

Exploring the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants from practice to industry

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Ethical declaration

I declare that this thesis is wholly my own work except where I have made explicit reference to the work of others. I have read the DBA guidelines and relevant institutional regulations and hereby declare that this thesis is in line with these requirements. I have discussed, agreed, and complied with whatever confidentiality or anonymity terms of reference were deemed appropriate by those participating in the research and dealt appropriately with any other ethical matters arising.

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Abstract

This Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) thesis explores the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) from practice to industry-based roles. The thesis seeks to understand how CAs develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in this transition and addresses the following objectives:

1. To understand how CAs' skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.
2. To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition.
3. To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.

This exploratory study seeks to embrace theory as lenses through which to understand the research problem and employs theoretical lenses relating to fit and transition in an effort to develop a utilitarian framework that informs the transition from practice to industry. The research method employed is qualitative semi-structured interviews held with multiple stakeholders including: CAs transitioning from practice to industry; industry-based hiring managers (HMs); Chartered Accountants Ireland; recruiting firms and a continuing professional development provider.

It was found that CAs roles in industry are different to practice and skills gaps exist with methods used to close this gap identified. It was identified that CAs focus on developing hard skills during transition while HMs identify soft skills as requiring development. There was evidence that person-culture fit was important and achieving such a fit was more difficult than achieving person-job fit. It was also found that the CA passes through phases of transition with evidence that supports five phases of transition as opposed to four outlined in the transition cycle theory. Finally, a theoretically based framework was developed that informs the transition from practice to industry which will be of relevance to all of the stakeholders interviewed.

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List of abbreviations

AAA	American Accounting Association
ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
AICPA	American Institute of Certified Public Accountants
AKSA	Accounting Knowledge and Skills Area
Big 4	PricewaterhouseCoopers; KPMG; EY; Deloitte
CA	Newly qualified Chartered Accountant
CAI	Chartered Accountants Ireland
CFA	Chartered Financial Analyst
CIMA	Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
CPA	Certified Public Accountant
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DBA	Doctorate in Business Administration
HM	Industry based hiring manager
IAASA	Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority
ICAA	Institute of Chartered Accountants of Australia
ICAEW	Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales
ICAS	Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland
IFAC	International Federation of Accountants
IMA	Institute of Management Accountants
MBA	Master of Business Administration
SME	Small and medium enterprises
TWA	Theory of Work Adjustment

Section 1:
Introduction and
DBA research
overview

1.0 Introduction

The accountancy profession in Ireland has traditionally focused on audit and practice-based requirements which is not surprising as auditing has been the core business of the profession for most of the twentieth century. Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) is recognised as the largest institute in Ireland accounting for almost 48 per cent of all qualified accountants (IAASA, 2018) with members employed in both practice and industry. By the end of the twentieth century, industry-based Chartered Accountant members became the majority and continue to outgrow their practice-based counterparts (IAASA, 2018). As the requirements of the profession evolve, the traditional role of industry-based accountants as a scorekeeper is no longer viable. Accountants in industry now require a myriad of skills encompassing technical, generic, professional, lifelong learning and emotional intelligence skills (Jackling and DeLange, 2009). This raises the issue of whether newly qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) entering industry-based roles possess the skills required of their new roles. To understand this issue, we must review the CA's route to professional membership. The most popular route to membership is to complete a higher education programme, then prepare for final examination of the CAI while simultaneously gaining mandatory professional training within a 'Big 4' practice firm (Flood and Wilson, 2009) or a smaller practice firm.

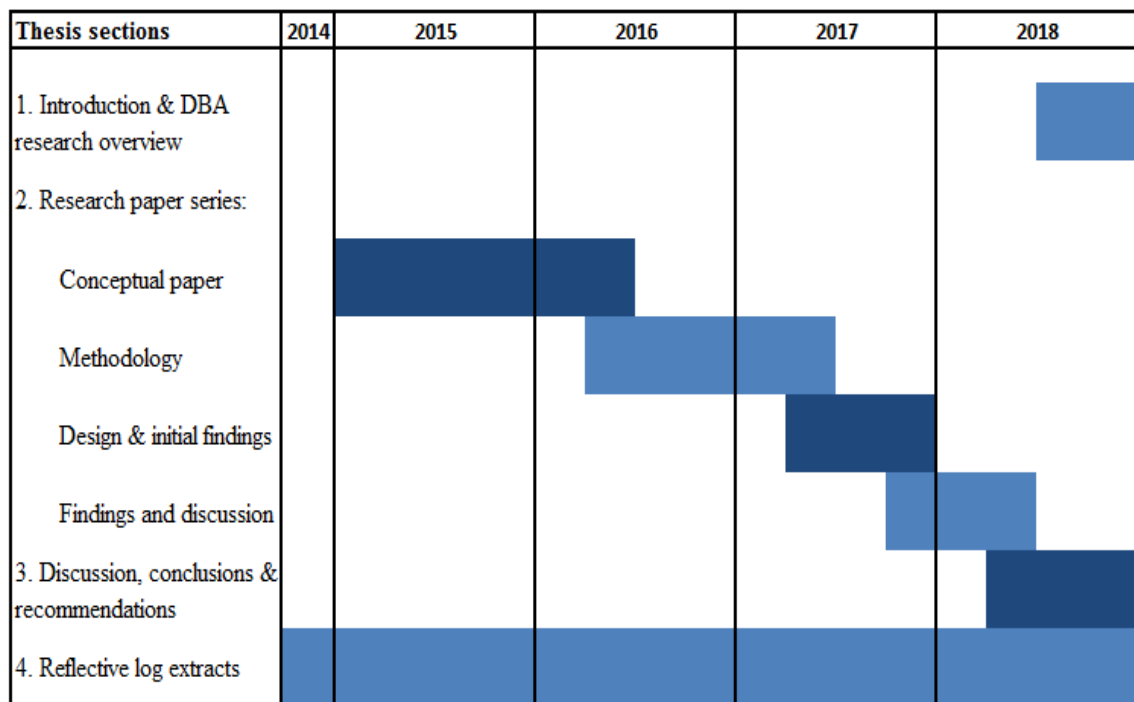
This road to membership ensures that CAs are prepared for roles in practice but what of industry? It is acknowledged that the majority of Chartered Accountants train within practice (IAASA, 2018) but ultimately commence in industry-based roles, which are defined as any roles outside of client facing accountancy practice firms, within a year or two post qualification (Farmer, 2013). These CAs leave the structure and safety of their training firm for new roles in industry. Many of these CAs are proficient auditors but may enter roles titled as financial accountant, management accountant or financial analyst in industry. It would seem that while audit training provides a good foundation, there may be further development requirements with any skills gaps requiring remediation upon entering industry. Additionally, a move from practice to industry involves moving from a training firm with like-minded and similarly aged individuals to a new environment which can vary in size, culture and in terms of the level of practical supports provided. While moving into a new organisation is acknowledged as a stressful period (Stanley, 2013), in the case of CAs moving from practice to industry, there is a change in both the organisation and the role which results in an even more challenging transition. An

exploration of this transition of the CA from practice to industry is therefore warranted based on the foundation that 1) Chartered Accountant training is predominantly performed through practice-based firms; 2) most CAs will make the transition from practice to industry within a year or two post qualification (Farrar, 2013); 3) the transition involves both the challenge of a change in role and a change of employer. This exploration is being completed to uncover fresh insights and knowledge of the transition thereby contributing to the field of study. This involved a number of steps which were taken by the researcher over the last number of years and the structure and development of this journey now follows.

2.0 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured into four distinct sections which were developed throughout the course of the DBA as illustrated below in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Timeline of Thesis Development



Section 1 which includes this introduction provides the background to the research and presents a justification for the study. This section defines the subject area, demonstrates the focus of the study, outlines the objectives and shows how the thesis relates to the professional practice of the researcher. It further provides a detailed portrayal of the specific organisational context within which the study is located and indicates how the

study relates to previous research and theory on the topic. The section also briefly sets out the methodology employed in the study.

Section 2 of the thesis consists of four papers: ‘Conceptual paper’, ‘Methodology’, ‘Design and initial findings’ and ‘Findings and discussion’. The conceptual paper encompasses a review of the literature and provides the theoretical foundation for the aims and objectives of the thesis. The methodology paper presents the research design in the context of the aims, objectives and philosophical positioning of the study. It lays out how the methodology is operationalised and addresses ethical implications, validity and reliability. The design and initial findings paper evaluates the emerging themes from the initial interviews held before the findings and discussion paper finally builds and expands on these initial findings. Each of these papers were prepared and examined at points in time throughout the DBA journey. It is acknowledged that there is a need to provide the reader with the context of the evolution of the research and the altering routes along the road to the conclusion of the research study. As a result, a preface is presented before each of these papers which offers a linking narrative, context and helps weave the papers together to provide cohesiveness to the overall thesis.

Section 3 of the thesis provides the discussion component of the thesis along with the conclusions and recommendations of the study. This section includes the researcher’s claims regarding original contribution to professional practice and illustrates how this contribution is theoretically informed. It includes a summary of key findings, recommendations, contributions, limitations of the research and suggestions for further research.

Section 4 of the thesis is composed of extracts from the researcher’s reflective log that was maintained throughout the research journey. This section of the thesis provides details of how the professional practice of the researcher has been influenced by the DBA process and offers examples of reflections throughout the process. The section also illustrates the personal growth and learning of the researcher in assimilating existing knowledge and developing analytical, conceptual and critical thinking skills.

Following on from the presentation of the structure of the thesis, an overview of the research along with the academic rationale is presented in the following section which provides the background to the research and presents a justification for the study. This

section defines the subject area, demonstrates the focus of the study and outlines the objectives of the study.

3.0 Research overview and academic rationale

The subject area is defined as relating to the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) who move from practice to industry-based roles. By way of background and justification for this subject focus, it was identified that significant debate has taken place since the mid-1980s in relation to the failings of training and education to provide the skills and competencies required of accountants in the workplace (Albrecht and Sack, 2000; Bui and Porter, 2010; Thompson, 2013; Lawson *et al.*, 2014). However, studies to date have focused on the correspondence of skills developed in higher education with the requirements of practice-based accountants (Flood and Wilson, 2009; Pan and Perera, 2012; Stanley, 2013). In contrast, limited research exists in relation to accounting education offered by the professional bodies (Byrne and Flood, 2003) such as CAI and the requirements of industry settings. This lack of research has resulted in calls for research into the skills and competencies required of industry (Lawson *et al.*, 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015).

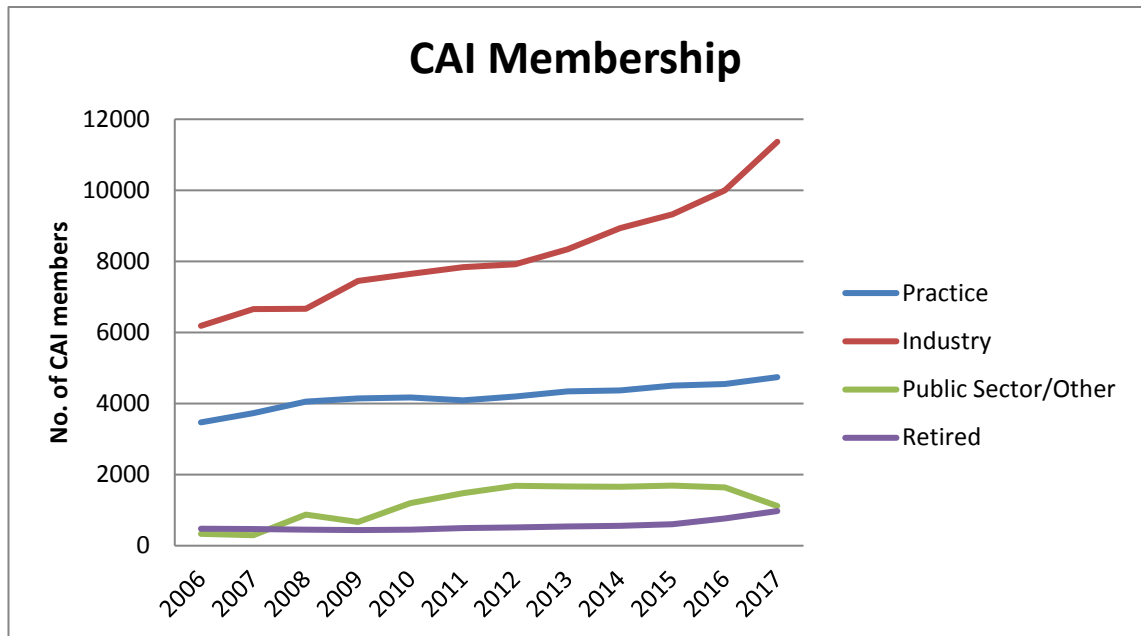
The call for a focus on industry is justified given that over 62 per cent of qualified Chartered Accountants are ultimately employed in industry (IAASA, 2018). Furthermore, the number of Chartered Accountants employed in the industry sector has grown by a substantial rate of 70 per cent from 2008 to 2017¹ (IAASA, 2018). In contrast, the number of practice-based Chartered Accountants grew by just 17 per cent² during the same period (IAASA, 2018) which is illustrated below in Figure 2. While most Chartered Accountants' longer-term careers result in employment in industry, it is evident that the majority of these individuals train for membership within a practice-based setting (IAASA, 2018). It is also acknowledged that over half of newly qualified CAI members transition from practice to industry within a year or two post-qualification (Farmar, 2013). Very little is known about this transition and how the skills and competencies required in industry are developed. While academic research appears lacking in this area, professional trade journals provide anecdotal evidence of the challenges involved in this transition (Haurant, 2016; Bryant, 2019). Drew-Sellers and Fogarty (2010, p.715)

¹ Industry employed Chartered Accountants grew by 70 per cent from 6,669 in 2008 to 11,367 in 2017.

² Practice employed Chartered Accountants grew by 17 per cent from 4,053 in 2008 to 4,743 in 2017.

suggest that future academic research should investigate this transition and the "conversion process" that accountants go through and this study responds to this call.

Figure 2 – CAI membership trends 2006-2017



Source: IAASA (2007 to 2018)

Research in the area of transition is mainly from the Human Resources literature and has largely focused on school to work transitions (Swanson and Fouad, 1999; Fenwick, 2013), early career socialisation (Ashforth and Saks, 1996) and promotion (Ibarra, 1999). Nicholson and West (1989, p.182) describe career transition as "any major change in work role requirements or work context" and Heppner (1998) expands on this definition suggesting career transitions occur when either a task change, position change or occupation change is undertaken. It is argued by this researcher that the transition of a CA from practice to industry may result in all three of these changes. The CA changes role from an auditor to a myriad of differing titles in industry, the tasks and skills in the new role are likely to no longer be audit focused and the CA will also need to confront the cultural challenges that a new organisation brings. The significance of such a complex transition for accountants from practice to industry will add to the body of transition-based research and aid in understanding the educational and skills developmental needs of CAs.

In terms of accounting development and education research, many studies have identified that research has been predominantly based in the United States (Coady, 2014; Howieson *et al.*, 2014). Different geographical perspectives would help contribute to the field of

study. Nevertheless, as accounting is moving towards global standards, it is anticipated that while the study takes place in an Irish context, it may also be of wider interest to international accounting educators and practitioners.

Following on from the process of conceptualising the research problem which is presented later in Paper 1 ‘Conceptual Paper’ and based on the lack of research relating to this transition, an exploration of the conversion of CAs from practice to industry is undertaken to help answer the question of how CAs develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in this transition. This exploratory study also seeks to address the following objectives:

1. To understand how CAs' skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.
2. To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition.
3. To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.

While the study is exploratory in nature, this approach allows for the discovery of fresh insights into a CAs transition which allows the researcher to meaningfully contribute to knowledge as well as providing opportunity to highlight insights that can be practically applied in the accounting field.

There are many reasons as to why the researcher chose this research area and decided upon these objectives and the following section adds to the academic rationale for the study by also presenting the personal and professional rationale behind the research.

4.0 Personal rationale

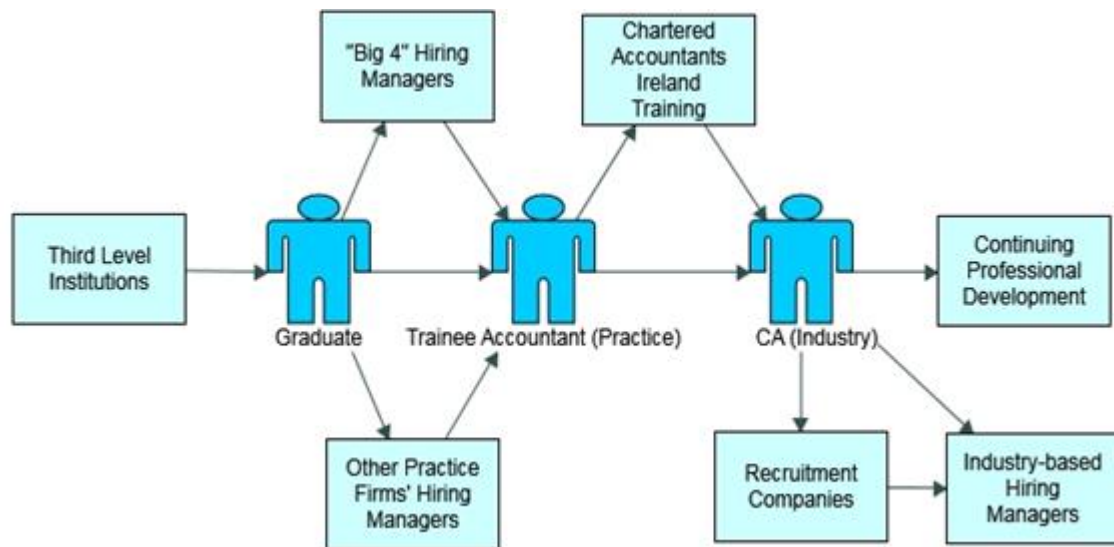
The decision to research the transition of CAs from practice to industry was informed by observations of the researcher who is a Chartered Accountant employed in the manufacturing sector. As the researcher was trained in industry, he did not directly experience this transition from practice to industry. However, he had observed as a financial manager in current and previous roles that many CAs employed from practice into industry appeared to struggle to adapt to their new industry role and the culture of their new organisation despite their professional training within practice. This led the researcher to become interested in how the transition was experienced and managed. Based on the researcher's own experience of hiring CAs, it was also perceived that there was a skills gap between the requirements of industry and what the candidates possessed

from their training within practice. This observation highlighted that CAI and the 'Big 4' affiliated firms prepare accountants for practice rather than industry roles. This seemed logical as most Chartered Accountants train in practice and it is these practice firms that fund the CAs education. It came as a surprise to find that a large majority of qualified Chartered Accountants are employed in industry as outlined above (IAASA, 2018) which added to the importance in understanding how CAs transition to industry and identifying what can be done to support them through this transition. On a personal level, the researcher felt it important to understand this transition better when hiring future CAs for positions in industry and has amended his approach based on the findings of this study which is discussed in the reflective log extract in Section 4 of this thesis. From a broader professional perspective, it would seem logical that others in the profession will relate to the issue. It therefore seems appropriate that a professional rationale also be provided.

5.0 Professional rationale

The professional rationale behind the research is apparent as the subject area is of relevance to the majority of Chartered Accountants in Ireland who make this transition from practice to industry as demonstrated above. Furthermore, the study may have wider utility based on the premise that accountants from other professional accountancy bodies such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales (ICAEW) in the United Kingdom may follow a similar transition. The research topic is therefore of relevance to the accounting profession but particularly to the qualifying Chartered Accountants who will make this transition in the future. Drawing from the conceptual paper, there does not appear to have been any previous studies published that studies this conversion process (Drew-Sellers and Fogarty, 2010) that CAs go through. There are many other stakeholders involved in the journey of a college graduate to a fully qualified CA that will also hold interest in the findings as illustrated below in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Stakeholder map



It is acknowledged that each of these stakeholders identified in Figure 3 play a role in the professional development of CAs who transition from practice to industry. Higher education plays a formation role that precedes professional education and training but is outside the remit of this study. Additionally, hiring managers in practice are outside the remit of this study. The stakeholders considered for this study are therefore the stakeholders post professional training which include: CAs, industry-based Chartered Accountants qualified more than two years classified as longer qualified accountants (LQs); industry-based hiring managers (HMs); CAI; recruiting firms and a continuing professional development provider. It is imperative that these particular stakeholders have a positive impact on the development of future accountants who will shape and influence the direction of the profession. Therefore, an understanding of how these stakeholders' influence and support the CA is of importance to the profession in ensuring high quality professionals who are a fit for the roles they fill in industry after completion of their practice-based training contracts.

Having identified the basis of the study and the rationale behind it, the next step is to understand the theoretical underpinnings through which the research could be developed. This step involved identifying potential theoretical lenses through which to view the subject. There is also an evolving application and refinement of the use of theoretical lenses through the qualitative process which is discussed later in the thesis.

6.0 Theoretical underpinnings

From a theoretical perspective, the study incorporates Nicholson's (1987) transition cycle theory and fit theory incorporating person-job (Kristof-Brown, 2000) and person-culture fit (Edwards, 1991) as lenses for the research which are now presented in turn. This use of multiple theories is often termed "theory triangulation" or "theoretical pluralism" (Hoque *et al.*, 2013, p. 1171) and has been used previously in accounting studies (Covaleski *et al.*, 2003; Modell, 2005; Ahrens and Chapman, 2006). As studies in the area of accounting skills development are generally renowned for their under-deployment of theoretical frameworks (McPhail, 2001; Tight, 2004; Haggis, 2009; Coady, 2014), it is hoped that the use of the three theories outlined below will demonstrate the utility of theory in addressing research problems in this area of study.

6.1 Nicholson's transition cycle theory

This study centres on the transition of CAs from practice to industry-based roles and thereby constitutes a period of change for the CAs who must synchronise with a new role through the development of skills while also adapting to a new culture. In order to better understand transitions, Nicholson (1987) put forth a transition cycle theory which suggests that such transitions go through a cycle of preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. Preparation describes the period before embarking on a new role. Encounter involves the early stages of the new role. Adjustment is concerned with identifying how to perform in the role and involves role development in order to minimise job misfit. Finally, stabilisation is based on the assumption that the transition finally reaches a position of equilibrium.

Nicholson's transition cycle theory is used as a lens through which the transition of the CA is viewed, as it sets out the potential phases of transition which must be traversed by the CA. Consistent with Nicholson's theory, this transition involves both personal and role development. Personal development entails the CA adapting to fit the role through the development of skills while role development involves the role adapting to fit the CA and this was found in some cases as presented later in the thesis. The theory provides a basis through which to better understand how CAs develop job and culture fits during the transition process.

6.2 Person-job fit theory

The fit between individuals and their workplace has long been an area of interest for academics, employers, recruiters, job seekers and incumbents (Kristof-Brown, 2000) as higher levels of fit result in increased job satisfaction (Cable and DeRue, 2002), better role performance (Wang *et al.*, 2011) and reduces intentions to quit the organisation (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Wang *et al.*, 2011).

Edwards (1991) describes person-job fit as the fit between the individuals' abilities and the demands of their role. Chuang *et al.* (2016) expand on the person-job fit concept arguing that it includes the dimension of skill and this fit concept is supported by Muchinsky and Monahan's (1987) complimentary based view which posits that an employee compliments the characteristics of the workplace when their skills compliment the requirements of the position. Kristof-Brown and Guay (2011) further posit that person-job fit considers the dimensions of both skills and competencies. In this context, skills are identified as something that can be taught and learned while competencies include the effective application of these skills. Boritz and Carnaghan (2003) identified that educators' emphasis on competencies is based on skills that can be taught and acquired. It is this focus on skills imparted through professional education and training that dictates that person-job fit is considered in this study.

6.3 Person-culture fit theory

Person-culture fit is identified as the "idea that organisations have cultures that are more or less attractive to certain types of individuals" (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991, p. 491). As a result, failure to align with culture may result in an employee vacating their position (Nazir, 2005; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006; Wang *et al.*, 2011) which is an undesired outcome in any transition. Therefore, there is a need to consider both person-job fit through the alignment of skills simultaneously with person-culture fit in determining how to best support CAs through the transition process.

Studies have shown that recruits whose values align with those of the firm adjust more quickly (Chatman, 1991), feel more satisfied (Chatman, 1991; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006) and intend to remain with the firm longer (Chatman, 1991; Nazir, 2005; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006). Indeed, values are identified as the crux of person-culture fit with Nazir (2005, p. 42) hypothesising and finding supportive evidence to suggest "the correlation between the organizational value profiles and the individual

value profiles determines the person-culture fit". Nazir (2005) further suggests that person-culture fit may provide insight into employee adjustment to a new organisation and as such, person-culture fit was determined as a lens that would provide insight into the adjustment of CAs transitioning from practice to industry. The theoretical base is elaborated upon in more detail in Paper 1 'Conceptual Paper' and is subsequently drawn upon in the other papers when deemed appropriate. Having determined the theoretical base for the study, the research design is now discussed.

7.0 Study design

The study design is presented in Paper 2 'Methodology' of this thesis which provides evaluative insight into its development. An exploratory approach was deemed most appropriate given the dearth of research in the area being investigated coupled with the research question and objectives being pursued. Exploratory research is the initial research approach into an area that is under-explored (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002) and is conducted when a researcher seeks to comprehend the nature of the problem (Sekaran, 2003; Saunders *et al.*, 2009). This study attempts to understand the skills and competencies required of CAs transitioning from practice to industry and to also understand how best to develop these skills and competencies throughout the transition phase. While extant literature does provide a suite of skills required of accountants (Albrecht and Sack, 2000; Richardson, 2005; Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008), there are no known published studies that explore the required skills of CAs during the transition from practice to industry. Furthermore, existing literature regarding Chartered Accountants centres on skills required in practice as distinct from industry (Flood and Wilson, 2009). As a result, there does not appear to be an adequate survey instrument that would appropriately measure the skills and competencies required of a transitioning CA. The paucity of research in the area of transitioning accountants from practice to industry suggests that the literature is not robust enough to support or develop hypotheses that can be quantifiably tested.

While the study is predominantly explorative, there are also some descriptive aspects to the study whereby the study attempts to answer the "how" questions. Descriptive research is extensively employed in educational studies (Gay *et al.*, 2006) and can be "undertaken in order to ascertain and be able to describe the variables of interest in a situation" (Sekaran, 2003, p. 121). This type of research is of particular value when a field of study is first being investigated (McMillan, 2004) and is seen as 'information gathering'

(Phillips and Pugh, 2005). It would appear that this approach is appropriate in a field of research where there have been few prior studies relating to skills required of CAs transitioning to industry (Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015). This study thus comprises exploratory and descriptive components in its design to address the research problem of how do CAs develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in this transition.

Qualitative tools including semi-structured interviews are particularly suited to exploratory research designs (Patton, 2002). It is proposed that the research therefore consists of semi-structured interviews which are suited for understanding individual's perceptions and experiences (Flick, 2009) and which aids in understanding of how gaps in skills and competencies for industry can be developed by CAs during the transition. The flexibility of this approach allowed the discovery of information that was considered important by the participant (Gill *et al.*, 2008) which aids in the exploratory process of this study. The use of semi-structured interviews was also supported by their use as a method in previous exploratory studies relating to accounting skills and competencies and early career accountant studies (e.g. Anderson Gough *et al.*, 2001; Coupland, 2001; Drew-Sellers and Fogarty, 2010; Bui and Porter, 2010). Interviews were considered more effective than surveys in obtaining perceptions and allow greater depth of investigation into the views of the interviewee (Kvale, 1996). With the perspective of hindsight, the researcher uncovered some detailed and nuanced insights into the challenges of the transition with for example; one CA interviewed identifying “it was a big change in terms of culture, in terms of work and the different dynamics of work”. These changes are explored in more detail in Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ and Paper 4 ‘Findings and Discussion’. The interview is mobilised towards positivistic ends in this study (Ahrens and Chapman, 2006) not only to uncover skills and competencies required in industry but also to inform how best these can be acquired during the transition from practice to industry. The use of the study design allowed findings to be generated and contributions to be formed which are now discussed.

