



Graduate employee adaption to organisational culture and performance

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Abstract

This study outlined the integration of graduate employees into organisational culture and performance system settings, focusing on a South African retail organisation. This research explored the distinctive contributions that graduates, with contemporary academic knowledge and new insights, can offer to the dynamics, culture and operational performance of the organisation. This case study probed graduate integration, the influence of graduate integration on organisational culture in the medium term, performance indicators for the immediate to medium term, and the challenges and opportunities presented during the induction process.

The central aim of the inquiry was an assessment of how organisational leadership, mentorship and onboarding processes facilitate or hinder assimilation into existing corporate frameworks. The study portrays the dual role of graduates as disruptors and enhancers of organisational culture, underlining the potential contributions of graduates in driving innovation, process improvement and collaboration, while gaps in soft skills and cultural misalignment act as potential barriers.

These findings provide recommendations that can be acted upon by corporate leaders, HR professionals and policymakers in their quest to optimally integrate and develop graduate talent while reinforcing a culture of inclusion, continuous learning and performance excellence. The research contributed a deeper insight into workforce development strategies and their implications for organisational growth and adaptability within a dynamic and competitive business environment.

Dedication

To my loving wife, Bianca Naude, and our beloved children, Jakkie, Leané, and Mianke, your respective support and love have been my stronghold. Your understanding and sacrifice have been fundamental in achieving this well-desired feat that epitomises the very meaning of family, support and commitment.

Bianca, your patience and encouragement have guided me through all the ups and downs, always helping, and always encouraging me, even at those moments when everything seemed to be collapsing.

Jakkie, Leané and Mianke, it is your respective smiles, and belief in me that have been the fuel which drove me, reminding me of why I strive for excellence. I not only see success but also the light of kindness and compassion shining in your futures.

Always endeavour to do better, not for your sake alone, but especially for all the souls that you will meet along the way who might need an outstretched hand.

May you have in your endeavours remembrance of the power of empathy, strength in unity and the great impact of extending your blessings to make the world a kinder, more inclusive place for all.

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This academic journey is not only a reflection of my effort but one of support, sacrifice, and belief in me by each one of you. As such, with deep gratitude, I am dedicating this achievement to all of you, without whom it would have been unimaginable.

Thank you for being my strength, my source of motivation and thank you for sharing this journey with me.

Declaration

I, **Barend Jacobus Naude**, student number **2455063**, declare that this research report is my own work, except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements.

It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand Business School, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other university.

Name: Barend Jacobus Naude

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Naude', enclosed within a large, loopy oval stroke.

Signature:

Signed at Brakpan on the 25th of November 2024

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Chapter 1 – Introduction to Research Proposal

1.1 Introduction

This research study assumes that graduates, equipped with their academic knowledge and proficiency, can adapt to the cultural and performance paths of their employers. The extent of the graduates' ability to adapt is not fully understood or utilised in organisations (Barna, 2013).

This study explored graduate employees' ability to adapt while at a South African retailer, by conducting a thorough analysis of literature and participant responses. Different facets of the graduate employees' roles, challenges, and obstacles graduates face when integrating into an organisation were explored. The adaptation processes within leadership structures, and the effects on efficiency and corporate culture, were not excluded. Furthermore, this study investigated the approaches organisations can adopt to optimise the beneficial outcomes of incorporating new graduates while minimising potential drawbacks. The research sought to offer practical insights to business leaders, HR professionals and policymakers on how to effectively utilise newly hired graduates to promote a culture of ongoing learning and exceptional performance.

1.2 Background

Recognising the critical role these individuals play, the study delved into the nuanced dynamics between fresh graduates and established corporate environments, aiming to leverage their unique competencies (Van den Bareselaar, 2020). This study was set against a backdrop of rapid technological advancement and demographic evolution, positioning the integration of newly hired graduates as a strategic element for innovation and cultural transformation within organisations.

As graduates become present and visible in the workplace, they bring with them new perspectives, creativity, and vibrancy which can significantly contribute to a company's

culture and operational performance. This is particularly relevant as workforce demographics evolve, necessitating a deeper understanding by businesses of the effects these young professionals have on internal processes and cultural frameworks (Employment Hero, 2022).

Furthermore, the research examined the intricate web of an organisation's culture, a tapestry woven from its values, beliefs, and traditions that define its essence. This cultural core is instrumental in fostering employee dedication and satisfaction, which in turn, are crucial for the company's overall success. The study also investigated how a company's adaptability in its corporate culture relates to measurable performance outcomes, such as financial metrics, innovation rates, and market position (Adebayo, 2023; Daley, 2024).

By analysing the extent to which newly hired graduates contribute to or disturb these vital organisational elements, the study attempted to bridge the gap between theoretical constructs of organisational performance and culture with the tangible impacts of assimilating graduates into the business world. The intention was to provide insights that align academic postulations with the empirical realities of integrating new academic talent into professional settings.

1.3 Problem statement

This research aimed to bridge the gap in understanding the impact of newly hired graduates on organisational performance and cultural adaptation.

It acknowledges the critical role of integrating young graduates, equipped with their recently completed academic knowledge into the workforce for organisational growth and effectiveness. There is a pressing issue that despite strategic hiring, businesses often struggle to effectively leverage this influx of talent to enhance company culture and performance (Rhodes University (RU), 2023).

The study tackled the effectiveness of current adaptation strategies for integrating graduates and the risk of underutilising their potential which could impede innovation and competitive advantage in a dynamic market (Govendor, 2023).

To address this, the research examined the current impact of new graduates on company culture and performance metrics. It highlighted the barriers preventing these young professionals from fully contributing to and assimilation into their new environments. The study sought to unearth the organisational challenges, whether structural, cultural or related to human capital management that create obstacles to effective integration.

Moreover, this study not only identified the barriers but also proposed actionable and tangible strategies to improve onboarding processes. These strategies focused on designing a developing dynamic, inclusive, and high-performance organisational culture. By doing so, the research aimed to fill the gaps in the literature and provide a robust framework for HR professionals and organisational leaders.

The ultimate goal was to foster a culture that is receptive to the influx of new ideas and approaches brought in by graduates. By creating a supportive onboarding experience, organisations can ensure that graduates are not only well-integrated but also empowered to contribute to the company's strategic objectives. The development of such a culture can lead to enhanced performance outcomes, both in terms of productivity and innovation (Govendor, 2023).

This research offers a critical examination and actionable solutions to ensure the potential of new graduates is not only recognised but fully realised within the organisational context, thereby securing a competitive edge in a dynamic marketplace.

1.4 Research objectives and questions

The following research objectives and questions have been developed to investigate these dynamics with particular interest in the effects of onboarding strategies on organisational culture and performance, along with the challenges and opportunities that accrue. It is expected that through investigation into the named areas, this research would identify actionable insights to help organisations achieve optimum integration for new graduates so their contributions serve broader strategic intent and foster a culture that is both inclusive and high performing.

- 1.4.1 To evaluate the medium-term effects of integrating newly appointed graduates on organisational culture.
- 1.4.2 To assess the immediate and medium-term impact of newly appointed graduates on organisational performance.
- 1.4.3 To identify the challenges and opportunities presented by newly appointed graduates to organisational performance and culture.

The hypothesis suggested organisations develop dynamic, inclusive and high-performance cultures through effective onboarding and integration strategies. This will better leverage the potential of new graduates, leading to improved performance and a competitive advantage in the market.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

- 1.5.1 The research is delimited to a South African retailer, which means the findings may not be generalisable to other organisations in other regions or countries with different cultural, economic or workforce market conditions.
- 1.5.2 The focus is specifically on the retail sector, so the results may not apply to other industries, such as manufacturing, technology and / or public services.
- 1.5.3 Scale of business: If the retailer in question is a particular size (e.g. a large corporation vs a small business), the findings might not translate well to organisations of different scales.

- 1.5.4 The research might only consider the immediate or medium-term impact of graduate integration, rather than any long-term effects which would limit the understanding of the graduates' impact over a much longer period.
- 1.5.5 The proposal only considered certain aspects of organisational culture and performance, such as team dynamics or efficiency metrics, and did not address others like customer satisfaction or individual employee well-being.

1.6 Definition of terms

Table 1.6. Definitions of terms table. Source: Author's own (2024)

Word	Definition in a Business Context
Adaptation	The process by which organisations adapt their activities to reflect environmental changes and economic needs (Miller, 1992).
Change management	A technique for moving people, teams, and organisations towards a desirable future state (Kotter, 1996).
Company culture	A pattern of shared fundamental assumptions that the group learns while solving its difficulties of outward adaptation and internal integration (Schein, 2010).
Company performance	The assessment of a company's capacity to meet its business goals and how effectively it uses its assets (Kaplan & Norton, 1996).
Development	Activities aimed at improving the performance and potential of people and groups within an organisation (Senge, 2006).
Influence	Influence refers to the ability to shape the character and behaviour of an individual or entity or the actual impact that is produced (Kotter, 1996).
Integration	The coordination and combining of a company's activities, functions, and divisions to unite efforts towards a shared purpose (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2002).
Mentorship	Mentorship is the direction offered by an experienced individual in a corporation or educational institution (Kram, 1985).
Onboarding	The process by which new workers learn the information, skills, and attitudes required to function effectively as organisational members and insiders (Bauer, 2010).
Training	A company's deliberate endeavour to help workers gain job-related abilities (Watson & Noe, 2017).

