a new job created through third parties such as recruiters, were also given as participants' reasons for career transitions.

5.2.1 Drivers for career transitions

As described in earlier sections, only few participants had clear aspirations or career goals when leaving their firms. Job changes were often driven by a curiosity to explore other opportunities, a sense that there would be many available opportunities, a dislike for audit work, or push factors within the firm. This research found that the uncertainty and lack of clarity on career choice resulted in explorative job choices after their time with their firm for most of the participants.

In Group 3, only Lulu was extremely clear on her goal to work in investments and private equity and deliberately chose a role that supported her longer-term aspirations. Glenda's comments below show how her initial commitment to remaining within the firm later changed to a desire to explore a career outside the firm:

> I realised that I do like the environment and that I'm enjoying the auditing and the interaction with the clients, so that what's I was learning. So, at manager level, I decided to stay on until partner level. **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:18 (11:11)**

Glenda continues:

> I felt that I could see my trajectory in the firm but also felt that I've always wanted to be an FD or CFO for a listed entity, to be able to get those skills. And I felt that being a partner you don't necessarily get the same skill set of running as a

> financial director in a business. **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:81 (35:35)**

Deciding on the next career step was difficult, and participants found that guidance was not readily available. They struggled to identify their strengths and interests, as Lerato accounts below:

> I was in exactly that situation where I thought, now, what do I do? The one thing, so I am very good at identifying what I *don't* like to do. To this day, I still struggle [with] what I *want* to do. **P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:21 (77:77)**

Kumo describes a similar struggle and, significantly, mentions that this remains a question she asks herself rather than having access to independent advice:

> But then towards the end of my first year as an AM I started thinking, okay, what do I want to do? It is a question you keep asking yourself. And if you're like me, you keep changing the answer. **P8: Transcript LM1 Kumo.rtf - 8:9 (41:41)**

Accepting jobs can provide a gradual increase in experience, but as Grace describes below, these still fail to be truly fulfilling:

> I felt that it gave me that next sort of bit of learning that I hadn't managed to get exposure to in my training period. And I'd used that time to also think about what next. Where do I want to go? I knew that as fun as learning was it wasn't my lifelong sort of dream where I'd want to settle down. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:25 (94:94)**

Zodwa explains how searching the job market and attending interviews can assist in identifying the type of roles she does not want, thereby eliminating these from the range of options:

> I didn't know whether it was going to be a finance role or investment or tax. I had no idea. It's only when I started going through interviews that I felt, oh, yes, I don't think I want to go finance manager route where now you've got auditors coming through and they're looking what you've done. **P15: Transcript LE4 Zodwa.rtf - 15:16 (63:63)**

Career aspirations, with several participants, continue to emerge and develop as there is a sifting of what they like and do not like, and as they experience organisational dynamics and begin to make choices around what they enjoy or dislike.

Asked about what her next steps would look like, Vicky raises her lack of certainty:

> That's part of my problem, I don't. Sometimes I think, do I want to go do my own thing? But then I think what is that thing? I like the idea but what do I want to do? Do I really want to go out again and hustle for work? Is that what I want to do? So, I have those conversations, I don't know. I'm hoping one day it's just like going to come together in my head and it will make sense. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:81 (77:77)**

Tholakele's account below highlights the ongoing decision process on the journey of unfolding career options with the hope of finding her ultimate niche:

> I didn't want to go that route either, so I had to think about, am I ready to just become a lecturer for the rest of my life and write research papers. And I felt like I was missing out on what was happening in the industry in the qualification that I studied for, so at that point I started thinking I should get back into industry. I'm still young, lecturing is something I enjoy, but I can always come back to it later. And I looked at a few entities that I could then join but I wanted a kind of transition into industry. **P6: Transcript R2 Tholakele.rtf - 6:72 (41:41)**

Consequently, participants moved into a variety of roles ranging from banks, financial roles in corporates and parastatals, lecturing, investment and private equity, and moving to empowerment firms. The search for the perfect fit and niche was found to be an ongoing question. Nomvu, who had the longest tenure (10 years) in her current organisation, expresses the following sentiment:

> I want to grow. I want more. A position that is more strategic than the one that I have. I can't put a title to it because it depends what organisation whatever. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:98 (168:168)**

This research found that participants lacked support systems providing access to advice and guidance in shaping their career, often resulting in a trial-and-error selection of jobs. They had hopes and dreams of success but an undefined path of getting there. This research showed that even longer-term tenure in a role was not necessarily an indication that the individual planned to stay longer term.

5.2.2 The role of recruiters and recruitment agencies

This section deals with the role recruiters played in participants' job choices. Most participants interacted with recruitment agencies for job placements, but the experience did not feature prominently in their narratives. Recruiters were regarded as useful contacts to identifying opportunities, and contact was initiated either by participants themselves or by the recruiters. Two elements were noted: firstly, on being unclear on career aspirations, individuals turned to recruiters for assistance with the expectation that they will find a match for them. Secondly, as Naledi relates, recruiters actively target individuals for opportunities, particularly with a BEE focus:

> I went to go meet a recruitment agency. You know they call you: "You're a young CA, you're black, you're smart. Let's see what we can give you. Let us know what you want". This recruitment agency told me exactly what I thought I could see myself doing. **P3: Transcript S3 Naledi.rtf - 3:31 (30:30)**

Participants' related unmet expectations that recruiters would genuinely aim to find placements that were a good fit for them. Instead, some found the commercial drive for recruiters to make placements outweighed a real interest in the candidate's need. A neutral sentiment towards recruiters was also noted, where a pragmatic approach to recruiter utilisation was taken. Grace relates a more positive experience with a recruitment agency:

> Luckily the person sat down with me, you know the agent, because she was from a different space with much more experience she sat down and listened to me. Luckily, she listened to me from that space and made me, through my interviews, see that this is the right decision. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:64-65 (216:219)**

At least one individual from each group had contacted, had been contacted by, or was placed through a recruitment agency. Nolwazi finds recruiters to be persistent in their pursuit of candidates:

> I got the call again from ABC: "The Group CFO wants to meet you". So, I said: "Well, I'm not coming there. I already declined two FDs there". I mean this guy wastes my time. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:83 (304:304)**

Jabulisile explains her experience of how skilled recruiters read candidates to best position and market opportunities:

> My interviewer, we just hit it off…And you know he saw me dream (laughs) and he said (emphatically) “No, you’ll fit in here, you have such a nice personality, you’re so great, the work here is challenging”. **P5: Transcript R1 Jabulisile.rtf - 5:29&30 (36:36)**

Dudusile’s experience is that approaches made by recruiters are relentless:

> But even now I’m still getting a lot of approaches. Sometimes I get the sense the request is not genuine to the extent that people just want to throw your CV in the pot. It’s not about if it makes sense for you or if it makes sense for the company. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:17 (71:71)**

To conclude, recruiters were experienced by most participants at some point in their career and while helpful in identifying opportunities, were less effective in understanding the individual and providing her with career advice.

5.2.3 Challenges in transitioning to corporates

This section will cover the challenges participants experienced in transitioning into corporates. Where relevant, experiences from banks are included for purposes of completeness. Participant transition narratives included the attraction or recruitment phase; the immediate period on joining, including joining logistics; the medium-term challenge of establishing credibility; as well as the longer-term integration into the hierarchy, organisation, teams and work.

Attraction and recruitment challenges

This research found that attraction and recruitment challenges included that placements were motivated by racial transformation, that there was a mismatch between the role offered and the reality, and a lack of challenge in the new role.

BEE-motivated placements: Participants experienced being recruited into roles which were sold as one thing and turned out to be something different. Roles with impressive

executive titles and role descriptions that promised a good career move disguised what was often recruitment into the organisations' strategic EE programme or building their potential leadership pipeline. This resulted in feelings of frustration and disillusionment for Grace:

> I found when I made the jump, the way in which the agents had pitched it was materially different to what it was when I got there. What I had thought was going to be Chief Operating Officer… I'm coming in to fulfil that role. Only to discover that it is like going back to articles. They were running a whole programme. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:47 (160:160)**

Learning that there were at least two incumbents as potentials for a future role gave the clear indication that, while being developed, their competencies were being evaluated. This was different from the executive role they thought they had been hired into. Consequently, there was pressure to perform and a sense of uncertainty regarding their role success.

Role expectation and reality mismatch was experienced when the new position had not been clearly defined at the outset, as was the case with the various rotational programmes in banks. This led to ambiguity regarding what was expected of them and what they could expect of the programme.

Lack of challenge in a new role was experienced negatively by participants and, where unresolved, contributed to short tenure within a role. Feeling unchallenged resulted from work that was highly routine in nature, that could be mastered quickly, or which was limited in range and volume. Nomvu's experience below was in an organisation where there was a culture of stretching out work out over a month, which could have been completed in two weeks:

> And now, you work on this thing and then after a week you are done, or two weeks. And that's it. Then you've got some routine work and then I got bored. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:32 (64:64)**

This research found that many transitions into new roles disappointed participants, with actual roles not living up to the expectation of the new joiner.

Establishing professional credibility

This section covers the challenges experienced after joining a new organisation. Participants experienced challenges around their credibility, feeling pressure to perform, especially when replacing less qualified but experienced people.

Being treated as a newcomer without credibility: Participants found that their appointments into senior roles did not automatically translate into being treated as a credible equal by colleagues or superiors. Frustration was felt when colleagues and bosses were dismissive of their contributions. Nolwazi's experience was a direct reminder that she was the newcomer, which undermined her credibility and created a sense of exclusion:

> The biggest challenge was the GM guys, the heads of business units, because they've got their reservations in you, and they'll remind you so many times in the first few months: you don't know what you're saying. You don't know what you're talking about. You know, giving them advice, and just giving them their numbers. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:65 (247:247)**

Particularly where the appointments were BEE motivated, participants found a further challenge in establishing credibility when they found they were *assigned artificial activities* that were not taken seriously within the business. Grace found that the real running of the business was continued by those in existing roles.

> One kind of like felt that these projects they want us to work on are just sort of let's-keep-them-busy type of projects and not necessarily projects that the business would then take on seriously. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:49 (164:164)**

Identity only as a black woman and not seen as a professional was a deterrent to establishing credibility for Nomvu:

> They didn't see me as a chartered accountant, no! They only saw… this black… woman. That is now everybody is now trying to make sure they are developing; they are fast-tracking. For me, that's how I felt. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:48 (93:93)**

Replacing less qualified staff who remain in the organisation created discomfort and isolation for Nomvu. As a complete newcomer, this is perhaps more difficult than the tension experienced for fast-tracked individuals in PSF.:

> In terms of the grading at the mine, CAs were put at a higher (job) grade. He was in the position where they appointed me, and then they moved him because they needed someone who understood technical and was good at accounting, whatever, so they moved him to project accounting. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:63&64 (113:113)**

Nomvu continues:

> You understand this person, they've been doing the thing for the last 15 years, you can't be… you *are* a threat to them. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:93 (154:154)**

Pressure to perform or prove oneself worthy was found to be an ongoing challenge; one which proved to be tiring for Nolwazi:

> I don't like proving myself as a person so I have never operated from that front. I know it is there. I'm aware of it. But I think at this stage now I know what I'm capable of… I suppose mainly, maybe it was Company B and previously as well, sometimes I see this in the bank because people expect zero from you. I am shocked, because I don't even operate in average. I know I operate above average. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:85 (319:319)**

Nolwazi continues:

> Because it felt like waking up every day and putting up an armour. You go to war. And some days you don't even feel that the armour fits right. So, I suppose you don't even feel like you've got energy to fight…Unfortunately, I think it was not just a once-off example that it happened. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:68-69 (255:255)**

Disregard for the professional training was felt where there was a lack of understanding of the CA training, as Dudusile relates:

> I think obviously being a black woman, I was the only black CA in the division and there were other people. I must say that I faced the challenge of, you are young, you're a CA, please don't think you're going to tell us how to do our job. So, I faced that dynamic. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:25 (107:107)**

The experience of being a new joiner and then having to prove their worth beyond being seen as a statistic, and being appreciated for the rigours of their professional training, creates challenges in achieving early success in a new role.