8.0 Contributions

Section 3 of this thesis details the contribution claims of the study to both theory and practice and outlines how the objectives of the study were addressed which is now briefly outlined. One objective of the study is to develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry and this theoretically informed framework is presented in

Section 3 of the thesis. The framework developed informs the transition of CAs to industry and can be utilised to understand how to navigate the transition based on a multiple stakeholder perspective which included CAs, HMs, LQs, CAI, recruitment companies and continuing professional development providers.

The development of a fit matrix provides the means to a better understanding of the job and culture fit dimensions of the transitioning CA and aids in providing a better understanding of how to support the CA through the transition. The findings presented later in this thesis support the importance of person-job fit and person-culture fit (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011) and the emergence of these fits in the empirical data collected supports the need to consider both fits in order to assess the new employees' transition. The fit matrix may therefore be of interest to both those who hire CAs in the future and the CAs themselves.

The study also has implications for CAI as it calls for a rethinking of the positioning of training and supports required for CAs. The evidence supports that most members are employed in industry but are trained in practice and as such, there is a skills and competence deficit that needs to be addressed to ensure accountants are trained appropriately for the positions where they will ultimately be employed. The findings and recommendations provided in this research offers information in how CAs could be best supported. The study is also relevant to accounting students and those who intend becoming accounting students as it is beneficial for them to fully understand the transition they will take upon entering industry if they decide to pursue such a path. Furthermore, it is important to understand what industry-based employer's expectations are and the skills that they most value in newly transitioned accountants. This study also offers recommendations regarding supports that can be used to address any gaps in competencies or skills that may exist.

From a contribution to theory perspective, this study attempts to expand upon the theoretical lenses utilised for this study. In relation to Nicholson's (1987) transition cycle theory, it was found that there are five phases of transition encountered by CAs transitioning from practice to industry as opposed to four outlined in Nicholson's theory. While the phases of transition were closely aligned to Nicholson's theory, the empirical findings suggest that there are two dimensions of grounding and assessing involved in Nicholson's adjustment phase of transitioning. The grounding phase was found to be

about understanding the basics of the role and gaining an understanding of the vision, goals and strategy of the organisation. The discovery of an assessment phase, whereby expectations that are placed on the CA are assessed is significant as not only does it extend Nicholson's transition cycle theory but also has practical implications for CAs making the transition.

Additionally, a fit matrix is developed which provides the means to a better understanding of the job and culture fit dimensions of the transitioning CA. The findings support the importance of person-job fit (Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011) and person-culture fit (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991) and the emergence of these fits in the empirical data collected supports the need to consider both simultaneously to assess a CAs transition. This exploration of both fit theories viewed simultaneously can be seen as theory development and offers opportunity for further research exploration. The fit matrix developed can be used as both an indicative and predictive tool when recruiting CAs into industry and may offer wider utility to other professional transitions.

9.0 Concluding comments

The accounting profession has seen many changes since its inception. Accounting has moved beyond merely scorekeeping and has entered an era where it must now embrace advancing technology, globalisation and the need to add value. This ever-evolving complexity presents a challenge to the profession and a need to understand the unique complexities of industry-based roles is essential as more members take up such positions. CAI is recognised as the dominant brand (IAASA, 2018) in the accounting profession in Ireland with the 'Big 4' insisting that graduates follow the Chartered route. Undoubtedly, the training and development opportunities provided through training as a Chartered Accountant in practice offers college graduates an excellent platform from which to build their future careers in the accounting profession. However, the focus on practice needs over those of industry may be a missed opportunity as just 33 per cent of qualified members remain in practice post qualification (IAASA, 2016). There are many opportunities for CAs in industry and this research may help CAs to understand areas for development to more closely align with the requirements of these industry roles. Additionally, the development of the fit matrix presented in this thesis, uniquely combines both person-job fit (Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011) with person-culture fit (O'Reilly *et*

al., 1991) which offers a theoretical development that provides both an indicative and predictive tool for HM practitioners.

Section 2 of the thesis which follows will conceptualise the research context and provide the theoretical foundation for the study in Paper1 'Conceptual Paper'. Paper 2 'Methodology' will then present the research plan including the planned operationalisation which is put into action in Paper 3 'Design and initial findings' which also includes initial findings and emerging themes. Paper 4 'Findings and discussion' presents the findings from the completion of the data analysis and offers initial discussion regarding the insights uncovered.

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Section 2:

Cumulative paper

series

Preface to paper 1 - Conceptual paper

The conceptual paper was presented at the Doctoral Colloquium held in WIT in April 2016. The final version of the paper included in this thesis was submitted following amendments based upon examiner commentary. At this point of the study, the researcher found that research skills were still in development with academic writing in particular requiring more work. The researcher was conscious of this need to develop research skills and attended evening courses provided by WIT. In addition, time was spent focusing on writing style when reviewing literature. However, the development of this skill was particularly honed through the construction of multiple drafts of the conceptual paper which were reviewed by the appointed supervisors prior to the presentation at the Doctoral Colloquium. Learning from academics that are familiar with academic writing style and structure was an invaluable support in completion of the conceptual paper and indeed the entire thesis.

Another skill required was the ability to reflect. The researcher found reflection to be difficult at first and there was a feeling of being forced into reflection through the DBA process. There was resistance to this at first but then it was noticed that reflection was taking place anyway but just not being recorded and the log was merely a method to document these thoughts. Some of these thoughts centred around the researchers own experience in relation to transitions and the merits of completing the research in order to aid in supporting future new hires in the researcher's own workplace. Informal conversations that were held with colleagues and peers suggested that the research would be of practical benefit and use to others in the profession. This spurred the researcher on in the quest to understand the transition further. It seemed that being an accountant studying accountants ensured a greater understanding of the subject under investigation which adds to the research, but it was also important for the researcher to recognise potential bias. A sample of the researcher's reflections is to be found in Section 4 'Reflective Log Extracts' of this thesis.

One such reflection relates to the choice of research topic. The proposed title for the study was initially: "The skills required of newly qualified Chartered Accountants transitioning from practice to industry". Reflecting back on this title, it was clearly aligned with the quantitative leanings of the researcher who is a qualified Chartered Accountant and

therefore aligned more comfortably with quantitative methods. At this point, the researcher was attempting to lead the research in a direction which would allow quantitative techniques rather than letting the research decide the course of the most appropriate techniques and method. Examiner feedback in relation to this fact and to the use of the word skills in the title without any mention of competencies resulted in the title being amended to "Exploring the transition of newly qualified CAs from practice to industry". This revised title remained intact to the end of the research journey and gives a better sense of what the research entails. The research was not conceived as merely an exercise in gathering a list of skills required in industry but is instead a review of the challenges that newly qualified Chartered Accountants face as they transition from practice to industry and this new title captures this conception. The conceptual paper identifies a number of literature gaps which the study attempts to address. At the forefront of these gaps is that the author was not aware of any previously published research in relation to this transition in accounting which suggested that a contribution to practice and theory could potentially be discovered. Furthermore, Fenwick (2013, p. 364) calls for education that "helps attune professionals to the multiple and complex nature of transitions". This interested the researcher as it supported the need to investigate the transition of accountants from practice to industry and this study responds in particular to this call.

The objectives of the study were also amended in Paper 1 'Conceptual Paper' following commentary from the examiners. Research objectives 1 and 2 were initially presented as: 1) To identify what skills newly qualified Chartered Accountants perceive as being necessary for industry-based positions and 2) To identify what skills newly qualified Chartered Accountants perceive as being already developed for industry-based positions. These objectives were discarded and reworded to remain consistent with an explorative qualitative study. The revised objective was 'to explore the skills and competencies required of newly qualified Chartered Accountants in industry-based positions. Again, the initial objectives were influenced by the researcher attempting to subconsciously lead the research down a quantitative route without due regard for the need to let the research be guided by current literature and the theoretical base.

The research objectives decided upon encompass both theory and practice. Objective 1 is to explore the skills and competencies required of newly qualified Chartered Accountants

in industry-based positions. Research in this area has been neglected (Lawson et al., 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015). This objective encompasses a discovery of the perceived skills required by industry. Objective 2 is to understand how the necessary skills and competencies identified in industry can be developed during the transition from practice and supports calls for research regarding the professional education sphere (Byrne and Flood, 2003). The objective is theoretically informed by Nicholson's transition cycle (Nicholson, 1987), in that it attempts to better understand the transition from practice to industry and how skills and competencies required can be developed during the transition. Finally, objective 3 relates to the practical application of the findings of the research discovery process through the development of a framework which can aid accountants in their transition from practice to industry. This objective is theoretically informed through the lenses of TWA, Nicholson's transition cycle, and person-job fit which are used to help identify the skills necessary for transitioning to industry and how such skills might be developed during the transition process.

The base of theories reviewed for the conceptual paper was initially focused on accounting education which is noted for an under deployment of theoretical frameworks (Haggis, 2009). This initially posed a problem for the researcher in identifying suitable theory to guide the research which led the researcher to review multiple career transition theories. This theoretical base appeared to align well with the research being undertaken as the study developed into a focus on the transition of a newly qualified Chartered Accountant from practice to industry. A review of development theory (Super, 1957), transition cycle theory (Nicholson, 1987), change theory (Kubler Ross, 1969), theory of work adjustment (TWA) (Dawis *et al.*, 1964) along with a number of different fit theories was undertaken. This review helped focus the theoretical lenses used for the study on the transition cycle theory, TWA and the fit theories as these were most appropriate due to their focus on transition and alignment of skills and competencies. It transpires that Nicholson's transition cycle theory along with person-job fit and person-culture fit emerged as the theories that ultimately informed the analysis of the findings of the research. Person-culture fit was dominantly found within the data later collected and while those CAs who joined ex-audit clients appeared somewhat culturally aware of their new setting in industry, others who did not join ex-audit clients were less aware of what to expect. The commentary from the examiners commended this grounding in theory but questioned other aspects of the paper:

The paper is well written and grounded in theory. Where the paper loses clarity is in the exposition of the research question and also in the brief explanation of a research strategy. The research method is described as being both explorative and descriptive, yet the major theories seem to use quantitative instruments. Coupled with this is the issue that the research question is framed as a 'How' question. This needs to be addressed.

(Source: Examiner Feedback, 22 April 2016)

As a result of this feedback, a brief explanation of the research strategy including the research philosophy and methodology was included in a section at the end of the paper entitled "next steps towards a research methodology". The study is clearly positioned as exploratory in nature and would involve semi-structured interviews to explore the research question and objectives. As such the framing of the research question as a 'How' question seemed appropriate and the research question of "how do Chartered Accountants develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in the transition from practice to industry" was therefore kept intact. A defence of the qualitative approach in light of the theories chosen was also provided. It was identified that available survey instruments such as Albrecht and Sack (2000) have been developed to assess correspondence between higher education and practice-based requirements. However, there were no survey instruments available that would adequately assess the correspondence of skills required in industry-based positions with those imparted through professional accounting education. As such, this was an example of how the researcher learned to use current literature to inform decisions regarding an appropriate research design for the study given the objectives and their refinement in the paper.

The researcher struggled with understanding how theories using quantitative instruments could be used in an exploratory study as it seemed counter-intuitive. At this stage, the chosen theoretical lenses of neo-correspondence theory and TWA (Dawis *et al.*, 1964) clearly resided in the functionalist space consistent with Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigmatic matrix. However, while these theories did not lend themselves to the qualitative methods required of an exploratory study, it was felt that they clearly aligned with the functionalist and utilitarian nature of the study being undertaken. After all, the study sought to explore how the necessary skills and competencies required for industry-

based positions can be best developed. Furthermore, this utilitarian approach sought to develop a practical framework that can be applied in future transitions and would generate knowledge that can be put to use. While the chosen functionalist theoretical lenses were aligned to quantitative techniques, it was clear that qualitative research was required to understand more clearly how skills and competencies that are required throughout the transition might be developed. This qualitative study could also provide potential future research with a basis for a quantitative based study.

The research strategy taken is fluid and there is no intent by the researcher to label the approach. The research study loosely follows an abductive strategy (Peirce, 1903) which involves collecting clues and detecting the most logical plausible and promising causal explanation of the situation being explored (Lukka, 2014). According to Lukka and Modell (2010) abductive reasoning involves an iterative process between empirical findings and theoretical elements which fits with the theoretical triangulation or pluralism (Hoque et al., 2013) process that is taken in this study. The study also moves at times into a more inductive approach in that theory was enhanced and developed through the development of the fit matrix using personal interpretation of the data and which led to richer theory contribution. This engagement with theory led to the development of a framework that informs the CAs transition from practice to industry that acts as both an indicative and predictive aid to HMs in recruiting and assessing CAs.

This use of existing theory recognises Lewin's (1952) quote that "there is nothing more practical than a good theory". It is recognised that theory plays a very important role within this thesis, offering lenses through which to view data collected in practice and helping illuminate the findings. The thesis does not seek to test theory but instead is used to "puzzle" (Spens and Kovacs, 2005) through the CAs transition through the use of existing theory which plays a role even if it is not able to explain the phenomenon (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). Therefore, the researcher moves back and forth from existing theory and the data collected in order to address the research objectives of the study. The explanatory capacity of theory in a practice setting also informed theoretical elaboration (new stages in transition) and developments (combining fits).

The paper concludes that the research may indicate gaps that exist between skills and competencies acquired in practice-based training and those required of industry while

offering a framework to aid the professional development of accountants making the transition in the future. At this stage of the research, there was less focus on the transitional phases that are experienced by the CA in the transition to industry. A dominant theory that emerges in later papers is Nicholson's (1987) transition cycle theory which moved the researcher away from TWA (Dawis *et al.*, 1964) and neo-correspondence theory (Saunders and Machell, 2000). This transition theory was complemented by the concepts of fit, with much of the empirical data collected aligning with person-culture fit and person-job fit. These particular theories are elaborated further in the subsequent papers in Section 2 'Research Paper Series'.

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Paper 1: Conceptual paper

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RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

Paper 1:

CONCEPTUAL PAPER

**Exploring the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants
from practice to industry**

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the conceptual basis for investigating the question of how Chartered Accountants develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in the transition from practice to industry. The majority of the members of Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) are trained in practice. Once qualified, the majority of these accountants' transition to employment in industry. There has been extensive debate about skills gaps between accounting education and employers' expectations in accounting, but research focus to date has been on practice-based requirements and higher education provision.

The key concepts of the study are outlined with neo-correspondence theory and the theory of work adjustment (TWA) proposed as theoretical lenses to investigate the skills and competencies that are perceived as being required in industry. The evolution from practice to industry is viewed through Nicholson's Transition Cycle to help explore how newly qualified accountants develop and become equipped with these skills and competencies during the different phases of transition. This research rationale is identified through the emergence of a number of literature gaps culminating with the formulation of an overarching research question with resultant subsidiary objectives that will be addressed through this research study.

Keywords: *industry-based accountant, accounting education, career transition, theory of work adjustment, neo-correspondence theory, Nicholson's transition cycle*

1.0 Introduction

This paper sets out the context for a study to explore the transition of newly qualified accountants from practice to industry. It specifically addresses the question of how Chartered Accountants develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in the transition from practice to industry.

The majority of the members of Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) undertake a training contract in a practice firm (IAASA, 2015) which comprises audit-based training and work experience. However, the majority of qualified members are employed in industry-based roles (IAASA, 2015). This suggests that most Chartered Accountants will make a work adjustment from practice to industry within their career, with most transitioning within two years of completion of their training contract (Farrar, 2013). The ease of this transition may depend on how closely the skills and competencies required of practice are aligned with those required of industry. The identification of the difficulty of this transition is based anecdotally on the researchers experience as a qualified Chartered Accountant based in industry and his involvement in hiring newly qualified accountants.

This paper draws on accounting education literature as its primary base and begins by setting out the context of the study. It then defines the key concepts of competencies and skills. This is followed by justification of the neo-correspondence theory, the theory of work adjustment, person-job fit and the transition cycle as theoretical lenses for the study. The paper then reviews accounting educational reform, skills and competencies which leads to the identification of gaps in the literature. The paper culminates with the formation of an overarching research question and resultant objectives based on these gaps.

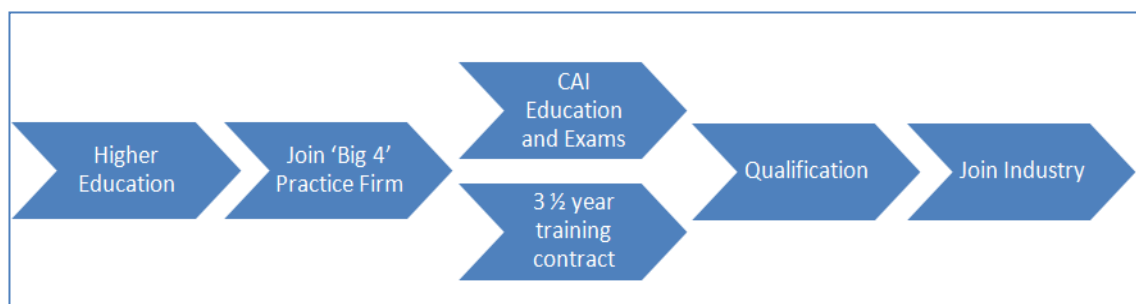
2.0 Context of study

There have been increasing calls for reform of accounting education in recent times particularly as changes in the business environment have challenged the competencies required of professional accountants (Lawson *et al.*, 2014). There is a recognised gap between accounting education and employer expectations (Bui and Porter, 2010; Thompson, 2013). Some authors (Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015) contend that new perspectives in this field of study are required. The focus of research to date has primarily been on reviews of accounting curricula in higher education (Flood and Wilson, 2009).

In contrast, there is very little written about professional education (Flood and Wilson, 2008).

The profession in Ireland is dominated by CAI and the 'Big 4' accountancy firms of PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG, EY and Deloitte. These institutions 'make' accountants (Gray and Collison, 2002) and "dictate the educational and practical experience standards to be achieved for entry into the profession" (Francalanza, 1997, p. 119). The most popular route to professional membership is to complete a higher education programme, then prepare for final examination of the professional body while simultaneously gaining mandatory professional training usually within a 'Big 4' practice firm (Flood and Wilson, 2009). However, it is acknowledged that while the majority of trainees will be employed within a 'Big 4' firm, there is also a significant minority employed as trainees in smaller practice firms. A total of 80 per cent of trainee Chartered Accountants were employed in practice firms in 2014 (IAASA, 2015). However, only 28 per cent of qualified members were employed in practice in 2014 (IAASA, 2015). These statistics suggest that many accountants transition from training contracts in practice to a longer-term career in industry. This is supported by Farmar (2013) who identifies that within a year or two post-qualification, half or more of newly qualified CAI members have left practice and taken employment in industry. However, focus on industry-based accounting skills development has been neglected in prior research (Lawson *et al.*, 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015). This typical route to membership and ultimately a career in industry is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Typical timeline of a Chartered Accountant to an industry career



An increasing range of career opportunities, in particular within industry, has resulted in considerable growth in numbers joining the profession over the last number of decades (IAASA, 2015). The industry sector has seen growth of 38 per cent since 2008, while in contrast, the number of practice-based accountants has grown by just 8 per cent in the

same period (IAASA, 2015). Farmar (2013, p. 245) acknowledges the trend of growth outside of practice, suggesting that industry-based members of the profession are "causing profound and subtle changes in the Irish profession, to the extent perhaps of leading some business accountants to challenge the relevance of the professional bodies" such as CAI. These challenges may be due to the perception that skills required in industry differ from practice (Siegel *et al.*, 2010) and accountants in industry act as business partners with internal customers rather than serving the external clients of practice.

The ever-changing commercial environment demonstrates the importance that the profession continually reviews and re-evaluate their position over time (Edwards *et al.*, 2007; Hamilton, 2013). The business environment has changed dramatically and no longer calls for the largely audit-based profession of the mid-twentieth century (Farmer, 2013). Instead a profession of multiple and evolving disciplines is now required (Hamilton, 2013), for example: taxation, business partnering, corporate finance and management consultancy. Collins (1990, p. 15) proposes that professions emerge from "major processes of social change" including "industrial development and urban growth". The rapid changes relating to globalisation and technology (Suskind and Suskind, 2015) necessitates that the profession continually evolve its education and training to meet the needs of society and business.

CAI recognised the need for broader knowledge in 2007 and introduced a new competency-based framework. More recently, CAI issued a strategy document entitled 'Strategy 2020' (CAI, 2015, P. 7) which details one of the primary activities of the institute as "ensuring a highly educated and practically trained stream of Chartered Accountants to meet the rapidly changing needs of business and society generally". In order to meet this goal, a taskforce is currently reviewing existing education with a view to implementing recommendations by the end of 2016 (CAI, 2015).

Hassall *et al.* (2005), Coady, (2014) and Howieson *et al.* (2014) have all identified that research relating to accounting education is dominated by studies emanating from the United States. The reason for this may be in reaction to the competition from Master in Business Studies (MBA) programmes (Albrecht and Sack, 2000) and the dominance of the MBA designation among senior managers in the US (Wilson and Thomson, 2009). It is suggested by Farmar (2013) that due to the weakness of management education in Britain and Ireland, companies look to accountants to contribute professionalism. As a

result, while senior managers are mainly MBA qualified in the United States and qualified engineers in Germany, accountants dominate the British and Irish cadre (Wilson and Thomson, 2009). If accountants dominate such senior positions in industry (Farrar, 2013), it is important to understand how education can most effectively shape these future leaders in society.

Lawson *et al.* (2014) calls for accounting education to focus on students' longer-term career in these future leadership roles and calls for education outside of practice and the audit-based environment. This view is supported by Rebele and St. Pierre (2015, p. 135) who posit that this "different perspective on accounting education lends itself to a different paradigm and the opportunity for some valuable and interesting empirical research". It is an opportunity that this research study will explore.

3.0 Key concepts: Competencies and skills

Definitions of what is meant by both competencies and skills is required before these concepts can be applied to accounting education research. This section introduces these concepts and highlights the differing interpretations within the literature.

3.1 Competencies

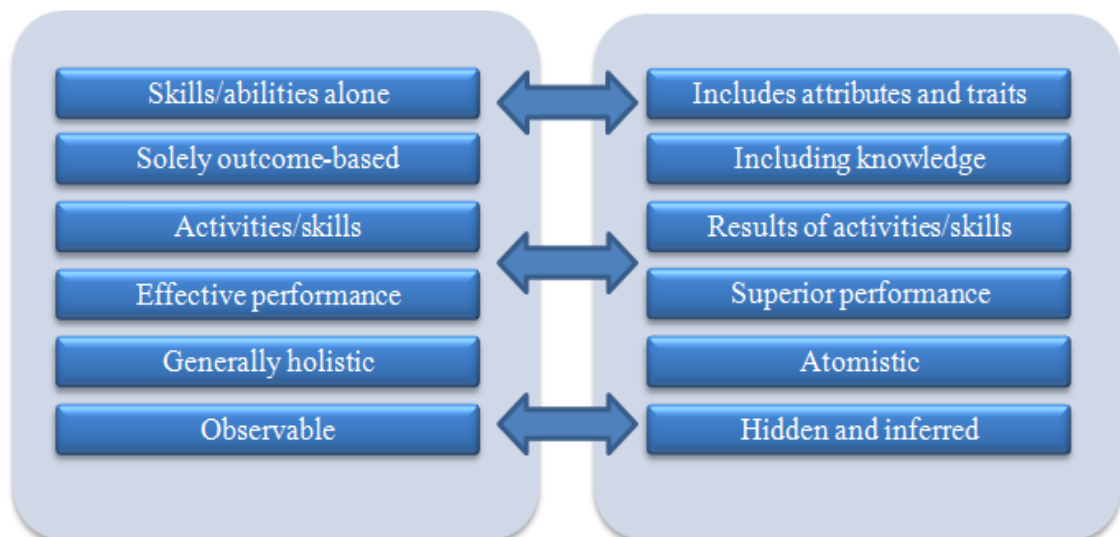
There are many studies, outside of accounting education research, that attempt to classify competencies into distinct groupings. Becker (1980) delineates between general and firm specific competencies. This was advanced by Nordhaug (1993) who espoused competencies of firm-speciality, task-specialty and industry-speciality. Kellerman (2007) distinguishes between five different groups: general-academic, scientific-operative, personal-professional, social-reflective and physiological-handicraft. Bunk (1994) puts forth four competency groupings: specialised, methodological, participative and socio-individual. Instead, three groupings are used by Heijke *et al.* (2002): competencies acquired in education which are of direct use in employment, competencies acquired in education which facilitate acquisition of new competencies and postgraduate competencies acquired during employment. These studies outline that many different views exist relating to groupings of competencies.

Many professional accounting bodies around the world employ competency-based approaches to education (Boritz and Carnaghan, 2003). In the United States, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) framework includes

functional, personal and broad business competencies (AICPA, 2016). The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) employ a framework of twelve key areas which breaks down further into technical and behavioural competencies (ACCA, 2016). In Ireland, CAI designed their framework to deliver on three main competency types: functional competencies, business competencies and core professional competencies (CAI, 2007). While it is clear that accounting educational frameworks differ around the world, it is also evident that central to each approach is the priority of the development of competencies.

CAI define competency as "the ability to apply knowledge, understanding and skills in performing to the standards required in employment" (CAI, 2015). However, there are differences in the definition of competency between the professional bodies around the world (IFAC, 2001). This difference in definition of competencies is also evident in accounting education literature. In Boritz and Carnaghan's (2003) critical review of competency-based accounting education literature, they identify six dimensions in which they assert the definition of competency differs. The differing views of these dimensions within the literature are illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1 - Competency definitions - differing dimensions



Source: Adapted from Boritz and Carnaghan (2003, p. 10)

A comprehensive academic definition has been provided by Rubin *et al.*, (2007, p. 453) in which they describe competencies as "complex and dynamically interactive clusters of integrated knowledge of concepts and procedures; skills and abilities; behaviours and strategies; attitudes, beliefs and values; dispositions and personal characteristics; self-

perceptions; and motivations that enable a person to execute a professional activity with myriad potential outcomes". While this definition addresses the many dimensions of competencies, accounting education literature centres on skills, which suggests that the skills component is an important dimension worth further discussion.

3.2 Skills

It is important to clearly delineate the concept of skills from that of competencies. Skills are something that can be taught and learned while competencies include the effective application of these skills. Based upon Rubin *et al.*'s. (2007) definition of competencies above, it can be deduced, that skills are in effect just one of a myriad of dimensions that allows an individual to gain competence in a profession. However, it is believed that skill is the dimension that can be influenced most through education (Boritz and Carnaghan, 2003).

There have been many studies that review the necessary skills required of accountants. Cory and Pruske (2012) reviewed skills required of accounting graduates in both practice-based and industry-based settings. They concluded that while some overlap existed in the skill requirements of both groups, there were also distinctive skills requirements for each setting. However, the range of skills reviewed in this study was limited and twenty five of the thirty-four skills investigated related to information technology skills.

A study by Siegel and Sorensen (1994) selected fifteen broad accounting knowledge and skills areas which they asked respondents to rank in terms of skill importance for entry-level management accountants. The researchers concluded that entry-level management accountants had inadequate management accounting skills. This finding was supported by Richardson (2005) in a study of the perceptions of skill requirements in Australia. Montano *et al.* (2001) and Hassall *et al.* (2005) focused on management accountants' communication skills, group skills, problem solving skills, time management and information technology. They called for innovation in curriculum design to address these broad skill requirements. A survey of Irish Chartered Accountants by Meagher (2001) also addressed this broader skill set concluding that a challenge exists to maintain technical accounting skills competence while broadening the skills base to cope with expanding roles.

Albrecht and Sack (2000) is recognised as the most significant review of skills in accounting education research. This study was cited in over 29 per cent of accounting education research papers from 2001 to 2007 (Johnson and Halabi, 2009). The study reviews a broad range of twenty-two skills. It is also determined that Albrecht and Sack (2000) has formed the basis for survey analysis of many other studies (For example: Burnett, 2003; Cory and Pruske, 2012).