1.7 Significance of the study

This study provided valuable insights for corporate leaders, HR professionals and policymakers to develop more effective integration strategies for new talent, thereby improving organisational growth and adaptability.

Studying the adaption and influence of graduates on company culture and performance is important as it involves various aspects, such as academic preparation, professional practice, organisational adaptability, recruitment and retention strategies, team dynamics, academic knowledge enhancement, economic innovation, societal shifts and leadership development.

This study aimed to provide a thorough analysis to address the noticeable gap faced by graduates when moving from academic settings to the professional world. Organisations can improve their onboarding and training methods by identifying these challenges. This will help match the skills and expectations of new graduates, leading to increased job satisfaction and possibly reduced turnover rates.

1.8 Structure of the research report

Chapter 1 outlines the research problem, context, and study objectives. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive analysis of the literature regarding graduates' influence on organisational culture and performance. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology for the study. Chapters 4 and 5 are the results of the data analysis and subsequent discussions. Chapter 6 provides recommendations.

1.9 Summary

This study provided valuable insights for corporate leaders, HR professionals and policymakers to develop more effective integration strategies for new talent, thereby improving organisational growth and adaptability.

Studying the influence of recent graduates on company culture and performance is important as it involves various aspects, such as academic preparation, professional practice, organisational adaptability, recruitment and retention strategies, team dynamics, academic knowledge enhancement, economic innovation, societal shifts, and leadership development.

This study aimed to provide a thorough analysis that addressed the noticeable gap faced by graduates moving from academic settings to the professional world. Organisations can improve their onboarding and training methods by identifying these challenges. This will help match the skills and expectations of new graduates to the requirement of the organisation, leading to increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover rates.

Integrating new graduates into established teams poses distinctive challenges and opportunities in equal measure. This research explored how different integration strategies impact culture and performance, thus providing valuable insights for managers responsible for building effective teams. The results of this study would enhance academic conversations on workforce development, organisational behaviour, and human resource management. This provides valuable insights for both theoretical concepts and practical strategies in integrating new graduates into the workforce.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review:

2.1 Introduction

Organisational culture is a multilayered construct that impacts all aspects of an organisation's operations. It is shaped by and evolves through various factors including new employees, particularly recent graduates. Graduates not only have the most current academic knowledge but also new perspectives and innovative potential which could significantly affect an organisation's cultural and performance parameters. This literature review combines research on how graduates can influence organisational dynamics, culture, and performance, emphasising the importance of strategies for effective integration.

2.2 Theoretical framework



Figure 2.2. Theoretical framework diagram for new graduates. Source: Author's own (2024)

The theoretical backdrop of organisational culture and performance (Figure 2.2) encompasses several dimensions, including social, material, and ideological traits that define employee interactions, collaborative efforts, and shared values, respectively. Renowned studies, such as *Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory*, and *Schein's model of organisational culture*, provide a foundational understanding of how culture shapes organisational behaviour and performance.

Research indicates that an organisation's culture is a strategic asset that can contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage. It can influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and performance which affect the organisation's overall effectiveness and ability to innovate. The Human Capital Theory posits that the knowledge, skills, and abilities that employees bring to an organisation constitute valuable resources that can lead to a competitive advantage and enhanced performance.

2.3 Conceptual framework

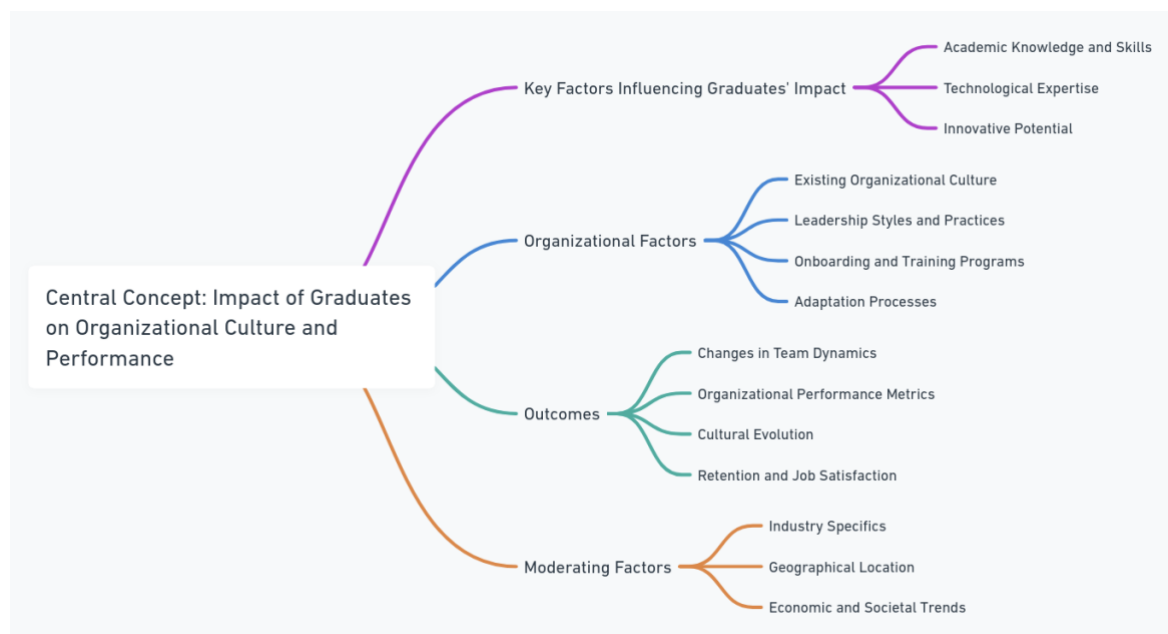


Figure 2.3 - Conceptual framework diagram for new graduates. Source: Authors own (2024)

Figure 2.3 provides a clear insight into how the assimilation of graduates, in a structured manner, could lead to the organisational culture being renewed and might drive towards continued performance enhancements, and, in turn, a culture of continuous learning and

innovation. It is the opinion, as Cote (2023) writes, that with ongoing leadership involvement, organisations can draw from graduates a new set of perspectives and foster enthusiasm in organisational culture to achieve higher performance. This framework would support the research, providing an anchor for the complex and nuanced relationships at play when graduates meet established corporate structures.

2.4 Impact of organisational culture on performance

The literature has evidence of the impact of organisational culture on performance. Some specific cultural traits, such as innovation at a high level, accountability, and teamwork, are associated with high-performance outcomes. Denison's (1990) study emphasised the correlation between the cultures of participation and effectiveness. Gordon and Di Tomaso (1992) identified the attributes of organisational culture, for example, risk-taking, openness to change and proactive problem-solving that account for an increase in corporate performance.

2.5 Graduate impact on organisational dynamics

Introducing graduates into the workplace will change the culture and most likely disrupt the organisational dynamics to some extent. Graduates usually present updated insights from their academic knowledge and usually put theory into practical problems they experience.

This enthusiasm may lead to innovative problem-solving and cultural change within an organisation. Companies face multiple challenges when integrating these new members into already existing hierarchies and norms, and the graduates' expectations.

Further insights on how the organisation might capitalise on this new talent come from Kotter and Heskett's (1992) study of corporate culture and performance. It further suggests that an organisation with an engaged culture that fosters innovation will allow new graduates to offer further benefits of new ideas and approaches to doing business.

2.6 Adaptation and integration processes

To effectively tap into graduates' full potential, their integration must be in a manner that aligns with the organisation's goals. Researchers, such as Willmott (1993), note that for an organisation to succeed there must be an embedded organisational culture of learning and the exchange of knowledge, considering that both these factors are critical for the successful assimilation of graduates. Adaptation processes are key, and the organisation should be flexible enough to incorporate new views.

2.7 Organisational change and the role of leadership

Leadership remains the main factor that defines, shapes, and transmits organisational culture. The literature points out that leaders are the agents for good socialisation of new graduates into organisational culture. Therefore, it remains an important role. Leaders should be the epitome of cultural values but in the meantime, create an environment that is sensitive to the influx of new contributions from new graduates. Magee (2002) emphasises that the real commitment of leadership is to be supportive and drive an inclusive culture into which new graduates are integrated.

2.8 Challenges and opportunities

Graduates in most cases, are bound to face challenges from transitioning between their universities and the companies which recruited them. This includes adjustments in organisational culture and understanding the unspoken expectations that will enable them to contribute meaningfully to the company's objectives. The literature shows that when there are discrepancies between the graduate's expectations and the reality in the workplace often leads to integration problems.

2.9 Summary

According to the literature reviewed, an organisational culture that is accommodative, supportive, and leaning toward continuous learning and improvement is in a better position to seize the potential that graduates offer. This is where leaders have a critical role to play

in ensuring that the organisational culture evolves so that it is inclusive of new talent and beneficial for high performance.

The literature points out the strategic human resource practices to optimise the contributions made by the new graduates. Some of the best practices include customised onboarding programmes, mentorship opportunities, and the commitment to adopting a culture of innovation and collaboration.

As organisations grapple with this rapidly changing business environment, there needs to be an understanding of how to manage the process of integrating graduates into the workplace. The cultural and performance implications of such integration become a critical area of continued research and practice.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research technique used in the study. This section provides a detailed explanation of the approach and the underlying paradigm used to guide the investigation. Subsequently, this paper addresses the research design, data collection methods, ethical issues and the study's validity, reliability and limits.

