

**EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS OF REQUISITE SKILLS OF GRADUATES OF THE MASTER'S IN
PSYCHOLOGY WITH SPECIALISATION IN RESEARCH CONSULTATION (MARC) GRADUATES**

by

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DECLARATION

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Employer expectations of requisite skills of graduates of the Master's in Psychology with specialisation in

Research Consultation (MARC) graduates

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I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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SIGNATURE

28 February 2023

DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late brother, Mkhululi “Maloli aka Dj Lox” Ludwaba.

Thank you for encouraging never to give up on my dreams. You were and still are the best brother I had. I love you Khusta, till we meet again.

(13 May 1985 – 16 March 2021)

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at describing employers' expectations from MARC graduates, with the intention to address the skills required by employers from MARC graduates to be employable in the South African labour market, as a research question. To address this research question, the sociological institutional theory was applicable to construct the expectations of employers from MARC graduates. In addition, through the social constructionism paradigm, the methodology followed, included a generic qualitative research design and a snowball selection method to access ten participants, where data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the use of an interview schedule as a guide to conduct the interviews. Data received were transcribed, and a thematic analysis method applied for analysis.

The findings of this study demonstrated the constructed expectations that employers shared, to make sense of effective research skills that MARC graduates should possess to become employable. These employers had important roles in decision-making phases of recruitment, hence, exploring their constructed expectations assisted in determining the requisite skills contributing towards gradueness and employability of MARC graduates. Therefore, the findings indicated that MARC graduates should obtain completed qualifications and be affiliated with a professional board for meaningful networking. Furthermore, employers of MARC graduates emphasised the value of recruiting graduates with generic skills that complemented their qualifications and contributed towards effective performance in the work world. Moreover, these employers valued MARC graduates with subject knowledge that would assist these graduates in performing work activities effectively. These employers indicated that MARC graduates were expected to obtain work experience prior to joining the working world. Therefore, employers of MARC graduates expect graduates who have been exposed to research processes and are able to apply these processes practically, to benefit different communities. The findings of this study might contribute to the curriculum development of training employable MARC graduates, as well as to address the needs of employers. However, the small number of participants involved in the study may be limitations to the study.

Key words: Higher Education, employability, Master's in Research Psychology Consultation, gradueness, sociological institution theory, social constructionism, unemployment

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CET	Community Education and Training
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EL	Experiential Learning
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
ISPP	International Society of Political Psychology
MARC	Master's in Research Psychology Consultation
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non- Governmental Organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
PDP	Personal Development Planning
SAMEA	South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association
SAMRA	South African Marketing Research Association
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SARIMA	South African Research and Innovation Management Association
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNISA	University of South Africa
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Key word	Definition
Employability	Employability involves having a set of achievements including the skills and personal attributes that makes an individual stand a good chance in acquiring employment, secure it and be successful in their chosen occupations. These achievements benefit graduates, the work environment, the society and the economy of the country (Yorke & Knight, 2006; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017).
Graduateness	Graduateness concept refers to “the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institutions” (McCabe, 2010 pg. 1)
Higher Education	Higher Education in South Africa intends to educate and equip people with high-level skills to meet the employment needs of the public and private sectors (DHET, 2019)
Master’s in research psychology consultation (MARC)	The MARC programme is a coursework-based training programme, leading to a professional registration with the regulating board for health professions, the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) (Fynn & Janse van Vuuren, 2017)
Social constructionism	Social constructionism examines knowledge and understandings of the world, it is a paradigm based on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Jung; 2019).
Sociological institution theory	The sociological institutional theory is a neutral idea, defined as the “emergence of orderly, stable, socially integrating patterns out of unstable, loosely organised, narrowly technical activities” (Selznick, 1996 p271).
Unemployment	The concept of unemployment is defined in different ways. In simple terms, it is defined as the state of being unemployed or being without a paying job but available to work. Meaning, a person who is actively seeking work but is without work (Swanepoel, Erasmus, & Schenk, 2008; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019).

Chapter 1: Orientation

1.1 Introduction

Graduate employment is increasingly becoming an area of concern for Higher Education institutions (HEIs), employers, and students (Adebakin, Ajadi, & Subair, 2015; Tran, Ngo, Nguyen & Le, 2021). However, there seems to be an inconsistency in required skills by employers, and those possessed by graduates from universities. As a result, many university graduates are either underemployed or unemployed (Adebakin et al., 2015; Tran et al, 2021). For this reason, this study aimed to explore employer expectations of Masters in Research Psychology Consultation (MARC) graduates. Moreover, this study attempted to clarify and comprehend the required skills of MARC graduates. In addition to this, the intended goal was to align MARC training outcomes with employer expectations, in the context of research psychology qualifications in South Africa (SA). Subsequently, the outcomes of this study may assist curriculum development in the University of South Africa (UNISA) Department of Psychology to design and equip UNISA MARC graduates with relevant knowledge and skills.

This study is essential, given that the percentage of the social sciences graduates' unemployment rate in SA is currently at -6.4% according to the Statistics South Africa. (Statssa, 2023). In light of the latter, there is a need to develop MARC graduates and create employment opportunities for them, as their profession plays an important role in different communities. As a result, in a study conducted by Laher (2005) on the status of research psychology in SA, it is argued that research psychology and research psychologists are an important part of psychology, and are essential in transforming and improving psychological practice in the unique and diverse South African context. Therefore, this study explored and clarified the MARC requisite skills required by the employers of these graduates. The following section considers the research problem of this study.

1.2 Research problem

Generally, universities are essential for the construction of knowledge and creation of wealth for societies (Tran et al., 2021). Universities are there to create skilled labour, produced for societal and global consumption (Adebakin et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2021). However, according to Teijeiro, Rungo and Freire (2013); Tran (2018), universities must change their traditional

focus and make a special effort to help their students to develop competencies that best foster employability. Although students obtain competencies from universities, employers still complain that it is hard to find graduates with the required knowledge and skills tailored to their needs (Tran, 2013; Tran et al., 2021). This leads to skills gaps, and based on the study by Betti, D'Agostino and Neri (2010), educational skills gap is the lack of coherence between the required and offered educational level for a given job.

There is a notable gap in current knowledge, linking graduate and employer perspectives to the context and content of education to graduate employability (Andrews & Higgson, 2008; Tran et al, 2021). Based on a study conducted by Teijeiro *et al.*, (2013), the results indicate that there is a huge difference between the competencies taught at the universities and those that the labour market demand. Additionally, one of the challenges with skills and initiatives in Higher Education (HE), is the assumption that skills have the same meaning in education and employment contexts (Adebakin et al., 2005; Tran et al., 2021). It must be noted that the universities and employers of graduates do not have a common meaning for skills (Tran et al., 2021). This makes it important for the universities and employers of graduates to have the same focus regarding employability skills (Adebakin et al., 2005; Tran et al., 2021).

Mohamedbhai (2015) states that enrolment in HE has increased in most African countries, with a greater output of graduates. However, the increasing unemployment rate of these graduates was not expected (Mohamedbhai, 2015). For this reason, graduate unemployment is a significant area of study because unemployment amongst graduates is potentially damaging to the economy, and it is important to identify the necessary requirements for graduates to become employed (Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Tran, 2018). Specifically, in the focus field for this study, the social sciences graduate unemployment figures of -6.4 % indicate a need to address the gap between graduates and employment (Statssa, 2023).

Employers of MARC graduates were interviewed in this study, with the aim of communicating the necessary requirements for these graduates to be employed. It must be noted that this program and its graduates had the required characteristics for this study, and this is outlined further on in the study. Accordingly, the communication of the required MARC graduates' skills was done by considering the experiences of these employers, focusing on what employers believed are the required skills for MARC graduates, based on their experience of working as MARC graduates. The next section provides the research aims and objectives of this study.

1.3 Research aims and objectives of the study

The aim of this study was to provide clarity and awareness of the expected MARC graduate skills that contribute towards potential employment of these graduates. Based on the sociological institutional theory, decision-making by employers is possible when organisations are guided by this theory (Furusten, 2013). Furthermore, the objectives of this study included:

- To describe the employers' expectations from the MARC graduates;
- To explore the gap between employers' expectations and MARC graduates' skills.

1.4 Research question

The overall question posed in this study was “What are the skills required by employers for MARC graduates to be employable in the South African labour market?” This research question links with the assumption of the sociological institutional theory, which includes the notion that employers recruit employees that adhere to the requirements of the organisation. The recruitment process of the organisations aligns with the requirements set by the social institutional theory (Furusten, 2013). Hence, this study intended to provide an understanding of the required skills that may contribute towards employment of MARC graduates. In addition, the job market expects MARC graduates to be equipped with appropriate research skills. Furthermore, the role of MARC graduates in an organisation, which includes provision of research consultation activities, may also be determined by the required skills from the employers of these graduates. Therefore, this study intended to explore employer's expectations from MARC graduates and envisioned to understand the extent these organisations go through in employing MARC graduates. It was also important for the researcher to understand the role these graduates play within the research component of organisations, and the experience of working with MARC graduates. Equally important, through this study, the intention was to explore the gap between employers' expected skills and MARC graduates' skills; and how to avoid such gap. The next section provides the motivation for conducting this study.

1.5 Rationale

Most HEIs aim at producing students who exhibit the skills and competencies that are sought after by employers (Makhanya, 2012; Tran, 2018). The skills obtained from HEIs assist students in seeking employment from different work environments (Tran, 2018). There is a significant responsibility on the part of HEIs to produce quality graduates with the appropriate attributes to address the priority skills shortages (Chetty, 2012; Tran, 2018). This responsibility cannot be solely for HEIs, which are major players in ensuring employment include education, government, organisations, and individuals (Guilbert et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2021). Oluwajodu et al., (2015); Tran (2018), concur by mentioning that organisations, government and educational institutions should address the skills shortage, working together towards the implementation of appropriate programmes that would provide graduates with the necessary skills that are required in practice.

Equally important, the employability of an individual depends upon assets in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes; the way in which these assets are used and deployed; the presentation of assets to potential employers, and the context within which the individual works (Crespi & Ramos, 2021; Hillage & Pollard, 1998). In addition to this, HEIs need to identify different demanded working patterns that graduates might engage in, and must ensure that they possess employability skills that employers prefer (Tran, 2021; Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). Also, in today's challenging working environment, the possession of subject skills alone is no longer sufficient for a new graduate in meeting employer requirements; it is increasingly necessary for the graduates to gain transferable skills, as these skills enhance their prospects of employment (Tran, 2021; Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). In addressing the latter, some employers and HEIs have collaborated to reduce the skills gap by implementing and allowing for experiential learning (Tran, 2021).

Experiential learning is a model of education in which the learner begins with an experience, followed by reflection, and then develops a theory to explain the experience, and finally tests the theory in new situations (Tran 2021). In addition, experiential learning includes cooperative education, internships, service learning, externships, job shadowing, and practicum (Kleeman, 2011; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Furthermore, employers often regard recent university graduates as those who lack the basic skills to complete simple routine assignments, which gives the impression that certification is a mere formality rather than an indication of achievement, and experiential learning therefore assists in addressing such issues (Adebakin et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2021).

Based on the above, and the problem stated earlier, the findings of this study might benefit the UNISA Department of Psychology in understanding the requirements of MARC graduates in the work environment. In addition to this, companies that employ MARC graduates may also benefit in clarifying their expectations from these graduates as new employees. Furthermore, this study could also contribute towards addressing the gaps between MARC graduates' skills and the employment requirements. More importantly, companies can inform curriculum developers through research such as this to ensure that training aligns with their needs as employers.

1.6. Research Design and Methods

1.6.1 Paradigmatic Perspective

This section provides a brief overview of the methods applied to address the research question for this study. In addition, a detailed discussion on the research design and methods is elaborated on in Chapter 4 of this study.

The paradigm in this study was the social constructionism paradigm, as the researcher aimed to achieve understanding of the participants' expectations. Appropriately, social constructionism examines knowledge and understandings of the world (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Jung, 2019). It is a paradigm based on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Jung, 2019). Hence, the perspectives of the employers of MARC graduates assisted the researcher in obtaining detailed information, which was utilised to construct and interpret answers to the research questions. This paradigm suited this study, considering the researchers' intentions of gaining new insights about the expectations of employers of MARC graduates. In addition, this paradigm was effective because it accommodated multiple perspectives and versions of truths from different participants. Furthermore, in connection with this paradigm, the theory applicable to this study is briefly elaborated on next.

1.6.2 Theoretical perspective

“Whether or not they are aware of it, managers do not fully control the nature and timing of their decisions. Their framework of action is limited by institutional constraints in the surrounding environment – what is technically, economically, socially and culturally possible in different contexts. With a better understanding of their environment – and how it affects how

they think, what they do and why they do it – decision-makers are also better able to make more carefully considered decisions about organisations” (Furusten, 2013, p.vii).

According to Furusten (2013), the decision-making process within organisations is guided by the social institutional theory. Hence, employers make better decisions when recruiting potential employees for their organisations. In addition, the above statement indicates that an institutional framework of action was effective for organisations to determine what they do and the reasoning behind it. Hence, this study was embedded in the social institutional theory, which attends to the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure, including schemas, rules, norms and routines, which have been established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005).

More importantly, social institutional theory emphasises the framework element, which asserts that institutions are made up of diverse elements that differ in several important ways (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). These elements posit different bases of order and compliance, varying mechanisms and logics, diverse empirical indicators, and alternative rationales for establishing legitimacy claims. According to Kent et al., (2022); Scott (2008), the three elements of social institutional theory include regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements. Regulative elements include stress rule-setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities. Normative elements include the introduction of a prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life. Cultural-cognitive elements emphasise the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008). All these three elements are at work, though in varying ways, to stabilise social behaviour. Although all institutions comprise various combinations of elements, they vary over time in terms of which elements are dominant (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005).

In addition, in a study conducted to develop a framework to understand employers’ perceptions on graduate employability, Cai (2013) applied the social institutional theory to address and clarify employers’ beliefs on graduate employability. The author realised that to obtain a clear understanding of employers’ beliefs about educational output, using insights from the social institutional theory would assist. This study was conducted as a follow up study, focusing on “the employment prospects of international graduates from Finnish Higher Education from the employers’ perspectives”. The author aimed at developing a framework that could serve as a tool that helps stakeholders of HE to identify key measures of improving graduates’

employment through influencing employers' beliefs. The study concluded that a more comprehensive framework for understanding how employers make decisions on recruitment based on their beliefs, includes using the insights of the social institutional theory (Cai, 2013). Consequently, in this study, the researcher intentionally applied the same theory to conceptualise employer expectations of requisite skills of MARC graduates. According to the social institutional theory, managers produce information and rules about the organisations, based on their cognitive frameworks influenced by a particular organisation (Furusten, 2013; Lewis et al., 2018). These cognitive frameworks assisted in interpreting the expected requisite skills of the MARC graduates. In addition, in this study, the researcher was determined to understand the perceptions of the employers through the skills relative to the work demands of the MARC graduates. Furthermore, social institutional theory is guided not only by conditions, but also by perceptions of conditions and thus the patterns of belief within a population shape social institution (Lewis et al., 2018; Mayhew, 1968). To achieve this, the following section deliberates on the applicable research approach.

1.6.3 Research approach

To address the research question, the researcher followed a qualitative approach, which, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2010); Uğur (2019), can be quite helpful in addressing exploratory research questions. Also, this study intended to place its emphasis on understanding the expectations of the employers of MARC graduates through the required skills for these graduates to be employable. The qualitative approach is effective when there are multiple possible realities constructed by different individuals (Leedy & Ormrod 2010; Uğur 2019). Hence, the researcher intended to obtain detailed information from different participants, and a qualitative approach assisted in that regard. Moreover, the aim of qualitative approach is to examine a relatively small number of participants' know-how in depth (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Uğur, 2019).

Furthermore, the researcher followed a qualitative approach because it assisted in answering the research question in relation to the expected skills that contribute towards potential employment of the MARC graduates. Also, the processes that allowed the researcher to obtain detailed information from the participants are discussed in the analysis section of this study. In addition, a qualitative approach links to the chosen theory, as it allows for individuals to mention what they believe to be a norm, and valuable skills, for MARC graduates to meet the

expected outcomes. Accordingly, employers informed the researcher about what they believe are relevant skills for these graduates, based on their experiences; they provided details on the expected outcomes emanating from such skills.

1.6.4 Research design

The applicable research design for this study was the generic qualitative design. According to Percy *et al.*, (2015); Uğur (2019), a generic qualitative design considers people's description of their subjective opinions, beliefs, attitudes, or reflections on their experiences of the world. This design was selected for this study as it is applicable to obtain subjective expectations of employers. Hence, the subjective expectations of employers contributed towards addressing the research question; and employers were able to share their reflections based on their own experiences of working with MARC graduates.

Moreover, the generic qualitative approach was applicable to this study, as it requires the exposition of individual meaning of a process based on participants' beliefs and perspectives (Kahlke, 2014; Ruslin *et al.*, 2022). Thus, this study relied on the employers' experiences to share the requisite skills that may contribute towards employment of MARC graduates. In addition, to access employers of MARC graduates and get feedback from these employers, the researcher made use of a snowball selection method, briefly discussed below.

1.6.5 Population and selection method

The population of this study consisted of managers and recruiters from the employers of MARC graduates. The researcher accessed a sample size of one participant per company, from ten different companies that employed these graduates. Although there are many different companies employing MARC graduates within Gauteng Province and the rest of SA, the researcher was guided by the applied selection method to access participated companies. The researcher engaged with companies referred to by the participants, through a snowball selection method. The recruitment and selection of participated companies continued until the researcher received repeated information and there was no new information received from the recruited participants during data collection phase. The detailed information received from the participants allowed the researcher to capture the expectations of employers from MARC graduates.

To recruit participants for this study, a snowball selection method was effective as it assisted the researcher in obtaining relevant participants through referrals within the industry. Further discussion on the population and sampling of the participants of this study is presented in Chapter 4. The next section explores data collection techniques.

1.6.6 Data collection techniques

Concerning data collection, the researcher made use of semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to follow standard questions as well as one or more individually tailored questions to obtain clarification or probe the individuals' reasoning (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Ruslin, Mashuri, Rasak, Alhabsyi & Syam, 2022). Accordingly, for this study, semi-structured interviews were essential for the researcher, to record the expectations of the employers. Thus, these interviews allowed the researcher to interact with the participants, to derive the employer requisite skills. Also, the semi-structured interviews allowed for subjectivity of the obtained information from the participants. Appropriately, semi-structured interviews facilitate rapport, allows a greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to explore novel areas, and produce richer data (Ruslin et al., 2022; Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Accordingly, during the interviews, the researcher was guided by an interview schedule, which contained key questions that covered the focus of the employer requisite skills. In addition to this, it is important to produce an interview schedule beforehand, because it enables the researcher to think explicitly about what he or she hopes the interview might cover (Ruslin et al., 2022; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Furthermore, the interview questions were structured and organised based on the literature and social institutional theory, included in this study. Moreover, the interview schedule for this study was structured, focusing on normative expectations, appropriate skills, and normative compliance with social institutional theory. Therefore, the interview schedule assisted the researcher to focus on the aspects that provided information to address research questions of this study. It must be noted that the interview schedule is included in annexure B.

The next section provides brief details of data analysis applied in this study.

1.6.7 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a process applied to conduct qualitative data analysis, which involves searching themes across the data set to find repeated patterns of meaning (Percy et al., 2015; Uğur, 2019). It is of note that thematic analysis can be created from concepts drawn from the literature (interviewees' responses in this case, or from theory); it may also be based on the researchers' propositions and/or themes and research questions (Uğur, 2019). Also, a deductive approach to thematic analysis starts with a list of themes that a researcher expects to find in their data, this list was guided by the sociological institutional theory (Uğur, 2019). Kiger and Varpio (2020) are of the opinion that thematic analysis is a useful and accessible tool for qualitative researchers and can be flexible.

Thematic analysis is a flexible but reliable approach applied to identify, analyse, and report on patterns within the qualitative data (Majumdar, 2018; Uğur, 2019; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Therefore, the researcher applied a thematic analysis in this study, because it provides a pure, rich, qualitative and detailed account of data (Majumdar, 2018; Uğur, 2019; Vaismoradi et al., 2013) and also assisted in capturing the expectations of employers, guided by the sociological institutional theory in determining what employers expect from MARC graduates. A thematic analysis process followed in this study is further discussed in Chapter 4. The next section provides brief information on the ethics considered in this study.

1.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance with Ref. No: PERC-17037, was sought from UNISA, and permission for participants' involvement based on informed consent from participants, was obtained from all companies involved in this study. In addition, the researcher established a relationship and trust through the signing of informed consent with participants. Also, a relationship was possible from the participating organisations through consultation of appropriate documents and preliminary visits to the organisations (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004). To encourage honesty from participants when contributing to the data, the researcher ensured that the data collection sessions involved only those who were genuinely willing to take part and were prepared to offer data freely. This was done by providing consent forms for participants to read and sign when they agreed to participate in this study. Participants were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point, should they feel the need (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004). The researcher also planned to make use of member checking, by asking the participants

to read their transcript to check if their words were accurately captured (Laher, Fynn & Kramer, 2019; Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004). Moreover, a detailed discussion pertaining ethical considerations for this study is outlined in Chapter 4.

1.8 Researcher's interest

Regarding the researcher's interests to the topic, this arose from coming from a community with limited resources and less motivation for achievements. The researcher struggled to make it out of this community. However, the encouragement was to make it in life by obtaining a qualification, become employed and effectively contribute back to the community. On the contrary, the real work world had its own expectations from a graduate prior to being employed. These expectations were not communicated during the academic period, hence the researcher struggled to meet the employers' requirements after completing a qualification. Additionally, this is not only an individual's reality, but several graduates have also experienced a similar challenge. Hence, the unemployment rate continues to be negatively affected, which is considered and discussed in more detail on in Chapter 3.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overall overview to the research problem, the research question, aims and the objectives of this study; as well as discussing the rationale of conducting this study. In addition, the research design and methods applied in addressing the research question towards achieving the intentions of this study were included. These methods include a paradigmatic perspective, a theoretical perspective, research approach, research design, population and selection method, data collection techniques, and data analysis. Furthermore, this chapter considered the ethical implications around conducting this study and included brief information on ethical issues. The next section sets out the outline of the chapters included in the dissertation and the following chapter elaborates further on the theoretical framework guiding this study.

1.10 Outline of the dissertation

Chapter 1	provides an orientation and rationale of the study
Chapter 2	provides a theoretical framework guiding this study
Chapter 3	provides the literature overview relating to the research topic
Chapter 4	provides the research designs and methods applicable to this study
Chapter 5	presents the findings of this study
Chapter 6	presents the discussion and conclusion

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher provided an overview of the research question and the aim of this study, which was to provide clarity and awareness of the expected MARC graduates' skills that might contribute towards employment of these graduates. Thus, this study made use of the sociological institutional theory as the theoretical framework to understand what contributes to the employability of MARC graduates from the employers' experiences. Based on the understanding and application of the sociological institutional theory, the researcher obtained and interpreted the employers' expectations towards potential employment of MARC graduates.

Therefore, this chapter focuses on introducing the sociological institutional theory as the theoretical framework, which underpins the study. A detailed discussion on the adopted conceptual framework alongside the major elements of the sociological institutional theory is provided. In addition, a diagram indicating the aspects of the conceptual framework, adopted to address the research question of this study, has also been included. Furthermore, the researcher discussed the implications of the sociological institutional theory to this study. Accordingly, this chapter provides an explanation of how the sociological institutional theory connects with the employability of the MARC graduates. The next section discusses the origin of the sociological institutional theory, the different schools of thought, the choice from the highlighted schools of thought and the reason for its adoption.

2.2 Overview of Institutional theory

In this section, a brief discussion on the origin of the institutional theory is included, as well as an argument on the schools of thought describing the institutional theory background and the choice of a school of thought related to this study. Institutional theory is a theoretical framework for analysing social phenomena that views the social world as being comprised of institutions, which include enduring rules, practices, and structures to set conditions on action (Kent et al., 2022; Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). The recognition of institutional theory and its history in this study allowed for the acknowledgement of practices and structures considered important from different organisations. Thus, the next section provides a brief history of the institutional theory.

2.2.1 A brief history of the institutional theory

More than thirty years ago, a theoretical and empirical development in the institutional approaches to organisations evolved, accompanied by a strong interest in the core institutional theory ideas (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Zucker 1988). Institutional theory concepts and ideas are essential in understanding the decision-making processes of the organisations (Bridgstock, 2019).

The input of, and first systematic attempts, were by two classical philosophers: Max Weber (1981) and Emile Durkheim (1980); Hogan (2019); Peters (2012). Weber focused on an interpretive approach with the idea that action is social in the sense that the actor attaches a subjective meaning to the action (Hogan, 2019; Peters, 2012; Weber, 1981). According to Peters (2012), Weber (1981) identified the way cultural rules tend to constitute the basis for collective action in a variety of settings (Hogan, 2019; Peters, 2012; Serrat, 2017). The role of beliefs or cultural systems is to provide a set of meanings required to interpret actions (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). Accordingly, Weber's (1981) point of view acknowledges the constructed reality on how cultural rules become internalised and interpreted towards influencing human behaviour (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019).

Durkheim (1980), however, believed that institutions are symbolic systems that include systems of knowledge, beliefs, and moral authority that translates into meaning (Durkheim 1980; Hogan, 2019; Peters, 2012), and that the symbolic systems are subjective products of human interaction, but experienced by people as objective (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). According to Peters (2012), Durkheim (1981) emphasised the critical importance of symbols in structuring human behaviour, inside and outside of formal institutions, and one can therefore make sense of human interaction, decision-making, and the rationale for interpreting human behaviour (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). Acknowledged symbols are cultural artefacts such as qualifications, the reputations of specific institutions or programmes and specific values that employers deem to be important, based on their symbolic value. The following section considers the institutional theory within organisations.

2.2.2 The institutional theory within organisations

The above-mentioned philosophers' viewpoints are imperative in any consideration of human behaviour within organisations particularly when attempting to provide a meaning towards certain perceptions on organisation settings (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019).

Hence, the institutional theory views organisations as responding to socially constructed beliefs about what constitutes efficient and effective organisational behaviour (Bridgstock, 2019; Suddaby et al., 2013). Therefore, to understand organisational behaviour, an application of the organisational theory is usually ideal (Jones, 2013; Sung & Kim, 2021). This is because an organisation is a tool people use to coordinate their actions to obtain something they desire or value (Jones, 2013; Sung & Kim, 2021). An organisational theory is the study of how organisations function and how they affect and are influenced by the environment in which they operate (Jones, 2013; Sung & Kim, 2021). In contrast, institutional theory moves beyond studying of functions of organisations, and includes studying human practices and decision making within organisations (Bridgstock, 2019; Suddaby et al., 2013). Hence, the application of the institutional theory in this study assisted with comprehension of how organisations exercise certain rules to restrain and direct employees' behaviour.

In addition, governance is one of the aspects promoted by the institutional theory to establish human behaviour within an organisation (Masuku, 2019; Naidoo, 2009). Hence, the primary question asked by the institutional theory scholars, concerns the nature of governing institutions that could structure the behaviour of individuals toward better ends (Hogan, 2019; Peters, 2012; Serrat, 2017). Governance is the action or manner of governing an organisation and is essentially about effective leadership characterised by the ethical values of responsibility, accountability, fairness and transparency (Masuku, 2019; Naidoo, 2009). Within organisations, governance involves making decisions and using resources to alter conditions within society. The assumption is that the nature of organisations influences the capacity of the system to govern effectively (Masuku, 2019; Naidoo, 2009). The following section is a discussion of the schools of the institutional theory.

2.2.3 The schools of the institutional theory

In governing organisations, the three major schools of the institutional theory emerged, including the historical institutionalism, political institutionalism, and the sociological institutionalism (Hogan, 2019; Peters, 2012; Serrat, 2017). According to Amenta and Ramsey (2010); Gohan and Arbar (2022), historic institutionalism argues that institutions are so that processes behind the creation and persistence of organisations and policies can be traced and explanations that form a combination of institutions, processes and events can be sought; in this manner institutional reasons that are contextually bound to particular places in time may

also be explained (Gohan and Arbar, 2022). Further, Amenta and Ramsey (2010); Gohan and Arbar (2022), argue that political institutionalism addresses power and emphasises the role of political institutions on political outcomes and processes. Hence, employees within organisations are forced to work with defined resources and other means of action that control procedures within organisations (Gohan and Arbar, 2022). On the other hand, according to Amenta and Ramsey (2010); Gohan and Arbar (2022), sociological institutionalism is a response to view organisations focusing on cultural, environmental ideas, and motivation of human activity. Furthermore, cognitive schemas and paradigms establish beliefs, which organisations may use to attribute structures and encourage stability (Amenta & Ramsey, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022). In addition, the sociological institutionalism approach is relevant when discussing the concept of the requisite employability skills of graduates through the employers' expectations. Consequently, the choice out of the three identified schools of thought is sociological institutionalism, because of the interest in understanding human activity. Hence, the standpoint is a cultural theory that emanates from organisational theory used to scrutinise organisations (Bridgstock, 2019; Suddaby et al., 2013).

Furthermore, sociological institutionalism provides a broad cultural theoretical perspective on organisations and focuses on the diffusion of ideas and other cultural forms in search of legitimacy (Amenta & Ramsey, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022), highlights organisational stability and structures through systems application (Gohan & Arbar, 2022). These systems consider primary motivators of human activity with the assumption that norms, rituals, models and culture establish what is appropriate (Amenta & Ramsey, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022). According to Hogan (2019); Peters (2012), decision-making processes within organisations may utilise the different ideas of institutionalisms as a set of lenses, to illuminate different aspects of structures and behaviour. Hence, the sociological institutionalism emphasises the importance of values in defining the nature of organisations and individual behaviour within symbolic structures (Hogan, 2019; Peters, 2012; Serrat, 2017). Therefore, the sociological institutionalism was an appropriate idea to this study, among the three ideas of institutional theory. This idea complements and captures the notion that effective human interaction is possible through the understanding of norms, rituals and cultures (Gohan & Arbar, 2022).

Additionally, the three identified schools of thought are critical in conceptualising the institutional theory in general and considered in understanding human behaviour within organisational settings. From the three identified schools of thought, sociological institutionalism appropriately addresses the research questions of this study through

consideration of the norms and customs within organisations; it is representative of the institutional theory aspects this study intended to achieve. A detailed discussion on the perspective of the sociological institutional theory follows in the next section of this chapter.

2.3 The sociological institutional theory

This section of the chapter focuses on debating the application of the sociological institutional theory to this study. The sociological institutional theory is a neutral idea, defined as the “emergence of orderly, stable, socially integrating patterns out of unstable, loosely organised, narrowly technical activities” (Selznick, 1996, p271). In addition, the sociological institutional theory facilitates the understanding that contributes towards decision-making according to the institutional framework of organisations (Furusten, 2013; Lewis et al., 2018). The assumption is that a better understanding of the decision-making process within an environment encourages how employers function, and improve chances of making more carefully considered decisions (Bridgstock, 2019; Suddaby et al., 2013). Additionally, the sociological institutional theory regards organisations as responding to socially constructed beliefs about what constitutes efficient and effective organisational behaviour (Furusten, 2013; Lewis et al., 2018) and these are imperative in understanding the social structures that guide effective conduct of the employees within organisations. Further to this, the sociological institutional theory suggests that much organisational behaviour occurs in response to social pressures, arising from the common environment created by other organisations (Bridgstock, 2019; Suddaby et al., 2013). Hence, the sociological institutional theory attends to the aspects of the social structure, which involves social interaction between a group of people, such as employers and employees (Furusten, 2013; Lewis et al., 2018). Therefore, the sociological institutional theory considers the processes by which structures, including schemas, rules, norms and routines, became established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). Gohan and Arbar (2022); Scott (1987) concurs with this by asserting that institutions are a set of regulative, normative and cognitive structures that offer stability and meaning to social behaviour. These structures, according to Lewis *et al.*, (2018); Meadows (1967) benefit institutions through systems that facilitate functioning of human beings participating and committed to different organisations.