It is evident from the studies identified above that prior research relating to skills required of accountants has focused on quantitative survey instruments. Byrne *et al.*, (2012) suggest that the use of qualitative techniques would enable educators to develop a deeper holistic understanding which would help in the development of teaching and assessment practices. Furthermore, it appears that gaps continue to be identified through survey-based approaches but with little evidence that such gaps are narrowing. A qualitative approach may provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the development of relevant skills in specific contexts which would possibly aid the closing of such gaps (Byrne *et al.*, 2012).

A common theme that emerges from the review of the research relating to accountants' skills is that there is no uniformity or agreement as to the necessary skills required of accountants which would suggest that a better and more holistic understanding is required. From the range of papers reviewed, it is clear that despite the differing terminologies and groupings of skills used, there are many commonalities between the skills highlighted. It would seem important, that studies relating to the alignment of skills developed to those required in the workplace, are examined using the appropriate theoretical lenses. These theoretical lenses are discussed in the following section.

4.0 Theoretical lenses

This study is focused on accounting skills and competencies and how their development can influence career transition from practice to industry. It is therefore appropriate that the theoretical lenses for this study should relate to theories of accounting education and career transition.

Accounting education research is noted for its under deployment of theoretical frameworks (McPhail, 2001; Tight, 2004; Haggis 2009; Coady, 2014). Coady (2014) reviewed the fifty most significant studies over a thirty-year period and found that 76 per

cent did not have any theoretical foundation. Conversely, career transition theories are numerous and include: development theory (Super, 1957), transition cycle theory (Nicholson, 1987), change theory (Kubler-Ross, 1969), theory of work adjustment (TWA) (Dawis *et al.*, 1964) and numerous fit theories.

Career transition theories have generally been applied by scholars from two separate perspectives. Vocational psychology focuses on career counselling, early career choice and decision making while sociology concerns itself with socialisation, later career development and involuntary job loss (So, 2010). Many of these theories focus on concepts such as psychological responses, personal traits, characteristics and emotional responses. Theories with emphasis on these concepts are not considered as appropriate theoretical lenses as they do not focus on the skills and competencies of the individual which is the core of this study. Therefore, the career transition theories that are most appropriate are TWA, person-job fit and Nicholson's transition cycle theory.

As skill is a dimension that can be influenced through education (Boritz and Carnaghan, 2003), accounting education theories were also explored. Neo-constructive alignment theory (Biggs, 1999) was considered but dismissed on the basis that it is insular to education and did not consider the external environment. Neo-correspondence theory (Saunders and Machell, 2000) was chosen as a lens as it looks at the relationship of education and the workplace. It therefore clearly aids the investigation of how the perceived skills required in industry correspond to those already developed through professional training in practice. A discussion of the chosen accounting education and career transition theories is now presented.

4.1 Correspondence and neo-correspondence theories

Correspondence theory was developed and introduced by Gintis (1971) to address problems within higher education. The theory asserts that the educational experience corresponds to the workplace experience (Swartz, 2003) and the norms, values and dynamics of schooling mirror those found in employing organisations (Coady, 2014). Bowles and Gintis (1976) asserted that "schools socialise students to accept beliefs, values and forms of behaviour on the basis of authority rather than the students own critical judgement of their interests" (Bowles and Gintis, 2002, p. 12). This socialisation of students is sometimes referred to as the hidden curriculum (Nicolescu and Paun, 2009).

Neo-correspondence theory evolved from correspondence theory challenging the notion of socialisation and the hidden curriculum. The theory was developed by Saunders and Machell (2000) and is concerned with addressing the explicit links between education and the workplace which is called the explicit curriculum (Saunders and Machell, 2000). This theory places focus on addressing gaps between the specific skills and competencies that employers require against those provided through education.

The theory has been widely adopted in higher education research (Pan and Perera, 2012). For example, Nicolescu and Paun (2009) investigated employer perceptions of the graduates from the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest. However, it has not been as extensively used in accounting education research. Coady (2014) utilised neo-correspondence theory to assess the requirements regarding emotional intelligence development in university accounting education. The theory was also employed by Pan and Perera (2012) who reviewed the relevance of university accounting education to identify correspondence with Australian employers' expectations of required skills, competencies and market knowledge. They concluded that a lack of correspondence existed between university accounting programmes and the requirements of employers. These studies support the scope to extend neo-correspondence theory to professional accounting education and the workplace.

It is evident that neo-correspondence theory has been mainly used to quantitatively assess correspondence between education and the workplace. However, the survey instruments that are available in accounting education research such as Albrecht and Sack (2000) have been developed to assess correspondence between higher education and practice-based requirements. There are currently no survey instruments available that would adequately assess the correspondence of skills required in industry-based positions with those imparted through professional accounting education. This study will explore some of the skills and competencies that may inform the development of a survey instrument that would aid a quantitative assessment of this correspondence in the future.

4.2 Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), person-job fit and transition cycle

TWA was developed by Dawis *et al.* (1964) and is considered a major career theory (Leung, 2008). The theory proposes that "work is an interaction between an individual and a work environment in which each has requirements of the other" (Dawis and Lofquist, 1981, p. 9). The theory suggests two main indicators of work adjustment:

satisfaction of the individual with the work environment and satisfaction of the work environment with the individual. The closer the congruence of a persons' abilities, such as skills and competencies to the requirement of the role, the more likely they will be perceived as satisfactory by their employer (Dawis and Lofquist, 1981).

TWA is widely used in understanding job satisfaction (Bretz and Judge, 1994) and in career counselling research (Brown and Lent, 2012). However, Dawis and Lofquist (1981) conclude that vocational educators should consider utilising the theory as it provides a generalist approach to vocational education and can be used as a lens to discover skills and competencies. Jones (1972) applied the theory to act as a framework for the study of engineering college students and their academic environment. The study investigated graduate perception of satisfaction via a questionnaire. This was compared for congruence against exam results which reflected the college's satisfaction with the graduate. The theory was also utilised in an educational sense by Na-Nan and Pukkeeree (2013) who used it to measure the work adjustment of new graduates from varying disciplines into the workplace in Thailand. These papers identified the importance of adjustment and fit to a new environment but failed to explain why poor fit may occur or how it can be addressed.

The concept of fit has been central to TWA, for example: 'person-environment fit' (Swanson and Fouad, 1999) and 'individual-organisation fit' (Bretz and Judge, 1994). The fit between individuals and their work-environment has long been an area of interest for academics, employers, recruiters, job seekers and incumbents (Kristof-Brown, 2000). However, Chuang *et al.* (2016) maintain that 'person-environment fit' involves multiple dimensions. This multidimensionality is reflected through the number of different fits that have emerged from existing research: person-job fit, person-organisation fit, person-group fit, person-supervisor fit (Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011) along with person-situation fit and person-culture fit (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991). Each of these fits consider different dimensions such as skills, competencies, values, goals, personalities and interests. Boritz and Carnaghan (2003) identified that educators' emphasis on competencies is based on skills that can be taught and acquired. Therefore, the focus on the skills imparted through professional education and training dictates that it is person-job fit that demands particular focus in this study.

Edwards (1991) describes person-job fit as the fit between the individuals' abilities and the demands of their role. Chuang *et al.* (2016) expand on the person-job fit concept arguing that it includes the dimension of skill. This fit concept is supported by Muchinsky and Monahan's (1987) complimentary based view which posits that an employee compliments the characteristics of the workplace when their skills compliment the requirements of the position. However, it is apparent that immediate fit when transitioning to a new role is not always possible. In many cases an individual must develop certain skills and competencies in order to create a better fit with the role.

Research in the area of transition has mainly focused on school to work transitions (Swanson and Fouad, 1999; Fenwick, 2013), early career socialisation (Ashforth and Saks, 1996) and promotion (Ibarra, 1999). Nicholson and West (1989, p.182) describe career transition as "any major change in work role requirements or work context". Heppner (1998) expands on this definition suggesting career transitions occur when either a task change, position change or occupation change is undertaken.

In order to better understand these transitions, Nicholson (1987) put forth a transition cycle theory which suggests that such transitions go through a cycle of preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. Preparation describes the period before embarking on a new role. Encounter involves the early stages of the new role. Adjustment is concerned with identifying how to perform in the role and involves role development in order to minimise job misfit. Finally, stabilisation is based on the assumption that the transition finally reaches a position of person-job fit.

The education and career theories identified above are considered as complementary theoretical lenses for this study. Neo-correspondence theory focuses on the identification of the gaps between the skills required in industry versus those provided through accounting education. TWA adds an additional focus on both employee and employer satisfaction while attaining a person-job fit during the work adjustment from practice to industry. Finally, Nicholson's transition cycle helps to frame the stages of this transition period.

5.0 Accounting education reform and skills

This section of the paper reviews the literature relating to accounting education reform and the development of skills and competencies. This will lead to the identification of

gaps and the conceptualisation and formation of an overarching research question and resultant objectives.

5.1 Accounting education reform

Accounting education reform has been widely debated since the mid-1980s. Many criticisms have been levied at accounting educators regarding their failure to equip accountants with the necessary skills and competencies required in a rapidly changing environment (Bui and Porter, 2010). A repositioning of the role of the professional accountant is evolving from technological advances, regulatory pressures and globalisation (Byrne and Flood, 2003). It is these rapid business environment changes that prompted a number of significant studies in the area of accounting education as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 - Accounting education - Significant studies

Study Title	Country	Sponsoring Organisation	Year
<i>Future Accounting Education: Preparing for the expanding Profession.</i> (The Bedford Report, AAA, 1986)	USA	AAA	1986
<i>Perspectives on Education: Capabilities for Success in the Accounting Profession</i> (The Big Eight White Paper) (Arthur Anderson <i>et al.</i> , 1989)	USA	Big Eight Firms	1989
<i>The Revolution in Accounting Education</i> (Sundem <i>et al.</i> , 1990)	USA	IMA	1990
<i>What Corporate America wants in Entry-level Accountants</i> (Siegel and Sorenson, 1994)	USA	IMA	1994
<i>Added Value Professionals: Chartered Accountants in 2005</i> (ICAEW, 1996)	UK	ICAEW	1996
<i>The Future of Business</i> (ICAA, 1998)	Australia	ICAA	1998
<i>CPA Vision Project: Focus on the Horizon</i> (AICPA, 1998)	USA	AICPA	1998
<i>Accounting Education: Charting the course through a perilous future</i> (Albrecht and Sack, 2000)	USA	IMA/AICPA/AAA/Big 5 Professional Service Firms	2000
<i>The Pathways Commission: Charting a national strategy for the next generation of accountants</i> (AAA and AICPA, 2012)	USA	AAA/AICPA	2012

The studies produced over the last thirty years have very common themes in their criticism of accounting education (Chu and Man, 2012), in particular, the stagnancy of both accounting curricula and teaching methods (Bui and Porter, 2010). They call for deemphasising technical knowledge in favour of a broader based education which includes critical analysis, logical thinking, strategic thinking and literacy (Merino, 2006).

They also call for greater focus on interpersonal skills, communication skills, ethics and general business organisational skills (Robson *et al.*, 2003).

Notwithstanding these recommendations some argue that education should maintain its strong focus on technical skills (St. Pierre and Rebele, 2014). It is also suggested that a narrow focus has been taken in many of the key studies above (Mathews, 1994; Davis and Sherman, 1996; Hassall *et al.*, 2005; St. Pierre and Rebele, 2014). Davis and Sherman (1996) and Hassall *et al.* (2005) argue that curricula have centred on skills development intended for the requirements of large practice-based accounting firms. This is supported by Siegel *et al.* (2010) who suggested the profession does not consider accountants outside of practice despite this being where the majority of qualified accountants are employed. Furthermore, the increased call for soft skills development is criticised by St. Pierre and Rebele (2014) in their questioning of what soft skills are required, whether they can be taught and whether accounting educators have the requisite expertise to teach these skills. Their belief is that supporting reform to encourage soft skills development is misguided and essentially asking academic staff to perform the impossible (St. Pierre and Rebele, 2014).

Albrecht and Sack's (2000) seminal study is widely regarded as one of the most significant studies in accounting education. The report warned of the demise of accounting education as an academic discipline and lamented that accounting education is plagued with problems (Albrecht and Sack, 2000). Consistent with the neo-correspondence theory view of education, it is argued in the report that accounting education should provide what the business world wants and not necessarily a technically competent accountant devoid of all other skills. Mirroring some prior reports, they called for focus on soft skills, decision making and critical thinking with less emphasis required on technical competence.

More recently, the Pathways Commission report (AAA and AICPA, 2012) put forward a comprehensive strategy for accounting education. The report calls for focus on students' long-term careers and the need to consider a wider range of business careers and settings rather than just practice-based accounting. Recommendations for implementation include establishing a committee to establish future needs and conducting bi-annual surveys to determine future skill demands. In response to the Pathways Commission report (AAA and AICPA, 2012), Lawson *et al.* (2014) identified that accounting education should

consider settings outside of practice-based accounting. Ultimately, they asserted that the demands of long-term professional careers necessitate change and a new educational direction (Lawson *et al.* 2014).

5.2 Accounting skills and competencies

There have been many studies relating to skills and competencies in accounting education over the last two decades with many suggesting a skills gap has emerged, in particular, due to rapid changes such as globalisation and technological advancements (Montano *et al.*, 2001; Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008). Many academic papers have explored what skills are acquired during higher education and compared them with those required in the workplace (Richardson, 2005; de Lange *et al.*, 2006; Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008; Milner and Hill, 2008). The focus of these studies has been on identifying the gap that exists between what employers expect versus what higher education provides. However, the closing of this gap has been focused on practice-based requirements (Bui and Porter, 2010; Stanley, 2013). This has led some to call on research to identify and address the skills gaps between accounting education and industry workplace requirements (Lawson *et al.*, 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015).

Siegel and Sorenson (1994) identified that a perceived difference exists between skills required for entry level management accountants in industry and accountants in practice. This was supported by the findings of Richardson (2005) who concluded that employers of graduate accountants in industry placed importance on management accounting skills but found that these skills were underdeveloped in many cases. Ahadiat (2008) focused solely on management accounting skills and concluded that major gaps in skills development existed in the accounting curriculum. In other studies of management accountants, Montano *et al.*, (2001) and Hassall *et al.*, (2005) sought to identify vocational skills requirements of management accountants. The studies both concluded that a wider set of vocational skills should be incorporated into accounting education programmes. A review of Irish Chartered Accountants by Meagher (2001) also addressed these broader vocational skills required concluding that a challenge exists to maintain technical accounting skills competence while broadening the skills base to cope with expanding roles.

The consensus among the research studies outlined above is that the skills and competencies required in the workplace do not match those obtained through accounting

education. However, research focus has been on education provided through higher education as distinct from professional education which highlights a research opportunity.

6.0 Literature gaps and emerging research questions

Accounting education research has repeatedly called for educational reform in higher education. These calls for change in higher education began with the Bedford Report (AAA, 1986) but still continue three decades later. Research in accounting education has focused repeatedly on the same limited topics with some scholars suggesting that the research field is 'stagnant' (Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015). It would seem that different research perspectives are required.

It is evident that existing studies are dominated by a focus on gaps in the correspondence of skills developed by higher education with those required of practice-based accountants (Flood and Wilson, 2009). In contrast, there is very little evidence of research into professional education distinct from higher education (Byrne and Flood, 2003). A focus on the skills correspondence between professional training and education and the workplace may therefore be of interest.

Lawson *et al.* (2014) identified a research gap in addressing skills required for a student's long-term career. There have also been calls for research to focus on accounting education in organisational settings outside of practice which has been neglected in prior research (Lawson *et al.*, 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015). These calls for further research would seem to compliment a research study investigating the skills of accountants in industry, which is ultimately where the vast majority of accountants focus their long-term career (IAASA, 2015).

The uniqueness of the Chartered Accountant training contract and recognition that the vast majority of accountants' transition from practice to industry within two years of qualification (Farrar, 2013) makes work adjustment theory particularly relevant for study. However, this author has been unable to identify any published research relating to the work adjustment transition of accountants from practice to industry. This gap provides opportunity to advance our understanding of work adjustment theory.

Many studies including Coady (2014) and Howieson *et al.* (2014) have identified that accounting education research has been predominantly based in the United States. However, route to membership is different from country to country (Chen, 2014).

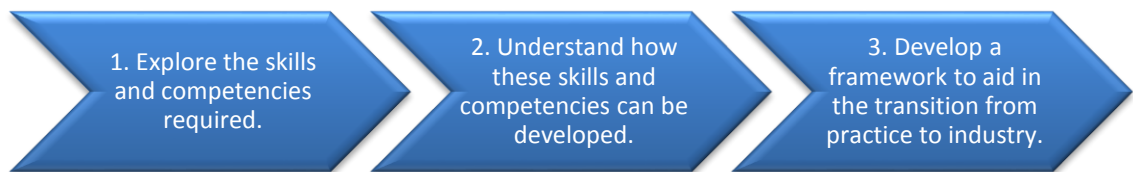
Therefore, different geographical perspectives are also required which would contribute to knowledge and provide opportunity for comparative studies in the future. However, as accounting is moving towards global standards, it is anticipated that while the study takes place in an Irish context, it may also be of wider interest to international accounting educators and practitioners.

The following overarching research question emerges from the literature gaps identified above:

RQ: How do Chartered Accountants develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in the transition from practice to industry?

In order to address this question, the following sub-objectives shown in Figure 2 are presented and discussed.

Figure 2 - Research objectives



1. To explore the skills and competencies required of newly qualified Chartered Accountants in industry-based positions.

Industry-based skills are perceived as being different from practice-based skills (Richardson, 2005). It is therefore important to explore the skills and competencies perceived as being required for transition to industry-based positions. However, research in this area has been neglected (Lawson *et al.*, 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015). This objective uses neo-correspondence theory as a lens to determine differences between perceived skills required by industry against those perceived as already developed through professional training in practice.

2. To understand how the necessary skills and competencies identified in industry can be developed during the transition from practice.

This objective supports calls for research in the professional education sphere (Byrne and Flood, 2003). The objective moves under the theoretical lenses of TWA and Nicholson's transition cycle (Nicholson, 1987), in that it attempts to better understand the transition from practice to industry and how skills and competencies required for this adjustment can be developed. Fenwick (2013, p. 364) calls for education that "helps attune professionals to the multiple and complex nature of transitions". There are many ways in which these skills can be developed upon transition but suitable methods for development cannot be proposed until the underdeveloped skills are understood. Byrne *et al.* (2012) suggest that the use of qualitative techniques enables a deeper holistic understanding.

3. To develop a framework that will aid newly qualified accountants make the transition from practice to industry.

This final objective would provide future accountants with a template or framework which would aid them in their transition from practice to industry. This objective is viewed through the career theory lenses of TWA, Nicholson's transition cycle, and person-job fit. These lenses may aid in identifying the skills necessary for transitioning to industry and how such skills might be developed during the transition process.

7.0 Next Steps towards a Research Methodology

This section will briefly outline the research methodology and philosophy of the research. The chosen theoretical lenses of neo-correspondence theory and TWA clearly reside in the functionalist space consistent with Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigmatic matrix. Both theories can be used to explore how the necessary skills and competencies required for industry-based positions can be best developed. This utilitarian approach seeks to develop a practical framework that can be applied in future transitions. As such, the study is pragmatic in its approach as it is concerned in attempting to understand the transition of the accountant from practice to industry in a way that generates knowledge that can be put to use.

Based upon the number of gaps identified in the subject area being researched, the study will be exploratory in nature. Exploratory research is the initial research approach into an area that is under-explored (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). It is considered a useful approach when the researcher seeks clarity in understanding a problem (Saunders *et al.*,

2009). The problem that this study attempts to understand centres around understanding the skills and competencies required of a newly qualified accountant transitioning from practice to industry. Therefore, while the chosen functionalist theoretical lenses lend themselves to quantitative techniques, it is proposed that qualitative research is required in order to understand more clearly what skills and competencies would need to be addressed in such a quantitative study.

The study may also move to a more descriptive nature whereby the study attempts to answer the "what" and "how" questions. Descriptive research is widely used in educational studies (Gay *et al.*, 2006). This type of research is of particular value when a field of study is first being investigated (McMillan, 2004). This is of importance to the proposed study as this author has been unable to identify that career theory has ever been applied to the transition of accountants from training to professional roles. In addition, there are few studies relating to skills required of accountants in industry (Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015).

It is proposed that the research will consist of semi-structured interviews with industry-based hiring managers and other stakeholders including the professional bodies and CAI graduates that have recently made the transition. Hennick *et al.* (2011) suggest that interviews allow the researcher to obtain detailed and reflective information and as such can be described as a conversation with a purpose. The semi-structured interviews proposed are qualitative in nature. A semi-structured interview involves interviews with the researcher that is based on a list of themes or questions which may not necessarily be identical for each interviewee. This allows flexibility to introduce new questions as the interview evolves which is necessary as it is the interviewees' perceptions that will guide the conduct of the interview (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). More in depth discussion with regard to research methodology will be discussed in Paper 2 'Methodology'.

8.0 Conclusion

A criticism of research in accounting education is that it has become 'stagnant' (Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015). Many of the major studies, over the last three decades, have repeatedly called for a shifting perspective to include coverage of non-technical skills (AICPA, 1998; ICAA, 1998; Albrecht and Sack, 2000; AAA and AICPA, 2012). However, many would suggest that these reports are biased towards practice requirements (McPhail, 2001; Hassall *et al.*, 2005; St. Pierre and Rebele, 2014) which may be due to

the power and hegemonic influence of the 'Big 4' accounting firms who fund the training of accountants. As a result, research has focused on higher education curriculum (Flood and Wilson, 2009) and the needs of practice over industry (Lawson *et al.* 2014).

Lawson *et al.* (2014) calls for focus to be placed on a students' longer-term career, as while many accountants may begin their career in practice, most will ultimately build a longer-term career in industry. Rebele and St. Pierre (2015) support this view suggesting that research in this area would provide opportunity to be valuable and interesting while opening up a new trajectory of research.

This study is a step into this new research trajectory. An analysis of the work adjustment of newly qualified accountants transitioning from practice to industry may indicate that gaps exist between skills and competencies acquired in practice-based training and those required in industry. While it is unreasonable to expect professional training to deliver upon every competency and skill required by industry, it is thought that some key issues may be identified. Identification of these issues will offer opportunity to address gaps that exist and may help provide a framework to aid the professional development of accountants making this transition in the future.

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Preface to paper 2 - Methodology

The methodology paper was developed between June 2016 and March 2017 and was presented for external examination in April 2017 at which point the researcher also received ethical clearance from the School of Business which is attached in Appendix 1 of this preface. Some minor revisions were made based on examiners commentary and the examiner approved version of the paper is presented in this thesis. The researcher spent nine months preparing this paper and much of that effort went into a deeper review of the literature to identify the most relevant papers in the research area. This review was based on a criterion driven search of the most relevant academic journals and led to the identification of 53 related studies which are presented in Appendix 8. The scope of each study, findings, conclusions and recommendations along with an identification of the research methods used were identified. While many studies were identified, reviewed and considered, the studies presented in Appendix 8 were the most relevant to this study. This review aided the researcher in identifying methodologies used in previous papers to gather a greater appreciation and understanding of the research methods employed depending upon the ontological assumptions of the research. It became apparent to the researcher that this paper would be about assessing choices and justifying the decision made to follow a particular path.

The conceptual paper proposed that an exploratory approach was most appropriate for the research. However, the researcher started out by being method driven with the researcher losing sight of the research question. There was an initial lack of appreciation of the importance of appropriately choosing a method suitable to the research question, and the researcher got lost in the choices of methods available without fully assessing the appropriateness of these choices. As a result, quantitative methods were still being considered for use at this stage, likely due to the researcher having clear leanings towards this method based on his accounting background and comfort in dealing with statistical information. A mixed method approach was also thought to be beneficial as it would combine interviews in order to design a survey instrument that could be then used in a quantitative study. However, this was reflected upon and it was subsequently decided that this approach would not be feasible or manageable in the timeframe of the DBA programme. It was subsequently decided that in order to be true to the research question, it was clear that the most suitable course of action was to take a qualitative based approach

which is particularly suited to exploratory research designs (Patton, 2002) and the research question and objectives of this study. This would allow a complete detailed description of the research topic. The choice of semi-structured interviews as the research method was based on their use in previous exploratory studies such as Bui and Porter (2010) amongst others in the areas relating to early stage career accountant studies and research relating to accounting skills and competencies. In addition, the researcher felt that there would be no concerns in relation to access to interviewees as the Chartered Accountant network is a close and supportive one which proved to be the case when interviews were eventually conducted.

A big concern for the researcher with regard to the research methodology centred on the need for the author as a Chartered Accountant employed in industry to remain unbiased when interviewing (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007) in a study that relates to the transition of Chartered Accountants into industry and there was much reflection on this point recorded in the researcher's reflective log. It was therefore important that the research protocols be developed and followed. These protocols included a piloting phase of the study which involved debriefs with the pilot interviewees to help ensure that questions were clear and easily understood. In addition, the use of the reflective log was adopted to ensure biases were recognised and minimised (Bulpitt and Martin, 2010). The use of member checking which involves obtaining feedback about data collected (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was also used. Remaining conscious of potential bias was prevalent for the researcher throughout the process.

Another factor that was at the forefront of the researchers mind at this stage of the research was internal consistency across all the interviews held and consistency of the application of ethical standards. Seale (1999) promotes and connects the concept of dependability, consistency and reliability in qualitative studies. As such consistency in the context of this study can be defined as "the logical, traceable and carefully documented research process" (Kihn and Ihantola, 2015, p. 235) and thus be interpreted as procedural reliability (Ryan *et al.*, 2002). Reliability using semi-structured interviews can be "elusive" (Creswell, 2009, p. 153). In order to reduce the reliability threats in the semi-structured interviews, the interviewer would go on to conduct pilot interviews, avoid leading questions, take notes and offer the interviewee opportunity to sum up and clarify points that they have made. The researcher played the key role in the data collection process (de Villiers *et al.*, 2019) through the consistent design of interview guides across all cohorts

(Arthur and Nazroo, 2003) and performing consistency checks in the qualitative analysis process with the aid of the NVivo tool (Welsh, 2002). In addition, the interviewer ensured that respondents were assured of ethical clearance and a consent form was signed by interviewees. As the data gathered was at a point in time it was not possible to capture how perceptions might change over an extended period of time.

The research objectives were an area in which the examiners suggested change following the initial presentation of the paper. It was suggested that they be reformulated, cognisant of the theoretical lenses and be more in keeping with the exploratory nature of the research. As a result, the research objectives were amended to:

1. To understand how CA's skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.
2. To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition.
3. To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry

These amendments move the objectives further away from a simple identification of a mere listing of skills and direct the research towards a richer discovery of the phases of transition in keeping with Nicholson's Transition Cycle Theory. In addition, the objectives maintain their relationship with the other theoretical lenses such as the theory of work adjustment, neo-correspondence theory and person-job fit theory as the research involves exploring the work adjustment process and how CAs' skills and competencies fit and correspond to their new role. The final objective was kept intact, in keeping with the utilitarian philosophical underpinnings of the study. At this stage of the study, the researcher was conscious of the employment of a number of theoretical lenses, but these were deemed most pertinent to the study at that particular point. It would later become apparent that particular lenses lent more explanatory utility in the analysis and illumination of the findings.

The research strategy to address the above objectives is considered fluid and it is not the intent of the researcher to label the approach. However, research objectives 1 and 2 loosely follow an abductive research strategy (Peirce, 1903) which is one of collecting clues and detecting the most logical plausible and promising causal explanation of the situation being explored (Lukka, 2014). Abductive reasoning involves an iterative process between empirical findings and theoretical elements (Lukka and Modell, 2010) in order

to address the research objectives. The researcher remains cognisant of the subjective nature of reality that underpins the abductive approach and that many suggest that such a strategy is grounded in an interpretivist approach (Chamberlain, 2006; Lukka and Modell, 2010; Lukka, 2014). Objective 3 also used elements of an abductive approach but also moved at times into a more inductive approach in that theory was enhanced and developed through the development of the fit matrix and framework that informs the CAs transition from practice to industry. This personal interpretation of the data collected led to richer theory contribution with the identification that both person-job fit and person-culture fit be reviewed simultaneously which allowed for the development of a model that acts as both an indicative and predictive aid to HMs in recruiting and assessing CAs.