3.2 Research methodology and approach

This research was to understand the influence of graduates on company culture and performance and their impact on these factors over time. It also needed to establish if there were challenges and or obstacles that graduates face that should be addressed to effectively manage the impact on an organisation's culture and performance. Therefore, a qualitative research methodology was selected due to its methodical approach and innovative tools that can uncover potential answers and identify solutions to our limited understanding (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

3.3 Research design

The use of a case study approach is widely recognised for its in-depth exploration and comprehensive understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context (Yin, 2018). Specifically, in organisational studies, case studies allow researchers to examine the complex influences and outcomes of new factors within a company, such as the impact of new graduate employees on organisational culture and performance.

It provides a detailed examination of the interactions, behaviours and perceptions that shape the culture of an organisation, offering insights into nuanced facts that might not emerge through other research methods (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Moreover, the method is particularly well-suited to exploring “how” and “why” questions, offering a detailed understanding of the dynamics at play when graduates enter and are assimilated into the

workforce, thus influencing the culture and potentially the performance of the organisation (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Case studies would be particularly good at capturing the lived experiences of individual graduates, the unstated elements of organisational culture, and the often insubstantial performance metrics that extend beyond mere financial performance (Siggelkow, 2007). By focusing on particular instances within the selected organisation, the case study provided a detailed narrative that embodies the complexities of corporate culture, change and performance dynamics (Yin, 2018).

3.4 Research population and sample

The **population** was:

When selecting a sample for the population for an in-depth case study, I focused on **one** retail company, and within that company, only segments where the impact of graduates would be most observable and applicable.

The **sample** included:

- **Graduates:** Newly hired employees having graduated within the last 1 to 3 years.
- **Management:** Supervisors and managers who oversee graduate employees.
- **Executives:** Individuals involved in recruiting, training, and developing graduate staff.

Sampling strategies should be purposive; selecting individuals and groups who can provide information about the cultural and performance influence of graduates within the company (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

In this scenario, the sample was composed of:

1. A representative group of graduates across different departments (where they are mentored).
 - Eight graduates were interviewed from four departments.

2. Department heads or team leaders, who could comment on the performance and cultural integration of graduates.
 - I conducted interviews with the four selected department managers.
3. Executives provided insights into the strategic intentions of hiring graduates and the expected outcomes.
 - Three executives tasked with the recruitment and training of graduates were interviewed.

Through the careful selection of cases in this sample, one could uncover the mechanisms through which graduates contribute to or alter company culture and performance metrics (Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.5 The research instrument

Using interviews and observing the participants were the most effective research instruments to study the graduates' influence on company culture and performance in a retail context.

As Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson and Kangasniemi (2016) emphasise, semi-structured interviews facilitate a deep understanding of intricate social experiences by enabling the interviewer to delve for more information and clarification on certain points, thus ensuring a thorough exploration of the research questions. Participant observation, on the other hand, complements interviews by offering direct insight into the everyday workings of the graduates' environment, and the lively interactions between graduates and other employees in the workplace.

The combination of semi-structured interviews and observations of the participants enabled a complete understanding of the topic, capturing both the explicit narratives of the participants and the embedded cultural and performance dynamics within the retail company (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6 Data collection procedure

In the data collection to explore the influence of graduates on company culture and performance in a retail context, two primary procedures stood out: semi-structured interviews and participant observations.

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their balance of structure and adaptability, enabling in-depth exploration of individual perspectives of the graduates' impact. Participants could explain their experiences and opinions which provided nuanced qualitative data. The format of these interviews allowed the researcher to delve into complex social phenomena by prompting and clarifying responses to ensure a comprehensive coverage of the research questions (Kallio et al., 2016).

3.6.2 Participant observations

To complement the interviews, participant observations provided the opportunity for direct observations of interactions and behaviours within the environment. This method captured the less noticeable aspects of company culture and performance, such as non-verbal communication, rituals, and informal interactions, which may be unknowingly articulated by participants during interviews but are critical for understanding the embedded cultural practices (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

3.6.3 Combining the interviews and observations

By integrating these methods, the research aimed to construct a robust picture of how graduates contribute to and integrate with the existing retail company culture and performance metrics. The observations provided context and depth to the verbal data collected through interviews, leading to a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

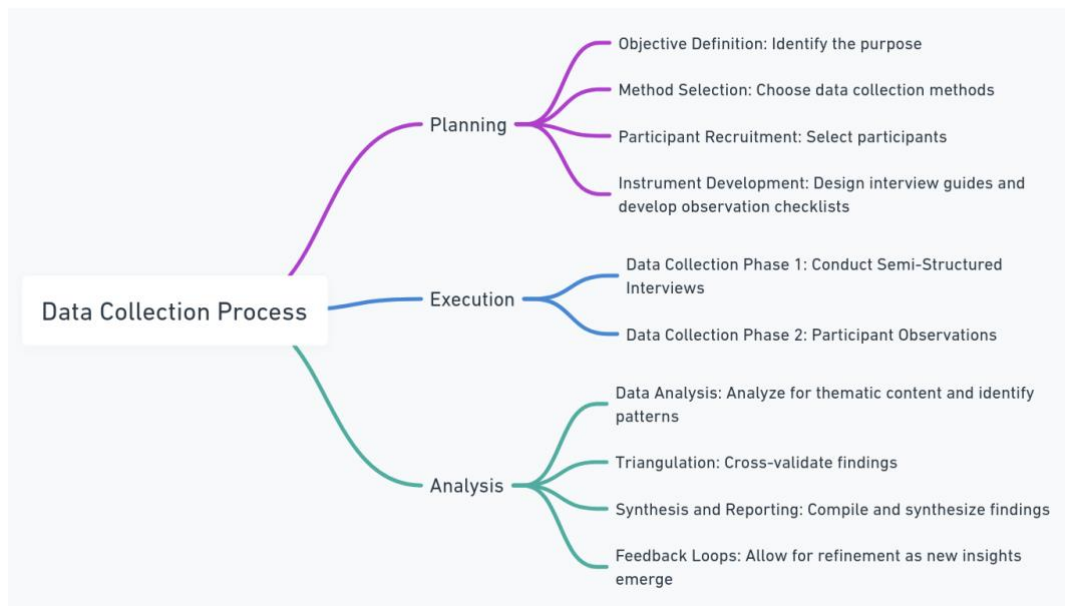


Figure 3.6. A visual representation of the data collection process. Source: Author's own (2024)

3.7 Analysis and interpretation of data

The approach was a systematic way of analysing the conversation and the behaviours. The primary methodology in this qualitative study was thematic analysis where complex data would be efficiently reduced to be represented in simpler and more manageable themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7.1 Applying structure in a 6-phase approach

1. Familiarisation: This phase allowed me to be conversant with the collected data. This included listening to the recorded interviews and reading through the transcriptions, thus gathering my first impressions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
2. Highlight key points: The data highlighted standout information. This could have been anything that relates directly or indirectly to my research questions (Clarke and Braun, 2017).
3. Group similar ideas: Clustering key points according to their similarity. In one cluster, my themes started from the main ideas representing patterns determined by how the graduates influence company culture and performance (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Refining the themes: I had to ensure that each theme embodied the core points within its limits. It would need to conform to this rule from numerous extracts. This meant that similar themes needed to be grouped, more concrete themes needed to be separated from larger themes and discard any information that did not fit (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
5. Define the themes. Each theme was named descriptively and captured its essence. This clarified what was meant by each theme and how it related to the impact graduates have on performance and culture.
6. Document findings: A brief report of the findings was written. It covered the established themes and informed the reader of those that emerged on how graduates contribute to company culture and performance (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7.2 Academic approach

1. Theoretical rigour: The process was blended with a form of inductive (building theories from observation) and deductive (applying theoretical structures to observations) logic to warrant a balanced approach based on academic practice (Clarke & Braun, 2017).
2. Iterative analysis: The approach was iterative by working through the steps to refine themes and conclusions to achieve a fitting representation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
3. Transparency and rigour: I adhered to academic standards of qualitative research that require clear documentation of the process from data collection, analysis, and reporting. These findings would be reliable and credible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research used a structured approach to add meaningful insight to the academic conversation on graduates, and how they impacted culture and performance in the company.

3.8 Limitations of the study

One of the main limitations was the challenge of generalisability. It is argued by Yin (2014) that case studies focus on a particular context, thus providing only a narrow space within which the findings would be generalisable to other settings or populations. This specific case study meant that the unique attributes of the studied organisation and those of their graduates, do not represent broader trends.

Another limitation was the potential for subjectivity in the data interpretation process. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that in thematic analysis, much independence is left to the researcher, hence, there is a high probability that the findings would reflect his own biases, and thus, would be subjective.

Moreover, the quality of the case study, in conducting the in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, is large. This is further argued by Creswell and Poth (2018) that large volumes of data, for instance in management and analysis, run a strong possibility of key insights being obscured.

Time and resources are yet another limitation of the study. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), the level and detail required by the case study method can only be realised at the cost of time and resources, which limits the number of cases studied. In addition, the researcher relies on the participants' reports, therefore, reducing accurate information.

Podsakoff et al. (2003) point out that memory biases and social desirability needs can seriously threaten the participants' responses and, to a greater extent, compromise the data integrity.

3.9 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a successful study, in this case the impact of graduates on company culture and performance, lies on some important criteria to be adhered to, namely (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability.

For the trustworthiness of qualitative research to be assessed, its validity and reliability need to be reflective of this approach by aligning with the qualitative paradigm.

