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Entitlement Disconnect: Exploring Management Graduates' Mental Schema in Their Anticipatory Psychological Contract**

Abstract

In this paper, we expanded on the psychological contract theory by exploring the mental schemas of graduates' anticipatory psychological contract before they start employment. With this research, we aimed to explore and substantiate themes associated with the mental schemas of graduates, so that the psychological contract formation theory can be expanded by investigating the role of entitlement disconnect and its influence on the anticipatory psychological contract. Literature regarding the formulation of the psychological contract is still underdeveloped, especially regarding the anticipatory phase thereof. Entitlement disconnect has also not been focused on in past literature, especially as a component of the anticipatory psychological contract that can have an impact on graduates' career schema and voluntary turnover intention. A qualitative approach to research was adopted consisting of interviews with 18 final-year economics and management sciences graduate students in the final phase of their degrees to derive themes associated with the mental schemas of graduates' anticipatory psychological contract. The findings suggest that graduates already have a developed mental schema that was based on their entitlement. It was also confirmed that graduates had a disposition towards voluntary turnover intuition before organisational entry, which was due to an entitlement disconnect perception. The final and most surprising finding was that some graduates already displayed pre-employment violations, where graduates already anticipated psychological contract breach before entering an employment relationship. This research suggests that graduates' mental schemas in their anticipatory psychological contract play a much bigger role in the development of their psychological contract, after organisational entry than what was initially thought.

Keywords: Entitlement disconnect, Anticipatory, Psychological contract
(JEL: J01, J41, L14)

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Introduction and theoretical framework

The psychological contract framework played a vital role in defining the relationship between employer and employee (Shore et al., 2012), as well as explaining workplace behaviour (Restubog et al., 2007). The majority of psychological contract research focuses on how the psychological contract develops once an individual is employed (for instance Adams et al., 2014; O'Leary-Kellyet al., 2014; Tomprou & Nikolaou, 2011), but relatively little attention has been given to the aspects that influence the psychological contract in the anticipatory phase of employment, with only a few publications on this topic (for instance De Vos et al., 2009; Gresse et al., 2013; Linde & Gresse, 2014; Ruchika & Prasad, 2019). It is suggested that understanding how expectations and obligations develop, it may increase the odds of reinforcing desired employee employment outcomes, while simultaneously reducing the undesirable ones (Sherman & Morley, 2015).

The formation of the perceptions and beliefs of this psychological contract, creating the implicit and explicit obligations that make up the employment relationship (Conway & Briner, 2005; Rousseau, 1995), was proposed by Windle and von Treuer (2014) to be formed with three stages of socialisation. These authors (Windle & von Treuer, 2014) indicated that the psychological contract already formed in the anticipatory phase (pre-employment and recruitment), then moved over to the early socialisation phase (first six months of employment) and lastly to the latter socialisation phase (contract evaluation and revision). De Vos et al. (2005) and Rousseau (2001) suggested that new employees hold a basic psychological contract that becomes more complex and matured over time, as their work experiences increase. Lub et al. (2016) noted the role of generational differences on the development of psychological contract expectations and obligations, in addition to the impact of the employment relationship on it. These research contributions to the formation of the psychological contract imply that the contents of the psychological contract are influenced by socialisation processes, before the initialisation of the employment relationship. These socialisation processes initiate pre-employment expectations and obligations, which are linked to the anticipatory psychological contract (Ruchika & Prasad, 2019). However, this formation of a mental schema would not be influenced by socialisation processes, but also the individuals own sense of deservingness, directly linked to expectations grounded by the individual's mental schema.

Gresse et al. (2013) have confirmed that expectations from a graduate's mental schema can be influenced by self-perception factors, environmental-oriented factors and anticipated workplace-oriented influences. This may cause some negative consequences, particularly in the anticipatory phase of the psychological contract, as some individuals have no prior experience in employment to base their beliefs on.

The factors that form the psychological contract are already figuring during the recruitment stage of employment, as well as interaction with other employees when

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they start to work (Rousseau, 2001). This formation of the psychological contract is mainly linked to the organisational entry process. There are authors (Ruchika & Prasad, 2019; Eilam-Shamir & Yaakobi, 2014; Gresse, 2012; Gresse et al., 2013; De Vos et al., 2009) who have accepted that some factors of the psychological contract can form prior to the actual organisational entry, even before the recruitment phase of employment, in the form of an anticipatory psychological contract. De Hauw and De Vos (2010) defined the anticipatory psychological contract as the pre-employment beliefs that individuals have regarding future employment.

Such an anticipatory psychological contract also includes promises that individuals want to make to their future employers and incentives they expect to receive (De Vos et al., 2009). De Vos et al. (2009) were of the opinion that prospective employees already have a mental schema about what they expect from their future employer, even if they have no prior experience in employment, which was also confirmed by Gresse et al. (2013) in interviews conducted with undergraduate students who have not yet entered formal employment. A schema can be considered a mental model of conceptually related items or elements which directs how new information is organised (Stein, 1992). This conceptual model (schema) that prospective employees have – regarding what they expect from employment – will determine the degree to which their expectations matched the actual employment relationship (De Vos et al., 2009). The schema theory is nothing new to psychological contract research as it has been implied in Rousseau's (1990) reconceptualization of the psychological contract, from the employee's perspective. Schema theory provides a theoretical lens to evaluate how the psychological contract works, which emphasises how information is used when parties come to an agreement (Sherman & Morley, 2015). The principle of this anticipatory psychological contract is that the beliefs, before organisational entry, are based on already available reciprocity, even though it is not connected with a specific employment contract. Reciprocity in the psychological contract reflects a principle of mutuality between two parties (Schalk & De Ruiter, 2019). Such a reciprocal expectation, in anticipation of employment, is not primarily based on the actual legal contract of formal employment, but on social and normative expectations (Berkhout, 2006). The individual's anticipatory psychological contract does not include an actual legal contract, through employment, which implies that expectation levels can fluctuate between individuals (Gresse et al., 2013; Gresse, 2012). A form of reciprocity exists, even though these anticipated implicit beliefs are not based on an actual employment agreement, since it is based on a principle of mutuality between the individual and future employer.