Bosses and managers

This research found that individuals in the role of bosses and managers presented challenges to participants. Bosses who were over-protective, unsupportive, overshadowing, micro-managing, or used exclusionary tactics, are described below.

Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) highlight the importance of leadership involvement in the newcomer's transition. The individualised socialisation (Ashforth & Saks, 1996) calls for interest shown in the newcomer on an individual basis. The experiences shown below were found to be examples where this did not take place.

Over-protective bosses: Where the newcomer is still trying to establish her new identity and credibility within the organisation, the apparent well-meant protection from her superior does not necessarily translate into a positive experience. Grace found that the result can be a guarded approach towards her, which can hamper her overall integration and delay building relationships:

> And that's when I felt like, how do I measure myself around whether what I'm saying makes sense? And when people are almost 'yes men', because I think people also felt that I was protected by the MD. So, it felt that: "We can't be seen not be welcoming this lady who wants to do this and who wants to investigate stuff and ask questions". **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:55 (192:192)**

Unsupportive bosses: Grace also experienced encountering a further challenge when the boss him/herself does not believe the newcomer to be credible. This is evidenced in behaviour such as being closed to her ideas and not taking the work that is produced seriously:

> When I was talking to him you could hear that like, in essence he is saying 'no', he is finding creative ways of saying no. But he is not willing to buy in. He is not willing to think about it… And I can send detailed proposals, this and that, spoke to big businesses that side that we can link up with and nothing. None of it

> happened. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:56 (192:192)**

Ayanda experienced a lack of support, which was expressed in the form of being excluded from meetings:

> So, there would be meetings and he would forget to invite me and other like brainstorming sessions, he would forget. So, I knew, like doing silly things like that. **P11: Transcript LM4 Ayanda.rtf - 11:24 (44:44)**

In comparison to the degree of support and mentoring in PSF, participants found bosses and managers wrapped up in their own activities and not being available to the newcomer. Dudusile puts it as follows:

> I always say that's because my boss is too busy. He is too busy managing stakeholders, managing his own career, his own ambition of moving upwards. He simply wants people who would come in and start doing. He is not conscious of there is a transition that is happening here. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16: (296:296)**

Being overshadowed by the boss: Working in the shadow of a strong boss with established credibility within an organisation can be disadvantageous to her own credibility becoming visible, as experienced by Grace:

> That's why she was always there. She would be the one that … CEOs wouldn't talk to each other. They'd rather use her to discuss and get the answers through and so on. So, that also felt that maybe if you're working behind someone that great, no-one else can actually see whatever little greatness you feel you have. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:41 (140:140)**

Lulu experienced *being micro-managed* as disempowering and not being able to operate as a professional. This restricted her sense of development.

> It was nice to know okay, fine I'm learning the best skills from that but I always felt that in a way he was holding you back. So, when other people were like 'no, let her go'. He's still going to be like, 'ugh, she's not ready'. **P9: Transcript LM2 Lulu.rtf - 9:36 (89:89)**

Unwillingness to hand over work: Dudusile was brought in as successor to a retiring financial director. His resistance to teaching her and to handing over work to her left her with unchallenging routine daily work rather than fulfilling the role she had been

hired for. This relates to Horwitz and Jain's (2011) findings on resistance due to fear of being replaced. Dudusile says:

> Well, in the six months I hadn't done anything really… Literally nothing happened. In the six months, I can tell you what I did: I checked payments. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:57 (248:248)**

Dudusile continues:

> I had a very different expectation of the content of work. In my mind, what would have happened is that I would have worked closely with the FD, shadowed him, had experience of him showing me what needs to be, teaching me and telling me who he is. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:80 (329:329)**

I found the above to resonate the findings by Horwitz and Jain (2011) of white male-oriented organisational culture still being characterised by lack of communication and a degree of fear of being replaced. This research highlights the importance superiors play in supporting a career transition.

Organisational environment

The impact of the organisational environment on career transitions is described in this section. Some transitions remain unsuccessful due to a *disempowering organisational environment,* which disregards the newcomer gaining credibility through her contribution of ideas and thinking. Grace relates her experience:

> So, that is when I also felt then how do I get people to trust me more and to understand that I'm here to work with you but perhaps be willing to take other ideas, which is tough. It didn't really happen even 'til the day that I left. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:58 (192:192)**

Comparing the new environment to their experience in PSF was found to be a factor in several participants' transition challenges. Dudusile's account below highlights how participants missed being surrounded by like-minded individuals who are at a similar intellectual level, the team-work experience, managing teams who understand their responsibilities, clarity in deliveries, a structured environment, and finally, a common understanding of the capabilities at each level.

> In the auditing environment, people are always working together, people are always socialising together. You almost form a kind of family situation, whereas in corporates it doesn't always follow. Maybe I had that reference. I sort of expected if I asked you a question you won't say you don't know. Maybe it is just a different culture I guess. Corporate is a different culture. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:40 (166:166)**

Organisational changes such as successive restructures resulted in rapid changes in bosses, which impeded the development of relationships with bosses. This resulted in uncertainty of expectation, having to re-prove their capability with a new boss, and having to renegotiate development and progression plans with bosses unsupportive of further development investments. Ayanda relates:

> I had such a lot of bosses. I think about four of them. Initially, there was a guy looking after the department. Then there was a restructure. We got someone who had no experience in acquisition finance. That was painful. Barbara was caretaking the department while we were going through another restructure. And then there was another restructure last year. **P11: Transcript LM4 Ayanda.rtf - 11:30 (52:52)**

Organisational resistance to black managers made the transition challenging for participants. In addition to being new to the organisation, Nomvu experienced that her social integration was hampered by being different:

> It was like now for the first time I started to experience that they are not seeing me. Although at the firm they treated me differently, I think they had their own reasons. They wanted me to *stay*. But here now this is an organisation that has policies, and I start to feel like …I'm a qualified chartered accountant, but that is not what the people saw… They didn't see me as a chartered accountant, no! They only saw… this black… woman. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:47 & 110 (91:93)**

Organisational language barriers created feelings of being excluded, where Afrikaans was the dominant organisational language and both spoken and written communication was Afrikaans. Dudusile relates her experience:

> I understand. I speak a bit. I mean like in-house would be in Afrikaans and emails would be in Afrikaans. You would be given a forwarded email and you must act on it and it is in Afrikaans. Now I need to ask somebody to translate it what does this say. No, meetings would not be in Afrikaans. But you just… something came

> out in the whole culture that for me it was uncomfortable. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:55 (244:244)**

Organisational hierarchy was experienced as disempowering, and where work had to be carried out through the chain of command even where the person with the information sat within view of the participant but could not be directly approached.

Performance management practices: Receiving negative performance feedback, despite having met all the targets set, resulted in disillusionment, anger at unethical behaviour by the manager doing the rating and confusion at the lack of clarity of measurable expectation.

Organisational politics, where progression to leadership positions becoming politically motivated rather than on merit, was experienced as uncomfortable. This was experienced in the higher education sector, where the integration of two institutions had resulted in power struggles. Tholakele found that the departmental positioning for power conflicted with her purpose of making a difference through teaching.

This research finds that organisational dynamics present challenges to new joiners in the form of practices, policies, organisational culture and individual attitudes.

Onboarding programmes, training programmes and newcomer support

This section deals with the challenges participants experienced with onboarding programmes or lack thereof. The organisational approaches aligned to *individualised socialisation tactics* (Jones, 1986*).* Organisational onboarding strategies for newcomers varied between organisations but were experienced by most participants as their own responsibility. Navigating the new organisation and learning the policies and procedures was partially organised by some but largely left to the individual to find her own way. Individuals within the corporate structures were not always found to be helpful or to necessarily understand the nature of training programmes. Lerato relates her experience:

> I think they did it differently before I joined. So, how I found out how this process works was through the sessions organised by HR. But in setting goals, for

example, I kind of had to figure it out. **P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:76 (285:285)**

Glenda explains that when she made her transition to corporate, a structured onboarding programme was in place but support after the formal programme was lacking:

> The onboarding in the first week was actually quite good and then within two weeks they had also taken us to their London HQ to do the onboarding there as well, as they say that [at] executive level everybody needs to do the HQ onboarding, and then thereafter you are on your own (laughs). **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:51 (37:37)**

Glenda continues:

> I say they had good intentions but I don't think there was a specific plan. **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:85 (43:43)**

Dudusile, who joined the same organisation as Glenda, relates her experience following the structured programme:

> I think Company V was, it almost was like, (sighs), I've never been on a battlefield but it almost felt like that. To the extent that like you're just simply on your own. Even your boss is not bothered. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:66 (292:292)**

At more senior roles, Dudusile explains, organisations are not sufficiently explicit regarding the delivery expectations of newcomers:

> Do organisations actually think you can't expect this from us? You are senior. You are qualified. You are supposed to just come in and off you go and just deliver. Maybe that's what they're expecting. That's why I begin to ask myself the question that maybe we expect too much. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:84 (336:336)**

Dudusile continues that, as a newcomer, she was often left to figure out the role on her own:

> Not from my boss! And I've been doing this job for a year. Now that is the biggest joke in my mind. So, it was just like that. It is such a spin. That nobody has time for anything or anyone. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:68 (296:296)**

Ineffective joining logistics resulted in one participant arriving and finding that her new

employers had forgotten about her joining. She was sent home while they sorted out a laptop and other arrangements.

Supportive relationships: Participant experiences fell into the disjunctive and divestiture categories (Jones, 1986), where no particular person was assigned to assist them and they had to navigate their own way through the organisational culture. Dudusile reflects on her experience, where she met someone much later, who would have been able support her during her transition:

> "I really wish I had met you before you joined Company V because you would have had a completely different experience. Because I would have explained to you exactly what is going on, how you could have positioned your role". She just said basically: "If I had spoken to you before, the experience would have been very, very different". **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:79 (324:324)**

For the most part, participants found little support as newcomers, which included identifying individuals that would be of assistance.