1. **Credibility** entails determining whether the research findings are true from the participants' perspective. In addition, credibility-enhancing strategies were included, as well as extended engagement, persistent observations, and triangulation of data sources. What is being communicated, will be the depth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This strengthens the study's validity when the findings represent the experiences and views of the participants.
2. **Transferability** refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts or other groups. While generalisability deals more with a quantitative aspect, transferability helps researchers find the relevance of the findings in other similar contexts, based on descriptions and assumptions made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, a clear description of the study context, participants and conditions in which the research took place, provided support to the element of transferability.
3. **Dependability** addresses the study's stability over time and under similar conditions. It is rather close to reliability in the case of quantitative research but considers the changing nature of experiences being investigated in the qualitative study. Concerning the above, it assures the dependability of this study with an audit trail, giving explicit documented details about issues in the research process, decisions and alterations made together with the applicable rationale (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
4. **Confirmability** is shaping the findings of the respondents and not by the researcher's bias, motivation or interest. This has been done through practices like reflexivity (critical self-reflection of the researcher regarding biases and how these can influence the

research), triangulation and an audit trail documenting the research process from the data collection to the interpretation and reporting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.10 Ethical considerations

1. **Informed consent:** The participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, methods, potential impact, and their rights before consenting (American Psychological Association, 2017). Consent was voluntary and revocable at any stage of the research.
2. **Confidentiality and anonymity:** Protecting the participants, as well as the company's identity and personal information, was crucial (British Psychological Society, 2018). The data was securely stored, and aliases were used throughout the research study.
3. **Non-maleficence:** No harm should be done and the participants' emotional and psychological well-being were considered especially when discussing sensitive topics (Sieber, 1992).
4. **Beneficence:** My research should benefit participants or contribute to broader knowledge for others (Wiles, 2013). The value of the study should outweigh any risks.
5. **Respect for autonomy:** All participants' independence was acknowledged and respected including their right to withdraw without any adverse consequences to them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
6. **Data handling and reporting:** All the data were handled responsibly, ensuring accuracy when collected, analysed and reported (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
7. **Dealing with sensitive information:** Extra care was taken of any research that might have involved sensitive topics, supporting participants as needed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

8. **Avoiding conflict of interest:** Any potential conflict of interest should be disclosed that impacts the research (Sieber, 1992).
9. **Cultural sensitivity:** I was sensitive to participants' cultural differences, their backgrounds and norms were respected (Wiles, 2013).
10. **Transparency:** There was transparency about the research goals, data usage and potential publication of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.11 Summary

This research sought to explore the adaption of new graduates to company culture and performance within a retail context. This was done using qualitative methodology that emphasised depth and nuance over breadth.

This mode of the study sought to capture the complex interplay between the individual experience and broader organisational dynamics using a case study approach.

This study collected important insight into how new graduates integrate and influence their work environment via a careful data collection process, embracing semi-structured interviews and participant observations.

Chapter 4 - Presentation of Findings

4.1 Introduction

Graduates and graduate programmes lie at the heart of moulding the future workforce into a perfect fit through which young and fresh minds are successfully integrated into an organisation. This study explored graduates shifting from an academic environment to the corporate world. It also discusses the various opportunities and challenges attempted by graduates during the journey of personal goal alignment with organisational objectives.

In-depth interviews with graduates and managers revealed several important themes emanating from these programmes, focusing on how they support performance measurement, foster innovation, promote collaboration and encourage cultural integration.

Graduates are expected to contribute to the firm's goals through quantitative and qualitative measures, normally based on structured performance reviews and feedback mechanisms. Innovation, teamwork and assimilation into the corporate culture form the bedrock of success. At the same time, this reduces the number of aspects where they fail, particularly developing soft skills, such as emotional intelligence and adaptability, which are generally not emphasised during their time at university.

The various themes identified from this work were analysed in this report, to understand how an organisation can help the professional development of this young talent. The role played by managers was also discussed, touching on how they set expectations, continuous on-the-job training and feedback to the graduates in their new roles. They also ensured the importance of doing well and that graduates felt part of the company culture through mentorship and proper induction.

The current study, therefore, gives a broader view of the graduate experience from an employee and managerial perspective and serves as useful insight for understanding best practices for graduate development and retention.

4.2 Naming convention of the participants

Every participant in this study was assigned a unique code to identify all participants but keep them anonymous. This is shown in Table 4.2 below. G01 will represent Graduate 1, M01 will represent Manager 1, and E01 will represent Executive 1. These participant notification codes were used throughout the data collection, from participant recruitment to the analysis and reporting of the respective findings, to safeguard all the participants’ identities and the confidentiality of their responses.

Table 4.2. Naming convention table. Source: Author’s own (2024)

Code	Assigned Graduate	Code	Assigned Manager	Code	Assigned Executive
G01	Graduate 1	M01	Manager 1	E01	Executive 1
G02	Graduate 2	M02	Manager 2	E02	Executive 2
G03	Graduate 3	M03	Manager 3	E03	Executive 3
G04	Graduate 4	M04	Manager 4	E04	Executive 4
G05	Graduate 5				
G06	Graduate 6				
G07	Graduate 7				
G08	Graduate 8				

4.3 Key themes of the interviews

Graduate programmes in organisations are successful due to the correct balance between performance expectations and personal and professional development. Critical themes that emerged from this study are summarised in Table 4.3 below.

*Table 4.3. Themes and key elements of graduate performance and organisational development.
Source: Author's own (2024)*

Common Groups	Key Themes	Summary	Sub-Themes
Performance and Goal Alignment	Performance measurement and contribution to company goals Performance expectations and development Performance management and expectations Long-term retention and contribution	Graduates and managers emphasise the importance of aligning personal goals with organisational objectives Clear expectations help guide contributions toward business growth	Personal goal alignment, retention rates, structured feedback, use of performance metrics, strategic goal contribution.
Innovation and Process Improvement	Innovation and process improvement Resources for performance optimisation	Graduates introduce tools and processes to improve productivity, supported by resources like mentorship and technical tools from executives	Automation tools, process improvement, resource allocation, mentorship, and technical tools for success
Collaboration and Communication	Collaboration and communication Feedback and recognition	Effective collaboration and communication are essential for performance success	Teamwork, stakeholder engagement, formal/informal feedback,

	Feedback and continuous improvement	Regular feedback and recognition drive alignment and development	communication with managers, recognition for achievements.
Cultural Integration and Adaptation	Company culture and integration Adapting to organisational culture Cultural fit and integration Encouraging contribution to company culture	Mentorship, onboarding and cultural alignment help graduates integrate into the company Encouraging contributions to company culture enhances engagement	Inclusion, mentorship, onboarding, alignment with company values, open communication, and encouraging participation in cultural activities.
Skills Development and Challenges	Challenges and development of soft skills Ongoing training and support Challenges and conflict resolution Challenges in graduate programme execution	Graduates face challenges in soft skills development Continuous training, conflict resolution, and addressing performance issues ensure success	Emotional intelligence, adaptability, continuous training, conflict resolution, addressing skill gaps, and programme execution issues

4.4 Linking findings with the research questions

Table 4.4 pinpoints the key research questions for this study, aligned with the relevant themes and summaries of the findings portrayed. The table indicates the core focus of the findings on medium-term effects related to graduate integration and its impact on organisational culture, the contribution to performance metrics and the challenges and opportunities that this presents. These findings provide a structured understanding of how the newly appointed graduates will influence organisational culture and performance.

Table 4.4. Findings table will rename to: Research questions and key findings on graduate integration and performance. Source: Author's own (2024)

Research Questions:	Themes:	Summary
Evaluate the medium-term effects of integrating newly appointed graduates on organisational culture	Cultural integration and adaptation, collaboration and communication	Focus on how well graduates integrate into the company's culture, including mentorship, collaboration and cultural fit
Assess the immediate and medium-term impact of newly appointed graduates on organisational performance	Performance and goal alignment Skills development and challenges	Examine the impact of graduate contributions on performance metrics, including goal alignment, retention and soft skill development
Identify challenges and opportunities presented by newly appointed graduates to organisational performance and culture	Innovation and process improvement Cultural integration and adaptation Skills development and challenges	Identify barriers and opportunities related to innovation, cultural integration and overcoming skill gaps for enhancing organisational performance

4.5 Research Question 1 - Evaluate the medium-term effects of integrating newly appointed graduates on organisational culture

4.5.1 Graduate themes

Company culture and integration

Several graduates emphasised that this was something collaborative and the inclusive culture helped them to fit in at work.

G02 found this happening by operating in a collaborative environment and states

I contributed to a positive culture by regularly engaging with different stakeholders to make sure I was tracking well with my performance, getting feedback on how I was progressing.

and G03 also praised the “inclusive culture...” which was displayed.

G04 also appreciated the fact that the office environment was open, which enhanced the interaction with management and *stated*

Inclusion, because I was part of that morning meeting... I got to understand that my tasks were not in isolation I was part of a bigger team.

G05 states

The first aspect of the company culture would be our collaboration and inclusion... I worked as an industrial engineering graduate, and because I was still a beginner in coding, the senior manager exposed me to a business analyst who was more experienced. This collaboration really helped.

4.5.2 Manager themes

Adaptation to organisational culture

The strategy was assimilation into the culture. Managers would guide the graduates through mentorship and induction programmes.