Furthermore, the institutional structures provide a set of familiar or routine conditions to encourage appropriate conduct of participants’ behaviours (Lewis et al., 2018; Meadows,

1967). Hence, the sociological institutional theory holds that institutions, which assumes that social orders, social rules, or taken-for-granted norms and beliefs, drive human actions (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). Additionally, regulated beliefs and practices within institutions are seen by employers as being normal, expected, and appropriate procedures to drive human actions (Cai, 2012; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). Furthermore, social order comes into being as individuals act, interpret that action and share their interpretations with others. These interpretations are attempts to classify behaviours into categories that enable employers to respond to them in related practices (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987).

According to the sociological institutional theory, organisations are influenced by normative pressures which may arise from external sources such as the government, or from within the organisation itself (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). These pressures lead organisations guided by legitimated elements, from standard operating procedures to professional certification and government requirements (Kent et al., 2022; Zucker, 1987). Furusten (2013); Lewis *et al.*, (2018) argue that ‘institutional environment’ is the concept used to describe circumstances and the surrounding environment that determines the conditions that organisations and their managers must adapt to, and manage. For example, if the business is education, each school must live up to the institutional demands for what it considers as characteristic of a real school. According to Peters (2012); Serrat, (2017), the most important use of the elements of sociological institutional theory within organisations is to provide clarifications for the decisions-making, which involves utilising resources to structure required behaviour.

Therefore, the importance of establishing and maintaining stability within an organisational setting is one of the standpoints of sociological institutional theory, alongside preserving the correct recruitment decisions which contribute towards achieving appropriate graduates. According to Kent *et al.*, (2022); Zucker (1987), stability increases effectiveness when linked to the goals of an organisation by creating routines. The features of what qualifies an institutionalised organisation, are discussed in the following section, which encourages implementation of institutional practices by the organisation and its members.

2.3.1 The key features of the sociological institutional theory

This section discusses the qualifying features of the sociological institutional theory and the ways in which organisations encourage consistency towards employees within a work environment. According to Gohar and Abrar (2022); Scott (1987), institutionalisation is a practice that promotes organisations in becoming regulated; institutionalisation occurs whenever there is an exchanged pattern of repeated actions by types of actors (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987). According to Peters (2012); Serrat (2017), the existence of some stability over time is imperative within institutionalisation, and stable features can assist employers in predicting employees' behaviour on that basis. Furthermore, organisations must affect employees' behaviour in some way to force an appropriate behaviour among its members (Peters, 2012; Serrat, 2017). Another mechanism used by organisations to help them function within environments is that of developing routines that worked in the past. According to Hanson (2001); Kent *et al.*, (2022), these routines become part of the collective memory of organisations and transmitted through culture, socialisation, professionalisation, personnel hiring practices, and imitation. Thus, they become forces for stability rather than change. Additionally, one of the most important routines within an organisation is the socialisation, whereby individuals acquire identity and learn the norms, values, behaviour, and social skills that are appropriate to a certain organisation. According to DiMaggio (1988); Kent *et al.*, (2022), socialisation is an important aspect of institutional work for new participants, performed with the greatest integrity by members with a great stake in the existing institutional order.

Furthermore, the sociological institutional theory is rooted in compliance with aspects of life; it operates to produce common understandings about what is appropriate and meaningful behaviour within organisations (Kent *et al.*, 2022; Zucker, 1983). In addition to this, employees' behaviour is established and motivated to comply with the requirements imposed by employers (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987). As a result, a successful institutionalisation practice creates legitimated employers who tend to enforce aspects of the institutional forms and make sure that employees abide by the obligatory demands of organisations (DiMaggio, 1988; Kent *et al.*, 2022). The next section of this chapter considers the critical viewpoint of the sociological institutional theory.

2.3.2 Critical view of the sociological institutional theory

According to Bridgstock (2019); Suddaby *et al.*, (2013), sociological institutional theory lacks the endogenous explanations for processes of stability and change, and it is at risk of losing internal coherence. In addition to this, it is lacking in terms of being a reasonable construct for research (Bridgstock, 2019; Suddaby *et al.*, 2013). The concept of an institution is ambiguous, and this ambiguity is the result of the lack of both theoretical and methodological elaboration on the process of sociological institutional theory (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). Bridgstock (2019); Suddaby *et al.*, (2013), argue that a theoretical movement that seeks to ensure coherence by returning to the roots in lived experiences and focusing attention on the processes, rather than on the social structures, are the outcomes of sociological institutional theory. According to Lawrence and Shadnam (2008); Swart (2019), the sociological institutional theory emanates from largely interpretivist roots and has been employed in many areas with a variety of methodological and epistemological approaches, with researchers now from both realistic and social constructionist traditions. As a result, sociological institutional theory is compatible with many different perspectives and research questions, and has no common set of constructs or methods (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). Additionally, in this study, the researcher intended to focus on the social constructionism paradigm to address the research question. Therefore, this study intended to make use of the organisational structures and activities, including cultural cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that are relevant in providing stability and meaning to social behaviour. The next section of this chapter discusses the structures or elements of the sociological institutional theory.

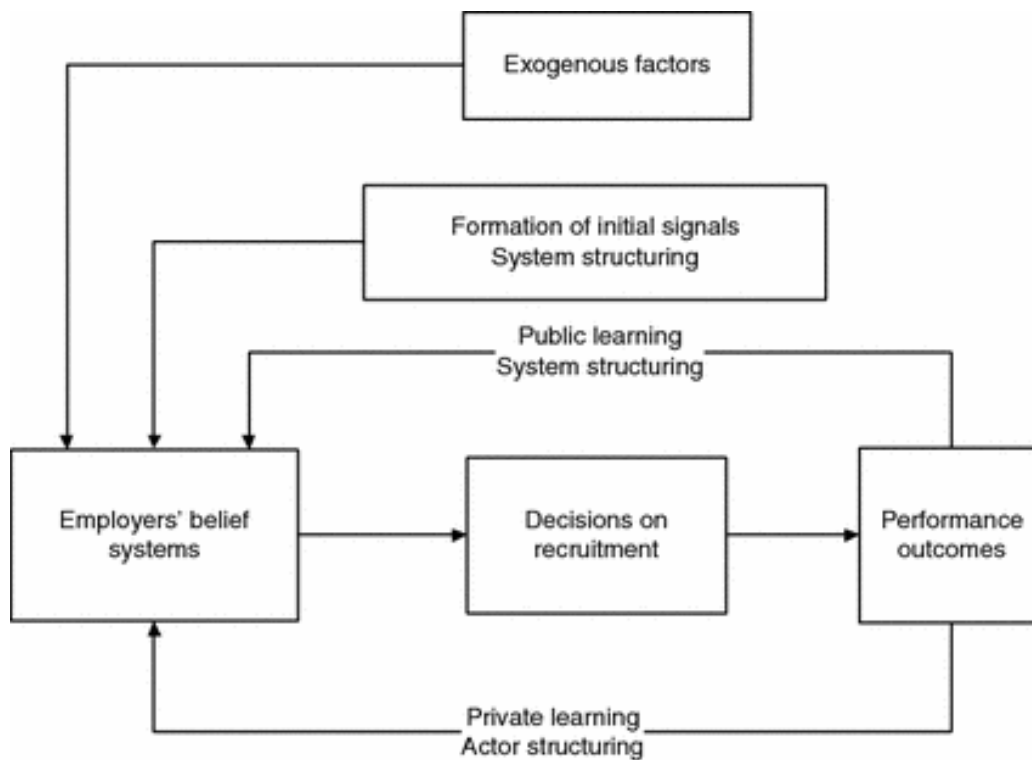
2.4 The elements of sociological institutional theory: a conceptual framework

This section of the chapter discusses the conceptual framework to this study, which includes a detailed discussion on the elements of the sociological institutional theory. According to Gohar and Abrar (2022); Scott (2008), the elements of the sociological institutional theory include regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements. The regulative element stresses rule setting and plays a stabilising role by prescribing actions through formal or informal rules that establish, monitor, and sanction activities (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008). On the other hand, the normative element involves the standards and cognitive frameworks that create and control professions and other moral standards-making bodies (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). Furthermore, the cultural-cognitive

elements include shared understanding compliance, with essential structures that are culturally supported (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). In addition, the elaboration of rules and requirements distinguish the elements of the sociological institutional theory, which individual organisations must conform with if they are to receive support and legitimacy (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987).

The conceptual framework devised by Cai (2013) identifies factors and mechanisms affecting employers' belief system and indicates the ways in which constructed knowledge direct the employers' choices (Bailly, 2008; Lewis et al., 2018). According to Hanson (2001); Kent *et al.*, (2022) the employers' beliefs' conceptual framework indicates that organisations process information, formulate plans and aspirations, interpret environments, generate strategies and decisions, monitor experiences and learn from them, and imitate other organisations (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). It consists of the different aspects including- *Exogenous factors, Formation of initial signals, Employers' belief system, Decisions on recruitment, Performance outcomes, Public learning, and Private learning* (Cai, 2013; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). A detailed discussion of the aspects of the employers' beliefs conceptual framework follows in the next sections of this chapter. Figure 1, below, indicates the employers' beliefs: a conceptual framework applicable to this study and in conjunction with the elements of the sociological institutional theory.

Figure 1: *Factors and mechanisms affecting employers' beliefs*



Source: Cai, 2013

Note: This figure demonstrates the employers' beliefs conceptual framework applicable with the elements of the sociological institutional theory.

Elements of the sociological institutional theory force organisations to be similar to each other in form and practice, and DiMaggio (1988); Kent *et al.*, (2022) refers to that force as the isomorphism, a constraining system that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions (DiMaggio, 1988; Kent *et al.*, 2022). The isomorphic system includes the coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphic (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019), which are associated with the elements of the sociological institutional theory. Additionally, the coercive isomorphic results from formal or informal pressures applied on the organisation by the government, other organisations, or the cultural expectations of the environment (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). Further, it emanates from the influence of other organisations on which an organisation is dependent, and from the expectations of the organisational social surroundings. Moreover, the essential coercive force includes a legal environment, government authority and funding (Cai, 2013; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). However, the mimetic isomorphic is associated with hesitation in goals, technology, or market dynamics, which leads organisational decision-makers to adopt structures and practices that model other leading

organisations in similar fields (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). More importantly, mimetic isomorphism occurs when one educational organisation consciously models itself after another, based on the belief that it represents a higher level of success and achievement in the public eye (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). On the other hand, the normative isomorphic results from the standards and cognitive frameworks that create and control the professions and other moral standards making bodies (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). These different isomorphic systems are discussed, in connection to this study in the following section, together with the elements of the sociological institutional theory.

2.4.1 The prescribed expected standards of conformity

This part of the chapter discusses the significance of the prescribed standards that enforce conformity for employees within organisations. According to the sociological institutional theory, the normative element specifies the need for the prescribed standards, according to Cai (2013); Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe (2019) are seen as the *exogenous factors*. According to Gohar and Abrar (2022); Smit and Hitt (2005), the normative element of the sociological institutional theory is a result of the standards and cognitive frameworks that create and control professions and other moral standards-making bodies. In addition, the normative element is rooted in the processes of professionalisation in which universities as well as professional certification and accreditation agencies impose the values, codes, and standards (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). These agencies also act as gatekeepers, determining who gets into the profession and therefore further reinforcing the expected standards (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022).

According to Cai (2013); Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe (2019), the *private learning* of the employers' beliefs conceptual framework occurs when employers start to hire graduates with similar educational credentials, and the performance outcomes of the employees become benchmarks for the employers to adjust their beliefs. According to Greenberg (2011); Martini *et al.*, (2018); Massoud *et al.*, (2020), *performance outcome* of the employers' beliefs conceptual framework links to the execution of action and the desire to perform well and demonstrate one's competence to others. Moreover, the normative element of the sociological institutional theory also links to the *decision on recruitment* aspect of the employers' beliefs conceptual framework. According to Greenberg and Baron (2003); Martini *et al.*, (2018); Massoud *et al.*, (2020), *decision-making* is the process of making choices based on several

alternatives. The *decision-making* involves how decisions are made, how they have improved, and it is an important goal of the organisation's behaviour (Martini *et al.*, 2018; Massoud *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, companies that dedicate their time in attracting newly recruits to join their organisation are likely to find those recruits strongly committed to the company (Greenberg & Baron, 2003; Martini *et al.*, 2018; Massoud *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the mimetic isomorphism can be associated with the *decision on recruitment*, as this isomorphism, according to Lawrence and Shadnam (2008); Swart (2019) focuses on guiding organisations to make decisions by adopting structures and practices that model other leading organisations in their similar fields. The following section discusses the need for the appropriate conduct within organisations.

2.4.2 The appropriate organisational conduct through regulations

Organisations have specific rules and regulations guiding the conduct of employees and prospective employees of each organisation (Martini *et al.*, 2018; Massoud *et al.*, 2020). Thus, this section of the chapter discusses the significance of the appropriate conduct of employees within organisations. For organisations to ensure appropriate employee conduct, an implementation of the codes of conduct, which include rules and regulations, is encouraged for different organisations. According to De la Torre-Castro and Lindström, 2010; Gohan and Arbar, 2022; Scott 2008, the regulative element of the sociological institutional theory stresses the importance of setting rules and regulations to encourage stability within organisations. These rules and regulations act as informal or formal prescribed rules to establish, monitor, and sanction activities (Hanson, 2001; Kent *et al.*, 2022). In addition, the regulation processes involve the capacity to establish rules, and the power to exercise control over the conformity of others to the rules (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008).

In addition, the central aspects of the regulative processes are force, fear and appropriateness, balanced by the existence of rules (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008). According to Gohar and Abrar (2022); Smit and Hitt (2005), the regulative element of the sociological institutional theory includes the appropriate basis of compliance, with regulatory rules and coercive mechanisms. Furthermore, the regulative element of the sociological institutional theory stems from political influence and the need for legitimacy (Cai, 2012); Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe (2019). This element results from formal or informal

pressures exerted on the organisation by the government, other organisations, or the cultural expectations of the environment (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019), assuming that there are determinants encouraging organisations to exercise certain regulations in recruiting precise skills and encouraging a particular conduct in promoting productivity within an organisation.

In terms of gathering information on certain regulations within organisations, the researcher incorporated the employers' beliefs conceptual framework mentioned earlier. The employers' beliefs' conceptual framework includes the *formation of initial signals*. This is when employers adjust to the required criterion of the organisation, and obtain information on how, for instance, a recruiting process is conducted in an organisation (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). According to Cai (2012); Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe (2019), the *formation of initial signals* exists before either *private* or *public learning* processes, and it develops within employers' perception framework through a process of system structuring. The *formation of initial signals* plays a role in influencing employers' beliefs in order for employers to perform according to the organisations' expectations (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). In addition, it is associated with the regulative element of sociological institutional theory; this element plays a balancing role by suggesting rules that sanction actions and specific behaviour within an organisation. Furthermore, Hanson (2001); Kent *et al.*, (2022) mention that school rules, state laws, court decisions, and professional standards govern the actions of employers and employees within organisations. For instance, *formation of initial signals* act as a guide for employers to adjust their perceptions and make use of the organisation's framework when recruiting or performing tasks (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). In addition, it also links to the coercive isomorphic because this isomorphic results from formal or informal pressures applied on the organisation by the government, other organisations, or the cultural expectations of the environment (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). The following section highlights the effect of the employers' beliefs and values towards recruiting and wanting specific employees within organisations.

2.4.3 Social connection through organisational values and beliefs

This section of the chapter elaborates the importance of the relevance of values and beliefs that encourage employers to employ individuals connecting to their organisational culture. According to De la Torre-Castro and Lindström (2010); Gohan and Arbar (2022); Scott (2008),

values interpreted as to what people think, are important or right. The values are stable, long-lasting beliefs about what is important to a person or an organisation, and a belief is an internal feeling that something is true (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). In addition, the values and beliefs for the sociological institutional theory shape and work as a filter, that people and organisations use to view reality and give meaning to such reality, as they interpret their world (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). Hence, the basic building blocks for values and beliefs are the meanings and common frameworks of references (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). The values are commonly formed by a particular belief that is related to the worth of an idea or type of behaviour (Cai, 2012; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019).

Furthermore, the sociological institutional theory considers the concept of values and beliefs through the cultural-cognitive element, which includes the shared understanding of compliance, with essential structures that are culturally supported (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). According to Lawrence and Shadnam (2008); Swart (2019), the consideration of cultural-cognitive element is vital when there are doubts about goals, technology, or market dynamics, which leads organisational decision-makers to adopt structures and practices that model other leading organisations in their fields (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). Additionally, the cultural-cognitive element occurs when employers face hesitancy, and try to imitate successful organisations as a solution (Cai, 2012; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). According to De la Torre-Castro and Lindström (2010); Gohan and Arbar (2022); Scott (2008), the cultural-cognitive frameworks provide deeper foundations of institutional forms. The cultural-cognitive element emphasises the shared ideas that create the nature of social reality, and the frames through which meaning succeeds (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008). According to De la Torre-Castro and Lindström (2010); Gohan and Arbar (2022); Scott (2008), when organisations are unsure about how to perform certain activities, they imitate similar organisations to adapt to such activities and this imitation emerges within the employers' belief conceptual framework.

More importantly, the employers' belief conceptual framework includes different aspects that influence organisational structures and employers' beliefs. De la Torre-Castro and Lindström (2010); Gohan and Arbar (2022); Scott (1987) are of the opinion that organisational structure is a flexible intervention, shaped in reaction to the characteristics and commitments of participants, as well as having been shaped by influences and constraints from the external environment. In addition, the employers' belief conceptual framework views the external environment as the exogenous (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022).

Exogenous aspects structure employers' behaviour, which include social action and system development, and these aspects are referred to as exogenous, because the employers themselves do not influence them (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987). The possible *exogenous aspects* affecting employers' belief include a larger cultural environment faced by employers, specific market conditions and the companies' particular characteristics (Cai, 2013; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). Even though employers do not directly influence the externally derived aspects, employers may also not avoid these aspects (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022). According to the sociological institutional theory, the cultural cognitive element influences and guides employers to behave in a certain way within a particular organisation. Thus, this element plays a role in shaping shared beliefs and values within organisations (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022).

Moreover, the *public learning* of the employers' belief conceptual framework has an impact on the imitation of organisations (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987). Some employers may imitate other companies that have been successful in recruiting graduates, in terms of enhancing productivity. This is when mimetic isomorphism occurs, to allow the organisation to model itself after another similar organisation (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987). According to Lawrence and Shadnam (2008); Swart (2019), the mimetic isomorphism is associated with hesitation that leads organisational decision-makers to adopt structures and practices, that model other leading organisations in similar fields. However, according to Cai (2013); Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe (2019), some other employers may facilitate the *public learning* process by creating opportunities for information sharing among the employers or directly distributing information concerning the performance of the graduates at workplaces among employers in the field. The elaboration on the significance of the sociological institutional theory to this study is presented in the following section.

2.5 Implications of the sociological institutional theory for the study

This section discusses the association of the sociological institutional theory to this study. The researcher intended to understand how the employers of MARC graduates determine the skills these graduates should possess to become employable. According to the sociological institutional theory, the employers' beliefs and values directly influence employees' actions by

specifying how employees should behave in a particular work environment (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987). Hence, this study was intended to understand the employers' beliefs that could contribute towards achieving a desired behaviour from MARC graduates. The application of the sociological institutional theory assisted the researcher in understanding and making sense of such employers' beliefs.

Furthermore, the researcher intended to understand the role played by the prescribed standards imposed upon the employers in ensuring the employment of accredited graduates, hence the researcher was able to address the employers' expectations from MARC graduates. In addition, to address the research question, the normative element of the sociological institutional theory assisted, as it emphasises the introduction of prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life. The normative element in this study contributed towards addressing why certain skills and attributes were appropriate to a particular organisation, what happens when employees did not conform to the required standards and how these organisations ensured obligation for MARC graduates to abide by. According to Kent et al., (2022); Zucker (1988), the normative element of the sociological institutional theory focuses on the transmission of the social component, generally from external sources, such as the professions. In this study, the researcher intended to understand the required employment skills that employers of MARC graduates perceive as necessary skills, to transmit from their own experiences to these graduates to be employable.

The sociological institutional theory also assisted the researcher to explore and understand the appropriate conduct expected from MARC graduates. The regulative element of the sociological theory assisted in obtaining information about the appropriate conduct of MARC graduates. The regulative element focuses on the idea that institutions are enforcers of moral authority (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). The specific rules and regulations of an organisation normally guide a desired conduct within an organisation, and the application of such rules determines the favourable outcomes for the organisation (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987). This study intended to gather information on the specific regulations that successfully guided MARC graduates to comply and have a good conduct within a particular organisation. The regulative element of the sociological institutional theory is included in this study, considering that this element results from the expectations of the social surroundings in which the organisation is embedded (Cai, 2012; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019).

The researcher intended to understand values and beliefs that motivate employers of MARC graduates towards employing employees with specific attributes. Additionally, the cultural-cognitive element of the sociological institutional theory assisted in an understanding of the employers' values and beliefs, that play a role in the recruitment of MARC graduates. The cultural-cognitive element of the sociological institutional theory provides the deeper foundations of institutional forms and provides the infrastructure on which beliefs, norms and rules rest (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008). Through this element, employers of MARC graduates identified the reasons why they expect graduates to behave in a certain way, and have certain attributes to form part of their organisations. Furthermore, the cultural-cognitive element is included in this study, because it emphasises the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames which meaning results from (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008). Therefore, the employers of MARC graduates communicated how they disseminate their organisational culture to these graduates. Thus, this study focused on these elements seeing that organisations comprised of many institutional elements, some rules, norms or beliefs, copied in on-going interaction, while others borrowed from their environments (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008).

According to the sociological institutional theory individuals' internal informative beliefs are shaped by external institutional frameworks, in which the elements of sociological institutional theory are intertwined (Cai, 2012; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). Therefore, the constructed feedback from the employers of MARC graduates contributed towards the study. Furthermore, Lewis *et al.*, (2018); Mayhew (1968) argue that sociological institutional theory is understood as a process whereby appropriate mechanisms of socialisation control institutes, to ensure that employers are adequately motivated to conform to the normative obligations. Furthermore, Furusten (2013); Lewis *et al.*, (2018) mention that the activities and products of organisations contribute to the creation of formal and informal structures in society, that the rest of the employees must relate to. In addition, Cai (2012); Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe (2019) state that sociological institutional theory can assist in understanding how employers make decisions on recruitment based on their beliefs, using insights from the sociological institutional theory.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter included a brief overview of, and discussion on, the origins of the institutional theory, which included the schools of institutionalism as historical, political and sociological institutionalism. For this study, the researcher placed an emphasis on sociological institutionalism as it provided an understanding on the importance of values in defining the nature of organisations and individual behaviour within symbolic structures. The key features of the sociological institutional theory within organisations include the prescribed expected standards of conformity; appropriate organisational conduct through regulations; and social connection through organisational values and beliefs (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 1987). These three features, or elements, underpin the framework that guided the interview approach and analysis of the employer expectations of MARC graduates.

The next chapter focuses on the relevant literature, which includes a discussion of the concept of employability, graduateness, linking the sociological institutional theory with the employability concept, and the social constructionism approach in addressing the research question.

Chapter 3: Literature overview

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the sociological institutional theory was discussed, which is the theoretical framework this study is based on. According to Lawrence and Shadnam (2008); Swart (2019), sociological institutional theory is a theoretical framework for analysing social phenomena that view the social world as being comprised of institutions, which include enduring rules, practices, and structures to set conditions on action.

This chapter focuses on discussing education and training aspect of HE, and the role of education in society. Although there are other aspects of the HE sector, this study concentrated on one aspect, which is providing integrated post-school education and training for citizens, to improve the quality of their lives (DHET, 2020). The role played by education within society is an important point to ponder, as clarifying it may assist in putting into perspective the reasons behind the need for HE and skills acquisition by graduates, towards employment. In addition, a discussion on employability and graduateness is included in this chapter, to explain the two different ideas, and how each one influences graduates' employment and work readiness.

The focus of this study was on the skills expected by employers from MARC graduates, and it is important to consider the features of the research psychology category. Therefore, in this chapter, a discussion on the research psychology field comprises consideration of its training, regulating bodies, and employment settings for research psychology graduates; the researcher wanted to tap into the literature that may lead to understanding employers' perspectives on employability of MARC graduates and anticipates addressing the research questions. The next section discusses the landscape of HE and its role in SA.

3.2 Higher Education in South Africa

In this study, HEIs are viewed as institutions that pose institutional regulations to the students who become graduates, after being institutionalised by the culture and regulations of HEIs (Boughey, 2002; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Therefore, this section of the chapter discusses the connection between HEIs and its features, which include the shape of HE systems, unemployment, graduate unemployment and the function of HEIs in SA.

3.2.1 Higher Education systems

The SA HE system dates to the era of the *separate development policy*, which was an active HE and schooling policy under the apartheid regime (Boughey, 2002; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Under this policy, HEIs were separated for non-white and white population groups establishments (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017). Furthermore, the separate development policy included discriminatory practices, in which all education institutions were segregated along different races (Allais, 2017; Lomofsyk & Lazarus, 2001). Thus, the apartheid regime constructed a system which denied majority race groups' access to a decent education (Allais, 2017; Ensor, 2003). As a result, the black majority was denied access to learning experiences from these well-resourced HEIs, which were available for the white minority (Boughey, 2002; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). For instance, research was structured for the White population, while blacks were offered nursing instead of medicine or public administration instead of political philosophy (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017). However, this system changed after the democratic elections in 1994, which brought improvements to the country and the education system.

After the democratic elections in 1994, which introduced equality, educational reform became one of the priorities for the democracy (Boughey, 2002; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). The approach and delivery of education needed transformation, to integrate education systems and provide a decent education for all, particularly for the majority that had been denied access for a long time (Allais, 2017; Ensor, 2003). The approach to transforming the apartheid educational system began with the introduction of new policies and mechanisms that would create an equitable education system (Allais, 2003; Allais, 2017). The new system had to promote international competitiveness and inclusivity of diverse educational needs for all South Africans (Allais, 2003; Allais, 2017; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). Hence, one of the regulatory bodies, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), established in 1995, led to the review of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which traces its origins back to the labour movement of 1970 (SAQA, 2020).

Accordingly, the distinction between HEIs and workplace-based training paved the way for the recognition of NQF to standardise the quality of qualifications across the education system (Boughey, 2002; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). One of the reasons behind the NQF model was to shape South African's education and training systems, with the main intention of ending segregation within the system (Allais, 2017; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). In addition, the NQF model became responsible for the accreditation of the workers for accumulated competencies,

and for eroding social barriers that prevented access to quality education and training (Allais, 2017; Ensor, 2003). Furthermore, as a response to globalisation, the NQF model established guidelines for nationally and internationally benchmarking standards to contribute to the drive for international competitiveness (Allais, 2003; Allais, 2017; Ensor, 2003). To date, the integrated approach to education and training has been retained with a continuous review of the model, to make it more effective and responsive to the country's educational needs (SAQA, 2020). Continuous reviews have resulted in the birth of other effective regulations, for instance the Council on Higher Education (CHE), which is a statutory corporate body established to promote quality and quality assurance of HE (CHE, 2020). Also, the Skills Development Act (SDA) promotes and monitors the national skills development strategy (DHET, 2020) and furthermore, Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) promotes learnerships for scarce and critical skills in SA (DHET, 2020).

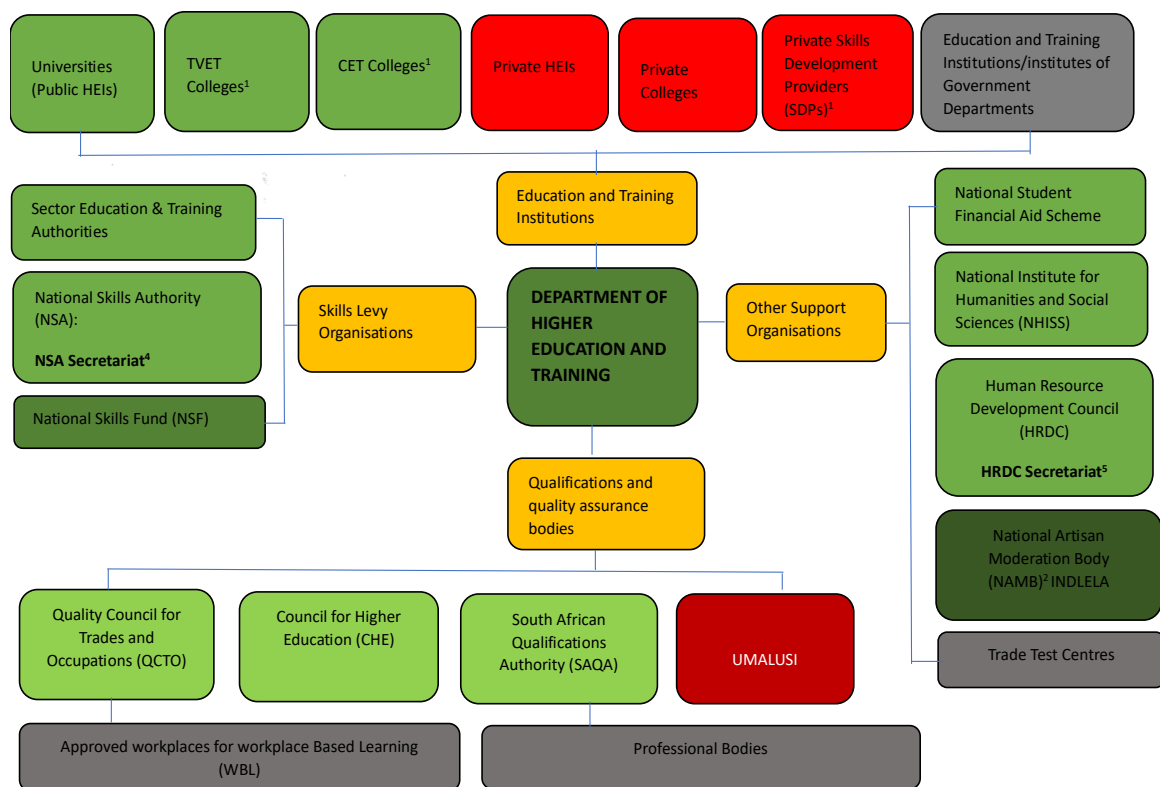
Moreover, to enhance and achieve the desired outcomes, the HE sector promoted inclusivity through the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), which was designed to respond to diverse learner needs (Allais, 2017; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). According to Bozalek and Boughey (2012); Bozalek and Zembylas (2017), OBE focuses on the application of knowledge, rather than building knowledge frameworks. OBE is a system that bases each part of education around outcomes and is based on the belief that all learners can achieve success while individuality is respected (Allais, 2017; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). The promotion of inclusivity and individuality may have a positive impact on the retention rates as well as encouraging student enrolment from different backgrounds (Boughey, 2002; Boughey & McKenna, 2021).