Lack of investment in development was found to be demotivating and often resulted from a manager being the conduit for the individual's growth aspiration to organisational investment. Ayanda's experience below serves as an example of this:

> The guy that I was reporting to is not a CA. He did try it at some point in his life and it didn't work out. So here you are and you've got that qualification that he also wanted to get but you don't know whether sometimes some of these bad vibes you're getting that he's got a gripe with that because every time you talk about continuous development, that you need to go on courses and stuff like that, he kind of looks at you funny: "No, the bank is not going to fund that". **P11: Transcript LM4 Ayanda.rtf - 11:33 (52:52)**

Participants found organisational lack of understanding that registered CAs are required to achieve continuous professional development through courses to remain registered. In addition to this, participants are personally motivated to further their learning. As many as five participants raised support for continuous development as important. Two of these joined a university where further academic studies are expected, resulting in Masters degrees for the participants. The remaining three participants came from across Groups 2, 3 and 4, and found little support from their

organisations for further studies at the MBA or Masters level. Cost, and not seeing the value for the organisation, were among the reasons given to participants as to why they would not be supported for such studies.

Personal challenges

The final area of challenges found by this research was the requirement of personal adaptability of participants in a new environment. Transitions required having to build new relationships, get role clarity, build self-belief and deal with anxieties. The negative emotions of the personal uncertainty became a motivation for some participants to minimise the uncertainty (Hogg, 2009) through seeking out relationships and support. Establishing themselves in the new organisation was challenging. Drawing comparisons to other experiences, especially expectations created by their experience in PSF, left many new environments wanting. Dealing with the disillusionment that arose when finding themselves in 'transformation' roles required personal resilience and survival.

5.2.4 Transition positives

In contrast to the challenges described in the previous section, participants also described positive experiences related to their transitions. While the positive experiences were less frequent than the negative experiences, recognising these helps understand their positive impact on newcomers.

Attraction and recruitment positives

Positive joining experiences: Well-planned joining logistics created a welcoming start for the newcomer, making her feel that she had been expected. These included being welcomed by her manager, having a laptop ready, and being given clarity on her role. Some employers, such as the banks, made provision for flexible start dates, affording the newcomer short-term secondment with her firm before starting her role with the bank.

> I called them up and said: "I've got this offer can I go? I'll be back". And they

> responded: “Sure”. I thought: “Did that just happen?” I also had to learn at the time that if you just ask exactly for what you want, you’ll get it. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:30 (123:123)**

Participation in a strategy session which coincided with her joining, provided clarity on the team’s purpose.

Establishing professional credibility

In contrast to the section on the challenges related to establishing credibility, this section presents the positive experiences.

Achieving competence and finding a *good fit* between interest and the role was experienced positively, as Lerato explains:

> And I get to do the same work that I enjoy because I have found my niche in terms of what I want to do finally. It took a couple of years. But I really enjoy the space that I’m in right now. **P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:108 (303:303)**

Feeling positively challenged, even if it meant moving beyond her comfort zone, was found to be rewarding, explains Grace:

> I found that that some sort of ambiguity is... what I thrive on. Which is what the bank didn’t have. At the bank, you did this on day one. Day two you did that. Day three you did that. At four o’clock you do this and this and that’s not me. So, I found that getting into that space and again. And even my own exposure just got elevated. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:35 (120:120)**

In the research, fewer positive experiences regarding establishing credibility were encountered than were negative experiences. The few positive examples, however, highlight that a positive environment together with personal approach can result in achieving credibility positively.

Bosses and managers

This section provides the positive experiences with superiors for newcomers, who were supportive, acted as organisational champion, or were good role models.

Supportive bosses who believe in the newcomer and trust her capability was an

empowering experience that Lulu describes below:

> I was sitting with the boss and here they actually trusted me. They were [saying]: "You are going to go and talk. At the very first meeting you are going to talk because you did the documents". And then they'll step in where I don't understand, you know? But everything was open. I could do as much as I wanted. It was like being back at the firm. **P9: Transcript LM2 Lulu.rtf - 9:66 (155:155)**

Organisational champions, when found, were beneficial to establishing credibility with others. Nolwazi relates how her CEO communicated her arrival in the organisation in an affirming manner:

> One of the very first things, she just made a big deal about was my arrival. She announced (it) to everyone. She put pictures in the emails. And I was like "wow". Obviously, I had (previous) experiences at the bank, SAP experiences. She communicated all of that. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:47 (171:171)**

Dudusile experienced working with what she called an 'incredible' boss. She felt empowered by being delegated work and being trusted to deliver, and says:

> The fact that he delegated so much. I literally did his job at a lower level. And he made sure that everybody knew about it. He almost marketed your name. He made people know who you are, what you are doing and how well you are doing. You know he was happy to sort of just sit at the backseat and sort of push you forward. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:60 (268:268)**

The experiences described above demonstrate that, despite these experiences representing a minority of the participant sample, supportive relationships positively impact the transition experience.

Organisational environment

In this section, the positive organisational environments encountered by participants is discussed. Two aspects were noted, namely working in inclusive environments (Wang et al., 2015) and an environment with a cultural fit.

Inclusive environments provided positive experiences, especially where individuals were recognised and valued for what they brought in skill, experience and

competencies. Glenda gives the following account of her experience of an inclusive environment:

> I was the only female with about 15 males in the leadership team and one black man, so it's not necessarily transformed in gender or race etc. But somehow not feeling that… there was no issue of people bringing, or that you feel there's a race or gender issue. So never have I felt that sense before, it was very interesting working with them because as I say I never felt that discomfort there. **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:54 (37:37)**

Working with black professionals was a positive experience with reduced pressure to prove themselves as worthy, resulting in more enjoyment of the work. Ayanda, in Group 3, found that working in the bank with a largely black team in leveraging and financing, which she says was quite rare, found that it contributed to her enjoying the environment. Lulu found a better cultural fit when she joined a black-owned private equity organisation. She found though, that her family had initial reservations that moving to a black company was too risky and that she should rather remain with larger corporates.

Onboarding programmes, training programmes and newcomer support

This section presents the findings of positive onboarding approaches. O*rganisational onboarding and development practices* that were positive included an onboarding experience with a visit to international headquarters (already mentioned in the previous section). Two Group 4 participants joined the same organisation (at different times), where they experienced a structured and thorough newcomer training programme where pre-defined steps had to be completed. Even here, however, the internal organisational support from others was inconsistent, as Zodwa relates:

> At X they've got this academy programme where if you come in to be a deal maker with them, they take you through that programme for two months. …So, that is the challenge that you find that the people who are there for a long time they already have learnt the shortcuts and they don't care what you want to learn. And at the same time, you still want to learn. **P15: Transcript LE4 Zodwa.rtf - 15:19-25 (89:97)**

Leadership development programmes delivered by business schools or internal

programmes with some use of external providers were experienced by several participants. Nomvu provides this example:

> There is this big group policy and this leadership development (programme) and therefore I'm one of the people that are in that development programme. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:52 (97:97)**

This research finds that, even at more senior levels, elements of formalised onboarding processes are experienced positively by newcomers.

5.2.5 Time-period during which new positions are challenging

This section deals with the references made by participants to an adjustment period after a promotion or an appointment, during which life was particularly difficult. The finding from this research is that this adjustment period ranged from a minimum period of three months to a maximum period of 18 months. Participants often referred to being in a survival mode with conflicting priorities during this time, as Vicky's and Lerato's comment below show:

> My first year I was miserable because I was not getting to do the things I used to enjoy doing. I was getting time to spend with my clients but I wasn't getting time to spend with my teams. Because there were so many different things and different responsibilities that you needed to do. And the things that used to make it good for me in coming to work, I wasn't getting to. So, it was a really tough year for me. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:48 (46:46)**

> So, it was I think the first three months was obviously you're surviving, you're in a new environment completely. Very different from a work perspective to that which I was used to. **P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:26 (96:96)**

It is during these times that participants mentioned experiencing loneliness and being without clear guidance. A specific adjustment period relating to career transitions was not found in the literature.

5.2.6 Tenure in corporates

The tenure of participants in their respective corporate roles, with some exceptions, tended to be of short duration, as depicted in Figure 13 below. Individual participants held varying number of jobs and the diagram below excludes jobs in the banking sector.

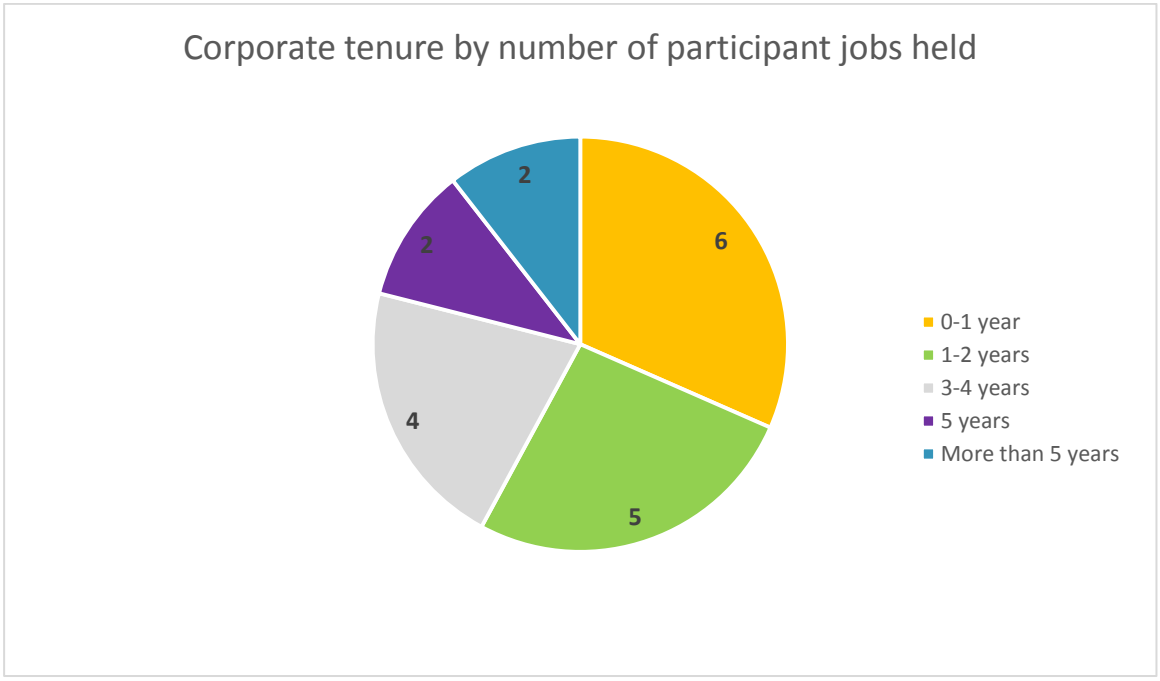


Figure 13: Tenure in corporates by number of participant jobs held

Six jobs held had tenure of a few months to one year, five jobs had tenure of between one and two years, four jobs had tenure of three to four years, and only four jobs fell into tenure categories of five years or more. This finding is significant in highlighting the relatively short tenure of African women CAs as represented by the sample.

5.3 Mentorship and coaching in corporate roles

As was the experience in PSF, the roles others play in the transition, integration, development and career of an individual fall into roles of mentors, organisational champions, and external coaches. This section presents the findings from Groups 2, 3

and 4 but excludes Group 1, as these have been covered in Chapter 4. As described below, most participants did not experience strong mentorship within the organisations they joined.