M03 encouraged open discussions with graduates to understand the culture of the organisation and *stated*

We assess the level of competence in the interview process. Once they join us, we assess their performance expectations... it's important that the graduate not only delivers work but also fits into the team structure.

M03 further states

We provide them with induction and ask the grad to be involved in the process, asking questions where they need assistance... this two-way communication is crucial for cultural adaptation.

M01 mentioned that wearing a company uniform makes the graduates feel part of the organisation and adjusts more quickly to the organisation's culture.

M02 describes adaption to the organisation's culture in the following manner

We in as much as yes, we are very sensitive to the fact that they are graduates... I tell them that you are now in the workplace and there are going to be expectations of you, so we have open conversations about what is normal and what may be toxic in terms of culture.

4.5.3 Executive themes

Cultural fit and integration

Using interviews as the initial assessment for a cultural fit is one of the keys determining factors if a graduate will fit into the company's values.

To this effect, E01 uses behavioural questions to assess one's fit with the organisation.

E02 talked about how the values and leadership expectations shaped the culture of the company

Culture is the how and the way of doing things in a business... Graduates should be onboarded into our culture and values and participate in all culture initiatives, just like any other associate.

E03 states

We don't distinguish between graduates and permanent employees in our culture... we expect everyone to align to our values, and cultural fit is assessed

during the recruitment process through behavioural questions aligned with those values.

E04 states

We talk about the culture of the organisation during induction, and the graduates are included in all culture-related programs, so they understand the values and leadership expectations from the start.

4.6 Research Question 2 - Assess the immediate and medium-term impact of newly appointed graduates on organisational performance

4.6.1 Graduate themes

Performance measurement and contribution to company goals

Graduates focused more on performance measurements to contribute to company goals. For instance, G01 has aligned SMART personal goals with company objectives

*...measure my contribution based on my KPIs as a systems and process analyst...
I built a report to monitor inventory effectiveness, which is still in use today*

G05 mentioned how through cost-saving initiatives operational efficiency has been achieved, G02 practices a regular review against stakeholder expectations and G04 measures related performance against the adherence to company values.

I look at how the DCS are performing in terms of their budget for labour and whether they are efficient enough to execute tasks with the labour provided. I measure my contribution in that regard...

G03 states

Every year, we do goal setting, and I use that to assess how my work is aligned with the company's goals, prioritising orders and moving loads as needed to service our customers.

Innovation and process improvement

Graduates have repeatedly brought along ideas that can be implemented to streamline processes efficiently.

G01 automated certain operational tasks with the aid of a Power BI dashboard to improve productivity

I automated the reporting process for inventory management, reducing aged stock significantly. I also developed a tool to streamline article assignments for easier picking operations.

G06 states

We created dashboards on Power BI to track machine utilisation and productivity, enabling better delegation and improved performance outcomes on the floor.

whilst G05 modelled slot optimisation to tackle the problem at the distribution centres.

I created a Power BI dashboard that helped centralise article maintenance requests, improving efficiency by cutting hours of manual work.

G03 helped develop a labour management tool to manage manpower effectively. G04 improved data processing efficiency with the use of Excel techniques.

4.6.2 Manager themes

Performance expectations and development

Managers have to set clear expectations for the graduates so that their roles match the organisation's goals. M01 measured graduate performance using Excel competence sheets and stated further

We apply a 30-60-90 day principle... they shadow and get on-the-job exposure to understand what the standards are that are required in terms of performance.

According to M02, collaboration and feedback were underscored.

In the case of M03, there were issues relating to understanding the measures of performance or indicators.

We assess performance with one-on-one sessions, looking at goals, progress, and allowing for requests for assistance... It's important to assess work-related outputs but also how they live the company values.

M01 introduced continuous development of practical competencies for the graduates.

M04 went further to state

It's important to set performance expectations from the onset... this will allow clarity on the graduate's role and how it aligns with organisational goals.

Continuous training and support

This was about the need for continuous training to complement the lapses in practical experience for graduates.

For M01

Training assists the graduate in fitting into the company

while M02 suggested that tackling the skills shortage is very important to equip the company with a young and dynamic workforce.

4.6.3 Executive themes

Performance management and expectations

Performance metrics were pegged on both short-term and long-term business goals.

In that, E01 was more into innovation and problem-solving metrics

The first metric I look at is whether the graduate transitions from the programme into a permanent position... This shows that we've successfully integrated them both in terms of capability and culture fit.

E02 placed more emphasis on “postgraduate qualifications and additional skills beyond initial academic merit.”

E03 expanded further that the overall retention period is also a measure of graduate success

For me, we should be looking at what business performance improvements we can expect from graduates—metrics like innovation, growth, and problem-solving capabilities are key.

Performance optimisation resources

The executives recognised that mentorship and access to the correct tools are critical for graduates' success. E01, however, mentioned the focus on induction programmes, while E03 referenced resource allocation to the company's value proposition in supporting both the organisational and graduate development needs.

E02 states

We align the resources we provide to graduates with the company's strategy and capabilities. The onboarding program, mentorship, and tools of trade are crucial to ensuring graduates perform at their best.

E04 mentions

We assign mentors and coaches to graduates right from the start, alongside technical resources like laptops. The goal is to remove barriers so they can get on with their jobs seamlessly.

4.7 Research Question 3 - Identify challenges and opportunities presented by newly appointed graduates to organisational performance and culture

4.7.1 Graduate themes

Challenges and development of soft skills

Generally speaking, soft skills are difficult to develop because academia generally do not focus on emotional intelligence and adaptability.

G04 had to acquire soft skills on the job

When I encounter performance challenges, I go directly to the person and build a relationship. Effective communication and building relationships are key to overcoming challenges.

G05 used the teamwork experience of university projects to manage the tasks of the current role.

In terms of challenges, I always keep an open line of communication with my line manager and other analysts. This has been crucial in overcoming performance hurdles."

G07 states

I had to learn emotional intelligence on the job... Initially, when my ideas were rejected, I took it personally, but I learned how to manage such situations effectively.

Teamwork and communication

Overcoming the challenges required some level of collaboration. G02 believes that teamwork among members helps to share any progress regarding challenges. G03 states *"that building relations will help overcome the challenges."* Whereas G04 networked with personnel across departments about problem-solving to provide operational efficiency.

4.7.2 Manager themes

Challenges and conflict resolution

Managers took the performance challenges more systematically by combining documentation, retraining and mentorship. For M02, the focus was to guide and support the graduates through challenges, as stated

...some graduates have challenges with basic skill sets, for example, Excel... we take them step by step, explain the importance of the work they're asked to do, and provide ongoing training and support to address these gaps.

For M01, the effort was to do more hands-on training to solve these issues.

There were graduates not pulling their weight... this resulted in formal discussions, and eventually, when their contracts ended, we didn't renew them because they didn't live up to our values."

M03 commented

We had a graduate who could not present a required report in the correct format... We provided side-by-side training and additional exposure to ensure they understood the context and could perform effectively.

Encouraging contributions to company culture

The managers encouraged the graduates to contribute to the organisation by sharing ideas and engaging them in diverse activities. M03 encouraged the graduate to ask questions and participate in team activities, which M01 supported by providing a safe place for protected expression of their ideas and ongoing learning from feedback they gather.

4.7.3 Executive themes

Challenges to graduate programme execution

Executives identified challenges in structured graduate programmes.

E03 mentioned business needs tended to extend beyond the duration of programmes, while E04 pointed out inconsistencies in onboarding into business units, thus creating different expectations for graduates.

One of the challenges is that graduates are sometimes pulled into operations to address immediate business needs, extending their programme beyond the intended timeline... We need to stick to the graduate development timelines... Some departments are not as consistent in nurturing and mentoring graduates... It requires extra effort to ensure graduates are well-integrated and mentored in their teams.

E02 mentions

...major challenge is losing graduates mid-programme... To address this, we ensure we recruit more graduates than we need, knowing that a few might exit early.

Long-term retention and contribution

Long-term retention (4 years and longer) was one of the major measures of graduate success. E03 and E04 tracked the contribution of graduates over time. Success was measured by their promotions into different positions, and how well they continued to contribute to the business thereafter.

4.8 Observations

While observing the newly appointed graduates in their departments for just over a week, I noticed mixed outcomes in their integration and development. Although some graduates were engaging with their colleagues, attending meetings, and participating in discussions, others seemed hesitant to interact or struggled to find their footing within their teams.

In terms of performance, a few graduates were actively contributing to real-life projects aligned with the company's goals, showing potential by developing tools or dashboards that could streamline operations. However, not all efforts were equally impactful; some struggled to fully grasp their roles or adapt their problem-solving skills to the demands of the projects. Their innovative ideas occasionally lacked the practical insight needed for implementation.

Some challenges, however, were evident within the group. Certain graduates found the fast-paced environment and unfamiliar systems difficult to navigate, which slowed their progress. Despite attending training sessions to improve their technical skills, such as Excel or project management, not all graduates could keep up with the required pace. While there were feedback sessions, including one-on-one meetings with managers providing constructive guidance, it was clear that not all graduates could immediately translate the feedback into improved performance.

4.9 Unintended findings

A number of the ancillary findings that have presented themselves throughout this research inform the process of graduate integration, particularly concerning organisational culture and performance. These findings, though not core to the original research questions represent several important considerations for the organisation looking to improve its graduate programme

Leadership's focus on upward relationships

While the role of leadership in mentoring and guiding graduates is highly touted, one of the surprising findings in this study was that a significant number of leaders were primarily worried about managing upward relationships with senior executives regarding their own performance, sometimes at the expense of effective relationships with their team members. This can result in the disengagement of new graduates from their managers, and thus affect mentors in providing them with effective guidance and

feedback. Leaders should be encouraged to balance upward and downward management to support graduate integration effectively at all levels.