However, there are negative factors; for example, the remote, rural areas attract less qualified staff compared to urban areas (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017). For the SA education system, respecting individuality is imperative, as there are different contributors impacting the learning experience, which may affect the outcome. For instance, the under-preparedness of many poor working-class students for HE could affect their academic performance, and later the graduation rate (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017). This has also raised issues of equity in access to HE, as students from poor backgrounds struggle to access HE (Stats SA, 2023).

However, there are strategies in place to support the different needs of SA students, including financial, academic and practical learning support. To emphasise inclusivity and individuality

in education provision, SA has diverse HE institution facilities. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is a national department responsible for setting goals and frameworks for the HE system and the funding system in SA (Stats SA, 2023). According to DHET (2019), there are currently 26 public HEIs, 124 private HEIs, 50 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, 299 registered colleges and 9 Community Education and Training (CET) colleges. These facilities provide post schooling and support to the different educational needs of South Africans; and the difference appears in the programmes offered by each facility (DHET, 2019).

Figure 2: Post-schooling education and training system



Source: DHET, 2019

Note: The above diagram indicates the main categories of post-schooling education and training facilities, with different organisations that support the mandate of HE system in SA. According to DHET (2019), traditional universities offer general formative and professional academic programmes including undergraduate, postgraduate, Masters and PhD graduate programmes. The TVET colleges provide vocational or occupational education opportunities to develop skills towards a specific range of employment (DHET, 2019). In addition, CET

colleges are intended for youth/adults who did not complete their schooling or never attended school and do not meet the requirements at colleges or universities (DHET, 2019). Private institutions position themselves as universities, and offer local or internationally accredited programmes (DHET, 2019). The other strategies and organisations are available to contribute to the education goals through provision of access, equity, progression, quality and efficiency (DHET, 2019). Despite the availability of these different strategies, there are other negative encounters faced by the country and those who invest in education, including unemployment discussed in the following section.

3.2.2 Unemployment in SA

The concept of unemployment is defined as the state of being unemployed or being without a paying job but available to work, meaning, a person who is actively seeking work but is without work (Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019; Swanepoel, Erasmus, & Schenk, 2008). In addition, for an individual to be considered unemployed, they must be of working age, available for work and have made specific efforts to find work during the previous four weeks (Case, Fair & Oster, 2012; Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe, 2019). In a study conducted by Rheede (2012), it is argued that the unemployment definition should also include discouraged individuals and those without the resources to search for jobs. This is also argued by Case *et al.*, (2012); Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe, (2019), that those people classified as not in the labour force include discouraged job seekers, full-time students, retirees, and those staying at home to take care of their children. Therefore, unemployment refers to people who are part of the labour force who have not worked within a week and took active steps to look for work, as well as those who have not (Hwang, 2017; Rheede, 2012).

According to Case *et al.*, (2012), adding the number of discouraged job seekers to the unemployed provides a better picture of the country's unemployment situation. However, some unemployment is inevitable and there are different types of unemployment, which are necessary to distinguish between, as seen below:

- *Cyclical unemployment* occurs when the economy is in recessions and depressions, in which few or no jobs are created for new entrants to the labour market (Case et al., 2012; Hwang, 2017; Rheede, 2012).

- *Frictional unemployment* occurs due to the normal turnover in the labour market, which may never be a zero rate, though it changes over time (Case et al., 2012; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019).
- *Structural unemployment* occurs due to the changes in the structure or overall inability of the economy to accommodate the total labour force, which result in a significant loss of jobs in certain industries (Case et al., 2012; Hwang, 2017; Rheede, 2012).
- *Seasonal unemployment* occurs due to the expected changes in economic activities, which are predictable for certain sectors, especially agriculture and tourism (Hwang, 2017; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019; Rheede, 2012).

The above unemployment types occur during different economic periods, affecting the growth and decline of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the total market value of the country's output, the value of all final goods and services produced within a country in each period (Case et al., 2012; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019).

According to Stats SA (2023), one of the challenges in SA is unemployment among HE qualification holders, which contributes to the country's unemployment rate currently at 32.9% (Stats SA, 2023). The unemployment rate is the ratio of the number of people who are classified as unemployed, to the number of people in the labour force, and is expressed as a percentage (Case et al., 2012; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). Unemployment rate is a key measure of how the economy of the country is performing (Case et al., 2012; Hwang, 2017; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). The link to the economy of the country is discussed later, focusing on the connection between the economic growth of the country and the function of HE. According to Stats SA, there is a growing demand of educational needs in SA, which the government is responding to, by changing the governance and funding system (Stats SA, 2023). However, the high unemployment level is aggravated by the lack of labour market preparation of graduates (Stats SA, 2023). According to Case *et al.*, (2012); Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe (2019), employers look for workers that can meet the job requirements and grow with the company. However, jobs are becoming more distinctive with different required skills, and matching the job skills becomes more complex which results to unemployment (Case et al., 2012; Hwang, 2017; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). Table 3.1 below indicates the unemployment rates in SA.

Table 3.1: *Unemployment rates in South Africa*

Year	Unemployment %
Q1: 2023	32.9
Q1: 2022	34.5
Q1: 2021	32.6
Q1: 2020	30.1
Q1: 2019	27.6

Source: Stats SA, 2023

Note: The above table indicates the unemployment rates for a five-year period in SA, which has been increasing as the labour force increases. As indicated above, the labour market also affects the unemployment rate, which then affects the economic growth of the country. This unemployment percentage also includes the number of unemployed graduates, which is discussed further in the following section.

3.2.3 Graduate unemployment

Education holds a promise for a better future for many South Africans, through success in the labour market (DHET, 2019). As argued by Rheede (2012), the human capital theory maintains that, by investing in education, labour productivity is enhanced and the increased productivity results in higher earnings. However, the existence of graduate unemployment contradicts this positive notion of investing in education (Rheede, 2012; Hwang, 2017). Additionally, HE in SA was designed to provide quality learning, regardless of industry or institution (i.e., university, college or workplace) (DHET, 2019). Furthermore, HE was designed to create a combination of institutions and programmes with alternative entry points and navigation through the learning system, for promotion of economic growth (Stats SA, 2023). Hence, the post-schooling education and training systems mentioned earlier, assist in delivering the objectives of HE, to ensure the increase in the number of graduates that will participate in the economy (DHET, 2019; Long & Fynn, 2018). However, the quality of graduates and the demands of the job market are not always properly aligned to address the number of unemployed graduates (Long & Fynn, 2018).

According to Hwang (2017); Rheede (2012), graduate unemployment focuses on graduates with certain qualifications and demographic characteristics, who have attained education in

specific fields of studies. Additionally, graduate unemployment is complex, and influenced by different contributors, such as, inter alia, the fields of study, race, gender, structural changes in economy, the institution of graduation, and lack of experience (Magagula, 2017; Moleke, 2006). It is therefore imperative to highlight these contributors:

- *Institutions and qualifications:* Graduates from historically black institutions are disadvantaged and take too long to be employed, compared to graduates from historically white institutions, who are assumed to have better skills (Magagula, 2017). Amongst offered qualifications, the engineering and natural sciences graduates appear to have better employment prospects compared to humanities graduates, due to the lack of practical skills for the latter (Magagula, 2017).
- *Race:* The historic exclusion of the black majority population from education, healthcare, employment, and land ownership resulted in impoverishment of the Black population (Magagula, 2017). Consequently, they continued to face the lowest prospects of finding employment as compared with other races (Magagula, 2017; Moleke, 2006). The racial disparities may discourage the majority of the population from searching for employment opportunities (Rheede, 2012). Also, some white employers and colleagues may have discriminatory beliefs against blacks in a work environment (Magagula, 2017; Rheede, 2012).
- *Gender:* Gender disparities still exist in the world of work, and the SA employment sector is very patriarchal (Magagula, 2017). Hence, there are limited women in professions considered to be male dominated, and women face various obstacles, including discrimination as well as their choice of more service-orientated professions (Magagula, 2017; Moleke, 2006; Oluwayemisi, 2019).
- *Structural economic changes:* Economic changes determine the employment trends. This affects the kind of skills and education level required at a particular period (Magagula, 2017). Additionally, the structural changes in the demand and supply of certain fields of education may create a skills mismatch affecting global competitiveness, which results in structural unemployment of graduates (Oluwayemisi, 2019; Rheede, 2012).

- *Lack of experience and skills:* Work experience is the indication that individuals can perform tasks. Graduates without work experience are faced with resistance by employers (Oluwayemisi, 2019; Rheede, 2012). Although graduates may have the required qualifications, they may lack the necessary skills and experience required for employment opportunities (Magagula, 2017).
- *Language proficiency:* Language is an important aspect, which may affect the employability of graduates (Oluwayemisi, 2019; Rheede, 2012). The English language is one of the barriers to graduate success, and it is the preferred language used by employers to screen prospective employees (Fynn & van der Walt, 2020; Rheede, 2012). Additionally, Black graduates who can express themselves in English have better chances of employment than those with an African mother-tongue language (Oluwayemisi, 2019; Rheede, 2012).
- *Social networking:* Connectivism plays a crucial role in the connection network which results in new forms of knowledge (Fynn & Janse van Vuuren, 2017). As argued by Fynn and Janse van Vuuren (2017), networking is necessary for graduates to experience valuable influences from employers, family, friends, consultants, institutions, and academic staff. The quality of social networks has an impact on unemployed individuals, as they may be influenced by different kinds of employment opportunities (Magagula, 2017). In addition, prospective employers are more likely to employ individuals referred to by their social networks, and so employment opportunities for those without networks may be reduced (Magagula, 2017).

The above are some of the demographic characteristics contributing towards the unemployment of graduates. Additionally, all types of unemployment mentioned earlier connect to graduate unemployment. However, the cyclical, frictional and structural unemployment factors seem to be more relevant to graduate unemployment (Hwang, 2017; Rheede, 2012). According to Berg and Broekhuizen (2012); Oluwayemisi, (2019), graduate unemployment is also linked to some debates in SA, including the content of school and university curricula, the quality of education, university access, affirmative action policies, emigration and immigration. The function of HE is discussed further in the following section.

3.2.4 Function of Higher Education

The function of HE connects to the economic growth of the country and its productivity (Cummings, 2010; Jonck & Coning, 2018). According to the DHET, one of HE objectives is to increase the rate at which the skills necessary for economic growth and social development are delivered (DHET, 2019). Another goal is to promote access, equity, and fairness of opportunity. Through education, individuals are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in the economy and social situation (Magagula, 2017; Moleke, 2006). The economic and social situation of the country determines the employment of graduates and effective methods to place workers in the labour market (Pinto & Ramalheira, 2017). Therefore, one of the goals of HE is to equip graduates with the skills needed by employers in the labour market (DHET, 2019). Hence, education is valuable and is most critical in determining a country's ability to compete in the economic world (Jonck & Van der Walt, 2015; Jonck & Coning, 2018). In addition, HE has the responsibility of providing graduates with professional knowledge and skills that will help them to meet and satisfy the demands of the labour market (Tran, 2013; Tran et al., 2021).

Based on the ideas presented by Biesta (2015), HE has three focusing functions including qualification, socialisation, and subjectification. The qualification element involves the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and attributes (Biesta, 2015; Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2017). Hence, HE (institutions, processes) in SA intends to educate and equip people with high-level skills to meet the employment needs of the public and private sectors (DHET, 2019). This is important, especially for graduates, as it separates them from ordinary citizens and places them in a better position when searching for employment (Biesta, 2015; Biesta et al., 2017). Steur, Jansen and Hofman (2012) argue that HE influences students in different ways, including cognitive skills, attitudes, values, moral development, career choices and competences (Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2012).

In addition, socialisation introduces graduates to the traditional ways of being and doing, which includes cultural, professional, political and religious traditions (Biesta, 2015; Biesta et al., 2017). As a result, one of the intended functions of HE in SA is to provide opportunities for social mobility, while strengthening equity, social justice and democracy to deal with the injustices brought by the post-apartheid system (DHET, 2019). Because of the socialisation element, graduates become aware of their social surroundings and conduct themselves in an appropriate manner towards different social circumstances. They therefore understand what is expected of them at a workplace, and become responsible for their actions (Biesta, 2015; Biesta et al., 2017). Furthermore, the subjectification element of education focuses on the way

graduates come to exist as subjects of creativity and accountability rather than as objects of the actions of others (Biesta, 2015; Biesta et al., 2017). Through HE, SA also intends to produce new knowledge, assess and find new applications for existing knowledge (DHET, 2019). The role of HE also includes the contribution to continued professional development and other forms of life-long learning (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; Yorke & Knight, 2007). The next section focuses on the collection of these attributes and skills through the discussion of the gradueness concept.

3.3. The concept of gradueness

This section discusses gradueness, which refers to a collection of attributes achieved through university education by graduates (Chetty, 2012; Tran, 2018). As discussed in the previous section, university education has a crucial role in assisting ordinary individuals on the journey to become graduates, by exposing individuals to qualification requirements, social issues and subjectivity (Biesta, 2015; Biesta et al., 2017). In this process, graduates acquire different skills, as they are exposed to HE, and as the core purpose of HE is to prepare graduates who are ready for the work world (DHET, 2020). Hence, gradueness focuses on the development of the desired skills and attributes considered as essential by employers (Minocha, Hristov & Reynolds, 2017).

According to Omar *et al.*, (2020); Steur *et al.*, (2012), it is imperative to comprehend graduate attributes which contribute towards defining graduates, as HE prepares students to have distinctive characteristics. Gradueness concept refers to “the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institutions” (McCabe, 2010 pg. 1). In addition, the gradueness concept denotes the quality of personal growth and intellectual development of the graduates produced by HEIs (Coetzee, 2014; Crespi & Ramos, 2021). Based on the study conducted by Steur *et al.*, (2016a), what graduates are expected to have in common at a specific stage in their students’ academic intellectual development is referred to as gradueness.

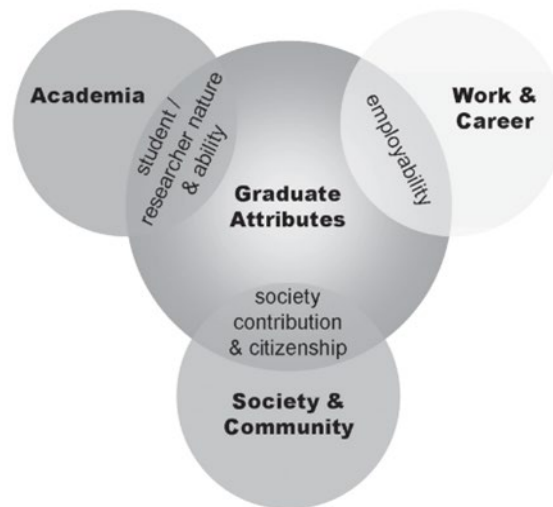
Based on the gradueness concept, construction of knowledge and intellectual cultivation of graduates take place in different ways including by means of scholarship, reflective thinking, and moral citizenship (Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2016a). In addition, lifelong learning is another aspect considered in developing graduates intellectually (Barrie, 2004; Crespi & Ramos, 2021; Steur et al., 2012). The first aspect of gradueness, scholarship or academia,

refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with research practice. In this regard, graduates should possess an ability to conduct academic research and show a scholarly attitude towards complex organisational and societal problems (McCabe, 2010; Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2012). As scholars, graduates should be leaders and produce new knowledge through inquiry and critique (Barrie, 2004; Crespi & Ramos, 2021). According to Coetzee (2014); Crespi and Ramos (2021), the scholarship aspect of graduateness assists with development of certain skills, including problem solving and decision-making skills, analytical thinking skills, and enterprising skills.

The second aspect of graduateness, reflective thinking or the work and career aspect, is concerned with knowledge application (McCabe, 2010; Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2012). This aspect involves the higher order abilities where students construct knowledge through the collection of information and opinions from different sources including work-integrated learning (WIL), as an important part of learning, which is the enrichment of learning by integrating theory and practice in the work-based context (Long & Fynn, 2018). WIL exposes students to the real expectations of the work world by allowing them to demonstrate and apply new knowledge (Long & Fynn, 2018). According to Omar *et al.*, (2020); Steur *et al.*, (2012), students must be able to translate, integrate information and apply various obtained skills and knowledge in reflecting on different situations.

The third aspect of graduateness is moral citizenship or society/community, which refers to the students' moral development and perception of students as global citizens who have knowledge on different humanities (McCabe, 2010; Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2012). This aspect is also concerned with the ethical and moral development of students to become socially relevant (Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2016a). Additionally, the moral citizenship aspect of graduateness assists graduates with developing ethical and responsible behaviour, presenting and applying information skills, and interactive skills (Coetzee, 2014; Crespi & Ramos, 2021). Furthermore, Cavanagh, Burston, and Southcombe (2015) argue that potential employers' value graduates with socialisation skills because through this skill, graduates acquire personal identity, values, norms and behaviour, which is appropriate in each social context (Cavanagh et al., 2015; Sugiarti et al., 2021).

Figure 3: *Graduateness components*



Source: McCabe, 2010

Note: The above diagram demonstrates the three components of graduateness which contribute to developing and equipping students with knowledge towards becoming graduates (McCabe, 2010; Omar et al., 2020). The above-mentioned graduateness components relate to the functions of education, discussed under the role of education section in this chapter. As explained by Barrie (2004), graduates become lifelong learners when they can commit to continuous learning and can understand their world and their position in the world (Barrie, 2004; Crespi & Ramos, 2021). This aspect is concerned with graduates' ability to connect new knowledge with previously learned knowledge and reflect on its worth (Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2012).

According to Coetzee (2014); Crespi and Ramos (2021), the lifelong learning component develops graduates with goal-directed behaviour and a continuous learning orientation. All graduates should obtain knowledge that may prepare them to adjust in changing work demands (Narayan et al., 2018; Sok et al., 2013). Bernstein and Osman (2012); Narayan *et al.*, (2018) argue that graduateness is about committing to lifelong learning, where graduates continue to learn and unlearn, throughout the continuous evolving working life.

The developed attributes become applicable in different contexts, including the work environment, community and academia (McCabe, 2010; Omar et al., 2020). Further to this, graduateness prepares graduates in three categories of achievement, namely: field-specific – a body of knowledge skills and qualities relevant to a certain field; shared achievement – general

attributes of graduates in similar qualifications; generic achievements – general qualities of all graduates (Bernstein & Osman, 2012; Narayan et al., 2018). Consequently, graduates become distinctive individuals with higher intellectual capacity (Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2012). Therefore, commitment to lifelong learning promotes professional practice and functioning knowledge which continues to develop throughout work life (Bernstein & Osman, 2012; Narayan et al., 2018). Lifelong learning helps graduates to continuously develop intellectually, and be familiar with what is happening and uniquely applicable around the world (Barrie, 2004; Crespi & Ramos 2021).

According to Omar *et al.*, (2020); Steur *et al.*, (2012), students achieve gradueness at a specific stage of their intellectual development. However, a certain portion of students might not achieve gradueness by the time they graduate from HEIs (Omar *et al.*, 2020; Steur et al., 2012). In the process of developing gradueness, which is viewed as the skills and knowledge graduates possess, WIL allows students to practically demonstrate their understanding of learned knowledge (Chetty, 2012; Long & Fynn, 2018). Additionally, students learn from their work experiences provided by the collaboration between HEIs and work environments aiming to promote the integration of theory and practice (Long & Fynn, 2018).

As discussed by Bernstein and Osman (2012), a continuous engagement and constructive alignment with all stakeholders, ensures valuable contribution in developing gradueness. This collaboration becomes convenient for graduates to establish employability, in which they must possess the necessary attributes required by the workplace, making gradueness and employability connect in preparing successfully employed graduates (Chetty, 2012; Tran, 2018). Therefore, gradueness is necessary for graduates to advance to the employable stage of their career development, which is discussed in the following section.

3.4 The concept of employability

This section of the study discusses the concept of employability and clarifies the concept, as well as connecting it to the study in question. As indicated in the previous section, gradueness is a key element of employability. Without the required attributes, graduates may not achieve employability necessary for the successful employment of graduates (Chetty, 2012; Tran, 2018). In view of a definition of employability, Crespi and Ramos (2021); Hillage and Polland (2002), argue that employability is about work and the ability to become employed. According to Sin, Tavares, and Amaral (2017), employability is not just about getting a job, but about

learning what grants graduates the ability to understand work. For these authors, employability focuses on the ability and puts less emphasis on the word employ (Sin et al., 2017). In addition, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work (Minten, 2010; Tsitskari et al., 2017). According to Rowe and Zegwaard (2017); Yorke and Knight (2006), employability involves having a set of achievements, including the skills and personal attributes that makes an individual stand a good chance in acquiring employment, securing it and being successful in their chosen occupations. These achievements benefit graduates, the work environment, society and the economy of the country (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; Yorke & Knight, 2006).

Considering the above, employability is a psychosocial construct which demonstrates individual characteristics in promoting adaptive reasoning, behaviour, to effect and enhance the individual-work interface (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth 2004; Succi & Canovi, 2020). However, Fugate *et al.*, (2004); Succi and Canovi (2020) argue that it depends on an individual to acquire the knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics valued by the current or prospective employers, that will assist in employable. In addition, Bridgstock (2009); Bridgstock (2019) concurs by mentioning that employability involves far more than merely possessing generic skills to attract employment, but rather being proactive in navigating the work world. Furthermore, employability does not guarantee employment; it enhances an individual's chances of obtaining employment (Fugate et al., 2004; Succi & Canovi; 2020).

According to Narayan et al., (2018); Sok, Blomme, and Tromp (2013), employability embraces the ability to move within the labour market and gain more relevant skills for a sustainable job. For these authors, employability encourages individuals to become resourceful in empowering themselves towards employment instead of expecting employers to provide ongoing employment opportunities (Narayan et al., 2018; Sok et al., 2013). According to Crespi and Ramos (2021); Hillage and Polland (1998), the four main essentials of employability include the following:

- a) Employability assets, this consist of knowledge, skills and attributes
- b) Deployment which includes career management skills
- c) Presentation which is concerned with job getting skills
- d) Context which involves the level of opportunity within the labour market

The above-mentioned essentials of employability assist graduates with qualities, job searching skills, work experience, interview techniques, and other external factors (Pool & Sewell, 2007;

Suleman, 2017). This connects with the discussion above that, for graduates to be employable, they should possess certain characteristics that are attractive to potential employers. Lindsay (2005); Tsitskari *et al.*, (2017), argue that employability encompasses the possession of those required qualities and competencies by an individual to meet the changing needs of employers and customers. In addition, employability skills include talents that empower graduates to gain employment and have successful career occupations (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; Yorke, 2006). Furthermore, employability skills are generic or transferable abilities and knowledge, that are effective for use in the work environment (Tsitskari *et al.*, 2017). According to Suleman (2017), obtained graduate skills include key skills, generic competencies, core skills, transferable skills, and employability skills.

According to Crespi and Ramos (2021); Hillage and Polland (2002), employability involves having the capacity to gain initial employment, remain employed, and obtain new employment opportunities if required. However, graduates should obtain education and training towards a relevant qualification to acquire those employability skills that fit employers' needs (Suleman, 2017). While this is the case, employment and employability are not regarded as the same thing, as one might be highly employable, but unemployed or under-employed (Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Lees, 2002). For instance, being employed means having a job; and being employable means having the qualities needed to maintain employment and progress in the workplace (Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Lees, 2002). Pool and Sewell (2007); Suleman (2017) argue, there is so much more to employability than just gaining employment, such as acquired knowledge and relevant attributes valued by prospective employers.

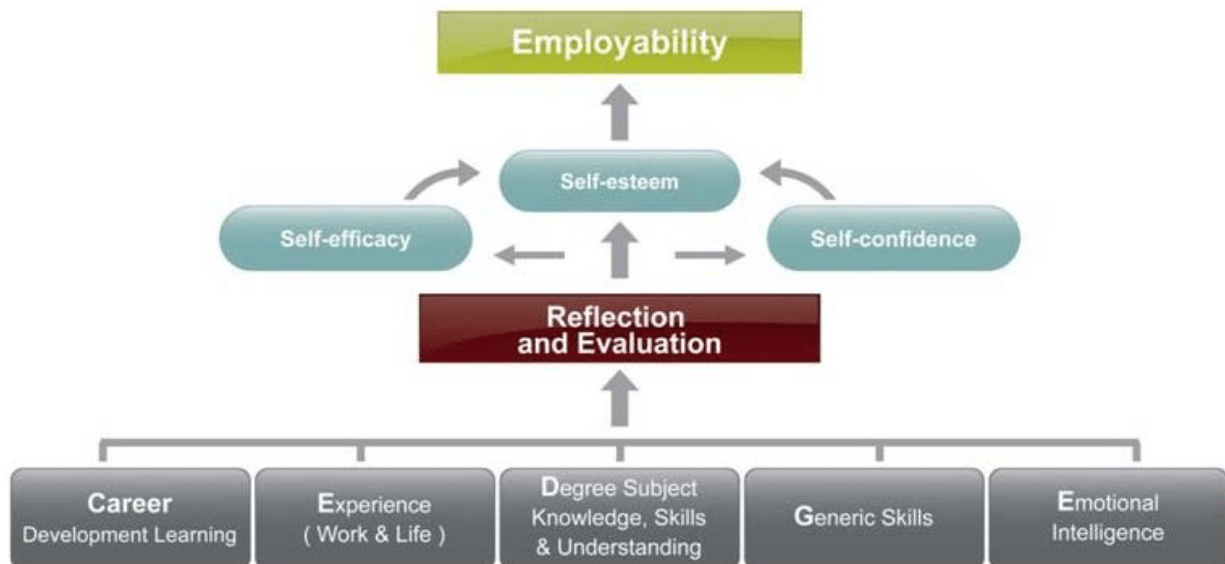
Based on the argument by Archer and Chetty (2013); Tran (2018), employability includes aspects such as quality and relevance of the qualification, career management approach, and orientation to the job market. As explained by De Vos, De Hauw and Van der Heijden (2011); Tsitskari *et al.*, (2017), graduate employability is obtained through the acquisition of knowledge, employability skills, abilities and other characteristics that are valued by current and prospective employers.

As discussed in the previous section, graduateness focuses on the collection of attributes achieved through university education by graduates (Chetty, 2012; Tran, 2018). Employability focuses on career related skills that promote graduates' suitability for appropriate employment opportunities (Coetze, 2012; Crespi & Ramos, 2021). The next section focuses on discussing the elements of employability that forms part and prepare graduates for the work world.

3.4.1 The elements of employability

This section focuses on the crucial elements that form part of graduate employability, which includes a discussion on knowledge, skill and abilities of graduates' prior employment. These elements are presented in this section with the emphasis on the Key to Employability model. As argued by Scott Connell, Thomson, and Willison, (2017), it is important to have resources developed to encourage graduates to take responsibility for their own employability. According to Pool and Sewell (2007), the Key to Employability model suggests that the provision of skills development opportunities to the students enable them to access and cultivate essential aspects that may be crucial towards becoming employable. These aspects may include the development of higher levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, as well as self-confidence (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). Equally importantly, perhaps the model should also allow for the development of innovative skills that would encourage graduates to develop their own work instead of waiting for employment elsewhere. Then again, it is important to promote and firmly focus on individual initiative to encourage ongoing employability and employment (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). This may also motivate graduates to initiate work activities, instead of waiting for instructions from the employer.

Figure 4: *The essential components of employability*



Source: Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Pool, 2017

Note: This figure demonstrates the employability components. According to Pool and Sewell (2007), the Key to Employability model consists of the following components.

Career development learning

Career development learning is comprised of activities that enable graduates to present themselves effectively to prospective employers and make informed decisions about their careers (Scott et al., 2017). Jackson and Wilton (2017) concur and mention four features of career development learning that graduates should have: decision making skills; opportunity awareness; transition awareness; and self-awareness. According to Pool and Sewell (2007); Suleman (2017) a career development component is important in increasing self-awareness in graduates and enabling them to consider career interests that suit their personalities. Career development learning allows graduates to self-reflect and recognise their personal strengths, to identify suitable career opportunities and conduct effective job searches within their chosen career fields (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). Furthermore, the career development learning component of Key to Employability, also enhances the adaptability to different work environments through graduates' capability to respond to a range of job opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004; Succi & Canovi; 2020). Additionally, this component prepares graduates for initial desired employment as well as long-term career success (Jackson & Wilton, 2017).

Experience (work and life)

According to Pool and Sewell (2007), the experience component of the Key to Employability consists of both knowledge obtained through work and in experiencing life in general. Exposure to work and life experience helps graduates to develop their capabilities that may enhance their employability (Suleman, 2017). Additionally, graduates with work experience stand a good chance of securing employment, as they may apply the learned knowledge to their occupation (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). Rowe and Zegwaard (2017); Yang *et al.*, (2016), argue that to enhance graduate employability skills, many HEIs have incorporated various experiential learning (EL) activities into their education curriculum. EL activities vary from institutions and education programmes. Some may include in-service training, learnership programmes, shadowing, periodic placement or practical exposure (Paadi, 2014; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). The EL activities equip graduates with the necessary workplace skills that will make them employable, and improve their productivity in their work environments (Paadi, 2014; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). According to Harvey (2001); Pheko and Molefhe (2017), EL

activities may also play a role in employability development by ensuring that, by the time graduates seek employment they would have obtained work experience, other extra-curricular activities and knowledge. Furthermore, partnerships between employers and HEIs are valuable in promoting work related learning which assist towards work experience (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). Scott *et al.*, (2017) concur and state that HEIs should identify opportunities to increase support for graduates and gain work experience.

Degree subject knowledge, skills and understanding

This component of the Key to Employability model involves studying a specific discipline in depth to obtain an HE qualification. Degree subject knowledge, skills and understanding are all important contributors towards employability, as potential employers judge graduates on how successfully they have completed their degree or qualification (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). This is where the employability and graduateness concept converge, where the focus is on the qualification knowledge and skills (Suleman, 2017). However, as indicated earlier, graduates need both employability and graduateness to secure job opportunities (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). According to Suleman (2017), the degree subject knowledge, skills and understanding focuses on the cognitive and non-cognitive achievements of graduates, which facilitates access to employment and success within the work environment. Although these elements play a complete role within employability of graduates (Suleman, 2017); this component is unlikely to assist graduates in securing employment on its own (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). According to Suleman (2017), absolute employability symbolises the knowledge and skills acquired by graduates. Employers value and reward acquired skills differently, based on graduates' attribute and educational background. In addition, employers want graduates with relevant subject knowledge, skills and understanding (Pool & Sewell, 2007, Suleman, 2017).

Generic skills

Generic skills are skills transferred to a range of contexts in HE or the work environment (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Tsitskari et al., 2017). The term generic skills may also be referred to as core skills, key skills, transferable skills, employability skills or generic competencies (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017; Tsitskari et al., 2017). As discussed above, employability skills

are generic or transferable abilities and knowledge that are effective for use in the work environment (Tsitskari et al., 2017). Generic skills involve the development of certain common skills expected by recruiters and potential employers (Tsitskari et al., 2017). These skills may include time management, attention to detail, decision-making, communication, and ability to work with others (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Tsitskari et al., 2017).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is an important competency for social interaction and crucial for adaptation in different aspects of life (Lopes, Brackett, Nezlek, Schutz, Sellin, & Salovey, 2004; Serrat, 2017). It is one of the personal qualities a graduate should develop to achieve their employability potential (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). According to Goleman (2015); Serrat (2017), emotional intelligence is responsible for self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Graduates, who possess high levels of emotional intelligence, have the capability of recognising or managing their own feelings, and motivate themselves as well as others (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). Understanding emotional dynamics may help graduates to anticipate their own and others' emotional reactions and manage emotions effectively in any given situation (Lopes et al., 2004; Serrat, 2017).