Of the participants in Group 2, only Tholakele came close to a mentoring relationship with a more senior person with whom she could discuss her career, and even this she described as being informal. Jabulisile's short time away from PSF did not lead to significant new relationships, and Lerato, despite her desire for one, remained unsuccessful in identifying a suitable mentor.

In Group 3, Kumo and Lulu experienced some good managers, but despite developing good relationships with a few, none developed into mentors. Ayanda's promising relationship with a senior woman in the bank dissolved when that person was transferred to another division. No mentorship relationship had developed. Nolwazi describes a relationship with an organisational champion where the relationship had elements of mentorship:

> I suppose it has never been too formal but there's always that person, like if you think back, it was Vanessa, who I could even just go and say I'm thinking I want to resign. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:127 (371:371)**

Glenda (Group 4) experienced mentorship by a partner in her firm but no mentorship relationship had developed outside the firm. Nomvu found support outside her organisations with professional coaches and psychologists. Zodwa's mentors came from outside the organisation, from her father's network of friends and acquaintances. During her postgraduate studies while working, Grace obtained exposure to an iconic individual who she would have loved as a mentor, but time constraints on the side of the prospective mentor prevented that from realising. Dudusile was the only participant in Group 4 who identified a mentor in one of her roles.

This research found, therefore, that little mentorship takes place within organisations for African women CAs transitioning to corporates.

Coaching

This section deals with the coaching experiences of participants, their understanding as well as expectations of coaching.

Only two participants (Group 1 and 4) had actual experiences of executive coaching. Vicky had coaching to prepare her for her partnership admissions process as part of an accelerated development plan. This coaching through external service providers was arranged by her firm, and Vicky explains that attending coaching had not been her choice:

> And to be honest, when I started it was not a choice I had made – the firm had put me on this accelerated development programme and part of that was it would be good for me to go on executive coaching. So, I did it but I did not know what the value of it was going to be but I was doing it. So, it was very uncomfortable for me. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:70 (66:66)**

Nomvu had two experiences of executive coaching linked to leadership development programmes in two different organisations. Of the participants, she had the best understanding of the value to be derived from coaching. Summarised below are the benefits Vicky and Nomvu found from coaching.

Vicky explains how coaching helped her identify blind-spots and enabled her to work on them:

> After a couple of sessions, I got to see the benefit. You know when you are listening to yourself on a video and someone has told you something and you say 'Ja, sure' but then you see it and it becomes a very different experience. And in the end, I was glad I did it. It was the little things about me that I had always been uncomfortable about. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:71 (68:68)**

Both Vicky and Nomvu found that learning to receive and accept feedback, including feedback from assessments, helps understand yourself better. Vicky explains:

> It was very uncomfortable. First you start out and do the tests – are you an introvert or extrovert, so that was ok, because you do that throughout your operational career. But then you start to delve into how you talk, practicing how you talk, being on camera... and it was tough for me because I'm not a… I felt like I was under a microscope. The first couple of sessions were really, really, tough for me. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:69 (66:66)**

Nomvu relates:

> I'd say I'm receiving feedback but I would pretend. Those are the things the coaching helped me with. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:76 (132:132)**

Coaching allowed Vicky the time to learn to introspect and reflect, which she describes as follows:

> It becomes a different space. But in the end, I was glad I did it. In the end, it also made it easier when I became more introspective because of those conversations I'd had with people about myself. I'd never been an introspective person before executive coaching. You did what you had to do, you just got on with it. I never thought I'd see benefits of introspection or stuff like that. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:72-73 (68:69)**

Vicky explains how coaching helped her in her transition to a more senior role:

> It was good and probably something that I did not know I needed at the time., but it helped me a lot in my first year as a partner. That ability to just kind of isolate and put things in perspective and really talk to yourself if I can put it like that. That was something I probably never would have done before that. **P4: Transcript S4 Vicky.rtf - 4:75 (69:69)**

Nomvu, who experienced a tough transition into a new organisation, describes how coaching helped build her confidence and ability to cope:

> It did help me now in terms of… because I thought all along I could adjust. It affected me, it did help me in building myself. Now, to make me more strong... I used the coaching for that, I used the coaching because I wanted to cope, I wanted to be able to build relationships. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:56-57 (105:107)**

Working with a coach makes one accountable for taking action and practicing new behaviours, and using the coaching sessions to talk through the learning. The regularity of coaching sessions helps build on the learning and the accountability of the individual. Nomvu reflects on this experience:

> And therefore, I *will* start to do those things and I *will* start to practice them. I'll hit a rock, and then I'll know when it is the following week and I'm at my coaching session then I will share this. This is what happened. And I started to learn to have a relationship even now with other people. **P13: Transcript LE2**

Nomvu.rtf - 13:78 (132:132

Executive coaching positively impacted Nomvu's personal life, and she explains how it helped her to achieve improved work-life balance:

> I had to face some challenges in my personal life, and *that* it also helped me (with). Because I managed through that period I managed to move on in a better way. So now I can handle things differently. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:83 (136:136)**

Nomvu adds that coaching helped develop interpersonal relationships through understanding herself better and being able to see things from the other person's perspective. This formed a strong foundation for her in learning to manage others. She explains:

> You understand this person, they've been doing the thing for the last 15 years, you can't be… you *are* a threat to them. Coaching helped me to identify those things that I never learned – *that* person, when they see, what do they see? **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:93 (154:154)**

Executive coaching, Nomvu finds, assists with learning to operate at a strategic level:

> Then you know how to manage people. But upwards, that's the part that I now really have to work on and then I have to understand, you know, when you are at a strategic level, positions, the things that are really important and not important... once you are at those levels, there are politics. Relationships, and how to navigate that, without being a politician. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:101 (178:178)**

Nomvu also learnt that executive coaching cannot address all areas and situations which arise where therapy is required. She describes her experience:

> But it doesn't help to deliver good work where you are just not yourself. And that started to affect me, because sometimes you start to park things. Put them in the back, you know. All those things and then it started to affect my health and all that. Then I ended up on anti-depressants for about six months because it was just too much. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:62 (109:109)**

Nomvu continues:

> And then one thing also, when I was attending coaching, I realised that I also

> need some other help. That's where I found myself going to get psychiatric help. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:69 (119:119)**

Other participants had not experienced executive coaching but articulated a need to have someone to assist them in their development, or retrospectively had identified periods in their career where coaching would have provided them much-needed support. This was felt when there was confusion about their career direction or in transitioning to a new role, as Lulu says:

> You just sometimes get so confused. That looks sexy today and you (think) maybe I could do that and be FD. Then you want something else and so I think it would help to have someone who can help you focus (on) a thing at a time or get direction. So, it can be just (that) this is too much. **P9: Transcript LM2 Lulu.rtf - 9: (175:175)**

Dudusile describes her need as:

> Because firstly, it is not just a transition of job. You're transitioning from being a technical doer to being a leader. So, you need somebody to help you with that transition... My personality inclines me to do things in a certain way, to manage relationships in a certain way, to talk to people in a certain way, so I need to be aware of all this. Somebody needs to help me to be aware of all this. I'm not always aware. **P16: Transcript LE5 Dudusile.rtf - 16:77 (320:320)**

In conclusion of this section, participant experiences highlight the value of coaching, and those who have not had the benefit of coaching expressed an interest in the support coaching could provide.

5.4 Requirements for success

Across the interviews, participants commented on the required competencies for success, and these are described in this section. Some overlap with those highlighted in Chapter 4, as identified during the training contract period and post training contract period in firms, and thus both will be covered in this section.

Leading and managing others requires the ability to delegate. Emerging from the research findings as subsets of delegation skills, are firstly, the ability to let go of the

work and secondly, allowing and trusting others to do it. For participants whose technical skills had been the foundation for progression to management, this was a tough lesson to learn. Letting go of technical work meant having to learn new skills. Other skills required learning to manage conflict to ensure delegated work was carried out. And finally, the art of asking for help was identified as necessary for effective delegation.

Teamwork and collaboration skills as competencies were raised consistently across all groups. Participants mostly accredited developing this skill during their time within the PSF and recognised its later value both in or outside PSF.

Developing good interpersonal skills and learning to build relationships are key to managing others. This is particularly relevant in stepping-up and taking charge of teams and the work, especially when others are not yet convinced of her taking charge. Interestingly, participants in Group 3 and 4 remarked that being flexible in building relationships with different people is critical each time a new job is embarked on, making this not only an important management skill, but also a personal skill in managing transitions. Learning to be empathetic was listed by several participants as an essential management skill. Linda says:

> But when I deal with first years that are that timid and nervous and that shy, it reminds me of myself and now I know how to coach people to deal with those kinds of conflicts. **P2: Transcript S2 Linda.rtf - 2:4 (5:5)**

Interpersonal skills including assertiveness skills are critical in learning to work with, or deal with, tough people in the work environment.

Managing others requires the ability to give honest feedback on others' performance. Participants lived experiences as recipients of feedback included feedback that was at times painful or confusing, non-descript, or alternatively sound and balanced. The ability to listen is included in their recognition of the importance of the art of providing feedback to others.

Further to acquiring skills to managing others, progression means transitioning from a specialist role to a manger role. Nomvu describes how she struggled with this:

> They wanted a lot of CAs within the organisation. We were in that group when they were trying to recruit CAs. Then we went for some management assessments – those are the other things that traumatise you – I went to the management assessment and I *failed* the management assessment! So, remember I am a technical person not a manager. **P13: Transcript LE2 Nomvu.rtf - 13:72 (126:126)**

Managers are expected to be able to prioritise, and this skill was described as becoming more relevant with increasing seniority. A final management requirement was found that to be recognised as a manager, she must behave like one. Credibility at manager levels develops when others see her believing in herself as a leader.

Success competencies beyond managerial skills include the ability for business development and business management competencies. Earning the trust of superiors creates relationships conducive to further growth. Learning both that one can say no and how to do it was mentioned as a tough lesson. Project management skills need to be developed in order that all aspects of work are kept in balance, to ensure people, clients, board members, management, budgets, and timelines are all under control.

Beyond relationship building, the ability to network at various organisational levels and external to the organisation was raised across all participant groups. This included learning to network with clients. Grace remarks:

> It was very much around relationship building and understanding that I'm not actually a huge player of golf. I barely have swung a golf club but I understand the value behind those engagements and why I would want to be there from a business perspective and so on. **P14: Transcript LE3 Grace.rtf - 14:98 (184:184)**

To conclude, the findings of this section are that skills such as leading, managing, delegating, working in teams, prioritisation, interpersonal skills, and giving feedback are required to establish credibility within a new role. Business skills, project management and networking skills were found to further contribute to success.

5.5 Family relationships and support

In the interviews, the family backgrounds of participants featured strongly. These findings are included here as they contribute to the understanding of the transition challenges.