Another suggestion by the examiners of this paper was to provide a deeper explication of the philosophy of the study. This was developed in the 'research philosophy' section of the paper which provides a justification of the use of the functionalist paradigm for the study. For example, this section of the paper is linked directly with the research area being explored and original proponents' work is analysed to help explicate the conclusion with regard to the philosophical choices made for this study. The study is also pragmatic and utilitarian in nature which aligns well with the positivist leanings of the researcher despite the use of a qualitative approach and this was identified through the reflective log (See Section 4). As a practitioner, the researcher felt that it was important that the study be practical with an outcome that could be put to use once the research was completed.

Other comments from the examiners that were also addressed in this paper included a request for the paper to be a little more sympathetic to the reader, more generous in navigating the paper, the abstract should tee-up the methodology, and the introduction could give a better sense of the structure of the paper along with better handovers to the following sections. These suggestions were addressed in the final paper included in this thesis. The abstract was amended to offer a better description of the methodology and method. The introduction was changed to provide a better sense of the structure of the paper and attempts to provide greater depth of understanding to the reader as to how the research objectives were decided upon and how they directly link to the chosen theoretical lenses for the study. Furthermore, the introduction offered greater signposting of the paper and indeed signposting was introduced throughout the paper in order to provide more sympathy to the reader with appropriate section handovers also introduced.

The paper presented to the examiners included draft interview guides and it was beneficial to receive valuable feedback at this point prior to commencement of interviewing. They suggested to reconsider the guides in light of the exploratory nature of the study and to move away from the potential listing of skills by the interviewees. On this basis, the interview guides were redesigned taking account of the changes made to the research objectives. The questions were significantly revised with 'how' type questions being more dominant. The questions relating to listing skills were removed and the questioning was designed to let the necessary skills emerge from the conversation rather than request the interviewee to provide a list.

The revisions made to the paper based on the examiner's commentary helped provide a more cohesive paper that attempted to better align the research methodology to the theoretical base and the pragmatic and utilitarian nature of the study. It is acknowledged that a reader of the final version of the thesis may find the introduction a little repetitive with Paper 1 'Conceptual Paper'. This repetition of the context of the study was necessary as each paper needed to stand alone and be examinable in its own right. A further review of methodological papers was also completed since the completion of this paper. The methodological approach taken for this study is consistent with trends on greater disclosure and rigour (Dai *et al.*, 2019). The number of interviews (twenty-eight) conducted in this study is also supported with Dai *et al.* (2019) identifying a median of twenty-six interviews for interview-based studies conducted between 2000 and 2014 in accounting-based academic journals.

Having completed the DBA research methodological process, the researcher's retrospective reflections include: i) the interview method was effective in gathering participant perceptions leading to the study's contributions; ii) the transcription and analysis of interview data was more time-consuming than anticipated; iii) as a sole researcher it wasn't possible to compare ones interpretations with those of a second interviewer or member of a research team; and iv) if time and resources permitted it would have been interesting to gather perceptions from other stakeholders such as those of higher education or alternatively to have been able to re-interview, a year later, those who have just moved to industry from practice. The learning that the researcher has taken from these reflections include: i) the importance of having an appropriate fit between the study's objectives and the method employed; ii) more detailed planning of qualitative data analysis; iii) as a sole researcher the importance of preparation of the interview guides in

advance and testing through pilot interviews; and iv) expanding on the stakeholders interviewed.

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Appendix 1 School ethics committee approval

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April 3rd 2017

Dear Alan,

Thank you for submitting your revised proposal to the School Ethics Committee.

The Committee is satisfied to approve your submission, however we would advise that you discuss with your supervisors the planned use of the CAI member listing and provide your supervisors with assurances that the use of the member list for research purposes is in accordance with data protection legislation.

If you require any further clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact me.

We wish you well with your future research endeavours.

Yours truly,

Denis 

Professor Denis Harrington
Head of Graduate Business, and Chair of the School of Business Ethical Committee, WIT

Paper 2:

Methodology



Participant Name: Alan Murphy 20066695

Supervisors: Dr. Seán Byrne and Mr. John Casey

Date: 7th May 2017

RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

Paper 2:

Methodology

A research methodology for exploring the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants from practice to industry

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a research methodology for exploring the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) from practice to industry and seeks to specifically answer the question of how CAs develop skills and competencies to assist them in this transition. The study will explore how CAs make the adjustment from practice to industry and will seek to understand how skills and competencies can be developed during the stages of transition. The study will also seek to develop a framework to inform accountants navigating this transition in the future.

The research study is positioned within a functionalist space and is considered pragmatic and utilitarian in nature. Theoretical pluralism will be adopted using neo-correspondence theory, the theory of work adjustment (TWA), transition cycle theory and person-job fit as lenses for the study.

The research method will be qualitative semi-structured interviews which will be held with: CA's transitioning from practice to industry, industry-based hiring managers, Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) representatives, a continuing professional development (CPD) provider and a recruiting firm. This approach to analysis is thematically informed by existing literature and the theoretical lenses but will remain open to further emerging themes.

The research provides opportunity to utilise correspondence, transition and fit theories in a way that contributes to practice through the development of a framework that will help ease the transition of future accountants making the move from practice to industry. It may also have potential implications for the re-design of the curriculum or possibly the introduction of entirely new educational courses.

Keywords: *accounting education, newly qualified Chartered Accountants, transition, industry, skills, competencies, research methodology*

1.0 Introduction

This paper outlines a research methodology for exploring the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) from practice to industry and to specifically answer the question of how CAs develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in this transition.

There has been much debate since the mid-1980s regarding the failure of education to provide the necessary skills and competencies required of accountants in the workplace (Albrecht and Sack, 2000; Bui and Porter, 2010; Thompson, 2013; Lawson *et al.*, 2014). However, studies to date have focused on the correspondence of skills developed in higher education with those required of practice-based accountants (Flood and Wilson, 2009; Pan and Perera, 2012; Stanley, 2013). In contrast, limited research has been undertaken with regards to professional accounting education (Byrne and Flood, 2003) and requirements outside of practice settings. This has resulted in calls for research into the skills and competencies required in industry settings (Lawson *et al.*, 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015).

These calls for a focus on skills required in industry are justified given that the majority of accountants are ultimately employed in industry (IAASA, 2016). Furthermore, the number of Chartered Accountants employed in the industry sector is growing at a substantial rate of 40 per cent from 2008 to 2015³ (IAASA, 2016). In contrast, the number of practice-based Chartered Accountants grew by just 11 per cent⁴ during the same period (IAASA, 2016). While most Chartered Accountants' longer-term careers result in employment in industry, it is evident that the majority of these individuals train for membership within a practice-based setting (IAASA, 2016). Farmar (2013) acknowledges that over half of newly qualified Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) members transition from practice to industry within a year or two post-qualification. However, very little is known about this transition phase that many accountants experience or how the skills and competencies required in industry are developed. Drew-Sellers and Fogarty (2010, p.715) suggest that future research should investigate this transition phase and the "conversion process" that accountants go through.

³ Industry employed Chartered Accountants grew by 40 per cent from 6,669 in 2008 to 9,323 in 2015.

⁴ Practice employed Chartered Accountants grew by 11 per cent from 4,053 in 2008 to 4,502 in 2015.

Based on the lack of knowledge relating to this transition phase, an exploration of the conversion of CAs from practice to industry will be undertaken which may help answer the overall research question of how do CAs develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in this transition. This explorative study seeks to also address the following objectives:

1. To understand how CA's skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.
2. To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition.
3. To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.

These research objectives are centred around the exploration of the transition of CAs from practice to industry and are cognisant of the theoretical lenses that are being utilised to understand this change. Objective one is viewed through neo-correspondence theory and person-job fit theory. Neo-correspondence theory places focus on addressing gaps between the specific skills and competencies that employers require against those provided through education, which in this case is provided through CAI training in a practice-based environment. In a similar vein, Edwards (1991) describes person-job fit as the fit between the individuals' abilities and the demands of their role while Chuang *et al.* (2016) expand on the person-job fit concept arguing that it includes the dimension of skill. However, immediate fit when transitioning to a different role in industry is unlikely and individuals may require development of certain skills and competencies in order to create a better fit with the role.

The journey towards this better fit leads on to objective two which seeks to explore the transition from practice to industry through Nicholson's transition cycle theory (Nicholson, 1987). This theory identifies preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation as the four stages of transition. Preparation describes the period before embarking on a new role. Encounter involves the early stages of the new role. The adjustment stage is concerned with identifying how to perform in the role and involves role development in order to minimise job misfit. This stage links with the theory of work adjustment's assertion of two main indicators of work adjustment: satisfaction of the individual with the work environment and satisfaction of the work environment with the

individual. Finally, stabilisation is based on the assumption that the transition finally reaches a position of person-job fit.

The final objective is concerned with utilising the information obtained through objectives one and two in order to develop a framework that may inform CA's transition from practice to industry. The chosen theoretical lenses that will be used in the study are set in the functionalist space consistent with Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigmatic matrix. The study also seeks to understand how education can be utilised in the workplace and as such the approach can be considered pragmatic (Peirce, 1903; James, 1907; Dewey *et al.*, 1998) and utilitarian (Mill, 1906; Moore, 1960). Each of the objectives are based upon an exploration of the views and perceptions of multiple stakeholders who have recently been through or who have had some involvement in such transitions. In keeping with the exploratory design, semi-structured interviews (Bui and Porter, 2010; Drew-Sellars and Fogarty, 2010) with each stakeholder group will be undertaken to understand the phenomenon being explored.

This paper will first provide discussion of the philosophical assumptions underlying the research which guides the research design adopted. This is followed by the research design and a review of the methodological approaches in prior accounting education and career transition papers. A more detailed focus on research protocols, sampling strategy, data analysis, validity and reliability are then provided. The paper culminates with concluding remarks on the chosen research methodology.

2.0 Research philosophy

Burrell and Morgan's paradigmatic matrix (1979) is used to provide a sense of the philosophical positioning of this study. While this framework provides four pure positions: interpretive, functionalist, radical structuralist and radical humanist, it is acknowledged that that in practice, these pure positions become blurred with many researchers adopting a middle ground (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, the Burrell and Morgan (1979) matrix is used to provide an indication of where the research philosophy resides. The chosen theoretical lenses for this study including neo-correspondence theory and transition theories such as the theory of work adjustment (TWA) reside in the functionalist space in Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigmatic matrix. These theories will be used as the lenses through which to explore how skills and competencies are best developed for industry-based positions.

Empirical philosophy dominates the academic accounting literature despite questions about its validity (Truan and Hughes, 1999). In addition, accounting educational practices are rooted in empirical philosophy and seek to develop knowledge from external, metaphysical, value-free objective observation which is viewed as reality (Morgan, 1988, p 477). Popper (1965), Giddens (1979) and Tinker (1988) challenge this empirical base used in accounting education research as it would appear that hegemonic influence, personal perceptions, partisan institutional influences, and psychological disposition impact upon how knowledge is attained. This is particularly true in CAI accounting education which is dominated by the 'Big 4' accounting firms. However, notwithstanding of this influence, this study is concerned with how CAI students who have become CAs function in their new roles in industry and as such the philosophy taken is grounded in a functionalist view of accounting education as espoused by Durkheim (Pope, 1975).

Functionalism is a philosophy that is objective and grounded in the "sociology of regulation" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 25). This philosophy would align with a study that seeks to provide explanation of the status quo and the existing consensus and social order of things (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) such as the influence of the 'Big 4' practice accounting firms on CAI. This study is an exploration of CAs' transition from practice to industry and seeks to understand the correspondence of skills and competencies delivered through practice training with the needs of industry. It further seeks to understand the transition process from practice to industry. Ontologically, the study is grounded in realism and wishes to provide rational explanations of the social order of things. This is consistent with a functionalist approach which assumes an epistemological perspective rooted in the sociology of regulation and which demands an objective point of view with its main features being realism, positivism and determinism (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The research approach seeks to develop a practical framework that can be applied in future transitions. As such, the approach is considered pragmatic (Peirce, 1903; James, 1907; Dewey *et al.*, 1998) and utilitarian (Mill, 1906; Moore, 1960) in that the study is concerned with attempting to understand the transition of the accountant from practice to industry in a way that engenders knowledge that can be put into use. This approach contends that participants in the study, through purposive sampling, will be able to articulate the nature of the transition being investigated and the skills and competencies required. Lefley (2006, p. 359) encourages the use of a pragmatic approach in accounting

research and contends that "pragmatism is concerned with what works and ties up with the utilitarian arguments that what matters has utility to the individual".

The choice of a research strategy is one of the most important decisions that a researcher must take. In the case of this research study an abductive strategy (Peirce, 1903) was first considered. The process of abductive research is one of collecting clues and detecting the most logical plausible and promising causal explanation of the situation being explored (Lukka, 2014) and thus appears to suit the research being undertaken. According to Lukka and Modell (2010) abductive reasoning involves an iterative process between empirical findings and theoretical elements which fits with the theoretical triangulation or pluralism (Hoque *et al.*, 2013) process that will be taken in this study. However, cognisance must be taken of the subjective nature of reality that underpins the abductive approach and many argue that this choice of a strategy is grounded in an interpretivist approach (Chamberlain, 2006; Lukka and Modell, 2010; Lukka, 2014). On this basis, this approach was rejected. Both inductive and deductive methods were also reviewed. An inductive approach is one which involves moving from "individual observation to statements of general patterns" (Collis and Hussey, 2009, p. 8) or inferring from specific to general to draw conclusions based on premises. This approach involves development of a theory that could explain patterns and as such is rejected for this study. A deductive approach relates to arguments that are certain to be true by definition and moves from the general to the particular (Ormerod, 2010). It would seem that this study is based more in a deductive space, but it is not hypothesis driven and therefore does not fit neatly into the deductive based approach. In summary, it is difficult to label the research approach for this study, but due to the exploratory nature of the study, the aim is not to provide conclusive answers but to tackle an unexplained and under-researched area of study.

To conclude, this exploratory research study will be realist, functionalist, utilitarian and pragmatic in orientation. This approach has implications for the research design which is discussed in the following section of the paper. The paper will then go on to discuss the stages that will be taken in conducting the semi-structured interview method chosen. This will be followed by discussion of the sampling strategy and determination of who will be interviewed for the study followed by the method of data analysis before finally considering ethical challenges and their mitigation.

3.0 Research design

A research design is the "blueprint for fulfilling objectives and answering questions" (Cooper and Schindler, 2011, p. 87) and involves developing a framework through which data is collated, measured and analysed (Bryman, 1989). Skills and competency studies have centred around gaps in the correspondence of skills developed by higher education with those required of practice-based accountants (Flood and Wilson, 2009). There have been calls to focus studies on skills required by industry-based accountants (Lawson *et al.*, 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015) and on accountants' skill requirements for their longer-term careers (Lawson *et al.*, 2014). The paucity of research in the area being investigated aligns well with the research question and objectives outlined previously and suggest that this study should be exploratory in nature.

Exploratory research is the initial research approach into an area that is under-explored (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002) and is conducted when a researcher seeks to comprehend the nature of the problem (Sekeran, 2003; Saunders *et al.*, 2009). This study attempts to understand the skills and competencies required of CAs transitioning from practice to industry and to also understand how best to develop these skills and competencies throughout the transition phase. While extant literature does provide a suite of skills required of accountants (Albrecht and Sack, 2000; Richardson, 2005; Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008), there are no known published studies that explores skills required during the transition phase from practice to industry. Furthermore, existing literature centres on skills required in practice as distinct from industry (Flood and Wilson, 2009). As a result, there does not appear to be an adequate survey instrument that would appropriately measure the skills and competencies required of a transitioning CA. In relation to the use of theory, this author has been unable to identify any published research relating to the application of work adjustment transition theories to the transition of accountants from practice to industry. In addition, the dearth of research in the area of transitioning accountants from practice to industry suggests that the literature is not robust enough to support or develop hypotheses that can be quantifiably tested. This analysis of existing literature relating to accounting skills and their use of theory supports the choice of an exploratory research design.

While the study is predominantly explorative, there are also some descriptive aspects to the study whereby the study attempts to answer the "what" and "how" questions.

Descriptive research is extensively employed in educational studies (Gay *et al.*, 2006) and can be "undertaken in order to ascertain and be able to describe the variables of interest in a situation" (Sekaran, 2003, p. 121). This type of research is of particular value when a field of study is first being investigated (McMillan, 2004) and is seen as 'information gathering' (Phillips and Pugh, 2005). It would appear that this approach is appropriate in a field of research where there have been few prior studies relating to skills required of accountants in industry (Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015). This study thus comprises exploratory and descriptive components in its design to address the research problem.

Qualitative tools such as semi-structured interviews are particularly suited to exploratory research designs (Patton, 2002). It is also proposed that qualitative research is required in order to understand more clearly what skills and competencies should be investigated in any future quantitative studies (Patton, 2002). It is proposed that the research will consist of semi-structured interviews which are suited for understanding individual's perceptions and experiences (Flick, 2009) which will aid in our understanding of how gaps in skills and competencies for industry can be developed by CAs during the transition period. The flexibility of this approach allows uncovering of information that is considered important by the participant (Gill *et al.*, 2008) which aids in the exploratory process of this study. The use of semi-structured interviews is supported by their use as a method in previous exploratory studies relating to accounting skills and competencies and early career accountant studies (e.g. Anderson Gough *et al.*, 2001; Coupland, 2001; Bui and Porter, 2010; Drew Sellars and Fogarty, 2010). Interviews are considered more powerful than surveys in obtaining narrative data and allow greater depth of investigation into the views of the interviewee (Kvale, 1996). Ahrens and Chapman (2006) suggest the interview may be mobilised towards positivistic ends depending upon the notion of the reality it explores. For the purposes of this study, the interview is intended to uncover skills and competencies required in industry and seeks to inform how best these can be acquired during the transition from practice to industry.

Hennick *et al.* (2011) describe interviews as a conversation with a purpose which allows the researcher to obtain detailed and reflective information from the participant. Semi-structured interviews involve "prepared questioning guided by identified themes in a consistent and systematic manner interposed with probes designed to elicit more elaborate responses" (Qu and Dumay, 2011, p. 246). The aim of the semi-structured interview is to

understand what the respondents' perspective is and how this perspective was formed. Therefore, the semi-structured interview guides for this study (Appendices 1 to 5) are designed to elicit opinions or perspectives on the research topic and to avoid leading the participant toward preconceived ideas. As such, they rely on the interviewer to follow up using probes in order to get more in-depth information on the research topic. While the interviews are based on a list of themes or questions these may vary for each interviewee depending on how the interview evolves. This allows flexibility as the interview progresses and allows greater elicitation of the interviewees' perceptions throughout the conduct of the interview (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

The following section of the paper presents a review of the methodological approaches in current accounting education literature. The review identifies the most common research methods used along with the stakeholders that are most frequently sampled. While the research design choices of this study are primarily motivated by the research questions, it was also deemed relevant to consult and be informed by the methodological practices within the accounting education field.

4.0 Review of methodological research in accounting education

It is noted by Smith (2011, p. 16) that "the positivist tradition remains the most popular in the accounting literature". This is consistent with a review by Coady (2014) of a sample of 50 published research studies from 1972 to 2012 in the area of non-technical accounting skills including emotional intelligence. Coady (2014) concluded that the majority of the studies reviewed were quantitative. This indicates the dominance of quantitative methods in the accounting education literature and supports that opportunity exists to expand on the under-utilised qualitative approach in accounting education. It was further identified that 76 per cent of papers did not have any theoretical foundation (Coady, 2014) which is consistent with the findings of McPhail (2001), Tight (2004) and Haggis (2009). This supports that opportunity exists to demonstrate the utility of theory in developing a better understanding of accounting education and career transition. Furthermore, as illustrated in Table 1 below, Coady (2014) identified that in terms of samples, the most commonly used stakeholder groups were university students. This again highlights an opportunity to gain perspectives from CAs in terms of their experience of professional education and how it corresponds to their role as an accountant working in industry.

Table 1 - Review of stakeholder groups of 50 non-technical accounting skills studies

Stakeholders	No. of papers	Percent
University Students	13	26%
Employers	9	18%
Multiple Stakeholders	9	18%
Curriculum reviews	7	14%
Academics	4	8%
Recent accounting graduates	3	6%
No Stakeholder	5	10%
Total	50	100%

Source: Coady (2014, p. 42)

It is useful to analyse the work completed by Coady (2014) to help guide the research design of this study. However, Coady's (2014) review was solely focused on non-technical accounting skills studies including emotional intelligence skills. As this study focuses on both technical and non-technical skills required of CAs, this researcher undertook a further review of the literature which included 53 research papers from 1999 to 2016 relating to accounting skills and competencies together with limited published studies relating to early career accountants. A total of 14 of these studies are common to the review undertaken by Coady (2014). Details of this review that was carried out are included in Appendix 8. Due to the fact that Coady (2014) did not complete an analysis of the research methods used in her review of published research, it was decided to undertake an evaluation of the methods used in the 53 papers examined by this researcher which is shown below in Table 2.

Table 2 - Review of a sample of 53 accounting education skills research

Research Method Used	No. of papers	Methods Used	Method Percentage
Survey	21	30	46.9%
Interviews	7	14	21.9%
Literature Review	9	9	14.1%
Comparative Study	3	4	6.2%
Archival	1	2	3.1%
Focus Group	0	2	3.1%
None	2	2	3.1%
Case Study	1	1	1.6%
Mixed Method	9	0	0%
Total	53	64	100%

This analysis illustrates that the majority of studies rely on surveys followed by interviews as a data collection method. However, it is evident that the surveys and interviews used were largely focused on college graduates and skills required in audit and practice-based accounting as opposed to industry-based accounting. This review suggests that the use of interviews is an appropriate methodological approach for this study and supports that a qualitative approach is suitable in order to answer the research question and objectives. The implications of these findings are considered in the research protocols of this study which is discussed in the following section of the paper.

5.0 Research protocols

Denzin (1989) suggests that a flawed design in the advancement of any research method will have a distorting impact on the final results. It is therefore important that research protocols are developed and adhered to. A summary illustration of the overall research protocols in this study is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - Research protocols overview

Research question	How do CAs develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in the transition from practice to industry?
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To understand how CA's skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements. 2. To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition. 3. To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.
Research method	Semi-structured interviews.
How to conduct the research method?	<p>The following stages are considered and discussed in detail below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation regarding themes and types of questions to ask. • Preparedness of the interviewer including training and pilot interviews. • Pre-interview including informed consent. • Interview environment considerations. • Considerations during the interview. • Post-interview protocols including follow up, transcript provision and maintenance of field diary.
Who will be interviewed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAs that have made a transition from practice to industry within the last three years; • Finance Managers in Industry who hire CAs; • CAI representatives; • CPD provider; • Recruiting firm.
Sampling	Judgemental purposive sampling.
Data analysis	Using the theoretical lenses of: 'Neo-correspondence Theory', 'TWA', 'Nicholson's Transition Cycle Theory' and 'Person-Job Fit Theory' in order to illuminate, inform and better understand the subject under review. This use of multiple theories is often termed "theory triangulation" or "theoretical pluralism" (Hoque <i>et al.</i> , 2013, p. 1171) and has been used previously in accounting-based studies (Ahrens and Chapman, 2006; Modell, 2005; Covaleski <i>et al.</i> , 2003). A six-step process of data analysis will be taken based on Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 87-88): "familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining themes and finally producing the findings"
Ethical issues	Consideration has been given to: privacy and confidentiality; informed consent; harm, politics and power.
Resources	The project will be completed solely by the researcher with the exception of interview transcription. It is intended that all initial interviews will be transcribed by the researcher in order to fully understand emerging themes from the data.
Time scale	The timeframe set for completion of interviews is 15th December 2017 while the overall completion of DBA thesis is set at October 2018.

This section of the paper will discuss the stages that will be taken in conducting the semi-structured interview method chosen. These stages include interview preparation, interviewer preparedness, pre-interview considerations, the interview environment, during the interview and post interview. This section will be followed by discussion of the sampling strategy and determination of who will be interviewed for the study followed by the method of data analysis before finally considering ethical challenges.

5.1 Interview preparation

Arthur and Nazroo (2003) highlight the need for prudent, considered preparation for interviews and emphasise the need to prepare an interview guide in advance. In a positivistic sense, although they do not use this term, Legard *et al.* (2003) propose that during interviews knowledge is given and the researcher's task is to extract the information from the participant. When interviewing "one seeks as complete a description as possible of the experience that a participant has lived through" (Giorgi, 2009, p.122). As in any semi-structured interview, the process involves questions around various themes. These themes have been identified in order to answer the research question, to support the research objectives and they are identified based upon existing literature as illustrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4 - Literature support of identified themes

Theme (T)	Background to theme	Literature support of theme
T1. Skills developed in practice relevant for Industry	This is an exploration of the pre-transition phase of the individual. It allows investigation into skills developed in practice that are relevant for industry, skills not developed in practice but needed in industry and any preparation made in advance.	Albrecht and Sack (2000); Hassall <i>et al.</i> (2005); Kavanagh and Drennan (2008); Wells <i>et al.</i> (2009); Bui and Porter (2010); Cory and Pruske (2012).
T2. Transition Phase	This theme is central to the study as it aids in the exploration of the transition itself. It will help identify any difficulties relating to skills that were encountered during the transition and how they can be overcome.	Ashforth and Saks (1996); Swanson and Fouad (1999); Coupland (2001); Fouad and Bynner (2008); Fenwick (2012); Na-Nan and Pukkeeree (2013).
T3. Skills and Competencies in Industry	This theme is again central to the research question and allows an exploration of the key skills required in industry. The theme also allows the discovery of how these development needs are best met.	Richardson (2005); Kavanagh and Drennan (2008); Jackling and De Lange (2009); Siegel <i>et al.</i> (2010); Cory and Huttenhoff (2011); Cory and Pruske (2012); Lawson <i>et al.</i> (2014).
T4. Maintaining skills and competencies	This theme will help in exploring some specific developmental tools that are currently available such as mentoring and CPD along with other options available to maintain skills.	Hicks <i>et al.</i> (2007); McManus and Subramaniam (2014).
T5. Managing skill development in future transitions	This theme allows exploration of what CAs would have done differently and may provide insight into the skills and competencies that were lacking or the approach that could be considered to help make the transition in future.	Howieson (2003); Parham <i>et al.</i> (2012).

It is important to understand how these themes guiding the research relate back to the overall research question and objectives of the study. Table 5 below highlights the themes that are specifically tied to the objectives of this study. Each theme was carefully selected and aligned to the research objectives in order to help answer the overall research question of 'how do CAs develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in the transition from practice to industry?' The exploration of each objective will be viewed through different theoretical lenses. This use of multiple theories is often termed "theory triangulation" or "theoretical pluralism" (Hoque *et al.*, 2013, p. 1171) and has been used previously in accounting studies (Covaleski *et al.*, 2003; Modell, 2005; Ahrens and Chapman, 2006).

Objective one seeks to understand how CA's skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements and is viewed through neo-correspondence theory and person-job fit theory which refers to the fit between the individual's abilities and the demands of their role (Edwards, 1991). Objective two centres on the transition phases and therefore uses TWA and Nicholson's transition cycle theory as lenses. TWA is concerned with 'satisfaction of the individual with the work environment and satisfaction of the work environment with the individual' (Dawis and Lofquist, 1981) while the transition cycle theory relates to the transition cycle of preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation (Nicholson, 1987). Finally, objective three is a culmination of the work completed for objectives one to three and relates to the development of a framework. This objective has regard to all four theoretical lenses.

Table 5 - Research objectives, interview guide themes and theoretical lenses

Objective	Semi-structured Interview guide themes (T)	Theoretical lenses
1) To understand how CA's skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.	T1. Skills developed in practice relevant for Industry T3. Skills and competencies in Industry	- Neo-correspondence theory; - Person-job fit theory.
2) To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition.	T2. Transition Phases T3. Skills and competencies in Industry T4. Maintaining skills and competencies T5. Managing skill development in future transitions	- Theory of work adjustment; - Nicholson's transition cycle theory.
3) To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.	T1. Skills developed in practice relevant for Industry T2. Transition Phase T3. Skills and competencies in Industry T4. Maintaining skills and competencies T5. Managing skill development in future transitions	- Theory of work adjustment; - Nicholson's transition cycle theory; - Neo-correspondence theory; - Person-job fit theory.