The contents of the psychological contract do not only include beliefs associated with reciprocity and mutuality. The influence of an individual sense of deservingness – entitlement – has been mentioned in previous psychological contract studies (Rousseau, 1998; Paul et al., 2000), but it was only regarded as a synonym for psychological contract expectations. Naumann et al. (2002) suggested that understanding and exploring an employee's perception of entitlement were crucial to under-

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standing the expectations of that employee or prospective employee. This sense of deservingness that individuals perceive was also referred to by Harvey and Harris (2010) as psychological entitlement. Psychological entitlement can be defined as a fairly stable and universal characteristic that occurs when an individual expects a high level of reward or preferential treatment regardless of his/her ability and performance level (Campbell et al., 2004; Harvey & Harris, 2010). Psychological entitlement does not incorporate the principle of reciprocity and should not be identified as part of an agreement. It is necessary to differentiate between a psychological contract expectation as a perceived belief, based on the principle of reciprocity and mutuality, while psychological entitlement is a sense of deservingness, without an agreement for it.

Harvey and Harris (2010) believed that unrealistic entitlement beliefs have negative consequences for both parties in an employment relationship, and Snyders (2002) believed that there should be a warning to individuals in the process of attaining a qualification and then fall subject to the dangers of unrealistic entitlement perceptions, something that can have a negative impact on future employment relations. Research that has focused on psychological entitlement in employment confirmed that psychologically entitled employees displayed a tendency toward unethical behaviour, conflict with their supervisors, high pay expectations, low levels of job satisfaction, and high levels of turnover intention (Harvey & Harris, 2010; Harvey & Martinko, 2009; Kets de Vries, 2006; Levine, 2005). Previous research on entitlement perceptions and the anticipatory psychological contract of individuals found that entitlement beliefs actually act as a determining factor for their levels of expectation, which are difficult to be fulfilled (Gresse, 2012; Gresse et al., 2013), but relatively little is known about how entitlement beliefs truly influence the anticipated psychological contract, other than creating higher expectation levels in employees. A study conducted by Schofield and Honore (2011) indirectly hinted at this connection between entitlement perceptions and the psychological contract.

Schofield and Honore (2011) conducted a study regarding expectations of employees and their managers and found that the majority of the participants, who were new working graduates, were proud to work for their employer and would recommend their employer as a viable employment possibility. These employees were also willing to do more for the company to ensure the success of the organisation. According to Schofield and Honore (2011), this research would have been encouraging for employers were it not for the fact that the majority of these participants stated that they had the intent to leave the employer within the first two years of working there. This indicates that the graduates still had a voluntary turnover intention although there was no perception of breach or violation within these employees' psychological contract. It is proposed that this occurrence where employees have a balanced psychological contract and still want to leave the company in a few years can occur as a result of a psychological entitlement state that is disconnected from the actual relationship; a form of entitlement disconnect.

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Entitlement disconnect, as a perception, refers to where an employee's employment expectations and the actual reality of employment are not in sync with their entitlement perceptions. This can lead to a predisposition of an employee to leave the employer due to the perception that the employer will not in future be able to honour the entitlement beliefs that the employees have, in absence of a grounded psychological contract breach or violation. Priesemuth and Taylor (2016) have found that psychological contract violation has a significant correlation with employee depressive mood states and that this relationship was higher for individuals who display high levels of entitlement. Entitlement disconnect has never been investigated as a component of the anticipatory psychological contract.

Therefore, this paper aimed to explore the mental schemas of graduates' anticipatory psychological contract to expand on the psychological contract formation theory by incorporating entitlement disconnect as a part of the anticipatory psychological contract. To achieve this, the following research propositions were derived from the above sections:

Research proposition 1: *Graduates' anticipatory psychological contract includes an entitlement-based career schema, before entering employment for the first time.*

Research proposition 2: *Graduates' anticipatory psychological contract can cause a predisposition towards voluntary turnover intention due to their entitlement disconnect perception.*

Research Design

Research Approach

We used a qualitative data gathering approach to derive themes associated with graduates' employment perceptions and entitlements, due to a lack of a grounded theoretical model on entitlement disconnect in the anticipatory psychological contract. An interpretivist/constructivist epistemological paradigm was followed, which is regarded as the framework for most qualitative approaches to research (Maxwell, 2006). According to Maxwell (2006), the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm sees the world as established, interpreted, and experienced by a person in their interaction with other individuals and social systems. The purpose of this interpretive/constructivist inquiry is not to generalise the findings to the general population, but rather to enhance the understanding of an occurrence (Lincoln & Guba, 2005).