Family background

Many participants were the first in their family to achieve a tertiary education, with some parents not having completed high school. Two participants were orphans with no family support in terms of career guidance. Nolwazi says this about her situation:

> I largely had to grow up by myself and raise my siblings because my parents passed on in my first year of varsity. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:88 (331:331)**

Where participants' parents had tertiary qualifications, they were often teachers or nurses. Consequently, their understanding of jobs was that they have hours and a set place of work. Participants as well as their families mostly did not have a background that prepared them for the corporate world. Families often did not understand the hours that needed to be worked in a professional environment, or even why the participants would choose to work long hours.

Mothers were found to play a major role in many participants' lives, from being strong role models on work ethic and needing to work hard, to being described as the participant's cheerleader and best friend. Although their mothers did not always understand exactly what their daughters' career entailed, they were a great source of support. Jabulisile calls her mother her biggest cheerleader:

> I could put my mom there, because she is my biggest cheerleader in everything I do. With my mom and career, she believes you need to work. She is a hard worker so she believes in that, working hard you know? **P5: Transcript R1 Jabulisile.rtf - 5:70 (68:68)**

Fathers, although they featured less strongly in narratives, were mentioned by three participants as playing a significant supportive role in setting high expectations,

believing in education and financial support. Lerato appreciates how her father would travel far distances to fetch her when she had to work late:

> My dad was very supportive as well as much as he knows very little about what I do to this day. As far as working late, he would come all the way to Isando from the West Rand to fetch me. **P7: Transcript R3 Lerato.rtf - 7:12 (26:26)**

Kumo acknowledges that family background and culture could be a limitation in terms of receiving the right support, advice and guidance in terms of life decisions:

> So, there's those small things that if you're taught earlier in life they make a difference when you come to the workplace. So yes, culture does limit you in that way. **P8: Transcript LM1 Kumo.rtf - 8:63 (302:302)**

In the two sections that follow, the role of becoming or being a mother, as well as the role of spouse or life partner, will be presented.

Motherhood and career transitions

With nine participants being mothers, motherhood was included in the challenges they faced. These included the time period of becoming a mother and the adjustment that this required with work and balancing priorities. The stories ranged from Dudusile, who had her first child at 18, to Kumo, who had her first child at the same time as writing her board exam, to Naledi who had twin boys at the same time as transferring to another division, and finally to Glenda, who had become partner and left for an executive role before having her first child. Each experience required its own level of adjustment and the extent of support that each had, varied.

Learning to prioritise, delegate both at home and at work, and balancing home and work were challenging. Several participants are single parents and the relationships with the fathers of their children varying from supportive relationships to non-existent relationships.

The expectations required for career success often conflict with the demands of being a mother, as Nolwazi explains:

> And maybe half of the time you realise that corporate is about presence. It is about (being) your most witty and your intelligence. It is because you are there and know what's going on. And if you want to be running at three to pick up a child every day, you will be excluded and not know certain things. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:98 (363:363)**

In the case of Naledi and Kumo, employer organisations provided support and flexibility to them in their roles as mothers. Naledi accounts the reaction from friends when they heard about her period of maternity leave:

> I took seven month's maternity leave. I remember when I was on maternity leave people said: "You actually took seven months, you know, companies don't give seven months". **P3: Transcript S3 Naledi.rtf - 3:52 (32:32)**

Kumo relates that she has flexibility in leaving earlier but that some personal resilience is required in this:

> You do pick up a bit of resistance from time to time but I can deal with it. I can openly address it to say that I notice you are not happy with me leaving. Is there a concern that we need to address? At least it is open. So, I think it is now more open instead of just leaving things to be. **P8: Transcript LM1 Kumo.rtf - 8:81 (290:290)**

Becoming a mother can contribute to reasons for resignation, as was Glenda's choice – she became a mother after having built her career. She explains her thought process:

> In terms of making time family-wise it... it's, I wouldn't say a conflict. For me, the one must take a back seat for the other one to excel. One can do everything for one to excel, especially for me personally that I always want to excel in the work environment and can't necessarily be average. And you want to put in the effort, you want to put in the hours, so it's just that striking that balance is a bit difficult. **P12: Transcript LE1 Glenda.rtf - 12:65 (47:47)**

Motherhood and the challenges it brings was found to play a role in the considerations of participants in their career transitions.

Spouses and life partners

In this section, the findings from participants' narratives of life partners or spouses is presented. These factored into career decisions for either more work-life balance, or the type of person became a factor in participants' feeling torn between a permanent

relationship and a career. Life partners and spouses were found to fall into several categories: those who were also professionals and understood the time requirements of a professional career, and those who were found to be the most supportive life partners. Jabulisile highlights the latter below:

> My relationship with my husband's parents and the relationship with my mom and dad – he doesn't mind if we have take-aways – to eat take away. If it's late – also he's also very much career – he wants to publish papers, he wants to – I mean, it's not the same as how I grew up, you know? Another thing is, my husband is very passionate about his work, hectically passionate about his work. **P5: Transcript R1 Jabulisile.rtf - 5:48 (56:56)**

Partners with traditional expectations were found to be the most challenging and created stress for the participant. Cultural traditional expectations are those which require a woman to be subservient, take care of domestic matters, be home to cook meals and take care of children. Being respectful to the husband's family, even having to provide meals to them, is a further expectation. Lulu found herself at cross-roads in her relationship and explains:

> My biggest dynamic is being with a traditional partner. There (are) certain expectations. Even from his family's side that we've always had issues with. There is a bit of: "You are going to have to choose between your career or me and our relationship". **P9: Transcript LM2 Lulu.rtf - 9:94 (187:187)**

Nolwazi explains her reluctance to get married to a partner with traditional expectations:

> But for me for my career because when I am with him now, it is traditional rules. You must sort out the cooking. You must sort out everything. And then you just get so tired and then you get to work and you're not sure how you got to work. And you realise oh, I'm at work. **P10: Transcript LM3 Nolwazi.rtf - 10:99 (363:363)**

For those who were unmarried, some experienced societal pressure from family or others to settle down, whereas others, supported by their families, were comfortable remaining single. The findings show that family background for black women professionals can be an additional support or additional stress and pressure.

To conclude the findings of Chapters 4 and 5, this research highlights the specific challenges of African women CAs in their career transitions. To understand the challenges of transitioning from professional services, this research first provides the experience of transitioning into and within professional service. This is required as a foundation to understanding the requirements for future career transitions and the implications for coaching. Organisational, personal, family, and stage of career all play a role in the success of career transitions. The reasons for leaving organisations and the motivations for leaving professional services were also covered.

The next chapter will discuss the significance of the findings.

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This section brings together the findings set out in the previous two chapters. The meaning and impact of the findings is also discussed. This study examined the lived experiences of African women CAs and their career transitions from PSF to corporates, to understand the implications for coaching practice.

The continued impact of South Africa's EE remains a driving force on the importance of the chosen group of professionals. During the period of the research, the 2015 and 2016 CEE reports were published (Republic of South Africa, 2015 and 2016). They reflected disappointing results, with little progress in the representation of Africans at senior management and top management level. Inexplicably, the 2015 report departed from a detailed gender-ethnicity breakdown, thus curtailing insight into African women's progress. Accountants were found to be fourth in the top ten most difficult positions to fill in South Africa (Manpower Group, 2015). Such shortage of skills, coupled with high EE targets, suggests that individuals such as African women CAs are in high demand for employers.

The research revealed that recruiters target African women CAs for actual positions or to boost their candidate pools with EE candidates. This study found that organisations hiring African women CAs are often EE motivated. The narratives of participants reveal the practice of fast-tracking within PSF, banks hiring them as recently qualified CAs, organisations hiring them to feed their managerial and leadership pipelines, as well as making well-intentioned placements at senior levels. The above was not found in the literature and this research therefore contributes to the body of knowledge.

By selecting four participant groups, the research provided an understanding of the lived experiences of transitions both within and outside PSF. By including participant narratives from entry into PSF, progress within PSF, reasons for leaving PSF, and entry into banks and other organisations, a comprehensive and rich insight into their lived experiences was obtained. The study revealed the significance of the first transition into PSF, as this became the reference for expectations in later transitions. When reviewing the literature, a similar finding was not encountered. Joining PSF as

part of a cohort provided the new joiners with a distinct joining experience, taking the shape of institutionalised socialisation (Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Despite early challenges, participants were adequately integrated into their respective firms. Technical training, on the job training and support from others, although variable in effectiveness, was present, supporting both technical and professional development (Anderson-Gough et al., 2002). They shared this experience with the rest of their cohort across race and gender, thus the overall experience is unlikely to be unique to the research target group. What was more likely to be unique were the adjustment challenges at the start of their careers, where their partially disadvantaged backgrounds resulted in being less prepared for the dynamics of professional environments than peers. This included being unprepared for the need to have mobility to travel to more than one place of work, not being able to afford a car, encountering language and culture barriers, and being unaware of organisational expectations. The challenges faced on entry differed from the earlier findings of Hammond et al. (2009, 2012) and highlight changes since 2000. Generalising this to African men would require further study. Although specific to the South African environment, further research would reveal the extent that this would be applicable to individuals from other developing countries. Awareness of this may assist employers of graduates to adapt programmes for more effective first time transitions into the world of work, particularly where diversity goals underpin employment targets.

A successful transition can be said to have been achieved if a psychological connection or contract develops (Wöcke & Sutherland, 2008) and if the individual becomes embedded in the organisation. The three-year training contract period provided a sufficiently long time period for a psychological contract and organisational embeddedness to develop (Holtom et al., 2008). Psychological ties developed in peer-group relationships and relationships with organisational seniors. A fit with organisational values developed with those who stayed or returned to PSF, and those who left spoke favourably about their time with their firms. The perceived sacrifice on leaving (Holtom et al., 2008) was articulated in their reasons for remaining on at least for some time, which included the opportunity to gain managerial experience. Organisations they joined later were often compared to their initial joining experience.

Those remaining in or returning to PSF demonstrated a continued attraction and viability of the traditional linear career option through a continued upward trajectory (Clarke, 2013; Culpin et al., 2015). Upward progression increased responsibility and hierarchical status. Functional transitions, such as the protean career model (Hall, 1996; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), were less frequent within PSF but not altogether absent with two participants having taken on non-auditing roles within their firms. The 'fast linear' upward trajectory of participants in the South African context appears to contradict the findings of Richardson (1996) that this category mostly applies to males. The findings of this research show that, in the South African context, this applies equally to African women. The difference may lie in males, especially white males, more easily establishing mentorship relationships.

The transition challenges of the first promotion within PSF after the CA articles, such as apparent unpreparedness for the role, a steep learning curve, and the pressure to perform, left many participants struggling with their new role (Kornberger et al., 2011; Lupu, 2012). Adjustment and survival at this career stage, although challenging, is made possible when there is interest and support from others within the organisation in their success. The uncertainty that is felt at this stage indicates that a more formal intervention such as coaching could make this transition more effective. This research found that aggressive fast-tracking of African women is common in South African PSF. Accelerated promotions to senior manager, director and partner result in significant pressure to perform, struggling not only with resistance from peers whom they had overtaken in promotions, but also partners in the firms. This research identified an adjustment period of six months to a year before participants felt that they had found their feet in their new role. During this time, they felt lost and isolated, and experienced it as a tough period requiring survival. The aggressively progressive nature of promotions places individuals into repetitive adjustment periods of six to 12 months, which require tenacity and resilience to survive. The individual, still struggling with the adjustment into one role, is drawn into the start of the next promotion process. The promotion processes to senior roles are stressful as the individual needs internal preparation and external preparation to face promotion panels. The study revealed that in some cases, organisational mentors help in this process, but that the lack of a formal

mentorship programme makes the experience inconsistent. Participants from PSF were more likely to have organisational mentors or champions than participants who had transitioned to corporate environments.