Reflection and evaluation

Based on the discussions by Scott *et al.*, (2017), the reflection and evaluation components take place when graduates are provided with development opportunities aimed at guiding them towards employability. According to Pool and Sewell (2007); Suleman (2017), graduates reflect on, and evaluate, the learning experiences that have taken place throughout the development process during their academic period. As suggested by Bell (2020); Coulson and Harvey (2013), for effectiveness of reflection and evaluation, graduates are required to have a high level of introspection, a capacity for abstract learning, and self-regulation. The capacity to critically reflect and evaluate oneself is associated with the higher order cognitive processes of self-regulation (Bell, 2020; Coulson & Harvey, 2013). Reflection and evaluation are promoted, using the personal development planning (PDP), which helps graduates with planning and recording of their development, and reflecting on their experiences towards employment skills (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017).

Self-efficacy/self-esteem/self-confidence

According to Alpaslan (2019); Sumanasiri *et al.*, (2015), self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence are psychological constructs that influence employability of individuals. Self-efficacy involves how people think, feel, motivate themselves and act in each situation (Alpaslan, 2019; Sumanasiri *et al.*, 2015). In addition, self-esteem appears as self-respect and a feeling of worthiness of an individual (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). When graduates achieve a high level of self-esteem, they become realistic about their learning achievements. Furthermore, self-confidence is a trait seen from a graduates' manner and behaviour in certain situations. According to Adebakin (2015); Tran *et al.*, (2021), employers prefer self-confident university graduates, who are optimistic, and can bring innovation to the workplace. Also, Alpaslan (2019); Sumanasiri *et al.*, (2015) argue that an interaction with social concepts such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-confidence assists graduates to achieve employability. However, too many of these personal attributes may lead to ineffectiveness of an individual (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017).

The Key to Employability model discussed above illustrates the different aspects necessary for the employability of graduates, according to Pool and Sewell (2007); Suleman (2017). As indicated above, each aspect of the Key to Employability model has a crucial role in crafting employable graduates, which prepares graduates for the work world. These aspects are critical for graduates to develop resilience and belief in their ability to navigate the labour market (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). A strategic decision to include employability across institutions has a positive effect on graduates (Scott *et al.*, 2017). The next section of this chapter discusses research psychology field and the training outcomes thereafter.

3.5 Research psychology field and its training outcomes

According to Rascher (2016), research psychology is the category of psychology which focuses on psychological research. Although this profession falls under the category of psychology, it does not provide therapeutic services, but is governed by the legislation, governing the practice of psychology (Fynn & Long, 2018). The psychology discipline has six categories, including clinical, industrial, counselling, educational, neuropsychology and research psychology (HPCSA, 2019). In addition, there have been few studies on research psychology according to Fynn & Janse van Vuuren, 2017; Fynn and van der Walt (2018); Fynn and Long (2019); Laher

(2014); Rascher (2016), and so, this section draws heavily on these studies. Thus, for the interest of this study, the researcher emphasises one category of psychology, which is research psychology.

According to Long and Fourie (2016), research psychology involves the scientific exploration of various societal and human issues. The research psychology category is scientific in nature as the students are trained in the traditional scientist-practitioner style and are exposed to both the practical aspects of psychology and the research aspects (Rascher, 2016). The role played by the research psychologists involves scientific consideration (Rascher, 2016). A study conducted by Fynn and van der Walt (2019), acknowledges that research psychology has its roots in the scientist-practitioner model of psychology and proposes that all psychologists should be trained in research and clinical skills. However, these authors argue about whether this model is applicable in the South African context, as research psychology focuses on psychological research approaches, without the involvement of therapeutic approaches (Fynn & van der Walt, 2019). Nevertheless, the research psychology profession contributes to producing psychological knowledge to other professions, including that of the clinical psychologists, for example, to effectively understand and deal with human issues (Long & Fourie, 2016). In contrast to the recognition of research psychology category, this field remains one of the less documented fields of study (Fynn & van der Walt, 2019), and thus, this study relies on a limited number of references for this section.

Based on the argument by Laher (2014), the research psychology category is an important part of the psychology discipline and is essential in transforming and cultivating psychological facets including all psychological practice and training. Furthermore, the role played by research psychologists includes creating and applying research methods for developing psychological and psychometric assessment tools, as well as steering monitoring and the evaluation of interventions (Rascher, 2016). Additionally, Laher (2014) argues that research psychologists are essential in developing new theories and evaluating existing theories in psychology. They play a major role in supporting practitioners within the field and they enhance the quality of research output. Research psychologists also play an important role in the training of all psychology graduates and promoting research competence amongst psychology practitioners (Laher, 2014).

According to the HPCSA (2019), the role of the research psychologist includes developing and applying psychological research methods. Previously, role of the research psychologists

included the provision of expert evidence or opinions. However, currently, it only stipulates the following as the research psychologists' scope of practice:

- a) Planning, developing, and applying psychological research methods; performing assessments relevant to the development of research for research purposes, including the development of psychological measures; researching, monitoring, and evaluating psychological interventions;
- (b) Advising on the development of policies, based on psychological theory and research designing, managing and evaluating measurement and intervention programmes;
- (c) Training and supervising other registered psychological practitioners in research psychology; and
- (d) Designing, managing, conducting, reporting on, and supervising psychological research; conducting psychological practice, and research in accordance with the Ethical Rules of Conduct for Practitioners registered under the Health Professions Act, 1974; adhering to the scope of practice of research psychologists; referring clients to appropriate professionals for assessment or intervention (HPCSA, 2019).

According to the HPCSA, the above scope of practice is a guide to the professional activities that the research psychologists should adhere to and may be involved in, when applying their skills and knowledge. However, as explained by Rascher (2016), the HPCSA is not the only regulating body for the research psychology professionals. There are other research related affiliations in South Africa including the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA), the South African Marketing Research Association (SAMRA), or the South African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) (Rascher, 2016). As argued by the HPCSA, the psychology professionals should adhere to and register under this affiliation for them to practise their skills professionally in the public. This does not exclude the research psychologists; however, Laher (2014) argues that the latter may practise their skills without registering with the health professions council psychology board. By the time the research psychology students graduate, they would have acquired skills that enable them to work within the psychology and other related fields (Laher, 2014). In addition, based on the findings by Rascher (2016), some of the research psychology graduates were not registered with the health professions board, but performed activities related to the scope of practice, indicating that the activities could be performed by the graduates with the same skills as research psychologists

without the research psychologist title. However, when the research psychology graduate or psychologists encounter individuals who need other psychological services beyond their scope of practice, they refer them to other relevant professionals (Rascher, 2016). The next section focuses on discussing the training of research psychology graduates.

3.5.1 Research psychology training

This section of the chapter discusses the training for the research psychology profession, which comes in different formats for different HEIs in SA and abroad. According to Laher (2014), the training offering of the research psychology graduates is on a full-time or part-time basis as a Masters in Research Psychology by coursework and dissertation or by coursework only, depending on a particular HE institution. According to Rascher (2016), students go through a selection process for various psychology Masters programmes in different HEIs based on different selection criteria, and each psychology category has its own selection criteria. For the interest of this study, the focus is on the training of the research psychologists. As discussed in the previous section, according to Long and Fourie (2016), research psychology involves the scientific exploration of various societal and human issues. The training exposes the students to both the practical and research aspects of psychology.

Fynn and van der Walt (2019) argue that academic research programmes should balance the employability drive against the knowledge production. More importantly, the findings of the study conducted by Fynn and van der Walt (2019), indicate that the curriculum of the Masters research course includes applied research, ethics, foundational concepts and skills, language and report writing, project management and micro-skills development within qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches (Fynn & van der Walt, 2019). These authors state that participants indicated that all academic research programmes utilise an active learning approach in exposing students to both the practical and the research aspects of psychology (Fynn & van der Walt, 2019). Students who wish to pursue a career in research psychology, should possess an academic and intellectual ability (Rascher, 2016). They should have an interest in research, statistics, critical and analytic thinking style, as well as creative thinking ability (Rascher, 2016).

Furthermore, this study focuses on one programme offered at a specific university in SA, which is the MARC programme, one of three Masters training offered in the psychology department at UNISA. According to Long and Fynn (2018), this programme is provided over a period of

three years, and online learning and face-to-face sessions are covered during the first year period. Thereafter, the off-campus period of two years is without classes, but students work with their supervisors until the submission of their final project (Long & Fynn, 2018). The MARC programme offers students both practical and research aspects of psychology. It includes EL activities, which involve the placements of the students in different work settings to expose them to work functions (Long & Fourie, 2016). As discussed under the graduate employability skills section, EL activities help to equip graduates with the necessary workplace skills that make them employable and improve their productivity in their work environments (Paadi, 2014; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017).

It is important to consider graduate skills, which include the talents and abilities obtained by graduates during their academic period. As discussed by Fynn and van der Walt (2010); Long and Fourie (2016), several skills that research psychology graduates gain from MARC programme include the following:

Table 3.2: *Research Psychology Skills*

Applied research	Micro-skills development
Compiling a literature review	Data capturing
Project management	Data analysis (quantitative and qualitative)
Ethics	Statistical analysis
Language and report writing	Foundational concepts
Questionnaire development	Interview skills
Personal skills	Programme evaluation
Market research	

Source: Long and Fourie, 2016

Note: This table demonstrates research psychology skills, Long and Fourie (2016), mention that personal skills include project management and planning, consulting, independence, presentation skills, time management, interpersonal skills, networking and critical skills. Based on their findings, language and report writing refers to the language and required technical writing skills. Applied research refers to the learning opportunities that allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in practice, and project management considers the basic principles of managing projects and ethics cover the ethical procedures within research and that of the

regulatory bodies. Furthermore, foundational concepts refer to the knowledge and understanding of research process and paradigms, whereas micro-skills development involves various specific skills (Fynn & van der Walt, 2019).

In addition, the skills suggested by Fynn and van der Walt (2019) connect to the Key to Employment model discussed above, which suggests that graduates should be provided with skills development opportunities. Further, graduates' employability skills are indicated under the elements of employability section of this chapter. Adebakin *et al.*, (2015); Tran *et al.*, (2021) argue that there is a need for graduates to develop and improve their employability skills from time to time, to be able to match up with the requirements of the employers of labour. The next section of this chapter focuses on the work environment of the research psychology graduates.

3.5.2 Research psychology work environment

This section discusses the existing employment settings for research psychology graduates. In a study conducted by Fynn and van der Walt (2019), one of the recommendations was to interrogate and reflect on the nature of work undertaken by research psychology graduates. According to Rascher (2016), the employment settings of the research psychology profession are far beyond only the provision of psychological services. Research psychology graduates may work in diverse sectors, including both private and public sectors. For example, these sectors may include academia, health or social research, financial accounting, marketing research, corporate research, monitoring and evaluation, and psychometrics or testing (Laher, 2014; Rascher, 2016).

Despite having diverse sectors employing these graduates, there are few job advertisements targeting research psychologists, due to the possible misconceptions about their role and focus of psychology (Long & Fynn, 2018). Rascher (2016) concurs with this by arguing that the title of 'Research Psychologist' may not be the employment requirement, as most employers do not search for research psychologists, but rather for graduates possessing required skills achieved during the academic period.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the role played by the research psychology category is important for the psychology field in general, especially in developing and applying research methods within the field (HPCSA, 2019). However, within the different sectors mentioned above, research psychology graduates render different types of services depending on the needs

of a sector. For instance, those in academia provide activities including lecturing and supervision of students. Those in market research, deal with company clients by compiling proposals and presentations. Those in health or social research, focus on the social development or community-based research (Rascher, 2016). As pointed out by Fynn and van der Walt (2019), graduates who understand the underlying logic of research approaches, stand a good chance of adapting to work environments when they obtain employment. The next section of this chapter is the conclusion.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, HE is discussed in terms of the shift to eradicate inequality and uplift society. A discussion on unemployment and graduate unemployment is included to highlight the significance of this study; different types of unemployment are included, with the contributors to graduate unemployment. The concept of employability involves having a set of achievements including the skills and personal attributes that makes an individual to stand a good chance of acquiring employment, securing it and being successful in their chosen occupations (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; Yorke & Knight, 2006). The employability concept encourages individuals to become resourceful in empowering themselves for employment instead of expecting employers to provide ongoing employment opportunities (Narayan et al., 2018; Sok et al., 2013). Another essential point of the employability concept is that being employed means having a job; however, being employable means having the qualities needed to maintain employment and progress in the workplace (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). A practical model on graduate employability, the Key to Employability model, demonstrates the crucial components of employability process for graduates. This model focuses on the different components assisting in preparing graduates towards employability.

Another essential point included in this chapter was the discussion on the research psychology field and its training. The research psychology category is an important part of the psychology, as it contributes to producing and distributing psychological knowledge to other psychology professions. Research psychology training exposes students to both practical and research aspects of psychology. The work environment of the research psychologist discussed in this chapter clarifies the sectors that may employ MARC graduates. The next chapter focuses on the discussion of the methodology applicable in this study.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods

4.1 Introduction

Previously the concept of gradueness, employability, and research psychology with its training in SA, was discussed. In this chapter, the study's philosophical worldview as well as the research methods are discussed in this chapter, the discussion focuses on the research methods applicable to exploring the aim and objectives of this study. The applicable methods are outlined, as well as the principles followed to address the research question. In addition, the advantages and disadvantages of such methods are included, with further discussions on the research design, selection method, data collection techniques, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study. The conclusion is included at the end of this chapter. The next section discusses the effective paradigm applicable to this study.

4.2 Paradigmatic Perspective

As stated, this section discusses the paradigm applicable to this study. According to Jung (2019); Kivunja (2014), a paradigm is a worldview or mindset that represents a pattern of thinking or understanding of the environment. It is important to identify a paradigm for this study, as paradigms help to understand the way we view things and the processes involved, in making sense of the world around us (Jung (2019); Kivunja, 2014). Prior to elaborating further on paradigms, it is necessary for the researcher to reflect briefly on ontological perceptions and epistemological stances that will inform the paradigm for this study (Bracken, 2010; Nkuda, 2017). According to Holmes (2020); Scotland (2012), ontology and epistemology are components of paradigms, together with the methodologies and methods applicable to a particular study.

Ontology: A set of beliefs about what exist or what is real, it is the assumptions about the nature of reality and what exists (Al-Saadi, 2014; Holmes, 2020). Ontology is a study of being, which is concerned with the nature of existence and the structure of reality (Al-Saadi, 2014; Holmes, 2020; Scotland, 2012). According to Bracken (2010); Nkuda (2017), people view reality differently, and to understand their realities or to demonstrate how people shape their actions within a particular reality, researchers should adopt certain ontological perceptions. These enable researchers to determine the research processes and approaches effective to reveal social truths or views people share about certain experience (Bracken, 2010; Nkuda, 2017). In

addition, ontology is concerned with what is possible to know about the world of existence, or the different aspects of society including cultural norms, social structures and social actors (Al-Saadi, 2014; Holmes, 2020).

Epistemology: A set of beliefs about the nature and forms of knowing, epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge is constructed, acquired and communicated (Holmes, 2020; Scotland, 2012). In addition, epistemology is concerned with the basis of knowledge, the understanding of what it entails and what is regarded as acceptable knowledge (Al-Saadi, 2014; Holmes, 2020). Furthermore, epistemology is about the issues of creation and dissemination of knowledge (Bracken, 2010; Nkuda, 2017). The epistemological assumptions researchers hold about knowledge affect uncovering knowledge about social behaviour (Al-Saadi, 2014; Holmes, 2020; Scotland, 2012). As indicated above, researchers should adopt an ontological standpoint to determine effective research approaches to address research questions. This also applies to epistemology; however, epistemology is firmly grounded to the ontological perceptions (Bracken, 2010; Nkuda, 2017). Therefore, researchers should adopt ontological beliefs that will guide them towards a specific epistemological assumption in constructing knowledge (Al-Saad, 2014; Holmes, 2020). Additionally, according to Holmes (2020); Scotland (2012), it is impossible to conduct scientific research without committing to an ontological perception and an epistemological stance.

Furthermore, there are different ways of viewing the world or realities, including scientific, social, interpretative, or critical realities (Holmes, 2020; Scotland, 2012). In addition to this, there are multiple versions of realities, depending on social structures or systems (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Jung, 2019; Kundi & Nawaz, 2010). For instance, if one views knowledge as hard, objective and tangible, then to effectively address a research question, this demands natural science methods. In contrast, when one views knowledge as being personal, subjective and unique, then subjective research methods would be effective in addressing the research question (Al-Saad, 2014; Holmes, 2020). Therefore, for this study, the ontological perspective is that reality is subjectively constructed through human interactions. Additionally, epistemology is a subjective human product knowledge, socially and culturally constructed. Furthermore, individuals create meaning when they interact with each other and with the environment in which they live (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Jung, 2019). For this study, the researcher is of the view that individuals have different life experiences and exposures to achieve a certain conclusion (knowledge), informed by the individual's uniquely constructed version of reality (ontology).

Based on the above reflections and understanding on ontological and epistemological perspectives, the relevant paradigm for this study is social constructionism. Additionally, there are several paradigms applied in different studies. However, social constructionism paradigm is based on the way knowledge is constructed in society (Jung, 2019; Schrader, 2015). As indicated above, reality and knowledge are subjectively constructed through human interaction (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Jung, 2019). Furthermore, the social constructionism paradigm is selected because it relates to the sociological institution theory, which is a theoretical framework applicable in this study. As discussed in Chapter 2, sociological institution theory posits that standards, regulations, and social connections are realities constructed by institutions to enforce ideal behaviour or outcomes (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Swart, 2019). The next section outlines the social constructionism paradigm.

4.2.1 Social constructionism

This section discusses the applicable paradigm in this study, social constructionism, and how it is applicable in this study. Social constructionism examines the knowledge and understandings of the world. It is a paradigm based on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Jung, 2019). Accordingly, social constructionism focuses on how people make meaning of the world they live in, and how they construct knowledge through social interaction with the objects and people in the environment (Jung, 2019; Schrader, 2015). Through the interaction with the employers of MARC graduates, this study anticipates constructing knowledge about the requisite skills expected by employers, to contribute towards the employability of MARC graduates. Furthermore, as indicated above, social constructionism is constructed by human beings subjective, and it depends on human understanding and interaction with systems which will result in producing meaning (Jung, 2019; Kundi & Nawaz, 2010). The subjectivity of a social constructionism paradigm allowed for different employers of MARC graduates to voice their expectations from potential employees, based on their experiences in the field, and on the cultural influences by different organisations. According to the social constructionism paradigm, there is no single version of reality, but multiple realities of situations and systems constructed through human active engagements (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Jung, 2019). Hence this study intended to interact with different employers in addressing the aim of this study, as mentioned in Chapter 1.

Social constructionism paradigm has often been applied in a learning environment by teachers to learners for effective construction of knowledge, to understand how learning happens and how to facilitate it (Jung, 2019; Kivunja, 2014). Additionally, social interaction is promoted as a process of active knowledge construction through group interaction within educational settings, to encourage exchange of ideas and as motivation for development for learners (Adams, 2006; Muhammad, 2021). Therefore, the implication of a social constructionism paradigm in this study was with the intention of applying the same principles of knowledge construction about the requisite employability skills for MARC graduates, and to assist HEI's in developing MARC graduates to become equipped with relevant attributes necessary for employment. In addition, the employability of graduates is socially constructed, and through the interactions in this study, the gathered constructed knowledge was effective in exploring and understanding the requisite skills imperative for developing MARC graduates to be successfully employed.

Subsequently, employers provided their experiences and understanding of their organisations, which may allow graduates' development that aligns with and relates to a particular organisation in promoting graduates' employability. In addition, as the sociological institutional theory suggests, institutions provide representatives with an understanding of their interests and identities (Checkel, 2011; Kent et al., 2022). This understanding assisted in addressing the research question; moreover, the feedback from the employers' expectations assisted in communicating most required skills that MARC graduates should develop during their academic period and prepare for their employability.

The disadvantage of the social constructionism paradigm is the fact that generalisation is prohibited. Knowledge gained in one context may not be applicable in another (Jung, 2019; Schrader, 2015). It was therefore important for this study to indicate the different context and cultural settings of the organisations involved to prevent generalisation of feedback. Also, the detailed specifics of the different contextual settings of the participants and organisations are discussed under the population and selection method section. Additionally, the next section of this chapter outlines the objectives and research question of this study, also clarifying the appropriate approaches effective to achieve the aim of this study, with the advantages and disadvantages of such approaches.

4.3 Objectives outline

As indicated in the introduction chapter, the aim of this study was to provide clarity and awareness of the expected MARC graduate skills that would contribute towards potential employment of MARC graduates. Furthermore, the objectives of this study include:

- To describe the employers' expectations from the MARC graduates; and
- To explore the gap between the employers' expectations and MARC graduates' skills.

The research question posed in this study was “What are the skills required by employers for MARC graduates to be employable in the South African labour market?” The recruitment process of the organisations aligns with the requirements set by the social institutional theory (Furusten, 2013). Through this study, the intention was to understand the required skills that may contribute towards employment of MARC graduates. In addition, the job market expects MARC graduates to be equipped with appropriate research skills. Also, the role of MARC graduates in an organisation, which includes provision of research consultation activities, may also be determined by the required skills from the employers of these graduates. Therefore, this study intended to explore employer's expectations from MARC graduates and envisioned to understand the extent these organisations go through in employing MARC graduates. It was also important for the researcher to understand the role these graduates play within the research component of organisations, and the experience of working with MARC graduates. Equally important, through this study, the intention was to explore the gap between employers' expected skills and MARC graduates' skills; and how to avoid such gap. The next section discusses the research approach followed in this study.

4.4 Research Approach

This section of the chapter focuses on the research approach followed to address the research question and achieve the aim mentioned above. This study was based on the subjective expectations of the employers of MARC graduates. Accordingly, to understand the experiences of these employers, a qualitative approach was applicable. According to Morrow (2007); Motulsky (2021), a qualitative approach is more effective to understand the meanings people make of their experiences. In addition, it is applicable when there are multiple possible realities constructed by different individuals (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Uğur, 2019). Accordingly, the qualitative approach is appropriate when one needs to present a detailed and in-depth view of perspectives (Morrow, 2007; Motulsky, 2021). The researcher collects data in the form of

words or texts from the participants by asking broad, open ended questions with respect to the study phenomenon (Morrow, 2007; Motulsky, 2021).

Additionally, the aim of a qualitative approach is to examine participants' reality in depth with a relatively small number of participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Uğur, 2019). Consequently, a small number of participants from different organisations that employ MARC graduates was included in this study and discussed in detail under the population and selection method section. Although this study focused on the employability of MARC graduates, both employers who employ and do not employ MARC graduates were approached for the benefit of this study. The intention of this study was to obtain detailed information on the requisite skills that contribute towards ensuring the employability of MARC graduates. Therefore, employers who intentionally or unintentionally employ MARC graduates, might benefit in understanding relevant requisite skills of MARC graduates. The following discussion focuses on the qualitative research design.

4.4.1 Qualitative research design

As briefly indicated above, this study is embedded in the qualitative approach, applicable to understand the meaning that is socially constructed by individuals in interacting with the world around them (Jung, 2019; Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). As indicated earlier, reality and knowledge are subjectively constructed through human interaction (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Jung, 2019). Therefore, from the social constructionism point of view, the intention of this study was to explore how people make meaning of the world they live in, and how they construct knowledge through social interaction with the objects and people in the environment (Jung, 2019; Schrader, 2015). According to Percy *et al.*, (2015); Uğur (2019), the generic qualitative design considers people's description of their subjective opinions, beliefs, attitudes, or reflections on their experiences of the world. Thus, the intention of this study was to provide clarity about and awareness of the expected MARC graduate skills from the employers' perspective; precisely, what employers believe are the requisite skills for these graduates, based on the employers' work experiences or exposure in their field. Therefore, employers of MARC graduates shared their opinions and experiences in working exclusively or inclusively with MARC graduates. The generic qualitative design probed participants' knowledge in determining the requisite skills contributing to the effective development and employability of MARC graduates.

More importantly, it is necessary to highlight that there are other research designs within the qualitative approach (ethnography, narrative, case study, grounded theory, or phenomenology), which are not all appropriate to address the research question for this study. These five qualitative research designs are usually applied in most qualitative studies (Creswell et al., 2007; Motulsky, 2021). However, these designs target specific studies with certain outcomes, with which this study is not aligned. Therefore, the generic qualitative design was selected for this study, as it was applicable to study the subjective expectations of employers. Hence, one of the objectives of this study was to describe the employers' expectations from MARC graduates. Furthermore, the researcher intended to collect data from participants who had experienced employing or working with MARC or research psychology graduates and develop a detailed description of the elements of what employers believe are the requisite skills for these graduates (Creswell et al., 2007; Motulsky, 2021).

Accordingly, the generic qualitative design seeks to expose individual meaning of a process from participants' beliefs and perspectives (Kahlke, 2014; Ruslin et al., 2022). Thus, the intention of this study was to explore how people make meaning of the world they live in; meanings are constructed, based on an understanding of the participants' worldview and experiences (Kennedy, 2016; Ruslin et al., 2022). Additionally, the social constructionism paradigm aligns with the generic qualitative design, as it focuses on how people make meaning of the world they live in, constructing knowledge through social interaction with the objects and people in the environment (Jung, 2019; Schrader, 2015). Kahlke (2014); Ruslin *et al.*, (2022) concur with this by stating that the generic qualitative design seeks to understand how people construct, interpret, and make meaning from their experiences. Despite this, the generic qualitative design is less established and less defined, which can portray a disadvantage to understand and apply in this study (Kahlke, 2014; Ruslin et al., 2022). Percy *et al.*, (2015); Uğur, (2019) cautions researchers to fully understand this design as well as other designs prior to opting for the generic qualitative design. Furthermore, researchers are cautioned against assuming that the generic qualitative design is the easy option, because it may confuse underdeveloped researchers in deciding which methodologies to include with this approach (Kahlke, 2014; Kennedy, 2016; Percy et al., 2015). However, the researcher in this study explored the other qualitative designs prior deciding to apply the generic qualitative design. In addition, the researcher in this study decided to apply methods that are aligned together to obtain information from the participants and address the research question.

To obtain rich information for this study, interviews were conducted to obtain an in-depth descriptive information from participants. The purpose of interviews is to explore the views, beliefs and experiences of individuals relating to social constructed knowledge (Brown & Danaher, 2021; Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). Through this study, the views and experiences of working with MARC graduates were explored to address the research question. Furthermore, information on interviews for this study is discussed under data collection strategies. The following section discusses the population and the selection method included in this study.

4.4.2 Population and selection method

In research, the term population refers to the total study, and consists of individuals, organisations, groups, and events from which information is obtained by means of the preferred method (Percy et al., 2015; Uğur, 2019). In this section, the population and selection method are discussed; the population of this study included the managers or recruiters and research consultants from the research consultation organisations. In terms of the participants, the researcher engaged with ten participants from different organisations, to obtain detailed information from the participants. According to Percy *et al.*, (2015); Uğur, (2019), a small but highly informed participation may provide rich information about the topic, and it must be noted that qualitative research is characterised by a small number of participants with the most experience in respect to the studied topic.

Additionally, many different organisations employ MARC graduates within Gauteng Province and the rest of SA. However, the researcher included one representative with relevant information on the topic in question, from ten different organisations that employ MARC graduates. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, in which no new information was received from participants; in other words, once a point was reached where enough data had been collected during the process to draw the necessary conclusions, data collection ceased (Brown & Danaher, 2021; Gill et al., 2008). As mentioned above, detailed in-depth information assisted with the interview and questioning process (Brown & Danaher, 2021; Gill et al., 2008). For inclusion purposes, the researcher followed a snowball selection method. This method allowed for different, relevant organisations to participate in this study and provide different perspectives to the research question. In terms of the selection method, according to Laher and Botha (2012); Laher *et al.*, (2019), the snowball selection method is generally used when

members of a special population are difficult to locate. In this study, the researcher did not necessarily know where MARC graduates were employed. Therefore, the intention in terms of this selection method is to locate the participants through the first initial participants. This selection and recruitment method are effective for challenges associated with communities that are difficult to reach (Laher et al., 2019; Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010).

Additionally, in the first part of the selection method, a few individuals within the relevant population were approached, and asked to approach other individuals who in turn were asked to approach more individuals (Laher & Botha, 2012; Laher et al., 2019). The researcher and the co-coder compiled a list of research companies to approach, with each company contact details; the human resources department of each company was contacted telephonically and via emails. From this contact list, three companies were reached and during the interviews these company representatives were requested to refer the researcher and co-coder to other companies. The company referrals made it easier to reach the participants who met the requirements of participating in this study. The snowball strategy assisted in selecting a diverse community to have more representations of different organisational cultures. Therefore, the advantage of considering a snowball strategy is that it is time and cost effective to implement. Also, this method identifies potential participants who might benefit from participating in a specific study (Laher et al., 2019; Sadler et al., 2010). However, the disadvantage is that the representation may be biased, with participants who share similar characteristics (Laher et al., 2019; Sadler et al., 2010).

To mitigate the disadvantages of the snowball selection method, the researcher involved managers or consultants from both public and private organisations. In addition, the organisations which employ MARC graduates represent academia, market and social research. Furthermore, the researcher selected managers and consultants based on their involvement in employing or working with MARC graduates. For example, those who sit in interview panels to provide applicable and detailed information.

The following are the criteria that the researcher used for the inclusion of the participants in the selection method:

- Managers/Consultants with direct influence in hiring MARC graduates, those who decide on the need to hire and sit in interviews;
- Managers/Consultants who work directly or indirectly with MARC graduates;
- MARC graduates currently employed as psychology researchers; and

- Self-employed MARC graduates working as psychology research consultants.

With these criteria, the researcher assumed that participants would provide detailed and relevant information about the expected skills from MARC graduates. The following section is a discussion on data collection strategies.

4.4.3 Data collection strategies

To explore the expected requisite skills of MARC graduates, as mentioned above, in-depth information from the employers of these graduates helped to address the research question for this study. In addition, to obtain the detailed information on requisite skills, interviews were conducted with participants of this study, as these provide a deeper understanding of social knowledge, where little is known about the social experience (Brown & Danaher, 2021; Gill et al., 2008). Therefore, the purpose of including interviews in this study was to explore the experiences and views of employers of MARC graduates.

4.4.3.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, as proposed by Percy *et al.*, (2015); Uğur (2019) were conducted. These interviews are recommended for a generic qualitative design to obtain rich information on a topic. In addition, semi-structured interviews include several key questions that guide participants on what to talk about, and define the explored areas (Brown & Danaher, 2021; Gill et al., 2008). Therefore, the researcher followed the standard questions with one or more individually tailored questions to obtain clarification or probe a participant's reasoning (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Uğur, 2019). These interview questions assisted the researcher in actively listening to participants and acquire relevant information about the requisite skills of MARC graduates. The researcher developed an interview schedule, which included questions as a guide to what was covered during the interview. Furthermore, the interview schedule covered questions deducted from the sociological institutional theory, which were aimed at addressing the research question. The interview questions were based on the three elements of the sociological institutional theory, as these elements provided aspects of what employers and employees should adhere to within organisations. Additionally, the interview schedule linked to the research question made it possible to address objectives and aims of the study (Brown & Danaher, 2021; Gill et al., 2008). Furthermore, the flexibility of the semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer to probe for more detailed responses from the participants. Another

advantage of this approach was that it provided guidance on what to talk about during an interview and allowed participants to think of pertinent information to elaborate on.