5.2 Preparedness of interviewer

The success of the semi-structured interview approach relies on the skills of the researcher in building a rapport with the interviewee and eliciting the key information and insights from the participants (Legard *et al.*, 2003). The interviewer in this study has prior experience of interviewing in both undergraduate and postgraduate research studies. In addition, he also has extensive experience of interviewing professional candidates for employment positions. While it is acknowledged that the approach in these interviews may be different, it is felt that this prior experience will be of value in the process. A pilot interview process consisting of two interviews will take place which will aid in the assessment of completeness and appropriateness of the contents of the interview guides. It is also anticipated that piloting will aid in timings and sequencing of themes of questioning. A pilot programme should also help hone the researchers' skills in conducting the semi-structured interview process and identify particular areas where the researcher requires training or advice before the main data collection process.

5.3 Pre-interview

Prior to the interview taking place, participants will be informed as to what the study entails, background of the study and be given assurances in relation to anonymity and confidentiality. This will aid in the fundamental aspect of informed consent, which is discussed later in this paper, and also gives the participants a sense as to what to expect from the interview.

5.4 Interview environment

Interviews will be held in a place free from distraction and at a location and time that is suitable for the interviewee. Face-to-face interviews will be preferred in this study as they are often longer which results in greater depth and exploration of nuances (Englander, 2012). However, where face-to-face interviews are not possible, telephone interviews will be conducted. Telephone interviews are an acceptable method in conducting semi-structured interviews for this study and can offer greater flexibility (Cachia and Millward, 2011) and privacy of setting for the interviewee (Holt, 2010). Either form of interview is acceptable as Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) found that there is was no discernible difference in terms of length of transcripts or depth of interviews between using face-to-face or telephone interviews.

5.5 During the interview

At the beginning of the interview, the objective of the study will be explained, confidentiality emphasised, and anonymity guaranteed. With the permission of the interviewee, notes will be taken, and the interview will be recorded. The researcher will also stress that there is no compulsion to answer all of the questions asked and the participant can cease the interview at any stage. The interview will be shaped by the themes identified previously in this paper. These themes are used to inform the topic guides as shown in Appendices 1 to 5. These topic guides include a list of questions that are designed to yield as much information as possible relating to the research phenomenon being explored and include prompts to encourage the interviewee to speak about specific issues if they do not spontaneously arise. These prompts are essentially probing questions that can prove invaluable to ensuring reliability (Barriball and While, 2013). A typology of research questions as illustrated in Table 6 is provided by Kvale (1996) and is adapted for use in this study. This typology of questions will be used by the researcher throughout the course of the interview process. It is thought that using a mix of questioning styles may elicit richer data from the interviewing process.

Table 6 - Typology of interview questions and application to interview design

Types of Question	Purpose	Application to current study
Introducing Questions	To provide context and start the conversation in order to move to the main interview questions.	Introductory section detailing background of study included in interview guide.
Follow-up Questions	To direct questions to what has just been said.	Follow up questions such as "what worked well?", "what didn't work so well?" are used throughout the interview guide.
Probing Questions	To draw out a more complete picture of the participants' experiences.	Probing questions such as "why so?" and "what worked well about it?" included.
Specifying Questions	To get specific and more precise descriptions from general statements.	Clarification prompts included in the interview guide designs.
Direct Questions	To elicit direct responses.	Direct questions such "who did you train with?" are included.
Indirect Questions	To pose projective questions.	Indirect questions also included such as "how do you feel" type questions.
Structuring Questions	To refer to key questions in order to close off one theme of questioning and open up another.	Structure will be provided during the interview through the interviewer explaining the structure of the interview.
Silence	To allow interviewees ample time to think and reflect on experiences.	Silence will be used as a technique when the interviews are undertaken.
Interpreting Questions	To rephrase and seek clarification of a response.	Specific use of the word "clarify" is included in the interview guide.
Throw-away Questions	To help put the interviewee at ease.	The guide includes questions at the beginning which are straightforward and direct which is hoped will put the interviewee at ease.

Adapted from Kvale (1996, pp.133-135)

It is important that each participant is given the opportunity to express their opinion fully (Patton, 1990). Therefore, at the end of each interview, the participant will be provided with an opportunity to add any points of relevance that were not covered during the interview.

5.6 Post interview

A transcript of the interview will be typed and returned to the participant, at which point they will be given an opportunity to approve or retract any information provided. It is important that the interviewee is left with a positive feeling towards the process (Legard *et al.*, 2003). A contemporaneous field diary will be maintained which will be updated immediately after the interview and will include observations and thoughts relating to the interview which may help later in the data analysis process.

Having determined the process for the interviews that will take place the next step in the process is to determine a sampling strategy and identification of who will be interviewed for the study. This will be followed by the method of data analysis before finally considering ethical challenges and their mitigation.

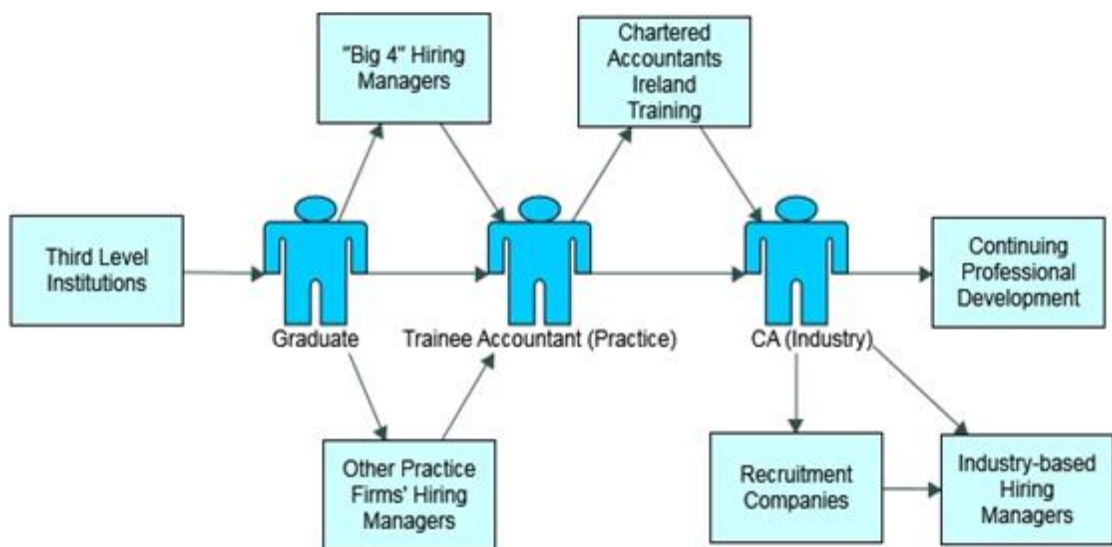
6.0 Sampling strategy

Sampling is a vital step in any qualitative research process (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007a) and can be defined as "the act, process, or technique of selecting a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population" (Gentles *et al.*, 2015, p. 1772). The intent in qualitative research "is not to generalise to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2009, p. 203) and this can be achieved using a purposeful sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling is synonymous with qualitative research and allows the researcher to choose the participants that are likely to generate the most useful data (Patton, 1990). In other words, the sampling strategy should be determined by the purpose of the research. The approach taken needs to be one that learns from the experiences of people who are "information-rich" (Patton, 1990, p. 169) and who can best help us to understand the research phenomenon being explored (Coyne, 1997). As this study seeks to explore the skills and competencies required of accountants during a transition phase, it is important to choose a sample that is consistent with the underpinnings of both transition and work adjustment theory. TWA suggests two main

indicators of work adjustment: satisfaction of the employee with the company and satisfaction of the company with the employee (Dawis and Lofquist, 1981). Therefore, it is suggested that "information rich" people in this case will be the CAs who have recently made the transition and the industry-based finance managers that hire such individuals. This purposeful sampling strategy is sometimes described as "theory-based or operational construct sampling" (Patton, 1990).

It is acknowledged that there are many other stakeholders that hold views in relation to the research question of how CAs develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in the transition from practice to industry. It is therefore considered that stakeholder sampling may be of value. Stakeholder sampling "involves identifying the major stakeholders who are involved in designing, giving, receiving or administering the program or service being evaluated and who might otherwise be affected by it" (Palys, 2008, p. 697). A stakeholder map was developed in order to help identify the major stakeholders in this study and this is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Stakeholder map



The study involves developing a framework that will aid CAs make the transition from practice to industry. Based on the stakeholder map, it would seem important to receive feedback from other stakeholder groups in order to ensure multiple perspectives are considered. Furthermore, it would seem essential due to the exploratory nature of the study (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, it is proposed that the study will involve consultation with other groups including two individuals from CAI involved in the training and development of trainee accountants, a CPD provider and a recruitment expert

in the area of accounting. These multiple stakeholders will serve to add additional perspectives on the CA transition process, by ensuring that alternative voices are heard which helps in exploring all viewpoints. Further stakeholders were considered for this study such as practice-based hiring managers, but these were discounted on the basis that they are not directly involved in the observation of the skills and competencies relevant to accountants in industry. Other professional bodies were discounted on the basis that the scope of this study involves CAI members only. Higher education institutes are also not included on the basis that CAs have subsequently passed through professional training and education which has provided them with the skill and competency levels that they have currently attained. While it is acknowledged that higher education is likely to have played an influential role in the accountant's development journey, it is thought that this may be illuminated during the interviews with the CAs.

In answer to the question of how many interviews are enough, Baker and Edwards (2012) provide the answer "it depends". In this study, the researcher will consider "data saturation" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 202) which is when a point is reached whereby no further new information is found (Guest *et al.*, 2006; Francis *et al.*, 2010; Fusch and Ness, 2015). It is proposed that 25 interviews may be appropriate, as shown on the sampling grid in Table 7 below in which definitions of the categories involved is also included. However, upon concluding these interviews, data saturation will be assessed.

Table 7 - Sampling grid

Category	Definition	No. of Interviews
Newly Qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs)	Chartered Accountants who have qualified in practice no more than three years prior to the date of the interview and who have transitioned to an industry role within that period.	15
Industry-based Hiring Managers	Industry-based hiring finance managers who are qualified Chartered Accountants who have hired at least two CAs (as defined above).	6
Other Stakeholders	Two individuals from CAI involved in the training and development of trainee accountants. One CPD provider. One recruitment expert in the area of accounting.	4
Total		25

The first data-set in the study is CAs that have qualified within the last three years and have transitioned from practice to industry during this time. Focus will be placed on industry-based roles with larger companies as this would suggest greater complexity and a more stressful (Gaertner and Ruhe, 1981) and challenging environment for a

transitioning accountant. This CA group is central to the objectives of the study and will be 'information rich' (Patton, 1990) as they will have recently made the transition that is being explored. It is further proposed that the sample will be a mix of participants from 'Big 4' firms and non-'Big 4' firms. This will help identify if location of training impacts upon the challenges faced during a transition from practice to industry.

The second data-set is industry-based finance managers who are qualified Chartered Accountants and who have hired at least two individuals from the CA data set. The reason for including this group is to ensure consistency with the theory-based sampling strategy chosen and to ensure that the satisfaction of the work environment with the individual aspect of the theory of work adjustment (Dawis and Lofquist, 1981) is fulfilled. Justification of interviewing a lower number of industry-based hiring managers is due to the stipulation that they will have hired at least two CAs. This group may in some cases have hired more than two CAs and will have knowledge in relation to what works well and what doesn't. In addition, this group may have at one point made this transition themselves in the past.

The final cohort of participants that will be interviewed represents other stakeholders including two individuals from CAI involved in education and training, a CPD provider currently engaged by CAI and an accounting recruitment expert. It is believed that a multiple stakeholder approach will help in the creation of the framework that may inform the transition process from practice to industry. Each of these three groups will be interviewed based upon the themes identified previously in this paper. An illustration of the theme of questioning for each stakeholder group is identified below in Table 8. Furthermore, interview guides for each of these groups in presented in Appendices 1 to 5.

Table 8 - Themes by stakeholder group

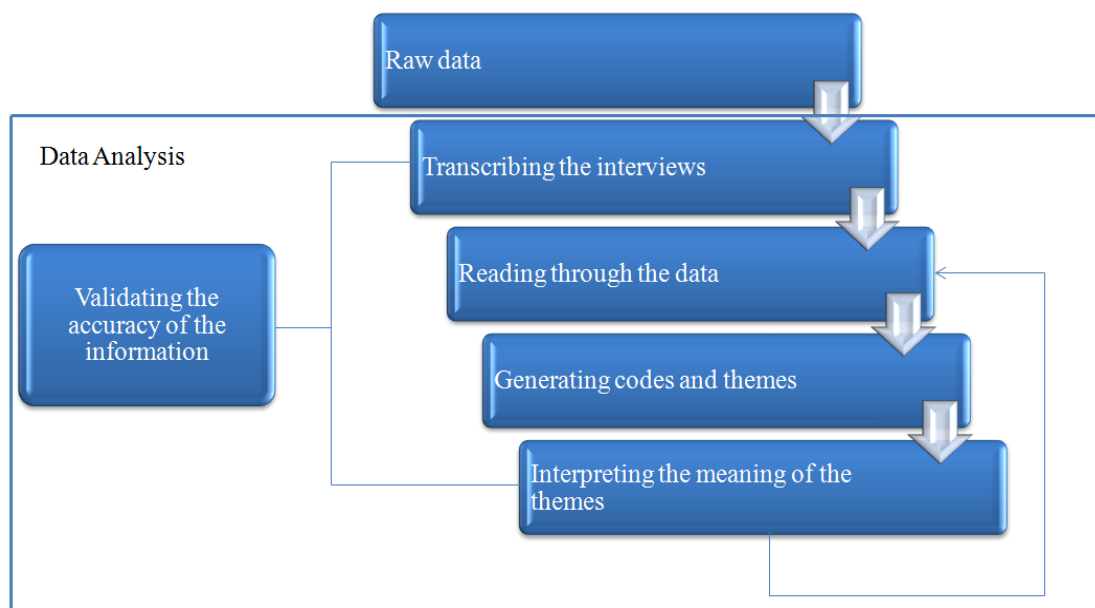
Theme (T)	Accountants who have transitioned	Industry hiring managers	Other stakeholders
T1. Skills developed in Practice relevant for Industry	✓		
T2. Transition Phase	✓	✓	✓
T3. Skills and Competencies in Industry	✓	✓	✓
T4. CPD, Mentoring and maintaining skills and competencies	✓	✓	✓
T5. Managing skill development in future transitions	✓	✓	✓

At this point, the research philosophy, research method, research protocols and sampling strategy have been presented. The next logical step is to decide on how the data collected will be analysed in order to draw conclusions that will answer the research question and objectives of the study. The next section of this paper will discuss the steps that will be taken in this qualitative data analysis.

7.0 Data analysis

Data analysis of semi-structured interviews involves the identification and analysis of themes which are patterns across data sets. Themes can develop from the interviews themselves or from the researcher's prior knowledge and understanding of the research topic being explored (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). The analysis of the raw data produced from a semi-structured interview is simplified by Creswell (2009) who provides an illustrative model of the steps of qualitative data analysis as shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2 - Steps of qualitative data analysis



Adapted from Creswell, 2009, p. 185

This approach is consistent with Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 85) who suggest analysing qualitative data involves four tasks: "discovering themes and subthemes, winnowing themes to a manageable few, building hierarchies of themes or code books and linking themes to theoretical models". Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 87-88) also identify six phases of thematic analysis: "familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes,

searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and finally producing the report". Each of these step-based approaches appear consistent with one another and emphasise the requirement to deeply engage with the data through layers of analysis and re-reading in order to extract the most informed analysis possible. In this study, NVivo software will be used to help with the data analysis. This is justified on the basis of the relatively large volume of interviews that will take place as it is thought that manual methods run the risk of human error in the search for information from the entire data set (Welsh, 2002). It is acknowledged that some researchers argue that the use of software may influence the researcher to follow a set path (Seidel, 1991) and that it encourages quantitative analysis of qualitative data (Bassett, 2004). However, others argue that NVivo aids the qualitative data analysis process through the improvement of the rigour of the data analysis process (Richards and Richards, 1994) through the validation of the researchers own beliefs of the data (Welsh, 2002). The use of the memo tool in NVivo aids in producing highly reflexive work and the ability to ensure a clear audit trail can be produced provides evidence of a systematic, iterative and multi-faceted approach to qualitative data analysis (Houghton *et al.*, 2016).

The next section of the paper discusses ethical considerations of privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, harm, politics and power and interviewer bias. This is then followed by discussion of threats to validity and reliability and how these threats can be mitigated in this study.

8.0 Ethical considerations

It is important that ethical considerations be considered in the research design phase. As interviews involve an intrusion into respondents' lives and there is a sensitivity to the questions being asked, it is vital that a high standard of ethical consideration be maintained (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). An ethical clearance submission has been forwarded to the Waterford Institute of Technology Business School Ethics Committee and as such, ethical clearance will be obtained prior to the commencement of data collection. The information sheet and consent form for this study are attached in appendices 6 and 7 respectively.

8.1 Privacy and confidentiality

An ethical challenge to interviewers conducting semi-structured interviews is the intimacy and openness that can occur during an interview which may result in disclosure of information that the respondent may later regret (Alshenqeeti, 2014). However, in this particular study, interviewees will be educated professionals who are already ethically aware with an understanding of confidentiality. It is therefore considered less likely that unintended information will be disclosed. In order to protect interview participants, it is important to assure that all data collected is treated sensitively and kept confidential. All interviewees will remain anonymous and transcripts will be sanitised to prevent any identification of individuals or firms. Furthermore, participants will be given opportunity to retract any information provided and to cease the interview at any point in time and have all associated data destroyed.

8.2 Informed consent

All participants of the study will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that it is possible to withdraw from the process at any time. A consent form, along with a brief explanation of the study will be distributed to each interviewee prior to interview which will provide detail around the privacy and confidentiality rules which are consistent with those set out by the Business School Ethics Committee of Waterford Institute of Technology. Each participant will be asked to provide consent to record the interview and the interviewer will offer to turn off the recording at any point upon request. A mode of continuous consent will be adopted during the course of the interviews using comments such as "are you happy to talk more about?" In addition, it will be made clear that the participant can withdraw from the study at any stage.

8.3 Harm

Sinding and Aronson (2003) highlight the potential of interviews to expose the participants' self-perceived inadequacies and failures. This may be of concern in this study as it is anticipated that the respondents provide details of difficulties in their transition from practice to industry. This can result in the interview becoming quasi-therapeutic. The interviewer needs to be cognisant of this fact and avoid switching from research to cathartics. A mitigation of this risk of harm will be the fact that it will be made clear to the interviewee that they can cease the interview at any point. In addition,

given the nature of the interview and the professional level of the interviewees, this risk is considered low.

8.4 Politics and power

As the interviewer holds the power of the direction of the interview, the participant may be drawn to discuss issues that he may rather have remained silent about. In addition, the researcher also holds the power over which quotes are used, how they are used and how they are interpreted (Koskei and Simiyu, 2015). These issues are mitigated to an extent in this study as interviewees are professional people with much experience and the nature of the interview will be peer-based. In addition, transparency is increased through the return of transcripts to participants. It is possible that the interviewee may decide to amend or withdraw information at this point. Should this situation occur, a revised transcript will be resubmitted to the interviewee for re-approval. Where the interviewee decides to completely withdraw from the study, all forms of the transcript will be destroyed.

8.5 Interviewer bias

This researcher acknowledges that as a member of CAI, there is potential for personal researcher bias (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007b) in this study. Qualitative interviews can present a number of challenges in relation to rigour and bias (Chenail, 2009) and interviewers can influence the information that is gathered (Judd *et al.*, 1991). Cohen *et al.* (2007) identified a number of concerns of interviewer bias in educational research including the interviewer's preconceived views, misperceiving what the interviewee is saying and the interviewee misunderstanding what is being asked. In order to counter these potential issues in this study, the interview guides included in appendices 1 to 5 are designed to ensure that questions are appropriately framed so as to ensure they are understood by the interviewee. It is proposed that this will be tested during the piloting phase of the study which will involve a debrief with the interviewee that will help ensure that questions are clear and easily understood. In addition, the use of reflexivity through the use of a field diary and reflective log will be adopted in this study and this will aid the researcher in ensuring biases are minimised (Bulpitt and Martin, 2010). Furthermore, the use of member checking which involves obtaining feedback about data collected (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) will be used. This is an effective method to reduce misinterpretation of data collected (Maxwell, 1996) and is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 314). Many of the ethical considerations raised

above have implications for the reliability and validity of the study. These concepts are important to all research studies and are discussed separately in the following section.

9.0 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are of significance to the findings of both quantitative and qualitative research and serve to ensure that data obtained from participants is presented in an accurate manner (Dörnyei, 2007). Validity refers to the extent to which the findings of a study accurately reflect the specific aspects it seeks to investigate, or in other words, does the data represent a true image of what is being studied (Collis and Hussey, 2009)? Reliability relates to the extent to which a study would yield the same results upon repeated trials (Leung, 2015). Although both validity and reliability are concepts rooted in quantitative studies (Kihn and Ihantola, 2015), it is argued that the qualitative researcher should also take account of these concepts while forming a research design, analysing results and judging the quality of a study (Patton, 2002).

Classic types of validity include both internal and external validity (Lillis, 2006). As these concepts originated in quantitative research, they are adapted for use in this qualitative study. Internal validity refers to the extent to which the investigation is measuring what it seeks to measure (Saunders *et al.*, 2009) and specifically in qualitative studies relates to whether valid conclusions can be determined from the study (Kihn and Ihantola, 2015). Internal validity can be difficult to gauge with qualitative research methods (Parker, 2014) such as semi-structured interviews, as a rigid style of question cannot be strictly adhered to. The questioning style has to vary depending on the interviewee, as some participants will have to be drawn out more than others. It is therefore important that at all times the researcher is conscious of the risks not to ask leading questions and ensure that focus is maintained on the data required to answer the research question. In this study, these risks are mitigated by the interview guides which are designed to avoid leading questions and to focus responses that will help answer the research question and objectives outlined earlier. Planning, research design and piloting are also considered important in this study in order to ensure higher degrees of internal validity. The main potential threats to internal validity are identified below in Table 9 which also suggests how these threats can be mitigated in this study.

Table 9 - Potential validity threats and their mitigation

Potential threat	Impact in this study	Mitigation in this study
Reactivity to researcher (Onwuegbuzie, 2003)	This relates to changes in the person's responses as they are taking part in a research investigation.	Taking of field notes, awareness of role in the process, use of guides and asking interpretative questions.
Power of interviewer (Koskei and Simiyu, 2015)	The interviewer holds the power in relation to the direction the interview takes.	Interviewees are professional people with much experience and the nature of the interview will be peer-based.
Interviewer Bias (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007b)	As a member of CAI, there is potential for personal researcher bias.	Mitigated by maintaining a research field diary, appropriate interview guide design, framing of questions and member checking.
Respondent Bias (Furnham, 1986)	As members of CAI, there is potential for respondents to be biased.	Data validation using triangulation of data collected and comparing and contrasting responses.
Interpretative validity (Maxwell, 1992)	The interviewer must interpret meaning from the data collected	Clear audit trail and demonstrate clearly how interpretations were reached.

External validity relates to the extent to which the results can be generalised (Collis and Hussey, 2009). In qualitative research, external reliability relates to generalisability to both theory and practice as opposed to statistical generalisability (Lillis, 2006). It is acknowledged that this study focuses on CAI graduates transferring from practice to industry in an Irish context. However, other worldwide professional bodies such as AICPA, ICAEW, ICAS, ICAA, CPA, ACCA all have members that take a similar career path (IAASA, 2016). Thus, given these similarities, the results that are found from this study may also be relevant to other professional bodies. However, further research would be required involving larger samples before one could generalise the finding across different populations (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007b).

It is acknowledged by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 316) that "there can be no validity without reliability". In quantitative studies, reliability refers to the repeatability of results (Golafshani, 2003). It is argued by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 300) that the term "dependability" is a more appropriate term to express reliability in qualitative research. Similarly, Seale (1999) promotes and connects the concept of dependability along with the concepts of consistency and reliability in qualitative studies. Dependability can be defined as "the logical, traceable and carefully documented research process" (Kihn and Ihantola, 2015, p. 235). This can be thus interpreted as procedural reliability (Ryan *et al.*, 2002) and it is important that "audit trails" are maintained throughout the research process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 382). Reliability using semi-structured interviews can be "elusive" (Creswell, 2009, p. 153). Brewerton and Millward (2001, p. 74) argue that "due

to their openness to so many types of bias, interviews can be notoriously unreliable, particularly when the researcher wishes to draw comparisons between data sets". In order to reduce reliability threats in the semi-structured interviews, it is proposed that the interviewer will conduct pilot interviews, avoid leading questions, take notes and offer the interviewee opportunity to sum up and clarify points that they have made. In addition, the interviewer will offer clarification on points made through the use of phrases such as "can I check I understand," or "can I just clarify".

In summary, validity and reliability are demonstrated in qualitative research through trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), rigour and quality of the research design. It is intended that the research performed in this study will follow the research design and protocols proposed in this paper in order to ensure the dependability of the results.

10.0 Conclusion

This study aims to provide an understanding of the skills and competencies required of accountants in industry and investigate how best these skills and competencies can be developed during the transition phase of accountants from practice to industry. Farmar (2013) identifies that within a year or two post-qualification, half or more of CA members have left practice and taken employment in industry. As such, this study is of particular importance to future qualifying Chartered Accountants as there have been no prior work completed that investigates this transition despite the perception that the skills and competencies required in industry differ from practice (Siegel and Sorenson, 1994; Richardson, 2005). The study will also be of importance to professional bodies such as CAI and in particular may influence decisions regarding future training. It may also impact upon CPD courses, mentoring and coaching provided by professional bodies.

From a theoretical perspective, the study incorporates aspects of neo-correspondence theory, person-job fit theory and career transition theories such as the theory of work adjustment and Nicholson's transition cycle. As accounting education is generally renowned for its under-deployment of theoretical frameworks (McPhail, 2001; Tight, 2004; Haggis 2009; Coady, 2014), this study seeks to demonstrate the utility of these theoretical lenses in developing a better understanding of career transition in the specific context chosen.

The research method that is used for this exploratory study is semi-structured interviews of the key stakeholders relating to the phenomenon being explored. This approach is consistent with studies relating to early careers of accountants and previous accounting skills and competencies studies. The research design is based on a functionalist position that is pragmatic and utilitarian as the output of the study will be a framework that can be put to use in real life and this philosophical positioning is consistent with the conceptualisation of the research problem.

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Appendix 1 - Interview guide for CAs

Date:		Time:	
Interviewee			

Background to the study

Explain the background to the study and the reasons why it is of interest.
Explain that the participants' perceptions are being sought and their contribution is highly valued.
Reminder of confidentiality/anonymity terms and/or other relevant ethical matters.

Background of the participant

Q1:	Who did you train with?
Q2:	How long did you remain there post qualification?
Q3:	When did you move to industry?
Q4:	Is your current employer an ex-client?
Q5:	If so, how did this relate to your transition?

Transition to industry

Q6:	How did you find the transition from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Why did you feel this?
Q7:	How did you prepare in advance for the transition to industry?
Prompt	Please expand giving examples.
Q8:	How was your job commencement supported by your new employer?
Prompt:	What elements of support were you satisfied with and worked well?
Prompt:	What didn't work so well?

Q9:	What do you feel were the main challenges you encountered in making the transition to industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q10:	How were these challenges overcome or how are you currently overcoming these challenges?
Prompt:	Please expand giving examples.
Q11:	What do you feel was the main support in helping you make the transition?
Prompt:	Explain why this was the case.

Skills/competencies developed in practice relevant for industry

Q12:	How do you perceive CAI training prepared you for a role in industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q13:	Did you find any of the skills that you developed while training in practice were directly transferrable to your role in industry?
Prompt:	Why so?