In this study, participants expressed their interest in and openness to additional support that independent coaching could have provided, which suggests that the transitions into the more senior roles would benefit from coaching.

Transitions out of the PSF environment

The comparisons between the groups remaining in PSF and those who transitioned out highlighted the different career options of the traditional linear and the newer career models. The decision to transition out of PSF is largely motivated by a desire to explore options for career growth and differs from Wallace's (2009) findings. Achieving the prestigious qualification of CA(SA) creates generic optimistic expectations of many great job opportunities. Consistent with Booysen and Nkomo (2010), they see themselves capable of progressing. The findings of this research reveal, however, a lack in understanding of and preparation for selecting opportunities to shape the future career. Consequently, upon leaving, individuals face uncertainty in selecting appropriate opportunities for their future career. Lacking the personal background where they can draw on parental guidance for career advice, as well as feeling inhibited from discussing it with their current employer, career choices become exploratory. With only few exceptions, the study identified uncertainty in career direction, resulting in the safe and viable option of joining banks. The large banks in South Africa are household names with good reputations and strong brands. They are known as employers of CAs and hence an attractive option to young CAs. Leaving their cohort of three years, they enter a new environment with much hope and expectation. In joining the banks, they experience a newcomer experience resembling an individualised socialisation approach (Jones, 1986), and newcomer integration is largely left to chance. The joining and socialisation experiences in banks ranged from being somewhat effective to one instance of being highly ineffective. The relatively short average tenure suggests that the experience and environment does not create a long-term career option. Supervisor

interest in the newcomer was lacking (Sluss & Thompson, 2012). Mentorship relationships are limited and restricted from forming due to frequent organisational changes and individual rotation to other departments. Strong peer relationships were also absent in the participant responses. Technical capability and intellectual capacity helped participants to quickly master the work required, but then feeling frustrated with a lack of challenge. The exploratory career transitions and the perceived safety of joining banks was not found in the literature and thus contributes to the body of knowledge.

Organisational embeddedness (Holtom et al., 2008; Ng & Feldman, 2007) was not achieved. Improved preparation of the individual through coaching to better cope with the transition experience could enhance the return on investment and retention of the qualified hire in the banking sector.

The exploratory nature of career choices resulting from uncertainty highlights the 'butterflying' career effect (McCabe & Savery, 2007). Employment offers were accepted across industries, ranging from banking, education, investments, telecommunications, retail, automotive, and financial services. Evidenced by participant job tenure, few found a good fit in the organisations which they joined and continued to try and grow their careers through inter-organisational moves (Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012). The nuance of the butterflying effect is slightly different in this study, being less about collecting experience across different industries and more about being a quest for opportunities that would challenge them, give them credibility and where they would achieve a sense of authenticity (Cabrera, 2007), as well as be enabled to contribute their capabilities. Their uncertainty regarding career opportunities and choices, coupled with the adjustment challenges in new organisations, links to the felt uncertainty and new identity construction experienced by executives in a study by Bennett (2015).

Transitioning into corporates presents numerous challenges which, when understood, may support successful transitions. This study shows that an organisational climate lacking warmth, acceptance and inclusion (Wang et al., 2015) towards the newcomer,

and which excludes newcomers from knowledge exchange and decision-making (Wang et al., 2015), hampers integration and reduces tenure, as seen in the lived experiences of participants. A proactive disposition (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), personal agency and adaptability play a role in the survival of the individual (Bennett, 2015). Successful participants drew on their internal reserves of resilience to navigate the corporate landscape their new jobs brought. The ability to deal with felt uncertainty (Bennett, 2015) seems to play a role in the individual adjustment process. The literature on socialisation of newcomers focusses mostly on the earlier career stages and this study contributes towards the understanding of transitions at the experienced level.

When asked about the support they had at each transition point, participant responses highlighted the need for support from others in terms of moral support, peer support, mentorship and guidance, or even someone to be their champion. For some, the need ran deeper and resulted in seeking psychological support. The two participants who had received coaching spoke highly of the impact it made on them and their successful transition into partnership on the one hand and on the other, success in a new managerial role. The study reveals that individual support and an internal champion is beneficial to newcomers' transitions, yet organisations seldom ensure this happens. Too often this is left to chance. A frequent absence of other African women in senior positions highlights a gap in terms of role models who share a similar background and leaving participants to carve their path on their own. The right type of support is simply not always available, and if available, the person providing it may not always be objective. Continued failure to address the required support will perpetuate turnover mid-career (Lupu, 2012) and the gap of strong African women role models in business will remain.

Business leaders already deal with a vast number of issues in a world that is increasingly changing, competitive and volatile. Sustainability, profitability and pressures from stakeholders leave little room for taking a newcomer under their wing. This study highlights that when leaders are part of the group that excludes the newcomer from decisions, there is little chance of a successful transition, and tenure

is likely to be short. Leadership disregard for the potential expertise and capability these professionally qualified women bring into the organisation translates into the perceived lack of newcomer credibility by others in the organisation. The sense of isolation and pressure to perform without anyone truly backing them up does not bode well for successful transitions. Supportive leaders who set the organisational tone regarding the newcomer, make newcomers feel welcome and empowered to succeed.

Contracting professional coaches can assist newcomer transitions where time, inclination, awareness and capability constraints prevent corporate leaders from successfully impacting the newcomer experience. Organisations ill-equipped to support transitions would benefit from the services of an executive coach to support the newcomer's organisational integration for the first few months. This would benefit both the newcomer as well as the organisation. The newcomer becomes more self-aware, is supported in building her network within the organisation, and designs a strategy for success in her new role. Organisations benefit from an improved integration process for critical hires, partnering with the coach to ensure the newcomer effectiveness in line with organisational strategy, and improved retention of newcomers. The return on investment on expensive recruitment fees would be an added benefit.

Proposed transitions coaching model

To address the specific needs of professional African women such as CAs, the participants lived experiences have been used to develop a proposed transition coaching model which focuses on the types of transitions experienced. This research highlighted the unique challenges and requirements of each transition type, and the proposed model in Figure 14 attempts to provide guidance to coaches to identify transition type and appropriate coaching requirements.

The path to South African organisations achieving successful growth in numbers of professional women in their managerial ranks and executive positions is fraught with complexity. Factors include the experience level at the point of entry, an appreciation of the extent to which the new environment differs from prior experience, and an

acknowledgement that the mentorship and support must be more formally arranged as there is less likelihood that it emerges naturally. An awareness of the impact the organisational culture may have on the newcomer joining the organisation is also critical.

The model differentiates four situations where transition coaching for African women CAs or other professionals may be helpful. These are: coaching for the first transition into the world of work, coaching for individuals being fast-tracked, coaching in preparation for career transition, and finally, coaching when transitioning to corporates.

Coaching can help individuals manage transitions (Wasylyshyn, 2003). Organisations who take up the challenge to better support the transition experiences of African women CAs joining them may contribute positively to the progress of EE. Nothing similar to the model was found in the literature and the model adds to the understanding coaches can bring in South Africa and elsewhere.

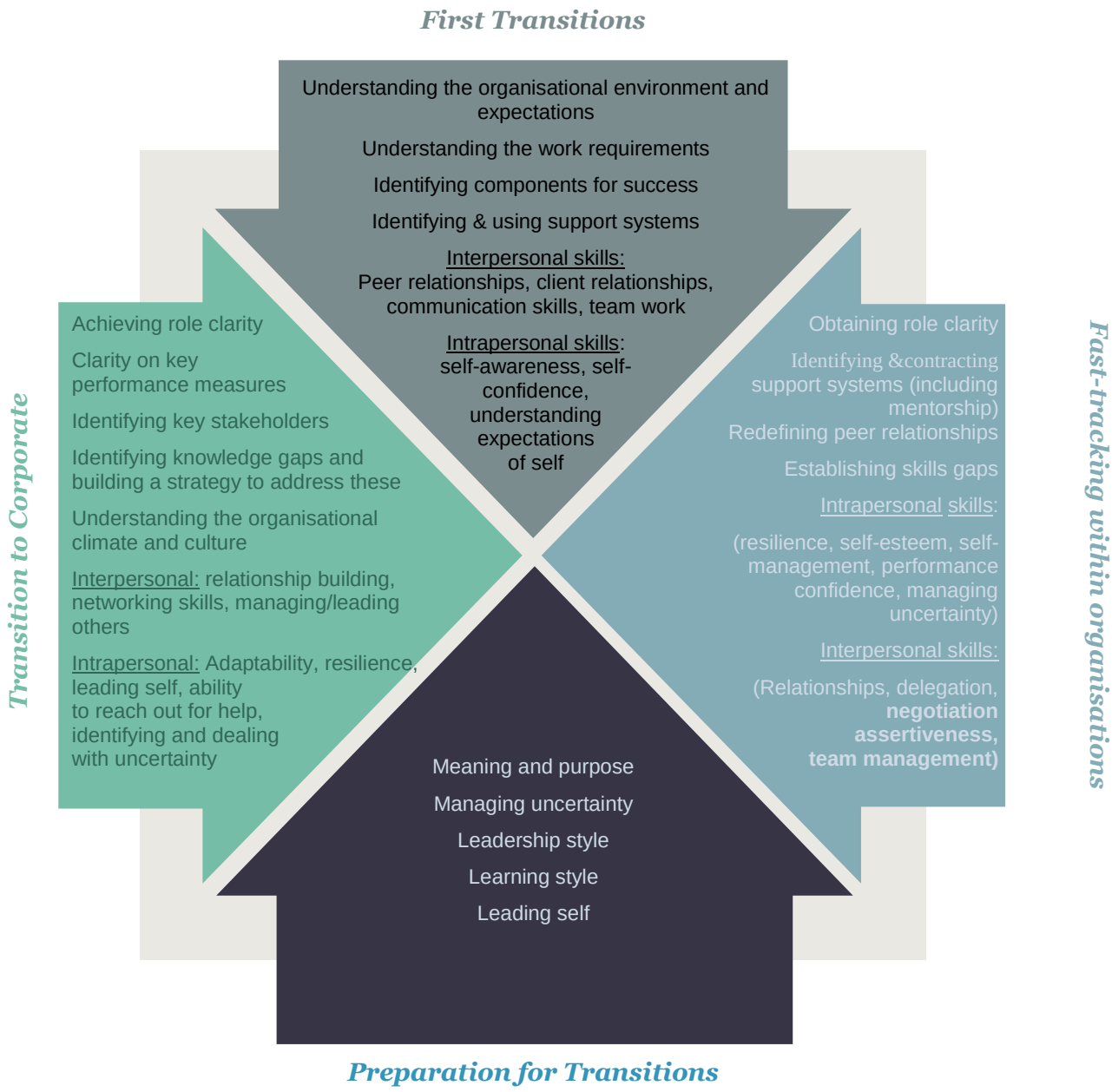


Figure 14: Proposed Transitions Coaching Model

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions of the study

The focus of the lived experiences of African women CAs and their transition experiences within the South African context contributes to the body of knowledge on different types of transitions and the challenges faced during such transitions. The proposed coaching approach highlights the need to identify the specific transition level and the different areas that may be most beneficial to the individual.