The questions that were developed were based on theoretical principles of the psychological contract, expectations and entitlements. Coded themes were also discussed through a literature study. Trochim and Donnelly (2008) stated that one of the reasons why a researcher may consider doing a qualitative study is when the current state of knowledge in an area is inadequate and a better understanding of a

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phenomenon is needed. Qualitative investigation is an in-depth process that allows the researchers to discover patterns, categories and interrelationships through the exploration of open questions (Blanche et al., 2006).

Research Strategy

Interviews were conducted and the data gathered was transcribed to identify the various themes associated with the anticipatory psychological contract and entitlements of graduates. The themes were identified based on a coding process. The various research propositions also acted as a measure to identify the themes related to this study and a literature review was conducted to substantiate these themes. This article is exploratory in nature since entitlement has not been sufficiently investigated in psychological contract research. For this reason, this article focuses on deriving themes, by means of a thematic analysis, associated with entitlement and perceptions of graduates using semi-structured qualitative interviews.

Research Method

Research Setting

The theoretical population for this study was graduates who have not yet entered formal employment. A sample that best represents the theoretical population was students in the final phase of obtaining their qualification, as they will enter the labour market within a few months. We used purposive sampling and snowball sampling to identify potential participants. Purposive sampling was used to determine a viable sample that would represent the research population. Trochim and Donnelly (2008) explain purposive sampling as a sampling technique where a researcher will sample with a specific purpose in mind. The sampling requirement was that participants should be final-year economics and management sciences university students who will enter the labour market after they complete their current enrolled qualifications. Due to the large number of variables that may impact expectations and experiences of participants from different study disciplines (for example the requirement to pass a board exam to be allowed to practise for accountants and law students), it was decided to focus on a single discipline in our research; also entitlement in the anticipatory psychological contract of management-related students has already been confirmed (Gresse et al., 2013), an element which is required for reaching the research objectives. The interviews were specifically timed to take place during the final examination of final-year students as they will be graduates after passing their examinations. The researcher made appointments with various university programme leaders to request a list of eligible participants.

Snowball sampling was also used to select participants for the interviews. Snowball sampling refers to where a participant in a study refers to other subsequent participants who meet the sampling requirements (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). A total of 18 interviews were conducted, which included 12 male and five female participants.

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The sample consisted of 18 final-year students majoring in Transport Economics, Logistics Management, Economics, Management or Public Administration, who have not yet entered formal employment. Participation in the interviews was voluntary and complete anonymity in reporting the results was promised to limit bias and to increase the overall honesty of the participants.

Data Collection Method

A semi-structured interview was conducted to obtain data from the participants, based on an interview guideline (Appendix). This guideline set out the process of the interviews, the environmental conditions, record and data keeping conditions, as well as some ethical considerations. A 60-minute interview was scheduled with each participant. The actual length of the interviews ranged from 12 to 46 minutes per participant, with an average length of approximately 20 minutes. The interviewer asked questions related to the research propositions that the participant had to consider and respond to. The responses of the participants were perceived by the interviewer as open and unguided. If additional information was required from a participant, the interviewer would ask the participant to elaborate. The main purpose of the questions was to understand the mental schemas of graduates' anticipatory psychological contract; therefore, the interview scheme consisted of seven questions that determined:

1. The state of the career schema of the graduates (research proposition 1);
2. The graduates' perception of the number of employers they will work for in the first 10 years of employment as well as the motivation for it (research proposition 2);
3. The overall entitlement perceptions and expectations of graduates (research proposition 1).

The specific interview questions that were used in data collection are displayed in the interview guideline (Appenix).

Recording and Data Analysis

The answers to each of the interview questions were transcribed and analysed separately to obtain themes associated with the research propositions. After this process, the responses were documented using a thematic analysis approach. The coding process was done in two phases:

Firstly, in Microsoft Excel, a coding grid was created where all the responses were captured according to the question that the response was related to, based on the central idea of the response. The central idea of a response was determined by the word choices that participants used (for instance: 'adapting', 'exposure' and 'learning') and what that word meant within context. If the central idea of a response was related to a previously documented response, the participant number was captured

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next to response and if the central idea of a response was unrelated to a previously documented response, a new response was documented. This was done until all the transcribed interview responses were captured based on the question they relate to. After analysing 14 of the 18 transcribed interviews, a saturation point was reached as no new data or responses became known, although points were still assigned to each existing response.

In the second phase, all responses were grouped based on similarity, irrespective of the question they relate to. This coding process was done in Microsoft Excel, where another coding grid was formed. The first step was to remove data clutter. Some of the responses were combined with responses from other questions due to them having the same central idea. Each response was then grouped in terms of similarity to form a cluster. The similarity of responses was determined by identifying the common characteristic between responses, which we called 'response core'. A descriptive heading was then assigned to each cluster. The clusters were then analysed and grouped by using subject literature and the research propositions in our paper as guidelines. These combined clusters represented the themes and sub-themes and were provided with an appropriate name. The coding was performed by the interviewer and reviewed by the co-author. The thematic analysis, which includes the final coding in phase 2, can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

Results

There were two global themes identified from the participants' responses: firstly, themes associated with graduates' mental schemas; and secondly, themes related to graduates' predisposition towards turnover intention, with the coded themes indicated in Table 1.

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Table 1. Results of graduates' mental schema

Global theme 1: Graduates Mental Schema				
Responses	**Response core**	**Participants**	**Sub-theme**	**Theme**
Get a basic job to obtain experience	Gain employment	1; 9; 15; 17	**Immediate strategy**	**Career Goals**
Gain employment in a lower managerial position	Gain employment	4; 11; 13;		
Start own company when I graduate	Gain employment	10; 11		
Adapting to the workplace	Socialisation behaviour	1; 2; 7; 14		
Start from the bottom and work your way up	Socialisation behaviour	2; 4; 5; 7; 8; 9; 17		
Meet influential people	Socialisation behaviour	1; 2; 4; 5		
Learn the ropes	Socialisation behaviour	1; 2; 3; 4; 7		
Do not know what is expected from me when I start working	Socialisation behaviour	1; 3; 4; 5; 6; 9; 10; 11; 12; 14; 17; 18		
Prove yourself to your employer	Career advancement	2		
Gain experience to advance in career	Career advancement	3; 6; 11; 13; 14, 16; 18		
Climb the employment ladder as quickly as possible	Career advancement	13		
Face different challenges	Career advancement	12; 16; 18		
I want to be the owner of my own business	Long-term goals	1; 3; 4; 5; 8; 10; 13; 14; 15; 18	**Long-term goals**	
I want to manage a company (CEO)	Long-term goals	2; 3; 5; 7; 11; 13; 17		
I want personal and professional growth	Long-term goals	3; 5; 7; 15		
I want a PhD degree	Long-term goals	6		
Obtaining set goals	Long-term goals	6		
Success is having a lot of money	Success perception	4; 7; 10; 11; 14; 13; 17; 18		
Success is making a difference in people's lives	Success perception	9		
Success is enjoying your job	Success perception	12; 17		
Success is when you own your own company	Success perception	1; 2; 3; 4; 5		
Success is being in a top management position (CEO)	Success perception	2; 11; 16; 18		
Upwards mobility is important	Require career advancement	4; 6; 13; 14, 18	**Results orientation**	
Gain money to become independent	Monetary rewards	7; 17		
Receiving monetary reward	Monetary rewards	4; 7; 10; 11; 13; 17; 18		
Having a lot of money	Monetary rewards	10; 11; 13; 14; 18		

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Global theme 1: Graduates Mental Schema				
Responses	**Response core**	**Participants**	**Sub-theme**	**Theme**
Being a leader	Status	10; 16	**Status and power**	
Empowering others	Status	4; 5; 7; 8; 9; 10; 15		
Providing for others	Status	8; 14		
Value power	Recognition	3; 4; 8; 9; 10; 14; 18		
Being the best in your field	Recognition	7		
Ensuring company growth	Recognition	12		
Obtaining a PhD degree	Recognition	6		
Admiration and respect from others	Recognition	6; 15; 16; 17; 18		

The results of the coded themes, regarding graduates' predisposition towards turnover intent, can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of graduates' predisposition towards turnover intent

Graduates' Predisposition towards turnover intent			
Responses	**Response core**	**Participants**	**Theme**
Exposure to different career experiences	Building career exposure	3; 5; 6; 7; 9; 11; 12; 15; 16; 17	**Strategic career move**
Corresponding with other potential employers	Building career relationships	1	
I will receive better employment offer	Anticipate better offer	2; 4; 5; 13; 14	**Impatience to succeed**
Company will not provide a sufficient salary	Anticipate low salary	4; 18	
Loyalty towards company	Loyalty	1	**Pre-employment violation**
Low loyalty perception of company	Loyalty	1; 7; 17	
Some co-workers will not like me	Conflict with co-workers	2; 4; 18	
You will get bored with the company and type of work	Workplace boredom	7; 11; 18	
First company will not be permanent	Lack of permanent position	8	
Unhappiness with employer	Employment dissatisfaction	4; 7; 8; 18	
Company will not provide a sufficient salary	Anticipate low salary	4; 18	

Findings

In this section, we will discuss the key findings of this qualitative study that will provide context to the results. The first global theme was identified as graduates' mental schema.

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Graduates' Mental Schema

As displayed in the results, three themes have been identified describing graduates' mental schema. The themes were career goals, results orientation, and status and power.

Career Goal

This finding relates to graduates' perception of their career and was based on two sub-themes, i.e. immediate strategy, and long-term strategy.

Immediate strategy refers to the strategies that graduates will use to enable them to reach their career goals. The mental schema of graduates already included three specific strategies, which they believe will contribute to the obtainment of their career goals. The first immediate strategy was that graduates need to *gain employment*. Gaining employment means finding a basic job in their field so that they can gain experience, something which they regard as important to achieve success. The respondents were aware that they would start in a lower position within a company, but there were some of the participants who believed that they would start in a lower managerial position. Two of the interviewees stated that they are going to start their own company as soon as they graduate – without any formal experience.

The second strategy was that they need to display *socialisation behaviour* in order to make them effective in employment. Some participants stated that their immediate career strategy involves adapting to the workplace and getting to know various important people within the company who can be an asset for career advancement. A response from one of the participants was:

> *"My **short-term career goals** would be that I would get some **exposure** and **communicate with different people** to get various skills and be able to **understand** what the company requires me to do"* [Participant 2, Male Logistics Management].

The participants emphasised that gaining experience in their field is the main goal in their short-term career strategy and paves the road for career advancement and additional benefits.

Career advancement was the final immediate strategy and refers to the desire of the interviewees to start gaining experience in their field so that they can advance through the ranks of the corporate ladder. Participants mentioned that they must have the opportunity to advance in their career. They were willing to start at lower levels of a company but emphasised that their goal is to advance to the next level as quickly as possible. One participant specifically stated:

> *"My **short-term career goal** is to **climb** the corporate **ladder** quite fast, within two years I want to be in a junior management position and within five years of working I want to be in **senior management**"* [Participant 13, Female, Transport Economics].

Long-term goals were the second sub-theme of career goals and refer to the specific career goals that these graduates want to accomplish within 10 years from starting

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employment. The results suggest that the majority of graduates want to have their own business or manage an existing company in a senior capacity. Only a few emphasised professional growth and status (PhD) as their long-term goals. This theme also suggests that the participants had *success entitlement.* This suggestion is based on a high correlation between participants' long-term goals and their success perception. One of the respondents was very specific and stated:

> *"In ten years from now, I will be the **CEO** of South African Airways, because they **pay** their **CEO** very well"* [Participant 11, Male, Transport Economics].

When asked what the respondents regard as success, most of them replied that success is when you are the owner of a company, when you empower others and when you are in the top position of an existing company. Only two of the participants stated that success means enjoying your job.

Results Orientation

The second theme that was related to graduates' mental schema was that they are very results-oriented in their approach to their careers. The responses that support this theme were that graduates want to be able to advance in their career and that they value monetary reward. Some responses from the participants included:

> *"I want to work so that I can start making **money** and take care of myself, basically I was in university all this time and now I want to **get a job** and earn **money**, that is my **short-term career goal**"* [Participant 17, Female, Public Administration];
>
> *"To me, being **successful** in my **career** means being a **billionaire**"* [Participant 11, male, Transport Economics]; and
>
> *"**success** depends on **money**, because maybe you started from a poor environment and now you **work yourself to the top** and are surrounded by **money** so you have basically become financially stable"* [Participant 18, Female, Public Administration].

Only one of the respondents stated that they would like to prove themselves to the company, the rest of the respondents only emphasised aspects that they want from their employers. The majority of the participants stated that they had no idea what will be expected from them when they start working, but they know exactly what they want from their future employers.

Status and Power

This theme refers to the respondents' desire to have status and power within society so that people will respect them. The career plan of the respondents included gaining status and power to give them the opportunity to empower others. Some of the responses related to this theme were:

> *"Something that will provide meaning for me in my work is to be able to **make a difference** in other people's lives, this is also my perception of what professional **success** will be"* [Participant 9, Female, Transport Economics];

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*"The **ultimate goal** in my career will be that people **admire** and **respect** me and what I am doing"* [Participant 15, Male, Logistics Management];

*"I need **power**, and for me to get **power** I must **gain experience** and look at what I am doing which is good and build on that"* [Participant 3, Female, Logistics Management].

The second global theme associated with this study was graduates' predisposition towards turnover intent.

Graduates' Predisposition Towards Turnover Intent

When asked how many employers the respondents think they will work for within the first ten years of employment, all the respondents stated that they would work for at least two different companies in the first decade of their career (with the average amount being four different employers). One of the participants stated that:

*"I am a bit **loyal** person and therefore I think I will work for maybe three companies in the first ten years of employment"* [Participant 1, Male, Transport Economics].

This is surprising because even though this participant emphasises that he is loyal, he already had a disposition towards turnover intention. The themes related to graduates' disposition to turnover intention are strategic career moves, impatience, and pre-employment violation.

Strategic Career Move

This theme refers to turnover intention due to acquiring different experiences within the field. Half of the respondents stated that the reason for their turnover intent is due to their desire to experience different sectors within their field so that they can gain diverse experiences in their career. Some of the responses were:

*"I want to work for at least three employers in the first 10 years of my career because when I eventually settle down I want to know the **culture of the organisation**, and know each and every **perspective of the organisation** so that I don't hop around between jobs later in my life"* [Participant 6, Male, Management];

*"The reason for working for different companies is to **experience different work experiences** and **different companies**, for instance working at Transnet to **gain experience** in transport and then working at the Department of Transport to **gain experience** in government and so on"* [Participant 16, Male, Transport Economics].

Impatience to Succeed

This theme relates to turnover intent due to the impatience of graduates to achieve goals. Some participants stated that the main reason they will work for more than two companies will be due to them getting a better offer from another employer. One of the interviewees stated that:

*"When I go through the internet and look at positions in Logistics it shows that a degree and three years' **experience** will provide you with a certain **salary** per month. Now I am working for less than that amount till I have three years' **experience** then I will apply for the **better salary** job. In the future, there*

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*may be another job that provides even a bigger **salary,** so I will apply for that, this is the reason that I will work for different employers in the first ten years of my **career**"* [Participant 4, Male, Logistics Management]

Pre-employment Violation

The most unexpected finding from the interviews was that graduates experience a form of pre-employment violation, even before starting their first job. Pre-employment violation refers to already established negative feelings or violations in the relationship with your future employer, even if you have not formally met them yet. Seven of the 18 participants had some form of pre-employment violation. One of the respondents believed that his future employer will not be loyal toward him, and therefore he must move to another company. Three of the respondents believed that their co-workers would make the job unbearable for them, which will necessitate them to leave the company. For example, one of the participants stated:

*"If you are working for a certain company you will eventually **make enemies** in that company because certain **groups won't like you** because you just came in the company fresh from university and are doing more work than they're doing, so you will need to **change employers**"* [Participant 2, Male, Logistics Management].

Some respondents believed that the salary from their future employer is not going to be sufficient, which will necessitate a career move. Three of the respondents stated that the reason that they are going to leave the company is due to them believing that their jobs will be boring and that there will not be opportunities for them to get promoted; some of the responses were:

*"From life **experience**, I have learnt that sometimes you know you **will not be happy,** and you are at a place in your life where you want to go somewhere else. let's say you have been working for two years, and now you feel that you are **not learning anymore** and doing the same thing every day over and over. This will make you want to **change the scenery** and go to a place where you can actually **learn** something different compared to what you already know"* [Participant 7, Male, Economics]

*"The problem is that you will **not be satisfied** with your job and location, so you will want to **move**"* [Participant 8, Male, Management]

The last respondent who was interviewed stated that the main reason that she will have various employers in her career is that she believes that she will not be happy in her job. Some of her specific responses were:

*"I feel maybe in my first job I **will not be happy** and just want to **change**, I will have the same problem with my second employer. At my third job, I will stop because I also want to be focussing on my entrepreneurial side, I want to be my **own boss** someday";*

*"you might find that there are **people that you don't like**. I know that there will be **people that you won't get along wit**h in the work environment. Maybe you might **not be comfortable** there where you are working, or maybe your employer will **treat you bad**. There might be problems with your working hours, where they expect you to work long hours, where everybody knows that you should not be working more than eight hours. I believe that the **salary** will also not be enough"* [Participant 18, Female, Public Administration].

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These results are significant because none of these participants have any work experience that could act as a frame of reference for their mental schema.

Discussion

Graduates' Mental Schemas

When considering the results, it is evident that graduates, in accordance with the opinion of De Vos et al. (2009), already had a clear mental schema of what they want from their future employers. The results also show that graduates already have a career schema in their anticipatory psychological contract, in absence of a formal employment contract or previous work experience. Thus, it can be accepted, following De Vos et al. (2009), that graduates will use this mental model to determine their choice of job as well as the evaluation method they will use to determine the extent to which their expectations relate the reality of work. These pre-employment expectations, based on the graduates' mental schemas, are likely to affect the psychological contract of those individuals once they start their employment (Gresse et al., 2013; De Vos et al., 2009).

The first research proposition was that graduates' anticipatory psychological contract already included an entitlement-based career schema plan before organisational entry. It should, however, be noted that the aim was not to investigate the career choices of graduates since there is ample research that has investigated this topic (for example, Madhavan et al., 2019; Mncayi & Dunga, 2016), rather the focus was on the understanding the role of schemas in the anticipatory psychological contract and how it will affect the psychological contract when these graduates actually start in the socialisation process of employment. The first theme that was identified was career goal, with the sub-themes immediate strategy and long-term strategy. From the results, it is clear that the strategy that graduates follow is aimed at achieving success – which, in their case, is also their entitlements – in other words, everything they as prospective employees do is a means to an end. This correlates with research findings by Kerslake (2005) that new job entrants are success-driven. Broadbridge et al. (2007) also confirmed that students are willing to work harder at the beginning of their careers to ensure advancement and future opportunities. Ng et al. (2010) have also found that graduates tend to lower expectations for their first job, but seek rapid development thereafter, which correlates with the results of this study. There were, however, a few unique cases in this study where some respondents still had unrealistic expectations regarding their first jobs (for example, starting in a managerial position, starting their own company or high pay expectations), which contradicts the literature that states that students tend to lower their expectations before organisational entry (Ng et al., 2010); however, this may be due to inflated entitlement perceptions. As stated earlier, psychological entitlement is an individual sense of deservingness and is not connected with any agreement, nor mutuality. Gresse et al. (2013) have identified that the level of qualification, perception

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of future contribution to the company, self-efficacy levels, the current labour market tendencies, employment equity standing, experience levels and cost of living are all factors that can influence the level of entitlement perceptions of an individual. A higher entitlement perception directly causes higher individual expectations.

In terms of graduates' long-term career goals that were identified from the results, if graduates start working at approximately 22 years of age (after 4 years at university), it will indicate that graduates believe that they will be in a top position of a company or the owner of their own company at the age of 32. From the article written by Hogg (2014), the average age of the CEO in the top 100 companies on the South African-based Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) is in their 50s, the youngest being 37 years of age (due to his father being the founder of a well-established listed company) with the rest all being over the age of 40. This indicates that graduates' long-term career strategies are unrealistic, as it does not fit within the norm. When considering the model of the individuals' anticipatory psychological contract suggested by Gresse et al. (2013), it can therefore be established that the career goals of graduates are entitlement-based due to it being a higher individual expectation.

The second theme identified was that graduates are results-oriented. This indicates that it was less about what the employer can gain from the graduate's skills and more about what the graduate can gain from his/her employer (getting something out of the relationship). Studies have confirmed that instant gratification is an occurrence that is evident among the current generation entering the workplace (Flower et al., 2010), which was also present in this study. A monetary reward was a reoccurring theme that most participants emphasised, but only a small minority of the participants emphasised the importance of getting an enjoyable job, which contradicts international literature in terms of career expectations of this generation of employees (Broadridge et al., 2007; McDonald, 2008; Mills, 2009; Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2016). An example of contractional literature includes Allen's (2004) findings that making a great deal of money tends to be less important for the current generation of employees than enjoying a full and balanced life. The participants stated that they do not know what the employer will expect of them, but they knew exactly what they wanted from the employment relationship. It would seem as if graduates, in the anticipatory phase of the psychological contract, do not realise the importance of their obligation towards their potential employers, which further highlights that entitlement perceptions might be present. This correlates with findings from Ng et al. (2010), who indicated that first-time occupational newcomers are regarded as entitled, based on the finding there was no relationship between performance levels (on a grade-point-average) while trying to achieve an outcome and the expectation for promotion or higher salary.

The final theme was status and power. The concepts of status and power are directly linked to graduates' long-term career strategy and emphasise the outcomes of new employees' career ambitions. Status and power could be summarised as the final

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outcome of the graduate's career plan; therefore, if the graduate's career plan was a competition, then the power and status will be equivalent to the prize of that competition. The fact that graduates desire status and power correlate with the findings from Ng et al. (2010) that new employees have a desire for praise and recognition.

Predisposition Towards Turnover Intention

The aim of the second research proposition was two-fold; the first aim was to prove that graduates have a predisposition towards voluntary turnover intention, before organisational entry, which was confirmed. All the participants stated that they believe that they would work for a minimum of two employees in the first ten years of employment. This finding correlates with the findings of Ng et al. (2010) and Schofield and Honore (2011). It must, however, be noted that in the case of Schofield and Honore (2011), their research involved employees who had the desire to leave their current employer even though they had a positive and constructive employment relationship.

The second aim of the research proposition was to determine whether the reason for graduates' predisposition towards voluntary turnover intention was based on an entitlement disconnect. A strategic career move was identified as the first reason that this disposition towards turnover intention exists among graduates. It was already emphasised that the current generation of graduates is success-driven (Kerslake, 2005), which can result in the perception that graduates need to explore their career opportunities so that they can find a job that is best suited for them to succeed. Although this tendency towards turnover intention may have a negative impact on the future employment relationship, between the graduate and their first employer, the reasoning thereof is related to the personal development of the individual rather than the entitlement-disconnect.

The second reason was due to graduates' impatience to succeed, which is a result of their desire for rapid advancement in their careers. This theme was named impatience to succeed because it was already established earlier that graduates want to climb the corporate ladder as quickly as possible. The participants believe that it will take longer for their salary and position to advance within a single company, and therefore they must seek employment elsewhere so that they can receive a better position and benefits. The impatient nature of the current generation of employees, in seeking rapid career advancement, has already been established in the literature (for instance Erickson, 2009; Ng et al., 2010). This theme, however, does relate to entitlement disconnect perceptions as graduates believe that the rate at which their salary and career will advance will not be sufficient to satisfy their entitlement beliefs, even though they have no frame of reference yet that supports the validity of their expectations.

The most surprising and unexpected finding of this study is that graduates seem to already have a kind of pre-employment psychological contract breach (in absence of

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an actual contract), and in some instances, a degree of violation is experienced, even though they have never entered an employment relationship. When entering an employment relationship, people tend to develop certain expectations about that relationship. Employees learn what the employer expects them to contribute and, in turn, these employees develop ideas about what they should receive in return (Heath et al., 1993). Each employee has a unique psychological contract based on his/her expectations and obligations towards the organisation (Turnley & Feldman, 1999), which can lead to the experience of breach or violation if these expectations were not met. According to Restubog et al. (2006), and Turnley et al. (2003), psychological contract breach occurs when a party to an employment relationship feels that the other party did not uphold its requirements and commitments.

The psychological contract is considered balanced if the employees feel that the organisation has upheld its requirements and commitments, and research suggests that employees with a balanced psychological contract are less likely to want to leave their employer (Scott et al., 2001). The problem in this case, however, is that students have not entered formal employment yet, so there is no way for them to determine whether expectations were met. It does, however, seem as if these graduates are entering employment with an unbalanced psychological contract, something that has never been found in psychological contract research. The occurrence of pre-employment violation in the anticipatory psychological contract does however seem feasible when looking at from the schema theory perspective, where an individual evaluates reciprocity and mutuality based on their individual schema. The occurrence of this pre-employment breach may be a kind of defence mechanism that graduates use for them to minimise the effect of entitlement disconnect after organisational entry, similar to the findings from Ng et al. (2010) that graduates tend to lower expectations before organisational entry to avoid disappointment when expectations are not met.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore and substantiate themes associated with the mental schemas of graduates in their anticipatory psychological contract before they commence employment. This information could assist in understanding how the psychological contract develops once these graduates are employed. Sherman and Morley (2015) have suggested that a schema theory approach to the psychological contract has the potential to provide new insights into how it is created; they also stated that if researchers were able to determine the unique experiences that were rooted in the schema, of employees or graduates, it would result in a better understanding of the psychological contract creation.

The findings suggest that graduates already have a developed mental schema (which correlates with De Vos et al.'s (2009) findings), which was, in fact, entitlement based. Entitlement does not form directly part of the anticipatory psychological

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contract since it is not connected with an agreement or mutuality but rather affects the expectations that are associated with it (Gresse et al., 2013). The themes that became known were graduates' career plans, which included graduates' immediate and long-term strategies, results-orientation and status and power. The immediate career plan of graduates was aimed at getting any job and then incorporating various strategies to advance in their career; the long-term strategy was to achieve success in their careers, which was identified as a success entitlement. It was found that graduates were results-oriented, where the participants only emphasised aspects that they expected from their employer, for instance, money, which graduates emphasised as an important aspect of employment, even though it contradicts some literature that millennials do not see money as important as, for instance, an enjoyable job (Allen, 2004). The reason for this finding, which goes against popular literature, maybe due to the uniqueness of the sample, as most students studying at this specific institution are from rural areas studying on government bursaries. This, however, reinforces the idea that entitlement perceptions play an important role when deconstructing the mental schemas of employees and graduates. The last theme identified was that graduates want power and status, which correlates with the findings from Ng et al. (2010), that the current generation of employees has a desire for praise and recognition.

The second part of this study was to determine whether graduates had a tendency towards turnover intention and whether this tendency was due to an entitlement disconnect. From the results, all the respondents believed that they would work for a minimum of two employers in the first decade of employment, which confirms that graduates had a disposition towards voluntary turnover intention before organisational entry. The themes that became known were strategic career move, impatience to succeed and pre-employment violation. It was established that strategic career move – graduates' desire to experience different areas within their field of expertise – was not related to entitlement disconnect, but rather related to the personal development of the individual. The second theme, impatience to succeed, reinforced the notion that new employees had the drive to succeed in their careers. These graduates believed that the rate at which their career advances will be too slow when only working for a single company, so when another company advertises a position, the graduate will most likely apply for the new position. It was established that graduates' impatience to succeed is due to an entitlement disconnect perception. The final and most surprising theme was the experience of pre-employment violation, where graduates already had a form of breach of the psychological contract before organisational entry (and in some cases, psychological contract violation). These graduates believed that their employer will not meet their expectations and that is the reason why they believe that they would work for more than one employer. The only logical explanation for this occurrence is that the graduate is using it as a defence mechanism to minimise the effect of entitlement disconnect and disappointment after organisational entry. These findings suggest that gradu-

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ates' mental schemas in their anticipatory psychological contract play a much bigger role in the development of their psychological contract after organisational entry than what was initially thought. It should be noted, according to our review of psychological contract literature, that pre-employment violation has never been established in psychological contract research and warrants further investigation.

By considering all the findings and themes of this paper, it is clear that the mental schema that graduates have plays an important role in the development of the psychological contract. The findings suggesting that these entitlements and expectations related to the anticipatory psychological contract, which is not based on any formal agreement or mutuality, has already influenced some workplace behaviours in these graduates, even before commencing employment.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

With this study, we proposed that the formation of the psychological contract is based on an individual's mental schema, which includes an entitlement-based career schema. Testing of this proposed link by using a structural equation model would not only confirm the model but indicate the strength of the correlations. The use of a probability sampling technique on an expanded study population would address the current limitation to generalise the results. Such a quantitative confirmation of this paper's propositions will also confirm the impact that an anticipatory psychological contract, due to their entitlement disconnect perception, can have on the predisposition towards voluntary turnover intention. An unexpected finding of this study was that graduates seem to already have a kind of pre-employment psychological contract breach. This finding needs further research in the origins and impact of such a perception before actual work-related relationships were experienced.

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Appendix: Interview guides

Interview Guide for Researcher

Process of the Interview

1. During the study or any publication action, the names of the respondents will not be disclosed.
2. The study population will consist of third-year Economic and Management Sciences students of a South African university.
3. Participation in the study will only be on a voluntary basis.
4. The interviewee has the right to stop and end the interview process at any time if they feel that the interviewer has made them uncomfortable or is biased
5. No students will be victimised, nor be discriminated against (directly or indirectly).
6. Findings and recommendations will not be used to victimise or discriminate against any participant.
7. Findings of the study will be disclosed to any relevant party.
8. A semi-structured questionnaire will be used during the study.
9. Open-ended interviews will be held face to face.
10. Interviews will be recorded for any future reference.
11. Interviews will be transcribed
12. In view of the reliability issue of the study, all the interview questions will be asked in English.

Sample Selection

1. Research will be conducted on final-year students at a South African university.
2. Purposeful and snowball sampling will be used to determine which third-year students will be included in the sample
3. Therefore, the sample will include final-year students in any field related to commerce.
4. The researcher will obtain a class list from third-year commerce-related lecturers where students will be randomly selected from the class list for interviews. The students may also suggest other students who might be included.

Recording and Record-keeping

1. Interviews will be audio-recorded with the permission of the participants.
2. Transcripts will be made of every interview recorded.

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3. Copies will be made of every interview transcript and such copies, as well as the audio recordings, will be securely held in safekeeping for any future reference.

Interview Environment

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

Interview Guide for Interviewee

Interviewee no: _____
Gender: _____
Date: _____
Venue: _____

Introduction

1. Introduction:
   a. Welcome interviewee; and
   b. Introduce interviewer.
2. Overview of the study:
   "The purpose of this study is to explore the mental schema of graduates in order to enhance our understanding of the anticipatory psychological contract"
3. Anonymity:
   "Your name and identity will be anonymous and will not be published or disclosed in any manner; there will also be no discrimination against any person or group."

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4. "Please note that if you feel uncomfortable at any stage, you are welcome to stop me and end the interview."
5. Recording and recordkeeping: "As interviewer, I will use an audio recorder to assist me later in analysing the interview. Do you have any problem with the use of an audio recorder?"

Questions

1. You are now at the end of your undergraduate studies; how do you feel about starting your professional career? [Follow-up: Can you explain to me what your short-term career goals are?]
2. Do you believe that you have an idea of what to expect when you start working [Follow-up: why do you say this?]
3. Professionally, where do you see yourself in ten years' time? [Follow up if elaboration is required]
4. What do you think is going to happen in the first ten years of your work journey? [Follow up in terms of money, position, benefits]
5. How many employers do you think you will work for in these ten years? [Follow up with: Why?]
6. How would you regard success in your professional career; in other words, what does being successful in your career mean to you? [elaborate]
7. Any general comments?

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