Impact of organisational pressures on graduate experience

It was clear from the results that graduates could be inhibited by high levels of organisational pressure, particularly in performance-based environments. Here, a few graduates were expected to adapt to very fast-paced environments, leading to instances of stress and underperformance that were poorly managed by the mentors or support structures. Companies should have more gradual onboarding processes and support those graduates who suffer from pressures associated with high-performance environments.

Inconsistent approach to mentoring and onboarding practices

The inconsistency of mentorship and induction was another unplanned discovery throughout the diverse departments. Indeed, while some enjoyed highly structured support, others had to make their way with their job description, and sometimes, with little or no guidance at all, which resulted in differences concerning performance and integration with the company's culture. In addition to its other benefits, standardised mentorship and onboarding programmes throughout all departments let graduates know they are getting uniform support.

4.10 Summary

Evidence from this study suggests that graduate development must be multi-channelled, including important elements of performance measurement, innovation, collaboration and cultural integration.

Graduates who can align their goals with wider business objectives tend to perform at a higher level and are more able to innovate their work. Whether through the development of tools to improve operational efficiencies or through other cost-saving initiatives, innovation is a recurring theme among successful graduates.

It is again about collaboration and communication with those graduates who interact more often and closely with their teams, managers and stakeholders, as they can perform well in their roles. It is perhaps most evident in how graduates use feedback mechanisms for monitoring progress against their given ideals, finding focal points of improvement and maintaining alignment with company goals.

Company culture no doubt creates an inclusive, supportive environment that helps the graduates settle into work and overcome various challenges. Mentorship and collaborative culture inspire further learning and make the newcomers feel valued.

The success of graduate integration will not just be conveyed by short-term performance outcomes but reflects long-term retention and how valuable contributions are made to the organisation over time.

Chapter 5 - Discussion of the findings

5.1 Introduction

The integration of newly appointed graduates into an organisation is an involved and multidimensional process, with far-reaching implications for both the culture of the organisation and its overall performance. Graduates bring with them new academic knowledge, new perspectives, and innovative potential that are likely to have a great impact on the operations of any organisation. However, this transition from academia to the corporate world is fraught with many challenges that the graduate has to experience. This needs careful management, guidance and support from the senior associates to integrate the graduates successfully.

This chapter discusses issues related to the three key research questions, each based on a different aspect of the graduate integration process, namely (1) the medium-term effects of graduate integration on organisational culture, (2) the immediate and medium-term impact of graduates on organisational performance, and (3) the problems and opportunities presented by the integration of graduates into the organisation.

Consequently, and through a deeper analysis of the literature review, as well as the thematic findings during the research, an explanation is developed of how graduates influence the culture and performance of an organisation and the strategies through which such integration is managed.

5.2 Research Question 1: What is the impact of newly appointed graduates on the organisational culture in the medium term?

Organisational culture is widely regarded as one of the prime influences of employee engagement to overall performance. As Hofstede's (1980) Cultural Dimensions Theory states, culture is formed through deeply ingrained assumptions, values, and behaviours that guide employees on how to interact and cooperate. Schein (2004) states that culture

does not remain static but rather changes over time as employees change when the likes of new graduate employees are being inducted into the company.

Graduates do, however, bring new academic knowledge, innovative ideas and a fresh pair of eyes that might support or break the existing cultural framework of the organisation. Their influence on organisational culture is discussed in the study where several participants emphasised how graduate integration has changed the organisational climate.

For instance, two graduates explained that a collaborative and inclusive environment allowed them to adjust to the organisation's culture and thus be more active in their teams. All this relates to Schein's (2004) proposition, stating that organisational culture is a set of shared values and beliefs which need to be continuously communicated by new and existing employees. Kotter and Heskett (1992) state that an organisation that has an open and innovative culture is well disposed to incorporating graduates into the mainstream. This emerges in the study where the experiences of graduates benefit from mentorship and open communication which helped them align with the cultural values.

For instance, one graduate commented that the collaborative culture within the company enabled him to deal closely with more experienced colleagues. This helped broaden his knowledge about technical jobs and generally about the organisation's goals. Leadership is an influential factor in organisational culture and integrating new graduates. According to Magee (2002), organisation leaders should ensure that the working environment is friendly and inclusive enough to provide room to accommodate new workers until they feel their presence and aligned with the company's ideologies.

Managers created an active environment in which the graduate could ask several questions, participate in some team activities and contribute to initiatives that drive the culture of the organisation. In support, Hofstede (1980) finds that leadership is the significant driver of cultural alignment and employee engagement. More so, Schein (2010) let it be known that such cultural integration cannot be one-way traffic, as much as organisations must adapt to new perspectives and ideas of graduates, the onus also exists for graduates to align with

the existing cultural framework of the organisation. Chapter 4 revealed that mentorship and feedback were indispensable during the professional induction of graduates into the workforce. Some of the managers during the interview process stated that

Managers created an active environment in which the graduate could ask questions, participate in team activities, and contribute to initiatives that drive the culture of the organisation.

Another stated

It's important to educate graduates on company values, such as respect, striving for excellence, integrity, and customer service through participation in cultural initiatives and mentorship.

Graduates spoke of the good lines of communication that were in place which allowed them to understand how their role fitted into the large organisational context, thereby further reinforcing their sense of belonging and cultural fit. The integration of graduates may influence the development of the organisational culture. Schein (2010) and Willmott (1993) argue that a newly hired employee, particularly graduates, may provoke cultural change since these represent new ways of thinking and behaving at work. In Chapter 4, it was mentioned that several graduates commented on how their new perspectives regarding problem-solving and process improvement influenced the cultural practices of the organisation.

For instance, one graduate stated that their contributions to the automation of some processes shifted organisational focus toward more innovative and data-driven decisions. However, there are difficulties inherent in integrating graduates into an organisational culture. For example, Denison (1990) and Gordon and Di Tomaso (1992) warn that organisational cultures that have very entrenched norms and values resist any change and might make it difficult for new workers to introduce new ideas or new practices. One manager states

One challenge was when a graduate bad-mouthed a senior manager. We addressed it by emphasising the importance of constructive feedback and showing commitment to resolving concerns appropriately.

Indeed, some graduates expressed frustration with the pace of cultural change that was slower than anticipated, particularly when the organisation adopted an approach that was extremely hierarchical or traditional. Some graduates followed up on this by describing how one may be open to new ideas and eager to introduce them but then discover one's colleagues are more senior and resistant to moving from established practices. Despite these difficulties, Chapter 4 and the literature in general, provide an outlook that by leaders being supportive and offering an enabling environment to innovate and collaborate, the medium-term outcome of graduate integration into organisational culture is positive.

A manager states

One of our graduates contributed significantly by creating a system access framework. This innovative initiative was later adopted across the organisation.

According to Kotter and Heskett (1992) and Schein (2010), leadership is important in embedding the values that give a culture an open outlook toward change and new ideas. It was further identified that the supportive role of managers helped graduates with cultural adaption when they included the graduates from the outset in the various cultural initiatives to help align with the organisation's values.

5.3 Research Question 2: To determine the immediate and medium-term contribution of newly appointed graduates to organisational performance:

Graduates can contribute majorly to the performance of an organisation, especially in the short to medium term (1 to 3 years), provided they possess knowledge and skills that can be aligned with the strategic objectives of the organisation. Some managers mention

One graduate designed a time-in-motion study that was so advanced it was implemented company-wide, resulting in process optimisation.

Another manager states

A graduate developed a picking-error project that influenced operational improvements, leading to further investigations by industrial psychologists.

Becker's Human Capital Theory (1962) proposes that the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the workers entering any organisation are valuable resources that help drive the competitive advantage and hence, performance. This fact corroborates with the theory mentioned in Chapter 4 where the graduates contributed to improving performance with innovations, such as automating processes, streamlining operations, and introducing new tools for increased productivity.

Denison (1990) and Gordon and Di Tomaso (1992) emphasise that certain cultural characteristics are strongly linked to high-performance results, including innovation, accountability, and responsiveness to change. Many of the graduates (Chapter 4) provided good examples of how they made a difference to improve performance through innovative problem-solving. One graduate developed a Power BI reporting dashboard which automated much of the reporting process involved in inventory management, thus significantly lowering aged stock levels and bringing marked efficiency improvements to operations. Another implemented a machine utilisation dashboard that allowed him to improve delegation and performance monitoring on the shop floor.

Both these examples provide considerable insight into how graduates may use academic knowledge and technical ability to enable new practice implementation in pursuit of improving organisational performance. This often requires active support and guidance from leadership, however, as Wren (2018) explains, one of the more impactful ways that leadership behaviours can impact employee performance involves the encouragement of innovation and collaboration. The clear situating of performance expectations and provision of necessary resources and support to the graduates were very important in the case of two managers.

Leadership coaching may constitute a means of equipping these graduates with ways of overcoming the challenges inherent in their new roles and determining how their contribution aligns with the organisation's strategic objectives (Cox et al, 2014). Graduates

received guidance and mentorship from their managers, enabling them to overcome initial difficulties and make good contributions to their teams. One manager mentions that

Ongoing training is critical, especially since many graduates lack practical business experience and technical skills like advanced Excel.