This research may be of benefit to the following:

7.1.1 Benefit to individuals

During interviews, the participants expressed feelings of isolation in their accounts of career transitions. They saw others coping with their work challenges and consequently, they felt they too should be coping, which prevented them from reaching out for support. They soldiered on through the confusion, barriers and challenges. They kept any fear of failure to themselves and dealt with uncertainty of new roles on their own. Even the uncertainty regarding job choices and career direction is seldom expressed to others. A benefit of this study to individuals is that it recognises this sense of 'going it alone', and thereby reveals to individuals that what they experience is shared by others.

If organisations adopt a transition coaching approach, individuals benefit in having a safe space to articulate anxieties, uncertainties and fears. Identifying these and sharing them with a coach, individuals can more quickly and effectively determine coping strategies for adapting to the new environment. Together with the coach they would agree on steps to take, and would benefit from the coach holding them accountable for carrying out their actions. Coaches who understand experiential learning cycles, such as those described by David Kolb (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), or transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), would benefit individuals in taking them through successive learning

phases so that they can make sense of each leaning cycle, discuss outcomes of actions, recalibrate if necessary, and emerge with stronger adjustment capabilities.

7.1.2 Benefit to organisational leaders

Organisational leader responsibilities are broad and the time available and skill required in people matters can be limited. The ability to coach and mentor new members of executive and management are skills that not every leader possesses. With EE pressures at race and gender levels, there is more focus on making demographically aligned appointments than managing such newcomers. Leaders are often unaware of the challenges newcomers face when entering organisations, and are often unaware that their organisational culture is a barrier to newcomers. Prejudice against age, experience level, faulty assumptions on intellectual capability, and perceived threat of the newcomer, all contribute to less than welcoming organisational environments. By highlighting some of the challenges faced by participants, this research contributes to leaders' understanding of required support. By engaging coaches for newcomers, leaders provide the professional intervention needed to support the newcomer. Additionally, a systemic approach that aligns objectives and outcomes between the organisation, the coach and the individual (Kahn, 2014) helps create awareness of the specific newcomer challenges unique to the organisation. Leaders benefit from a newcomer transition that is aligned to the business context, the organisational culture and the socio-political climate. Leadership time spent with newcomers becomes more focussed and effective as the coach and newcomer agree on what is needed from the leader. Coaching sessions held with senior teams to address diversity issues help raise awareness of the unconscious bias they may be projecting.

The outcome is improved openness to new joiners, which impacts the experience for the new joiner and consequently, accelerated effectiveness, integration and improved tenure. New managers or executives who are supported have greater role clarity, develop the right networks, and are able to make a contribution to profits.

7.1.3 Benefit to human capital departments

Human capital teams take responsibility for successful recruitment, the onboarding of new joiners and the development of new joiners. In the South African context, the human capital teams play a pivotal role in supporting the organisational employment equity strategy. Quick turnover of new joiners means that the time-consuming effort of recruiting replacements is required. Human capital departments are often stretched and spend more time on reactive activities than proactive activities. Two options exist with transition coaching, namely that coaches are appointed into the human capital team or that the service is outsourced. These options mean that coaching can complement the overall onboarding experience and human capital staff can focus on other activities that move the organisation forward, rather than getting stuck in repeating the same work.

Interacting and working alongside coaches further benefits human capital teams in upskilling an understanding of coaching and how this assists with effective leadership development.

A cautionary note must be added here, that since executive coaching is an individualised intervention, it comes at a premium. Such investments would be reserved for specific appointments and are not intended to be a replacement of the organisational onboarding responsibilities.

7.1.4 Benefit to recruitment companies

Recruitment agencies and executive search companies build their reputations on the capability to search for and identify suitable candidates for client organisations. Extending the service offering to the area of coaching candidates for transition preparedness may provide the edge over competitors. The related cost can be included into placement fees as a full offering. Reputable recruitment companies already provide background checks as well as some form of assessments. This would extend the suite of offerings and provide better return on investment for their clients on placement fees. In the South African context, where there is high demand for black

professionals, recruiters run the risk of falling prey to the temptation of quick placements. If the individual has a bad experience and is unprepared for the change, tenure is likely to be of short duration. A good experience and being prepared for the transition is likely to result in a more successful transition. Both the individual and organisation are likely to give reputational accreditation to the recruitment company, which ultimately is good for business and likely to attract more candidates for placement.

7.1.5 Benefit to coaches

Coaches in professional practice support organisations and executives across a broad spectrum of situations. This research highlights the career choice uncertainty, the challenges in first transitions into the workplace, the challenges of fast-tracking, barriers that the newcomer may experience, and the challenges of inter-organisational transitions. The proposed transitions coaching model that was developed from the research outcomes (Figure 14) provides coaches with an understanding of the type of career transition a client may be considering or going through, and provides guidance on coaching areas that may be helpful to the client. The approach taken by coaches remains unrestricted as they deal with the uniqueness of each client.

7.2 Suggestions for further research

The understanding gained of how challenging the first transition into a PSF can be for individuals coming from a background that was disadvantaged (economically, educationally or in exposure to corporate know-how) is specific to the South African context. Further research would highlight the extent that this would be applicable to individuals in other developing countries. Awareness of this may assist employers of graduates to adapt programmes for more effective first-time transitions into the world of work, particularly where diversity goals underpin employment targets.

Further study, such as a longitudinal study on whether successive transitions that build on experience from earlier transitions are less or more successful, may be useful. The

extent to which experience and maturity plays a role in later transitions would make for interesting research.

Replication of the study in other major centres of South Africa could expand the understanding of transition experiences in smaller towns and the impact of different cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, this first study of black women CAs and their career transitions shows that BEE requirements will continue to drive the hiring and progression of African women in organisations. Racism, language, gender, race, sense of isolation, gaining credibility, and lack of organisational support structures are significant obstacles for many women. Until organisations have developed and embedded sound newcomer integration processes, professional coaches can significantly contribute to newcomer transitions, using the model proposed. Coaching is further proposed as component of newcomer integration approaches for the African woman CA, holding both the individual and organisation accountable for transition success.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter to participants explaining the research

Dear (Participant),

Thank you very much for your time and for agreeing to take part in this research exercise.

The research is being completed as part of my requirements to complete a Masters in Management for Business and Executive Coaching degree at Wits Business School.

The purpose of this research is to identify how coaching can assist professionals who transition from a professional services firm to the corporate environment.

During the interview, I will be drawing on your personal experiences through questions that have been developed based on my research of literature. Your input based on your own career transition experiences will help my understanding of the factors that should to be taken into account for determining how coaching can assist effective transitions of individuals.

The names of individual participants and the organisation being surveyed will be kept confidential in the research report, but the overall findings will be published.

Regards,

Gerlind Smith

083 459 4799

gerlindsmith@gmail.com

Letter to participants 2 explaining the research (participants who have remained in professional services firms):

Dear (Participant),

Thank you very much for your time and for agreeing to take part in this research exercise.

The research is being completed as part of my requirements to complete a Masters in Management for Business and Executive Coaching degree at Wits Business School.

The purpose of this research is to identify how coaching can assist professionals who transition from a professional services firm to the corporate environment.

During the interview, I will be drawing on your personal experiences through questions that have been developed based on literature research. The input on your own career transition/progression experiences within your organisation will help in understanding the factors that should to be taken into account for determining how coaching can assist effective transitions of individuals.

The names of individual participants and the organisation being surveyed will be kept confidential in the research report, but the overall findings will be published.

Regards,

Gerlind Smith

083 459 4799

gerlindsmith@gmail.com

Appendix B: Research instrument

Before we begin, could you please provide me with some relevant background demographic information which helps contextualise your interview responses.

Part 1: Participant demographics

Name	
Date & Time	Location
Title	
Position	
Marital Status	
Children	
High School	
University undergraduate degree	
University CTA	
Year of CA qualification	
Articles completed at which firm	
Number of years at firm after articles	
Position on leaving	
Employer after leaving	
Position	
Period of employment	

Are you still in the same company?	
Have you received coaching in your career?	

Part 2: Interview questions

Introduction:

Establish rapport through interviewer introduction. A brief background to the personal interest in this topic following many years of working in a professional services firm and having been involved in the development of chartered accountants through their qualifying years and into leadership roles, but also experienced the departure of many CAs, particularly black CAs, into corporate roles. An interest in effective corporate transformation and the experience of individuals making that transition.

Purpose of the interview:

To understand the career transition experience of African female CAs who have moved from the professional service environment to a corporate environment.

No	Respondent	Questions & prompts
1	All	Please tell me about your career experience during your period of articles, including highlights and challenges. • What were your experiences of being mentored and/or coached?
2	Remained in firm	Please describe your reasons for remaining with (firm) and your experiences in the role of manager • Why did you decide to stay? • What support did you receive during this time? • Could you describe what was challenging for you?
3	Respondents who transitioned out	Why did you decide to leave (firm name) and join (company name)?
4	Respondents who transitioned out	Please tell me about your experience with your new company starting from the point when you were accepted the offer and including your first few days at your new company. • How did you experience the first six months in company (name)?
5	All	Could you highlight specific challenges that you experience/d and how you dealt with these? Prompts: Organisational challenges

		Personal challenges People & relationship challenges
6	All	Who or what helped you most in navigating your new environment/role?
7	All	On reflection of your experience, what do you believe could support other new entrants in making a successful transition?
8	All	What in your view are unique factors that black women CAs experience when working in corporate organisations?
9		Could you tell me about your experience of receiving executive coaching in your new role? How did you benefit?
10		Are there any other comments you would like to make regarding your career transition and how coaching can assist in this process?

Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences. This information will be most helpful to my research.

Appendix C: Letter of consent

Letter of Consent

The Graduate School of Business Administration
2 St David's Place, Parktown,
Johannesburg, 2193,
South Africa
PO Box 98, WITS, 2050
Website: www.wbs.ac.za

Masters of Management RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

The Impact of Coaching during Career Transitions

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction

My name is Gerlind Smith. I am conducting research for the purpose of completing my Masters in Management in Business and Executive Coaching at Wits Business School.

My research topic aims to understand the experiences of professionals transitioning from professional services firms to corporates and how coaching can contribute to the career transition. My specific focus is on African female chartered accountants who have made the career transition. The research I am conducting is a qualitative study for which I require individual participants with whom I will conduct interviews. I will analyse the responses from each interview and analyse the themes that emerge across the respondent interviews. The conclusions that will be drawn from the research and theory that will be developed from the conclusions will be written up in a report which will be made available to all participants.