Skills/competencies in industry

Q14:	Did you perceive that further skills were needed for your role in industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q15:	How did you develop competency in these skills?
Prompt:	Please provide examples.

Maintaining skills/competencies

Q16:	How do you maintain the development of key skills?
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Prompt:	Any examples?
Q17:	How do you view CPD training in relation to transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q18:	Do you have a mentor?
Prompt:	If yes - tell me about your mentoring experience and how it works for you
Q19:	How do you view mentoring in relation to transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?

Managing skill development in future transitions

Q20:	What skills do you perceive are in most need of development for accountants transitioning from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q21:	Finally, is there any advice that you would give to a CA making the transition from practice to industry in the future?
Prompt:	Explain why. Any further advice?

Other issues

Is there anything that you perceive as relevant to our discussion that you would like to add?	
Thank you for your time.	Reassurance of anonymity/confidentiality
Inform the respondents that they will be provided with the transcripts and be given access to the executive summary if they so desire.	

Appendix 2 - Interview guide for hiring manager

Date:		Time:	
Interviewee			

Background to the study

Explain the background to the study and the reasons why it is of interest.
Explain that the participants' perceptions are being sought and their contribution is highly valued.
Reminder of confidentiality/anonymity terms and/or other relevant ethical matters.

Background of the interviewee

Q1:	Are you a member of an accountancy body?
Prompt:	If yes, please confirm the accountancy body you are a member of?
Q2:	Who did you train with? (Industry or Practice?)
Prompt:	If practice, when did you transition to industry?

Transition to industry

Q3:	How do you prepare in advance for CAs joining your company?
Prompt:	Expand with examples.
Q4:	How do you manage the induction of CAs into your business?
Prompt:	Please expand in detail.
Q5:	How do you support CAs in the first six months of their new role?
Prompt:	Expand with examples.
Q6:	What do you feel are the main training and development needs of CAs transitioning from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?

Q7:	How do you satisfy the training needs for CAs?
Prompt:	In house or external? Provide details.
Q8:	What do you see as the main challenges involved for CAs making the transition from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q9:	How are these challenges overcome?
Prompt:	Please provide examples.

Skills/competencies in industry

Q10:	How do you feel CAI training prepares trainee accountants for industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q11:	What are the skills that you look for in an individual when hiring a CA in your industry?
Prompt:	Clarify why so?
Q12:	Do you feel that the CAs hired are competent in these skills when you hire them?
Prompt:	If not clarify why for each skill mentioned.
Q13:	How do you help the CA develop a competency in these skills?
Prompt:	Please expand.

CPD, mentoring and maintaining skills/competencies

Q14:	How do you keep your accounting staff up to date with the development of key skills?
Prompt:	Please provide examples.
Q15:	How do you view CPD training in relation to the transition into industry?

Prompt:	Why so?
Q16:	Do you act as a mentor to CAs?
Prompt:	If yes - tell me about your mentoring experience?
Prompt:	If no - do you think CAs would benefit from having a mentor?
Q17:	How do you view mentoring in relation to the transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?

Managing skill development in future transitions

Q18:	What are the key skills that you see as vital to the success of accountants in Industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q19:	Finally, is there any advice that would you give to a CA making the transition from practice to industry in the future?
Prompt:	Explain why. Any further advice?

Other issues

Is there anything that you perceive as relevant to our discussion that you would like to add?	
Thank you for your time.	Reassurance of anonymity/confidentiality
Inform the respondents that they will be provided with the transcripts and be given access to the executive summary if they so desire.	

Appendix 3 - Interview guide for CAI representatives

Date:		Time:	
Interviewee			

Background to the study

Explain the background to the study and the reasons why it is of interest.
Explain that the participants' perceptions are being sought and their contribution is highly valued.
Reminder of confidentiality/anonymity terms and/or other relevant ethical matters.

Background of the interviewee

Q1:	Who did you train with to become a Chartered Accountant? (Industry or Practice?)
Q2:	In what way has your role related to the transitioning of CAs from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Please expand and provide examples.

Transition to industry

Q3:	How do you believe CAs should prepare in advance of moving from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q4:	How do you feel CAs are supported by CAI in making the transition from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Please expand and provide examples.
Q5:	What do you feel are the main training and development needs of CAs transitioning from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?

Q6:	How do you feel CAs can best satisfy these training needs?
Prompt:	Provide details.
Q7:	What do you see as the main challenges involved for CAs making the transition from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q8:	How do feel these challenges could be best overcome?
Prompt:	Please provide examples.

Skills/competencies in industry

Q9:	How do you feel CAI training prepares trainee accountants for industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q10:	What are the skills that you believe are important for CAs working in industry?
Prompt:	Clarify why so.
Q11:	Do you feel that the CAs are competent in these skills when they qualify through a training contract in practice?
Prompt:	Clarify why so.
Q12:	What is the best way to help a CA develop competency in these skills?
Prompt:	Please expand.

Maintaining skills/competencies

Q13:	How do you view mentoring in relation to the transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q14:	How do you view CPD training in relation to the transition into industry?

Prompt:	Why so?
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Managing skill development in future transitions

Q15:	What are the key skills that you see as vital to the success of accountants in Industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q16:	Finally, is there any advice that would you give to a CA making the transition from practice to industry in the future?
Prompt:	Explain why. Any further advice?

Other issues

Is there anything that you perceive as relevant to our discussion that you would like to add?	
Thank you for your time.	Reassurance of anonymity/confidentiality
Inform the respondents that they will be provided with the transcripts and be given access to the executive summary if they so desire.	

Appendix 4 - Interview guide for CPD provider

Date:		Time:	
Interviewee			

Background to the study

Explain the background to the study and the reasons why it is of interest.
Explain that the participants' perceptions are being sought and their contribution is highly valued.
Reminder of confidentiality/anonymity terms and/or other relevant ethical matters.

Background of the interviewee

Q1:	Are you a member of an accountancy body?
Prompt:	If yes, please confirm the accountancy body you are a member of?
Q2:	Who did you train with? (Industry or Practice?)
Q3:	In what way has your role related to the transitioning of CAs from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Please expand and provide examples.

Transition to industry

Q4:	How do you believe CAs should prepare in advance of moving from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q5:	How do you feel CAs are supported in making the transition from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Please expand and provide examples.

Q6:	What do you feel are the main training and development needs of CAs transitioning from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q7:	How do you feel CAs can best satisfy these training needs?
Prompt:	Please provide details.
Q8:	What do you see as the main challenges involved for CAs making the transition from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q9:	How do feel these challenges could be best overcome?
Prompt:	Please provide examples.

Skills/competencies in industry

Q10:	How do you feel CAI training prepares trainee accountants for industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q11:	What are the skills that you believe are important for CAs working in industry?
Prompt:	Clarify why so.
Q12:	Do you feel that the CAs are competent in these skills when they qualify through a training contract in practice?
Prompt:	Clarify why so.
Q13:	Taking each that was mentioned in turn, what is the best way to help a CA develop competency in these skills?
Prompt:	Please expand.

Maintaining skills/competencies

Q14:	How do you view mentoring in relation to the transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?

Q15:	How do you view CPD training in relation to the transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?

Managing skill development in future transitions

Q16:	What are the key skills that you see as vital to the success of accountants in Industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q17:	Finally, is there any advice that would you give to a CA making the transition from practice to industry in the future?
Prompt:	Explain why. Any further advice?

Other issues

Is there anything that you perceive as relevant to our discussion that you would like to add?	
Thank you for your time.	Reassurance of anonymity/confidentiality
Inform the respondents that they will be provided with the transcripts and be given access to the executive summary if they so desire.	

Appendix 5 - Interview guide for recruiter

Date:		Time:	
Interviewee			

Background to the study

Explain the background to the study and the reasons why it is of interest.
Explain that the participants' perceptions are being sought and their contribution is highly valued.
Reminder of confidentiality/anonymity terms and/or other relevant ethical matters.

Background of the interviewee

Q1:	Are you a member of an accountancy body?
Prompt:	If yes, please confirm the accountancy body you are a member of?
Q2:	Who did you train with? (Industry or Practice?)
Q3:	In what way has your role related to the transitioning of CAs from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Please expand and provide examples.

Transition to industry

Q4:	How do you believe CAs should prepare in advance of moving from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q5:	How do you feel CAs are supported by CAI in making the transition from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Please expand and provide examples.

Q6:	What do you feel are the main training and development needs of CAs transitioning from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q7:	How do you feel CAs can best satisfy these training needs?
Prompt:	Provide details.
Q8:	What do you see as the main challenges involved for CAs making the transition from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q9:	How do feel these challenges could be best overcome?
Prompt:	Please provide examples.

Skills/competencies in industry

Q10:	How do you feel CAI training prepares trainee accountants for industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q11:	What are the skills that you believe are important for CAs working in industry?
Prompt:	Clarify why so.
Q12:	Do you feel that the CAs are competent in these skills when they qualify through a training contract in practice?
Prompt:	Clarify why so.
Q13:	Taking each that was mentioned in turn, what is the best way to help a CA develop competency in these skills?
Prompt:	Please expand.

Maintaining skills/competencies

Q14:	How do you view mentoring in relation to the transition into industry?
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Prompt:	Why so?
Q15:	How do you view CPD training in relation to the transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?

Managing skill development in future transitions

Q16:	What are the key skills that you see as vital to the success of accountants in Industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q17:	Finally, is there any advice that would you give to a CA making the transition from practice to industry in the future?
Prompt:	Explain why. Any further advice?

Other issues

Is there anything that you perceive as relevant to our discussion that you would like to add?	
Thank you for your time.	Reassurance of anonymity/confidentiality
Inform the respondents that they will be provided with the transcripts and be given access to the executive summary if they so desire.	

Appendix 6 - Information sheet

Researcher's name: Alan Murphy

Project title: “Exploring the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants from practice to industry”

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to specifically answer the question of how newly qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) develop the skills and competencies which will assist them in the transition from practice to industry-based roles. The study seeks to also address:

- To explore the skills and competencies required of CAs for industry-based positions.
- To understand what skills and competencies required for industry are not fully developed by CAs that have transitioned from practice.
- To understand how gaps in skills and competencies required for industry can be developed by CAs during the transition period.
- To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.

Why am I being asked to participate?

As this study seeks to understand the skills and competencies of CAs transitioning from practice to industry, it is appropriate that individuals who have recently experienced this change in career along with hiring managers of such individuals are interviewed.

Other viewpoints are also being sought from stakeholders such as Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) training representatives, a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provider and an accountant recruiting firm. These individuals are being asked to participate as they are experts in their fields which directly relate to the purpose of the research.

Do I have to participate?

No, participation is voluntary, and you will have the option to withdraw at any point from the study. If you choose to participate you will be asked to sign an informed consent form.

What would participation in the study mean for me?

Participation on the study will involve an interview which will take approximately one hour. You will be asked several questions about skills and competencies required of CAs transitioning from practice to industry based positions. The interview will be recorded, with your permission, in order to accurately capture the conversation. The recordings will be transcribed, but anonymity is ensured as your name and the name of your organisation will not be included in the transcription.

What are the benefits of participating?

There are no direct benefits to the participant in this research. However, the study seeks to enhance understanding of skills and competencies required of Chartered Accountants transitioning to industry and how these can be best developed. An objective of the study is to develop a framework which may be of benefit to Chartered Accountants that will make the transition from practice to industry in the future.

What are the risks associated with participating?

The risks associated with participating in the study are limited. You may be asked to provide details of difficulties in your own transition from practice to industry which may cause discomfort. If you wish, you may also skip any question, but continue to participate in the remainder of the study.

Can I withdraw at any point?

Yes, you may withdraw at any point and have any data you provided destroyed.

How will data gathered be managed and used in the study?

All information collected in this study will be kept completely anonymous and will adhere to the Data Protection Act's (Ireland) 1988 and 2003. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. You will be assigned a random numerical code. The code key and the data will be destroyed within five years of the date of completion of the study. All data provided will be used for the purpose of this study as outlined above and may also be used as the basis for future published articles. Anonymity is ensured as your name and the name of your organisation will not be included in any publications.

Can I verify aspects of the work and view a summary of the findings?

Yes, you will be able to verify all information that is transcribed as part of the interview. A copy of the transcript will be typed up and returned to you in order to provide an opportunity to retract any information provided.

Appendix 7 - Consent form

I have read and understood the information sheet provided and by choosing to give consent:

(please tick the box)

- 1) I am voluntarily participating in this study.

- 2) I grant permission to record my interview.

- 3) I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any point.

- 4) I understand that my own and my organisation's details will be anonymised.

- 5) I understand that the anonymised data will be cited in the project/thesis and other publications.

Signature

Participant _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix 8 - Accounting skills and competency studies

Title	Authors/ Year/ Country	Journal	Scope	Findings	Recommendations/ Conclusions	Research Method
1. "Employability skills of international accounting graduates: Internship providers' perspectives"	Jackling and Natoli (2015) Australia	Education and Training	Explores "the perceptions of internship providers with respect to employability skills of international accounting graduates that undertake a twelve-week internship".	The most highly developed skills of interns is team skills. 40 per cent suggested that interns were not work ready with respect to acculturation, problem solving and communication skills.	There is a need for a more "cohesive theoretical underpinning" of the intern concept as a way to enhance transitions from study to work	Survey
2. "Has the quality of accounting education declined?"	Madsen (2015) USA	The Accounting Review	An evaluation of the quality of accounting education from the 1970s to the 2000s.	Accounting education quality has been steady or increasing in quality, but the quality of accounting students has been declining due to competition from business degrees.	Survival of accounting education depends on how well it competes with other alternatives such as business degrees.	Comparative study
3. "Thoughts on competency integration in accounting education"	Lawson <i>et al.</i> (2015) USA	Issues in Accounting Education	Discusses possibilities of integrating competencies in the accounting curriculum.	Provides examples of where multiple competencies can be integrated when teaching accounting subjects.	Encourages the incremental use of an integrated competency framework.	Literature Review
4. "Focusing accounting curricula on students' long-run careers: Recommendations for an integrated competency-based framework for accounting education"	Lawson <i>et al.</i> (2014) USA	Issues in Accounting Education	A paper which attempts to address the calls from the Pathways Commission and seeks to identify a map of competencies and to create a curriculum for the future.	A new framework of accounting education is required that looks at all sectors and focuses on the longer-term careers of accountants.	Accounting education should focus on long term careers. Organisations outside of public practice should be considered. Should focus on how accountants add value to organisations. Curriculum should be thought through integrated competencies mechanisms.	Literature Review
5. "A comparative review of the need for accounting education change in selected countries"	Chen (2014) USA and other countries	Advances in Accounting Education	Reviews the need for accounting education to change in certain countries under investigation.	In the selected countries, it was found that generic skills as opposed to technical skills were being nurtured.	Accounting education reformers should consider the adoption of the 'Accounting Education Change Commission' initiatives and eventually adopt the recommendations of the Pathways Commission.	Comparative Study

6. "Practitioners are from Mars; academics are from Venus?: An investigation of the research-practice gap in management accounting"	Tucker and Lowe (2014) Australia	Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal	Seeks to gain insight into barriers contributing to the gap between research and practice in management accounting.	Professional bodies have an important role to play in addressing the gap between academia and practitioners. Barriers to research utilisation include difficulty in understanding academic research papers along with limited access to papers.	Recommends seeking views across sectors, organisational sizes, industry types and beyond natural boundaries.	Survey
7. "Perspectives of accounting students and teachers on the changing role of management accountants in organisations"	Shuttleworth (2014) South Africa	Southern African Business Review	A study to "determine if prospective accounting students and accounting teachers are aware of the changing roles of management accountants".	Both students and teachers are not aware of the role of management accountants.	Secondary and tertiary educators should promote the professional identity of management accountants. Management accounting curriculums should be examined to meet the needs of the modern workplace.	Survey, Interviews
8. "Enhancing the undergraduate accounting curriculum to augment core competencies"	Andre and Smith (2014) USA	Advances in Accounting Education: Teaching and Curriculum Innovations	Review of some of the skills set out by AICPA and discussion on how to incorporate them into accounting electives in undergraduate education.	Inclusion of the core competencies as outlined by AICPA enhanced students experience.	Students who complete the special topics course along with the traditional accounting course may be better prepared to enter the accounting profession.	Survey
9. "Accounting practitioners reflect on faculty impact: Bridging the gap between theory and practice"	Johnson (2014) USA	American Journal of Business Education	Explores "the perceptions and experiences of mid-career accounting professionals with respect to the impact of academic faculty on their careers".	Academics that incorporate practical experience in the classroom have most impact on accountants' career success. Academics were perceived as playing an important role in guiding students into the professional sphere.	Accounting educators should remain cognisant of the "possibility that business students are instrumentalists and seek a balanced approach between academic foundation and practical application".	Survey
10. "Who should teach what? Australian perceptions of the roles of universities and practice in the education of professional accountants"	Howieson <i>et. al.</i> (2014) Australia	Journal of Accounting Education	Seeks to address the question of what educational bodies such as universities, professional bodies and accounting firms should teach.	"Tendency to expect universities to have the greatest responsibility for the development of accounting graduates".	Greater communication and sharing of strategies and expertise is required between universities, professional bodies and accounting firms. There is also a need to create a workplace whereby graduates can build on and transfer their skills and knowledge.	Interviews

11. "The perceived gap between academics and professionals about accounting education system in Iran"	Mashayekhi and Mohammadi (2014) Iran	Science Journal of Education	Research attempts to identify the needs of the market versus what is taught.	Different stakeholders should be considered in accounting education.	Provides a number of recommendations concerned with improving skills of accounting students.	Comparative Study / Survey
12. "Bridging the gap between tertiary education and work: Situated learning in accountancy"	Stanley (2013) Australia	Issues in Accounting Education	Reviews the impact of "workplace learning experience program in accountancy at the Queensland University of Technology".	The programme was deemed successful and worthwhile due to the perceived differences in the learning occurs in the workplace versus university	Encourages further study of work placements and also stresses need for the study of graduates' transition into accounting work.	Interviews
13. "A work integrated learning (WIL) framework to develop graduate skills and attributes in an Australian university's accounting program"	Leong and Kavanagh (2013) Australia	Asia-pacific Journal of Cooperative Education	Looks at the work integrated learning programme introduced in Australia and how to effectively embed this into the curriculum.	The paper proposes a three-stage framework to effectively embed work integrated learning into an undergraduate accounting programme.	Further investigation required in relation to generic skills developed.	Literature Review
14. "Competences versus competencies in Romanian accounting education"	Patrut (2013) Romania	International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences	Presents points of view in relation to competencies and competences of an accounting professional.	Explained the differences between the concepts of competency and competences.	Further study of the area recommended.	Literature Review
15. "An analysis of the perception of Chartered Accountant trainees regarding access to the accounting profession and professional training needs"	Stefan <i>et al.</i> (2013) Romania	Annals of the University of Oradea, Economic Science Series	Study analysed the way in which trainee-chartered accountant perceive access to accounting education.	A large percentage of trainee accountants believe there are barriers to the access of the accounting profession in Romania.	Further investigation required regarding competences that are most useful for professional accountants.	Survey
16. "A comparison of generic skills and emotional intelligence in accounting education"	Daff <i>et al.</i> (2012) USA	Issues in Accounting Education	Addresses the need for accountants to have emotional intelligence and develop generic skills.	Technical skills, generic skills and emotional intelligence are all essential. A rounded education process is called for.	Need to develop an instrument to gain views of stakeholders in relation to emotional intelligence.	Comparative study
17. "Accounting majors' perceptions of future career skills: An exploratory analysis"	Parham <i>et al.</i> (2012) USA	American Journal of Business Education	Study to determine skills perceived as most important for future careers.	Writing and communication skills, motivation, financial analysis, decision making, and professional attitude were deemed most critical.	Curriculum need more focus on a wide variety of business courses and disciplines. The impact of other functional areas on accounting needs to be understood by students.	Survey

18. "Market relevance of university accounting programs: Evidence from Australia"	Pan and Perera, (2012) Australia	Accounting Forum	Investigation to identify if "Australian Universities produce accounting graduates with skills knowledge and competencies in line with market expectations".	University programs do not always meet the needs of the market.	Suggests that future studies be performed to investigate how discrepancies between market expectations and university accounting programmes be reconciled.	Survey
19. "Necessary skills for accounting graduates: An exploratory study to determine what the profession wants"	Cory and Pruske (2012) USA	Proceedings of the American Society of Business and Behavioural Sciences Annual Conference	Obtained the viewpoints of "public accountants and non-public accountants regarding the importance of accounting related skills and topics to be covered in undergraduate curricula".	Identified eight skills that were deemed critical: spreadsheet skills; word processing, problem solving, Microsoft windows, ethical awareness, internet research, presentation software and database software.	Suggested that the viewpoints of recently hired graduates should be garnered regarding the necessary skills in their first accounting position.	Survey
20. "Industry perspective workshop programme: An instructional case used to integrate transferrable skills in introductory accounting"	McGuigan <i>et al.</i> (2011) New Zealand	Issues in Accounting Education	Reviews the use of an industry perspective workshop programme.	Provided a number of case studies which looked at integrating skills development. Students liked that the cases simulated real-world decision-making scenarios and they developed team skills through working with peers	Suggested that an industry perspective workshop programme helped students to relate accounting to real-life situations and promotes non-technical accounting skills.	Case Study
21. "An exploration of accountants, accounting work and creativity"	Bryant <i>et al.</i> (2011) USA	Behavioural Research in Accounting	Exploration to discover if creativity is essential to professional accounting work.	Accountants require no less creativity than of three competing professions. Accountants have lower levels of creativity. There was no proof that more creative accountants were any less ethical.	Creativity matters in accounting work, but the profession attracts individuals that are less creative mainly due to the perception of the profession.	Archival Analysis/ Survey
22. "Perspectives of non-public accountants about accounting education and certifications: An exploratory investigation"	Cory and Huttenhoff (2011) USA	Journal of Finance and Accountancy	Exploratory study looking at the skills required by non-public accountants.	Critical thinking is of most importance to non-public accountants. Advocates change in teaching methods.	Focus should be placed on honing critical thinking, communication skills and ethics. In favour of the 150-hour program in CPA exams.	Survey

23. "A strategic model for accounting education"	French and Coppage (2011) USA	Journal of Applied Business Research	Discusses the need for change due to new competencies being required in accounting; "a model for accounting education and gives examples on how to improve accounting education".	Provides recommendations around recruiting students, developing professional skills, changing from a learning to a teaching paradigm, managing the educational process, using technology and reducing the price of education through internships.	Suggests that educators must continue to evaluate views of \accounting curriculums in order to sustain the level of graduates into the future.	Literature Review
24. "What accountancy skills are acquired at college?"	Chaker (2011) Kazakhstan	International Journal of Business and Social Science	Assessment of the accounting skills of the "Kazakhstan Institute of Management Economics and Strategy" that accounting graduates acquired in college.	Accounting graduates were equipped with some skills but not all that are required.	Accounting graduates "should possess technical and functional skills in addition to communication skills but the exact skills required" depend upon where the graduate works.	Survey
25. "Accounting education at a crossroad in 2010 and challenges facing accounting education in Australia"	de Lange, P. and Watty, K. (2011) Australia	Accounting Education	An investigation into the main challenges faced by accounting education in Australia.	Better and stronger links required between the profession, academia and industry need to be developed.	Universities should incorporate work experience into their programs.	Literature Review
26. "The ongoing preparation gap in accounting education: A call to action"	Siegel <i>et al.</i> (2010) USA	Management Accounting Quarterly	A longitudinal review of what accounting educators teach versus what accountants do.	Undergraduate accounting courses have remained unchanged for 25 years and a gap has developed between what is taught and what is required by the workplace.	Synchronisation of accounting market demands, and university curriculum needs to take place.	Literature Review
27. "Developing skills via work placements in accounting: Student and employer views"	Paisey and Paisey (2010) United Kingdom	Accounting Forum	Evaluation of the skills development during work placement within a Scottish accounting degree program.	Experience was perceived as an important benefit to work placement. There were differences in perceived development of skills within industry compared with practice. It was found that some skills are better developed through work experience rather than the classroom.	Calls for further research in international settings in relation to students' perceptions of skills development.	Survey

28. "The expectation-performance gap in accounting education: An exploratory study"	Bui and Porter (2010) New Zealand	Accounting Education: An International Journal	Exploration of the accounting education expectation-performance gap relating to competencies.	An expectation-performance gap was identified. Accounting employers' perceptions of required competencies were different to those of educators.	An expectation gap exists. However, there are constraints on accounting education in delivering all competencies required by employers.	Semi-Structured Interview
29. "Crisis in Accounting: Are accounting curricula following the path of General Motors?"	Taitkonda (2010) USA	Management Accounting Quarterly	Review of the curriculum of AACSB accredited business programs.	Cost and management accounting "courses are limited and offered primarily at junior level".	Calls for changes to the curriculum.	Archival
30. "Do accounting graduates' skills meet the expectations of employers? A matter of convergence or divergence"	Jackling, B. and De Lange, P. (2009) Australia	Accounting Education	A review of whether employers' expectations of accounting graduates' skills are being met.	The requirements in the workplace result in the need for generic skills as well as technical skills and competencies. Skills gaps were identified in team skills, leadership, interpersonal skills and verbal skills.	Technical accounting skills should be taught by the professional accounting bodies and universities should focus on the development of generic skills.	Survey, Interviews
31. "Bridging the education-profession gap: The accounting student-practitioner day (ASPD) program"	Law <i>et al.</i> (2009) USA	Journal of Accounting Education	Detailed discussion of the ASPD program.	The ASPD program works with positive feedback provided by students and faculty/practitioners.	Report made a number of recommendations: Encourages use of ASPD program, select a planning committee and resource program correctly and consider carefully the assessment plan for the program.	Survey
32. "Professional skills and capabilities of accounting graduates: the New Zealand expectation gap?"	Wells <i>et al.</i> (2009) New Zealand	Accounting Education	An investigation into the capabilities considered important for trainee accountants during their first years after graduation.	"Teamwork and real-world learning experiences were identified as areas for improvement" in university accounting courses.	A balance is needed between university and the workplace in the development of professional capabilities.	Survey
33. "Accounting for the future: More than numbers"	Hancock <i>et al.</i> (2009) Australia	Australian Learning and Teaching Council	A review of non-technical skills that will be required by accounting graduates into the future.	Communication and problem-solving skills were lacking and impeding career success.	A number of recommendations were included to aid accounting educators enhance non-technical skills.	Survey, Interviews, Focus Groups

34. "What skills and attributes does an accounting graduate need? Evidence from student perceptions and employer expectations"	Kavanagh and Drennan (2008) Australia	Accounting and Finance	Identification of the required skills and attributes required from an accounting graduate.	Employers are seeking real world knowledge and business awareness. Students are cognoscente of employer expectations relating to communication, teamwork and professionalism.	University accounting programmes need to develop non-technical professional skills and attributes.	Survey, Interviews, Focus Groups
35. "Competencies for young European higher education graduates: Labour market mismatches and their payoffs"	Garcia-Aracil and Van der Velden (2008) Europe	Higher Education	The correspondence of salary to level of competencies is examined using a sample of European higher education graduates.	Roles that entail increased participative and methodological competencies are better paid.	Identification of the required competencies, whether these are specific or generic, focused on short term success or long-term careers and what are the implications for curriculum.	Survey
36. "Setting the skills agenda - The views of UK accounting academics"	Milner and Hill (2007) United Kingdom	Unpublished Working Paper	Canvassing the opinion of academics in relation to communication and problem-solving skills.	Definition of and approach to skills are not approached or understood uniformly by accounting academia.	Establish skills are in the context of higher education, examine why academics have different opinions as to what skills are and tackle reluctance to address skills issue, understand what the critical skills are and finally recognition and examination of the political dimensions.	Semi-structured interviews
37. "From overhead to asset: the importance of people skills"	Foley (2007) Ireland	Accountancy Ireland	Sought to provide a review of the importance that people skills play in accounting	Leadership is required at every level of an organisation.	Investment in the development of chartered accountants' people skills.	None
38. "Priorities for the development of vocational skills in management accountants: A European perspective"	Hassall et. al. (2005) UK and Spain	Accounting Forum	Identification of priorities in vocational skills development based on opinion of European employers of management accountants.	Educational institutions do not place sufficient focus on development of non-technical skills.	Work placements should be a goal of educational institutions.	Survey
39. "Curriculum requirements for entry-level management accounting in Australian industry and commerce"	Richardson (2005) Australia	Journal of Applied Management Accounting Research	A review of accounting knowledge and skills areas required of entry-level management accountants.	"There is a difference in perceived requirements of management and public accounting positions".	There is a need for change in tertiary accounting courses to facilitate the skill requirements of industry and commerce.	Survey