This, therefore, agrees with what the literature has emphasised about the development role of leadership in fostering a performance culture supportive of continuous learning and development (Schein, 2004).

Also, the immediate utility value of graduates to organisational performance may result in longer-term gains, such as innovation, process enhancement and effectiveness. Becker's Human Capital Theory (1962) suggests that the skills and knowledge contributed by new employees may result in more sustained performance improvement when these resources are correctly embedded into the performance system of an organisation. As was mentioned by some of the graduates, the tools and processes they developed, continued to be used by the teams long after the initial implementation, thus suggesting that their contributions had a lasting impact on the organisation's performance.

One graduate, for instance, designed and implemented a cost-saving initiative that enhanced operational efficiencies at the distribution centres. In contrast, another presented a labour management tool that helped to optimise manpower utilisation. In this regard, such innovation assistance brought in short-term gains and contributed towards long-term success in light of enhanced efficiency of processes. This agrees with the views of Gordon and Di Tomaso (1992) who suggest that organisations resting on innovation and continuous improvement culture, are likely to realise sustained gains in performance.

Yet, there are challenges in integrating graduates into organisational performance systems. As Willmott (1993) explains, the effective integration of graduates will depend on how well an organisation provides structured induction programmes, ongoing training and clear performance expectations. An example, some graduates were clearly frustrated with a lack of clarity concerning specific roles and responsibilities, especially in organisations where performance metrics were not well defined. One graduate stated that they did not

understand how their job fitted into the wider goals of the organisation, and thus felt that they could not contribute meaningfully. One manager noted that

...some graduates struggled to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace requirements. Structured retraining and mentorship helped address this.

Despite these challenges, the literature and findings indicate that the medium-term impact of graduates on the performance of an organisation is generally positive, especially where support and resources are provided by the organisation to ensure graduate success. Becker's Human Capital Theory (1962) and work by Denison (1990) also highlight how graduate contributions must be aligned with organisational goals and how a culture of innovation and continuous improvement needs to be instilled.

Most managers were influential in making sure the graduates became cognisant of how they were expected to perform while being equipped with tools and support to reach their expectations with one manager stating

Some graduates struggled to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace requirements. Structured retraining and mentorship helped address this.

5.4 Research Question 3: Identify the challenges and opportunities that newly appointed graduates pose to organisational performance and culture

The integration of newly appointed graduates into an organisation presents various challenges and opportunities regarding cultural adaptation, performance alignment, and soft-skill development.

According to Karimi and Pina (2019), soft skills, such as leadership, teamwork, and emotional intelligence are essential for workforce success but remain underdeveloped in academia. This growing gap requires organisations and academic institutions to collaborate on training, mentoring and curriculum alignment to prepare students effectively.

Several graduates reported that these soft skills were difficult to develop as they tried to negotiate their way through different interpersonal situations and learned to work at a fast pace in the corporate world. One graduate reported that he struggled with relationship building and communicating well with his colleagues, while another struggled with how to handle conflict and resolve performance problems. These challenges align with the findings of Willmott (1993) who argues that organisations are responsible for developing a culture of continuous learning and development to overcome such skill gaps among graduates. A manager noted during the interview that

Encouraging graduates to remain curious and contribute ideas fosters innovation, even if those ideas require refinement before implementation.

whilst another manager noted that

Some graduates struggled with inappropriate feedback and lack of required technical competencies. We addressed this with additional training and clear feedback.

Despite these challenges, the integration of graduates also brings substantial opportunities to organisations through increased innovation and process improvement. Graduates bring new ideas and ways of working that contribute to organisational innovativeness and performance improvement to which Kotter and Heskett (1992) referred.

Various graduates proposed the introduction of some tools and processes, which streamlined operations and increased efficiencies. Results can also become evident in critical business areas, for instance, a graduate instituted a machine utilisation dashboard that improved productivity and performance outcomes for the production floor. Another has undertaken cost-saving activities that reduced operational inefficiencies at the distribution centres.

Furthermore, the integration process of graduates into organisational culture opens different avenues for cultural evolution and cultural renewal. As Schein mentioned in his work, newcomers may become a very serious driving force for changes in the culture of the

corporation, especially in cases when they bring some new ideas that strongly contrast with the ones preexisting.

These findings support how several graduates mentioned that their contributions to process improvements and problem-solving influenced the organisational cultural practices, increasing the interest in more innovative and data-driven decision-making practices.

However, graduate integration requires the ability of the organisation to manage these opportunities and challenges effectively. Organisations with rigid hierarchies or deeply entrenched norms tend to resist change and, therefore, often have difficulty modulating new ideas or practices brought in by graduates (Gordon & Di Tomaso, 1992). As noted in Chapter 4, some graduates expressed frustration with the pace of cultural change where more established employees were resistant to new ways of working.

Even given these challenges, it appears that the literature and the findings in discussions throughout the study suggest more opportunities than challenges exist around graduate integration but organisations must be set to invest in the necessary support and resources for integration. As Kotter and Heskett (1992) and Schein (2010) established, leadership is a critical component in the development of a culture that supports innovation and continuous improvement, in support of what one manager noted

Leadership ensured a structured onboarding and feedback process to address performance issues and align graduates with organisational goals.

The study showed the role of managers in guiding the graduates through their cultural adaptation, ensuring that from the very beginning, the graduates became involved with the initiatives related to the culture and embraced values upheld by the organisation.

5.1 Summary

The integration of newly appointed graduates into organisational culture and performance systems accommodates a complex but rewarding process with clear challenges and opportunities for organisations. Graduates carry new knowledge, innovative potential, and fresh perspectives that will enhance the culture and performance.

Leadership is about cultural flexibility and ongoing support. Organisations can offer mentorship, feedback and also structured onboarding to help the graduates overcome such challenges and maximise their contribution. In this way, organisations will not only contribute to improved immediate performance outcomes but also assure long-term retention and innovation by making the graduates valuable and long-lasting assets for the organisation.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the major findings of the study and gives good-practice recommendations. Therefore, it tries to distil those insights from the critical research questions explored in the preceding chapters while simultaneously giving practical recommendations for improving the integration and development of newly appointed graduates within organisations. It includes recommendations on how organisations can apply leadership coaching, mentoring, and formal onboarding processes to smooth the graduates' transition from academia to corporate settings and align performance and culture.

6.2 Key findings

The study sought to investigate three important research questions concerning the newly appointed graduates' integration into the organisational culture and performance system. A summary of the key findings aligned with each research question is presented below.

6.2.1 Research Question 1: Assess the impact of the inclusion of newly recruited graduates on the organisational culture in the medium-term

Integration of graduates into organisational culture: Graduates can bring new perspectives and academic knowledge to challenge and improve the existing cultural framework within any organisation. How well they integrate depends on mentorship, onboarding, and readiness to accommodate a collaborative and inclusive culture the organisation provides. Essentially, leadership plays a quintessential and leading role in ensuring that graduates not only adapt but also contribute to cultural evolution within the life span of the organisation.

As evidence, the study highlights certain graduates experienced smooth integration into a work environment where regular feedback and participation were encouraged.

Role of leadership: The silent role of leadership lies in encouraging an open and adaptable culture. For successful integration, leadership should actively support the cultural assimilation of graduates through active mentoring, feedback mechanisms, and engaged involvement in culture-related initiatives. Executive participants emphasised the need for induction programmes to ensure graduates receive a cultural immersion into an organisation from day one.

6.2.2 Research Question 2: Evaluate the recruits' graduate performance in terms of immediate and medium-term organisational outcomes

Graduate impact on organisational performance: Graduates contribute to organisational performance by introducing innovations within the workplace and aligning their contributions to the company's overall strategic objectives. In many cases, newer insights brought better efficiencies in operations and innovations in many aspects, such as automation of processes, solving tough technical challenges and performance optimisation.

The development of a Power BI dashboard, through which operations were smoothed and its inventory management significantly improved, illustrates some of the immediate values graduates can bring by applying their technical skill sets.

Role of leadership within performance management: Setting clear expectations about performance and continuous feedback will help the graduates contribute their share toward overall organisational objectives. This is where senior leadership will be substantive in coaching and mentoring the new graduates to bridge the gap in their academic knowledge versus practical workplace performance. Managers seemed to offer a helping hand in performance expectations to the graduates concerning the overall company goals.

6.2.3 Research Question 3: Determine what challenges and opportunities newly appointed graduates bring to organisational performance and culture

Challenges in graduate integration: One clear development needed in graduate integration is soft skills, such as emotional intelligence, flexibility and effective communication. These are not usually well-developed within an academic environment and their absence serves as a barrier to integrating individuals effectively into the culture and performance regime of the organisation. One graduate, for instance, found it challenging to manage emotional intelligence in the workplace but through mentorship and training, he overcame this.

Opportunities for organisational innovation and culture development: Graduates can create several opportunities regarding innovation, creation and culture development. Their new perspective opens avenues for creative problem-solving and improvement in processes. Further to this, their successful integration into the culture will help foster an even more dynamic and inclusive organisational culture for the future.

Innovative tools that enhanced efficiency in operations, such as some of the graduates mentioned, provided performance tracking dashboards and resource optimisation.