Further to the above, the first part of data collection involved three participants, who were from different organisations that employed MARC graduates. The researcher, with the assistance of the co-coder, contacted these participants separately via email, and this provided brief information about participating in this study. The email contents included the ethical clearance, interview schedule and participants' agreement sheet. (All these documents are included in the study as annexures for reference). Prior to the interviews, participants were requested to submit completed agreement sheets indicating their voluntary participation, and that they would only share information pertaining to this study. Initially, the plan for data collection indicated that interviews would be physically conducted in the presence of both researcher and participant. However, by the time interviews took place, the country was in lockdown due to the Covid19 pandemic. This forced the researcher to improvise and conduct interviews virtually, for the safety of all those involved in the data collection phase.

The interviews were conducted through Microsoft teams and Zoom application. In addition, the three interviews were conducted on different days. During the interviews, participants were informed that the interviews were recorded; the researcher made use of notes and a recording device to collect data from the participants during the interviews. All participants were assured that their information would be kept confidential and only utilised for this study; they adhered to the rules of engagement and followed the instructions. The first part of the questions captured the personal details of participants, including the company name and years of service. The answers to this section of the questions were covered by two of the participants prior to the formal questioning session. Therefore, the researcher decided to skip this question as the information was already recorded when these two participants introduced themselves to the researcher.

Also, during the interview, the internet connection was a challenge, and resulted in some inaudible information. This is indicated on the transcripts, to ensure that the correct information was captured; the researcher requested that participants repeat their answers or statements where necessary. In addition, participants were further interviewed to obtain in-depth information about the requisite skills of MARC graduates. The interview schedule assisted in bringing focus, and when the conversation faded, the researcher guided participants to the following question even though there was no chronological order followed from the interview

scheduled. The researcher realised that following a chronological order of the interview schedule might disturb the flow of feedback received from participants. Therefore, the schedule was used as a guide of the conversation, and all participants were allowed to share as much information as they preferred in terms of the subject in question.

Furthermore, to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the first part of interviews was conducted to check whether the interview questions provided relevant feedback that would address the research aims and objectives. Therefore, it was important for the researcher to consider the trustworthiness of the study during data collection to allow the researcher to adjust to a relevant approach, should a need arise. The researcher confirmed the interview questions and data collected at this stage with the co-coder prior to continuing with recruiting other participants. Also, it should be noted that if the interview questions were not addressing the objectives of this study, the researcher would rework all interview questions guided by the sociological institution theory. Subsequently, seeing that participants were able to provide relevant information, the researcher decided to continue with the second part of interviews. The second part of data collection was conducted, consisting of seven participants from different organisations. The method followed with the participants at the first part of data collection, was applied to the participants at the second part of data collection. In addition, trustworthiness concepts are discussed in the sections below.

4.5 Data Analysis Strategy

This section of the chapter discusses the strategies of data analysis applicable in this study. As discussed above, this study was based on qualitative approach, where the researcher aimed to find out the requisite skills of MARC graduates from the employers. The actual experiences and real motives for employers to employ MARC graduates were determined through the application of a qualitative thematic analysis (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019), a process applied to conduct qualitative data analysis, which involves searching themes across data set to find repeated patterns of meaning (Percy et al., 2015; Uğur, 2019). Furthermore, thematic analysis is a flexible but reliable approach applied to identify, analyse and report on patterns within the qualitative data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Therefore, the researcher intended to identify themes deducted from the literature, analyse them to link them to the research question and then report on the themes to communicate their link, to address the research question. The intention was

to count the frequency of the identified themes, but not to analyse the content of the themes transpired during the analysis. Consequently, the advantage of applying thematic analysis was that it provided pure, rich qualitative and detailed account of data, which identifies common threads across an entire set of interviews (Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). In addition, in analysing the collected rich qualitative data, the researcher applied thematic analysis to achieve the objectives and address the research question of the study.

Subsequently, it is strongly recommended to complete data collection prior to an in-depth literature review to prevent bias and perceived notions during data analysis stage (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Nevertheless, in this study, the researcher opted to conduct an in-depth literature review prior to data collection for a better understanding of the field of study. The argument is that, to allow themes to emerge naturally from the data during analysis, it is recommended that researchers conduct inductive analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2016; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). However, in this study the researcher opted for a deductive analysis, which, according to Percy *et al.*, (2015); Uğur (2019), is applied when researchers have pre-understanding and some pre-determined categories to assess during data analysis. In contrast, inductive analysis is a data driven analysis, where researchers do not attempt to fit data into pre-existing categories (Percy et al., 2015; Uğur, 2019). Additionally, the benefits of applying deductive analysis outweigh those of inductive analysis, as it allows researchers to remain open to the possibility of new themes emerging from the data analysis (Percy et al., 2015; Uğur, 2019). The steps followed in the process of analysing data for this study are discussed in the next section.

4.5.1 Data Management and Analysis

4.5.1.1 Transcription process

As indicated above, the first part of interviews was recorded, and the researcher transcribed all the interviews. According to Halcomb and Davidson (2006); McMullin (2021) the transcription process includes the reproduction of spoken words during the interview from audiotape to written text. The exact word-for-word spoken words were transcribed into a word document. This process is referred to as a verbatim transcription, where the written words are the exact duplication of the audiotape (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; McMullin, 2021). Furthermore, to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness to this study, the researcher adhered to the following

steps suggested by Halcomb and Davidson (2006); McMullin (2021) in transcribing the interviews:

1: Audiotaping of interview and concurrent note taking

The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded after obtaining permission from the participants to record the interviews. During the recording process, the researcher made notes in a separate notebook about some of the highlights that transpired during the interview. The notes were made to reflect on during data analysis stage and ensuring that proper feedback is captured to prevent misunderstanding participants or missing important points they might link with other points as the interview progressed.

2: Reflective journaling immediately post-interview

Immediately after each interview, the researcher jotted down reflections in a journal. These included the researcher's impression about the interviews, issues raised by the participants and concepts that emerged during the interview.

3: Listening to the audiotape and amending/revision of field notes and observation

The researcher listened to the recording and transferred spoken words verbatim into word documents. Comparing the reflection notes with the transcribed interview details, the researcher continued listening and amending the transcription to be a true reflection of what was communicated by the participants. The researcher continued to record verbatim transcriptions including all expressions by both the researcher and participants.

4: Preliminary thematic analysis

Once all interviews were typed and captured in a word document, the names of the participants were carefully removed for confidentiality reasons, replaced with pseudonyms. The researcher read through the final transcription to search for common ideas or feedback from the participants.

5: Secondary thematic analysis

This step included checking of the transcripts which was important for the credibility and trustworthiness of data. However, during the first part of data collection and analysis, this step was not conducted; all transcripts were checked after data collection was complete.

6: Thematic Review

At this stage, the researcher created a deductive heuristic, which was a guide for coding in this study. Heuristic for this study included three elements of codes based on the theory applied in the study: codes, description of codes as well as sub-codes.

The above steps suggested by Halcomb and Davidson (2006); McMullin (2021) contributed to provide a structure to follow when transcribing collected data in this study. Then, once the transcription process had been concluded for the collected data, the researcher prepared for data analysis, which is discussed in the following section.

4.5.1.2 Thematic analysis

As discussed above, thematic analysis was applied to analyse collected data in this study. Thematic analysis is a process applied to conduct qualitative data analysis, which involves searching themes across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning (Percy et al., 2015; Uğur, 2019). To achieve thematic analysis for this study, the researcher made use of ATLAS.ti software. For the first part of data analysis, the interview transcripts were uploaded into ATLAS.ti, and saved under one folder to prepare for analysis. As indicated above, a deductive analysis was effective for this study, as the researcher had pre-understanding of the literature review of this study. In addition, the deductive analysis was guided by the sociological institution theory elements which included normative expectation, appropriate behaviour and normative compliance. Hence, the codes were deducted from these elements: however, some of the highlighted codes emerged from the data and were fitted into different elements.

Furthermore, the researcher read through the uploaded transcripts as the first step towards identifying relevant codes. After this, the researcher created the codes on the folder as identified in the heuristics guide developed by the researcher for the analysis of this study. In addition, the researcher went through the transcripts for the second time, but this time highlighted quotes from the transcripts that link to the created codes. As the researcher continued with the coding process, memos were created and attached to specific transcripts. These memos included the researchers' reflections, notes, ideas, doubts and questions that emerged during the coding phase of analysis.

Additionally, the coding process was concluded when there were no new quotes that could be linked to any relevant codes. Therefore, the researcher grouped all the codes under the relevant elements indicated on the heuristics, to determine themes that would relate to the research

question and prepare to export analysis for reporting. The next sections explore issues of trustworthiness of this study.

4.6 Trustworthiness of the study

This section explains the importance of trustworthiness in this study. Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods applied to promote the quality of the study (Motulsky, 2021). For this study, trustworthiness was ensured through collecting data from relevant participants who were knowledgeable about the subject in question. Also, interpretation of the feedback received from the participants was not manipulated, it was captured verbatim as received from the participants. Furthermore, the methods applied in this study, promoted a standard quality followed to address the research question. Also, to ensure quality to this study, the sociological institutional theory was set as a guide to deduct concepts and provide a structure to follow to develop interview schedule. To further promote trustworthiness of this study, the following criteria by Lincoln and Guba (1985); Motulsky (2021) were followed: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability. Additionally, the specifics of the social constructionism paradigm discussed above were considered to clarify trustworthiness in this study. For instance, collected data was communicated as presented by the participants to reflect their experiences.

4.6.1 Credibility

Credibility involves the truth of the study and its findings, the use of the appropriate research methods in this study contributes to the credibility of the study and its findings (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004). The credibility of this study was promoted through the credibility of the relevant participants, their experiences and how they represented their expectations of working with MARC graduates (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004). Also, to address the research question, appropriate and fitting methods were followed and applied to ensure credibility of this study. According to Morrow (2005); Motulsky (2021), credibility is achieved by prolonged engagement with participants, which includes persistent observation in the field, use of peer researchers, negative case analysis, researcher reflexivity, and member checking (Morrow, 2005; Motulsky, 2021). All these techniques were applied effectively to establish credibility of the study. For instance, for member checking, participants were requested to read their transcripts to check if their words were accurately captured (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004).

Also, a self-reflective journal had been used to ensure that researcher subjectivity did not dominate but that participants' perspectives were fairly represented (Morrow, 2005; Motulsky, 2021). Additionally, the reflective journal was used to record the researcher's initial impressions of all data collection sessions (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004).

4.6.2 Transferability

Transferability of the study involves the extent to which the findings are useful in other settings (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004). Therefore, a transferability technique is achieved when sufficient information about the research context, processes, participants, and researcher-participant relationships is received, to enable the reader to decide how findings may be transferred (Morrow, 2005; Motulsky, 2021). Furthermore, transferability was enhanced by detailing the research methods, participants' criteria, as well as the contextual setting of this study. In addition, a thick description of each organisational context is provided to encourage transferability of the study to similar contexts (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004).

4.6.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of data over time and based on the conditions of the study (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004). As indicated earlier, this is embedded in the sociological institutional theory, and the elements of this theory were utilised to identify themes towards addressing the research question. This assisted in promoting stability of data collected, and all the processes within the study were reported in detail to allow future researchers to repeat the same process and may obtain the same results (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004). Furthermore, the researcher ensured this by providing explicit methods and processes to derive the findings.

4.6.4 Confirmability

According to Morrow (2005); Motulsky (2021), confirmability is based on the perspective that the integrity of the findings relies on the data. In addition, the researcher must sufficiently connect the data with the process and the findings for the reader to confirm the adequacy of the findings (Morrow, 2005; Motulsky, 2021). In this study, the researcher ensured the integrity of the findings by aligning the applied methods with the sociological institutional theory. This promoted guidance towards collecting data that intended to address the research question and ensured findings determined from the received data. The process of achieving findings involved relevant participants with subject knowledge, deduction of interview schedule from the theory and aligning themes with the elements of the theory. Also, ensuring collected data

reflected verbatim feedback from the participants, analysis of the correct transcripts and producing themes guided by the followed methods to achieve the findings that addressed the research question. Furthermore, to reduce researcher bias, this study only included research findings resulting from the experiences of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004). This was done by sticking to the received data and reporting the original data to address the research question. None of the researchers' preferences or ideas were included but only the feedback as received from the participants was utilised to achieve the findings of this study.

In addition, the above criteria were applicable to promote trustworthiness in this study. Also, the process leading to the final findings of this study was explicitly detailed to encourage trustworthiness of the study, which was the advantage of applying the above criteria. However, the disadvantages were the limited possibility of demonstrating that the findings and conclusions were applicable to other similar situations (Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004).

4.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance with Ref. No: PERC-17037, was obtained from the Department of Psychology at UNISA, with permission for participants' involvement requested and obtained from all organisations involved in participating to this study. The ethical clearance and permission for participation was requested by the co-coder on behalf of the researcher, however, the letter to the participants included both the names of the co-coder and the researcher. Once participants agreed to participate in this study, informed consent forms were distributed to the participants prior to their involvement to the study: all participants signed and agreed to participate in this study. Furthermore, participants were assured that participation in this study was voluntary and that they could decide to decline their participation at any given time should they feel the need. Therefore, both confidentiality of the shared information as well as anonymity of participants were assured to all participants involved in this study. The shared information to be kept for a period of five years and was stored in a protected computer folder with limited access to the researcher and co-coder only. The following ethical considerations were adopted as mentioned by Nyathi (2018); Shenton (2004); Zegwaard (2018).

Autonomy – the researcher respected that, participants made their own decisions and made their own choice; in case they decide to withdraw from being participants of this study. As indicated earlier, participants were allowed to decline their participation if needed.

Informed consent - the researcher and co-coder shared informed consent with the identified participants via email, and ensured that participation was strictly voluntary for all participants. The contents of the informed consent are reflected on annexure D and that participants were completely informed about the intention of this study. Once participants understood the intention of the study as well as their involvement, participants were requested to sign the participation sheet, reflecting on annexure C and returned the completed forms via email. In addition, participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study, and about the extent to which the obtained information was to be shared.

Confidentiality - all information gathered was treated in a confidential manner, to prevent the compromise of individual careers. Participants' personal information (e.g., names) was withheld to protect their identities, as indicated earlier, the names of the participants were carefully removed from the transcripts for confidentiality reasons and replaced with pseudonyms. Participants were informed about the publication of the results, and that copies of publication will be made available to them. With this, the researcher ensured the participants that only the connected information will be shared and published. Also, participants were assured that the collected information, interview recordings and transcripts were safely stored in a protected computer folder with limited access to the researcher and co-coder only.

Non-Maleficence - the researcher ensured that no intentional harm was caused to the participants by sharing of their confidential information with other parties or forcing their involvement in this study. Participants' involvement was voluntarily, and their participation was transparent to ensure no harm intended through participation in this study. All participants were treated fairly with respect and dignity, and the researcher did not inadvertently hurt participants or manipulate them for the benefit of the researcher.

Beneficence - attempts were made to maximise the benefits that this study afforded to the participants in the study. However, there were no direct benefits in participation to this study, although the in-direct benefit was for participants to communicate and have their experiences recorded for the benefit of others.

Justice – the researcher interviewed and treated all the participants in a reasonable fair manner. This was done by providing participants with equal opportunity, in terms of time for the interviews, and access to the information of this study.

Fidelity – this was done by valuing commitments to the participants and having an honest working relationship with all the participants. The researcher respected the scheduled

appointments with all participants and was flexible for those requested to reschedule their interview appointments to the time preferred by participants. An honest working relationship was maintained between the researcher and all participants.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter focused on discussing research methods applicable in exploring the aim and objectives of this study. In addition, applicable methods were suggested with the principles followed to address the research question of this study. Paradigms were discussed and defined, according to Jung, (2019); Kivunja (2014), paradigms are a worldview or mindset that represents a pattern of thinking or understanding of the environment. According to Holmes (2020); Scotland (2012), it is impossible to conduct scientific research without committing to an ontological perception and an epistemological stance, and these were discussed. The paradigm components discussed are aligned to the social constructionism paradigm, in which this study is embedded. The social constructionism paradigm was selected because it relates to the sociological institution theory, which is a theoretical framework applicable in this study.

The approach and design for this study was discussed in the chapter, in addition to the methods used. In terms of selection method, a small number of participants from different organisations that employ MARC graduates were included in this study. As discussed, to obtain the detailed information on requisite skills, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants of this study. Therefore, the flexibility of the semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer to probe for more detailed responses from the participants. The data analysis strategy applicable in this study was the thematic analysis, a process applied to conduct qualitative data analysis and it involves searching themes across data set to find repeated patterns of meaning (Percy et al., 2015; Uğur, 2019). Trustworthiness, dependability, ethics and related issues to assess the quality of this study, were also discussed in this chapter. Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Department of Psychology at UNISA. The next chapter focuses on the findings of this study.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, the discussion focused on the research methods applicable to explore the aim and objectives of this study. This chapter includes the findings of this study and focuses on providing the information of the participants, with brief particulars of the organisation's participation in this study.

More importantly, the results and analysis are included, with the focus on the three elements adopted from the sociological institutional theory. These elements provided guidance on the interview schedule, which was used as a navigator during the data collection phase to gather views and feedback from the participants in this study. Furthermore, in this chapter, the results and analysis section provide the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data collection phase, with some direct quotes from participants, to emphasise what emerged in the conversations. The next section brings focus on the participants' information of this study.

5.2 Participation information

This section introduces the participants involved in this study. As indicated in the previous chapter, data collection was done in two different parts. The two different parts were applied to promote the quality and trustworthiness of this study. The first part helped the researcher to check and confirm the relevancy of the data collection tool, prior to proceeding to the second part. Therefore, participants' details indicate individuals from different races, industries, and backgrounds. In addition, as indicated in the previous chapter, organisations were represented by one individual (per company), interviewed as participants for this study. Consequently, the different backgrounds of the organisations and participants contributed to the diversity of the feedback or opinions presented in this study. Despite the diversity of these participants and organisations, all these organisations employ MARC graduates, although they perform different roles within different organisations.

Furthermore, all the participants included in this study were referred by the initial participants, through the snowball selection method applied to recruit participants to represent their organisations and participate in the study, after the researcher had contacted different organisations. Some of the organisations were referred to by some participants, following the snowball selection method. The first part included interviews with three participants. The first participant, P1 was from a private company that focuses on providing psychometric related

services, and has more than 25 years of serving the community. P2 was from a private medium sized company, focusing on market research with more than nine years' experience in serving the community. P3 was from a private, medium sized, long-term insurance company, with more than 25 years' experience in serving the community. Details of other participants and their experience follow: P4 was from a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO), offering treatment to victims of substance abuse, and they have been offering services to the community for more than 10 years. P5 was from a digital market research company with five years in the community. P6 was from an academic institution, which employs MARC graduates, with more than 13 years' experience. P7 was from a market research organisation, with over six years' experience. P8 was from an academic institution, which employs MARC and has more than six years in practice. P9 was an independent consultant, and a MARC alumnus, and has seven years' work experience. P10 was an independent consultant and MARC alumnus with three years' work experience. Participants from all these organisations work directly with new entrants in the research units of these organisations, and some participants were MARC alumni, but they were recruited because they employ MARC graduates. These employers had information to share about their experience, within the boundaries of confidentiality and ethics, in what they believed is required for MARC graduates to become employable. The details of the participants are captured in the table below:

Table 5.1: *Demographics of participants*

Name	Race	Gender	Work experience	Qualifications	Role	Industry
P1	W	F	15+ years	PhD in Industrial Psychology	HOD	Psychometry
P2	A	M	5+ years	PhD Candidate	Manager	Market Research
P3	W	M	15 + years	PhD in Industrial Psychology	HOD	Insurance
P4	A	F	4+ years	Degree in developmental studies	Manager	NPO

P5	A	M	4+ years	Honours Marketing Management	in Director	Market Research
P6	A	M	13+ years	MBA	Director	Academia
P7	A	M	6+ years	MBA	Director	Market Research
P8	A	M	6+ years	PhD	Lecturer	Academia
P9	A	F	7+ years	PhD	Consultant	Academia
P10	A	F	3+ years	MARC	Consultant	Academia

Note: The above table reflects participants' information included in this study. The following section includes the highlights and feedback that emerged from the conversations between the researcher and the participants.

5.3 Findings

This section of the study concentrates on the feedback received during the interview sessions between the researcher and participants in this study. In addition, themes and sub-themes that transpired during the data collection phase are included, with some direct quotes from participants, to emphasise what emerged in the conversations. As indicated above, an interview schedule which guided these conversations, concentrated on the elements pointed out in the sociological institutional theory, discussed in Chapter 2, and applicable to this study. Therefore, deductive themes were grouped under normative expectation, appropriate behaviour, and normative compliance elements. Accordingly, themes were deducted from the theory; however, sub-themes emerged from the conducted interviews. These themes and sub-themes are presented in the following table.

Table 5.2: *Themes and Sub-themes*

Elements	Themes	Sub-themes
Normative expectation	General expectations	Align with organisation, be exposed to research
	Completed qualification	Honours, Masters, PhD, degree
	Affiliates, standards and regulations	Professional board, HPCSA, SAMRA, ISPP, meaningful connection or environment, network
	Career development	Learning, placements, empowerment, courses, training, long life learning, continuous learning, networking
Appropriate behaviour	Appropriate conduct	Being professional, character, honest, adaptable, flexible, best attitude, moral, ethical, independent
	Skills	Communication skills, interpersonal skills, self-management, emotional intelligence, academic language, listening, computer literate, time management
	Knowledge and work activities	Qualitative, quantitative, analyse data, conduct research, interpret data, literature review, collect data, write proposal, project management, psychometry, mixed methods, appropriate methodology, statistics, marketing research, social marketing, psychology, HR, criminology, digital, conduct research, analyse data, psychometrics
Normative compliance	Compliance promotion	Performance and performance improvement
	Important values	Balance (work under pressure), respect, trust, honesty, loyalty
	Expected responses	Willingness and ability to learn, knowledge application
	Work experience	Placements and internships, Work Integrated Learning

Note: The above table recaps the elements, themes and sub-themes that emerged during data collection and analysis phases of this study; these are discussed below. Also included are some of the quotations from the participants. The next section focuses on the first element of the sociological institution theory, normative expectations.

5.3.1 Normative expectations

The first element adopted from the sociological institutional theory is the normative element, rooted in the processes of professionalisation or achieving desired behaviours, where universities, as well as professional certification and accreditation agencies, impose values, codes, and standards (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). Moreover, through normative elements, social behaviour is enabled or constrained because of the standards and cognitive frameworks that create and control professions and other moral standards-making bodies (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). The conversation around prescribed expectations of employers led to the discovery of the essential aspects of being professional, as one of the basic requirements that is attractive for new entrants to fit in an organisation. The first participant (P1) mentioned that it is important for graduates to be professional, as there is a certain appropriate demeanour when one is a professional. As a result, they expect graduates who understand being professional; however, P1 pointed out that though the environment is more relaxed, one is expected to carry oneself professionally. The transcript includes all pauses and utterances.

P1: *“They will need to be professional....you know we professionals, you carry yourself ... ummhh ... as such, so you... you ... ummhh ... we are polite and ... ummh ... eerr ... decent with one another ... ummhh ... you need to be able to take feedback and criticism ... ummhh ... and use it constructively ... ummhh ... you know ... to not ... ummhh ... you knowalso tell to seek it...to seek it out ... eerr ... and not... I mean we would never give destructive, but you have to be able to take criticism ...and work to improve ... ummhh ... you need to be able to... you need to be diligent ... you know show up on time, be neatly presented... you know ... the basics”.*

P8: *“I don't know if it's a ... it's a ... it's a ... it's a value as such, but maybe an intellectual ability ... is analytical skills. You need to be very analytical. You need to be able to communicate very well and communicate your ideas and know how to speak to different people about your ideas ... you know ... how to pitch your idea as*

well ... you know ... that's also very important thing ... you know ... because sometimes you have to persuade people ... through stories ... you know ... and ... you know ... particularly if you're working in a ... in spaces where you are in advocacy. Umm, so that ... that's ... that ... that's what I think are important things ... you know ... strong analytical skills, curiosity ... but I think also again ethics ... you know ... because people can make ... people wanna make decisions based off your insights and you can drive agendas that do not exist or drive an organisation in the wrong direction based on the insights that do not exist ... you know ... eerr.. yeah ... So, ethics then become quite ... quite central as well”.

Similar to the above, the second participant, (P2) mentioned that having professional employees is important, as it becomes easier to work with them as there will be mutual understanding between employees, and the environment becomes friendly and welcoming.

P2 “In this company the environment is... you know ... it’s like a friendly environment... like a family thing where ... you know ... people are welcome to come work with us but as long as you still professional”.

The importance of professionalism for graduates was also indicated by the fourth participant (P4), who stressed that graduates must have character to be professional, and work effectively in their environment. For this organisation, having character is important, as it requires individuals to conduct themselves appropriately for a specific organisation.

P4 “... You know what, for someone to work with us must have a character with moral quality... ummh... we always say you must have the heart for people. If you don’t have a heart for people, you will never do this work. Ja... you must just have a heart for people no matter what skill you have, if you don’t have character ... eerr... a heart for people you can come with your skills and your degrees and diplomas or your qualifications it’s not gonna work out”.

The above statements demonstrate that, for some organisations, being professional is recommended as a basic requirement for new entrants in preparing them to become employable in these organisations, although being professional is not clearly communicated in words.

However, for these participants, professionalism differs from one organisation to the other. For some organisations, being professional means having a character that is grounded in moral values. The first theme recognised under the normative expectation element, is general expectations of employers to the potential employees. This theme is displayed next.

5.3.1.1 General expectations

Companies that dedicate their time to attracting new recruits to join their organisation are likely to find those recruits strongly committed to the company (Greenberg & Baron, 2003; Martini et al., 2018; Massoud et al., 2020). Strongly committed recruits strive to work and have a desire to remain in the company as they are committed to the organisations' goals and values (Greenberg & Baron, 2003; Martini et al., 2018; Massoud et al., 2020). Furthermore, recruiting employees is one of the important decision-making processes within an organisation. It provides opportunities to find people who match the requirements of the organisation. For instance, one participant mentioned that their organisation respects the fact that employees have different personality characteristics; however, they still look for graduates that would be able to adjust within their organisation.

P2: "People have different personalities but as long as you respect the work environment and respect the work that we do and then you align ... you know ... with what the company ... eeerrr ... requires"

In addition, some organisations generally expect new entrants to understand what is functionally required from them immediately, when they become part of the organisation.

P3: "We assume that a graduate once they have graduated from the university that they have got the...the knowledge and the theoretical basis of the discipline of the science that they are studying in. So, if its research psychology... you know ... that you've got the basic understanding of the theoretical underpinning of that particular... ummh... science. We then also look at ... ummhh ... how can you translate those skills into the practical working environment, so if you have to join us, what are some of the skills that you can already apply".

P9: "A basic understanding of what it takes ...eerr... for one to say this is my research and what the research process is about ... for one and for someone who ...

you know ... for instance, in the workspaces, someone who can assist with ... eerr ... reviewing of articles, it's end of the year ... we've got so many people who want to ... to publish their ... their research. So, research graduate should be someone who's able to ... to look at ... eerr ... the write-up that's available and be able to say yes, OK, yes, the ... the topic or the title that's ... that's ... stands there does align with the type of a research method that was chosen. And yes, this will be a good enough ... eerr ... proposal that it ... it can go through to ... you know ... the ... the other stages of their research”.

Moreover, some organisations are keen on knowing that new employees can conduct research or have been exposed to it, and that would be effective to the organisation.

P7: “I would expect someone whose actually done a bit of a groundwork in terms of research ...eerr... probably those who would have been exposed in conducted studies even though they were not working for a particular company but my expectation of that person would be that they are able to join a company and when joining a company ... like our company they will be able to identify areas where companies can improve through research and also check that in the market where we operate ... eerr... what are of the opportunities and what are the threats that can actually affect the operation of the organisation ... so, that will be my expectation from ... from a researcher”.

P8: “You have to always be curious as a ... a researcher, that's the first thing you have to be inquisitive, asking questions because you are a researcher. That's ... that's one of the things you're trying to find ... truth, you are searching ... you know ... So, for me, that's a trait every researcher should have ... you know ... I mean, I always say the day I stopped being curious, I'm just go, like, find a different job ... you know ... eerr ... if I don't wonder why people do ABCDE ... you know ... you know ... then ... then ... then ... then I ... then I'm not a researcher because research starts from the question, right. So, that for me is the first sort of important sort of trait that I ... I would like ... I think researchers should have”.

P10: “I would expect them to know basic concepts in research ... you know ... basic concepts like types of methodologies, types of research approaches ... you know ...

how to write research proposals ... eerr ... so, I ... I think I would expect more from a research graduate ... and who ... who has gone through maybe a research program like let's say the master's in research psychology program, the MARC program. I would expect a whole lot more from them than a graduate that just did their MBA or that just did ... eerr ... a simple Masters or PhD without the research coursework”.

While this is the case for this organisation, an NPO generally expects graduates to be involved in voluntary work, to gain exposure to the kind of work they perform prior to joining the organisation.

P4: *“One can start by volunteering their services to be familiar with the organisation. Then they might stand a good chance to become employable”.*

Based on the conversations held with different participants, it transpired that organisations have different expectations from new entrants, though some expectations may overlap slightly. However, when it comes to finer details, these organisations focus on different aspects in terms of general expectations from new employees. According to institutional theory, decision-making within organisations may utilise the different ideas of institutionalisms as a set of lenses, to illuminate different aspects of structures and behaviour (Hogan, 2019; Peters, 2012). Another theme that transpired from the normative expectation elements of sociological institutional theory, is the importance of completing a qualification; this is discussed next.

5.3.1.2 Completed qualification

According to Jones *et al.*, (2021); Steur *et al.*, (2016a), being a graduate is beyond just a qualification, though a graduate refers to a person who is awarded a qualification by authorised institutions. Hence, what graduates are expected to have in common at a specific stage in their students' academic intellectual development, is referred to as *graduateness*. Additionally, *graduateness* focuses on the development of the desired skills and attributes, considered essential by employers (Minocha *et al.*, 2017). Participants included in this study stated that they expected their new entrants to have obtained a certain level of higher education, although some participants indicated different educational levels. However, all participants mentioned that a completed or partially completed qualification is important to qualify to work within the organisation or research projects. One participant indicated that their qualification requirements depended on the project at a given time.

P3: *“I think it will probably depend on the project at hand, but predominantly we would look at somebody with a Masters degree at a minimum”.*

However, other participants mentioned that a minimum qualification requirement for their organisations would be the Honours degree level.

P2: *“Ja in terms of ... ummh ... the academic background what we look at is, ... you know ... Honours, Honours degree ... you know ... so up to Honours, Masters, PhD because ... you know ... like in Honours you already have the sense of ... you know ... research you know. You already have the sense of how you conduct research eerr how you do field work ... you know ... how you collect data. So that’s what we like that’s our lane, so we start with Honours all the way up”.*

P5: *“But in terms of education if you say clearly in terms of education ...ummh... then that person should come in from Honours level ...ummh... must be creative for research marketing space basically”*

Another essential point mentioned by participants, was that although a completed qualification is an important requirement for prospective employees, the level of education depends on the research project.

P6: *“Depending on the role, at least someone who’s done a degree we are then able to understand that they’ve been exposed to some level of ... even if it’s not research specific but then at least be exposed to things like statistics ...eerr ... you know ... and... and ... and ... ummh ... assisting, maybe even ... even foundation of research. I mean in research psychology as an example or even in marketing”.*

Furthermore, for some organisations, a completed qualification is important for new entrants, so that they may apply the knowledge gained from their completed qualifications.

P7: *“It matters for graduates to have completed their qualification prior joining our company. I think the best way would be it is the right thing for the graduates to*

complete their qualification ... so, that they can actually take the information that they've learned at the university level and then bring it to our organisation”.

P8: *“So, with completing ... completing the course work component makes sense ... you know ... and then moving on to the applied setting with ... obviously now you have to juggle completing your ... dissertation component. But I don't think it's an issue provided, that you are in an environment that allows you to ... to still apply ... research skills ... you know ... I think other people go back to their traditional work environments where they're not even ... eerr ... applying research skills ... you know ... or ... or research skills are not being demanded of them. I think that's where maybe it can pose a challenge for a lot of people ... So, the idea that you must just finish your qualification and then when you are done. Then ... only they will let you go. I don't think it's practical or it adds any value ... you know ... Because, while we're ... while you are ... while you are still completing your dissertation, you could still be learning and be in other research projects and learning research and upskilling yourself ... you know ... So, by the time you graduate, you've got project experience ... you know ... there's a lot that you can still ... you can still benefit ... you know”.*

P10: *“To be honest I would say that before one joins an organisation, an organisation that is focused in research, one needs to complete their qualifications because there's a lot that one learns in the process of ... of doing the research qualification that would come as a benefit for both the individual and the organisation when they enter into the organisation, because when the individual enters into an environment without having completed the ... the ... the qualification, then there's some other things that are still ... that are still outstanding ... that are still confusing to an individual ... you know ... whereas after they've completed there's certain things that they have, they would have probably covered in their ... in their research work or in their qualification that would benefit them”.*

In addition, though these participants indicated a requirement of a completed qualification in research, some participants did not specify the requirements in terms of educational level. However, they indicated a specific affiliation and profession as requirements for graduates to fit within their organisation. Information on the affiliation is discussed below.

5.3.1.3 Affiliation, standards, and regulations

Research psychology professionals should adhere to and register under the HPCSA affiliation (HPCSA, 2019), to enable them to practise their skills professionally to the public. However, Laher (2014) argues that research psychology graduates can practise their skills without registering with the HPCSA. Also, according to Rascher (2016), there are other research related affiliations in SA that research psychology graduates may register with, to render research related services. In addition to this, the standards and regulations embrace the importance of setting rules and parameters to encourage stability within organisations (Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008). For instance, to give order and direction to research psychology professions, participants referred to the external structures made available, to provide yardsticks to the profession, or to employees within their organisations. Also, participants in this study indicated the magnitude of affiliation for their organisations. For instance, some participants mentioned the importance of being affiliated prior to joining the organisation, due to the type of projects they would be involved in. Other organisations consider graduates even if they are not affiliated with any regulating institution. Furthermore, for some organisations, standards and regulations are important to provide a meaningful work environment and support professionals in their work engagements.

P1: *“We we...require a completed registration with the Health Professions Council”.*

P9: *“HPCSA gives one ... professional recognition. So, you are listed amongst other professionals, and you have a network that you can consult with. HPCSA has a guideline of what is expected ... eerr ... of ... of a research psychologist in terms of the ethics”.*

P10: *“I will speak based on experience ... eerr ... with us research psychologist because ... and the HPCSA as a professional body that we register with. So, with the HPCSA it's a matter of that professional body guarding us ethically if whatever research we do or we conduct it's within the ethical frameworks or borders of that they have stipulated according to their Health Professions Council of South Africa ... eerr ... so, in that regard, in actually guarding the psychologist ... the research psychologist is ethically then the board, the... the ... the HPCSA is of necessity, because it doesn't only protect the participants, but it protects the research*

psychologist as well. But in other ... in other ... in other ... in other aspects of the job, I don't think the board really plays a great role in ... in ... in them being ... in individuals being affiliated with it, I think it just plays a great role in monitoring that ethical conduct is ... is followed through both on the participants and on the on ... on ... on the researcher side”.

Additionally, some participants indicated that there were other affiliations that set standards and regulations for psychology research professionals.

P6: “Look it’s always recommendable ...umhh... I know agencies they usually affiliate. At corporate level they wouldn't really, it’s not really a must because like I said we don't deal with research work that requires us to affiliate, but there are people usually who choose to ...ummh... be affiliated with SAMRA, South African Market Research Associate. But it’s not ... it's not a train smash if you not”.

P8: ... and in pursuing a research interest, it's always good to be affiliated with organisations that are like minded ...and ...and then do the kind of work or produce the kind of knowledge ...you are also... that you're ... you're interested in ... you know.....so the ISPP, it's International Society for Political Psychology is ... is one of the platforms where I ... I ... I did also have a registration... So, I'd always recommend that ...because ...you need to also belong to a network that will challenge you... you know ... And in terms of your lifelong learning... I think that's also just a very important platform because when you go to these societies, or you go on ...conferences... you learn so much ... you improve so much of your ... of your research and knowledge and skills in... in your niche area ... you know”.

However, for other participants, affiliation was not a major focus of the conversation, as these participants indicated that they focused more on whether graduates meet the minimum required skills, and are able to practically practise their obtained knowledge or perform their tasks effectively.

P7: “Not really, they do not really have to be affiliated to any professional board. For this organisation as I mentioned before, we consider those that have completed their

qualifications, with knowledge on how to conduct research that will benefit the organisation”.

On the other hand, for some organisations, professional affiliates are not considered as available to support research psychology professionals.

P5: “Not that we don't want our graduates to be affiliated but there are no professional bodies per se that really ...eerr... add value to our... to our... to our industry”.

Based on the findings by Rascher (2016), some of the research psychology graduates were not registered with the HPCSA but performed activities related to the scope of practice, indicating that the activities could be performed by the graduates with the same skills as research psychologists, but without the research psychologist title. As indicated earlier, the HPCSA is not the only regulating body for the research psychology professionals; others are available to research psychology graduates for registration, to enable them to render research-related services. These other affiliations are mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study. The next section discusses the issue about career development of new entrants.

5.3.1.4 Career development

Career development learning is the acquisition of abilities applicable to one's occupation, which builds knowledge towards the world of work, and is comprised of activities that enable graduates to present themselves effectively to prospective employers and make informed decisions about their careers (Bridgstock, 2019; Scott, et al., 2017). During the first part of data collection, two participants indicated the importance of career development, which continues even when graduates are in the work environment. One participant mentioned that it is important for their organisation to develop new entrants based on expectations, which is viewed as empowerment to the graduates. He mentioned that, though they may employ some graduates as interns at first, it is important to ensure that they are trained about the company's expectations.

P2: “Ooooh ja... we like ummh currently have interns, we have interns that work with us, so I pretty much go with them you know into the process of you know just helping them understanding what we do as the company you know”.

Furthermore, P1 indicated that, it is important for graduates to experience continuous development with relevant knowledge, that would become applicable in a particular context. For instance, P1 mentioned that in their organisation, research instruments evolve with time, and therefore employees should be up to date with what is relevant to that industry, to provide effective services. Moreover, this participant indicated that having graduates exposed to some form of practical work during placements, has advantages and disadvantages for both the organisation and new entrants with relevant knowledge for that organisation.

P1: *“Making sure that students are using the most modern eerr techniques for an access used in practice necessarily...whether it will be qualitative or...or quantitative, but it’s... you know it’s not fair to you as a student to train you up in using...ummh...using something that isn’t being...used in practice necessarily”.*

P8: *“Career development of researchers is a continuous thing I think it's ... I mean, think about ... when I worked in ... eerr ... when I went and did my internship, for instance, I'd already done a year of course work ... where I was taught ... you know ... how to use SPSS ... it was quite intensive ... you know ... eerr ... about ATLAS.TI and ... and ... and ... but when I got to that space, I was ... I had the skills that I could still work on SPSS and then ... you know... there was sort of ... there was a refresher, but I was ready ... you know ... And but I was still learning, adding more ... you know... adding complexity on things that I didn't know”.*

P9: *“I think the idea of continuous education, I don't know if I'm putting it right, but being able to give the graduate ... eerr ... the freedom to ... to study further and to ... not necessarily study further but have courses available that enhance their work or how they deliver their work. it helps a lot as part of the ... development in ... in ... in research to be employed in a space where you'll be exposed to ... to various ... eerr ... angles of the process ... you know ... Say for instance, I'm doing research and there is there is qualitative but then I get into a space where I have to be exposed to ... data coding using SPSS ... you know ... So, being employed in ... in a space where one can be used in different spaces in ... in research could benefit the ... this person when they do get their qualification then they are well-rounded and ... they are well rounded graduates”.*

P10: *“if I have conducted or rather let me make an example like I conducted a study ... and my study was a qualitative study ... you know ... ummh ... when I do get into the organisation as a Master’s in research graduate. I still need to develop my quantitative skills ... you know ... because I need to be an all-rounder, especially working in an academic environment where you ... whereby one supervises students ... you know ... you ... you can't ... you ... one cannot side-line students that are quant but that have similar interests. So, it would be beneficial for one to actually look at maybe honing their quantitative research skills and actually being able to help others that actually are doing the quantitative research and maybe skills like monitoring and evaluation”*.

The development of new entrants appeared important for employers to ensure that graduates adhered to what was required by the organisation. For instance, P3 and P5 mentioned the importance of developing new entrants.

P3: *“I mean we will develop, so we are very, very strong on bringing people in, that we believe they have the right potential and then developing them over time”*.

P5: *“We provide career development for our employees, especially new entrants. We offer our employees skills that are not normally offered as part of the degree from the university but a requirement in our industry”*.

On the other hand, some organisations focused on providing staff development for all employees, but did not provide a special focus on new entrants.

P4: *“Staff developments where staff and we have a lot of skills developments for staff as well, yes, there's staff development, there's always courses...there's always new courses every day, even if those courses are not offered by us, by ourselves we partner...we constantly partner up”*.

P7: *“Umm ... no, not ... not at this stage. However, we do support those that need to further their studies especially if their studies are aligned with the work they are performing, and the company pays 100% of the tuition fees”*.

Career development seems important for continuous learning, or development of employees to fit in the organisation and remain relevant in the work industry, or research projects that they are involved in. Furthermore, it is imperative for new employees to be willing to learn and be developed in their careers. According to De la Torre-Castro and Lindström (2010); Gohan and Arbar, (2022), normative expectations define goals, objectives and appropriate ways of doing things within the organisations. This includes responsibilities, privileges, licence, rights and mandates on what is expected from employees. Therefore, the above themes indicate the framework that organisations follow in terms of what is expected, and how employees are expected to conduct themselves within organisations. Accordingly, employers' beliefs-conceptual-framework by Cai (2012) includes the *formation of initial signals*. This is when employers adjust to the required criteria of the organisation, and obtain information on how, for instance, the recruiting process is conducted in an organisation. According to Cai (2012), *formation of initial signals* exists before either *private* or *public learning* processes, and the develops within employers' perception framework through a process of system structuring. The *formation of initial signals* plays a role in influencing employers' beliefs in order for employees to perform according to the organisations' expectations. Hence, the normative expectations element indicates what is expected from the graduates to be employable. This also links with the expected appropriate conduct from the graduates, which brings us to the aspect of appropriate behaviour considered towards employment, discussed next. The regulative element of the institutional theory plays a balancing role by suggesting rules that sanction actions and specific behaviour within an organisation (Cai, 2012; Gohan & Arbar, 2022).

5.3.2 Appropriate behaviour

The rules and regulations considered in sociological institutional theory present as informal or formal prescribed rules to establish, monitor, and sanction activities (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). Moreover, the regulation processes involve the capacity to establish rules and the power to exercise control over the conformity of others to the rules. To ensure conformity, regulative systems offer rewards and punishment (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008). Therefore, conformity is promoted to attain rewards through the regulative element of the sociological institutional theory, which includes the appropriate basis of obedience, with regulatory rules and coercive mechanisms (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). As an overarching classification of regulatory rules and conformity standards, having

appropriate behaviour was often referred to by the participants of this study. Though it is one of the elements that emerged in sociological institutional theory, this element is also included as one of the themes that emerged during data collection. For some participants, appropriate behaviour is guided by the company values included in the normative compliance section.

P3: *“We are very particular about... you know what are ... the behaviours associated with our values. And we’ve got ...eerr... you know an internal ...[pause]... document that process that helps people understand what our people promise and then our leadership DNA. Eerr ... because I think that sets the tone for what is acceptable behaviour and what is not acceptable behaviour”.*

P8: *“I wonder sometimes if our professional ethics of ... of ... the ... the research psychology translate into organisational ethics ... you know ... But for me ultimately you would want a research psychologist to ... to really try to uphold the ethics that ... we ... we have learned ... you know ... that you write about in the ... in the board exam etcetera ... etcetera ... you know ... But even for people who don't register, research ethics cut across ... you know ... and there ... yeah ... there are many obviously ethical grey areas where ... you may find people they want a certain answer ... you know ... from the research, but because they want to push a particular agenda in the space that you are in ... how do you work around that ... you know ... but ... generally, I think the professional ethics are ... are good ... you know ... when you're ...you know ... preserving human dignity, informed consent ... you know ... not falsifying data ... you know ... all those ... all these other things, are things that we ... we ... we should ultimately adhere to ... you know ...”.*

P10: *“It's a bit tricky because as a researcher ... coming into an organisation and working for an organisation. I believe that it's different than when you're working as a private consultant. I don't know if I'm making sense ... as a private research consultant because if I'm going to, if I'm a research psychologist or a MARC alumni coming into a higher learning institution as a full-time academic or permanent academic ... employee then it's different because in that instance I am bounded by the organisational rules, ethics and ... and code of conduct ... you know ... along of course, with the ... the ethical ... the ... the ... the ... HPCSA, the board ethics as well ...you know ... code of conduct on ethics as well”.*

In addition, other participants considered appropriate behaviour an important aspect for all graduates and employees to fit in well in an organisation.

P6: *“I think that one is not necessarily specific to research graduate. I think as an employee going to any organisation is just understanding the organisational culture and some of the principles and what they stand for and just them fitting into that ...right... but if you look at like a field like for example specific to research, one thing that is quite important in research is you need to be someone who’s adaptable and flexible ...right”.*

Although participants emphasised the importance of appropriate behaviour from the employees, the conversation about appropriate behaviour was aligned with appropriate conduct. Employees in these organisations are expected to conduct themselves appropriately, behave in a certain manner and adhere to the important values that are associated with these organisations and what they represent. Accordingly, the sociological institutional theory highlights organisational stability and structures through systems application. These systems consider primary motivators of human activity with the assumption that norms, rituals, models and culture establish what is appropriate (Amenta & Ramsey, 2010; Gohan & Arbar, 2022). Appropriate conduct is discussed below.

5.3.2.1 Appropriate conduct

As indicated above, appropriate conduct emerged frequently as one of the basic requirements for new entrants in organisations. The sociological institutional theory stresses the importance of setting rules and regulations to encourage stability within organisations; organisations have specific rules and regulations guiding the conduct of employees (Gohan & Arbar, 2022; Scott, 2008). To encourage appropriate conduct, the participants of this study mentioned that new entrants should adhere to the organisation’s basic requirements, including having strong interpersonal skills, to be able to adjust and become team players within the organisations.

P1: *“You need to be able to take initiative, without ummhh without necessarily sort of working away from, or just doing your own thing. Let’s put it that way, so there’s a*

difference between taking initiative and just doing your own thing but be willing to help, willing to.... Be part of the team. That's very important".

For other organisations, it is important for new employees to have a relationship with the managers, to be guided on the appropriate conduct within the organisation. While this is sometimes the case, for other organisations, a person's demeanour is considered important in terms of conduct.

P3: *"We also make sure that they have meaningful connection with their line manager as well as with the human capital partner that looks after them for the first couple of months to make sure that they are settling-in into our environment".*

P5: *"We are looking at ... ummhh.... A person who... who... has the best attitude ...ummhh... a person who understands ...eerr... we have an eye for quality ... an eye for... ummh... [silence]... I'm trying to put into words ...ummh... digital ... ummh... a person who is ...ummhh... is up to date with what's happening in the world of research".*

P7: *"Obviously we need a person, or we need someone We will need someone who's honest, someone who's not gonna be getting involved in public space and sharing the information about our company and best be a very confidential person. That's what I would say".*

P10: *"So, I think in terms of ... in terms of just general conduct in ...in terms of general conduct of a research psychologist I think the biggest ... the biggest thing ... I think it's ethics ... it's being ethical in ... in ... in ... in ... in our research ... you know ... being ethical ... in everything that we do ... you know ... ummhh ... moreover that we are conducting research with human beings ... you know ... we need to ... we need to be able to ... issues of confidentiality ... you know ... issues of ... of ... of anonymity, issues of respect ... you know ... issues of nonmaleficence ... you know ... issues of ... a consent ... you know ... those I think are the issues that we need to put at the forefront of our work more than anything as researchers ... you know ... and as research psychologists that are conducting research with human beings. I think those are the biggest values or the biggest ... demeanours ... I think that all or code of ... or*

ways of conduct that we should handle ourselves in ... you know ... but generally I believe that it's just a matter of ... of ... of us conducting ourselves in the humane way in a moral way like everybody else. I'd like to think, I don't think ... there's a thin line, to be honest between, uh, moral, moral conduct and ethical conduct ... you know ... because I believe that as a research psychologist or as a researcher, we are told that you cannot divulge certain information about the research ... I mean, the participants or what the participants have said to you ... you know ... and ... and without their consent”.

P8: “As a researcher, I may not always go back to my professional ethics. Remember, the professional ethics of research psychology also draw from the Constitution of South Africa ... you know ... and various other sub legislations ... you know ... So, they are also not just ... they don't just exist in isolation ... you know ... the idea that you should have consent from your participants but ... and now you're in an environment where people are telling you no, just force them to ... to do the ... the ... the survey. That's not that ... that ...you can't work that way ...you know ... I would expect a graduate that we produce in ... in any university, research psychologists to be really ... adhering to the ... the professional ethics ... you know ... the ethics of research, they are very important, although sometimes people get irritated with them, but they are very, very important ... you know ...”

Employers indicated that it is important for graduates to show respect among other skills, to be professional and adhere to what the organisation represents, to be able to fit well within the organisation. In addition, the organisational configurations seem to play an important role in encouraging new employees to adhere to the standards and regulations of the organisation. These configurations provide guidance on how new entrants should adjust and be aligned with work expectations. In addition, generic skills are considered important within organisations and therefore discussed next.

5.3.2.2 Generic skills

Employability skills are generic, or transferable abilities and knowledge, that are effective for use in the work environment (Tsitskari et al., 2017). Generic skills involve the development of certain common skills expected by recruiters and potential employers. According to Coetzee

(2014); Crespi and Ramos (2021), the scholarship aspect of graduateness enables development of certain common skills, including problem solving and decision-making skills, analytical thinking skills, enterprising skills, communication skills, planning ability, leadership, initiative, and the capacity for cooperative work. Therefore, employers in this study alluded to the recognition of relevant skills that new entrants bring to the organisation. Although the skills may vary in terms of importance from organisations, these employers emphasised the significant function of the skills. Amongst other skills, interpersonal, problem solving, time management, communication and emotional intelligence were some of the generic skills highlighted by participants.

P3: ...Ummhh and I mean we will develop, so we are very... very strong on bringing people in, that we believe they have the right potential and then developing them over time. Ummhh... but we would like to see that graduates at least, I think from their side are really great at problem solving and they will be able to say I do apply my technical skills in...in the working environment. What are the interpersonal skills look like, would they be able to fit with our culture and fit with other teams. What we definitely look at is, we want people to ...[inaudible] ... we would like researchers to have the necessary interpersonal skills”.

P9: “I think communication is crucial because this is a person who might be called onto ... so in terms of communication, this person will liaise and with a ... yeah ... with ... whoever you need to ... to work with external or internal ... So, you should be able to manage your time to ... find the resources ... you know ... to be able to get the work done. If you find that by day two ... you're struggling with something, you should be able to go back to ... the line manager or whoever you report to, to say ... you know what, I'm struggling with this and that”.

According to Peter (2010); Serrat (2017), emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the cognitive ability to perceive, understand, regulate and use emotions effectively. EI describes the ability to manage the emotions of oneself, those of others, as well as those of the group, including a self-perceived ability to identify and assess these emotions (Serrat, 2017). EI is an important competency for social interaction and is crucial for adaptation in different aspects of life. Graduates who possess high levels of EI, have the capability to recognise or manage their own feelings, and motivate themselves as well as others. These graduates become more productive

and successful, and they help others to become more productive as well (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Serrat, 2017). When participants were asked about this aspect, most of the participants agreed that EI plays an important role when working with people.

P1: *“Ooh ja ja it’s a [giggles] well absolutely.... absolutely true, ja so good emotional intelligence is really important so you know ability to communicate with your teammates. Absolutely, and...and ... and I guess part of that is also...ummh managing stress and managing yourself ... eerr ... eeerr ... its ummhh its very..... its key[giggles]... Ummhh so it depends for as long as they have the.... the necessary technical skills, but its ja... self-management ummhh is part of that”.*

P8: *“Oh, I think they are important for every person ... right let's ... I mean those are important things, being able to communicate with people. But I ... I ... you are ... one could say these are probably more important for a research psychologist who's gonna be client facing and working with different people ... you know ... because people have different demands and you need to be able to communicate with people properly, you need to be assertive to say but I can't go beyond ... eerr ... the scope of ethics, I can't falsify data for instance, and give you the answer that you want ... you know ... it's no possible, the data is not telling me that. So, those are ... I think those will always be important skills ... you know ... although I think they probably the most difficult to master, but they are the most important skills ... for sure ... you ... we ... whether we can train people ... to be emotionally intelligent, I don't know, but ... you know ... those are important skills ... you know ... it would ... would it ... it ... it would be beneficial for people to be able to know who they are, how to communicate with people know they trigger points ... you know things like that ... yeah”.*

P10: *“I believe that self-awareness forms part and parcel of emotional and emotional intelligence like you're saying ... you know ... someone to be able to look at their own personal development ... you know ... and say these are my weaknesses, these are my strengths ... you know ... so being self-aware, being*

able to reflect on ... on ... on ... on who you are, what you are, your weaknesses and strengths is ... is ... is I think emotional intelligence that is required”.

These employers indicated that their organisations completed assessments to assess the new entrants on self-management and interpersonal skills considerably. Also, for these employers, it is important for employees to understand ethics and deliver projects on time.

P2: *“When they have so many projects, they can be able to handle you know the pressure when they handle projects and can help them to be more efficient”.*

P3: *“I think [inaudible] what we definitely look at is we want people to ...[inaudible] ... we would like researchers to have the necessary interpersonal skills [inaudible] very strong understanding of ethics and what you can and what you can’t do in that particular space, I think that [inaudible] ... technical skills”.*

The development of relevant skills for graduates or potential employees emerged as a crucial aspect for employers in this study. For these organisations, the implication of skill sets depends on the focus of the organisation and the projects covered by these organisations. Also, knowledge and work activities involved in research are considered in terms of future employment. These are, therefore, discussed next.

5.3.2.3 Knowledge and work activities

Employers value and reward acquired skills differently, based on graduates’ attributes and educational background, hence graduates are expected to gain knowledge, develop skills and cultivate positive attitudes. Also, employers want graduates with relevant subject knowledge, skills and understanding (Omar et al., 2020; Pool & Sewell, 2007). In addition, students must be able to translate, integrate information and apply various acquired skills and knowledge in reflecting on different situations. Hence, students are prepared for work placements by integration of knowledge and skills to compensate for work readiness and employability of graduates (Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2012). Appropriately, the reflective thinking or work

and career aspect is concerned with knowledge application. Therefore, graduates should obtain sufficient knowledge, skills and a good composure of attitude to compete globally (McCabe, 2010; Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2012). Accordingly, this aspect involves the higher order abilities where students construct knowledge through the collection of information and opinions from different sources. One participant mentioned that graduates should be able to translate acquired skills and knowledge into feasible activities, to fit well within an organisation.

P3: *“So, we basically ask three questions ie. Can you do the job...and when I say can you do the job, it’s based on the... your technical theoretical underpinning, so if you are a research psychologist, are you able to actually do proper research in a working environment? Do you understand how things like focus groups work and statistical analysis work etc. So that’s our first question. Our second question is, can you do the job here, which is a behavioural question around our culture...our values, are you going to fit with what we are able to do? And the third one is, can we grow in future because we’ve got a philosophy that people join us for a career and not just for the first job? And that’s one of the three things that we would look at, and that last one also looks at all you really a culture fit to what we stand for”.*

P8: *“Based on my experience you ... you ... I think what is important is ... because remember, ... eerr ... any ... any ... any ... any ... the theory just lives in a book ultimately ... but we use the theory to add value to organisations ... right ... that ... that ... that is our ... our magic superpower ... you know ... in any research projects. You’re ... you’re trying to excavate or find some sort of truth ...right ... or ... or insights to the community. That’s what you’re really doing ... as a ... as a researcher and ... valuable work activities or valuable or things that they ... you ... you find that work, is that you first also need to learn how to contract with people ... you know ... eerr ... so the ... the ... the theory now lives within a context”.*

The other participants indicated that graduates should be able to understand obtained skills into practice and handle clients or projects they were involved in effectively.

P1: *“We ... eeerrr ... typically for us ... eerr ... it would be important, they would need to have ... eerr ... some familiarity with psychometric assessments and the kind*

of research that you would do you would be using the assessments, so for us it's definitely the...the quantitative skills that are ... ummhh ... are certainly going to make someone more attractive”.

P3: “So, I'm saying I don't think more imperative, I'm just saying it ethical consideration, we ... we would expect our researchers to have a thorough understanding of ... ummh ... ethical matters and how we should approach research.

On top of that, we would expect them to be able to do research in a sensitive environment. So, like you've mentioned, so their ability to work with stakeholders. Their ability to work with, ... ummhh ... you know ... sensitive topics and sensitive matters, and really to comply with the ethical principle of do no harm”.

P2: “You need to be able to analyse the data. So, you need to know how to analyse quantitative data and qualitative data... right, and do the interpretation and interpret those data”.

P8: “I remember with my ... with my experience ... post MARC is, I had to sit down with an industrial psychologist who had a particular problem in a particular context ... you know ... and they wanted to understand ... they wanted insights basically ... but also learning to contract with them ... you know ... and it was very, very important and initially in contracting with them, I also learned other different forms of analysis that were quantitative method that I've never used ... you know ... but that was very, very important. The ability to know that research only exists in relation to other people ... you know ... So, contracting becomes a very important sort of ... or client management, client facing ... you know ... project management ... you know ... because now you know SPSS is not is not just for you to play with but it's a tool for you to deliver insights ... you know ... the statistical technique, research methodology are just tools for you to ... to service another person ...you know ... and ... you sort of have to figure out that ... what can I use ... you know ... for this person ... you know ... and that ... that ... that ... that becomes quite invaluable cause. Now it's not just SPSS, it's a tool for you to service another person ... you know ... I don't know if I am making sense”.

P9: *“This graduate can then be of assistance to ... to write this up to reports, be able to do presentations on ... on the findings. So being able to bring data to life is important ... you know ... being able to ... from numbers or ... or themes that come up to ... to ... to a PowerPoint to say yeah, we had five participants ... and of these or all five ... you know ... had unanimous agreement on this specific aspect or whatever it is. And ... and then of course, the software that comes with it, if you are doing qualitative, they should be well versed on the Atlas.TI and in terms of quantitative they should have an idea on ... on ... how to use Excel, SPSS. Hey, there's a buzz with R ... but ... you know ... yeah, as a graduate in ... in research, you should be able to ... to use these software's because they're then assist you to ... to be able to interpret your ... your data to be able to present on ... on the findings”.*

P10: *“I feel that both theoretical knowledge or research and the practical side of research is very important because one thing you notice as a graduate is that we speak about these things theoretically and say this is what quantitative research is, this is what qualitative research is, this is what data collection is, or this is what semi structured interviews are, all these ... this is what observational ethnographic research is, but it is not the same as to when you have gone out there and done it physically ... you know ... So, I believe that theoretical knowledge in regard to all research aspects, both quantitative, both qualitative, sampling methods and data collection methods. Anything ... any theory related to research is necessary theoretically, but at the same time having an exposure to it practically is also very important, so I need not say I know what ... semi structured interviews are. But I need to say I've also experienced what it is as well ... you know ... I've conducted a semi-structured interview as well. So, I feel that those ... those are very important skills that ... that a research psychologist needs to know. So, everything like and all-round holistic knowledge on what research is ... is really important”.*

In terms of specific research skills, participants had different opinions regarding the focus of researchers. Some employers appreciated graduates with broad knowledge and understanding of different research methods.

P3: *“I think an important one is we do like people that can do both qualitative and quantitative research because we think it answers different questions ... around what*

we have, and I think that's why we, we ... we like the combination of it, so we don't necessary want somebody that has just one type of skill set, we like a multidisciplinary ... ummh ... approach. We looking for people with very strong understanding of ethics and what you can and what you can't do in that particular space".

P7: "It would be great if you have someone with mixed method because you'll never know in terms of the size and the population of the studies that we normally conduct. It differs according to industry to industry".

P5: "We have different clientele and due to that, our research skills have to be diverse to be able to address our client's needs. Although we deal with a number of statistical related jobs, we do get some qualitative work from NGO's etc... So, you realize that within the organization we might have people with both kind of skills qualitative and quantitative and some would have better strength in qualitative or quantitative and they get assigned to different clients ...umh... depending on their skill set".

P6: "It's just choosing the correct or appropriate methodology for the task ...right... if you ask me differently, you'd ask me what do I prefer, I prefer quantitative method. For someone who's still new in the field it's better for them to be exposed before they can ... but which methodology is better... they all the same it's just choosing appropriate methodology for ... for what is asked".

P10: "It's important for ... for one to know how to conduct data collection ... that ... that ... that is ... that is very important. It is very important to know how to conduct ... so data collection would be your ... interviews would be ... yeah ... anything to do with interviews. It is important to know your ... your ... your, what do they call it ... eerr ... your sampling methods ... you know ... because they are very ... and ... and ... you to know knowledge ... you know ... theoretical knowledge about the types of sampling methods, the types of methodologies that they belong under, and the type of impact that both theoretical impact and ... and ... and ... and practical impact that these type of sampling methods would have, how they would impact your study".

Some employers in this study indicated that organisations appreciated good educational backgrounds and subject knowledge, aligned with the organisation's specialisation. For instance, P1 stated that, for their organisation, a psychometric background was essential for one to join the organisation.

P1: *“Ja you working with the psychological data, ummhh...you tend to find very ummh... few people actually who...who are interested in the psychometrics side of things because it's very technical, but many that come must have experience”*

However, other organisations considered research knowledge as sufficient fundamental subject knowledge for new entrants to be part of the organisation.

P2: *“I mean I can also say like background... I mean background, so we look at Honours [pause] in many fields ... you know ... as long as ... you know... you know ... how to do research right”.*

Although all participants confirmed an appreciation of educational backgrounds, subject knowledge expectations differed for each organisation. Another essential point was ensuring that new employees complied with the organisations' culture and the cultural aspects of organisations, guiding new employees to adjust and fit well into the work environment. The *formation of initial signals* also links to the coercive isomorphic because this isomorphic result from formal or informal pressures applied to the organisation by the government, other organisations, or the cultural expectations of the environment (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008). The normative compliance element is discussed in the following section.

5.3.3 Normative compliance

The cultural-cognitive element of sociological institution theory includes shared understanding of compliance, beliefs, assumptions and ideologies, with essential structures that are culturally supported (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005), and also shared conceptions of the real world through which meaning is understood (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010, Kent et al., 2022). Therefore, the values and beliefs for the sociological institutional theory shape and work as a filter that people and organisations use to view reality, and give meaning to such reality as they interpret their world (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Hanson, 2001;

Kent et al., 2022). In addition, individuals of the organisation must conform to cultural structures of the organisation, if they are to receive support and legitimacy (Kent et al., 2022; Scott, 1987). For this study, participants indicated that their organisations promoted compliance in different ways that could include appreciating employees, engaging them in different aspects, and making them feel part of the organisation.

P3: *“We tried to make sure ...[pause]... that our employee value proposition is relevant to engage people to want to work for us ... eerr ... and make that commitment to us in the longer term, and an employee value proposition speaks to things like do they have challenging work, do they have further opportunities to grow, do they have opportunities to train and develop in our environment, and what is provided and offered to them in regards to that. Do they have competitive remuneration, ...eerr... and do they receive constant and consistent feedback, and we measure that constantly through things like our employee engagement surveys ...umhh... as well as focus groups and getting feedback from employees around what is their experience of the organisation as an employer”.*

P7: *“In terms of company culture ... it’s a very diverse organisation with different people from different backgrounds, different cultures, different region. So, a person to be able to fit in properly in the organisation ... obviously there will be some programmes that will be introduced ... ummh... some team building exercise in order to involve them in the The business and so that they know exactly how the company operates. So, those will be things we do to assist them to adjust within the company”.*

P4: *“The first thing that is most important in our belief is... is obviously we speak about the love of God... so we practice the love of Christ as well in our organisation”.*

P9: *“I just wanted to say because it also then makes the ... the graduate, feel valuable ... you know ... and it's ... it's difficult to ... to leave when ... it's ... it's let me put it this way... it's easier to live when you feel that you are not ... anyway they won't even miss me ... you know ... they don't recognise that I'm here ... I was just ... I was just working towards their goal, but if it's now turns around and it ... it's to my benefit as*

well ... you know ... I can add this to my CV ... you know ... and not ... not ... not necessarily ... you say that I'm gonna leave in the next five years, but it's boosting me as a person”.

Organisations promote organisational culture and compliance in different ways that may benefit both organisations as well as employees. Some organisations ensure that they have programmes in place to empower new entrants to fit into the organisations, while other organisations focus on the company’s vision and mission to promote compliance. However, employees are expected to comply in a satisfactory manner that is aligned to the organisations’ culture. Hence, the sociological institutionalism provides a broad cultural theoretical perspective of organisations, and focuses on the diffusion of ideas and other cultural forms as the search for legitimacy to achieve the desired behaviours (Amenta & Ramsey, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022). The compliance promotion theme is discussed in the next section.

5.3.3.1 Compliance promotion

According to Cai (2013); Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe (2019), in terms of enhancing productivity, some employers may facilitate the *public learning* process by creating opportunities for information sharing among employers, or directly distributing information concerning the performance of the graduates at workplaces among employers in the field. In addition, productivity is enhanced through team building, effective communication, social support, relational justice, and leadership style (Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). The cultural-cognitive element emphasises shared ideas that create the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning succeeds (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Scott, 2008). Participants of this study pointed out that organisations ensured that new entrants were aware of their work environment by encouraging meaningful adjustment and support within the organisation, through assessment and providing feedback to encourage performance improvement.

P1: *“What we would do for all employees for those who are ... ummhh ... employed ... eerr ... we would give the feedback on their assessment results and we would ... ummhh ... put that into the... whole performance management plan. ... Ummhh ... so in ...in our performance process we don’t only focus on your... ummhh ... technical performance and delivery but we do focus... you know ... we also include personal development ... ummhh ... working towards career goals and things like that”.*

P3: *“So, we treat our graduates the same way that we treat any of other employee that joins the organisation. So, they go through a ... thorough on-boarding process, where they are introduced to the organisation, who we are and what we stand for”.*

P10: *“I feel that being loyal to the ways research should be done is very important. It's one of the skills that an organisation should actually allow researchers to actually ... or rather, allow themselves to give to researchers that are working in their organisation. One of ... another thing is ... not confiding your researchers to ... to a specific way of you doing things because remember ... I feel that ... eerr ... specific ... specific topics call for different types of research methodologies ... you know ... and I believe that research psychologist or research graduates have the ability to actually see ... these differences, to say, OK, this topic is better off when it's conducted qualitatively or quantitatively or ... or in ... in a mixed methods where ... you know ... so, if ... yeah ... I think a research organisation that hires these research ... ummhh ... psychologists or graduates should allow or should give their researchers that freedom to say, OK, this is how you can come ... or tackle this topic ... you know ... and not say to them ... here's a research topic, it needs to be done quantitatively and that's it ... you know ... because then you are confiding, then you are saying to them you are not able to think beyond thinking of your own research, I mean, you're thinking of your own way of conducting research ... you know ... give them that thing to say, this is what we want from you, this is what we want to find out and give them that opportunity and the time and the respect to actually ... and the trust to say we trust you as this graduate to go out there and conduct this research without us giving you boundaries on how it should be done or what type of methodology you should conduct. Because I think you are confining ... you are confining them and you are limiting their knowledge by giving them directive to say do it this way ... you know ... which can be frustrating”*

Although organisations encourage performance improvement, as indicated above, some participants believed in having a proper research psychology designation to appreciate and retain these graduates accordingly.

P8: *Look ...the ... the difficulty I think ... you know ... with clinicians, for instance, when they work in government, it's very clear that you have a designation ... eerr ... clinicians ... you know ... the problem with us is that ... our designation is very rare. I think we're ... the only place where I know where they use the designation, research psychology is in the military ... ummhh ... I don't know who else I'll ... I'll be quite honest; I don't know if you've seen anywhere else where they use the designation, they call someone a research psychologist. So, and ... and this comes to issues of remuneration, I guess. It is tricky because when you don't have the designation being recognized, like let's say clinicians and understanding what skill set they bring to the organisation and how important the skill set is. Then I ... I think the market becomes very tricky to say what is the market ... you know ... currently ... the only time I was paid as a research psychologist was when I did my internship. So, I don't know, it's a tricky one because ... how do you retain or how do you remunerate research psychologist properly, so that you ... you keep them within organisations. But when you don't even know what the designation is ... you know ... which is why I'm like ... I'm wondering in future if ... you know ... are we not gonna call ... should we not just call a research psychologist, data scientists ... you know ... within the social sciences, for instance ... you know ... or data social scientists. Maybe this is what they are ... you know ... And maybe then you have a much more clear idea of what is a research psychologist ... Because we are actually data scientists in ... in different contexts”.*

Some organisations allowed their employees to be creative and flexible in terms of performance, although there were rules guiding compliance and performance within the organisation.

P5: *“We believe that in order for somebody to be creative they need to be themselves. So, we don't have restrictive policies or ... ummhh ... rules within the organisation. ... ummhh ... the organisation is made-up of young people, flexible times and ... ummh ... working times and ... eerr ... you know there's work from home and work from work ... and ... ummhh ... the dress code is not restricted to... to ... a kind of a uniform”.*

In addition, other organisations stress that it is important for researchers to adhere to and comply with the requirements of conducting research.

P6: *“So, it’s not necessarily an individual who needs to comply to this. So, it’s also understanding what are the ... what are the ... the rules for research. For example, if whether you subscribe to SAMRA or not you have to do that ...like when you speak about ethical conduct”.*

P10: *“These research graduates are people that or rather individuals that know their research and or rather know what research is, they've done it intensively so ... you know ... and they know ... I think knowledge or supposedly they ... they are meant to have knowledge that ... eerr ... is more than just an ordinary research graduate. So, in ... in ... in ... in them ... having knowledge of this it is very important for you to be able to retain these individuals. Or for you to retain their loyalty, it is important that an organisation is also ... loyal, mindful to research ways ... you know ... to say we are conducting research the way it ... it ... it should be conducted ... you know ... there are no shortcuts and I can ... like you mentioned ... there are organisations that want fast turnaround times ... you know ... in terms of research and there are lot of things or research skills or research ... ways that are compromised along the lines ... you know ... and that can be very discouraging to research psychology graduate”.*

For these participants, compliance promotion was encouraged through involvement with employees on different levels to achieve common understanding and expected performance. Therefore, compliance is promoted through sharing ideas on how graduates should abide by the rules of an organisation. Furthermore, the values of the organisations are considered important, and play a role in encouraging new employees to fit in, in an organisation. Therefore, important values are discussed in the next section.

5.3.3.2 Important values

Potential employers consider graduates with socialisation skills because through these skills graduates acquire personal identity, values, norms and behaviour, which are appropriate in different social contexts, and these values form attitudes and work behaviour that is aligned with the goals of the organisations (Cavanagh et al., 2015; Sugiarti et al., 2021). In addition, understanding graduates’ moral development and global citizenship assisted in exploring the relevance of the acquired attributes that may allow graduates to work in different work environments, either culturally or demographically. The participants in this study indicated the

benefits of working with employees who respect different social contexts, and appreciate other people's differences to find a way towards working in harmony with others.

P1: *"Learn from the others and understand ummhh where others are coming from. And ummh essentially the most important thing for me is that you have ... eerrr ... integrity and ... ummhhh ... and a very strong respect for the ethics of the profession as well"*.

P10: *"Loyalty I think comes ... comes at the forefront because ... ummh ... because loyalty, I think ... be it your consultant, be it to you are an academic researcher ... you know ... I think you need to be loyal to your participants, you need to be loyal to your clients as well ... you know ... uummhh ... trust is also a huge one ... ummh ... as an academic researcher, I cannot go out there and research and use participants that don't trust me ... you know ... because, I mean ... it ... it doesn't make sense. How am I going to get those participants to provide me even with sensitive information if I am looking for sensitive information, if they don't trust me with that information ... you know ... if they don't trust me to be ... to ... to take care of issues of confidentiality ... you know ... so, it ... and ... and how does an organisation even give me their work if they don't even trust me in ... in ... in ... in coming up with information that is honest. And I think respect ... touching up on respect, it is always important that in however we conduct ourselves, when we come across our participants, no matter what the nature of your participants are, you need to respect them enough because they also bring value into your work ... your line of work as well"*.

For other organisations, the promotion of important values depends on adhering to research ethics which researchers should be aware of, as it encourages employees' appropriateness in different social contexts.

P3: *"We would expect our researchers to have a thorough understanding of ... ummh ... ethical matters and how we should approach research. On top of that, we would expect them to be able to do research in a sensitive environment. Their ability to work with, ... ummh ... you know ... sensitive topics and sensitive matters, and really to comply with the ethical principle of do no harm"*.

In addition, other organisations emphasised that employees must be guided by company values. For these organisations, it is important for employees to adhere to the company's values in terms of service delivery.

P6: *“And that's why I'm saying the compliance component and the ... the principles of the company ... what do they call it those usually ... the values ... usually they always tie together. I mean one of the values ... I mean for any organisation most commonly is like integrity. So, the integrity will deal with the whole concept, I'd say, if you breakdown integrity it will probably talk to you to be honest, dah ... dah ... dah, which would then talk to that. So, that's why I'm not saying it's specific to research, it's specific to this but I'm saying it's... it's ... it's within the company values as well”.*

P4: *“We're also a Christian organisation by the way ... like a Christian organisation founded on biblical values and that...that's how we operate”.*

P5: *“I think one of our values is ... ummhh ... quality... ummhh... we aim to... to ... to ... to ... to ... to ... produce ... you know ... quality services for our clientele. We are passionate about the quality of our services”.*

P7: *“...Ummh... our values ... it's actually ... it's openness and trustworthy and ... dedication, we believe in having dedicated employees who are trustworthy. Transparency goes with openness right”.*

P9: *“Being true to ... to yourself and ... and ... and also to those that you'll be working with ... you know ... either being participants or colleagues and the value of being a psychologist that mean ... you know and what is this now I'm trying to find the way to is it accountability being able to account within the task you're able to ... to deliver on it or at least work towards ... you know ... something and ... and not just say and I am new in this organisation there's others who've been doing this before I mean you've been given a task but then you step away from completing it for whatever reason without communicating with someone else and I did not what ... what wait which describes someone who just let's go of their responsibilities hmm by then the detriment of ... of the group”.*

According to these participants, ethics and company values were crucial for employees to adhere to when working with others. The impression is that consideration of the environment and all those affected in the research process, is important for these organisations. Another theme emerged during data collection, and the expected responses from the potential employees are discussed below. The sociological institutionalism emphasises the importance of values in defining the nature of organisations and individual behaviour within symbolic structures. Hence, important organisational values are basic capital for social ways to create harmony within the work environment (Peters, 2012; Sugiarti et al., 2021).

5.3.3.3 Expected responses

Graduates should possess an ability to conduct academic research and show a scholarly attitude towards complex organisational and societal problems. The scholarly attitude includes creating scholarly writings, ensuring quality, disseminating to the academic community, and preserving the writings for future use (McCabe, 2010; Narayan et al., 2018; Steur et al., 2012). As scholars, graduates should be leaders and produce new knowledge through inquiry and critique. Hence, leadership entails the ability to think in complex terms, because it is a trait with qualities used to interact in situations (Flores, 2012; Petre, 2020). Participants included in this study acknowledged the importance of new entrance's mindset, concerning work environment. Their views range from willingness to the ability (for graduates) to learn and listen.

P5: “We basically ...eerr... train them coming from university, we look for passion ... ummhh... we look for the people that are passionate, dedicated and willing to learn to ... you know ... to ... to ... to work or learn more in this industry and then we take them up with their qualification that they have from the university”.

P1: “The basics when you working in an organisation ... ummhh ... you need to be willing to learn, so I for example will [inaudible], you need to be able to challenge but you also need to be able to compromise”.

P3: “I think we also look at ...eerr... behaviour, from a strong perspective, so behaviourally ... you know ... the willingness for the graduate to learn, do they have the learning orientation”.

In addition, P2 mentioned that for this organisation, it was important to employ graduates who were willing to learn and adjust to the company's way of doing things.

P2: *"Ja... I think the ability is just eerr listen...right and learn [pause] that's ... that's what we mainly focusing on ...as long as people are willing to listen and willing to learn ... eeerrrr ... they can be able to adjust within the organisation"*.

P9: *"They should have ... eerr ... the concrete application of ... of the ... of the qualification, they should have an idea of ... what research is about ... you know ... the ... the whole research cycle that you come up with the research questions and you ... you have this idea ... in terms of your topic, it's broad enough"*.

For other participants, their focus was on the company recruitment process, and that the company would search for certain candidates with specific exposure.

P6: *"I would always recruit someone that ...eerr... in the research world, they say they come from agency side. Agencies is ...eerr... research agencies that do research for ...ummhh... different clients. The reason I say that is because at agencies they teach them the fundamentals of the foundation so they will teach you like SPSS, they will teach you Excel, they will teach you how to analyse data and all of those things"*.

P7: *"...Eerr... in terms of our recruitment process normally we go to universities and we ...the ... there's a specific unit that actually have the ... maybe that has the database of all the graduates that have been with the institution and we contact all those universities"*.

P4: *"Just be yourself, we don't want to change people, just be yourself, be comfortable"*.

P8: *"I was also thinking about another skill ... you ... you ... you ... I don't think you leave with it, because it's based on the experience, the ability to manage projects I think is also very important because research projects are generally that ... you know ... there's a defined time frame, or defined beginning and the end. And... a good understanding of project management and even maybe client management is also very"*

important, but I think those are the skills that you will learn through experience... anyway, no one can fully teach you those things ... because ...you don't know the scope of projects and what the project ... how long it takes ... you know ... if you haven't done it before”.

P10: “So, I'd expect them to know a lot more about research. And like I mentioned earlier, methodology approaches, types of research that are there ... you know ... the ontologies there, the aetiologies ... you know ... all of that information because I believe that, that's what is covered and I would expect their knowledge to be much more extensive, in regards to research, even though they would not know how to conduct quantitative research, maybe, let's say they are more familiar with qualitative research, even though they wouldn't know how to conduct either of them. Maybe they only know how to conduct quant or not qual and all of that, but they should have an idea of the differences between the two”.

The sociological institutional theory suggests that much organisational behaviour occurs in response to social pressures, arising from the common environment created by other organisations (Kent et al., 2022; Suddaby et al., 2013). Therefore, a better understanding of the decision-making process within an environment encourages how employers' function and improves chances of making more carefully considered decisions (Furusten, 2013; Lewis et al., 2018). The sociological institutional theory considers organisations as responding to socially constructed beliefs, about what constitutes efficient and effective organisational behaviour (Furusten, 2013; Lewis et al., 2018). In these organisations, expectations from new entrants vary from company to company. Some companies follow a specific recruitment process to acquire employees that would fit perfectly in their organisations. On the other hand, some companies rely on an individual's ability and willingness to learn the expectations of the organisation, whereas other organisations did not want to change their employees, as long as they were passionate and dedicated to their work, which may assist graduates with the element of continuous learning to remain relevant in a particular work industry. Also, the aspect of work experience emerged during the data collection phase and is discussed next.

5.3.3.4 Work experience

Graduates with work experience stand a good chance of securing employment, as they may apply the learned knowledge to their occupation (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Hence, WIL assists graduates in the transition from HEI's to work and become productive, as they transition into the work environment (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Moreover, exposure to work and life experience assists graduates to develop capabilities that may enhance their employability. Although most participants acknowledged the importance of work experience prior to obtaining employment, some participants mentioned that they did not expect graduates to obtain work experience before joining their organisations. However, employers pointed out that they supported the development of new entrants as soon as they join their organisations as indicated under the career development theme. In addition, new entrants' development is designed to ensure that these employees perform their work activities accordingly, and therefore work experience depends on the job at a given time. For instance, one participant mentioned that, for their organisation, it was not necessary for graduates to have work experience prior to joining the organisation. However, it depended on their role.

P3: "No, not necessarily, it depends on the role that they are applying for. For some roles, we appoint ...ummhh... straight out of university or straight out of school, other roles we do need ... we do require previous experience. So, it's going to depend on the role or project that they are entering into".

P1 emphasised that their organisation specifically required a certain profession (from graduates) to join the organisation. On the other hand, some organisations acknowledged work experience obtained through WIL.

P1: "Experience received within the degree, in terms of the work that you have done ... you know ... whether its projects that you have handed in or your [inaudible] working experience to be able to do the analysis that we will need you to do".

P6: "As an intern try your best to first of all get into an agency first, like there's a lot of agencies like Kantar, Ask Africa, K&L ...there's a lot of agencies and they ... and those agencies what they then do is they going to stretch you for the first two to three years, you are going to work mid-nights but once you've done your ground years there ...like your zero to like five years there, once you then move whether you move

independently from there or whether you move into corporate or even moving in the ladders of that thing, you're going to have so much depth of the topic”.

P8: “OK, there’s two ways to it. Look, I’m a big fan because I ... I think I benefited from Work Integrated Learning. There’s ... there’s ... there’s ... there’s nothing wrong with Work Integrated Learning ... I think it poses a challenge when ... you have a graduate ... who then doesn’t work in a research-intensive environment ... you know... because they are not able to take the theoretical knowledge ... you know ... and then apply to a specific ... ummh ... context ... you know ... The beauty about, for instance, I mean ... I remember with my experience at the at ... at ... at the military is that, in the MARC course we would do ... we would work on SPSS, we’d run models to do those things. But when I got into the internship environment, I had to redo those things, relearn them, and apply them to specific projects in the context that I was in ... you know ... and ... and then those things are no longer theory anymore”.

P10: “I’ve never believed in ... in ... in ... in ... in graduates ... ummhh ... getting experience post graduating. I’ve always been a huge advocate of Work Integrated Learning ... you know ... because I don’t believe in that notion that we only hire experienced people because where should a graduate gain experience if you’re not gonna hire them ... you know ... So, I believe in ... in ... in ... in ... in ... in ... in Work Integrated Learning. They should have the practical experience of what research is beyond just the ... the ... the way it’s written in books ... that I believe they should have. But in terms of work experience ... and I think that’s where it becomes tricky to say ... work ... are we talking employer experience ... Because I believe that the work experience comes with different facets in it ... eerr ... work experience comes with ... does this person have to come with organisational behaviour ... you know ... to say this is how you behave in an organisation, or does this person only have to come with the research experience work ... you know ... Because if they have to come with organisational behaviour experience, then it’s very tricky for me to say they should come into a work environment with it because ... the work environment should hire me for me to be able to gain that organisational behaviour experience. But in terms of the research experience, I believe that an individual or graduate must come with that experience into a work environment, so ... it doesn’t have to be ... eerr ... experience on the level of that work environment because I ... I for one can say I was a MARC ...

I was not a MARC graduate when I got into ... eerr ... what ... what do you call this ... a market research organisation that I worked for ... I was ... I was not ... I was not a graduate as yet. But when I got into that environment I already came with research experience. So, as a research environment ... I was not absolutely empty in terms of what research is ... what ... you know ... I knew the basic research ... concepts ... I knew the basic general research practical ... ways of doing it practically ... you know ... so that when I do come into touch with what they're doing specifically with research, they don't start from scratch in explaining certain concepts to me, I know them already. So, in terms of the research experience, I had it already, it's just that I didn't know specifically how they conducted their research. So, I feel that it is important for a research graduate to come in with research knowledge ... with research experience."

In addition, other participants indicated that their organisations appreciated and considered the background of new entrants. The background considered as a requirement, included work experience and prior knowledge of new employees.

P6: "There's still some fundamentals that one can learn ... if graduates start at an agency for like at least a year, or maybe do an internship there, it would fast track when graduates step into incorporate. Because in corporate, they don't teach you or they don't focus on the fundamentals, because they usually ... in corporate, they would usually get you into a role to ... manage agencies".

Furthermore, other organisations did not expect graduates to acquire work experience prior to joining the organisation.

P7: "No, we do not expect them to have work experience ... as long as they can demonstrate that they understand what their job entails".

Despite the different perspectives participants had regarding work experience, these organisations appreciated graduates who could perform given tasks based on the knowledge they had obtained. The above-mentioned themes indicate that organisations had expected ways of accountability through compliance and expected responses from the graduates. Hence, the cultural-cognitive element of the institutional theory places emphasis on shared conceptions of

the real world and frames through which meaning is given (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010, Gohar & Abrar, 2022). The following section provides the summary and conclusion to this chapter.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter focused on providing the findings on the feedback received from the participants of this study, during the data collection phase, with the focus on what employers believed are required skills of MARC graduates. Therefore, the background information of those who participated in this study indicated the category of organisations involved in this study. These categories included different organisations ranging from market research, academia, psychometry, insurance, NPO and independent consultants in academia. Thus, the variety was achieved with different beliefs and opinions on the feedback captured during the data collection phase. As a result, the different backgrounds of these organisations contributed to the diversity of the feedback and opinions presented in this study. In addition, the background of these organisations and their representatives specified the diversity of the participants involved in this study. Also, based on the guidance of the applicable theory in this study, this chapter provided a break-down of the sociological theory elements to understand the important requisite skills according to this theory. These elements indicated the important roles each element had towards ensuring that employees adhered to the company's regulations, and appropriate conduct as well as appropriate values.

Other essential points included findings focused on themes and sub-themes that were constructed from the interviews, embracing the elements adopted from the social institutional theory. These included the three elements of the social institutional theory: normative expectation, appropriate behaviour, and normative compliance. Therefore, the themes for this study were deducted from the related theory, even though sub-themes were generated by the researcher from the collected data during interviews. Additionally, the themes as well as the sub-themes identified, indicated some complexity for some of these employers to be specific on what is required by these organisations and NPO from the MARC graduates to ensure employability. However, representatives from these organisations mentioned their company requirements from the MARC graduates in terms of what each organisation represented. This feedback helped gain understanding of different requisite skills effective for various organisations and NPO.

Although, participants of this study expressed different expectations about the requisite skills of MARC graduates, the feedback received was discussed in relation to the research question of this study further and reflecting in the following chapter. Therefore, to make sense and provide a detailed understanding of the feedback from the participants, the next chapter presents a discussion which elaborates on the findings of this study. Thereafter, the following chapter dissects the research question of this study in relation to the findings, and focuses on the results of this study, discussing and addressing the research question, as well as reflecting on the recommendations, limitations, and conclusion of the study.

Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the main elements and research question are addressed and summarised. This study intended to provide clarity and awareness of the expected MARC graduate skills, which contribute towards employment of these graduates, and in this regard, the social institutional theory was applicable to consider the employers' expected skills from these graduates. Three elements of this theory revealed the expected graduate skills. As discussed in other sections, such as Chapter 2, according to the social institutional theory, these elements include regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements. The regulative element stresses rule-setting and plays a stabilising role by prescribing actions through formal or informal rules that establish, monitor, and sanction activities (Kent et al., 2022; Scott, 2008). The normative element involves the standards and cognitive frameworks that create and control professions and other moral standards-making bodies (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). Furthermore, the cultural-cognitive element includes shared understanding compliance, with essential structures that are culturally supported (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005).

Findings of this study were discussed in Chapter 5, and information about participants was provided. This information highlighted the background of the participants, the industry which each organisation represented, as well as the period of serving the community or being in existence. Feedback was presented under three different elements inspired by the sociological institutional theory, namely normative expectations, appropriate behaviour, and normative compliance. Additionally, under each of these categories, the researcher identified themes that emerged during the interviews, as well as from the literature review of this study. Themes were related to the three elements and supported by direct quotes from the verbatim transcripts filed during the data analysis phase.

In this chapter, findings of this study, as well as addressing the research question in connection with the sociological institutional theory elements, are discussed. In terms of this study, a reflection on the different opinions received from the participants was considered, and the requisite skills of MARC graduates were recognised and understood as being important for employment of these graduates. In addition, the sociological institution theory elements were a guide to understand insights of employers that might make it possible for MARC graduates to become employable after obtaining their qualification. As stated, the aim of this study was to provide clarity and awareness of the expected MARC graduate skills that would contribute

towards potential employment of these graduates. Furthermore, the objectives of this study included the following:

- To describe the employers' expectations from the MARC graduates; and
- To explore the gap between the employers' expectations and MARC graduates' skills

In addition, the research question for this study was based on the following: what the skills required by employers for MARC graduates to be employable in the South African labour market? Moreover, it was determined (as noted in previous chapters and discussion), that the job market expected MARC graduates to be equipped with appropriate research skills. Thus, the role of MARC graduates in an organisation, which includes the provision of psychology research activities, was determined through the skills required by employers of these graduates. Therefore, this study intended to explore employers' expectations from MARC graduates and envisioned to understand why these organisations employ MARC graduates. It was also important for the researcher to understand the role these graduates play within the research component of organisations, and the experience of employers in working with MARC graduates. Equally important, through this study, the intention was to explore the gap between employers' expected skills and MARC graduates' skills, and how to avoid such gap. The above research question, a recap of relevant chapters and discussion of the findings, are addressed in the next section.

6.2 Discussion of the findings

The findings of this study are based on the feedback received from the participants of the study during data collection phase. These findings were presented and inspired by the three elements of the sociological institutional theory. As indicated in Chapter 5, these elements were presented, and included themes and sub-themes derived from the theory and emerged from the interviews. The three elements of the sociological institutional theory are reflected and discussed to address the research question, in the next section. These elements, as deliberated on in Chapter 2, are displayed as the prescribed expected standards of conformity, the appropriate organisational conduct through regulations, and social connection through organisational values and beliefs.

The prescribed expected standards of conformity

The first element adopted from the sociological institutional theory is the normative element, rooted in the processes of professionalisation or achieving those desired behaviours. Universities as well as professional certification and accreditation agencies impose the values, codes, and standards (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). The identified themes under the normative expectations element incorporated general expectations, completed qualification, affiliation, standards, and regulations, and career development. Also, some of the sub-themes included alignment with the organisation, the preferred qualifications, registration with a professional board with a meaningful connection and networking, as well as being empowered through learning and placement. Employers of MARC graduates mentioned their normative expectations for the employability of these graduates. For instance, employers indicated that when graduates join the work world, they should have completed their qualifications and be affiliated with professional boards for meaningful networking. As indicated in Chapter 3, professional boards do not just provide platforms for networking or meaningful connection. These boards serve as regulatory frameworks for professions, including MARC graduates. During our discussions, it was noted that the HPCSA was not the only regulating body for research psychology professionals, Others included SAMEA, SAMRA and SARIMA (Rascher, 2016). In support of this, employers indicated that professional regulators were equipped to assist with regulatory framework included HPCSA, SAMRA, and ISPP.

Furthermore, employers mentioned that professional regulators assisted graduates and professionals with knowledge expansion. As part of career development, professional regulators encourage graduates and professionals to engage in continuous career development through different engagements. As a result, employers of MARC graduates indicated that it was important for these graduates to ensure their development through continuous learning, engaging in empowerment training and courses, graduate placements, as well as networking. Therefore, the normative expectations of employers involve MARC graduates being exposed to research, aligning themselves with related organisations, affiliate themselves with regulatory boards, obtaining completed qualifications, and consistently empowering themselves to remain relevant in the world of work.

Employers' expectations from MARC graduates emerged under the normative expectations element of sociological institution theory. Generally, employers expected graduates who were

willing to adjust within their organisation and who could deliver or functionally understand research activities. Furthermore, under the general expectations theme, employers stressed the importance of graduates aligning with the organisations they intend to work with, meaning that one should be familiar with the operations of the organisation, the culture, the vision, targets, and goals of the organisations. Moreover, having employees aligned with an organisation boosts productivity and commitment towards the organisation.

Another essential point which emerged during the data collection phase pointed out by employers is that MARC graduates should perform their expected roles effectively, and have a completed qualification. Hence, the theme 'completed qualification' emerged from all conversations the researcher had with the participants. Further, it was communicated that depending on the role a MARC graduate will perform, the completed qualification may be an Honours degree, Masters, or a Doctoral degree. Moreover, those with an Honours degree would work under supervision, whereas those with Masters and Doctoral degrees could work independently. Additionally, a Master's degree for MARC graduates was recommended by employers as a relevant qualification for one to effectively perform research related activities without supervision.

The research psychology category is an important part of the psychology discipline and is essential in transforming and cultivating psychological facets, including all psychological practise and training (Laher, 2014). The role played by research psychologists includes creating and applying research methods for developing psychological and psychometric assessment tools, as well as steering monitoring and evaluation of interventions (Rascher, 2016). Participants in this study had different views about the roles played by MARC graduates within the research component of their organisations. The most important role played by MARC graduates is the provision of new knowledge through different research inquiries and critiquing existing information. Additionally, they should be able to manage entire projects. Furthermore, some of the roles occupied by MARC graduates include the role of research managers, consulting specialists, data processing professionals, data collection professionals, research professionals, organisation executives, scientific research associates, behavioural scientists and market researchers (SAMRA, 2021).

According to participants, the role played by MARC graduates is guided by the regulating bodies, for instance SAMRA and HPCSA. These regulators provide guidance on the scope of practise for the MARC graduates, and organisations support the knowledge application based

on the requirements of specific functions. Thus, MARC graduates focus on delivering psychological related research, and critically reviewing existing knowledge, by engaging in research on different topics. Accordingly, participating organisations that focus on providing psychological and psychometric services, benefit more from MARC graduates contributing through delivering psychological related research. Hence, the roles played by these graduates in such organisations include conducting ethical research through designing, managing, evaluating measurement and intervention programmes, reporting on, and supervising psychological research (HPCSA, 2019).

Furthermore, the roles played by MARC graduates differ according to the requirements of the organisations employing these graduates. For instance, for organisations focusing on market research, these graduates are involved in research about the performance of products in the market, checking market trends and providing research output that would guide organisations towards improving or maintaining their offerings, whereas organisations focusing on academia, these graduates are involved in academic research, teaching research methods and writing articles for future research. In another example, for organisations focusing on psychometry, MARC graduates are involved in research related to assessment tools for different topics. Lastly, for organisations focusing on consultation and NGO, these graduates are involved in research psychology aspects of the task at hand. Thus, participants of this study indicated that their organisations benefit from employing MARC graduates, as these graduates can adjust to their environment and apply their research knowledge to addressing the functional requirements of these organisations. Also, MARC graduates play a role in providing training and supervising other researchers, applying psychological research methods, monitoring, and evaluating psychological intervention or programmes.

Another essential point related to the data collection phase is that MARC graduates have knowledge and skills required in the research field, enabling them to play an important role into different research projects. As indicated by the above discussion, there are different roles played by MARC graduates in different organisations and NGO's, which lead to employers having different experiences in working with these graduates. Graduates should possess an ability to conduct academic research and have a scholarly attitude towards complex organisational and societal problems (Crespi & Ramos, 2021; McCabe, 2010; Omar et al., 2020; Steur et al., 2012). As scholars, graduates should be leaders and produce new knowledge through inquiry and critique (Barrie, 2004; Crespi & Ramos, 2021). However, there is a gap between employers' expectations and MARC graduates' skills obtained prior to joining the

work environment. One participant in this study mentioned that MARC graduates should be equipped with relevant skills to avoid the gap between what is practised in work environments and what is instilled into graduates at HEI's. In addition, this participant mentioned that it is unfair for students to get training on skills that are outdated and not applicable in practice. Therefore, this participant suggested that to avoid the gap between employer's expectations and MARC graduates' skills, HEI's should equip graduates with what is relevant in different research industries, so that these graduates may provide effective required services.

While this is the case, participants acknowledge the importance of empowering and developing new employees as they join their organisations. Some participants emphasised that their organisations specifically require a certain profession to join the organisation. On the other hand, some organisations acknowledge work experience obtained through work-integrated learning, while other participants indicated that their organisations appreciate and consider the background of new entrants. The considered background includes work experience and knowledge that new employees bring with to the organisations. Hence, the theme of career development emerged with sub-themes including training, learning, courses, and placements. Therefore, to bridge the gap between employers' expectations and graduates' skills, organisations commit to developing employees towards desired outcomes. In addition to this, participants encourage graduates' willingness to learn through development opportunities, internships, and placements offered by different organisations. Furthermore, exposure to work and life experience assist graduates to develop their capabilities, which may enhance their employability and attain employers' expectations.

Although this is the case, normative expectations connect with the regulative element of the sociological theory, as these elements both focus on the regulations, and focus on external regulations by other institutions. Regulative elements focus on internal rules posed by the organisation, to encourage a specific behaviour from employees. Also, it is between these two elements that, employers can apply the recruitment process guided by external normative expectations about qualifying MARC graduates. Equally importantly, employers can determine their requirements in terms of appropriate conduct and knowledge application, guided by the rules of the organisations.

The appropriate organisational conduct through regulations

The second element adopted from the sociological institutional theory is the regulative element, which promotes appropriate behaviour and plays a balancing role by suggesting rules that sanction actions and specific behaviour within an organisation (Cai, 2012; Gohan & Arbar, 2022). The themes that arose from this element comprised appropriate conduct, generic skills, knowledge and work activities. In addition, some of the sub-themes under the appropriate behaviour included being professional, honest, adaptable, flexible, best attitude, moral, ethical, independent; acquiring communication skills, time management skills, intellectual ability, interpersonal skills, self-management, emotional intelligence; qualitative, quantitative, analyse data, conduct research, interpreting data, literature review, collecting data, writing proposals, project management, and psychometry. Employers of MARC graduates stressed the importance of ensuring that graduates who display a specific behaviour that fits within their organisations, were employed. Hence, the regulative element of sociological theory assists employers in laying a foundation of a set of rules, guiding the required conduct within organisations. Thus, the regulation processes involve the capacity to establish rules and the power to exercise control over the conformity of others to the rules (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Kent et al., 2022; Scott, 2008). To illustrate this, employers of MARC graduates mentioned that their organisations appreciate graduates with appropriate conduct, presented through best attitude, honesty, ethically, professionally, independently, and flexible to adapt to change. Therefore, MARC graduates are encouraged to obey the rules of the organisations and portray an appropriate behaviour conducive in different organisations to be employable.

In addition to appropriate behaviour, MARC graduates were expected to demonstrate and present with certain generic skills involving the development of certain common skills expected by recruiters and potential employers, such as time management, attention to detail, decision-making, communication, and an ability to work with others (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Tsitskari et al., 2017). For this reason, employers of MARC graduates emphasised the value of recruiting graduates with generic skills, which complement their qualifications and contribute towards effective performance in the work world. According to these employers, generic skills assist MARC graduates in effectively managing research projects, these include communication skills, managing one's emotions, understanding academic language, computer literacy, time management, interpersonal skills and self-management.

Furthermore, the regulative element of sociological theory allowed employers to necessitate mandatory research skills from the MARC graduates to achieve work activities with the knowledge received from their academic qualifications, such as degree subject knowledge, skills and understanding; as potential employers' judge graduates on how successfully they have completed their degree or qualification (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Suleman, 2017). Hence, employers of MARC graduates stated that the employability of these graduates links to an ability to apply knowledge to research activities including analysis of data, conducting research, interpreting data, compiling literature reviews, collecting data, writing proposals, managing projects, understanding mixed methods and applying appropriate methodology, statistics, marketing research, and social marketing. Employers of MARC graduates expect graduates who have been exposed to research processes and are able to apply these processes practically, to benefit different communities.

Organisations employ MARC graduates because these graduates have a completed qualification, research knowledge and skills required to perform research related activities. In addition, organisations employ MARC graduates because these graduates go through intense work integrated learning, which help them to be work ready as soon as they join the world of work. Also, MARC graduates are employed by organisations because they are exposed to the importance of ethical conduct, which assists them in adhering to it, as expected from researchers. For instance, participants of this study stressed the fact that, depending on the type of research one is involved in, they must adhere to certain research standards regulated by different professional bodies, including HPCSA and SAMRA. Therefore, some organisations employ MARC graduates because they are familiar with regulating bodies and are affiliated with these regulators; they can have a meaningful connection with the environment they work in. For instance, some professional bodies require research psychologists to adhere to a scope of practice as a guide on what services they may render, as well as their demeanour towards conducting research. Therefore, organisations employ MARC graduates that would adhere to the ethical considerations and abide by the rules of conducting research. However, for some organisations, affiliation to regulative bodies was not a requirement.

Another essential point mentioned by employers was that MARC graduates should have relevant subject knowledge, skills and understanding of research. The research knowledge acquired by these graduates prepares them for practical research. The skills these graduates should have include communication skills, interpersonal skills, self-management, emotional intelligence, academic language, listening, computer literacy. In addition, the subject

knowledge and work activities include qualitative, quantitative, analysing data, conducting research, interpreting data, literature review, collecting data, writing proposal, project management, psychometry, mixed methods, appropriate methodology, statistics, marketing research, social marketing, psychology, human resources, criminology, digital. Other requirements have been discussed in this chapter. It must be noted that MARC graduates should also be able to translate, integrate information, and apply various skills in different research situations aligned with on the organisational specialisation. Moreover, MARC graduates should put skills into practice and handle clients or projects they are involved into effectively. Furthermore, some employers appreciate graduates with broad knowledge and understanding of different research methods. Hence, MARC graduates are employed in different industries.

An appropriate behaviour, as considered by employers, emerged towards employability of MARC graduates. According to Gohar and Abrar (2022); Scott (2008), the regulative element of the sociological institutional theory stresses the importance of setting rules and regulations to encourage stability within organisations, which act as informal or formal prescribed rules to establish, monitor, and sanction activities. According to Gohar and Abrar (2022); Smit and Hitt (2005), the regulative element of the sociological institutional theory includes an appropriate basis of compliance, with regulatory rules and coercive mechanisms. Therefore, employers who participated in this study mentioned that they would employ MARC graduates with appropriate behaviour, which includes being professional, honest, adaptable, and with a best attitude.

Social connection through organisational values and beliefs

The third element adopted from the sociological institutional theory, namely normative compliance or cultural-cognitive element, includes the shared understanding of compliance, beliefs, assumptions, and ideologies with essential structures that are culturally supported (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). Under the normative compliance element, the themes that were identified, included compliance promotion, important values, expected responses and work experience. In addition, some of the sub-themes under the normative compliance element included performance and performance improvement; balance and working under pressure; willingness and the ability to learn; WIL, placements, and internships. In this regard, employers of MARC graduates alluded to the significance of employing graduates who comply with the normative compliance expectations of the organisations. This

was stressed through organisations ensuring employee compliance by promoting an environment to encourage effective performance. Hence, the sociological institutional theory considers the concept of values and beliefs through the cultural-cognitive element (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). Thus, the culturally conducive work environment for MARC graduates is promoted by employers, believing that company values and beliefs assist to put in place structures that encourage employee compliance. According to these employers, these values and beliefs include engaging with graduates who can balance their work, work under pressure, adhere to the expectations of the organisations and be committed to the organisations, respect participants and the environment, and be trustworthy, dependable, and honest. These values and beliefs are shared through the organisational culture to promote a common understanding within organisations. According to Gohar and Abrar (2022); Scott (2008) values interpreted as to what people think are important or right. The values are stable, long-lasting beliefs about what is important to a person or an organisation, and a belief is an internal feeling that something is true. The values and beliefs for the sociological institutional theory shape and work as a filter, that people and organisations use to view reality and give meaning to such reality, as they interpret their world (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022).

In addition, values and beliefs are important to view reality and give meaning to the world of research. Accordingly, MARC graduates should be willing or able to learn the values and beliefs shared internally to the organisations in ensuring common views and knowledge application towards research. Moreover, employers indicated that MARC graduates were expected to obtain work experience prior to joining the work world. For these employers, work experience of MARC graduates includes WIL, placements and internships, which allow research exposure for these graduates.

Feedback received from the employers of MARC graduates indicated they adhere to the requirements of the sociological institution theory by employing graduates based on the external standards, as indicated in normative expectations. In addition, these employers emphasised their requirements for employing MARC graduates who showed appropriate behaviour, promoted by the set rules of the organisations inspired by the regulative element of the sociological institutional theory. Also, employers rely on cultural expectations, as indicated, or understood in the normative compliance or cultural-cognitive element. Through the lens of sociological institutional theory, the decision-making process of employing

graduates is possible, and employers are encouraged by the assumptions of this theory to base their decisions in employing MARC graduates.

Organisational important values appeared under the normative compliance element. For instance, for employers of MARC graduates, promotion of important company values link to appropriate conduct and how to approach research. Also, sociological institutional theory considers the concept of values and beliefs through the cultural-cognitive element, which includes a shared understanding of compliance, with essential structures that are culturally supported (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Smit & Hitt, 2005). Therefore, values and beliefs for the sociological institutional theory shape and work as a filter that people and organisations use to view reality and give meaning to, as they interpret their world (De la Torre-Castro & Lindström, 2010; Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022). The values are commonly formed by a particular belief that is related to the worth of an idea or type of behaviour (Cai, 2012; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019). Hence, employers of MARC graduates believed that organisational values are important to shape employees towards compliance within the organisations. Therefore, these employers expect MARC graduates to adhere to the organisational values to fit with these organisations.

Compliance promotion emerged as another noteworthy theme under the normative compliance element. Under this theme, employers mentioned that they promoted employee's compliance to the organisations through rewarding them, providing growth opportunities, and by offering training and development programmes, providing support, offering competitive remuneration, and providing consistent feedback. In addition to this, one participant mentioned that although as organisations, employers of MARC graduates have their expectations from these graduates, they do not just let employees figure out work activities, but provide support whenever needed to promote effective adjustment.

More importantly, some employers indicated that they employ MARC graduates who have obtained work experience through internships and placements, as they tend to adjust easily to a workplace with minimum additional training. In addition, employers clarified that MARC graduates may have as little as six months work experience obtained in various exposures. However, one employer recommended for MARC graduates to get exposure from research agencies for two to three years to get more practical understanding prior becoming an independent researcher. Furthermore, with the work experience gained by these graduates, they could fill different roles within the organisations.

Participants of this study indicated different experiences of working with MARC graduates. Some participants indicated that they had experienced the benefits of working with employees that respect different social contexts, appreciate other people's differences, and find a way towards working in harmony with others. Employers of MARC graduates reported that they had experienced employees who adhere to research ethics as well as organisational values. More importantly, according to the participants, their experience of working with MARC graduates is that they considered research ethical issues. Hence, it was communicated that for MARC graduates to be effective in their field, they should adhere to the ethics in conducting research. One participant mentioned that it was always important for researchers to consider the environment when conducting research; this is done through the consideration and acknowledgement of research ethics. But, based on feedback in this study, although MARC graduates are well equipped to conduct research, they do not apply for employment in certain industries especially after placement in psychometry industry; it appears that some graduates prefer working in market research companies.

Another important aspect of working with MARC graduates is that they are well groomed, and what one participant called an "all-rounder", meaning these graduates are familiar with all research methods. Although some MARC graduates were stronger on a particular research method, participants indicated that these graduates were familiar with most research methods. As a result, one participant indicated that as an organisation, they prefer MARC graduates with knowledge and exposure to different research methods for effective production of research projects. In addition, another participant gave an example that it was always beneficial to the organisation to have people with different knowledge in research methods, as this contributes to the success of research projects. The experience of working with MARC graduates includes employing graduates who benefit organisations towards achieving projects requiring different research methods.

Furthermore, MARC graduates have been reported to be willing to learn, an expectation by employers from MARC graduates, who also indicated that they experienced these graduates as being willing to learn and further their knowledge, but also to remain relevant within their field and continue with scholarly contributions. After all, graduates should obtain knowledge that may prepare them to adjust in changing work demands (Narayan et al., 2018; Sok et al., 2013). As Bernstein and Osman (2012); Narayan *et al.*, (2018) argue that graduateness is about committing to lifelong learning, where graduates continue to learn and unlearn, throughout the continuous evolving working life. The experience of working with MARC graduates for these

employers is important for this study, as their experiences contribute towards determining the requisite skills for these graduates to become employable.

Moreover, to bridge the gap between employers' expected skills and MARC graduates, practical experience plays a vital role. Participants mentioned that these graduates should be exposed to practical research prior joining the organisations. Additionally, some organisations generally expect graduates to gain groundwork from research agencies to gain exposure to the kind of research methods they wish to specialise or excel in, prior to joining their organisation.

These findings helped to address the research question of this study, with intense feedback on employers' expectations from MARC graduates. The research question is discussed in conjunction with the findings of this study in the next section.

What are the skills required by employers for MARC graduates to be employable in the South African labour market?

Education holds a promise for a better future for many South Africans, through success in the labour market (DHET, 2019). As argued by Hwang (2017); Rheede (2012), the human capital theory maintains that by investing in education, labour productivity is enhanced and the increased productivity results in higher earnings. However, the existence of graduate unemployment contradicts this positive notion of investing in education (Hwang, 2017; Rheede, 2012). The quality of graduates and the demands of the job market are not always properly aligned to address the number of unemployed graduates (Long & Fynn, 2018). This study intended to explore and discuss the requisite skills of MARC graduates, with the intention of contributing towards the reduction of unemployed graduates.

The feedback received from the employers during data collection phase assisted in understanding the constructed beliefs of employers regarding the above question. According to the sociological institutional theory, organisations respond to socially constructed beliefs about what constitutes efficient and effective organisational behaviour (Furusten, 2013; Lewis et al., 2018). Constructed beliefs and knowledge direct the employers' choices towards employing relevant graduates (Bailly, 2008; Lewis et al., 2018). According to Cai, (2013) employers' beliefs are influenced by factors and mechanisms including *Exogenous factors, Formation of initial signals, Employers' belief system, Decisions on recruitment, Performance outcomes, Public learning, and Private learning*. Thus, there are external and internal themes

which emerged from the participants during data collection. Both the external and internal themes were related to the three different elements of the sociological institutional theory.

Through sociological institutional theory elements, organisations must affect employees' behaviour in some way to force an appropriate behaviour of its members (Peters, 2012; Serrat, 2017). Therefore, the three elements of sociological institutional theory pointed to the beliefs of employers on what mandatory skills would assist MARC graduates towards becoming employed. As a result, external factors influencing employers' recruitment decisions include completed qualifications, affiliates, standards, and regulatory bodies. These all fall under the prescribed expected standards of conformity or the normative element of sociological institutional theory. In addition to themes mentioned in this chapter, another theme that was noted as the external factor, is the work experience obtained from placements and internships, in terms of the social connection through organisational values and beliefs, or the cultural-cognitive element of the sociological institutional theory. Although these expected requirements are external from the organisations, employers believe that for MARC graduates to be employable, these requirements must be met and are obligatory for most organisations. Based on external factors, some employers expect MARC graduates to have a completed qualification, be affiliated with regulatory bodies, and have work experience prior joining their organisations.

Furthermore, internal factors influencing employers' recruitment decisions include general expectations and career development. These two themes emerged under the normative element of sociological institutional theory. In addition, under the cultural-cognitive of sociological institutional theory, compliance promotion, important values and expected responses are also internal to the organisation. Moreover, under the appropriate organisational conduct through regulations or the regulative element of sociological institutional theory, transpired the appropriate conduct, skills, work activities and knowledge themes. Hence, organisations consider employing MARC graduates that will adhere to the rules of the organisations and conduct themselves accordingly. Employers expect MARC graduates to generally align with their organisations and be willing to develop their career further, and to comply with their organisations, understand company values and respond in an appropriate manner towards company values. Furthermore, employers expect MARC graduates to have relevant research skills and knowledge, to achieve research work functions within the organisations.

According to the participants of this study, MARC graduates should possess research skills that are relevant to different research industries to become employable. Employers indicated that the development of graduates also concerns employers, in ensuring that obtained skills are relevant to the practical work environment. Employers mentioned that they employed MARC graduates that are willing to learn, to further develop them according to what the organisations require as well as current research trends. Therefore, HEI's should develop MARC graduates with relevant skills, including the ability to adjust and understand the digital space, Python, R, SPSS, and STATA as some of the data analysis tool reported to be limited from MARC graduates from the UNISA. The next section mentions the contributions of this study.

6.3 Contributions of the study

As indicated in Chapter 1, this study might benefit the UNISA department of psychology in understanding the requirements in the work environment of the MARC graduates. In addition to this, companies that employ MARC graduates could also benefit from clarifying their expectations from these graduates as new employees. Furthermore, this study could contribute towards addressing the gaps between MARC graduates' skills and the employment requirements. More importantly, companies can inform curriculum developers through research such as this to ensure that training aligns with their needs as employers and therefore, it was important for the researcher to include relevant participants in this study to communicate the requisite research skills for MARC graduates to be employable and reduce the unemployment rate. Also, through this study, some organisations employing MARC graduates may derive benefits in relation to recruitment decisions. However, the researcher acknowledges that some companies' requirements differ. The next section explores the limitations to this study.

6.4 Limitations

This study intended to provide clarity and awareness of the expected MARC graduates skills that contribute towards potential employment of these graduates. Furthermore, this study aimed to describe the employers' expectations from the MARC graduates; and to explore the gap between employers' expectations and MARC graduates' skills. However, there are some limitations which could be improved on in future research of this nature. Firstly, there is the limited number of participants involved in the study. Though the study included a diverse

participation, there are other industries employing MARC graduates that could not be included in this study, for example, the banking industry, and the mining, automotive, and manufacturing industry etc. Also, this study focused on organisations based in Gauteng Province, even though there are MARC graduates employed around the country and abroad.

In addition, another limitation to this study was the sampling method utilised since it was difficult to gain access to the employers of MARC graduates. The snowball sampling method assisted the researcher to gain access to different research organisations. However, some of the participants were referred because they work with MARC graduates.

Despite the mentioned limitations, the quality of the data collected in this study was not compromised in any way; a data collection method was followed, and this led to relevant data being collected from different participants with no manipulation of data. In addition, the researcher adhered to the requirements of thematic analysis to capture the detailed feedback from all involved participants. Analysed data was presented as received from the participants, and the analysis guided the researcher to achieve findings for this study. Thus, the findings of this study were presented as a true reflection of the feedback received from the participants.

More importantly, this study has raised interest to the participants and those that employ MARC graduates. Some participants were interested in the intention of this study, for HEIs to prepare graduates that fit into the industry becoming employees. Another participant was interested in future research on what happens when graduates become unemployed. Emerging questions included: do they emigrate for better opportunities elsewhere or does the government have opportunities for these graduates?

6.5 Recommendations

6.5.1 Recommendations for future research

The experience in conducting this study was that there were employers who were interested in future research, which may include the reasons for graduates to emigrate for better employment opportunities. Also, some employers were concerned about the unemployment rate within the field of psychology, as according to them this is a profession in great demand in SA. These employers indicated that there was a need to employ psychology graduates and that these graduates would have a positive impact within communities. In addition, MARC graduates

could work on developing initiatives that could assist society in dealing with different issues that affected the betterment of individuals.

6.5.2 Recommendations for research psychology graduates' skills

During the data collection phase of this study, participants recommended that MARC graduates gain more exposure to research practically, prior to joining any organisation as a researcher. Also, some participants recommended that research agencies and internships on research services could assist MARC graduates to obtain the necessary work experience that could prepare them for future employment. Another important aspect mentioned by the participants of this study, was that graduates should be encouraged to understand all research skills, especially research methods, as different research projects require different research methods. Therefore, HEI's are challenged to produce well-rounded MARC graduates in terms of research skills. Also, the challenge is recommended for appropriate curriculum development for the training of these graduates aligned with the expectations of employers. Appreciation of this challenge by HEI's and curriculum developers would contribute effectively towards MARC graduates' employment as these graduates are dispersed in different research industries.

6.6 Conclusion

This study intended to address the unemployment problem experienced amongst MARC graduates and recommend some of the aspects necessary to mitigate this challenge as well as have successful employability of graduates. This study considered the constructed views of employers who participated during the data collection phase, following the elements of sociological institutional theory, which responds to socially constructed beliefs about what constitutes efficient and effective organisational behaviour (Furusten, 2013; Lewis et al., 2018). Moreover, sociological institutional theory suggests that much organisational behaviour occurs in response to social pressures arising from the common environment created by other organisations (Kent et al., 2022; Suddaby et al., 2013). Additionally, regulated beliefs and practices within institutions are seen by employers as normal, expected, and appropriate procedures in driving human actions (Cai, 2012; Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe, 2019).

While collecting data, the researcher noted that it seemed complex for some employers to be specific on what it was required by the organisation from candidates to ensure employability. It was clear what the organisation required in terms of what the organisation represented made

it difficult to clarify the issue from the perspective of graduates. Thus, the requisite skills from the MARC graduates were interpreted, following the guidance of the sociological institutional theory.

Despite the limitations to this study mentioned above, the intended objectives and research questions have been addressed. Therefore, awareness about the requisite research skills has increased and the gap between employers' expectations and MARC graduates is noted for HEI's consideration in preparing future graduates.

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Ref. No: PERC-17037



Ethical Clearance for M/D students: Research on human participants

The Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at Unisa has evaluated this research proposal for a Higher Degree in Psychology in light of appropriate ethical requirements, with special reference to the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Psychologists of the HPCSA and the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics.

Student Name: Ms A Nogqala **Student no.** 46858687

Supervisor: Dr A Fynn **Affiliation:** Department of Psychology, UNISA

Title of project:

Employer expectations of requisite skills of graduates of the Masters in Psychology with specialisation in Research Consultation (MARC) graduates.

The proposal was evaluated for adherence to appropriate ethical standards as required by the Psychology Department of Unisa. The application was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology on the understanding that –

- All ethical conditions related to voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality of the information and the right to withdraw from the research must be explained to participants in a way that will be clearly understood and a signed letter of informed consent will be obtained from each of the participants in the study;
- Any formal procedures that may be required to get permission from the institutions from which the participants are to be drawn, and all conditions and procedures regarding access to information for research purposes that may be required by these institutions are to be met;

Signed:



Prof. M Papaikonomou

Date: 2017-10-16

[For the Ethics Committee]
[Department of Psychology, Unisa]

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) *The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*
- 2) *Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the Psychology Department Ethics Review Committee.*
- 3) *An amended application should be submitted if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.*
- 4) *The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.*

Please note that research where participants are drawn from Unisa staff, students or data bases requires permission from the Senate Research and Innovation Committee (SENRIC) before the research commences.

Interview schedule

Demographic questions

What is the name of the organisation?

What is the background of this organisation?

What services does this organisation offer?

What are the values and goals of this organisation?

What is your position in this organisation?

What is your highest level of education?

What is this organisation's idea of an ideal graduate or employee?

How does the recruitment and decision-making process for employment work in this organisation?

How does this organisation make use of research psychology graduates' knowledge and skills?

How many years of work experience, working with research psychology graduates do you have?

Are you a research psychology graduate?

Interview questions

A. Normative expectations

The basis of compliance for normative expectations includes social obligation with binding expectations, appropriateness, certification and accreditation (Smit & Hitt, 2005; Gohar & Arbar, 2022). For organisations to perform certain functions, they are expected to employ and have accredited employees within their organisations. The normative element is rooted in the processes of professionalisation in which universities as well as professional certification and accreditation agencies impose the values, codes, and standards (Hanson, 2001; Kent et al., 2022).

- a) What are your general expectations from graduates who join this organisation for employment?
- b) Do you expect MARC graduates to complete their qualification prior to employment in this organisation?
- c) Do you expect MARC graduates to be affiliates of any professional bodies, prior to their employment in this organisation?
- d) What are the most valuable aspects of career development MARC graduates should achieve to be considered for employment in this organisation?
- e) What work activities do you consider to be valuable for MARC graduates to achieve prior to joining this organisation?

B. Appropriate behaviour/skill

Institutions have a logic of appropriateness which defines what behaviour is suitable or not for members of an institution (Peters, 2012; Sugiarti et al., 2021). For organisations to ensure appropriate employee conduct, an implementation of the codes of conduct, including rules and regulations, is encouraged for different organisations. According to Scott (2008); Gohar and Arbar (2022), the regulative element of the sociological institutional theory stresses the importance of setting rules and regulations to encourage stability within organisations.

- a) What would you regard as being appropriate conduct for a MARC graduate within this organisation?
- b) What are the standards and regulations of this organisation, which may assist MARC graduates to present an appropriate behaviour?
- c) Do you expect specific skills for graduates to fit in this organisation?
- d) What knowledge and skills do you consider important for MARC graduates to possess prior to working in this organisation?
- e) What is the most relevant skill or skills MARC graduates should possess to continuously deliver on the expectations of this organisation?
- f) How important do you consider the level of emotional intelligence to be from MARC graduates?

C. Normative compliance (meeting the required standards)

The source of compliance is derived from a commitment to the institution and its purpose, individuals must respond in ways expected and needed by the institution (Peters, 2012; Sugiarti et al., 2021). Values and beliefs emphasise basic assumptions, which determines the understanding of realities and how things should be. Employers might hire graduates based on their beliefs that certain functions in their organisation require individuals with specific knowledge. According to Scott (2008), Gohar and Arbar (2022), values are interpreted as being what people think are important or right.

- a) How does this organisation encourage commitment to promote compliance from the graduates?
- b) What values are considered important for MARC graduates to fit in this organisation?
- c) Does this organisation expect MARC graduates to develop certain values prior joining this organisation?
- d) How does this organisation ensure that MARC graduates comply with the set standards and regulations of this organisation?
- e) How do you expect MARC graduates to respond to the expected and needed norms of this organisation?
- f) Does this organisation expect MARC graduates to have work experience prior to employment in this organisation?

ANNEXURE C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified. I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview. I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname..... (please print)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number:

Research permission reference number (if applicable):

30 August 2017

Title: Employer expectations of requisite skills of the employers of Master's in Psychology with specialisation in Research Consultation (MARC) graduates

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Asanda Nogqala, and I am doing research with Dr Angelo Fynn, a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology towards an MA in Research Consultation, at the University of South Africa.

We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled Employer expectations of requisite skills of the employers of Master's in Psychology with specialisation in Research Consultation (MARC) graduates. This study is expected to collect important information that could assist academic planners to incorporate the findings to the curriculum development of the MARC programme. The researcher chose you to participate in this study because you work directly with the MARC graduates and may have constructive information that will be valuable to form part of this study. This study will include a limited number of participants, including yourself, to be able to capture detailed information from each participant. As a participant in this study, you are required to respond to the semi-structured interview questions, which will be about your perceptions of the required skills of MARC graduates. Participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you decide to take part, you will be given this sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a written consent form. The interview is expected to last for the duration of one hour, however, should you feel the need to withdraw from participating in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. As a participant, it is not intended that you will benefit directly from this study. However, it is possible that the results and findings of this study will contribute towards the development of a curriculum that may include some of the suggested required skills of the MARC graduates. Therefore, there are no foreseeable risks or harm to the participants in this study, and there will be no discomfort or inconvenience caused to the participants.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential, and your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you will provide to this study. Your answers will be given a code or pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. All recordings of the semi-structured interview will be kept protected and stored in a locked cabinet as well as computers with protected passwords. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data, and it will be erased after a period of five years following the publication of the data. There will be no payment or reward offered in taking part of this study. This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Psychology Department, UNISA. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr Fynn at fynna@unisa.ac.za Contact the research ethics chairperson of the Department of Psychology, Prof Piet Kruger at krugep@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Asanda Nogqala

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15 August 2023

RE: EDITING OF DISSERTATION

**EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS OF REQUISITE SKILLS OF GRADUATES OF THE
MASTER'S IN PSYCHOLOGY WITH SPECIALISATION IN RESEARCH
CONSULTATION (MARC) GRADUATES**

Author: ASANDA NOGQALA

This serves to confirm that the above-named document has gone through the process of copy-editing, proof reading and coherence of language. No factual content or authorial intention have been disrupted during editing.

The editor is suitably qualified and experienced, and holds a Masters Degree in Linguistics. Additionally, the editor is registered with APA, and is on the editorial board of the Science Publishing Group.

Dr Carol Ashley

Academic Author/Developer/ Editor/ Linguist/Lecturer