Your participation in the research

Your participation is based on your personal experiences and is completely voluntary. Should you agree to participate in this research, you may subsequently elect not to continue in the research process and may withdraw at any time.

As my research is targeted at individual experiences rather than specific organisational settings, I am approaching respondents in their individual capacity. If, however, you prefer that consent for your participation is also obtained from the organisation you

currently work for, I will provide a consent form to be signed by the appropriate individual.

Respondent Confidentiality

The names and identities of all respondents will be anonymised in the research report. The final report will be published. Interview records and respondent data will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. In the report, organisations will not be named but will be categorised as corporate or professional services.

Expected outcomes and benefits

The research will be of benefit to organisations in understanding the experiences of individuals who have made career transitions from professional services firms into the corporate world and the impact that coaching can have on successful transitions. This would benefit individuals who are still to make transitions in the future.

The study will be completed by the end of 2016, and I will share a copy of my report with you if you would like to receive one.

Consent

I, ……., consent to be interviewed in participation of the research conducted by Gerlind Smith.

Signature: ……. **Date**: …….

Appendix D: Code families with codes

Summary of code categories with related codes

Category	Codes	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	TOTALS:
Accelerated Progression	Fast-tracking makes you feel like a statistic	1	0	0	4	5
	Lack of support when fast-tracked	5	0	1	1	7
	Prejudiced views on fast-tracking	6	0	0	1	7
	Pressure to perform	11	3	0	6	20
	Relationship challenges	3	1	0	8	12
	Resentment from others	7	1	0	7	15
	Self-doubt and insecurities when fast-tracked	0	0	0	3	3
	Accelerated progression is an opportunity	4	4	0	2	10
	Total: Accelerated progression	**37**	**9**	**1**	**32**	**79**
Articles experiences	Articles has many positive aspects	5	1	13	10	29
	Challenges during articles	13	6	26	17	62
	Lessons learnt	0	1	6	20	27
	Racial bias experienced by black trainees	1	3	4	3	11
	Total: Articles experiences	**19**	**11**	**49**	**50**	**129**
Bank experiences	Negative experiences in banks	0	10	1	13	24
	Positive experiences in banks	0	11	1	3	15
	TOTALS: Bank experiences	**0**	**21**	**2**	**16**	**39**
BEE appointments	BEE motivated appointments	1	2	3	17	23
	Black females easily receive job offers	1	0	2	5	8
	Prejudiced views on BEE appointments	0	0	0	2	2
	Resistance to BEE appointments	0	0	0	4	4
	TOTALS: BEE appointments	**2**	**2**	**5**	**28**	**37**
Bosses and Managers	Boss/managers cause of potential turnover	0	1	0	1	2
	Impact of women bosses	0	0	6	3	9
	Ineffective boss/manager experience	0	6	3	1	10
	Managers can limit your growth	0	1	2	2	5
	Positive experiences	0	1	4	3	8
	TOTALS: Bosses and managers	**0**	**9**	**15**	**10**	**34**
Career choices	Career aspirations	4	9	5	11	29
	Reason for joining banks	0	3	1	0	4
	Role of recruiters	2	3	6	6	17
	What jobs should offer	7	3	7	9	26
	TOTALS: Career choices	**13**	**18**	**19**	**26**	**76**

Coaching	Benefits of coaching	4	7	5	18	34
	Coaching concerns	8	0	2	1	11
	Coaching expectations	4	7	3	12	26
	Need for coaching	1	0	1	2	4
	Understanding of coaching	3	0	3	7	13
	Therapy: Professional help provides objectivity	3	0	1	4	8
	Total: Coaching	**23**	**14**	**15**	**44**	**96**
Enabling behaviours to manage self	At senior levels people expect you to be self-sufficient	2	1	0	6	9
	Disabling beliefs	1	0	2	5	8
	Enabling and positive beliefs	0	5	4	8	17
	Grasp opportunities when they arise	0	0	6	7	13
	Learn self-belief	0	0	1	2	3
	Learning takes place outside your comfort zone	1	1	0	1	3
	Learning to ask for help	0	3	0	0	3
	Maturity provides greater perspective	3	2	2	2	9
	Progression requires you to establish a new balance	4	0	0	0	4
	Self-driven career and personal growth	1	1	10	4	16
	Self-driven transition success	0	0	1	3	4
	Self-sufficiency helps you adjust	0	0	2	0	2
	Values are important	2	2	0	0	4
	TOTALS: Enabling mng self	**14**	**15**	**28**	**38**	**95**
Family factors	Motherhood challenges	7	0	10	1	18
	Family background	2	0	3	7	12
	Family influence and support	8	5	12	3	28
	Not limited by traditional expectations	0	0	2	3	5
	Personal background as barrier or limiter	0	0	11	3	14
	Role of spouse or life partner	0	6	8	2	16
	Traditional & cultural expectations	0	0	5	7	12
	TOTALS: Family factors	**17**	**11**	**51**	**26**	**105**
Gender barriers	At the organisational level	0	0	5	9	14
	At the personal level	0	0	0	3	3
	Gender barriers posed by men	0	0	1	5	6
	Gender barriers to success	0	0	4	7	11
	Limiting gender stereotypes	0	0	0	4	4
	TOTALS: Gender barriers	**0**	**0**	**10**	**28**	**38**

Management competencies	Assertiveness as manager competency	3	3	1	2	9
	Conflict management as manager competency	1	0	0	0	1
	Delegation skills as manager competency	10	2	1	0	13
	Earning trust	2	1	2	1	6
	Empathy as management competency	1	1	2	2	6
	Negotiation skills	0	0	0	1	1
	Prioritisation ability as manager competency	2	0	0	1	3
	Project management skills are needed	2	0	1	0	3
	Providing feedback	1	2	1	1	5
	Relationship skills as management competency	5	2	10	5	22
	Teamwork and collaboration	1	1	4	4	10
	TOTALS: Management competencies	**28**	**12**	**22**	**17**	**79**
Negative organisational dynamics	Dealing with labels vs asserting yourself as legitimate professional	3	0	0	1	4
	Excluded by organisational power structures	0	1	0	2	3
	Lack of challenge	5	6	2	4	17
	Lack of recognition	0	0	0	3	3
	Language barriers in business	0	0	1	1	2
	Organisational changes are disruptive to progression	0	0	2	1	3
	Organisational culture challenges	0	5	3	4	12
	Organisational politics	0	5	0	0	5
	Organisational resistance to black managers	0	0	0	3	3
	TOTALS: Negative organisational dynamics	**8**	**17**	**8**	**19**	**52**
Organisational practices	People development & onboarding programmes	0	1	0	10	11
	Performance feedback	1	3	1	2	7
	Progression clarity	0	2	1	6	9
	Training and people development	2	1	4	11	18
	TOTALS: Organisational practices	**3**	**7**	**6**	**29**	**45**
Organisational support roles	Black professionals as role models	0	0	1	0	1
	Importance of mentors for career	9	6	9	12	36
	Internal champions are beneficial to success	0	4	3	6	13
	Mentored by a woman	4	0	5	2	11
	Mentoring others	0	0	3	2	5
	Mentorship during articles	2	5	4	3	14
	Positive role models are beneficial to growth	0	0	0	3	3
	Professional services mentor	5	3	3	1	12

	Support extends beyond time with employer	0	0	2	0	2
	Supportive relationships important for success	22	13	15	9	59
	Value of women role models	4	1	2	4	11
	TOTALS: Organisational support roles	**46**	**32**	**47**	**42**	**167**
Peers and friends	Friendships and career success	7	0	0	0	7
	Peer support	3	6	2	4	15
	Unsupportive or negative peers	0	3	0	1	4
	TOTALS: Peers and friends	**10**	**9**	**2**	**5**	**26**
Positive organisational dynamics	Experiences of being empowered & valued	8	1	2	16	27
	Inclusive work environments	0	2	0	5	7
	Organisational culture can be supportive	1	0	3	4	8
	Organisational fit and buying into strategy	0	1	3	2	6
	TOTALS: Positive organisational dynamics	**9**	**4**	**8**	**27**	**48**
Professional services experiences	Articles - support provided by the firm	0	0	2	7	9
	Prof Serv promotion challenges	3	2	0	0	5
	Retention by Prof Serv	11	4	11	7	33
	Secondment opportunities	4	3	7	5	19
	The professional services environment positives	3	7	0	1	11
	TOTALS: Professional services experiences	**21**	**16**	**20**	**20**	**77**
Racial bias	At work, you may encounter racial bias	1	2	0	3	6
	Black professionals constantly have to prove themselves	3	2	4	3	12
	Seniority of black people is overlooked	2	0	0	1	3
	You have to be resilient to prejudice	3	0	0	0	3
	TOTALS: Racial bias	**9**	**4**	**4**	**7**	**24**
Reason to leave	Decision to leave after articles	2	1	2	2	7
	Decision to leave the bank	0	2	3	2	7
	Decision to stay with employer or leave	3	0	4	8	15
	Desire to explore career options internationally	0	4	0	0	4
	Lack of challenge creates a flight risk	5	0	0	2	7
	Lack of challenge is a reason for leaving	0	1	2	5	8
	Prof Serv Personal reason	0	2	4	1	7
	TOTALS: Reason to leave	**10**	**10**	**15**	**20**	**55**

Return to PSF	Challenges of returning to PSF	0	2	0	0	2
	Positive experience of returning to the firm	0	8	0	0	8
	PSF are not all the same	0	2	0	3	5
	Reason for returning to professional services	0	5	0	3	8
	TOTALS: Return to PSF	**0**	**17**	**0**	**6**	**23**
Transition challenges	Adapting to a new company	0	1	1	2	4
	Elements of professional services firms lacking elsewhere	2	2	1	1	6
	Expectation and role clarity in new role	7	6	2	5	20
	Lack of support	0	1	3	5	9
	New challenges move you out of your comfort zone	6	1	6	0	13
	New job fails to deliver	0	5	2	6	13
	Newcomer fears, anxiety and self-doubt	6	0	0	0	6
	Newcomer recognition and credibility	0	0	10	5	15
	Time period in a new job when things are tough	7	6	1	5	19
	Tough first manager role	4	5	2	0	11
	Transition challenges	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTALS: Transition challenges	**32**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**116**
Transition positives	Achieving competence	9	1	1	1	12
	Effective transition experience	3	6	3	4	16
	Executive onboarding programme	0	0	0	2	2
	Increased role clarity makes a new job manageable	0	1	0	0	1
	New challenges provide growth and satisfaction	3	2	12	3	20
	Positive joining experiences	0	0	3	0	3
	Positive offer process	0	0	3	0	3
	TOTALS: Transition positives	**15**	**10**	**22**	**10**	**57**
Work-life balance	Impacts of excessive workload	2	2	0	0	4
	Long hours are expected in professional services	0	1	2	3	6
	Personal relationships impacted by work	4	6	2	2	14
	Work-life balance is a personal choice	2	0	2	0	4
	Work-life balance is impacted by progression	1	1	1	1	4
	Work-life satisfaction	0	1	1	0	2
	To achieve work life balance requires personal commitment	3	2	0	1	6
	TOTALS: Work-life balance	**12**	**13**	**8**	**7**	**40**