Long-term retention and leadership roles: In terms of long-term retention, the role played by leadership in grooming graduates through well-structured onboarding, continuous training and mentorship is very important. Supported graduates will contribute to the long-term success of the organisation. For instance, executives emphasised that graduate retention and performance have to be the two major measures for graduate programme outcomes.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, some recommendations that could help improve the effectiveness of graduate programmes and their integration within the organisation include the following:

6.3.1 Strengthen mentorship and coaching programmes

Graduate employees value formal mentorship and leadership development. Organisations should place high importance on establishing formal mentoring relationships that can develop skills and professionalism both professionally and personally. There should be regular evaluation of the effectiveness of the mentorship programmes through feedback from graduates and mentors alike.

6.3.2 Align graduate objectives with organisational objectives

Ensuring that graduate contributions are focused on company goals from the outset can contribute to higher levels of performance and engagement. Organisations should, therefore, set up goal-setting mechanisms through which individual performance will be linked to strategic business outcomes. Utilising performance measures, like KPIs and SMART goals for graduates, can be very helpful in guiding them, as some of the graduates explained.

6.3.3 Leverage inclusive and adaptive organisational cultures

Leadership must create an environment that promotes inclusivity and adaptability to accommodate the new perspectives of graduates. Organisations should encourage open communication, collaboration and cultural initiatives that help new graduates feel a sense of belonging. One should utilise the various onboarding programmes to orient the graduates with the company's culture and values, using leadership engagement as a support.

6.3.4 Acquire soft skills by continuous training

Soft skills, like emotional intelligence and adaptability, are essential for the future success of any graduate. In most cases, these are absent in their academic backgrounds. Organisations need to impart focused training and development programmes, considering the job requirements.

6.4 Potential further studies

While this study provided suitable insights into the integration of newly appointed graduates into the organisational culture and performance system, it also opened several avenues for further research. Such areas would help in establishing a better understanding of how organisations can optimally develop graduate development programmes and achieve higher levels of leadership effectiveness.

1. **Longitudinal studies of graduate retention and performance:** One of the limitations of this study was that it perceived the time for the integration of graduates as relatively short. It will be intriguing to conduct a longitudinal study that tracked the performance of graduates concerning retention over several years, along with cultural adjustment, to establish the long-term effect of graduate development programmes on organisational performance. A study could look into how graduates develop in an organisation over time, using measures of long-term retention and career progression that assess their eventual impact on innovation and culture.
2. **Impact of leadership coaching on graduate development:** Although leadership coaching has been identified as a useful tool in guiding graduates, the exact impacts that coaching would have on graduate development remains inadequately discussed. Further research, in more specific detail, will help in understanding how leadership coaching affects the graduates and their mentors, an endeavour that may lead to the discovery of how coaching can be enhanced. The research could focus on testing the efficacy of different coaching methodologies and their eventual influence on graduate performance, engagement, and retention over time.
3. **Studies on the development of soft skills at the graduate level:** The soft skills that emerged from this study are emotional intelligence, communication and adaptability which are poorly recognised and inadequately developed. A study could consider developing focused training programmes to improve graduate job performance and workplace culture adjustment. A study focused on developing

emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills in graduate programmes would assist organisations in providing better support for holistic growth in their new employees.

4. **Cultural adaptation in multinational organisations** Exploring the role of multinational, diverse cultural contexts in graduate integration is another potential area of study. The graduates entering organisations operating on a global scale may face particular challenges in adjusting to varying norms and expectations within different cultures. It could also be done as a cross-cultural study on how graduates adjust to the different kinds of organisational cultures in multinational companies and differences in leadership styles across contexts that support the integration of cultures.

6.2 Limitations of the study

While this study is an excellent opportunity to learn from the proceedings, there are limitations that one must be aware of, such as the five- to seven-month timeframe in which leadership coaching and graduate integration take place, which may be regarded as rather restrictive, and might not identify long-term impacts on organisational culture and performance. This study can expand its observation time even further with the benefit of capturing a more meaningful understanding of graduate integration, as well as the outcomes of leadership over a much longer term.

In addition, this study focused on a single retail company which limited the generalisability of the findings. Different business sectors may have varied dynamics, challenges, and integration processes, leading to potentially different outcomes. As a result, the conclusions drawn from this study may not fully reflect the experiences or best practices applicable to other sectors. Future research could benefit from a comparative analysis across multiple industries to provide a more comprehensive perspective.

6.5 Summary

The integration of graduates into the organisational culture and performance systems is complex, yet promising. Organisations can maximise the potential of newly appointed graduates through fostering inclusive cultures, setting clear performance expectations and providing ongoing mentorship. Consequently, leadership has a pivotal role to play in facilitating this process by ensuring integration takes place, and graduates can contribute meaningfully to both cultural and performance outcomes. The long-term success of graduate programmes will require the ability of organisations to continuously support learning, adaption and innovation in their workforce.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions:

Proposed research questions:

These original questions were taken out of the ARP, to focus on 3 main questions:

1. To explore the expectations of newly appointed graduates versus the realities of working environments.
2. To develop recommendations for organisations on optimising the integration of newly appointed graduates.
3. To investigate the role of mentorship and professional development opportunities in the successful assimilation of graduates into the company culture and their contribution to company performance.

Using the above, the following proposed questions to graduates, their managers and HR Executives were formulated:

Graduates Questions:

Performance:

1. How do you measure your contributions to the company's performance goals?
2. Describe a specific project or task where you significantly improved performance outcomes.
3. What strategies do you use to overcome performance challenges in your role?
4. How has your academic background prepared you to excel in your current position?
5. Can you share an experience where you had to innovate to meet a performance target?
6. How do you prioritise tasks to ensure high performance and meet deadlines?

Culture:

1. What aspects of the company culture have helped you integrate and perform effectively?
2. How do you contribute to a positive workplace culture within your team or department?
3. Have you been involved in any initiatives that aim to enhance the company culture? Please describe.
4. In what ways do you feel the company culture supports your professional development?
5. Describe how you align your work practices with the company's core cultural values.
6. How do you handle conflicts between personal values and company culture?

Managers Questions:

Performance:

1. How do you set performance expectations for new graduates in your team?
2. Describe a time when a graduate exceeded performance expectations and the impact it had.
3. What role does ongoing training play in enhancing the performance of graduates?
4. How do you provide feedback to graduates on their performance?
5. Can you share an example of a performance challenge faced by a graduate and how it was resolved?
6. How do you recognise and reward high performance among graduates?

Culture:

1. How do you ensure new graduates adapt well to the company culture?
2. Describe an activity or program your team uses to strengthen cultural bonds.
3. How do you model company cultural values to graduates in your team?
4. In what ways do you encourage graduates to contribute to the company culture?
5. What challenges have you faced integrating graduates into the company culture, and how have you addressed them?
6. How do you support graduates in expressing their cultural ideas or initiatives?

HR Executives Questions:

Performance:

1. What metrics do you use to assess the performance impact of hiring graduates?
2. How does the organisation ensure graduates have the resources they need to perform at their best?
3. Describe the process for setting performance goals for graduates across the company.
4. How is performance feedback gathered and acted upon for continuous improvement among graduates?
5. What challenges have you identified in optimising graduate performance, and how are they addressed?
6. In what ways does the organisation track the long-term performance contributions of graduates?

Culture:

1. What strategies are in place to ensure graduates enhance the company culture?
2. How does the organisation assess cultural fit during the recruitment of graduates?
3. Describe any initiatives specifically aimed at integrating graduates into the company culture.
4. How do you gather feedback from graduates on the company culture?
5. What measures are taken when a mismatch between a graduate and the company culture is identified?
6. How do you ensure that cultural values are communicated effectively to new graduates?

Appendix B: Interview Permission Letter

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Research on Graduate Adaptation and Its Impact on Company Culture and Performance

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am Barend Naude, a Master of Business Administration candidate at the Wits Business School. My research is centred on the adaptation of recent graduates in the professional environment and its subsequent influence on organisational culture and performance.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the capacity of graduates to integrate successfully into the workforce, and to understand the extent to which their transition shapes the overall dynamics of culture and performance within a company.

In pursuit of this, I am seeking participants for an interview to gain insights into workplace engagement, onboarding procedures, performance metrics and leadership interaction regarding culture and performance.

The interview will consist of a structured set of questions and is anticipated to require no more than one hour of your time.

Please note, it is my intention to audio record the interview sessions for accuracy during the analysis phase of my study. Be assured that confidentiality is paramount and that all the recordings will be securely stored and not distributed internally or externally. Your permission to record our discussion would be greatly appreciated.

Participation in this research carries no monetary incentive or direct benefits, and there are no consequences should you decide not to partake. You retain the right to withdraw from the interview at any point, and if at any time you feel discomfort, you are at liberty to discontinue your participation.

It is essential that the details of our conversation remain confidential, and I ask that you refrain from sharing any sensitive aspects of our discussion with external parties.

Should you have any inquiries or require further clarification about the research, please do not hesitate to reach out to me using the contact information provided below.

The results of this research will be compiled into a comprehensive report for submission to the Wits Business School. A summary of the findings will be made available to you upon request.

For any concerns or grievances regarding the ethical conduct of this study, please contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) at +27(0)11 717 1408 or email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za.

I look forward to the possibility of your contribution to this study.

Warm regards,

Barend Naude

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Declaration and Consent of Research Participant

I have been fully informed about the details of this research by Barend Naude. All questions I had were addressed to my satisfaction. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded. By signing below, I express my voluntary agreement to participate in this research and acknowledge receipt of this consent form.

Name of Participant:

Signature:

Date: