

**THE NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY**

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**Antecedents to Graduates' Intent to Leave**

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the Requirements of The Nottingham Trent  
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Master of Philosophy**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the principal reasons why graduates working in large private-sector organisations may harbour intentions to leave their jobs in the early stages of their career. In the first study, semi-structured interviews were carried out on 12 graduates working in a variety of professions and organisations. These were analysed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach to descriptive thematic analysis, which identified six distinct types of antecedents relating to graduates' intent to leave; these were: Organisational Receptiveness, Remuneration, Job Characteristics and Work Environment, Professional Development, Work Relationships and Social Support, and Professional Belonging. In the second study, items that were based on these antecedents were distributed as a questionnaire to 225 graduates working in a range of occupations and organisations. A series of data-reduction techniques carried out on this data led to a three-component structure being retained, and comprised of: professional development, work relationships and social support, and professional belonging. This structure replicated three of the six qualitatively-derived antecedents and has produced a useful measure of these antecedents, which has demonstrated strong levels of internal reliability and construct validity.

# **Chapter One: Introduction to Graduate Turnover**

## **1.1. Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter will lay out the rationale for the work undertaken; specifically, it will begin by explaining why there is a need to apply extant turnover theory and research to a graduate population. It will highlight that high levels of graduate turnover are a problem for large organisations, and due to its negative consequences, it is a problem that needs to be addressed. A graduate-focused approach to investigating graduate turnover will be adopted and the theoretical perspective, in which this work is set, will be outlined before offering a broader consideration of the empirical research into the withdrawal or turnover process. Finally, the broadly defined aims of this thesis will be stated, with a brief reference to the methodology used in this research.

## **1.2. The Problem of Graduate Turnover**

Despite the growing demand and intense competition for high-calibre graduates in large organisations, there is still little insight into how to retain the best graduates that join them (Institute for Employment Studies (IES), 2003). Few studies have investigated graduate turnover (Sturges and Guest, 1999) and little is known about why some organisations are more successful than others in retaining their graduates. Most organisations consider the recruitment and retention of high-calibre graduates to be integral to the success of their business; however, there is evidence to suggest that organisations are struggling to retain this key group of employees in their workforce (Sturges and Guest, 1999).

It is the turnover of an organisation's most effective and skilled graduates who add value to the organisation that is most problematic; for example, the average organisation retains just 50 percent of its graduate intake five years into their

careers, compared with the best performers that retain 86 percent (IES, 2003). The importance of graduate retention becomes clear when the negative impact of graduate turnover on the organisation and the individual employee is considered.

### **1.3. The Negative Costs of Graduate Turnover**

Employee turnover is an integral part of organisational life (Hom and Griffeth, 1995; Mobley, 1982) and although certain types of turnover may actually benefit an organisation (e.g., when a poorly performing employee leaves the organisation), no organisation with a high turnover rate can achieve superior performance as turnover pervades all aspects of an organisation (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2008). For example, a graduate survey of 362 UK graduate employers that employed between 7000 to 7500 graduates between the years of 1999 and 2001 has estimated that the cost of replacing graduates can be up to 150 percent of their annual salary (IES, 2003).

Further negative consequences of graduate turnover include: staffing difficulties; training and development costs; disruption to other employees; operational dysfunction associated with personnel loss; and the loss of technical and corporate knowledge (CIPD, 2006), which may have serious ramifications if the graduate moves to a competitor (Staw, 1980). All of these consequences lead to lost production and profits (Mirvis & Lawler, 1977). These effects ultimately reduce the organisation's capacity to achieve its principal aims; for example, its research and development may be hindered and market penetration may be slower or ineffective (Staw, 1980). Problems with a high turnover rate may be further compounded by shortages of workers or other 'knock-on' effects creating a destructive cycle. For example, turnover may occur in waves as disgruntled employees talk to other employees and pass their negative opinions onto the other workers, thereby reducing morale and increasing the likelihood of turnover (Mirvis and Lawler, 1977).

## **1.4. Managing Graduate Turnover**

Organisations typically endeavour to manage turnover through the use of Human Resources policies, their selection procedures, offering generous employment packages and initiatives such as mentoring schemes, and may also endeavour to create flexible working patterns, which help to accommodate the needs of their employees (Booth and Hamer, 2007). These organisational-level measures reflect an implicit belief that graduate turnover can be controlled by competent management, although this approach leaves little scope for the consideration of the beliefs and individual agency of graduates. In contrast, this thesis investigates graduate turnover from the perspective of the graduate. By adopting a psychological approach towards turnover, graduates' perspective relating to the turnover process may be better understood and may lead to more effective organisational interventions that may help improve the retention of graduates.

## **1.5. The Psychological Approach to Turnover**

Psychological explanations of employee turnover posit that individual perceptions and attitudes about work conditions lead to behavioural outcomes (e.g., Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, and Griffeth, 1992). Traditional models conceptualise turnover as a rational choice process and describe a multi-faceted, step-by-step, causal ordering of decision process stages, which include various affective, cognitive and behavioural variables, through to intentions to leave or stay, culminating in turnover (e.g. Mobley, 1977). For example, any resulting job dissatisfaction following an appraisal of the job may trigger a process of withdrawal (e.g., Hom and Griffeth, 1995). This process may comprise of leaving cognitions (e.g., thoughts of leaving or thoughts of searching for another job), which in turn, may lead to the formation of leaving intention, followed by the behavioural act of leaving itself (Mobley, 1977).

A number of different process models based along these lines have been proposed (e.g., Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino, 1979; Hom, Griffeth, and

Sellaro, 1984), but they all differ in relation to the type of variables included in their models and the precise causal ordering of these variables in the turnover process. Models typically assess the effects and relationships of antecedents on job attitudes, although they differ in relation to which job attitudes they include.

For example, Steers and Mowday's (1981) model of turnover incorporated the job attitudes of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job involvement, whereas Mobley's (1977) model only included job satisfaction. However, there is strong empirical support for a reduced linkage model where dissatisfaction leads to intent to leave, which in turn, leads to turnover (Hom et al. 1992).

## **1.6. Problems with Process Models of Turnover**

The predictive validity of traditional models of turnover is poor and typically account for less than 25 % of the variance in turnover (Lee et al., 1996). This may be due, in part, to a relatively small number of predictor variables being incorporated into those models; moreover, some models may exclude important predictors pertinent to the population being studied.

For example, turnover models have focused heavily on individual characteristics and have neglected the role of organisational factors (e.g. Tett and Meyer, 1993; Hom and Griffeth, 1995); including, the provision of career planning and career decision-making (e.g. Hom and Griffeth, 1995). Such variables are likely to be especially important for graduates beginning their careers and may play a crucial role in their decision to leave an organisation.

Traditional models of turnover have also underestimated the complexity of the reasons behind leaving intentions that occur in different populations and situations. Such research has investigated turnover using mixed samples of employees of differing ages and tenure that are specific to one organisation or occupation. These studies have failed to control for differences in career stage and other demographic variables, which may have an important influence on the

turnover process and thereby make any generalisation of their findings difficult (Maertz and Campion, 1998). An advantage of the present research is that it focuses on a specific cohort of employees (i.e., graduates) of a similar age, career stage and educational background, whilst also being occupationally and organisationally diverse.

## **1.7. Towards a Model of Graduate Turnover: Principal Antecedents of Intent to Leave**

The limitations of traditional turnover models and the complex nature of the turnover process mean that there is still a need to test new variables and create new models (Cotton and Tuttle, 1986) as well as expand theories and create new approaches (Griffeth et al. 2000). No standard theoretical framework for understanding and explaining employee turnover currently exists (Kevin et al., 2004); moreover, there is no extant model of graduate turnover and there has been little research on the main or important antecedents or predictors of graduates' intent to leave.

This thesis focuses on identifying and further elaborating on these antecedents that are hypothesised to trigger the withdrawal or turnover process; that is, their impact on the job-related attitudes of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and intent to leave. There is considerable evidence to suggest that these job-related attitudes are the principal antecedents to turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000), where intent to leave is generally accepted to be the immediate psychological precursor of turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000). Both job satisfaction and organisational commitment can be directly linked to an employee's intent to leave through established models of individual behaviour, e.g. Triandis' (1975) model of social behaviour and Fishbein and Azjen's (1975) theory of reasoned action where attitudes are presumed to directly impact on behaviour by their effects on behavioural intentions. Each of these variables will now be considered in turn.

### 1.7.1. Intent to Leave

There are strong theoretical reasons for focusing on intent to leave as the most direct and immediate cognitive antecedent of overt turnover behaviour. Fishbein and Azjen's (1975) theory of reasoned action (planned behaviour) contends that the "...best single predictor of people's behaviour is a measure of their intention to perform that behaviour" (p.369). Kraut (1975) has found that intent to leave represents the strongest single predictor of turnover; it has also demonstrated a correlation coefficient between .38 and .5 with actual turnover (Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Indeed, an employee's intent to leave is accepted to be the immediate psychological precursor of turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000).

Other empirical work has shown that behavioural intentions account for more variance in turnover than other variables such as satisfaction. This is conceptually appropriate as satisfaction is an affective or emotional response, whereas intentions are statements regarding a specific behaviour. Intentions are therefore helpful in understanding turnover as they help capture individuals' cognitive processes such as their perceptions and evaluations (Spencer, Steers, & Mowday, 1983).

There are also practical reasons for using intent to leave rather than actual turnover. For example, it is often found that only a small number of employees leave during the course of a study making the use of actual turnover problematic (Huselid and Day, 1991). Secondly, as the employee is yet to leave, research may be focused on understanding how to reduce leaving intention, which may help prevent the employee from leaving (Huselid and Day, 1991). It is also more practicable to ask employees about their intention to leave than by actually tracing them in a longitudinal study in order to see if they have left or not.

However, there are methodological problems of proxy 'intent to' variables like intent to leave (Dalton, Johnson and Daily, 1999). Dalton et al. (1999) and Vanderberg and Nelson (1999) have questioned the validity of using 'intent to' variables given that an individual's intent to perform a behaviour (e.g. turnover) is no guarantee that the individual will perform that behaviour, thus reducing the

predictive power of turnover models. Moreover, the use of such variables limits the ‘operationalising’ of turnover models such as Mobley et al.’s (1979) ‘expanded’ model.

In this research, intent to leave is used as a surrogate or proxy variable for actual turnover and is conceptualised to exist on a continuum, ranging from intending to stay to intending to leave. Moreover, by using intent to leave, this research thereby focuses on the volitional aspect of leaving and avoids non-volitional determinants.

However, intent to leave may be directed towards either occupational or organisational turnover; the former being where an employee transfers to another job within the same organisation, and the latter being where an employee leaves the organisation (Jackofsky and Peters, 1983). Dalton and Tudor (1993) have found that employees’ who wished to leave their current position and were permitted to do so within the organisation, were more likely to stay in the organisation than those employees who wanted to transfer but were not allowed. Such research supports the idea that employee perception of internal mobility is related to turnover.

### **1.7.2. Job Satisfaction**

Various job-related attitudes have been found to modestly predict turnover; however, overall job satisfaction is one of the strongest predictors (Griffeth et al., 2000). Defined as one’s affective attachment to the job viewed either in its entirety (global satisfaction) or with regard to particular aspects (facet satisfaction) (Tett and Meyer, 1993), job satisfaction plays a major role in turnover theories and is a key psychological predictor in such studies.

Its theoretical basis rests upon Locke’s (1975) value-percept discrepancy model that job satisfaction arises from an individual’s own evaluation of the job and a comparison with their own personal values. Job satisfaction has been shown to be negatively correlated with intent to leave (Mobley et al. 1979; Tett and Meyer,



1993) and accounts for 14 percent of the variance explained in turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000; Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid, and Sirola, 1998).

### **1.7.3. Organisational Commitment**

Organisational commitment is a distinct construct from other job-related attitudes such as job satisfaction, but it is correlated with them (Mathieu and Farr, 1991). Organisational commitment refers to the extent of an individual's identification with, and involvement in a particular organisation (Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979); and in accordance with social exchange theory it appears that employees give organisational commitment in return for pleasant and positive outcomes (Mowday et al. 1979). Mowday et al. (1979) view commitment comprising of the following three components: a strong belief in and acceptance of organisation's goals and values; a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation; and a strong desire to maintain membership of the organisation.

Organisational commitment has been demonstrated to exist in three forms; for example, Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model distinguishes between affective, continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment pertains to the extent of an employee's attachment to their occupation or to the organisation and Somers (1995) has found evidence to suggest that affective commitment is the sole predictor of turnover. Continuance commitment refers to the costs of leaving the role (e.g. pension, specific training etc.). Employees desire to avoid the costs (explicit or psychological) of leaving; however, employees that do not perceive any costs of leaving may feel a sense of freedom that may contribute to their motivation to quit. Finally, normative commitment is related to a perceived obligation to remain in the job or organisation. For example, employees' perceptions of work colleagues' expectations about them remaining in or leaving a particular role may provide a motivation for either staying or leaving (Reichers, 1986).

Several models of turnover posit organisational commitment as an antecedent of intent to leave (Jaros, 1997). Mathieu and Zajac (1990) summarised 36 studies and found a correlation of  $r = -.46$  between organisational commitment and intent to leave, where those employees with a high commitment to their organisation are less likely to leave (Jaros, 1997). Thus, the ability of organisations to retain their graduate recruits may depend, in part, on how committed their graduates are to the organisation (Jaros, 1997). Organisational commitment is therefore a desirable job-related attitude and has been shown to be associated with a number of positive attributes, such as the performance of organisational citizenship behaviours, motivation and job performance (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990).

## **1.8. Graduates' Job-Related Attitudes in a Changing Workplace**

Research into antecedents that predict graduates' job-related attitudes of satisfaction, commitment and intent to leave is relatively sparse and patchy as many antecedents have been left unexamined. There is little work that attempts to provide a more coherent and systematic account that focuses on highlighting what the main antecedents are and their relative importance in terms of their effects on satisfaction, commitment and intent to leave. Before extant research into these antecedents is discussed, the broader context in which graduates find themselves, in terms of the rapidly changing nature of work; including, organisational changes in structure; changes in working practices; and shifting notions of what constitutes a career, will be considered.

### **1.8.1. The Changing Nature of Work for Graduates**

Profound changes in the graduate labour market and organisational restructuring have significantly altered the nature of work for graduates. For example, the substantial increase in graduates leaving higher level tertiary-education has significantly changed the graduate employment market, creating fierce competition among both recruiters and graduates alike. Recruiters endeavour to

select the 'best' graduates from an ever increasing 'pool' of graduates, whilst competition amongst graduates has been intensified as supply exceeds the number of graduate-level roles (IES, 2003).

Similarly, the phenomena of globalisation, advances in technology, organisational mergers, organisational delayering and restructuring towards a flatter and more flexible or adaptive format now mean that most large organisations are unable to offer graduates so called traditional 'careers for life'. In the past, an employee's career was never explicitly recognised and was managed by both the employer and the employee (Orpen, 1994). However, the shift towards job training, development opportunities, mentoring, personal development plans and self-career management setting has led to the employee's responsibility for the self-management of their own careers (Hall and Mirvis, 1996). This has meant that the more traditional aspects, such as continuous hierarchical advancement and career management by the organisation are now largely redundant (e.g. Sturges and Guest, 1999).

The concept of the 'new' career is predicated on this changing nature of work and the reduced likelihood of a hierarchical 'career for life' for most employees. A successful career is now largely dependent on hopping from job to job and an ability to transfer skills from one organisation to the next (e.g. Sturges, Guest and Mackenzie-Davey, 2000).

In response to these changes, it appears that graduates desire a return on their investment that they have made in their own education and career; and in particular, the heavy financial investment made in obtaining qualifications. Graduates want to see this cost translated into financial and career development opportunities. For example, there is evidence to suggest that graduates are anxious to create their own 'self-based' career security valuing opportunities for learning and development which will produce marketable skills (Tulgan, 1996).

### **1.8.2. The Impact of the New Career on Graduates' Job-Related Attitudes**

The implications of these changes and the so called 'new career' on graduates' job-related attitudes and turnover have been largely overlooked (Sturges and Guest, 1999). However, empirical research findings suggest that traditional career values still seem important to graduates (Sturges, Guest and Mackenzie-Davey, 2000) and have been found to be associated with organisational commitment, especially at the beginning of an employee's career (Keenan and Newton, 1986).

The early years of employment are significant for the development of commitment to an organisation and positive organisational experiences during this time make a strong contribution to this process (Irving and Meyer, 1994), such as career development and training activities. Ball and Jordan (1997) have found that graduates enter an organisation with high expectations of the career-management help that they will receive from the organisation. Moreover, those graduates that are encouraged to think about their own careers and are helped to develop career-management skills are more confident and motivated to take control of their own careers (Ball and Jordan, 1997).

Sturges, Guest, and Mackenzie-Davey (2000) have found that the practice of taking control or self-managing a career does not appear to have a negative effect on organisational commitment; however, employees that are encouraged to rely on themselves and to expect less from their employers in terms of their own career management has been linked with a reduced organisational commitment (Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey (1999). Thus career self-management may be more effective as a supplement to organisational career management rather than existing as its substitute. Further evidence that indicates the inter-dependent nature of the two suggests that career self-management is a learned skill that requires help from the organisation (e.g., Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey, 1999).

The role of graduates' expectations may also affect the relationships among organisational and self-management of career and job attitudes. A failure to

meet an employee's expectations may lower what the employee feels they owe to the organisation and thereby engender an employee to leave more readily. For example, Sturges and Guest (2001) have found that graduates' organisational commitment is influenced by the extent to which they feel their expectations have been met by the organisation. Graduate expectations that exceed reality are a threat to organisational commitment early on in their career (Mabey, 1986) and the creation of an 'expectations gap', a discrepancy between what the employee expects or expected and actual job experiences, is also related to turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000).

## **1.9. Antecedents Related to Graduates' Job-Related Attitudes**

Most research into the job-related attitudes of graduates in the early stages of their career has focused on organisational commitment. It has been suggested that the link between organisational commitment and intent to leave may be at its strongest early on in an employee's career when commitment is still being developed (Cohen, 1991). Organisations therefore need to ensure the commitment of their graduates to the organisation if they want to maximise their retention. A summary of the most important work investigating these antecedents is given below.

### **1.9.1. Reasons for Joining and Leaving an Organisation**

Recent research investigating the factors deemed important by undergraduates when they considered joining an organisation has highlighted: high quality training and development opportunities, intrinsic work factors like job characteristics and career prospects to be more important than extrinsic factors such as starting salary and organisational prestige (Sturges and Guest, 1999). These findings were consistent with those reported by Hutt, Parsons and Pearson (1981) that the top three reasons cited for leaving their jobs among UK graduates were: not using abilities to the full, the nature of the work and career prospects. Similarly, Morris, Lydka and Fenton O' Creevey (1993) have studied 98 UK

graduates during the first few years of their careers and reported that perceptions of fair policies, good salary and job security were also related to organisational turnover.

### **1.9.2. Organisational Socialisation**

Entering the workplace for the first time may be viewed as a key transitional stage in an individual's life (Erikson, 1959), which involves new adult roles and changes in identity (Tajfel, 1982). Although it is often believed that work is seen as central to an individual's self-definition, there is limited evidence for the extent and nature of these changes. It is not clear whether or not the process of socialisation or how graduates are 'broken in' as they enter an organisation produces an actual change in their personal identity (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Mackenzie-Davey and Arnold (2000) found little evidence that graduates had changed much during the organisational socialisation process. It may be that 'fitting in' is about learning how to behave, rather than personal change. Employees may also identify with the organisation (Stryker and Serpe, 1982) without internalising its values (Mintzberg, 1983). There is also research to suggest that employees tend to join organisations that reflect their goals and values (George and Jones, 1996); thus, it may be that personal change is not required by graduates in order to fit in with the organisation.

Nevertheless, it appears that socialisation and the process of adjustment leads to changes in job-related attitudes (e.g., satisfaction and commitment), but there is no clear understanding of the changes involved (Meyer and Allen, 1991). An organisation's values or culture may influence turnover behaviour through its HR strategies and policies and through the level of fit with their individual employees, thereby creating an organisational environment that either opposes or encourages turnover (Kerr and Slocum, 1987). Sturges and Guest (2001) have added that whether or not employees find the organisation's culture 'comfortable' and helpful may also affect their organisational commitment, which in turn, has been linked to intent to leave. Similarly, O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell (1991) have found that organisational 'misfits' whose values don't match those of the organisation had a higher turnover rate.

### **1.9.3. Organisational-Level Antecedents**

There are conflicting accounts of how the size of an organisation affects turnover behaviour. For example, some studies suggest that the lucrative remuneration packages, greater opportunities for promotion and increased extent of participation in larger organisations reduces turnover (IES, 2003). Other research emphasizes the increased centralisation, routinisation and anonymity associated with an increased organisational size, all of which have been positively associated with turnover by reducing employee satisfaction (Mobley, 1982). It may be that graduates therefore have very different reactions to entering and working within a large organisation; the current research provides a suitable means for assessing the extent to which the effects of working within a large organisation affect graduates' intent to leave.

The ability of graduate turnover to be managed effectively at an organisational level was demonstrated by Rhoades et al. (2001) who have found that organisational rewards (e.g., recognition and opportunity for advancement), procedural justice (e.g., communication and decision-making) and superior support (e.g., a concern for employee's well being) led to perceived organisational support (i.e., organisational concern), which in turn, led to affective organisational commitment. Similarly, Allen, Shore and Griffeth (2003) have also suggested that perceptions of supportive Human Resource practices (e.g. participative decision-making, fairness of rewards and growth opportunities) contribute to the development of perceived organisational support.

### **1.9.4. Remuneration**

Remuneration is an important element of any employment package, but it is unlikely to be the main factor in turnover behaviour. Most starting salaries for graduates in large organisations are very competitive and usually include a broader package of benefits that may include share option plans and private healthcare. Moreover, these remuneration packages usually include performance-based incentives and relate future rewards with increasing progression and experience.

However, research has found that organisational rules and procedures for allocating rewards are equally important as fair and competitive pay, as it demonstrates that employees are valued and that their well-being is important to the organisation (Greenberg, 1990). If employees feel that they are supported by the organisation then they are more likely to develop a stronger commitment to the organisation (Shore and Wayne, 1993). For example, perceived fairness of the distribution of a merit-pay system committed employees to the organisation more than satisfaction with the amount of the raise; moreover, such behaviours are likely to reinforce employees' expectations and are indicative that they will be fairly treated throughout their tenure (Moorman, Blakely, and Niehoff, 1998).

#### **1.9.5. Job-Related and Career-Related Variables**

There is strong evidence that both job-related and career-related variables correlate with organisational commitment. For example, Sturges et al. (2000) found that intrinsic work characteristics (e.g., task significance, task identity, challenge, supervisory feedback), future rewards, such as career development and opportunities, and receiving both formal and informal help with career management were among the most powerful predictors of organisational commitment. Interestingly, they also found that career development was a strong predictor of intent to leave and turnover, whereas intrinsic work characteristics were not a significant predictor of intent to leave. These findings would suggest that career-related variables are of the most importance to graduates in the early stages of their career and that the provision of career-related opportunities by organisations is vital for the retention of their graduates.

Similarly, Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey (1999) and Morris et al., (1993) have argued that the experiences that are most likely to affect an employee's organisational commitment early on in their careers are those that relate to future career development. Such career-related factors that have been shown to affect commitment in graduates include: having challenging and interesting jobs to do (Morris et al., 1993), receiving appropriate training; a reason cited by many for actually joining the organisation (Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey, 1994) and provision of career opportunities (Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey, 1999).



The characteristics of an employee's job, including: autonomy, variety, skill, challenge and feedback have all been significantly associated with satisfaction, which in turn, is linked to turnover (Campion, 1991). Mathieu and Zajac (1990) have conducted a meta-analysis of 124 studies and found that organisational commitment had a strong relationship with job scope, leader communication and participative leadership. Smaller relationships were found with skill variety, task interdependence, salary and ability. Dunham, Grube and Castaneda (1994) have also reported a summary of nine studies and found that task significance, task identity, supervisory feedback, participatory management and career-related perceptions were significantly correlated with affective commitment.

#### **1.9.6. Work Relationships**

Existing research has neglected the relationships among graduates and their supervisors and peers, which may be important in their leaving intentions during the early stages of their career. Employees may develop attachments to certain individuals, which may increase their likelihood of staying in the organisation; whereas, employees who wish to withdraw from certain individuals may be more likely to harbour an increased intent to leave (Morrison, 2004). For example, Baker and Baker (1999) found that perceived differences in ideology with co-workers reduced organisational commitment and an employee's relationships with co-workers has also been negatively correlated with intent to leave (Hunt and Morgan, 1994).

Relationships at work appear to be multidimensional as employees seem to distinguish between their relationships with people or groups within the organisation and their relationship with the organisation itself (Becker, 1992). For example, Reichers (1986) has described how employees can become committed to co-workers, supervisors and mentors beyond their commitment to the organisation as a whole, which may be used to create social pressure on employees to leave or stay. Similarly, Barak, Mor Nissly and Levin (2001) and Wai Chi Tai, Bame and Robinson (1998) have all found that supervisor behaviour and a lack of social support are related to turnover.

## **1.10. Aims of Research**

The research outlined in this chapter has provided an overview of the empirical work into the withdrawal process and turnover, and has described the theoretical framework, in which this work is set. The current research is situated within the traditional process model paradigm and attempts to identify the main antecedents that may trigger the withdrawal or turnover process in graduates; specifically, the identified antecedents in this work effect changes in, satisfaction and commitment, the principal antecedents of intent to leave. It hopes to identify new antecedents relating to this process and elaborate on previously identified antecedents, which have been outlined above, and consider their importance in a graduate population. Finally, the standing of the antecedents in their broader context will be considered, giving an indication of their relative importance to one another.

In order to meet these broad aims, a mixed-methods approach has been adopted, which can be divided into two parts. In the first part, a qualitative perspective focuses on graduates' experiences relating to their leaving intentions. It uses previous research that has identified antecedents of intent to leave to inform the types of questions used in the semi-structured interviews in order to identify the antecedents. The second part adopts a more nomothetic approach by translating these experiences into discernible components that can be developed into an instrument that allows for these to be measured. This will be achieved by devising items based on the qualitatively-derived antecedents, which will permit a further examination of those antecedents by allowing for these experiences to be quantified as components. A comparison may then be made between the components and the qualitatively-derived antecedents. In addition, the quantitative assessment will allow for the items representing the components to form sub-scales, and permit an early-stage investigation into an instrument that measures the key antecedents of intent to leave in a graduate population.

# **Chapter Two: Qualitative Antecedents of Graduates' Intent to Leave**

## **2.1. Chapter Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the qualitative work, which has led to the identification of the most important antecedents relating to graduates' intent to leave. The rationale for adopting a qualitative methodology in this study is outlined, before moving on to describe the use of the specific data-analytic procedure that leads to the production of a typology, which comprises of six antecedents relating to graduates' intent to leave. These antecedents were: (1) Organisational Receptiveness; (2) Remuneration; (3) Job Characteristics and Work Environment; (4) Professional Development; (5) Work Relationships and Social Support; and (6) Professional Belonging. Each of these themes will be covered in turn, using quotes from interviewees in order to substantiate their origin in the data set. The antecedents and their themes are then discussed further and comments are made on any overlap amongst the themes or antecedents and any organisational and individual differences that may be present.

## **2.2. Introduction to Qualitative Methodology**

A qualitative methodology allows for the exploration of graduate leaving intentions by focusing on their own subjective experiences of this process. Such an approach is best placed to aid understanding of the motivations, meanings and consequences of graduates' own sense-making processes regarding their own leaving intentions, in their context, and thereby allowing for a greater understanding of the graduate leaving decision process. There have been few studies investigating leaving intentions that have adopted a qualitative stance

(Maertz and Campion, 1998) and the use of such an approach also provides an opportunity to re-examine the nature of leaving intentions from a different perspective.

The qualitative stance taken in this study aims to develop theory, which is based on well grounded rich descriptions in the graduates' own words (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). These descriptions go beyond simple cross-sectional 'snap shots' in time and represent an attempt to reveal the complexity of social experience and its meaning to graduates by emphasising the importance of individual differences in understanding by explicating their diversity and properties in a given social situation (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Miles and Huberman's (1994) data-display technique is used in this study. Their method values the role of theory in qualitative research and they reject the idea that qualitative researchers should suspend their pre-conceived notions of their subject area. In contrast, they believe that a researcher enters the field with orienting ideas, irregardless of how structured or inductive the research may be in nature. The use of semi-structured interviews in this study is consistent with this approach as they offer a flexible, but systematic method of data collection. They allow for the structure of the questions to be informed by the pre-existing turnover literature, whilst also permitting graduates the opportunity to identify new areas or issues that may play a role in the formation of their own leaving intentions.

### **2.3. The Aims of the Study**

The overall purpose of the study was exploratory and has aimed to elucidate the factors that participants' deem to be important in the leaving decision process. It explored in-depth issues and themes, which could feed into subsequent stages of the research, as well as clarify and build on earlier qualitative research investigating graduate turnover. The central research question that guided the research asked: which factors impact upon graduates' job satisfaction, their

commitment to their organisational role and their intent to leave.

## **2.4. Method**

### **2.4.1. Design**

Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted in three large blue-chip organisations with participants in a variety of professions. Each interview inquired into the factors contributing towards participants' leaving intentions over the course of their tenure up to the present; and in particular, they focused on their feelings (a) at the beginning of their training scheme (b) during their training, and (c) after the training scheme.

### **2.4.2. Sample**

Private-sector organisations were randomly selected from *The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers* (2005). Graduate Managers of eight large U.K. based blue-chip organisations were asked to participate in the study and three agreed to take part. Participating organisations were asked to identify graduates that had recently completed their training schemes with the brief that the sample should be representative of the graduate intake for the year they were recruited in terms of sex, race and the type of work they did; however, the researcher had no way of confirming that graduates met these criteria. Participants were then randomly selected from this pool of graduates identified by the organisations as suitable for the research. Some organisations found it difficult to provide graduates due to diverse geographical locations and their patterns of shift work; however, at the time of interviewing all graduates had completed their training schemes.

This post-training scheme cohort was chosen as most graduate training schemes last between two to three years and the period after this has been shown to be one when graduates are most likely to leave (IES, 2003). Moreover, there was a need to maximise the range of longitudinal data regarding participants' variations in

their experiences and perceptions of leaving intention. This would permit a greater period of time for a number of leaving intentions to arise in each participant, whilst providing the opportunity to see how and why these fluctuate over time. A decision was made not to interview graduates who had already left their organisations due to difficulty locating them, and so the findings therefore reflect the views of those graduates who were still with their employer at the time of interview.

Graduate occupations were varied, but all were similar in terms of the length of the training schemes (i.e., two to three years), and all graduates engaged in a variety of career-related activities. Graduates in more generalised occupations (e.g., marketing, human resources, logistics, etc.) were of interest because they were likely to hold non-career specific (academic) degrees compared to graduates with more vocational-oriented qualifications and careers (e.g., medicine, accountancy, etc.). There is evidence to suggest that retention is higher when graduates enter graduate-specific roles or a position that offers formal professional training whereas retention is lower when the position is more general (IES, 2003).

Interviews were carried out with 12 participants in a range of occupations, based in three different large blue-chip organisations. Organisation one comprised of three females and their respective professions were: Design Engineer; HR Manager; and HR Adviser. Organisation two comprised of three males and their respective professions were: Electrical and Electronic Engineer; Software Engineer; and Service Manager. Finally, organisation three comprised of three males and three females and their respective professions were: Environmental Advisor; Regional Coordinator; Procurement Projects Manager; HR Assistant; Business Cancellation Controls System Manager; and Marketing Advisor. The mean age and occupational tenure of the participants in each organisation are shown in Table 2.1. below.

**Table 2.1. Mean Age and Occupational Tenure of Participants in Each Organisation**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Mean Age (Years)</b>	<b>Mean Occupational Tenure Within The Same Organisation</b>
One (n=3)	28.3	4.3
Two (n=3)	31.3	4.3
Three (n=6)	27.3	4.8
Total (n=12)	29	4.5

### **2.4.3. Context and Participating Organisations**

Investigating any employee's leaving intentions is a potentially precarious subject and the wider political and economic climatic issues at the time of data collection may have given participants reason to be reticent and less inclined to speak openly and honestly about their leaving intentions. These potential problems were borne in mind throughout the research process, especially when designing the interview questions and when conducting the interviews.

The study was conducted in three large blue-chip organisations. Organisation one was a large aerospace engineering organisation employing over 40,000 people in four core areas, namely; Civil aerospace, Defence aerospace, Energy and Marine; they currently have customers in over 135 countries with annual sales in excess of £4 billion. However, at the time of the interviews, between April and October 2005, the organisation was still recovering from the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and the aerospace industry as a whole had suffered huge profit losses due to the resultant slump in both airline demand and

passenger confidence. They experienced a loss of £1 billion in trade from their Civil aerospace business in 2002, a reduction of 25% in sales and such losses led to large redundancy programmes involving the shedding of 5000 staff, including 1900 from the site where this research was conducted (Gow, 2001).

Organisation two was a large multinational electrical and electronics company employing 434,000 employees in 190 countries and is active in the industries of information, communications, automation and control, power, transportation, medical and lighting. Finally, organisation three was a leading multinational energy company employing 100,000 employees in over 100 countries and is active in various energy sources and petrochemicals. At the time of this research high oil prices had lifted the company's profits, reporting a 26% rise in annual profits to £8.7 billion in early 2005. Such profits meant that employees were currently experiencing stability within the business.

#### **2.4.4. Graduate Training Schemes**

Graduates participating in this research had all taken part in a graduate training scheme (or early development/experience programme) in one of a variety of technical and commercial roles. The different organisations had different approaches to graduate training and development; however, all schemes typically lasted between two to three years and involved a range of different attachments, with each placement lasting anywhere between three months up to a year. All programmes share the purpose of helping graduates to gain a better understanding of the business and to learn what is expected of them.

Typically, schemes include a combination of on-the-job experience, formal training and informal development opportunities. Other important aspects are professional and personal development where graduates are encouraged to pursue appropriate professional qualifications and are helped with this. Helping to oversee this process are early career development advisers and/or mentors in order to help graduates schedule their work placements and provide career advice and personal assistance. For example, regular appraisals and feedback are often



included as part of the development process.

#### **2.4.5. Interview Schedule Development and Piloting**

The core interview schedule was developed in view of previous research that had elicited the main antecedents found to affect an employee's intent to leave (e.g. Meertz & Campion, 1998), and also from the emergent themes from the data. This process helped to inform the type of questions that were asked in subsequent interviews.

The interview schedule was piloted on a colleague in order to see if any alterations were necessary; it was therefore not included in the subsequent analysis. Specifically, the pilot interview ensured that all questions could be asked in the time available and that questions were comprehensible. For example, a re-wording and a reordering of questions were made for sensitivity reasons, whilst also aiding the logical flow of the interview.

All questions were pre-formulated and prompts or further questions were used if participants did not understand a question and needed further clarification. For example, during the first interview, it was realised that a specific question on the role of job characteristics on graduates' intent to leave was required. This would permit participants to articulate their experiences rather than have the researcher infer these indirectly from their remarks. The revision of the interview schedule and its questions is consistent with Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestion that any conceptual structure brought to the study will usually be revised throughout the research process as new data becomes available.

Questions in section one of the interview schedule inquired into participants' demographic information, including; age, job, grade, tenure, educational and career history, and their reasons for selecting their chosen profession and organisation. Section two investigated the historical changes, if any, in each participant's leaving intentions. This section required participants to plot their leaving intentions on a graph over the course of their tenure with their

organisation and served as a visual aid that helped the researcher inquire into their leaving intentions. Participants were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with the following statement; “Taking everything into consideration I will leave my organisational role”. The graph’s y-axis was labelled 1 to 6, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 6 represented strong agreement. The x-axis comprised of the date (in years) ranging from 1996 to 2005 (see Appendix I for the graph).

In order to simplify this process as much as possible, participants were initially asked to plot just three points, namely; (1) how they had felt at the beginning of their training scheme, (2) how they had felt during the training scheme, and (3) how they had felt after they had completed the training scheme. Participants were then requested to plot any points during their tenure where their leaving intentions were particularly salient to them (in whichever direction). Finally, they were requested to join the various points in a manner that best described their various changes in feeling during their tenure and label these with a letter (e.g., A, B etc.) in order to act as a point of reference, thus helping to facilitate the interview.

Participants’ satisfaction and commitment including its three sub-types (i.e., affective, normative and continuance) were also measured over the course of their tenure. Using the same graph and scale, participants’ satisfaction was measured by their response to the statement: “Taking everything into consideration, I am satisfied with my organisational role.” Affective commitment was measured by the statement: “Taking everything into consideration, I feel emotionally attached to my organisational role.” Normative commitment was measured by the statement: “Taking everything into consideration, I feel an obligation to remain in my organisational role.” Finally, continuance commitment was measured by the statement: “Taking everything into consideration, it would be very hard for me to leave my organisational role right now, even if I wanted to.”

In order to investigate participants' leaving intentions, an adapted form of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954; see also Pearn & Kandola, 1998) was used in conjunction with the graph described above. Starting at their point of entry into the organisation, participants were required to work forward until they arrived at their current feelings. At each point where their leaving intentions had changed, in whichever direction, CIT was used to explore the situation leading up to this event, the underlying factors responsible for the change, and its consequences. The graph was referred to whilst conducting this process in order to ensure that both the researcher and the participants clearly understood which incident was being referred to. A brief example demonstrating the use of the CIT technique is given below:-

**Interviewer:** *"What were the circumstances leading up to this situation?"*

**Interviewee:** *"I was under a lot of pressure with my work at the time...and my time for study had been greatly reduced."*

**Interviewer:** *"How exactly, did this make you feel?"*

**Interviewee:** *"Let down and ignored... like I wasn't valued as an employee, compared to more senior members of staff."*

**Interviewer:** *"What were the consequences of this?"*

**Interviewee:** *"I seriously considered leaving and packing it in... I wasn't sure if this was the right job for me anyway."*

Questions in section three dealt with the main psychological antecedents thought to affect intent to leave (Maertz and Campion, 1998), namely; satisfaction, commitment (affective, normative, and continuance), unmet expectations, factors encouraging the graduate to stay in the organisation, work and non-work relationships, job characteristics, organisational and individual career management, the role of expected future satisfaction, organisational climate and culture, and individual and organisational beliefs and values. Again, the adapted CIT technique was used to investigate any reported events or issues raised by participants in further detail (see Appendix II for the final interview schedule).

#### **2.4.6. Data Gathering Procedure**

All 12 interviews were conducted between April and October 2005. All interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of participants and each interview ranged from 60 to 90 minutes in duration; written notes were also made throughout the interviews.

Prior to starting each interview, each participant was thanked for taking part and the purpose of the study was reiterated. Participants were made aware that some of their comments may be quoted verbatim in the analysis, but that they and their organisation would not be personally identifiable, thereby assuring confidentiality. In view of this condition participants were told that they may refuse to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable answering and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time before the results were written up. Before questioning began, the structure and procedure of the interview was outlined and participants were asked if they had any questions.

During the interview, if participants needed prompting or where interesting issues were raised then further questions were asked. This flexibility helped the interviews flow and ensured that interesting, yet unexpected topics could be covered. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to make any comments or discuss anything that had not been covered in the interview. Participants were then thanked for their time and given a stamped addressed envelope containing a list of the interview questions in case they had any other comments that they wished to make following the interview.

#### **2.4.7. Data Analysis**

The three main stages of the Miles and Huberman (1994) data-analytic approach: data-reduction, data-display, and conclusion drawing and data verification overlap with one another and so they were all carried out in parallel. The process of data-reduction occurred when data were reduced and summarised and involved the selection of specific material; it is a process that occurred

throughout the data-analytic process. This was achieved by using data-display or analytic 'tools' (e.g., coding) in order to test the researcher's explanations throughout the analysis and helped to standardise the analytic procedure and verify the subsequent results.

The process of data verification is inherent throughout the analytic process and conclusions were drawn and verified through the researcher's interpretation of the displayed data in order to demonstrate the validity and veracity of the emergent explanatory theory. The process of data verification entailed a process of collecting new data to refine, extend and continue the ongoing processes of data reduction, data display and data verification; and it is through all of these processes that the quality of this study and of its results are affirmed.

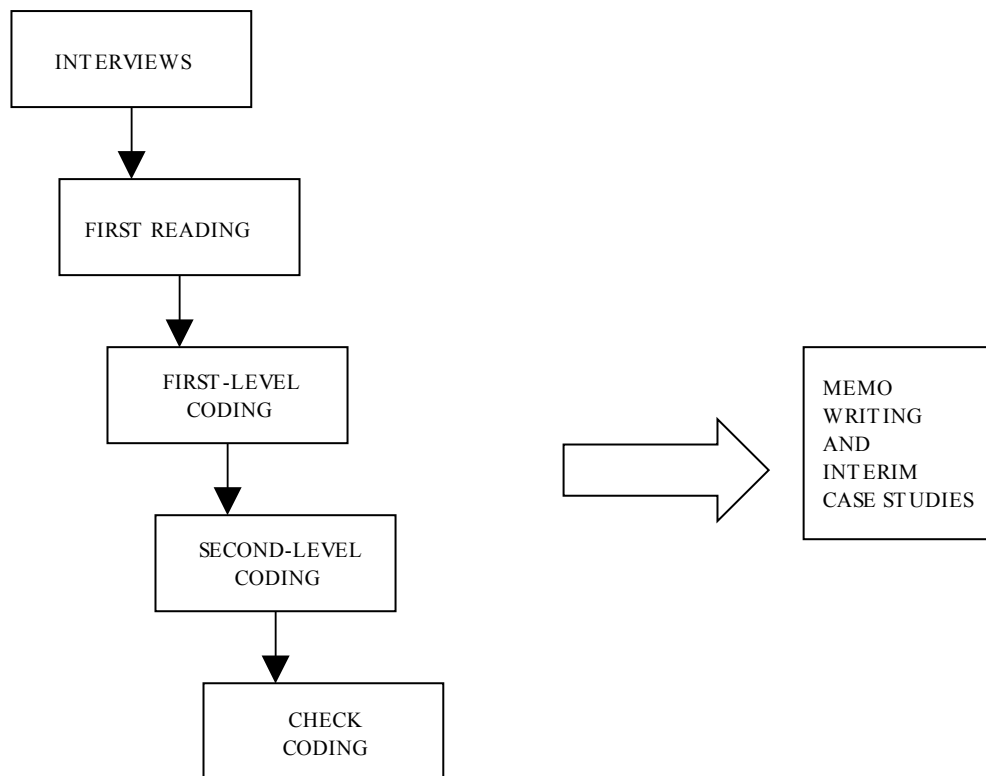
After each interview was transcribed, a full and close reading was carried out before coding began. This gave the researcher an initial sense of some of the aspects and issues arising from the data in context, whilst allowing the data to be interacted with in a relatively 'unmediated' way. The interviews were analysed independently of one another on a case by case (within) basis, drawing out themes of importance; before a cross-case (between-case) analysis drew these concepts and themes together.

It was during re-reading that coding began in earnest; and each transcript was read and coded in its entirety before moving onto the next one. This strategy prevented interviewees' voices flowing into one another in the researcher's mind. Two types of coding were employed and Miles and Huberman (1994) distinguish between the operational definitions of first- and second-level codes so that they can be consistently and accurately applied.

First- level codes entail a micro-level analytical stance; they are descriptive and labels are attached to codes of words. Second-level coding is referred to as pattern or meta-level coding and is more general, inferential and explanatory; it occurs when the researcher looks for structural relationships between codes, which are then grouped or clustered by relevance into smaller numbers of sets,

themes or constructs, which were drawn together during the cross-case analysis. Memo-writing and interim case studies were used as aides throughout the coding procedure and helped the researcher to focus data-analysis on answering the research question.

The final stage of coding, known as check coding, involved clarifying or confirming the researcher's own interpretations by discussing definitions of codes with colleagues, helping to make sure that accurate and appropriate definitions were used. The process of coding was considered to be complete when the analysis had run its course; that is, when all incidents had been classified, their categories were saturated and a sufficient number of regularities had emerged. A procedural diagram summarising the data collection and analytic methods used in this study is shown in *Figure 2.1.* below.



**Figure 2.1. Procedural Diagram of the Data Collection and Analytic Methods Used in this Study**

The analysis therefore involved identifying and examining the many themes or antecedents that described participants’ experiences that were deemed to be important in their intention to leave their organisations; a process that constituted descriptive thematic analysis (Hayes, 2000). This was done by noting the similarities and differences amongst the themes, which permitted the formation of coherent types, by grouping analogous codes together and allowing experiences to be categorised as a type of antecedent of intent to leave.

The culmination of this process was the establishment of a typology of antecedents of graduates’ intent to leave, which is described in the next section of this chapter. Data extracts were chosen that best illustrated each theme and further comments were made in terms of the overlap amongst the themes or antecedents and any organisational and individual differences that may be

present. The final typology was verified through discussions with colleagues and by the participants themselves using a qualitative typology verification response form. This form outlined the six key antecedent categories and their sub-types relating to intent to leave, and asked participants for their comments about the appropriateness and placing of the themes, and if they felt that there were any omissions. (See Appendix III for the qualitative typology verification response form).

## **2.5. Results**

### **2.5.1. Emergent Descriptive Themes**

The descriptive thematic analysis identified six antecedents or types of graduate experience relating to their intent to leave; these were: (1) Organisational receptiveness; (2) Remuneration; (3) Job characteristics and working environment; (4) Professional development; (5) Work relationships and social support; and (6) Professional belonging. Each of these antecedents are covered in turn below, using quotations from interviewees that were selected to illustrate the essence of each antecedent. In each case, interviewees are identified by a letter followed by the page and line numbers from where the quotation was taken from the transcripts.

### **2.5.2. Organisational Receptiveness**

The first antecedent or group of themes related to issues concerning organisational receptiveness. These related to the organisations' ability or willingness to receive or listen to graduates' views and whether the response was appropriate and in a manner that is mindful of their views. These issues were commonly experienced and often occurred in combination with the themes relating to graduates' job characteristics and social support. Issues relating to organisational receptiveness were varied and ranged from an organisational to an



interpersonal level, and each of these will now be explored using selected data extracts to illustrate each particular theme.

### **Consistency and Coherence of Communication**

There needs to be a coherence and consistency in communication at all times: from the graduate recruitment process (e.g., recruitment fairs, organisational literature and assessment centres) to those graduates on their training schemes. This consistency and coherence conveys to graduates that they and their views are important. For example, graduates complained of being given conflicting accounts of information about the organisation and their jobs, and this inconsistency was sufficient in itself to trigger doubts in graduates' minds regarding whether or not they wanted to work for a particular organisation.

Extract 1.1.

*“...there wasn't a flawless transition I have to say, I think they play on the organisation's prestigious image more than they should. You, well, it isn't exactly like that, the information I was given was good, but it didn't ring completely true once I started here, as it turns out, quite different, a bit like a holiday brochure scenario to be fair.”*

Interviewee A [P4:L36-L39]

Most graduate training schemes provide literature and opportunities for graduates to find out about the organisation and their role, but little specific information is given about the precise nature of the role. Although graduates usually experience a number of different roles and tasks, examples could be given and would help graduates prepare for their first few months of employment.

Extract 1.2.

*“I would have liked a lot more information about what kind of roles I would be doing, it's obviously difficult, because you, the organisation don't know what or where you'll be, but maybe some case study information or job descriptions or something would have helped.”*

Interviewee K [P8:L2-L5]

Communication at all levels, whether it is organisational, departmental, team based or interpersonal needs to be clear, coherent and structured for a smooth operation. This is important in helping the graduate feel part of a wider team and part of the organisation itself. Graduates repeatedly expressed annoyance with poor communication amongst groups and departments within the organisation and even difficulties with interpersonal communication, which included problems relating to ascertaining the preferred contact methods of other employees.

Extract 1.3.

*“You don’t necessarily feel part of the wider organisation, only your immediate team really...there isn’t much communication that goes on between departments or different sites...being up here in the north, you feel a little isolated from main office in London.”*

Interviewee D [P4:L30-L32]

Similarly, some graduates highlighted the lack of co-ordination between different departments that oversaw their training programs. This is a potential problem for all large organisations and it is crucial that adequate provision is put in place in order to ensure a co-ordinated delivery.

Extract 1.4.

*“...other people got a bit of a shock because they came into a bit of a side step... there’s one big flaw on the grad’ training scheme and it is because you’re funded centrally by the HR function, but you’re doing the work for business units who actually need the work doing, because the people who are paying for you don’t get the work from you. The people who are getting the work from you are getting you as free labour, so nobody has overarching control of what you’re doing.”*

Interviewee A [P3:L14-L21]

## **Clarity and Detail of Information**

Organisations need to express themselves clearly and make sure that the right level of detail or information is given so that graduates know what is expected of them, and that additional help is given if they require it. The organisation's ability to do this will impact upon the graduates' feelings toward the organisation and if graduates' perceive themselves and their views to be taken seriously by the organisation (i.e., if they feel valued and respected).

Extract 1.5.

*"...you can be bombarded with information and then there are other times when your tasks are less clear. There are no set of rules or guidelines to work within and this gets a bit dissatisfying; it indicates a lack of structure to the scheme."*

Interviewee E [P7:L19-L21]

## **Organisation's Willingness to Listen**

Communication issues surrounding graduate training programmes must be managed effectively and Human Resources personnel need to play a central role in this; for example, by helping to ensure a consistent input from both graduates and management. Where possible, it is important that graduates are permitted to exercise some choice in where they work and in which kind of projects they are assigned to work on. Graduates should also be allowed to make some contribution to the decisions that are made concerning them. Any signs that the graduates' views are unimportant or are excluded may engender feelings of worthlessness and dissatisfaction. Organisations therefore need to listen to their graduates and respond in a manner that is mindful of their views. Organisations that dictate, do not engage in constructive dialogue, or ride roughshod over the views of their graduates and concerns are all major sources of dissatisfaction.

Extract 1.6.

*“They don’t always listen...but whether something gets done about it I don’t know. There have been a few issues, that haven’t been resolved to my satisfaction, but as I say, there’s nothing that makes me want to do anything more than have a sulk; but if you’re not challenging them all the time to improve your work environment then things won’t get any better.”*

Interviewee K [P3:L37-P4:L4]

It is also important that graduates know of the appropriate channels in which to voice their concerns or problems; moreover, organisations need to create an atmosphere in which the graduates feel that this can happen.

Extract 1.7.

*“I wasn’t entirely sure about where to take or how to go about taking the issue in order for it to be resolved with the minimum of fuss...they [the organisation] could be clearer and provide more information about this...usually it’s your line manager or mentor who you go to with your problem, but there have been times when you feel they aren’t the best people to speak to.”*

Interviewee E [P5:L14-L20]

A speedy response to graduate queries is also very important and creates a sense that graduates are an important cohort of the organisational workforce. Organisations and senior management need to be receptive to graduate problems and queries at both an interpersonal and organisational level. Graduates need to feel that they are being listened to, that their views count and that any organisational response is mindful of their views.

Extract 1.8.

*“If I wasn’t getting a level of responsiveness back from the organisation, then that would have left me cold, so it needs to be two-way to succeed.”*

Interviewee J [P3:L31-L32]

## **Honesty and Openness of Communication**

Organisations must endeavour to meet graduates' pre-joining expectations of work and career by communicating accurately about what their jobs will entail. Graduates' expectations of their job are partly based on what they are told by the organisation and so they need to be honest and realistic to their graduates. Open and honest communication, at all times, is important to build trust and to encourage a dialogue between graduates and management so that graduates do not feel that they are being dictated to and ignored by the organisation.

Extract 1.9.

*“As far as I’m aware, I’m the only graduate here at the moment; everyone else has left because of, like nothing was delivered that was promised relating to career development and professional development. We get a bit of training, but it’s not transferable skills...I felt a bit cheated to be honest, I mean thinking back, they also said there would be a rigid pay increase for the first two years, but from what I was told in my interview I was completely lied to...they said they were putting the finishing touches to the graduate package and you get fobbed off quite a bit, I now realise that it was never going to come. You don’t realize at the time that you’ve been shafted if you like.”*

Interviewee C [P4:L23-L35]

All of these issues relating to an organisation's receptiveness are especially important in graduates' early formative experiences. They also play a strong role in graduates' attitudes towards the organisation and their first impressions of whether or not they feel it is well run and a good place in which to work.

### **2.5.3. Remuneration**

#### **Competitive Remuneration Package**

Pecuniary remuneration in large blue-chip organisations is very competitive and it needs to be in order to attract the best graduates. However, salary should only

form the basis of a wider remuneration package that may also include: share options, performance bonuses, discounts, company cars, private medical insurance, travel allowance and a re-location allowance. All of which are attractive incentives for graduates.

Extract 2.1.

*“The money is good here, but it’s also the other perks, which you get that definitely make your job worthwhile...it all adds up really to a very good overall package that would be difficult to give up.”*

Interviewee D [P6:L33-L38]

These perks and benefits all create very strong reasons for joining and staying with the organisation. Indeed, larger organisations are effective at creating these financial barriers, which may prevent graduates from leaving; however, organisations should realise that money alone is not sufficient for a graduate’s loyalty. For example, in the extract below, the graduate is explaining that he is due to collect his five-year bonus soon and that this is the only reason why he is remaining with the organisation.

Extract 2.2.

*“...from what we had been told in the interviews, we had definitely been lied to... so there was a part of that to blame and also the change of moving into [another] part of the business, which seemed a lot less organised...just lack of training on the product that I was going to work on...I actually started looking in 2004 and shortly after I started looking, two or three other graduates left and then this five-year bonus, which is if you stay for five years after you started, they give you a nice five thousand pound bonus, so I’m literally waiting till next year and then I’ll be looking again...I know for a fact that they won’t be offering another bonus so I’ll be off straight away.”*

Interviewee C [P9:L12-L22]

## **Equity, Transparency and Clarity of Remuneration**

Generally, pay was not an issue during the first few years of a graduate's career; although many graduates noted that it could become an issue if they felt that they got to a stage where they were not being fairly paid for the work that they were doing. Graduates need to feel that they are being fairly rewarded for their work and some graduates are attracted by higher salaries elsewhere, but in most cases, it would have to be a significant increase in order for them to make the move.

Extract 2.3.

*"I have expectations of how my salary will increase and to date it has done, so it's never really been an issue for me while I've been here...but, yeah, if it got to the stage where I felt I wasn't, if my pay didn't reflect my expertise or experience then I'd be dissatisfied and probably look elsewhere."*

Interviewee D [P7:L6-L11]

It is very important that there is a transparent and clear salary structure in place so that graduates can see how their pay will increase and what they must do for this to happen. A potential difficulty for organisations is when graduates have acquired further professional qualifications and experience and they become more employable. Organisations should therefore ensure that their remuneration packages reflect these changes.

Extract 2.4.

*"The good thing about here is that you can sort of see how your earnings will increase, it's very clear, yes...it's important to be clear about how you can increase your salary and how to get there."*

Interviewee F [P7:L24-L28]

The stability and certainty of the salary, associated perks, and expectations of incremental increases all help to create a sense of comfort for graduates with their job. Graduates commented on the reluctance of leaving to take up a position that involved a reduction in salary; therefore remuneration is clearly an

effective barrier to leaving and is an important consideration for organisations and their graduate retention.

Extract 2.5.

*“I’m on a very good salary here; it’s very safe and my team leader describes it as a fur-lined rut. It is a rut and it’s easy to whine about the place and turn up everyday and go home everyday and nothing ever changes, but it’s comfortable while you’re here, you know it’s not enormously pressured time wise, I don’t have to do enormously long hours. I don’t think it [pay] is that important, but it is easy to get comfortable with your pay...I think it would be a big wrench to go to something where I was being paid less, but it’s because I kind of am used to being paid what I’m being paid...I think overall if I suddenly found myself out of work, say [the organisation] had a big round of redundancies and we were affected and you know that was it. I think in terms of finding a new job when I was going from nothing, the salary really wouldn’t be that important. It’s just that walking out of something that’s better than you ever expected is difficult.”*

Interviewee K [P7:L12-L28]

### **Pecuniary Rewards as Part of a Broader Package**

Organisations must realise that although financial reward is important, it is not the be all and end all of graduates’ ambitions. Pecuniary rewards should not act as a substitute for other facets of their work; including, the intrinsic characteristics of their work (e.g., the nature and scope of the job) and the management of the graduates’ careers. Organisations need to recognise the importance of personal and career development for graduates’ and align their remuneration packages in accordance with graduates’ increasing experience and progression.

Extract 2.6.

*“There are other things other than the remuneration that keep you here. I’ve never really thought about going anywhere else. The only time I would leave would be if personal development wasn’t, I wasn’t developing as I should or I felt I wasn’t being given enough money for what I was doing.”*

Interviewee E [P8:L40-P9:L3]



### **Attitudes towards Pecuniary Remuneration**

Graduates demonstrated differing attitudes towards money; and these were inextricably related to their philosophy towards work: for example, whether they worked to live or lived to work. Some graduates were thrifty and lived within their means; others were more extravagant. Money was also of less importance for those graduates that enjoyed their work and were in a job that they wanted to do than for those that felt that they worked to live.

Extract 2.7.

*“I think when you’re doing something you love, like what I do, then the money isn’t, well, it becomes a bit irrelevant in that you just forget about that and I’m more focused with my work, that’s where my concentration is.”*

Interviewee H [P8:L36-L38]

For example, some graduates reported a willingness to take a pay cut in order to move into an alternative job that they would find more enjoyable and fulfilling. For other graduates, their salary was a large factor in staying where they were; in such cases, the graduate wasn’t completely happy or fulfilled, but had become accustomed to the lifestyle their salary afforded them.

Extract 2.8.

*“I’d like to say it’s [money] not important, but I’d probably be lying. I like to have money and my toys, my fast car; yeah, the money is important and the money is not too bad, but I’d certainly take a slight pay cut to work elsewhere if a better job came up.”*

Interviewee I [P8:L20-L22]

## 2.5.4. Job Characteristics and Work Environment

### Workload

These set of themes related to graduates' jobs and the environment in which they worked; organisations must recognise that different graduates will appreciate different job characteristics and working environments. A recurring issue for graduates on their training schemes regarded the extent of their workloads. Some felt under-used or lost, perhaps because they were not told what to do; others felt overworked at times. Workload problems may be symptomatic of a wider problem existing between the graduate and the line manager (e.g. communication difficulties); however, line managers must take responsibility for ensuring graduates' workloads are acceptable.

#### Extract 3.1.

*“There are times when you have too much to do and others where you're a bit lost. There isn't enough work for you so you get bored.”*

Interviewee A [P11:L10-L11]

Many graduates are prepared to make sacrifices in the early stages of their career (e.g., in terms of the number of hours they work), believing it to help them get their career off the ground. Graduates of this mentality are likely to put up with long hours and heavy workloads in the short-term, but such a scenario is likely to become detrimental to their satisfaction if it were to continue over a longer period of time.

#### Extract 3.2.

*“At the moment, I'm putting in the hours and doing as much as I can...I suppose I'm making a sacrifice at the moment to get my, well, to make progress here, but I'm not expecting to keep this up for very long really. It's okay at the moment, but there's no way I could stick this up for much longer.”*

Interviewee I [P13:L22-L27]

## **Job Skills and Variety**

It is important that graduates feel that they are using their abilities to the full. They expressed a strong desire to continually learn new things and to be tested and challenged. Organisations must recognise that graduates feel they have something to give and contribute to the organisation and that this must be allowed to show itself. It is all too easy for the organisation to lumber graduates with an excessive load of monotonous administrative tasks for which they are over-qualified and would rather spend less time on their completion.

Extract 3.3.

*“What’s in my job spec, my contract, what I’m employed to do I enjoy, but I find that I’m spending less and less of my time doing the development all the time; trying to find what’s going wrong and where it’s going wrong, which isn’t what I’m supposed to be doing.”*

Interviewee D [P9:L30-L33]

Graduates that are encouraged to excel and are viewed as an expert in a particular area all help to create feelings of satisfaction and feelings of competence in the graduate. It is important that graduates are given opportunities to demonstrate their expertise and skill; it is this process that engenders a feeling of self-importance in graduates and is highly conducive for fostering their satisfaction and commitment towards the organisation.

Extract 3.4.

*“A little bit in the sense that I’m good at what I do...I’m the only one working on this project, so I’m seen as an expert on the project so it’s nice to have people coming to you and ask my advice.”*

Interviewee D [P11:L29-L33]

## **Job Autonomy and Degree of Responsibility**

Large organisations appear to have difficulty in structuring their training schemes is striking a balance between giving graduates the right amount of independence, autonomy and freedom to work, and not overloading them with too much training and excessive levels of responsibility too early on in their careers. Giving graduates greater independence is an indication of trust and has implications for the graduates own feelings as to whether they perceive themselves to be deemed competent by the organisation. However, not providing enough help for their graduates can be equally as damaging.

Extract 3.5.

*“The good thing about this company is that they encourage you to make your own decision. They impress on you that you’re qualified, you’re sensible; if you make a decision you should justify your decision with rationale and we’ll support you with anything you’ll do and I’ve always been very impressed with that...you’re never downtrodden and told to do as you’re told; you’re encouraged to be your own person.”*

Interviewee C [P10:L15-L21]

## **Job Challenge, Interest and Career Relevance**

Large organisations are good at providing variety, through different work placements or assignments; but there is often some discord or incoherence in the level of interest, challenge or relevance of the work to the graduates’ professional and career development. Graduates strive for significance at work and it is vital that the work is seen as important and useful to them.

Extract 3.6.

*“The work was good and quite interesting, but I just couldn’t, at that time, see the relevance to my own development. I couldn’t see how spending six months here was going to help me if you see what I mean.”*

Interviewee F [P12:L5-L7]

It is helpful for graduates to see the results of their own work: so that they can see how the work is useful to the organisation and in terms of their own career development. There is often alienation where the results of graduates' work are intangible and seemingly lost, producing feelings of dissociation with the organisations' end product or service.

Extract 3.7.

*“The other factor that I think seems to me more is whether this organisation is somewhere where I want to be for the longer term, and that’s really because I don’t have a strong affinity to the product. So the engine itself doesn’t do much for me because I’m not an engineer by background and I feel removed from our direct product.”*

Interviewee K [P12:L4-L7]

## **Feedback**

Graduates' good work needs to be recognised in some capacity, whether it be in the form of a simple 'pat on the back' or more formally appreciated, such as through organised trips to see the final completed product. The use of rewards can help graduates develop a bond or a greater affinity with the end product or service.

Extract 3.8.

*“It would be nice if your contribution...the project or the completed product was seen and acknowledged, even if it was just a pat on the back.”*

Interviewee B [P13:L34-L37]

It is important for organisations to provide a more structured and systematic approach to acknowledging or recognizing the work of its graduates. An opportune time for this is through the dissemination of formal and informal feedback regarding a graduate's performance at clearly specified time intervals that is helpful and constructive. Interestingly, graduates often noted that advice and instruction given informally was far more useful.

Extract 3.9.

*“The feedback can be a bit confusing at times, especially the formal kind of feedback...I was told that I was ‘high potential’ a while ago now, but, it’s like, what does that mean? It would help if they could tell you how you can fulfil your potential.”*

Interviewee L [P12:L24-L27]

### **Working Environment**

In addition to the intrinsic characteristics of their work, the wider working environment in which the graduates operate is also important. Graduates entering the organisation and embarking on their training schemes gave no indication that the process of adapting to their organisations’ culture and climate was an issue of any real significance.

Extract 3.10.

*“No, not really, I think it’s like when you start anything new...you expect it to be different and there has to be a period of settling in and adapting, but it’s something that you just do and get on with.”*

Interviewee J [P13:L35-L38]

### **Accommodating the Needs and Preferences of Graduates**

Organisations offering flexible working patterns and hours, days off, childcare-friendly policies and home working are all becoming increasingly popular and valued by graduates. The use of such policies all help to instil feelings of trust and responsibility in graduates and add to the novelty of entering the ‘adult world’ of work, as it is likely to be their first job after finishing their formal education.

Extract 3.11.

*“The flexi-time is important, you know, if you can turn up at 10 or seven, no one batters an eye-lid as long as you do your core hours; so it’s great, you don’t get stressed about getting to work on time because it’s flexible, so if I know I’m going to be late then I’ll just think that I’ll have to stay a bit later.”*

Interviewee H [P11:L12-L15]

Organisations should not underestimate the importance of location in graduate placements. Graduates’ own preferences regarding location, their desire to live near to their family, their spouse or partner’s place of work and the length of commute to work are all significant factors and organisations should do their utmost to accommodate these considerations.

Extract 3.12.

*“...well, I couldn’t move to Scotland, for example. I have to be as close to my friends and family as I can get.”*

Interviewee I [P15:L26-L27]

### **Work-Life Balance**

A related problem is that graduates also have a strong desire to achieve a harmonious work-life balance. Although many graduates were keen to make sacrifices early on in their career (e.g., putting in longer hours), many viewed the work-life balance as extremely important.

Extract 3.13.

*“I do value my own spare time, partly because it’s quite rare at the moment...I wouldn’t like my current life to stay as it is. I’m looking to achieve a work/life balance, yeah.”*

Interviewee G [P12:L23-L26]

## **Office Environment**

The type of office environment in terms of its layout and norms is also very important. Although graduates may vary in their own preferences, it may be that an office that is too quiet with little social interaction may be an issue for graduates. Similarly, an office with an open-plan layout may also be initially unsettling for the graduate, as they may be used to a greater degree of privacy.

Extract 3.14.

*“And it’s a really, really quiet office, nobody talks and I was itching to get out of there, and if I had accidentally ended up in a full-time job down there, I would have been seriously considering leaving. Whether that would have made me leave engineering or just that office I don’t know.”*

Interviewee H [P14:L32-L35]

## **Organisational Bureaucracy**

Similarly, the bureaucracy and modus operandi of large organisations are surprising to graduates, especially those who are eager to make a positive impact quickly; however, in most cases these issues are generally accepted as a fact of organisational life and are duly accepted. However, there are cases where conflict may arise between the graduate and the organisation over working procedures and this is often a source of frustration for graduates.

Extract 3.15.

*“Some of the remuneration packages aren’t always in line with what you see from company policy and ways of doing things; so there are times when I don’t personally agree with what the organisation is doing, but you just accept it as part of organisational life and get on with it.”*

Interviewee J [P13:L34-L37]

In some cases graduates commented on how organisational politics at a senior level affected the nature of their work, although it was something over which they felt they had no control.



Extract 3.16.

*“I’m aware of certain issues or certain decisions that have been made that affect the rest of us in our work and day-to-day activities...big decisions will be made that are hard to fathom out sometimes, in which we have no say. It can be irritating, yes, but there really is very little I can do about it.”*

Interviewee K [P14:L14-L20]

### **Culture of Mobility**

There is a culture in large organisations of expecting graduates to continually move into new roles every few years or so, even post-training scheme. Such movement is also taken to be synonymous with career progression. Graduates are actively encouraged to change jobs and are made to feel as if their career is stagnating if they stay in one place for too long. Moreover, graduates feel that stagnation may be perceived as showing ‘a lack of ambition’ by the organisation. Graduates’ feelings regarding this culture of change were mixed and in some cases may not necessarily have been what they wanted.

Extract 3.17.

*“If you don’t sort of, start looking after a couple of years or so, people start hinting to you, or they start bringing it up in conversation ‘have you started thinking of what you want to do next’, so it is expected of you that you’ll keep moving around...it’s not to everyone’s liking...moving to a whole new location, department and having to get used to a whole new bunch of people.”*

Interviewee D [P14:L10-L17]

There needs to be some underlying structure when considering a graduate’s next job move in terms of what the job offers and what may be suitable for the graduate. For example, there needs to be a coherent plan in which graduates can see the significance and usefulness of the move in terms of their own career progression and training, rather than organisations’ moving graduates around for their own ends and convenience.

Extract 3.18.

*“Oh yeah, I know of people who have been moved to locations they didn’t want to go, or to fill roles that they weren’t interested in...it’s not good I can tell you, that sort of thing doesn’t go down very well.”*

Interviewee L [P13:L21-L25]

## **2.5.5. Professional Development**

### **Opportunities for Progression**

Themes relating to professional development included: job training and professional and personal development. A strong incentive for joining a large organisation is the vast number of opportunities afforded to graduates. Such opportunities may include secondments abroad and different placements for example. This wealth of opportunity is one reason why graduates choose to move within the organisation rather than leave it completely.

Extract 4.1.

*“...say I got really sick of engineering and I thought, alright I’ll go and do, work in HR. As a first step I could get myself an HR secondment within the organisation and try and understand whether that’s a good idea or not...and that’s the sort of thing I can do only because it’s such a big company...the opportunities are brilliant.”*

Interviewee H [P17:L25-L30]

### **Career Support and Advice**

Graduates need to see a clear organisational career structure in place, the opportunities to progress, and told how to achieve these goals. The organisation needs to help with this, and both formal and informal career advice through the use of mentors, buddies and line managers is vital. In particular, graduates would like more help in finding job placements, whilst on the training scheme.

Extract 4.2.

*“The career advice given to me formally was okay and you benefit from their input that they give you, but you don’t get quite as much out of it as the sort of advice you get informally from friends in the organisation, the more senior people who you know socially.”*

Interviewee B [P17:L23-L26]

Line managers, HR staff and mentors may all help by imparting advice and guidance to graduates. Line managers may be less trusted as they may give biased advice; whereas HR staff will be unbiased, but would have little or no knowledge and experience of potential career paths. Mentors are also useful; however, it is important that graduates respect the person if they are to listen to any advice that is given. For example, graduates need to respect their mentors and trust that their advice is impartial and in the best interest of graduates.

Extract 4.3.

*“I’ve seen my mentor once for about 15 minutes about six months ago...I just didn’t get much out of the meeting really. I guess he wasn’t really, I mean, I don’t think we saw eye to eye...and if you don’t quite know them or get on, then you’re not going to value their advice.”*

Interviewee A [P18:L16-L23]

Organisations also need to consider the extent of training that needs to be given and the suitability of how it is delivered to each graduate. Indeed, graduates may desire further instruction regarding the type of training that they should obtain. Organisations therefore need to consider the type of training a graduate needs and whether on-the-job training is better delivered in a structured or a self-paced learning format.

Extract 4.4.

*“We were telling communications that we hadn’t been sent on any course to do with the fundamentals, that what we had to do and the terminology; so we didn’t really even get the basics from the training.”*

Interviewee D [P18:L23-L25]

## **Opportunities to Obtain Academic and Professional Qualifications**

Large organisations are good at encouraging graduates to develop their careers. They provide the time and resources for graduates to obtain further academic and professional training and qualifications; although, they appear to undervalue such qualifications internally (e.g., chartership). In contrast, graduates view such qualifications as very important for their career development, especially outside of the organisation.

Extract 4.5.

*“The actual CIPD qualification is good for your career, but less so in this organisation...some of the more senior staff don’t really value it, I actually started to think there wasn’t much point doing the qualification as I would doubt that not being chartered would hold your career back here in this organisation, but it certainly would if I wanted to leave here.”*

Interviewee A [P17:L2-L8]

## **Personal Development**

Personal development is also undervalued by organisations. Graduate non-work interests should be encouraged and the time made available for graduates to develop their own personal skills, perhaps through workshops; including: public speaking, time management etc. would all be considered useful to graduates. Organisations should also help graduates realise their own personal goals and ambitions. Many graduates expressed a desire to get involved with the community or in charity work; others wanted to leave work to travel and fulfil other life goals. A more flexible approach by the organisation and help with the provision of activities in order to help graduates meet their goals and ambitions, which may or may not be related to their job, may help to retain their best graduates.

Extract 4.6.

*“I did the three peak challenge and other sorts of things that keep you here.”*

Interviewee D [P16:L34]

## Organisational Management of Career

Some graduates felt that the organisation ultimately determined their progression and mobility in the organisation and that the idea of complete career self-determination was largely illusory.

Extract 4.7.

*“I’m sure they [the organisation] want you to think that you’re in charge of your own destiny, but they’ll be pulling the strings really.”*

Interviewee G [P17:L14-L15]

In contrast, most graduates did not perceive the organisation to be in complete control of their career, suggesting that graduates are taking their own careers into their own hands; although it seems that they expect some support from the organisation. Many graduates remarked on the provision of a wide array of opportunities and good career-mobility within the organisation, although this did not appear to have translated into a strong feeling that the organisation was in charge of their careers.

Extract 4.8.

*“You have to take responsibility for your career here, no one will be as interested in your career as you are and you have to take personal ownership of that. I’ve always taken the steps, whether that be sort of the professional development or doing the masters or upgrading my professional development.”*

Interviewee H [P18:L26-L29]

Graduates do not expect to have quite so much autonomy and choice when entering the organisation, and paradoxically, although graduates expect to manage their own career, they expect more help with their careers, in its early stages, than they actually receive. However, there is a decrease in graduates’

expectations that organisations should help with their career management as their tenure increases; perhaps because graduates learn more about managing their own career for themselves, indicating that career-management is a learned skill. Nevertheless, career management must be viewed as a shared responsibility between the organisation and the graduate, and not something that can be left for graduates to handle on their own.

Extract 4.9.

*“It is the individual’s responsibility: if you want to sit on your own and not sort out your own promotions and, you know, not go for taking on opportunities, then to a certain degree, people around you will push you, but that’s dependent on who your team leader is and if they’re proactive or not...but if you don’t do it you can sit around and stagnate.”*

Interviewee J [P16:L18-L23]

Moreover, graduates hinted that they were more likely to engage in mobility-oriented behaviour (i.e., behaviour that made them more employable to employers outside of the organisation) as their tenure increased; again, adding support to the idea that graduates learn to manage their own careers. Indeed, as their tenure increased, graduates were more likely to have a greater career knowledge, clearer career interests and an improved knowledge of socio-economic and labour-market trends; all of which are conducive to career self-management.

Extract 4.10.

*“You are more aware of what kinds of jobs are out there and what your own worth is to be honest; that all comes with experience...I also had a clearer understanding or idea of how I wanted my career to look as well.”*

Interviewee F [P22:L14-L18]

## 2.5.6. Work Relationships and Social Support

### Graduate ‘Friendly’ Atmosphere

A hugely influential factor affecting graduate satisfaction in the workplace is their relationship with their work colleagues. Graduates that encounter negative experiences with other co-workers, particularly the more senior employees may form a significant reason in itself for graduates’ intent to leave. It is important that organisations create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere for graduates who are joining them; for example, some graduates reported being intimidated by the more senior members of staff when they first joined the organisation.

Extract 5.1.

*“I was nervous about approaching more senior employees, they are very busy people and don’t really have the time to talk to you.”*

Interviewee E [P24:L32-L33]

It is paramount that graduates also feel comfortable with and respect their co-workers and line manager. A line manager who does not devote time, support, take an active interest in or does not get along with the graduate will be problematic. Indeed, problems amongst co-workers, team members or employees is a major cause of dissatisfaction and leaving intent in graduates and should be dealt with immediately by the organisation.

Extract 5.2.

*“A significant factor would be if I didn’t feel comfortable or if the line manager that I was going to be working for, that I was going to be happy, and that we were going to be aligned in terms of the way we work and their own agenda in terms of where they are in their own career...and if the job didn’t turn out to how I thought it was going to be, and if I find myself blocked or in a difficult situation I couldn’t get out of, then I would start to look externally.”*

Interviewee D [P23:L28-L33]

## **Culture of Job Change**

Graduates move into different roles in different locations regularly whilst they are on their training schemes, and this is an unsettling problem for them as they have to adjust to new work colleagues and a different environment in which to work in. Many graduates found this change to be stressful, especially in their early years in the organisation. However, such change is also helpful if graduates are particularly unhappy with their current work colleagues. In contrast, graduates may also start to think of leaving if colleagues with which they have developed a close working bond leave or move on elsewhere.

Extract 5.3.

*“It’s the constant change really; just as you get settled it’s time to move...it is unsettling, which it is in the early days, but I’ve never got used to it I suppose. It can be both positive and negative; for example, I was sad to leave my last placement because I got on so well with everybody and my line manager was really cool...but if things weren’t so dandy, then the chance to move is a real bonus I guess.”*

Interviewee C [P24:L24-L29]

## **Inclusiveness and Feeling Part of a Team**

Graduates must feel as though they fit in with their work colleagues; they must be included and made to feel part of the team. Graduates should also be trusted and not made to feel looked down upon or patronised in a negative way because they are younger and less experienced.

Extract 5.4.

*“There is that element to it, where you tell them that you’re a graduate and they joke about it and everything, but it’s real, people have different attitudes about graduates and what they think a graduate can and can’t do or what they should and shouldn’t do...so there is some stigma attached to it.”*

Interviewee E [P23:L23-L28]



An overlooked phenomenon is the importance of graduates working with employees of a similar age to themselves. Graduates working alongside more senior employees reported feeling isolated after a period of time.

Extract 5.5.

*“I felt a bit isolated in that placement and I’d never thought of it before, but not having anyone your own age around, being in an environment of 50 plus year old men was, you know, boring and dull to be honest...I was glad to move on.”*

Interviewee G [P17:L23-L28]

### **Anonymity**

Similarly, graduates may be prone to feelings of anonymity and these feelings may be compounded by the large size of the organisation.

Extract 5.6.

*“I think if I were to move somewhere else it would be somewhere smaller. I get the feeling that you’re like a brick in the wall, it feels quite lonely like that. We have a resource chart where we’re moved from project to project and we’re not really treated like an individual.”*

Interviewee L [P23:L4-L7]

### **Interpersonal Support and Advice**

The use of line managers, mentors and buddies is important as a means of providing support, but their success is dependent on whether the graduate feels comfortable and respects the person from whom the advice or support is sought. The distinction between professional and personal support also needs to be made and graduates need to know who or where they can go to discuss any problems or issues that they may have. Such advice also needs to be objective, impartial and confidential.

Extract 5.7.

*“I wouldn’t say they had the biggest influence on me, but it’s a nice safety net to have really when you are faced with a difficult decision about your next career move, to talk to someone impartial who has got an insight into you as an individual.”*

Interviewee B [P25:L33-L35]

## **Peer Support**

Organisations should also not forget the importance of the social side of work and that many graduates look for opportunities to fulfil social needs. The formation of a social network for graduates or workers is important so that they can meet and get to know other graduates or employees in the organisation and get involved in team activities outside of work (e.g., trips away, sports, and hobbies). Such a network is particularly important in the early stages of the graduates’ arrival into the organisation when they may feel at their most isolated. Such activities may also help to foster a shared sense of organisational identity.

Extract 5.8.

*“The social side is very, very important. I think my colleagues at work, I relate to them, I respect them for their knowledge and ability they have, but also socially we get along and go out, so there are lots of things that go on...well they are work relationships but they extend further than that.”*

Interviewee G [P29:L31-L36]

### **2.5.7. Professional Belonging**

#### **A Feeling of Being in the Right Profession**

Professional belonging themes related to the graduates’ choice of career; whether they felt they were in the ‘right’ profession, and if they felt that they were doing what they wanted to do with their working life. Generally, graduates in non-technical, more commercial roles (e.g., human resources, marketing etc.) were

more likely to lack any clear aspiration or ambition regarding what occupation or career that they would want to pursue (i.e., they did not have an ideal job in mind.). In contrast, graduates in more technical roles (e.g., engineering) were more likely to know or have a sense of what kind of job or career they wanted to pursue.

Extract 6.1.

*“Yes, I’ve always been more technically minded and mathematics and engineering have always been my interests since school really, so it seemed logical that I would become an engineer...I wouldn’t have wanted to do anything else, I still don’t.”*

Interviewee I [P26:L34-L38]

Graduates in technical roles were more likely to have degrees related to their occupation; this is partly out of necessity, but it also reflects a clearer sense of occupational ambition. In contrast, those graduates in more commercial roles tend to have a more disparate or academic type of degree that is usually less vocational and is perhaps symptomatic of the graduates not having a clear idea of what profession or job that they wanted to do.

Extract 6.2.

*“I didn’t really know what I wanted to study at university, which is why my degree was quite general, in that it left a lot of doors open for me still.”*

Interviewee C [P21:L22-L23]

Most graduates have a clearer idea of what they don’t want to do as a result of their previous work experiences. Graduates may also, in part, suffer from a self-fulfilling prophecy, because they did well at a subject and passed its exams, they may feel that they should pursue that subject as a career.

Extract 6.3.

*“I did engineering at university because it seemed like a good idea at the time; it gave a good broad education without really closing any doors, but then when I was looking for a job it seemed that the best paid work I could get was doing what I was trained to do and what I was good at, logically, so I fell into it by virtue of not having anything else that I wanted to do.”*

Interviewee A [P28:L27-L31]

### **Ability to Change Career**

Many graduates want to leave their current profession, but don't know what else to do. They want to do something that they are good at and enjoy, but they are tied to the organisation financially because they have other commitments, or have become accustomed to a level of living that would be hard to give up.

Extract 6.4.

*“There is an element of being tied down, financially, I think a lot of graduates will tell you that although their not wildy happy with their jobs, they are comfortable, financially, with what they're earning and would find it difficult to give it up, even if something better came up that they'd prefer to do...it's really also about being comfortable with your job as well, I mean I'm not exactly pushed to the limit and tested everyday, but I'm on a good salary at the same time.”*

Interviewee E [P27:L11-L19]

Many graduates felt that they could still change their careers or professions if they wished, despite the time and effort spent obtaining their qualifications necessary for them to occupy their current positions. Graduates may also make a decision before commencing employment, perhaps by formulating a script, to work in their current organisation until a pre-specified time (e.g., when they have completed a professional qualification or finished the training scheme). Large organisations need to be aware that the opportunities they offer are often a factor in graduates' intent to leave. For example, graduates may see large organisations as a good way of quickly obtaining qualifications and a variety of experience and

using this as the platform on which to base their career before moving on elsewhere.

Extract 6.5.

*“I made a decision at the start of, when I first joined the organisation, to leave once I obtained my chartered status and had completed the scheme before moving on and I will still do that.”*

Interviewee B [P25:L22-L26]

### **Differences in Expectations of Career Advancement**

Some graduates are more ambitious to progress further and more quickly than others and this has implications in terms of retaining them. For example, technically minded graduates appeared to value achievement over advancement to a greater extent than those in more commercial roles.

Extract 6.6.

*“As an engineer, you’re striving to make a difference conceptually; perhaps by coming up with something new or a novel approach to solving a problem... obviously you want to progress, but that comes naturally by working on a variety of projects and becoming more experienced.”*

Interviewee K [P23:L22-L27]

### **A Desire to be Socially Useful**

Graduates strive for a life of conscience and significance: they want to contribute something useful to the community rather than to the economy; they want to help people, or to produce and contribute something useful and helpful. There was a strong sense of self-belief and high aspiration among graduates: a desire to accomplish more and a general attitude that they were entitled to more. For example, graduates may harbour vague notions, perhaps fancifully in some cases, of wanting to leave at a specified time in the future and make a career change.

Extract 6.7.

*“At the moment, I’m seriously contemplating what it is that I want to do and I don’t, although I enjoy the engineering, I don’t think it’s that, I don’t feel like I’m making the most of my abilities here as in engineering generally, not just the organisation. So whether I would move within the organisation and try a different function or whether I would get out of engineering entirely I’m not sure, but I think sometime over the next three years or so probably, I’d be looking to do something different, now that’s very dependent on me having some inspiration to know what I want to do and having the balls to get on and do it.”*

Interviewee C [P22:L24-L31]

Extract 6.8.

*“I’ve been off to the national trust at one point when I thought I might like to do something like that and to see what vacancies they had around, and I’ve been looking at other stuff, but a lot of that is not serious looking for a job, it’s more just looking.”*

Interviewee G [P26:L12-L14]

### **Organisational and Occupational Commitment**

This is part of the wider issue of how well graduates fit into their career role within an organisational context. Most graduates were more committed to their own profession and didn’t feel any sense of obligation or duty to remain with their organisation. For example, they were more committed to their team and work colleagues, rather than to the organisation.

Extract 6.9.

*“The responsibility is definitely to the people I work with and not to let them down and leave them in the lurch in the middle of the project, more so, to the company as a whole.”*

Interviewee H [P27:L3-L4]

## **2.6. Discussion**

### **2.6.1. Overview of Study**

The analysis of 12 interviews using Miles and Huberman's (1994) data-display technique has led to the production of a qualitative typology of antecedents of intent to leave in a graduate population. The findings from this study build on previous research to suggest that there are a number of key areas where organisations can intervene in order to prevent their graduates from leaving them. Six distinct types of antecedents relating to graduates' dissatisfaction and intent to leave were identified; these were: (1) Organisational Receptiveness; (2) Remuneration; (3) Job Characteristics and Work Environment; (4) Professional Development; (5) Work Relationships and Social Support; and (6) Professional Belonging.

### **2.6.2. Graduates' Experience of Antecedents**

Organisations were generally good at their provision of the antecedents outlined in the typology; however, there were dissimilarities amongst different organisations in terms of their approach to their graduates and the training schemes, with some offering a more comprehensive and systematic approach to certain antecedents than others. For example, some organisations' policies towards remuneration were less comprehensive than others.

A number of interesting themes and issues were raised in the interviews; and most of these issues were borne out of the organisations' attempts to strike a balance between their own needs with those of their graduates during the early stages of their careers. The different types of antecedents of intent to leave were all experienced to different degrees; the most commonly experienced of which related to graduates' job characteristics and their working environment. For example, some graduates preferred a greater degree of autonomy, variety and job challenge than others. Interestingly, most graduates felt that they were often not challenged enough and were underused during certain periods. However, it is important that organisations give responsibility to graduates early on in their

career; graduates will appreciate this and it will help to foster feelings that they are valued and trusted by the organisation. Themes relating to the job characteristics and work environment antecedent were typically experienced as every-day trivial nuisances that were accepted by graduates as part of their job, although on rare occasions, they were shown to lead to intent to leave too.

In contrast, issues relating to graduates' sense of career progression, personal development and professional belonging were reported less often, but these were of far greater salience and were a long-term consideration in relation to their intent to leave. A further, but understated factor that was critical for graduates related to their working relationships with their colleagues. The current study's findings suggest that it is very important that graduates feel comfortable with their work colleagues. Any discord or conflict may lead to a decrease in job satisfaction and an increase in their intent to leave.

Interestingly, a series of negative reasons (e.g., financial reward) for staying in the job and positive reasons for leaving (e.g., completing the training scheme) were identified. Some graduates thought of leaving in the early years during their training scheme, but failed to do so, because their thoughts of quitting usually occurred at isolated low points or because of a particular incident, rather than due to a deeper dissatisfaction with their career. Some graduates signified their intention to leave the organisation at some point in the near future, rather than choose to stay and build a career with their current organisation. A commonly experienced issue that related to graduates' intent to leave was if they were on a training scheme or not. A substantial problem for large private-sector organisations is that they may become a victim of their own successful training schemes, which typically offer a tremendous range of training and career opportunities and rewards. Graduates may take advantage of these training schemes and use them as a platform on which to launch their career.

Indeed, a high quality training scheme attracts graduates to the organisation and so positive experiences of training and development are important; however, it becomes detrimental to the organisation when graduates do not stay and repay the organisation for its investment in them. The period of time in which



graduates are nearing the completion of their training schemes is therefore a crucial time and organisations may need to offer further financial incentives and career management advice. During the interviews, it became apparent that graduates' progress was often left unmonitored once they left the training scheme. It may be that graduates coming to the end of their training scheme require further support by the organisation, helping to ease the transition into their first post-training scheme position.

### **2.6.3. Issues Relating to the Categorisation of Antecedents and Their Themes**

A potential problem of the current study was the preliminary nature of the themes in the typology. Certain types appeared to overlap with each other and could have easily been categorised under different antecedents; however, each theme was placed under the antecedent heading that was deemed to be the most appropriate. For example, issues relating to the level of detail, clarity, consistency and coherence of the communication could well have formed an antecedent in itself; but these were assimilated into the Organisational Receptiveness antecedent because they were shown to relate to graduates' perceptions of whether or not their views were considered to be important and taken seriously by the organisation. In addition, the theme entitled Accommodating the Needs and Preferences of Graduates was included as part of the Job Characteristics and Work Environment antecedent. However, it could have easily been included as part of the Work-Life Balance theme, which was also part of the same antecedent, as its issues included flexible working patterns and home working, which may also help graduates attain a better work-life balance. A further theme that may have overlapped with other antecedents related to graduates' Feelings of Anonymity. This theme could have been logically included under the Job Characteristics and Work Environment antecedent. However, it was considered to be more suitably placed under the Work Relationships and Social Support antecedent because feelings of anonymity stemmed from feelings of social isolation.

The two themes of Culture of Mobility and Culture of Job Change were similar, but were included under two different antecedents. Culture of Job Change was part of the Work Relationships and Social Support antecedent because it related to the unsettling effects on relationships amongst colleagues. In contrast, the Culture of Mobility theme was included under the Job Characteristics and Work Environment antecedent because it related to the nature of frequently changing positions or jobs within a large organisation and the need for an underlying and coherent structure to oversee this process so that the process benefits both the graduate and the organisation.

There may also be overlap amongst the antecedents themselves. Elements of the Job Characteristics and Work Environment antecedent included a broad range of themes and the effects of changes in the extent to which they are experienced may have implications for other antecedents. For example, a position that requires low skill and is not challenging enough may lead graduates to feel that their professional development is being stifled. Similarly, themes under the Work Relationships and Social Support antecedent may also be viewed to be part of the Job Characteristics and Work Environment antecedent. For example, graduates may view their relationships with their work colleagues as a characteristic of their jobs or part of their wider working environment, or in some cases, both of these.

#### **2.6.4. Methodological Issues**

This study's bias towards identifying issues relating to graduates' intent to leave has led to the presentation of negative aspects relating to graduates' experience in the workplace. However, it should be mentioned that there was mostly positive feedback from graduates during the interviews and that organisations were, in general, very good at providing for and meeting the needs of their graduates. Although the antecedents of intent to leave in this study were based on a self-selecting sample of 'stayers' and this must be borne in mind.

The qualitative work has investigated intent to leave using the retrospective and subjective accounts of graduates and has relied on their ability to accurately

remember their own past feelings. Nevertheless, a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was deemed valuable in its own right as this enabled the in-depth exploration of graduates' own sense-making processes in relation to their leaving intentions, thereby generating conceptually rich data grounded in the participants' own words. The study's procedural account and supporting documentation throughout also helped to ensure transparency and improved the replicability or reproducibility of the results by demonstrating what was done and how the researcher came to his conclusions.

Reflexivity was incorporated into the research in order to help the confirmability or objectivity of the results and involved the researcher taking account of his own role in the research. By being alive to the reasons why particular decisions were made and showing an active awareness of any possible biases or researcher effects, helped to ensure coherence between the analytical procedures and the interpretative claims in conclusions with the actual data. Indeed, the researcher is a graduate himself and was cautious of imposing his own pre-conceptions and own experiences onto the research. Hence, it was vital that the researcher kept focused on the research questions throughout the study by staying detached as an outsider and maintaining a theoretical and analytic focus.

The internal validity or credibility and generalisability of the findings were also improved through the replication of the same findings in a representative sample of graduates in different occupations and organisations, and making comparisons across the independent data sets. This choice of sample helped to overcome the potential problems of sampling non-representative interviewees and generalising from non-representative events or activities and processes.

### **2.6.5. Chapter Summary**

The work presented in this chapter has used Miles and Huberman's (1994) technique to great effect and has produced original and important data. The six emergent themes are based on the views of graduates themselves and therefore provide an excellent platform for further quantitative work presented in the next

chapter. A detailed breakdown of the antecedents and examples of their sub-themes are neatly summarised in the typology shown below in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2. Antecedents Relating to Graduates' Intent to Leave**

<b>Antecedent</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Organisational Receptiveness	Consistency and Coherence of Communication; Clarity and Detail of Information; Poor Co-ordination; Responsiveness; Organisation's Willingness to Listen; Honesty and Openness; Dictatorial Management; Graduate Influence in Decision Making Processes
Remuneration	Competitiveness; Perks and Benefits; Equity, Transparency and Clarity of Pay Structure; Overall Package of Rewards; Attitudes Towards Pecuniary Remuneration
Job Characteristics and Work Environment	Workload; Skill; Variety; Autonomy and Degree of Responsibility; Challenge; Interest; Career Relevance; Significance; Feedback; Accommodating the Needs and Preferences of Graduates; Work-Life Balance; Office Environment; Bureaucracy; Culture of Mobility
Professional Development	Opportunities for Progression; Career Support and Advice; Opportunities to Obtain Academic and Professional Qualifications; Personal Development; Organisational Management of Career
Work Relationships and Social Support	Graduate 'Friendly' Atmosphere; Culture of Job Change; Inclusiveness and Feeling Part of a Team; Anonymity; Interpersonal Support and Advice; Peer Support
Professional Belonging	A Feeling of Being in the Right Profession; Ability to Change Career; Differences in Expectations of Career Advancement; A Desire to be Socially Useful; Organisational and Occupational Commitment

The issues raised by the work presented in this chapter provide a platform for the next study by permitting the creation of specific items designed to tap these antecedents and sub-themes. This will then allow for a more systematic examination of the antecedents relating to graduates' intent to leave by permitting a direct comparison between the qualitative typology and the results of the quantitative analysis presented in the next chapter. A further analysis of the qualitative typology will be a useful test of certain categories, which may overlap with each other and may not be mutually exclusive.

# **Chapter Three: Measuring Graduate Intent to Leave: The Transition from Subjective Experience to Measurement**

## **3.1. Summary and Overview**

The study carried out in the preceding chapter permitted the transition from graduates' subjective experiences to a generalisation about these experiences at a nomothetic level. This was done by identifying and categorizing the different types of antecedents behind graduates' intent to leave in the context in which they occur. The analysis involved using Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach to descriptive thematic analysis (DTA), which permitted these antecedents of intent to leave to be drawn from the interviews by examining the different experiences of graduates relating to their intent to leave in a variety of organisational settings and occupations. Themes or antecedents were identified that best described these experiences, grouping similar themes together and allowing them to be categorised by type, thus creating a typology of antecedents of graduates' intent to leave. This process has extended the existing understanding of antecedents of intent to leave in graduates and has led to the development of a qualitative typology, which has formed the basis for item construction for the psychometric measurement of the antecedents relating to graduates' intent to leave.

## **3.2. Aims and Rationale**

Researchers have identified and measured many constructs relating to the antecedents of employee turnover; many of which are similar to the antecedents identified in this research (e.g., Hackman and Oldham's (1975) job characteristics scale or Hayman's (2005) work-life balance scale). However, the applicability of these instruments to a graduate population is questionable as they were not designed with a graduate population in mind. Moreover, there is currently no existing psychometric instrument designed to measure the antecedents of intent to leave in a graduate population.

Such psychometric measures are typically generic in their nature and are used in a range of working populations, which fail to take the variables of age, career stage and experience into account. In contrast, the scales and their items devised in this research are intended specifically for a graduate population; they have been based on detailed qualitative research using graduates in a wide range of occupations and organisations. The current study has focused on developing a psychometric instrument that measures the specific attributes within each of the constructs relevant to graduates as identified in the qualitative typology. It has therefore focused on identifying the items deemed to be the most salient and important to graduates in relation to their intent to leave.

The work in this current chapter therefore builds upon the work in the preceding chapter by using the qualitative typology to form the basis for the construction and development of items; thus laying the foundation for the psychometric measurement of the identified antecedents of graduates' intent to leave. The aims of the work were (a) to allow the measurement of these antecedents by developing a useful research tool; (b) to implement a preliminary investigation of dimensionality and internal consistency; and (c) to carry out measure refinement, yielding a shortened and improved scale.

The current work effectively constitutes the quantitative measurement of the six qualitative antecedents relating to graduates' intent to leave and allows for a comparison to be drawn between the two sets of data and the qualitative and quantitative methods in order to establish the extent to which the antecedents identified in the qualitative typology emerge as sub-scales in the research in this chapter.

### **3.3. Method**

#### **3.3.1. Scale Development**

All items and the constructs that they represented were based on the previous qualitative findings in the preceding chapter; thus items were constructed for

each of the six types of antecedents of intent to leave in the qualitative typology in order to create an item pool. Items therefore related to: organisational receptiveness, remuneration, job characteristics and work environment, professional development, work relationships and social support, and professional belonging. The original item pool shown below in Table 3.1. consisted of 62 items and was deemed to be large enough in order to allow for the best items to be retained after the analysis, whilst also keeping the questionnaire (See Appendix IV) short enough so that it could be completed relatively quickly.

**Table 3.1. Original Pool of Items Relating to the Six Antecedents of Intent to Leave**

<b>Antecedent</b>	<b>Item</b>
<b>Organisational Receptiveness</b>	I have been listened to during the graduate training scheme
	My views are not taken into account by the organisation (R)
	I am dictated to in this organisation with little say in how things get done (R)
	I have been placed into roles that I have wanted to work in
	My problems are quickly sorted out by the organisation
	My views are taken into account by my work colleagues
	I am helped with job-related problems
	I am listened to by senior members of staff
	This organisation is not mindful of its graduates (R)
<b>Remuneration</b>	I am offered project bonuses for outstanding work
	This organisation offers a competitive salary



This organisation offers a competitive package of benefits (e.g., share options, company discounts, performance bonuses, private health-care insurance)

There is a clear path for advancement in this organisation with regard to salary structure

I am not fairly rewarded for my work (R)

I am given an adequate amount of paid leave

### **Work Relationships and Social Support**

I have a good relationship with my manager

I am often patronized and belittled in this organisation (R)

I have good relationships with my work colleagues

I have lots of friends in this organisation

I have been made to feel welcome in this organisation

I am respected by the more senior colleagues in this organisation

I feel part of the team in this organisation

This organisation is a friendly place to work

I feel anonymous at work (R)

I feel I can talk to colleagues if I have a personal problem

I am trusted by the organisation

I have been supported throughout the process of adjusting to my work-role in this organisation

### **Professional Belonging**

I am in the right profession for me

I can't see myself staying in my current profession for the rest of my life (R)

If I could start afresh and choose my profession again, I would choose the same one

## **Job Characteristics and Work Environment**

It is too late to change my profession

I have invested heavily in my profession that changing it is unrealistic

The work I am doing is not what I want to do (R)

I have always wanted to be in the profession I am in now

I should have done something else with my life (R)

There is too much bureaucracy in this organisation (R)

There is enough variety in my work

I have had the opportunity to work on a variety of projects

Politics gets in the way of doing my job properly (R)

I am given adequate feedback on my job performance

I am being challenged to the full

I am using my skills to the full

My time is wasted by having to complete bureaucratic administrative tasks (R)

Working for this organisation allows me to achieve a work-life balance

The results of my work can clearly be seen

I am often over-worked (R)

I have been well-trained for the work I am required to do

My work is of great value and significance

My good work is always recognized by my manager

I am given the right amount of responsibility

There is often conflict between my own ways of getting things done and those of the organisation (R)

## Professional Development

I have the opportunity to pursue further academic study and qualifications

Career advice is available to me when I want it

My career will be looked after in this organisation

I sometimes feel that the work I am given is not helping my career (R)

There are good opportunities to experience different types of functions or roles in this organisation

There is a clear path for career advancement in this organisation

I have the opportunity to participate in structured learning programs

The training I have received will help my career in the future

There are few opportunities for me to progress in this organisation (R)

There are good training and development opportunities in this organisation

The organisation has helped me to manage my own career

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It is important that scale developers think critically about their measure as the first stage of assessing its validity (Cronbach, 1971), and so the measure was piloted on a small sample of 10 graduates, which allowed for a logical analysis of content to be carried out as a first stage of construct validation. This procedure helped to assess any issues and difficulties that arose from the measure's construction and first administration; including any weaknesses that may have potentially invalidated the measure (Pedhazur and Schmelkin, 1991).

After data collection, the psychometric properties and the general patterns in the data were examined in order to assess the scales' dimensionality and internal consistency, thus helping to refine the measure, leading to a shortened and improved scale. The underlying dimensionality of the measure was determined

by performing a Principal Component Analysis (PCA), which also allowed for the measure to be analysed in terms of its sub-scales, therefore permitting a comparison with the original qualitative typology from which the items were drawn. The internal reliability of the measure was also assessed by analysing the item homogeneity of each of its sub-scales. Finally, the relationships amongst the sub-scales measuring each of the antecedents were analysed using Pearson's correlation coefficients.

### **3.3.2. Respondents**

Private-sector organisations were randomly selected from The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers (2005). Graduate managers of 17 large U.K. based blue-chip organisations in the private sector were asked to participate in the study, and 11 agreed to take part. In order to maximise the sample of graduates in the early stages of their careers, participating organisations were asked to identify graduates that were either on a training scheme or who had recently completed one. Organisations were given the brief that graduates should be representative of the graduate intake for the year they were recruited in terms of sex, race and the type of work they did; however, the researcher had no way of confirming that graduates met these criteria. Questionnaires were then distributed electronically to these graduates achieving an overall response rate of 58 %. There were no notable differences in response rates between males and females, between graduates on a training scheme and those that were not, and across organisations. The sample size once the 15 questionnaires containing missing data had been list-wise removed was 525, of which 273 were male and 232 had completed their training schemes at the time of completing the questionnaire. The mean age of respondents was 24.9 years (S.D. 2.54), their mean organisational tenure was 2.25 years (S.D. 1.73) and their mean occupational tenure (within the organisation) was 1.11 years (S.D. 1.13). The respective occupations of respondents are shown in Table 3.2. below:-

**Table 3.2. Respective Occupations of Respondents**

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Accounting/Auditing	66	13
Engineering	63	12
Financial Services	57	11
Retail/Wholesale	54	10
HR/Recruiting	48	9
Information Technology	31	6
Other	29	6
Legal	28	5
Marketing	28	5
Consulting Services	20	4
Public Relations	19	4
Purchasing	15	3
Sales	17	3
Operations Management	12	2
Executive Management	10	2
Logistics	9	2
Banking	6	1
Product Management	5	1
Research and Development	4	1
Advertising	1	0
Biotechnology/Pharmaceutical	1	0
Environmental Services	1	0
Science	1	0

### 3.3.3. Logical Analysis of Content

#### Defining the Construct

The initial pool of items was developed a posteriori rather than rationally constructed a priori as they have been based on the constructs derived from the qualitative typology outlined in the preceding chapter. Such an approach was preferable to drawing items from previous measures as there were none specific to a graduate population; moreover, rationally constructed items are a poor basis for test construction as they rely wholly on face validity (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Items were constructed for each of the six types of antecedents of intent to leave in the qualitative typology. These items were discussed with

colleagues in order to ensure that the whole domain of each type of antecedent was covered with minimum amount of repetition. In the questionnaire, items were grouped together according to the antecedent or category that they represented.

### **Instructions to Respondents and Item Content**

The pilot study had revealed that the instructions given to respondents were clear and no issues were raised relating to the content of the items as they were based on detailed interview research. No problems were reported in the feedback from respondents about item coverage and items were worded so that they were sufficiently generic in their scope, ensuring that they were applicable to graduates in different occupations. Any evidence of low reliability and validity in specific items was uncovered during the statistical analysis.

### **Questionnaire Administration Conditions**

The questionnaire was administered through the use of the *Survey Monkey* online survey package for reasons of convenience, time and cost; it also helped to maximise the total number of graduates participating in the study. The web link to the questionnaire was sent out to participating organisations for distribution to their graduates. Respondents were free to complete the questionnaire at their leisure and were given the option of breaking off and completing the questionnaire at a later time. There were no restraints imposed on the time taken to complete the questionnaire, however, respondents were told to give their initial response rather than a considered one. Instructions given in the questionnaire included assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, the option of withdrawal from the research, and a short debriefing after respondents had completed the questionnaire.

A major advantage of using an online survey was that it allowed for the researcher to compel respondents to complete certain questions and also entire

sections before permitting them to progress to the next stage. This facility helped increase the total number of fully completed questionnaires; however, it was noted that 15 respondents had stopped completing the survey well before completion. It is speculated that these respondents possibly wanted to view the questionnaire out of curiosity and harboured no intention to complete the survey; alternatively, they may have stopped because they were frustrated with the requirement that all questions had to be completed before proceeding to the next stage. This trade-off serves to highlight an important issue regarding the use of online surveys in social research and would warrant consideration by all researchers using this method.

### **Scoring / Response Format**

The purpose of the measure was to investigate graduates' responses to the antecedents relating to intent to leave and so a self-report method was considered to be the most appropriate way to achieve this purpose. The instructions for the measure required respondents to read the set of statements and to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement using a five-point likert scale response format by checking the appropriate number. All points on the scale were labelled, with 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 5 representing 'strongly agree'. The response format worked well and respondent feedback highlighted that the measure was quick and easy to fill in.

The researcher also checked for logically inconsistent responses or the same response for all items and no faking or specific misleading response set was evident. Also, the use of anchors for each point was beneficial and prevented extremity scoring. Items were screened for their tendency to elicit extreme responses, and the mean responses on the likert scale for each item were checked and no items were discarded on these grounds.

## **Format and Layout of Questionnaire**

The use of an online survey package allowed the researcher to produce a professional looking questionnaire that was clear and relatively straight forward to complete by respondents. However, an issue relating to the visibility of certain items in the questionnaire was raised in the pilot study and so a lighter colour scheme was used in order to improve the clarity of the text.

## **3.4. Results**

### **3.4.1. Internal Structure Analysis**

#### **Principal Component Analysis and Parallel Analysis**

Principal component analysis is an exploratory technique that is appropriate when little is known about the underlying component structure as it permits theory to be generated about the dimensionality of the scales, which can then be tested further by using a confirmatory procedure (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). A principal component analysis was therefore used to assess the measure's construct validity by helping to establish the dimensionality of the scales; it also permitted the items to be formed into sub-scales, which is a pre-requisite to calculating internal consistency and carrying out descriptive statistics.

Pre-analysis checks were carried out on the data in order to confirm that it was suited for a principal component analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy tested the partial correlations among the items and demonstrated a value of .90, the closer values are to 1 the better. A further check used Bartlett's test of sphericity, which was significant ( $\chi^2 = 12903.93$ , d.f. = 1891,  $p < 0.01$ ). This meant that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and therefore implied the appropriateness of the component model.

Components were extracted using principal component analysis and were orthogonally rotated using varimax rotation in order to produce a more



interpretable solution (Pedhazur and Schmelkin, 1991). Varimax rotation assumes that components are uncorrelated with each other and therefore simplifies their interpretation by maximising high loadings on each component and minimising low loadings, so that the simplest structure is obtained. In contrast, an oblique rotation would have resulted in an uninterpretable solution with too many cross-loadings to ascertain distinct components with clear subscales.

The decision relating to the number of components to extract was made using parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) and this method also served as a primary means of item reduction. Commonly used decision rules for component extraction; namely, the Kaiser - Guttman (Kaiser, 1970) eigenvalues greater-than-one rule and the scree plot test (Cattell, 1966), are both problematic. The arbitrary eigenvalues greater-than-one rule does not always lead to components that are reliable; typically overestimating, and less often, underestimating the number of components (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Similarly, the reliability of scree plot interpretations is low (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991), as it involves subjective searches of plots for sharp demarcations between the eigenvalues in order to ascertain the more important components. In contrast to these mechanical rules of thumb, parallel analysis is a procedure that is statistically based and produces optimal solutions to determining the number of components (Horn, 1965).

The use of parallel analysis involved the generation of multiple sets of random data of the same form as the actual data set in terms of its number of cases and variables. Eigenvalues were then extracted and averaged, permitting a comparison with the eigenvalues derived from the actual data. The random data set produced eigenvalues that would be expected to occur by chance; thus components were retained on the basis that a given eigenvalue from the actual data was greater (and therefore accounted for more variance) than its equivalent from the random data. Components with eigenvalues below those of their equivalents in the random data set were therefore disregarded as they did not represent 'true' components.

Further principal component analyses (and parallel analyses) were carried out using only those items relating to components with eigenvalues greater than those of their equivalents in the random data set until all items were ‘explained’ by only those components with eigenvalues greater than those of their equivalents in the random data set.

In this study, an initial 15 components were extracted from the data; however, the application of the procedure described above was iterated seven times before all remaining items were ‘explained’ by only those components with eigenvalues greater than those from the random data set. In this process, a total of 42 items were dropped until a three-component structure comprising of 20 items was retained. The results of the final iteration of this process can be seen in Table 3.3. below. Only the eigenvalues for the first, second and third components observed in the actual data were greater than their equivalents observed in the random data; thus indicating that there were three ‘true’ components in the data set.

**Table 3.3. Observed Eigenvalues for Actual and Random Data Sets**

Component	Eigenvalues Observed in The Actual Data	Eigenvalues Observed in The Random Data
1	5.31	1.36
2	2.83	1.29
3	2.30	1.25
4	0.92	1.21

The cumulative variation accounted for by all three components after they were rotated was 52.21%. The percentage of the co-variation within the data accounted for by each of the three components and their eigenvalues are displayed in Table 3.4. below.

**Table 3.4. The Percentage of Co-Variation Accounted for by Each of The Three Components and their Eigenvalues**

Component	Eigenvalue	Percentage of Co-variation
1	5.31	26.57
2	2.83	14.14
3	2.30	11.50

The rotated component loadings are shown in Table 3.5. below. Components extracted first were the largest and therefore may be more salient. The items loading onto each component have been ordered in terms of their strength of relationship with each component. Item correlations with their components ranged from  $-.77$  to  $.84$ . It can also be seen that one item cross-loaded onto another component and so was selected to load onto the component that shared the highest correlation; this also made clearer theoretical sense.

**Table 3.5. Component Loadings for Items Concerning Intent to Leave After Varimax Rotation**

	Component		
	1	2	3
There are good training and development opportunities in this organisation	<b>.84</b>	.09	-.03
I have the opportunity to participate in structured learning programs	<b>.78</b>	-.02	.00
I have the opportunity to pursue further academic study and qualifications	<b>.72</b>	.08	-.04
Career advice is available to me when I want it	<b>.68</b>	.09	.04
The training I have received will help my career in the future	<b>.67</b>	.12	.09
The organisation has helped me to manage my own career	<b>.66</b>	.19	.27
There are good opportunities to experience different types of functions or roles in this organisation	<b>.61</b>	.05	.12
If I could start afresh and choose my profession again, I would choose the same one	.05	<b>.84</b>	.11
I am in the right profession for me	.20	<b>.82</b>	.17
The work I am doing is not what I want to do (R)	-.25	<b>-.77</b>	-.09
I should have done something else with my life (R)	-.05	<b>-.77</b>	-.23
I can't see myself staying in my current profession for the rest of my life (R)	-.22	<b>-.67</b>	.02
I have always wanted to be in the profession I am in now	-.12	<b>.64</b>	.02
I have been made to feel welcome in this organisation	.11	.14	<b>.72</b>
This organisation is a friendly place to work	.01	.17	<b>.70</b>
I have lots of friends in this organisation	-.01	-.03	<b>.66</b>
I feel part of the team in this organisation	<b>.31</b>	.11	<b>.60</b>
I feel I can talk to colleagues if I have a personal problem	-.13	.01	<b>.59</b>
I have good relationships with my work colleagues	.05	.02	<b>.58</b>
I feel anonymous at work (R)	-.23	-.18	<b>-.51</b>

N.B. Items that load onto components at greater than .30 are presented in bold.

The items formed into three sub-scales, each of which was given a name that best represented its items. Component one's items related to career development and career enhancing opportunities provided by the organisation; thus this sub-scale was labelled organisational career development, and consisted of seven items. Items that loaded onto component two related to the graduates' professions and their commitment to their type of work; and so this sub-scale was called professional commitment, and comprised of six items. Finally, the third component's items all related to the extent to which organisations were socially supportive of their graduates; hence it was named organisational social support, and composed of seven items. The components (sub-scales) and their items are shown below in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6. Components and Their Items**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Item</b>
<b>Organisational Career Development</b>	There are good training and development opportunities in this organisation
	I have the opportunity to participate in structured learning programs
	I have the opportunity to pursue further academic study and qualifications
	Career advice is available to me when I want it
	The training I have received will help my career in the future
	The organisation has helped me to manage my own career
	There are good opportunities to experience different types of functions or roles in this organisation
<b>Professional Commitment</b>	If I could start afresh and choose my profession again, I would choose the same one
	I am in the right profession for me
	The work I am doing is not what I want to do (R)
	I should have done something else with my life (R)

I can't see myself staying in my current profession for the rest of my life (R)

I have always wanted to be in the profession I am in now

**Organisational Social Support**

I have been made to feel welcome in this organisation

This organisation is a friendly place to work

I have lots of friends in this organisation

I feel part of the team in this organisation

I feel I can talk to colleagues if I have a personal problem

I have good relationships with my work colleagues

I feel anonymous at work (R)

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**3.4.2. Internal Reliability**

**Item Analysis and Cronbach's Alpha**

The principal component analysis has established the dimensionality of the scales, and has therefore allowed for the measure to be divided into sub-scales. In addition, the principal component analysis has demonstrated that the measure has a strong level of construct validity as all items formed clear sub-scales and correlated strongly with their components. The next stage of scale development involved assessing the internal reliability of the sub-scales; i.e., the homogeneity of items that belong to each latent component.

The reliability of each of the sub-scales was assessed in turn by performing an item analysis and involved calculating the item-total calculation. Items were considered to have an adequate consistency if their item-total correlation lay between 0.25 and 0.75 (Pedhazur and Schmelkin, 1991); and all items

demonstrated high levels of homogeneity with the other items in their respective sub-scales. Finally, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient was performed, which gives an indication of how reliable each sub-scale is; a coefficient of .70 and above is generally considered indicative of a reliable measure as long as the assumptions of alpha are not violated (Pedhazur and Schmelkin, 1991). The calculation of Cronbach's alpha demonstrated the variation in the sub-scales and they all demonstrated high levels of item homogeneity (internal consistency) (i.e.,  $\alpha > .7$ ). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each sub-scale have been presented in Table 3.7. below.

**Table 3.7. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for Component Sub-scales**

<b>Sub-scale</b>	<b>No. of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</b>
Organisational Career Development	7	.84
Professional Commitment	6	.86
Organisational Social Support	7	.73

### **3.4.3. Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics were examined next and are presented in Table 3.8. below. These provided an indication of the extent to which graduates felt about each of the components, and allowed for a comparison amongst graduates' scores on each of the different sub-scales (i.e., means and standard deviations). Interestingly, a relatively low mean and small standard deviation for the professional commitment sub-scale indicated a relatively low level of professional commitment amongst respondents.

**Table 3.8. Descriptive Statistics for Component Sub-scales**

Sub-scale	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Organisational Career Development	7	35	26.7	4.4
Professional Commitment	12	30	17.4	1.8
Organisational Social Support	16	35	25	2.7

#### 3.4.4. Correlations among Sub-scales

The strength of the relationships or associations among the sub-scales was examined using Pearson's correlation coefficients and the results are shown below in Table 3.9.

**Table 3.9. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients among Sub-scales**

	Component		
	1	2	3
1. Organisational Career Development	-		
2. Professional Commitment	-.18**	-	
3. Organisational Social Support	.09*	.04	-

N.B. \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Correlations among the sub-scales were significantly correlated at either the 0.01 or 0.05 level of significance, except for the non-significant relationship between the organisational social support and the professional commitment sub-scales. However, the size of the correlations in Table 3.9. suggests that the sub-scales constitute distinct types of components and this supports the theorised relationship that the components are relatively distinct from one another.



Correlations were also carried out to estimate the strength of association among the sub-scales for the two types of graduates: those still on their training schemes (n = 293) and those that had finished their training (n = 232). Scatter-plots were constructed to determine whether this relationship was linear, but the relationship was seen as weak with data being very heteroscedastic. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance revealed that the variance was equal for graduates that were still on a training scheme and those that had completed their training on all sub-scales. The appropriate t-test was calculated in order to ascertain differences in the mean scores between the two types of graduates on each of the sub-scales; thus, Organisational Career Development  $t(523) = 1.24, p = .21$ ; Professional Commitment  $t(523) = -.60, p = .55$ ; Organisational Social Support  $t(523) = 1.74, p = .08$ . These were therefore not statistically significant, suggesting that there were no significant differences between both types of graduates on each of the three sub-scales. The means and standard deviations of the two groups of graduates for each sub-scale can be seen in Table 3.10. shown below.

**Table 3.10. Means and Standard Deviations of the Two Groups of Graduates for Component Sub-scales**

<b>Sub-scale</b>	<b>Completed Training Scheme</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Organisational Career Development	Yes	26.99	4.24
	No	26.50	4.59
Professional Commitment	Yes	17.38	1.72
	No	17.47	1.87
Organisational Social Support	Yes	25.22	2.82
	No	24.81	2.63

## **3.5. Discussion**

### **3.5.1. Overview**

The present study has provided a preliminary or early stage psychometric investigation that has led to the development, psychometric assessment and revision of a measure designed to assess the hypothesised important antecedents or predictors of graduates' intent to leave. This work has also allowed for a direct comparison to be drawn between the qualitatively-derived typology of antecedents relating to graduates' intent to leave and the latent components (sub-scales) identified by the quantitative methods used in this chapter. The application of these two types of methodologies, and their comparison, provided a more holistic picture of graduates' intent to leave and thereby helped to enhance the validity of both studies.

A logical analysis of content revealed no problems with the measure per se and respondents reported no problems with the comprehensibility, clarity and visibility of its items. Furthermore, the principal component analysis and internal reliability analyses have resulted in the development and revision of the measure's sub-scales, and they have demonstrated good levels of internal reliability and validity. The dimensionality of the scale was shown to display three underlying latent components and the internal consistency of the three sub-scales was good with alpha coefficients ranging from .73 to .86. The current study has therefore produced a measure of the most important predictors of intent to leave for graduates, which has demonstrated sound psychometric properties.

### **3.5.2. Discussion of Components**

In order to facilitate the comparison between the components derived from the quantitative analysis and the antecedents derived from the qualitative analysis, Table 3.11. given below, has juxtaposed the three (components) sub-scales with the qualitatively-derived antecedents and their items, and shows which of those items formed the three sub-scales.

**Table 3.11. A Comparison of the Three-Component Structure and their Items with the Antecedents of the Qualitative Typology**

Component	Qualitative Typology Antecedent	Items
Organisational Career Development	Professional Development	<p><b>There are good training and development opportunities in this organisation</b></p> <p><b>I have the opportunity to participate in structured learning programs</b></p> <p><b>I have the opportunity to pursue further academic study and qualifications</b></p> <p><b>Career advice is available to me when I want it</b></p> <p><b>The training I have received will help my career in the future</b></p> <p><b>The organisation has helped me to manage my own career</b></p> <p><b>There are good opportunities to experience different types of functions or roles in this organisation</b></p> <p>My career will be looked after in this organisation</p> <p>I sometimes feel that the work I am given is not helping my career (R)</p> <p>There is a clear path for career advancement in this organisation</p> <p>There are few opportunities for me to progress in this organisation (R)</p>
Professional Commitment	Professional Belonging	<p><b>If I could start afresh and choose my profession again, I would choose the same one</b></p> <p><b>I am in the right profession for me</b></p> <p><b>The work I am doing is not what I want to do (R)</b></p> <p><b>I should have done something else with my life (R)</b></p>

		<p><b>I can't see myself staying in my current profession for the rest of my life (R)</b></p> <p><b>I have always wanted to be in the profession I am in now</b></p> <p>It is too late to change my profession</p> <p>I have invested heavily in my profession that changing it is unrealistic</p>
<hr/>		
Organisational Social Support	Work Relationships and Social Support	<p><b>I have been made to feel welcome in this organisation</b></p> <p><b>This organisation is a friendly place to work</b></p> <p><b>I have lots of friends in this organisation</b></p> <p><b>I feel part of the team in this organisation</b></p> <p><b>I feel I can talk to colleagues if I have a personal problem</b></p> <p><b>I have good relationships with my work colleagues</b></p> <p><b>I feel anonymous at work (R)</b></p> <p>I have a good relationship with my manager</p> <p>I am often patronized and belittled in this organisation (R)</p> <p>I am respected by the more senior colleagues in this organisation</p> <p>I am trusted by the organisation</p> <p>I have been supported throughout the process of adjusting to my work-role in this organisation</p>
<hr/>		

N.B. Items that formed the three sub-scales are presented in bold.

Looking at Table 3.11. it can be seen how neatly three of the six qualitative antecedents were represented by the extracted and rotated latent components after the principal component analysis. Thus each component comprised of

items that were drawn wholly from the same antecedent as identified in the qualitative analysis. The three antecedents of organisational receptiveness, remuneration, and job characteristics and work environment were not represented at all and thus a considerable number of items were lost during the analysis; however, the overriding focus of the study was on creating an instrument that demonstrated strong psychometric properties, rather than creating a comprehensive measure of antecedents relating to graduates' intent to leave. This does not necessarily mean that those omitted antecedents and their items were unimportant; rather it may be that they were perhaps too broad or generic in their scope.

The names of the three antecedents that were represented as components were subsequently altered in order to provide a better representation of the items that they describe. Looking at Table 3.11, it can be seen that the items, in bold, drawn from the professional development antecedent related to activities within the organisation that enhanced graduates' career development. The component composed of these items was therefore named organisational career development. It can be seen that those items, not emboldened, that did not form part of this component or sub-scale were more specifically related to graduates' feelings regarding their own career advancement.

Items, in bold, drawn from the professional belonging antecedent related to graduates' commitment to their profession and so the component composed of these items was named professional commitment. The two items that did not form part of this component or sub-scale related to graduates' willingness and capacity to change their profession. Finally, items, in bold, drawn from the work relationships and social support antecedent were related to graduates' relationships with colleagues and the degree of social support within the organisation. The component, which was composed of these items was subsequently named organisational social support. Items that did not form part of this component or sub-scale specifically related to graduates' perceptions of how they were treated by members of the organisation; support regarding work-role adjustment, which may have been interpreted to mean work-related support

by respondents; and, finally, graduates' relationship with their manager, which in contrast with the relationships with work colleagues item, was more specific and may not have been viewed as pertaining to social support by respondents.

A broader discussion of the components and their items, and the original antecedents derived from the qualitative work, including a consideration of how these findings fit in with previous research is given in the next chapter. The current study has therefore built on the qualitative part of this thesis and has served to highlight the most important predictors of intent to leave for graduates. In doing so, it has also provided an early-stage investigation that has produced a measure of these components. This newly-created instrument has demonstrated strong levels of internal reliability and validity, and has therefore provided a strong basis for further psychometric development.

# **Chapter Four: Discussion, Directions for Future Research, and Practical Implications**

## **4.1. Overview of Research**

The current work has set out to investigate the extant research literature on turnover by identifying the psychological factors or antecedents that have been shown to affect intent to leave, and has considered their relevance to a graduate population. It has therefore served to provide further insight into the withdrawal process in a graduate population. This research has undertaken a two-stage approach using a mixed-methods methodology in order to identify the key antecedents that impact upon graduates' intent to leave and develop a measure of these. It has therefore also allowed for a direct comparison to be drawn between the qualitatively-derived typology of antecedents relating to graduates' intent to leave and the quantitatively-derived latent components.

The first stage produced a qualitatively-derived typology of six key antecedents that impact upon graduates' intent to leave; before, the second stage provided a quantitative assessment of the typology. In this stage, the antecedents formed the basis for the creation of items, which were drawn from these antecedents and were then distributed to a sample of graduates in the form of a questionnaire. Graduates' responses were analysed using a series of data reduction methods, leading to the development, assessment and revision of a new measure designed to assess the important antecedents or predictors of graduates' intent to leave.

The usefulness or applicability of the results was considered at both a theoretical and an applied level. The antecedents of graduates' intent to leave fit in well with previous theoretical literature on turnover and has provided generic antecedents applicable to a diverse range of occupations and organisations. These are of practical use to graduates themselves, serving as a basis for self-understanding in helping them to better understand the processes involved in their own withdrawal cognitions. Moreover, the identified antecedents will be of

use to organisational managers and human resource professionals in helping them to better manage and prevent graduate turnover.

## **4.2. Qualitative and Quantitative Studies**

The qualitatively-derived typology identified six distinct types of antecedents relating to graduates' dissatisfaction and intent to leave; and it is these areas that organisations should focus on in order to better retain their graduates. These key antecedents were: organisational receptiveness, remuneration, job characteristics and work environment, professional development, work relationships and social support, and professional belonging.

Three of the six qualitatively derived antecedents (i.e., professional development, work relationships and social support, and professional belonging) were very neatly represented as components in the quantitative analysis; thus components comprised of items that were drawn wholly from the same antecedent, as identified in the qualitative analysis. However, not all of the items from these three antecedents of the qualitative typology loaded onto these three components. A considerable number of items were lost during the quantitative analysis; leaving three of the six antecedents in the qualitative typology (i.e., organisational receptiveness, remuneration, and job characteristics and work environment) unrepresented as components. It was decided during the analysis to sacrifice those items as the overriding aim of the study was to produce a measure that demonstrated the strongest psychometric properties possible. This does not necessarily mean that those excluded items were unimportant; rather it may be that those items and the qualitative antecedents and themes that they represent, were perhaps too broad or generic in their scope. The quantitative study therefore allowed for data reduction to take place, and permitted the items to form components.

The names of those antecedents that were represented as components were subsequently altered in order to provide a better representation of the items



which they describe. The three components were: organisational career development, professional commitment and organisational social support. These components have formed the basis for measuring the key antecedents of intent to leave, as they have demonstrated strong levels of internal reliability and validity and have therefore provided a strong basis for further psychometric development.

The quantitative investigation has thereby provided an assessment of the qualitatively-derived typology through its re-examination and extended the analysis to a larger sample of graduates that was theoretically diverse enough to encourage broader applicability. The credibility of the results was enhanced by comparing the data obtained from different methods, and has strengthened confidence in them. Although the two sets of results differed, as not all antecedents were represented as components, expecting to gain near identical results from two different methods is naïve (Bryman, 1988). Brannen (1992) has noted that any comparison between data sets should reveal the ways in which they complement and contradict each other, rather than aiming for complete consistency between them.

The key antecedents related to graduates' intent to leave identified in this work fit in well with previous research and similar factors that are important to graduates working in large organisations have been identified. For example, previous research has also identified a number of antecedents, including; good career prospects, fair policies, high quality training and development opportunities, and intrinsic job characteristics to be important for graduates (e.g., Hutt, Parsons and Pearson, 1981; Morris, Lydka and Fenton O' Creevey, 1993). In accordance with previous work, the current research has also found that the intrinsic characteristics relating to graduates' work and career were reported to be of greater importance than extrinsic factors such as starting salary (e.g., Sturges and Guest, 1999).

Interestingly, the three qualitatively-derived antecedents that were represented as components (i.e., professional development, work relationships and social support, and professional belonging) related to more long-term, career-related considerations and the organisation's capacity to support its graduates.

In contrast, the three antecedents that were not represented as components (i.e., organisational receptiveness, remuneration, and job characteristics and work environment) were more likely to be present-oriented or transient considerations, and were therefore perhaps seen as less important by graduates. The nature of the components relating to career-related considerations also fits with previous research that has found career-related variables to be the most important factor in graduates' intent to leave (e.g., Sturges et al. 2000). The current work has also identified the relevance of other antecedents that impinge on the withdrawal process in graduates. These antecedents relate to an organisation's receptiveness towards its graduates and their views, and the graduates' sense of professional belonging or commitment. A more detailed summary of these antecedents and how they relate to previous research is given below.

### **4.3. Discussion of Antecedents Related to Intent to Leave**

#### **4.3.1. Organisational Receptiveness**

Graduates' first year at work has been shown to be an important time for the development of commitment to the organisation and positive experiences during this time help (Irving and Meyer, 1994). Earlier studies have shown that fulfilling graduates pre-joining expectations of work-related experiences such as the training and development they receive fosters a sense of commitment to their employer (Wanous et al., 1992) and that the failure to meet these expectations may significantly undermine it (e.g. Sturges and Guest, 2001). Indeed, some graduates' expectations may exceed their experience, which may also reduce their commitment (Mabey, 1986). The current research has shown that organisations can manage graduates' expectations of work-related experiences by being open, honest and transparent when communicating information about themselves and the nature of their graduate roles. This strategy is more likely to succeed if organisations make as much information available to graduates during the job recruitment phase, and that this information is consistent and realistic.

Communication at all levels, including: organisational, departmental, team based or interpersonal needs to be clear, coherent, consistent and co-ordinated in order to convey to graduates that they and their views are important and that they are part of the wider team. Openness and honesty are also important in order to build trust and to encourage a dialogue between graduates and management so that graduates do not feel that they are being unnecessarily excluded.

Any signs that the graduates' views are unimportant may engender feelings of worthlessness and dissatisfaction and so organisations therefore need to listen to their graduates and respond in a manner that is mindful of their views. Organisations that do not engage in constructive dialogue or ride roughshod over the views and concerns of their graduates are all major sources of dissatisfaction. Moreover, a speedy response to graduate queries is also very important and creates a sense that graduates are an important cohort of the organisational workforce. These findings suggest that organisational receptiveness may relate to Rhoades et al.'s (2001) work into procedural justice (e.g., communication and decision-making) and superior support (e.g., a concern for employee's well being), which led to perceived organisational support (i.e., organisational concern), which in turn, led to affective organisational commitment.

#### **4.3.2. Career-Related Issues**

The current research has also demonstrated the important role of graduate expectations relating to the management of their careers. A failure to meet an employee's expectations may lower what the employee feels they owe to the organisation and thereby engender an employee to leave more readily. Previous research has shown that it is important for organisations to manage graduates' careers effectively in order to foster their commitment to their employer (e.g. Sturges and Guest, 2001); however, it is still unclear what constitutes effective career management.

Despite changes in the workplace and the shift to the so called 'new career' that emphasises career self-management; the current research has found that

graduates still expressed conflicting views over the extent to which they felt that the organisation was responsible for the management of their career. Some graduates believed self-determination was largely illusory, whilst others thought that they had a large degree of control over their progression and mobility within the organisation.

Previous empirical research findings suggest that traditional career values still seem important to graduates (Sturges, Guest and Mackenzie-Davey, 2000). For example, Ball and Jordan (1997) have found that graduates enter an organisation with high expectations of the career-management help that they will receive from the organisation. The current research has found that most graduates expected some assistance or greater help and advice with the management of their career, particularly in its early stages, and this is consistent with Keenan and Newton's (1986) findings that graduates need to be told what managing their own career involves and how their early work is helping their careers. However, these expectations diminished as their tenure increased; perhaps, an indication that graduates were more capable of managing their own careers as they had learnt more about managing their own careers for themselves.

Graduates also hinted that they were more likely to engage in mobility-oriented behaviour (i.e., behaviour that made them more employable to employers outside of the organisation) as their tenure increased; again, adding support to the idea that graduates learn to manage their own careers (e.g., Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey, 1999). Indeed, as their tenure increased, graduates were more likely to have a greater career-knowledge, clearer career interests and an improved knowledge of socio-economic and labour-market trends; all of which are conducive to career self-management. Nevertheless, career management should be viewed as a shared responsibility between the organisation and the graduate, rather than something that is left to graduates to handle on their own.

Graduates desire to pursue further academic and professional qualifications and they view such qualifications as very important for their career development, especially outside of the organisation. This would be consistent with the view of the new career that graduates aim to build their career rather than hold any

allegiance to their current place of employment (e.g., Tulgan, 1996). The wealth of opportunities for job training, professional and personal development and broad scope for career-mobility within large organisations mean that the turnover process is distorted as graduates may move within the organisation rather than leave it completely. These opportunities mean that it is all the more important for large organisations to have a clear and transparent career structure in place, making graduates aware of the opportunities for progression so that they have a clear understanding of how to achieve these goals. Line managers, HR staff and mentors may all help by imparting advice and guidance to graduates, although it is important that graduates feel comfortable and respect their mentors and trust that their advice is impartial and in their best interest.

#### **4.3.3. The Commercial / Technical Role Divide**

Significant differences were found between those graduates in technical roles and those occupying commercial roles. For example, graduates in technical roles appeared to value achievement over advancement to a greater extent than those in more commercial roles and expressed a stronger desire to make a significant contribution to their work. These findings mirror those of Keenan and Newton (1986) who found that engineering graduates, both before and after starting work, placed a high priority on skill development.

Graduates in commercial roles were also more likely to lack any clear aspiration or ambition regarding their choice of occupation. However, those graduates in more technical roles were more likely to have a clear idea of the job or career that they wished to pursue and were therefore more likely to have degrees related to their occupation; this is partly out of necessity, but it also reflects a clearer sense of occupational ambition. In contrast, those graduates in more commercial roles tended to have a more disparate or academic type of degree that is usually less vocational, and is perhaps symptomatic of career indecision.

#### **4.3.4. Work Relationships and Social Support**

Organisations should recognise the importance of the social side of work and that many graduates looked for work-related opportunities to fulfil social needs. Many graduates who have moved away from their friends and family to commence work with the organisation found that formal, or less formal, opportunities to meet like-minded graduates were beneficial. They were a useful way for graduates to make friends and therefore reduce feelings of anonymity and loneliness, and also helped to foster a shared sense of organisational identity. This may be particularly useful as some graduates who were working exclusively with older employees also reported feeling isolated at times and indicated a desire to work amongst other graduates or with employees of a similar age to themselves.

Good relationships with work colleagues are also very important for job satisfaction, commitment and retention. Graduates may find that work relationships suffer through the frequent changing of roles and movement to different locations, which have an unsettling effect for graduates, especially in the early years of their career, as they have to adjust to new work colleagues and a different work environment. The current work suggests that any negative experiences with other co-workers, particularly the more senior employees, may form a significant reason in itself for graduates' intent to leave. Similarly, graduates may also start to think of leaving if colleagues with which they have developed a close working bond leave or move on elsewhere. This is in accordance with the work of Becker (1992) and Hunt & Morgan (1994) who found that employee relationships at work may increase retention as a function of satisfaction.

#### **4.3.5. Remuneration and Rewards**

Graduates valued the competitive remuneration package and its associated perks and benefits; all of which create very strong reasons for joining and staying with their organisations. Indeed, larger organisations are effective at creating these

financial barriers, which may prevent graduates from leaving; however, graduates indicated that remuneration alone is not sufficient for retention and should be accompanied by a broader package that also focuses on the intrinsic factors relating to their work.

Graduates also need to feel that they are being fairly rewarded for their work, and this fits with research that has found that organisational rules and procedures for allocating rewards are equally important as fair and competitive pay, as it demonstrates that employees are valued and that their well-being is important to the organisation (e.g., Greenberg, 1990). It is therefore important that a transparent and clear salary structure is in place so that graduates can see how their pay will increase and what they must do for this to happen. Organisations need to ensure that their financial rewards reflect those changes and should do so by aligning their remuneration packages in accordance with graduates' progression and increasing experience.

#### **4.3.6. Job Characteristics and Work Environment**

The characteristics and intrinsic elements of graduates' jobs were important to them and were commonly reported sources of dissatisfaction for graduates. Graduates also expressed differences for their preferences in the extent to which these characteristics were experienced; and where possible, organisations should help to accommodate their graduates' needs and preferences.

Previous research has identified relationships amongst certain job characteristics and job-related attitudes, and intent to leave. Sturges et al. (2000) found that intrinsic work characteristics, such as: task significance, task identity, challenge and supervisory feedback are among the most powerful predictors of organisational commitment. Similarly, Campion (1991) has found that autonomy, variety, skill, challenge and feedback were significantly associated with satisfaction, which in turn, is linked to turnover.

The current work has also found a number of job characteristics are relevant to the withdrawal process. Graduates reported preferences for different degrees of autonomy in their work or felt either under-used or overworked at times. Training schemes therefore need to strike a balance between giving graduates the right amount of independence, autonomy and freedom in their work; whilst providing an adequate amount of support, ensuring that graduates are not overloaded with too much training or an excessive level of responsibility at an early stage in their careers. Indeed, graduates interpret their independence or autonomy as a powerful message that they are competent and trusted by the organisation, and are therefore conducive to their satisfaction.

It is also important that graduates feel that they are using their abilities to the full, and all graduates expressed a strong desire to continually learn new things and to be challenged. Organisations must recognise that graduates' feel that they have something to contribute and any opportunities that they are given to demonstrate this are highly conducive for fostering their satisfaction and commitment.

Large organisations are good at providing variety, through different work placements or assignments; but there is often some discord or incoherence in the level of interest, challenge or relevance of the work to the graduates' professional and career development. Graduates' felt that they were often placed into positions that best served the organisations' own ends and convenience, rather than in their own best interests. Moreover, the expectation that graduates would move into new roles every few years or so whilst on their training schemes was not welcomed by all graduates, with some indicating that they would prefer greater stability in their organisational roles.

Graduates often reported a feeling of dissociation with the organisation's end product or service, and that the results of their own work are often intangible and seemingly lost. It is important that graduates see the results of their own work so that they can see how the work is useful to the organisation. In addition, the use of informal feedback was reported as being very useful for informing graduates of the quality of their work; however, it is important that organisations provide a more structured and systematic approach to acknowledging or recognizing the good work of their graduates.



The wider working environment is also important and should not be underestimated in its effects on graduates' satisfaction. For example, graduates' thought that the modus operandi and bureaucratic elements of large organisations were generally minor irritations; however, graduates that dislike the impersonal nature and anonymity associated with large organisations may be reasons in themselves for graduates to leave. Similarly, the office environment in terms of its layout and norms is also very important. It may be that an office that is too quiet with little social interaction or an office with an open-plan layout may be unsettling for graduates depending on the extent of their preference for privacy.

Finally, peripheral issues related to graduates' jobs, including: the location of graduates' work placements, their desire to live near to their family or to their spouse's or partner's place of work, and the length of their commute to work are important considerations for graduates. The provision of flexible working patterns is valued by graduates and may help meet these needs; they may also help to instil feelings of trust and responsibility in graduates. Moreover, it also empowers graduates to take greater control over their lives so that they can attain a satisfactory work-life balance.

#### **4.4. Changes in Work-Related Attitudes**

This research has observed that graduates appear to harbour different work-related values to those held by preceding generations. Today's graduates live in a wealthier society; they are also entering a volatile workplace in a post-industrial age where information and knowledge are the new raw materials of a successful economy. Moreover, aspects that were considered to be part of the traditional career, such as the so called 'career for life' and hierarchical career advancement are no longer guaranteed (e.g. Sturges and Guest, 1999).

It may be that these economic and social changes have contributed to this change in values. For example, previous research highlights the importance of the compatibility or degree of fit between employees' personal values and beliefs

and those of the organisation, where any perceived mismatch by an employee may lead to organisational withdrawal (O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell (1991). Interestingly, the current study has found that this compatibility of values was not a major issue for graduates entering organisations and embarking on their training schemes. Graduates did not express any real concern about adapting to the culture of their organisations; moreover, graduates seemed less ideological and less interested in abstract principles and values. Instead, graduates seemed to take a more pragmatic stance when negotiating the day-to-day business of working in a large organisation.

Today's workplace also encourages graduates to be self-interested, more flexible, adaptable and opportunistic. For example, due to the new career, employment obligations are now largely viewed as transactional rather than relational (e.g. Sturges and Guest, 1999). Thus the current generation of graduates may aptly be described as adopting a utility-maximizing approach towards work and their careers; such a description reflects graduates' behavioural response in the workplace to these external pressures. For example, graduates seemed to place less of an emphasis on principles such as loyalty and commitment to the organisation. Instead, graduates demonstrated a commitment to the people with whom they worked with or to their type of work, or to the project that they were working on at that particular time, rather than to the organisation itself. Reichers (1986) has described how employees can become committed to co-workers, supervisors and mentors beyond their commitment to the organisation as a whole, which in some cases, may be used to create social pressure on employees to leave or stay.

In addition to these observations, graduates also appeared to harbour a strong sense of self-belief with some indicating a desire to change jobs and make a career out of more than one profession. Interestingly, graduates exhibited high aspirations; that is, they principally strive for a life of conscience and significance. For example, graduates indicated a strong desire for personal development, which may or may not overlap with their non-work interests. Many graduates expressed a desire to contribute something useful to the

community rather than to the economy by wanting to help people or produce something that is socially useful or helpful; others wanted to leave work to travel and fulfil other life goals. Any organisational provision of activities that help graduates meet these goals and ambitions may help to retain their best graduates.

## **4.5. Avenues for Further Research**

### **4.5.1. Antecedent Development and Assimilation into Withdrawal Process Models**

The current work has identified the key antecedents that are relevant to graduates' intent to leave and has given an indication of their relative importance. The use of retrospective accounts of graduates has permitted some insight into the antecedents' fluctuations over time and their changing nature. However, the precise role played by each type of antecedent and the effects of their interactions remain unclear. For example, if the effects of antecedents are accentuated or more keenly felt at specific times and if combinations of specific antecedents are more likely to lead to intent to leave than if they are experienced alone are still questions to be answered.

For example, further attention needs to be given to what constitutes effective career management for graduates. Specifically, the extent to which the organisation should manage their graduates' careers and how much autonomy graduates should be given to decide their own career paths appears to be the question that needs investigating further. The current work would suggest that career management should be a shared responsibility between the graduate and the organisation. It seems that the organisation should take a leading role during the graduates' early years of employment and graduates should be permitted to exercise increasing autonomy, should they feel able, as they accrue experience.

The current research has produced a typology that has identified antecedents of intent to leave applicable to graduates in a wide range of occupations. However,

there are still likely to be occupation-specific reasons for graduates leaving; or graduates may leave at different times for reasons related to their particular profession. For example, retailers have traditionally struggled to retain their new recruits and accountancy firms struggle to retain their graduates once they become qualified (Sturges and Guest, 1999). Similarly, professions that are high in demand (high career mobility) usually have a higher turnover, meaning that graduates can act on their intent to leave more easily.

Furthermore, there is a need to extend this type of work to other types of graduates who leave organisations early on in their career, regardless of their experiences at work, or to those graduates who have no interest in pursuing a career in a large organisation. It may be that the antecedents identified in this research are of less importance or relevance under these circumstances, and that graduates may be leaving for much broader reasons that are beyond the scope of the antecedents identified here and are therefore beyond an organisation's ability to manage.

Ongoing research investigating process models of turnover behaviour should therefore concentrate on the graduate withdrawal process and how their withdrawal cognitions culminate in intent to leave and actual quitting behaviour. Traditional process models are applicable to graduates and future work should assimilate these antecedents into the withdrawal process models.

The current work suggests that the construct of intent to leave may be too narrow to explain why and how graduates make the decision to leave by acting on their intent to leave. For example, in this research, several graduates harboured a high intent to leave at one time or another during their tenure, but did not act on these cognitions. It therefore remains to be seen how disgruntled graduates adjust to their dissatisfaction and intent to leave, and which coping strategies they employ. The current work would suggest that graduates harbouring leaving intentions due to dissatisfaction over certain antecedents may stay if they expect an improvement with those antecedents in the not-too-distant future. Dissatisfaction may also arise in graduates that do not expect to be satisfied in the future with one or more antecedents and this may, in turn, lead to withdrawal cognitions.

#### **4.5.2. The Public / Private Sector Divide**

There are a number of avenues for further research that have arisen from the two studies presented in this work. The exclusive use of large private-sector, blue-chip organisations in this research has permitted access to large numbers of graduates; moreover, their provision of structured training schemes, clearly delineated career structures, vast opportunities and relative ease of movement has provided graduates with a shared context in which leaving intentions could be systematically studied.

However, the exclusive use of graduates working in large private-sector organisations may have produced a typology that reflected certain underlying characteristics specific to graduates in this sector. Thus, there may be sector-specific differences amongst the private, public and not-for-profit spheres in antecedents of intent to leave. For example, there may be differences in the mentality or ambition of graduates entering specific sectors as they may be attracted to the higher salaries in private-sector roles or the greater stability and job security associated with the public sector. It may be that graduates entering private-sector roles are less risk-averse; or those graduates entering the not-for-profit sector are less self-interested, less ambitious and place less emphasis on pursuing a career. It is speculated that any differences amongst these sectors would probably be small and are possibly diminishing due to the broader changes in the workplace; including the nature of work and the concept of the new-career that induce corresponding changes in graduates' job-related attitudes.

#### **4.5.3. Further Psychometric Development of Measure of Antecedents**

The current work has also undertaken an early stage psychometric investigation that has produced a measure based on these qualitatively-derived antecedents. Any future psychometric refinement should focus on cross-validating the internal validity of the measure with a new sample of data using confirmatory procedures. In addition, a more detailed investigation of the measure's item characteristics and their discriminatory power would be necessary.

## **4.6. Practical Implications**

A series of recommendations based on the current work can be made, which large organisations may wish to adopt in order to help them retain their graduates. Organisations need to understand that a low job satisfaction and commitment, or a decrease in these, may be associated with intent to leave. Organisations must therefore ensure that they focus on the key psychological antecedents that relate to these work-related attitudes by actively creating satisfaction and commitment through the effective management of these antecedents. There are important issues surrounding the recruitment and entry of graduates into the organisation and the early stages of their careers including their training schemes which need to be managed effectively by the organisation. These issues need to be addressed in order to build graduates' trust, avoid feelings of exclusion, and to help ensure that they feel a valued part of the organisational team.

Organisations also need to take heed of all of the antecedents identified in this research and deliver these in a systematic and coherent approach rather than in a piecemeal, erratic manner that excludes certain aspects. Any omission, mismanagement or neglect of particular aspects of these antecedents may have a significant impact on graduates' job satisfaction, their commitment, and whether they desire to continue working for that particular organisation.

### **Recruitment and Organisational Entry**

- A particularly important stage is at the beginning of the graduate's entry into the organisation. During this process, graduates should be given a clear idea of how to perform the job to a high standard, including the knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes required, making it clear to graduates which skills will be acquired through training.

- Organisations need to provide information regarding the specific tasks, duties, responsibilities and interactions involved in the job. The use of a realistic job preview (e.g., Wanous et al., 1992) may help convey this information to graduates during the selection process by providing details about the amount of time required by different tasks and how much support is available. In addition, the opportunities for candidates to meet people that they would be working with in the job would be useful for graduates.
- Organisations need to ensure that graduates' expectations are met and understand that they play an important role in creating those expectations in the first place.
- In order to maximise the likelihood of retention, organisations should also encourage applicants to find out as much as possible about their organisations before deciding to join them.

### **Organisational Receptiveness**

- Encourage a co-operative, relationship-oriented atmosphere, which is receptive to graduates' views, and immediately deals with any concerns that arise. Information disseminated to graduates needs to be honest, open and consistent at all levels; moreover, a dialogue between graduates and management should be encouraged and avenues should be made available for this to happen.

### **Remuneration**

- Pecuniary remuneration should form part of a wider package that includes other financial perks and benefits (e.g., performance bonuses, share-options). Graduates need to feel fairly rewarded and a transparent

and clear pay structure should be aligned with graduates' experience and progression.

### **Job Characteristics**

- The characteristics of graduates' jobs are important and differences were expressed in preferences for the extent to which these characteristics were experienced. In general, most graduates desire a high degree of job challenge, autonomy, variety, independence and responsibility, freedom in their work, but also an adequate level of support. Graduates need to see the significance and usefulness of their work in terms of their own career progression and development. Their work should also be formally recognised; they also need to see the results of their own work in the form of the end product that is produced.
- Organisations need to recognise graduates' desire for a satisfactory work-life balance; the provision of flexible working patterns, location of work and length of commute to work are all significant considerations and organisations should do their utmost to accommodate these issues.

### **Professional Development**

- Encourage both professional and personal development including non-work interests, and adequate provision should be given to help graduates achieve these ambitions.
- A clear and transparent career structure should be in place that is understood by graduates. Most graduates expect to be able to exercise a large degree of control over their progression and mobility within the



organisation; and career and professional development advice and assistance should be provided by the organisation. This is particularly important at the beginning of graduates' careers, and is less of a requirement as graduates tenure increases.

- The end of the training scheme is a key time when graduates may decide to leave the organisation. Organisations need to ensure that appropriate incentives linked to professional development are in place in order to help maximise retention.

### **Work Relationships and Social Support**

- Support is necessary from peers, mentors and managers. The distinction between both professional and personal support also needs to be made and adequate provision needs to be made so that graduates are clear where they can go to discuss any problems or issues that they may have.
- Work provides a social function for graduates and organisations should encourage the formation of social networks, which help to foster a shared sense of organisational identity. Indeed, graduates would benefit from working amongst graduates or with employees of a similar age to themselves. Most graduates feel more committed to their team and colleagues, rather than to the organisation and thus graduates' working relationships are important.
- Negative interpersonal relationships, particularly with senior colleagues, may lead to withdrawal cognitions and should be dealt with immediately.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I

**Changes in Graduates' Intent to Leave, Satisfaction and Commitment over their Tenure Graph**

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
6 Strongly Agree										
5 Agree										
4 Slightly Agree										
3 Slightly Disagree										
2 Disagree										
1 Strongly Disagree										

## **Appendix II**

### **Final Interview Schedule**

#### **Interview Pre-amble, Introduction and Debriefing**

Before we begin I need to ask you to fill in this sheet giving me your contact details, which will allow me to contact you after the research has finished so that you can recheck your data and the accuracy of my analysis and conclusions. Today's interview should last between 60 and 90 minutes, although the time may vary. I will also be tape recording today's interview. Is this okay with you? I can assure you that any information that you disclose today will be kept confidential, and if you wish, you may withdraw from the study at any stage. Any comments you make in the interview may be quoted verbatim in my study; however, at no stage in the research process will you be identifiable and your personal details will be changed in order to protect your anonymity. Today's questions will focus on... Don't feel that you have to answer all of the questions or talk about anything that you feel uncomfortable with. Is this all clear? Are there any questions that you would like to ask? There will be an opportunity for you to ask any questions after the interview.

#### **Debriefing**

Are there any questions or comments that you would like to make? Today's interview was part of the preliminary stage of my project. My aims of today's interview were to.... I aim to develop a preliminary model of graduate turnover. Thank you for your time and participation in today's interview. I will be in touch when I have completed all of the interviews and have analysed them. You will then be given the opportunity to examine a copy of your data and the accuracy of my analysis and conclusions. Should you need to contact me....

## **Interview Schedule**

### **Section 1: Demographics and Career Background**

- 1.) How old are you?
- 2.) What is your current job title?
- 3.) What is your current grade/position?
- 4.) How long have you been working in your current organisation?
- 5.) What did you study at university?
- 6.) Is this your first job after graduating from university? Inquire further into career history if needed.
- 7.) What made you choose to work in your particular profession?
- 8.) Why did you join this organisation?
- 9.) Can you give a brief overview of your career history, including the various functions and departments that you have worked in?

### **Section 2: History of Feeling towards their Job and Leaving/ Staying Intentions**

Show interviewees the graph and ask them to mark on it: indicating their leaving intention(s) when they first started employment; during the training scheme; and after they had completed the training scheme. Then ask interviewees to indicate their leaving intentions over the period of their career to the present time, by drawing a continuous line using the points already on the graph as an aid. Ask participants to label any directional changes in the graph with a letter (e.g., A, B, etc.)

- 1.) Can you describe the circumstances surrounding your entrance into the organisation and your feelings towards your new job at the time?
- 2.) How long did your feelings towards your job stay this way? If feelings have stayed the same, inquire into why they have not changed. What elements of your job do you find most positive?
- 3.) How exactly did you feel towards your job when your feelings changed?
- 4.) Can you describe how and why your feelings changed in this way?

Using Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incidents Technique (CIT) to explore interviewee's leaving intentions and continue this line of questioning until all labelled points on the graph have been discussed.

- 1.) What were the circumstances leading up to this situation?
- 2.) What exactly occurred?
- 3.) How exactly did this make you feel?
- 4.) What were the consequences of this?

What stopped you from leaving and made you wish to stay?  
Were there any barriers or pressures that stopped you from leaving?

Repeat questions 2-4, if necessary, until they arrive at their present feelings.

### **Section 3: Antecedents of Commitment, Job Satisfaction and Intent to Leave**

#### **Met Expectations and Satisfaction**

- 1.) How far have your expectations about your work/job prior to entering the organisation been met? What were your initial expectations?
- 2.) Have your expectations changed while you have been here? How and why?
- 3.) Can you think of and describe an occasion(s) where the organisation has failed to meet your expectations?  
Did this affect your feelings/ attitudes towards your job?  
How did this affect your intention to leave/stay?
- 4.) Can you think of an occasion(s) at work that has been a major source of dissatisfaction for you?  
Did this affect your feelings/ attitudes towards your job?  
How did this affect your intention to leave/stay?
- 5.) Would expectations of your satisfaction improving in the future affect your intention to leave/ stay?
- 6.) What factors are likely to encourage you to stay or leave this organisation?  
For example; job characteristics, organisational culture, attachments in the organisation.

### **Affective, Normative and Continuance Commitment**

- 1.) Do you feel a sense of belonging to your current role? Why?
- 2.) Do you feel an emotional attachment to your role? Why? How has this changed throughout your training scheme?
- 3.) How enthusiastic are you about your present role? Why? How could the company improve this situation?
- 4.) Is this, in any way, stopping you from leaving/staying? How and why?
- 5.) Do you feel a sense of responsibility/obligation to remain in your present role? Why? How has this changed throughout your training scheme?
- 6.) Is this, in any way, stopping you from leaving/staying? How and why?
- 7.) Do you or have you, in any way, felt tied to the organisation? Would this prevent you from leaving if you so wished?

### **Work and Non-Work Attachments**

- 1.) Would / have your relationships at work with supervisors, mentors and co-workers play(ed) a role in your intention to stay/leave? How and why?
- 2.) Would you consider leaving if you had negative relationships at work? How and why?
- 3.) Have your friends or family ever played a role in your intention to stay or leave? How and why?

### **Job Characteristics**

- 1.) How satisfied are you with the opportunity you have to use your abilities? Why? Do you feel that you are being challenged?
- 2.) How could the company improve this situation?
- 3.) How satisfied are you with the amount of variety in your job? Why?
- 4.) How could the company improve this situation?
- 5.) Are there any aspects / elements of your job that have been or are a source of dissatisfaction for you? Do these affect your intention to leave/ stay?

## **Organisational and Individual Career Management**

- 1.) To what extent does the organisation manage your career? How does this make you feel?
- 2.) Has the extent to which you feel the organisation manages your career changed throughout your training scheme?
- 3.) To what extent do you feel responsible for managing your own career? How does this make you feel?
- 4.) Have you engaged in any activities that were more related to furthering your career outside than inside the organisation? Which activities? When did you engage in these activities?
- 5.) How satisfied are you with your chance of promotion? Why?
- 6.) How could the company improve this situation?
- 7.) Are you happy with the amount of training and development opportunities you are given? What are they? How could this be improved?
- 8.) Would you be happy to spend the rest of your career in this organisation? Why?

## **Organisational Culture / Climate and Individual Values and Beliefs**

- 1.) How would you rate the compatibility between your own personal goals and values (including professional ones) and those of the organisation?  
Has this changed at any time? How and why?
- 2.) Can you think of an occasion where the values, beliefs and general ways of doing things in this organisation have conflicted with your own ideas, values and beliefs? Did this affect your feelings/ attitudes towards your job?  
How did this affect your intention to leave/stay?

Any other comments?

## **Appendix III**

### **Response Form for Qualitative Typology Verification**

The six themes or types of graduate experience related to their dissatisfaction and intent to leave were: (1) Organisational receptiveness (2) Remuneration (3) Job characteristics and working environment (4) Professional development (5) Work relationships and social support; and (6) Professional belonging. Examples of each of these antecedents and their themes are summarised in the qualitative typology shown overleaf.

#### **Questions**

- 1.) Looking through the six types of antecedents in the typology, do they correspond to your own experiences within your organisation?
- 2.) Are there any antecedents or examples that you would have liked to have seen in the typology?
- 3.) Are you satisfied that the examples for each antecedent are in the right category?
- 4.) Do you have any further comments to make?

## Antecedents Relating to Graduates' Intent to Leave

Antecedent	Examples
Organisational Receptiveness	Consistency and Coherence of Communication; Clarity and Detail of Information; Poor Co-ordination; Responsiveness; Organisation's Willingness to Listen; Honesty and Openness; Dictatorial Management; Graduate Influence in Decision Making Processes
Remuneration	Competitiveness; Perks and Benefits; Equity, Transparency and Clarity of Pay Structure; Overall Package of Rewards; Attitudes Towards Pecuniary Remuneration
Job Characteristics and Work Environment	Workload; Skill; Variety; Autonomy and Degree of Responsibility; Challenge; Interest; Career Relevance; Significance; Feedback; Accommodating the Needs and Preferences of Graduates; Work-Life Balance; Office Environment; Bureaucracy; Culture of Mobility
Professional Development	Opportunities for Progression; Career Support and Advice; Opportunities to Obtain Academic and Professional Qualifications; Personal Development; Organisational Management of Career
Work Relationships and Social Support	Graduate 'Friendly' Atmosphere; Culture of Job Change; Inclusiveness and Feeling Part of a Team; Anonymity; Interpersonal Support and Advice; Peer Support
Professional Belonging	A Feeling of Being in the Right Profession; Ability to Change Career; Differences in Expectations of Career Advancement; A Desire to be Socially Useful; Organisational and Occupational Commitment



## **Appendix IV**

### **Questionnaire**

#### **Introduction**

This questionnaire investigates graduate retention and has been specifically designed to look into why graduates, like yourself, stay in their jobs and how they decide to leave or quit their place of work. From this research, I hope to identify the key factors linked to the retention of graduates. You have been identified as currently undergoing or having recently completed a graduate training scheme, and as such, I would appreciate you spending a short time completing this questionnaire.

If this questionnaire is to be useful, it is important that you answer each question frankly and honestly. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions since I am interested in what you think and feel. For your responses to be of most use, it's important that you answer all of the questions in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire requires you to indicate your opinion regarding a number of statements. I am seeking your initial response, not a researched answer. I want you to record what you believe to be the case in respect to your own experiences, beliefs and the organisation.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and your responses will not be used in the study and your information will be deleted. Any personal information that you do provide will be entirely confidential and will only be seen by myself. In order to ensure confidentiality, your completed questionnaire will only be accessible by me. Your answers will be used to calculate average responses using the responses among other graduates, and so at no stage in the research will you be personally identifiable.

Should you have any questions regarding the completion of this questionnaire or the research in general please contact me.

#### **Instructions for Completing the Questionnaire**

Please complete all of the questions in each sub-section following the instructions given at the start of each section. Please complete all of the questions in each section.

Upon completion of the questionnaire, please double-check to make sure that all questions have been completed.

The questionnaire should take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

## Section One: Questions about You

Sex Male / Female

How old are you? Years (21 – 32) Months (0 – 11)

How long have you been working in this organisation? Years (0 – 8) Months (0-11)

How long have you been working in your current role? Years (0 – 6) Months (0-11)

Current job title?

(1) Accounting / Auditing (2) Advertising (3) Banking  
(4) Biotechnology / Pharmaceutical (5) Consulting Services (6) Engineering  
(7) Environmental Services (8) Executive Management (9) Financial Services  
(10) Human Resources / Recruiting (11) Information Technology (12) Legal  
(13) Marketing (14) Operations Management (15) Product Management  
(16) Public Relations (17) Publishing / Printing (18) Purchasing  
(19) Research and Development (20) Retail / Wholesale (21) Sales (22) Science  
(23) Logistics (24) Other

Have you completed a graduate training scheme? Yes / No

Are you currently on a training scheme? Yes / No

## Section Two: Organisational Receptiveness

The following questions inquire into your organisation's receptiveness towards you at work. Using the five-point scale, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements below. There are no right or wrong answers as I am interested in how you feel about each statement.

Tick the appropriate number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. For example, if you tick the number 5 for statement one, this would mean that you "strongly agree" with the statement that you "...have been listened to during the graduate training scheme".

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1) I have been listened to during the graduate training scheme	1	2	3	4	5
(2) My views are not taken into account by the organisation (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(3) I am dictated to in this organisation with little say in how things get done (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(4) I have been placed into roles that I have wanted to work in	1	2	3	4	5
(5) My problems are quickly sorted out by the organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(6) My views are taken into account by my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
(7) I am helped with job-related problems	1	2	3	4	5
(8) I am listened to by senior members of staff	1	2	3	4	5
(9) This organisation is not mindful of its graduates (R)	1	2	3	4	5

### Section Three: Remuneration

The following questions inquire into your pay and conditions. Using the five-point scale below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements below. Again, there are no right or wrong answers as I am interested in how you feel about each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
(10) I am offered project bonuses for outstanding work	1	2	3	4	5
(11) This organisation offers a competitive salary	1	2	3	4	5
(12) This organisation offers a competitive package of benefits (e.g., share options, company discounts, performance bonuses, private health-care insurance)	1	2	3	4	5
(13) There is a clear path for advancement in this organisation with regard to salary structure	1	2	3	4	5
(14) I am not fairly rewarded for my work (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(15) I am given an adequate amount of paid leave	1	2	3	4	5

## Section Four: Work Relationships and Social Support

The following questions inquire into the type and how much support you receive from your organisation. Using the five-point scale below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements below. Again, there are no right or wrong answers as I am interested in how you feel about each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
(16) I have a good relationship with my manager	1	2	3	4	5
(17) I am often patronized and belittled in this organisation (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(18) I have good relationships with my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
(19) I have lots of friends in this organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(20) I have been made to feel welcome in this organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(21) I am respected by the more senior colleagues in this organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(22) I feel part of the team in this organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(23) This organisation is a friendly place to work	1	2	3	4	5
(24) I feel anonymous at work (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(25) I feel I can talk to colleagues if I have a personal problem	1	2	3	4	5
(26) I am trusted by the organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(27) I have been supported throughout the process of adjusting to my work-role in this organisation	1	2	3	4	5

### Section Five: Professional Belonging

The following questions inquire into how you feel about your profession. Using the five-point scale below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements below. Again, there are no right or wrong answers as I am interested in how you feel about each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
(28) I am in the right profession for me	1	2	3	4	5
(29) I can't see myself staying in my current profession for the rest of my life (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(30) If I could start afresh and choose my profession again, I would choose the same one	1	2	3	4	5
(31) It is too late to change my profession	1	2	3	4	5
(32) I have invested heavily in my profession that changing it is unrealistic	1	2	3	4	5
(33) The work I am doing is not what I want to do (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(34) I have always wanted to be in the profession I am in now	1	2	3	4	5
(35) I should have done something else with my life (R)	1	2	3	4	5

### Section Six: Job Characteristics and Work Environment

The following questions inquire into the characteristics of your job. Using the five-point scale below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements below. Again, there are no right or wrong answers as I am interested in how you feel about each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
(36) There is too much bureaucracy in this organisation (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(37) There is enough variety in my work	1	2	3	4	5
(38) I have had the opportunity to work on a variety of projects	1	2	3	4	5
(39) Politics gets in the way of doing my job properly (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(40) I am given adequate feedback on my job performance	1	2	3	4	5
(41) I am being challenged to the full	1	2	3	4	5
(42) I am using my skills to the full	1	2	3	4	5
(43) My time is wasted by having to complete bureaucratic administrative tasks (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(44) Working for this organisation allows me to achieve a work-life balance	1	2	3	4	5
(45) The results of my work can clearly be seen	1	2	3	4	5
(46) I am often over-worked (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(47) I have been well-trained for the work I am required to do	1	2	3	4	5
(48) My work is of great value and significance	1	2	3	4	5
(49) My good work is always recognized by my manager	1	2	3	4	5
(50) I am given the right amount of responsibility	1	2	3	4	5
(51) There is often conflict between my own ways of getting things done and those of the organisation (R)	1	2	3	4	5

## Section Seven: Professional Development

The following questions inquire into the professional development you have received from your organisation. Using the five-point scale below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements below. Again, there are no right or wrong answers as I am interested in how you feel about each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
(52) I have the opportunity to pursue further academic study and qualifications	1	2	3	4	5
(53) Career advice is available to me when I want it	1	2	3	4	5
(54) My career will be looked after in this organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(55) I sometimes feel that the work I am given is not helping my career (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(56) There are good opportunities to experience different types of functions or roles in this organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(57) There is a clear path for career advancement in this organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(58) I have the opportunity to participate in structured learning programs	1	2	3	4	5
(59) The training I have received will help my career in the future	1	2	3	4	5
(60) There are few opportunities for me to progress in this organisation (R)	1	2	3	4	5
(61) There are good training and development opportunities in this organisation	1	2	3	4	5
(62) The organisation has helped me to manage my own career	1	2	3	4	5

You have now completed this questionnaire. Please ensure that all questions have been answered before submitting your responses. Thank you very much for your time and effort; I appreciate your cooperation in spending time to answer my questions.