40. "International knowledge, skills and abilities of auditors/accountants"	Palmer <i>et al.</i> (2004) USA	Managerial Accounting Journal	A review of previous competency studies to reveal the main knowledge, skills and abilities required for entry-level accountants.	The following are requirements of entry level accountants: communication skills, interpersonal skills, general business knowledge, accounting expertise, problem solving capability, IT, personal attitude and capabilities.	Continuous assessment of accounting curricula to ensure they remain relevant.	Literature Review
41. "Competency-based education and assessment for the accounting profession: A critical review"	Boritz and Carnaghan (2003) Canada	Canadian Accounting Perspectives	A review and synthesis of literature based on competency-based approaches.	Identified a number of weaknesses in competency-based approaches. Development of competency statements or maps may be useful checkpoint for stakeholders.	The likely outcome of competency-based approaches in the long run will be better communication, greater transparency, improved assessment and a revitalisation of the accounting curricula.	Literature Review
42. "Accounting Practice in the new millennium: Is accounting education ready to meet the challenge?"	Howieson (2003) Australia	The British Accounting Review	A look forward to the future skills requirements of accountants and how these can be incorporated in accounting education.	Significant challenges will emerge for accounting educators and employers and traditional approaches will no longer be adequate. Suggest that new philosophies, materials and technologies need to be adopted.	Universities must change and transform itself and incorporate innovation in teaching to ensure that it remains relevant to accounting skills requirements of the workplace.	Literature Review
43. "Management accounting information and the needs of managers: Perceptions of managers and accountants compared"	Pierce and O'Dea (2003) Ireland	The British Accounting Review	The study sought to build on the research regarding the perceptions and roles of management accountants.	Evidence of preparer - user perception gaps in management accounting due to "an imbalance between technical and organisational validity, functional differentiation and an inherent tension between the simultaneous requirements of independence and involvement".	Future research into the usage of accounting techniques should involve managers and not just management accountants alone	Survey, Interviews

44. "Vocational skills in the accounting professional profile: The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) employer's' opinion"	Montano <i>et al.</i> (2001) Spain and United Kingdom	Accounting Education	Canvassing the opinion of CIMA qualified employers in relation to vocational skills in accounting.	Identified the need to include non-technical skills in the development of accountants.	Educators need to take a wider set of skills and knowledge into account in the design of curriculum.	Survey
45. "Accounting education: Charting the course through a perilous future"	Albrecht and Sack (2000) USA	Accounting Education Series	A thorough evaluation of the state of accounting education in the USA	Warned of the demise of accounting education. Found that the quality and quantity of students that choose accounting is rapidly decreasing and many professionals who majored in accounting would not choose it again given the choice. The profession believes the accounting education system to be obsolete and broken.	Educators need to undertake a thorough strategic re-evaluation of the accounting curriculum.	Survey, Interviews
46. "A survey of international accounting education in the US and some other countries"	Adhikari <i>et al.</i> (1999) USA	Journal of Accounting Education	A study into the coverage and methods employed by universities to internationalise the accounting curricula.	Progress has been made on internationalisation but there is scope to go further.	Calls for further field studies into the area of study.	Survey
47. "Quantitative skills: is there an expectation gap between the education and practice of management accountants?"	Francis and Minchington (1999) United Kingdom	Accounting Education	An examination as to the degree to which management accountants are trained in quantitative methods.	A wide range of skills are required by accountants with quantitative skills being paramount.	Quantitative skills should form part of syllabus.	Survey

Early Career Accounting Studies

Title	Authors/ Year/ Country	Journal	Scope	Findings	Recommendations/ Conclusions	Research Method
1. "Organisational and professional commitment of early career accountants: Do mentoring and organisational ethical climate matter?"	McManus and Subramaniam (2014) Australia	Accounting and Finance	Investigates "the effects of mentoring and organisational ethical climate on the organisational and professional commitment of early career accountants".	Commitment of early career accountants varies depending on the type of mentoring but overall it is seen as constructive for both the individual and the organisation. "Organisational commitment and professional commitment" are positively related	Mentoring in accounting firms needs strengthening. There is a need to foster ethical behaviour. Early career accountants will need to become more engaged with the profession over time.	Survey
2. "Practitioner and faculty perspectives on the career preparation of entry-level public accountants"	Simms and Zapatero (2012) USA	American Journal of Economics and Business Administration	An investigation into how entry level accountants can effectively manage between their education and the rigours of public practice.	"Communication skills, interpersonal skills and analytical reasoning skills are shortcomings of entry level public accountants". Faculty members agreed with practitioners' perspectives on shortcomings and the pathway to a successful career in public accounting	Suggest a more "holistic collaborative perspective of public and academic practices".	Survey, Structured Interview
3. "The factors that affect accountants' decisions to seek careers with big 4 versus non-big 4 accounting firms"	Bagley <i>et al.</i> (2012) USA	Accounting Horizons	Examines the reasons why individuals choose a career in Big 4 firms, while others do not.	Students perceptions while limited are similar to those of accounting professionals. One of the most commonly reported advantages of choosing a Big 4 firm is that it provides opportunity as a stepping stone to better employment opportunities. Prestige of a Big 4 firm was also a big influence on choice.	Retention of staff for Big 4 firms is a major concern and the implications that accountants use them as a stepping stone to better employment opportunities is of particular importance.	Survey

4. "The making of accountants: the continuing influence of early career experiences"	Drew-Sellers and Fogarty (2010) USA	Managerial Auditing Journal	An exploration of the residual influence of early career accountants' experience on their future career.	Found that "several years after departure from employment, accountants attribute much consequence to the training, value-formation and interpersonal relationships of their work history".	Their research "established that much tends to come with accountants as they transition from their first employment within the profession" It also found that further research should focus on this "conversion process".	Semi-structured interviews
5. "Accounting for change: A discourse analysis of graduate trainees' talk of adjustment"	Coupland (2001) United Kingdom	Journal of Management Studies	An exploration into how graduate trainees view change since joining a company.	Identity is regarded as a "flexible resource" and the findings support that participants attend to norms and culture of the workplace. They learn to behave appropriately and "avoid being bloodied".	Findings have implications for how current organisation employees conduct themselves and for their expectations of new entrants to the organisation.	Semi-structured interviews
6. "Tests of time: Organisational time-reckoning and the making of accountants in two multi-national accounting firms"	Anderson-Gough <i>et al.</i> (2001) United Kingdom	Accounting, Organisations and Society	Explores one key feature of professional socialisation in accounting firms: the discourse and practices of "time-reckoning and time-management".	Found that trainee auditors were found to be on call at all times akin to a professional doctor or physician.	The relationship between "time consciousness and career identity is a key issue" for firms in relation to staff retention and employment policy.	Semi-structured interviews

Preface to Paper 3 – Design and initial findings

The research design and initial findings paper was developed between May 2017 and September 2017. The paper was then presented for external examination at WIT on the 5th October where it was recommended without review required and this version is presented in this thesis. An exploratory approach was determined in Paper 2 ‘Methodology’ on the basis of the research objectives and there was a need to identify the design that best addresses the research objectives. Additionally, it was found that there was a lack of prior research into the transition of CAs from practice to industry-based roles. This exploratory approach determined that a qualitative approach be taken, and it was decided that the method would be in the form of semi-structured interviews as outlined in Paper 2 ‘Methodology’.

Interview guides were presented and examined in Paper 2 ‘Methodology’ which gave the researcher confidence in the guides’ ability to elicit the information required in order to address the research objectives of the study. There was much reflection surrounding the appropriate number of interviews to hold and the sample groups that should be targeted. It was clear that CAs who are the individuals at the centre of the study should be interviewed. Furthermore, industry-based hiring managers (HMs) who employ this group of people seemed well positioned to provide insight. Consideration was given in interviewing CAs and their HMs from the same companies to determine differences in perceptions between them. However, this seemed impractical and may have been perceived by the CAs as an assessment of them rather than an attempt to understand their transition and the challenges involved.

There was concern on the part of the researcher in relation to completion and transcription of the interviews and it was outlined in the research protocols in Paper 2 ‘Methodology’ that the researcher would get support with interview transcription. However, this support in transcription was not used as the researcher found that while transcription did involve a large investment of time, this investment was repaid as it allowed the researcher to become fully immersed and intimately aware of the content in the data gathered. This intimacy with the data was found to be very beneficial when preparing Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ and while NVivo was used as an aid to analyse data, it was found that the researcher could recall much of the conversations conducted with each of the

interviewees so when one theme was identified, it was relatively easy to understand where such themes arose in other interviews.

There were some indications of hegemonic influence of the 'Big 4' with some identifying that CAI training was audit focused. While hegemony was identified as a perception in the interviews undertaken, such perceptions extend beyond the boundaries of the research objectives. Additionally, 'Big 4' firms are not represented in the sampling frame, so the data collected is not balanced. However, these perceptions do inform potential future research which is outlined in Section 3 of the thesis.

A suggestion made by the examiners following the presentation of the paper was for the researcher to reflect on how the research links to his own world-view and his experience both as a HM and a former newly qualified accountant. As this was not included in any of the papers presented, it seems appropriate to include here in the preface to Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings'. These reflections are shown below and written in the first person as it was extracted directly from the reflective log.

The identification of the research topic really came about from my own view of how poorly prepared some newly qualified accountants are when joining our business. While I appreciate that these individuals may not have all the skills required to immediately impact upon the business, there appears to be a genuine lack of appreciation or understanding of the roles to which they apply. It almost feels that they think that once they are qualified, they are qualified to do anything that refers to accounting or finance without the need to further develop. Dare I say it, it almost feels like an arrogance, with them thinking I am a qualified Chartered Accountant so why are you questioning my abilities? Having spoken with a number of colleagues and peers, it seems I am not the only one with this opinion.

This observation by the researcher led to him questioning his own experience of moving into industry and while he did not train in a practice-based setting, there were some similarities identified which were documented in the reflective log as follows:

I reflect back and ask was I equally as unprepared and arrogant? I think that maybe I was, well at least I was oozing with confidence following qualification. However, I don't believe that I was as unprepared for a role in industry and specifically manufacturing as those I see now. This is partially because my background was different as I did not train in practice. Instead I am one in the minority who trained through the industry route in

University College Dublin. While manufacturing is vastly different from the educational sector, I felt I had acquired a very broad skillset in management accounting including costing and budgeting, financial accounting, taxation and treasury management. This helped me fit my role more quickly. The one thing I struggled with most was adapting to a different culture. I had moved to a longer working week, a smaller finance team and manufacturing is run by deadlines. In addition, I needed to get up to speed with the company itself, its values, mission, strategy and the politics and dynamics inherent in any organisation. I found this change in culture a challenge and it took time to find my place in my new organisation.

While my move was not a transition from practice to industry, it was still my first move post qualification so there are some similarities including culture but what of the role itself? How did I fit that role? I remember when I made the move, I completed CPD training on Sarbanes Oxley in advance of the move knowing that I would need to understand what it involved in my new role. I am not sure how many of the Chartered Accountants taking their first move from practice to industry today assess their skills in advance of their moves. I was lucky in that my skillset was closely aligned to the role so culture was definitely the main thing for me.

The reflection then moves forward into present day whereby the researcher reflects on his position as a HM and somebody who is directly impacted by the research study that was undertaken. The requirement by the profession and CAI in particular to improve its support provided to CAs emerges from the reflection.

Now, as an industry-based hiring manager, I have seen some accountants who come in and adapt quickly while others just struggle to adjust. We as an accountancy body need to realise that for many this transition is not straight forward and just because someone is provided a piece of paper stating they are qualified does not mean they can go into a new role in industry and hit the ground running. We need to understand this transition better and gather information on what works well for people in their transition and provide support and help to CAs which not only benefits them but also the industry employer and the institute's reputation. It is not fair to place blame solely on the practice firms, but it does seem to me that the 'Big 4' influence over CAI does have an impact in ensuring practice requirements are prioritised over industry. Industry-based employers are disparate and are not positioned to hire a large number of trainee accountants, so the onus is on CAI to support CAs through their transition to industry. As the majority of

CAs train in practice but are ultimately employed in industry, it would seem to me that understanding the transition and the gaps involved should be seen as an imperative for CAI.

This reflection of how the researcher's experience compares with CAs making the transition demonstrates the motivation behind the study and outlines why the researcher believes a problem exists. Following the first 13 interviews provided in this paper, it was not only proved to be a problem but there were even more insights found which are presented in the paper that follows.

Paper 3: Design and initial findings

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RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

Paper 3:

Design and Initial Findings

Findings emerging on the exploration of the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants from practice to industry

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the initial findings in a study exploring the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) from practice to industry. It investigates how CAs make the adjustment from practice to industry and seeks to understand how skills and competencies can be developed during the stages of transition. The study further seeks to develop a framework to inform accountants navigating this transition in the future.

The research method employed is qualitative semi-structured interviews. These interviews are currently being undertaken with multiple stakeholders: CAs transitioning from practice to industry; industry-based hiring managers (HMs); Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI); a continuing professional development (CPD) provider and a recruiting firm.

This paper discusses the initial findings from the interviews held to date with CAs (seven) and HMs (two). At this stage, a number of key themes have emerged which include differing perspectives of the role of a CA in industry, diverging HM and CA perceptions on the skills required in industry, as well as views on the phases of a CA's transition. The paper also provides an early stage and developing framework which seeks to inform the transition based upon data collected and which is framed by the theoretical lenses.

Keywords: *accounting education, semi-structured interviews, newly qualified Chartered Accountants, transition, industry, skills, competencies*

1.0 Introduction

This paper briefly recaps on the objectives and chosen research design. It then proceeds to present the pilot process outcomes and findings emerging to date. It will also present an early stage framework that seeks to inform newly qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) making the transition from practice to industry-based roles. It is anticipated that this framework will continue to evolve and develop as data collection and analysis proceeds.

There has been much debate since the mid-1980s regarding the failure of education to provide the necessary skills and competencies required of accountants in the workplace (Albrecht and Sack, 2000; Bui and Porter, 2010; Thompson, 2013; Lawson *et al.*, 2014). However, studies to date have focused on the correspondence of skills developed in higher education with those required of practice-based accountants (Flood and Wilson, 2009; Pan and Perera, 2012; Stanley, 2013). In contrast, limited research has been undertaken with regards to professional accounting education (Byrne and Flood, 2003) and requirements outside of practice settings. This has resulted in calls for research into the skills and competencies required in industry settings (Lawson *et al.*, 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015).

These calls for a focus on skills required in industry are justified given that the majority of accountants are ultimately employed in industry (IAASA, 2016). Furthermore, the number of Chartered Accountants employed in the industry sector has grown by a substantial rate of 40 per cent from 2008 to 2015⁵ (IAASA, 2016). In contrast, the number of practice-based Chartered Accountants grew by just 11 per cent⁶ during the same period (IAASA, 2016). While most Chartered Accountants' longer-term careers result in employment in industry, it is evident that the majority of these individuals train for membership within a practice-based setting (IAASA, 2016). Farmar (2013) acknowledges that over half of newly qualified Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) members transition from practice to industry within a year or two post-qualification. However, very little is known about this transition phase that many accountants experience or how the skills and competencies required in industry are developed. Drew-

⁵ Industry employed Chartered Accountants grew by 40 per cent from 6,669 in 2008 to 9,323 in 2015.

⁶ Practice employed Chartered Accountants grew by 11 per cent from 4,053 in 2008 to 4,502 in 2015.

Sellers and Fogarty (2010, p.715) suggest that future research should investigate this transition phase and the "conversion process" that accountants go through.

Based on the lack of knowledge relating to this transition phase, an exploration of the conversion of CAs from practice to industry is being undertaken which may help answer the overall research question of how do CAs develop the necessary skills and competencies to assist them in this transition. This exploratory study seeks to also address the following objectives:

1. To understand how CAs' skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.
2. To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition.
3. To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.

Paper 2 'Methodology' outlined and defended the use of an exploratory research approach in this study. The study examines the perceptions of multiple stakeholders in relation to the transition of CAs from practice to industry by conducting semi-structured interviews which are suited to exploratory research designs (Patton, 2002). The initial findings presented in this paper are based on interviews held to date with the two main stakeholder groups of CAs (seven interviews) and Hiring Managers (HMs) (two interviews).

This paper will firstly provide a review of the pilot interview stage and outlines the lessons learned from this process. The data collection processes, respondent profile and approach to analysis are then presented. This is followed by the initial findings and emerging themes. The paper culminates with an early visualisation of the framework based on the current data collected while reflecting these themes through the selected theoretical lenses and finally concluding remarks are offered which also includes the next steps to be taken in the process.

2.0 Pilot interview phase

A pilot study is a "pre-testing or trying out of a particular research instrument" (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001, p. 33). Pilot interviews were conducted with one CA and one HM which are referred to as CA1 and HM1 respectively in this paper. The main reasons for conducting pilot interviews in this study was to help hone the researcher's skills in conducting semi-structured interviews and to garner feedback from the

participants with regard to the content and flow of the interview. A profile of the pilot interviewees is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1 - Profile of pilot interviewees

	Newly Qualified Chartered Accountant (CA1)	Manager (HM1)
Job Title	Financial Analyst	Director of Finance and Administration
Background	Trained in 'Big 4' in South East	Trained in industry in Dublin
Location held	Wexford	Wexford
Industry role	Manufacturing	Manufacturing
Firm Size	Large	Large
Why Chosen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewee fitted sampling criteria - Interviewee is known by researcher - Expectation of honest feedback - Location convenient to researcher - Interviewee interested in the topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewee fitted sampling criteria - Interviewee is known by researcher - Expectation of honest feedback - Location convenient to researcher - Interviewee interested in the topic - Interviewee acts as a mentor

A number of lessons were learned as a result of holding pilot interviews which are now discussed. The sampling criteria of a CA in Paper 2 'Methodology' was Chartered Accountants who have qualified in practice with no more than three years prior to the date of the interview and who have transitioned to an industry role within that period. The CA in the pilot interview was in a second role post transition and found it difficult to know which position to speak about and as such may have provided answers relating to both positions post practice. This uncovered the need for tighter sampling criteria of what constituted a CA which is presented below in Table 2. An amendment to the HM sampling criteria is also presented in this table. This amendment was made on the basis of feedback from the HM pilot interviewee, who asserted that the perspective of qualified accountants from other accountancy bodies would be as valid and may potentially permit a broader accounting institute perspective.

Table 2 - Sampling grid

Sample Target Group	Revised interviewee selection criteria
Newly Qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs)	Chartered Accountants who have qualified in practice no more than two years prior to the date of the interview and who have transitioned to and remain in their first role in industry for at least three months.
Industry-based Hiring Managers (HMs)	Industry-based hiring finance managers who are qualified accountants who have hired at least two CAs (as defined above in this table).
Other Stakeholders	Two individuals from CAI involved in the training and development of trainee accountants. One continuing professional development (CPD) provider. One recruitment expert in the area of accounting.

Based upon the researcher's own reflection on the pilot interviewing stage, it was felt that improvement in the use of probing was also required (See Memos 1 and 2 in Appendix 5). The researcher also felt that care and attention was required in avoiding leading questions (See Memo 2 in Appendix 5). For example, when a pause occurred following a question in the pilot interview with HM1, the researcher offered topics for discussion that might have been relevant to the interviewee. The interviewer gained a more heightened awareness of being comfortable with silences in the interview and learned not to interrupt when a pause occurred.

As part of the pilot interview stage, the researcher requested feedback from the participants in relation to their perception of the interview and if opportunity existed to improve the process. An observation was made by CA1 relating to the positioning of the mentoring questions and it was suggested that they would flow better if the questions were re-arranged (See Memo 1 in Appendix 5). These questions were re-positioned as shown in the final interview guides presented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. In contrast, HM1 observed that the questions flowed very well in the interview guide (See Memo 2 in Appendix 5). Both HM1 and CA1 felt that they found themselves repeating answers during the interview (See Memos 1 and 2 in Appendix 5). However, the researcher believes this to be a positive outcome as it suggests that the most important themes can be reaffirmed in the interviews which ensures that key perceptions are more easily identifiable within the data.

3.0 Recruitment of interviewees and data collection

Following the initial pilot interviews and interview guide amendments, the process of recruiting interviewees commenced. This involved the researcher seeking support from a network of Chartered Accountant colleagues. All of the 'Big 4' practice firms have been contacted in order to identify potential CAs that fit the definition for interviewee

selection. In addition, support has been sought from some smaller firms, Chartered Accountant district societies and business network groups. Furthermore, the Chartered Accountant's trade magazine, "Accountancy Ireland", has offered to include a small article requesting support should it be required. However, it would seem that this will be unnecessary given the level of support that has been provided by the accounting community to date.

The collection of data has now commenced and a total of seven CAs and two HMs which includes the pilot interviews have been completed and analysed for this paper. In addition, the majority of the remaining interviewees have now been identified. The preliminary respondent profile is shown in Table 3 below which also includes the status of the interviewing process to date.

Table 3 - Status of interviewing process

	CA	HM	Others	Total	Transcribed	Paper
Pilot interviews held	1	1	0	2	Yes	3
Interviews held	6	1	0	7	Yes	3
Interviews held	3	1	0	4	Yes	4
Interviews arranged	4	2	4	10	No	4
Interviews not yet arranged	2	2	0	4	No	4
Total	16	7	4	27		

4.0 Interview administration

Prior to interviews taking place, the information sheet (Appendix 3) and consent form (Appendix 4) were issued to the participants so that they were given time to consider the nature of the study and the implications of participating in the research. They were also provided with detail of the time demands of the interview at this point. Interviews were then arranged and held in places free from distraction and at a location and time that was suitable for the interviewee. Face-to-face interviews were preferred as they are often longer which results in greater depth and exploration of nuances (Englander, 2012). However, telephone interviews were held with some interviewees as shown in Table 4 below. Permission to record the interview was requested prior to commencing each of the interviews. The interviewee was then informed as to what the study entails, provided with the background of the study and given assurances in relation to anonymity and

confidentiality. The interview guide was shaped by the themes from the literature while the interviewer remained open to new and emerging themes. This was aided by allowing the participant to express their opinions fully by providing them opportunity to add any points of relevance that were not covered during the interview. The interviews were transcribed and returned to the participant within five days of completion of the interview in all cases. This allowed the interviewee an opportunity to approve or retract any information provided while it was still relatively current in their mind. A full profile of the interviewees is provided in Table 4 which provides some descriptive data relating to the interviewees and the reference key used in the presentation of the quotations.

Table 4 - Profile of interviewees

Findings Reference Key	Job title	Time in industry	Industry	Firm size	Moved from	Where held	Firm location	Interview duration	Included in paper
CA1 (Pilot)	Financial Analyst	21 mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Wexford	Wexford	20 min	3
CA2	Control Officer	9 mths	Financial Services	Large	Big 4	Wexford	Wexford	41 min	3
CA3	Management Accountant	8 mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Waterford	Waterford	57 min	3
CA4	Financial Accountant	12 mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Wexford	Cork	37 min	3
CA5	Company Accountant	7 mths	SME	Medium	Mid-Tier	Dublin	Dublin	32 min	3
CA6	Financial Accountant	9 mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Telephone	Waterford	24 min	3
CA7	Associate	23 mths	Financial Services	Large	Big 4	Telephone	London	27 min	3
CA8	Company Accountant	24 mths	SME	Small	Mid-Tier	Telephone	Armagh	21 min	4
CA9	Company Accountant	18 mths	SME	Medium	Mid-Tier	Tyrone	Tyrone	38 min	4
CA10	Company Accountant	24 mths	Technology	Small	Mid-Tier	Telephone	Armagh	29 min	4
Interviewee	Job title		Industry	Firm size	Background training	Where held	Firm location	Interview duration	Included in paper
HM1 (Pilot)	Director of Finance and Administration		Manufacturing	Large	Industry	Wexford	Wexford	33 min	3
HM2	Chief Financial Officer		SME	Medium	Big 4	Dublin	Dublin	35 min	3
HM3	Financial Controller		Retailing	Large	Small Practice	Belfast	Belfast	48 min	4

5.0 Approach to analysis

Paper 2 'Methodology' outlined protocols that would be followed in conducting the research. This protocol included the stages in conducting the data analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006, pp. 87-88) six step approach: "familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining themes and finally producing the findings". These six stages are continually worked through in an iterative way through the data analysis phase for this paper. The semi-structured approach taken in the interviews did allow some structuring of the themes of questioning prior to data collection. This initial structuring resulted in a number of pre-determined thematic categories prior to interview. However, the researcher remained open to new concepts evolving from the data as it was collected. All interviews were transcribed and checked by the researcher. The self-transcription process and the repeated reading of the transcripts (Braun and Clarke's 2006, step one) allowed the researcher to become fully immersed in the data which builds upon the intimacy and familiarity with the data and also permits the checking of accuracy of transcription.

The qualitative analysis software package NVivo was used as a tool to aid in the analysis process and improve the rigour of the data review (Richards and Richards, 1994). The use of the memo tool in NVivo also aids in producing reflexive work and the ability to ensure a clear audit trail which can provide evidence of a systematic, iterative and multi-faceted approach to the qualitative data analysis (Houghton *et al.*, 2016). NVivo uses nodes as an index system and the initial early stage coding (Appendix 6) was based upon the literature review provided in Paper 1 'Conceptual Paper' and also on the researchers professional practice knowledge and experience of the research topic being explored (Braun and Clarke's 2006, step two). As the interviews were completed, they were loaded into NVivo and the process of reviewing the transcripts for themes commenced (Braun and Clarke's 2006, steps three to five). In many cases a number of nodes crossed over and were essentially the same or a subset of other nodes and as such these were combined. In addition, it was identified that some nodes could be categorised under one parent node and in other cases there was a requirement to split a parent node down into its component nodes. In conjunction with coding, memo notes have been recorded in relation to the coding themes and the researcher has also used modelling functionality with NVivo to aid in the visualisation of the area under investigation.

6.0 Emerging themes and findings to date

This section presents the preliminary findings (Braun and Clarke's 2006, step six) of the inquiry into the experiences of the CAs and HMs in relation to the transition of CAs from practice to industry. There are a number of emerging themes evolving from the data collected to date which is presented and discussed in this section. These themes are considered fluid given that the data collected at this point is based on two HM interviews and seven CA interviews. The section will also include some discussion in relation to how these themes engage with the theoretical lenses through which the research is being viewed, which is considered by the researcher, an integral part of the analysis and framework development process.

6.1 Theme 1 - Phases of transition

There was frequent mention of particular time periods throughout the interviews (See Memo note 6 in Appendix 5) which have been labelled below (See Memo note 7 in Appendix 5). While the interview guide was specifically designed to ask about preparation in advance, other time periods were often mentioned by the interviewees themselves such as the initial days of the transition, the first three months and the six-month period. These phases of transition are now discussed in turn.

6.1.1 Planning phase (Pre-transition)

It is evident that many CAs do very little in terms of preparation in advance of their move to industry. The main preparation in advance of the move to industry was to speak to colleagues such as audit managers that have audited the company or ex-colleagues that have already joined the company. These conversations appear to be at a high level with very little discussion of the specifics of what to expect as demonstrated by CA4 who commented:

I spoke with the audit senior on the job and he said that he was positive about the people who worked there and from an audit point of view they look at it as a dream job so you know that is obviously a good sign.

Others joined companies that were ex-audit clients which is likely to ease the process of transition with CA3 commenting: *"I knew people in the business and you know that was to my advantage obviously"*. Only three of the seven CAs interviewed to date moved to ex-audit clients despite six of the seven interviewed being ex 'Big 4' employees who are

likely to have had many large audit clients that could have been leveraged to provide their first experience of employment in industry.

The role of CAI to support the pre-transition preparation came up in two interviews. CA3 perceived that there was a need to run an event in relation to the move from practice to industry and it was further perceived that CAI have no provision of such. As a representative of the student society, CA3 organised such an event with the support of a recruitment company who "helped run it and they got three or four guest speakers to come in and talk to people in practice and kind of give them a sense of what it is like". It was perceived that this was helpful preparation in advance of transitioning in order to understand the expectations of an industry role and CA3 perceived that there was a gap in the support provided by CAI in this regard. In addition, HM2 identified the lack of preparation of CAs in advance of the move to industry with regards to the interview process commenting:

It is amazing the amount of people who come to an interview who have very little confidence in themselves and actually, that is another thing, that the institute could do is around interview training skills. What I tend to find is that they come with the expectation that you are going to go down through their CV and once you deviate from it there is mass panic. So, I think the lesson that not everything in life is structured is something to get across.

There was very little mention by CAs of completing specific skills courses relevant to the industry that they wished to enter in advance of the move with just one of the seven CAs interviewed to date doing so by commencing the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) exams prior to a move into a financial services role. In general, it would appear that CAs are unaware of the changes they will encounter when entering industry for the first time and perhaps this is a reason for the relative lack of preparation in advance of the move. HM2 identified the need to prepare for this change in role observing:

I have always hired audit trainees so that in itself always poses a problem as they are always backward looking, and they are also always very particular, and things need to be spot on and correct and it's that transition from a financial accounting focus of an auditor to a more management accounting focus within industry.

Following the period prior to the move into industry, interviewees were asked to describe how they find the transition to their new industry-based roles.

6.1.2 Inducting phase (Early days of transition)

It was evident that the initial experiences for CAs in their first number of days in industry was traumatic for the majority of those interviewed. Typical initial responses to the question of how CAs found the transition to industry included words such as "*surprised*" (CA4), "*challenging*" (CA6 and CA7), "*tough*" (CA6), "*daunting*" (CA2), "*different*" (CA3 and CA5) and "*difficult*" (CA1). CA2 described it as "*a complete culture shock*" and highlighted "*I think I was nearly ready to leave*". CA7 indicated the impact in the first week as:

You come in for your first week and you leave the office absolutely shattered because you are trying to absorb so much.

HM2 believed in ensuring CAs "*are straight into it on day one*" and further reiterated the point stating, "*I will hand hold them through the initial couple of weeks, but they own it from day one*". This approach from HMs may support the emotional responses from the CAs in the early days of transition.

One element of the initial inducting phase in industry that was emphasised by the CAs was the change from the heavy workload of audit. This was best highlighted by CA4 who commented "*coming straight from a senior in audit, you are doing sixty hours a week average to trying to fill out a 39-hour week, you know, it's a hard kind of transition*". This view was supported by HM2 who observed:

I have seen as well with all the graduates I've hired, they tend to have the mentality that I need to work all the hours under the sun ... if I am not seen in the office it is a bad thing.

HM2 believed that "*prioritisation*" of tasks is important in adjusting this mentality in addition to being commercially aware of where they can add value within their role.

6.1.3 Grounding phase (First three months)

Once the initial period of the first week is completed, it would appear that the first three months are all about understanding the basics of the particular role itself and gaining what CA1 describes as a "good grounding". For some CA interviewees, HMs provided training plans for this period, but it was found that this was not consistent across all employers with some employers preferring a more informal training approach whereby it was a case of taking responsibility to bring oneself up to speed in the role. For some interviewees training was provided by the previous incumbent of the role or someone else within the team. In some other interviews, standard operating procedures, internal controls and other documents were provided to the CA. This phase is captured well up by CA5 who remarked:

I would say it was two or three months before I felt that I had the minimum depth of knowledge that I should have and then it is always building off of that foundation.

However, this building phase appeared to continue longer than three months for some interviewees with CA4 indicating it took up to six months.

6.1.4 Assessing phase (Four to six months)

It would appear that the HMs use the four to six-month period to test the CAs with HM1 suggesting that "*after three months once they are settled in the role maybe then is the time that maybe if we are going to stretch them further*". This comment suggests that HMs expect the CA's to be familiar with the basics of the role after three months and are then assessed further after that stage. However, on the basis of the initial interviews with the CAs, it would appear that CA's may take up to six-months to get up to speed with their role with CA4 identifying "*I only kind of got to there at maybe around year-end so I was there six months*". CA3 concurred with this sentiment commenting "*I feel the first six months I got to, you know, on a level playing field*".

6.1.5 Normalising phase (Six months plus)

There were a number of interviewees who spoke about the first six months as a settling in stage which provided a foundation from which to build upon in the months to follow. CA4 commented that it was "*six months of a transition nearly before I was handed*

everything I was going to be doing going forward" which was supported by CA3 who talked about *"building on that six months and you get settled in"*. It would appear that the six-month date is a milestone timeframe by which a CA is assessed for the role. While it has not been mentioned in interviews to date, this is anecdotally supported by the many employers who incorporate six-month probationary periods into employment contracts.

These phases of transition can be viewed through the theoretical lens of Nicholson's transition cycle theory which purports that career transitions move through a cycle of preparation; encounter; adjustment and stabilisation (Nicholson, 1987). It is clear that the CAs interviewed referred to milestone timeframes in their transitions which are attributed as: pre-transition; early days of the transition, first three months and four to six months before stabilisation is reached beyond six months. However, it would appear that these timeframes identified do not fit neatly within Nicholson's theory. This is on the basis that when viewing the transition through the employers' perspective there would appear to be an additional assessment phase after the three-month adjustment period whereby HM1 speaks of *"going to stretch them further"* after three months before reaching the stabilisation phase. This suggests that there may be two distinct phases to Nicholson's adjustment phase from the HM perspective which are termed as grounding and assessing phases in this paper. This would imply that CAs may experience five phases of transition as opposed to the four stages proposed in Nicholson's theory and this observation will be explored further and discussed in the next paper.

6.2 Theme 2 - CA and HM perspectives on industry roles

There are very clear differences emerging from the interviews in terms of the roles in practice versus the roles in industry with both CAs and HMs recognising that these roles did not fully correspond with one another. However, the two groups somewhat differed in their observations of these differences. Both groups identified that practice tends to be more focused on technical accounting skills and have a more statutory and financial accounting focus whereas industry tended to focus more on management accounting. A summary of the views of CAs of practice versus industry is presented below in Table 5.

Table 5 - CAs' view of practice versus industry

	Practice	Industry
Skills focus	CA5 "looking solely at your point in time kind of set of accounts and auditing sets of accounts"	CA3 "there is obviously management accounting versus financial accounting and it is a jump ... a lot of things that you would be doing you wouldn't have done"
Structure of role?	CA2 "They are a lot more structured. Everything is kind of defined and templates and standardised reports. Everything is essentially standardised" CA3 "I was so used to a structured environment"	CA7 "adjusting to the lack of structure and despite the fact that there was a lack of structure there was a high expectation" CA4 "It is definitely less structured"
Procedures and role responsibilities	CA3 "when you are in audit and you are using these work programmes and they actually prescribe what you should do" CA3 "clearly tick box" CA4 "It is a tick the box exercise and you go through checklists"	CA4 "I have created my own list of what I need to do" CA7 "I don't think anyone can actually survive without structure ... so you have to try and create that by speaking to people and by kind of taking your own notes and building it out that way"
Scope of role	CA3 "I found audit very I suppose task orientated, it was just the same stuff over and over"	CA3 "You get into industry and it is so big and there is so much in it and its wide open" CA5 "you suddenly have a lot of responsibility"
Business acumen	CA5 "if you are on an audit or preparing someone's set of accounts you are only kind of getting into it and you are finishing your job and you move onto the next one"	CA5 "one of the challenges is getting a real depth of knowledge of the company"
CPD	CA6 "you had you know your CPD built in"	CA6 "In industry it is maybe a little bit more like the onus is on you to do your CPD"
Culture	CA1 "coming from [practice firm] as well you were kind of in a culture where everyone was sort of at the same age category and going through the same process together"	CA1 "it was a big change in terms of culture ... when you moved into industry you had ... an older age demographic, and they were a lot more settled, people who had been at the job for years. So, it was a different dynamic"
Social aspect	CA3 "I worked with a lot of people my own age so there would be a big gang of us and there would be that social aspect of it" CA4 "From a social side, you know it is a different demographic ... You are looking at people in their mid-twenties, like there are a lot of Thursday nights and Friday nights drinks and nights out"	CA3 "I felt the social side is sort of a little bit lacking here" CA4 "In [Company Name], it is very much like do your work and go home and that's it. There is not much kind of outside of that, so from that point of view it was I suppose a hard transition"

The most notable observation from Table 5 is that CAs appear to struggle with what they describe as a lack of structure in industry (See Memo 4 in Appendix 5). CA3 talked of coming from an audit environment where *"I have probably a very structured auditor head on me"* and in a sense, there is an element that they are told what to do, when to do it and how to do it with CA4 describing it as a *"tick the box exercise"* where *"you go through checklists"*. In contrast, HM2 offered the following observation:

... forget being an auditor, stop being an auditor and stop thinking like an auditor is the one thing that I beat into every newly qualified coming in, is that you are not an auditor.

CA7 suggests industry is about *"having to come up with what you are going to do and what you are going to spend your time on during the day"* while at the same time *"fulfilling the expectation"* that exists from the employer. CA7 described the lack of structure as *"blurry guidelines"* while CA3 remarked it was *"like just being ready for anything"*. This lack of structure, lack of procedures and checklists appeared to be an area of anguish for many of the CAs. However, this is an area that transitioning CAs may need to cope with, as HM2 remarks there is a *"lesson that not everything in life is structured"*. A second source of major change for the CA centres around the cultural and social aspect of practice versus industry (See Memo 5 in Appendix 5). This was identified by both CA3 and CA4 as a source of challenge in their transition due to the more mature age demographic in industry with CA4 noting *"I am probably the youngest in the office by about ten years"*. The lack of an out-of-work social interaction with work colleagues in their new work environment was also identified by the same participants as a difference which impacted their adjustment.

The views of HMs were in some instances different from those of the CAs in that they are more focused on what the role entails and what it means in context of the organisation. As a result, the perceptions of HMs shown in Table 6 below are categorised differently than the perceptions of CAs shown in Table 5 above. A summary of the views of HMs of practice versus industry is presented below in Table 6.

Table 6 - HMs' view of practice versus industry

	Practice	Industry
Skills Focus	<p>HM1 "Technical skills from the point of view of understanding of tax and audit are much more important when you work in practice versus industry"</p> <p>HM1 "I think if you are in practice, you are coming in from working with clients, doing their yearend accounts, doing audits, you are not really part of their teams. I mean you are in to do a job, make sure the guys are meeting controls, but I mean you are not really into a position that allows you to add significant value and influence direction of the company"</p>	<p>HM1 "roles in management accounting ... more working with the guys in production and senior managers looking after operations"</p> <p>HM1 "I think the finance team as a whole will be a lot more clued into what is happening in the wider organisation"</p> <p>HM2 "they need to know how to talk to a business or talk to the respective departments within a business, so they need to understand what they are doing"</p> <p>HM2 "more management accounting focus within industry"</p>
Looking back vs. looking forward	<p>HM1 "when they are in practice they would be working on historical information"</p> <p>HM2 "they are always backward looking"</p>	<p>HM2 "It is much more about the commercial aspects of the business rather than the retrospective"</p> <p>HM1 "you are very much part of a bigger team when you are in industry ... be seen to other departments that you can add value"</p>
Role Type	<p>HM2 "Challenger role"</p> <p>HM2 "Financial accounting focus of an auditor"</p>	<p>HM2 "You are going ... to a very much a support role and a lot of them, in my experience, a lot of them find that adjustment difficult to handle"</p> <p>HM2 "You are not an auditor"</p> <p>HM2 "should be more business partners"</p>
Work prioritisation	<p>HM2 "they tend to have the mentality that I need to work all the hours under the sun, the real you know if I am not seen in the office it is a bad thing"</p>	<p>HM2 "It is a prioritisation thing as well"</p>
Detail vs. big picture	<p>HM2 "There is an element that accountants are so particular, and we need to have everything spot on and everything must reconcile to you know within a hundred euro"</p> <p>HM2 "they are also always very particular, and things need to be spot on and correct"</p>	<p>HM2 "It is just that it is a commercial sense and a business awareness of what is important and what is not important"</p>

Although only two HMs have been interviewed to date, HMs perceive that there are significant differences between the roles of accountants in practice versus industry. HM2 perceived that a change in mind-set was required of the CA in order to advance in industry stating:

I always instil that finance people should be more business partners rather than accountants and they need to know how to talk to a business or talk to the respective departments within a business.

The emphasis from HM2 was to "*forget being an auditor*" in a "*challenger role*" focused on controls and accuracy. Based on the comments outlined in Table 6, they appear to want "*business partners*" who have a "*commercial sense and a business awareness*" that "*can add value*" to the organisation.

6.3 Theme 3 - Supports in developing skills

Throughout the interviews, there was many suggestions of supports that may be used to aid a CA in developing the skills required as they transition to industry. These supports include: CAI training, mentoring, in-house supports, CPD training, utilising networks, inductions and structured reviews. Each of these supports are now discussed in turn.

6.3.1 CAI training

The level of training provided by CAI was commended by both CAs and HMs. The scenario based multi-disciplinary case study was particularly praised in its attempt to prepare students for roles in industry. In addition, CAs who chose the 'advanced performance management elective' suggested greater satisfaction with the exams in preparation for roles in industry. However, CA3 who chose this elective suggested that this choice may be a "*controversial one because they wanted me to do audit and so I had to kind of push that one through*". While the overall view of CAI training was positive, there were also some potential opportunities for improvement identified. HM2 suggested that CAI training should be "*more tailored towards business*" while HM1 concurred expecting more "*focus on industry*". HM2 "*would prefer to see more training in business*" due to the profession being "*detached from the business real world*".

6.3.2 Mentoring

The use of formal mentoring was sparse with only one CA identified as having used this support in their transition. Instead, most CAs interviewed appeared to favour informal

chats with their own peers and families rather than gaining insights from a more experienced professional. While few CAs engaged with formal mentors, there was broad support in its use in supporting accountants through the transition. CA2 suggested that it is helpful to understand what *"somebody else has been through and benefitting from their experience"*. HM2 believed that mentoring should be a more organic process rather than the *"matchmaking"* process that CA1 use. HM2 perceived that *"it should be somebody that you know and who you have confidence in"*. This was supported by CA6 who commented:

I think it would depend on who the mentor was, how much time they had, and you know how much interest they have even or the experience they have of the role that you are going into.

These comments suggest that while mentoring may be seen as a useful support to CAs, care needs to be taken to identify the correct mentor and there is also a question as to whether CAs would engage with such a mentoring support. This will be explored further should the matter arise in further interviews.

6.3.3 In-house support

The most frequently offered internal supports to CAs was first, arranging meetings with key stakeholders and internal customers of that role and second, providing opportunity to sit next to someone within the organisation who took them through the tasks of their role. Both of these supports were widespread in the interviews, but it would appear that these supports were more informal and ad-hoc in most instances as evidenced by CA7 who suggested that *"it wasn't timetabled or scheduled and it was very much like when we come to it we will cover it"*. CA2 who is in a financial services position for nine months at the date of interview had not yet met their direct manager in person as they were located overseas and in a different time-zone. These observations would suggest that the expectation of such companies may be to place onus on these young professionals to take ownership of their own roles without the provision of much support with CA7 suggesting you need an *"ability to come up with your own things to do during the day"*. Support in large firms in both manufacturing and financial services seemed to favour in-house online training modules which are designed to provide the procedure for specific tasks. HM2 recognised more resource capacity in larger firms which allowed provision of

development opportunities through *"in-house CPD and learning and development"* which was perceived as a challenge for SMEs.

6.3.4 CPD training

Many of the CAs that were interviewed have yet to engage in CPD courses, which may be due to the infancy of their post-qualified career and that they have just been through a rigorous professional examination process. However, it may also be due to the unfamiliarity with the requirements of the CPD cycle with HM2 suggesting that CAs *"should definitely be managed through a transition of how to manage their CPD"* while also calling for the *"need to ensure that your CPD is relevant to what you do"*. This new paradigm of CPD ownership was reiterated by CA6 who stated that: *"I think maybe in industry it is maybe a little bit more like the onus is on you to do your CPD"*.

The use of CPD as a tool in a CA's transition to industry was something that many were in favour of but there was very little uniformity in how such a course be constructed as illustrated in Table 7 below. While uniformity may be may be a challenge, it does not deter from the perceived need for some form of transition CPD training for those individuals making the adjustment from practice to industry.

Table 7 - Perception of CPD in relation to transition from practice to industry

Interviewee	Perception in using CPD as a transition support
CA1	<i>"A one- or two-day course that covers all the areas required in a transition would be ... beneficial"</i>
CA3	<i>"I have never heard of an event ... to understand the move into industry"</i>
CA4	<i>"It doesn't have to be a full day"</i>
CA5	<i>"Having an evening with employers would be something that may be very useful"</i>
CA6	<i>"I think if it was tailored to certain types of industry roles or different sectors ... it could definitely be a help"</i>
CA7	<i>"I think there is scope for people doing courses to understand industry from the point of view of the front office which is a ... different view but adds a lot of context"</i>
HM1	<i>"I think the CPD is quite vague in what you should be covering at different stages of your career, so I think a more structured guideline from the accountancy body would help"</i>
HM2	<i>"I think that transition across from being a student to a member probably needs a little bit of focus around it"</i>

It would appear that support for a CPD course to aid a CA transition from practice to industry is widespread based upon the above comments. The form and content of such a course will be explored further in future interviews.

6.3.5 Networks

The importance of building relationships and networks has been evident in all of the interviews to date both from the point of view of the CA and HM. Many of the CAs interviewed used their network as a support in particular in advance of their transition to industry but also throughout the early stages of their new role. Some CAs noted having contacts or personal acquaintances in their new employment who seemed to act as informal mentors. These were people who were either former ex-colleagues from their practice firm or contacts made while previously auditing their new employer in industry.

CAs were also conscious of the need to develop relationships with their new colleagues in industry with CA4 stating that one needs to "*get to know the people around you*" while perceiving "*it is all about having friends in work*". The HMs also stressed this as important, but the focus was building on relationships outside of finance and understanding how to communicate with non-financial "*business partners*".

6.3.6 Structured inductions

There was an inconsistency in the use of structured inductions in the interviews held to date with many CAs expected to take ownership of their role immediately with very little support or training. This was particularly evident in the SME and financial services sectors. HM2's approach is to "*throw them in at the deep end*" who also admitted to being "*not actually very good on the support side*". In contrast, it appeared that a more structured training plan was evident in the larger firms with CA1 explaining this process as follows:

They had a good training plan in place that I followed for probably the first month or two and then obviously it petered off as I got more familiar with the role, but they brought me through each process and I sat with a number of different people to gain an understanding of the different areas of the business.

This approach seems to have helped CA1 in settling into their new role and supported the employee's level of satisfaction with the employer. HM1 also supported having a structured induction work plan stating:

You would have a clear work plan set out for them for the first probably three to six months and you would work with them on a weekly basis on that to try and understand and get them to see that this is the requirements

of the areas where they need to do, I suppose a bit of work on, like researching the role and responsibility and the key deadlines they have to meet and outputs required in the role. So that would involve weekly meetings and maybe more frequently if necessary.

HM1 suggested that in addition to the structured induction that an open-door policy is of use stating "my door is always open if people want to come in" so this dual approach of both structured and unstructured support was perceived as important in the development of the CA throughout their transition. It is not yet clear if a particular approach works best and this will be explored further in Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion'.

6.4 Theme 4 - Fit with role and culture

The concept of fit was evident in the discussions with both the CAs and HMs referring to the importance of fit to the role and fit with the work environment or culture of the organisation. This was captured by HM1 who commented: "I think a key trait is the fit for the company ... and the culture and how the person will adjust and adapt into that environment". CA5 stressed that "the most important thing is to find a company that is the right fit" before making the move to industry. However, others recognised that the fit of the individual with the role was impossible to identify until the person had been hired. CA6 commented "I don't think you know if you fit a company or a role until you get in there" while HM2 concluded that he had:

... actually been through a cycle where I have let somebody go because you know that they are just not going to get there and that is probably not a factor of them per se. It may be a factor of the role or the position and their fit to it and look some accountants are much better suited to staying in practice and being the technical, proficient auditor or technical accountant that they might be.

This observation suggests that a qualified and proficient Chartered Accountant who is technically competent may not entirely fit a position as an industry-based accountant based on the skills and attributes carried forward from practice. To mitigate this potential issue, HM1 believed that one should hire a CA who is a close fit for the role and address any deficiencies with training stating:

I think the clear thing is to look at the job role that the person is coming into and to identify their existing skill set versus what you need. You would

ideally hope that they would have a lot of what you need and you would put training in place be that a combination of in-house and sending them on courses.

This idea of partial fit was also identified by CA1 who understood the need to adapt to the new environment and culture stating:

I think it was quite difficult just to get your head around that different culture, that different environment and I suppose coming from [Big 4 company] you were in a culture where everyone was sort of the same age category and going through the same process together whereas when you moved into industry you had a lot more, I suppose maybe an older age demographic.

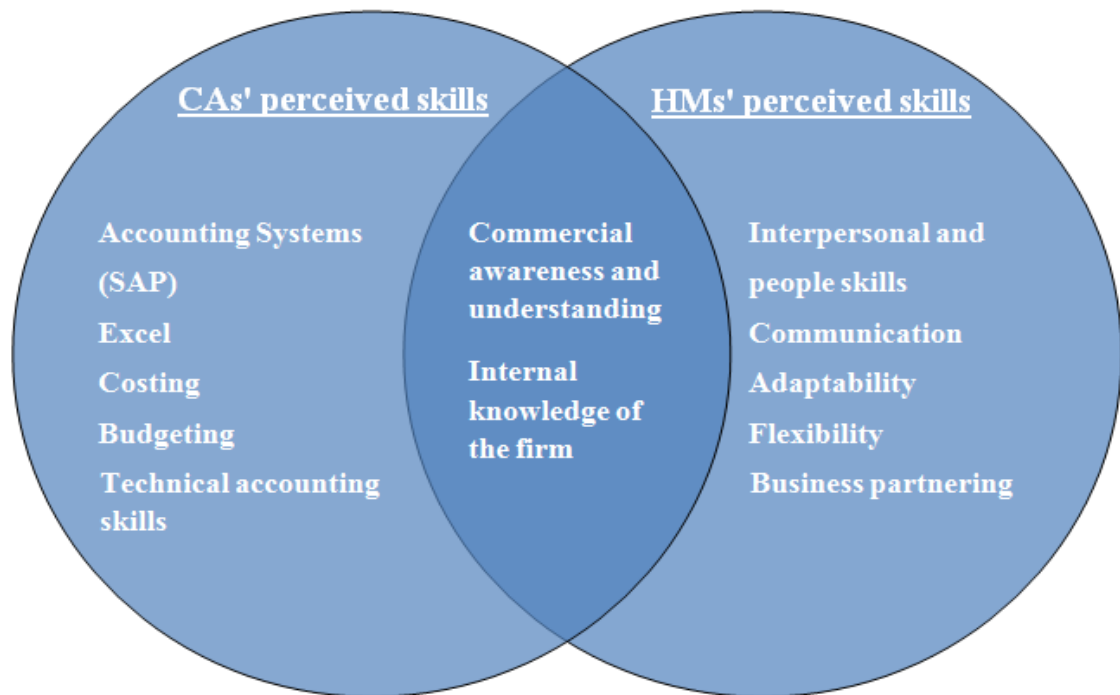
CA2 expanded further in terms of adapting to the culture of a new organisation suggesting "I suppose that culture that they have, you are definitely trying to almost mirror it and see if you can fit in, you know be accepted".

This concept of fit is viewed through the theoretical lens of person-job fit theory which refers to the fit between the individual's abilities and the demands of their role (Edwards, 1991). This also leads to the question then of what HMs view as the necessary skills and abilities for the demands of a role in industry and how these compare to the CAs making the move to determine why in some cases technically proficient accountants do not always succeed in industry roles. The next theme discussed addresses the perceptions of what both CAs and HMs see as the skills most important to develop for industry-based roles.

6.5 Theme 5 - Skills gap

Based on interviews to date, it would appear that there is a divergence between the skills that CAs perceive are most relevant for industry and those that HMs perceive as being most important (See Memo 3 in Appendix 5). Figure 1 outlines the skills that each group perceive as being required for industry and in which the CA needs further development:

Figure 1 - Perceived skills in need of development for industry roles



There would appear to be a focus by CAs on the requirement of hard skills such as information technology, technical accounting ability and specific management accounting tasks. This is in contrast to the HMs' focus on soft skills such as interpersonal skills, communication and being able to adapt and change. HM1 eluded to a need for the CA to become a "*business partner*" and have the ability to interpret meaning from data for stakeholders within the business. As highlighted in Figure 1, both groups appear to agree in relation to the need to understand the business fully and to have a wider commercial awareness and understanding. However, it seems clear that an emerging theme based on the data collected to date is the gap in the perception between the two groups in terms of what skills are most needed in an industry-based role. This finding will be explored further as the interviewing process continues as it is felt that it is very early to conclude on this finding given that only two HMs have been analysed at this stage of the research.

6.6 Theme 6 - Employer and employee levels of satisfaction

Throughout the interviews there were indications of satisfaction and frustration from both employers and employees of each other during the CAs' transition to industry. This section discusses the HM's level of satisfaction with the CA and the CA's level of satisfaction with the employer in industry.

6.6.1 Employers' level of satisfaction with employee

The HMs interviewed noted that audit-based CAs are targeted for industry roles. HM2 commented:

I have always hired audit trainees so that in itself always poses a problem as they are always backward looking, and they are also always very particular, and things need to be spot on and correct.

HM2 also perceives CAs as "a bit introverted" and believed "it is very hard to find a very outgoing, warm graduate and especially when they come from an audit mentality". This appears to suggest that while HMs see value in recruiting ex-auditors, there is a process of transition before becoming fully satisfied with these new recruits. HM1 purported that:

Most of the employees transferring from practice to industry are extremely diligent, extremely intelligent...their technical ability is extremely, extremely strong, they really understand the P&L and balance sheet.

Soft skills such as communication and interpersonal skills were identified as areas for improvement by the HMs. This is supported by HM1 who stated that: "I think it is more the soft side" and HM2: "you probably don't have the essential soft skills that you need" which highlight that HMs feel that there is room for improvement in this area.

6.6.2 Employees' level of satisfaction with employer

There were some clear differences in terms of the CAs' satisfaction with their employers with some very satisfied and some less so. CA3 noted that "the work-life balance is so good here" while CA4 states "it feels like they are trusting you to get your job done in the manner in which it needs to be done". In contrast, others expressed some dissatisfaction with the manner in which they are expected to pick things up by themselves with CA7 stating "it is more unstructured and there are no reference guides". CA4 expressed frustration with the role and "found it very boring work and repetitive work". CA4 also encountered problems in accessing the tools required to complete tasks identifying that it "took me maybe two months to get access to SAP, so you know like I couldn't do anything and that was frustrating". CA6 expressed difficulty with new work colleagues:

I would have definitely felt that there was resistance from say legacy workers as such that have been there for longer and you know, I don't

know if they took advantage of the role transitioning to someone else that they kind of thought oh let's see what I can get away with not telling this one or you know maybe trying to get you to do more work for them that wouldn't previously have been done.

This theme of levels of satisfaction is viewed through the lens of the theory of work adjustment, which is concerned with 'satisfaction of the individual with the work environment and satisfaction of the work environment with the individual' (Dawis and Lofquist, 1981). Based on the discussion above, from a HM perspective it would appear that personal attributes may influence the level of satisfaction with the CA. From a CA perspective it would appear to be the levels of support provided by the employer and new work colleagues that influence satisfaction. It is clear that both CAs and HMs have varying degrees of satisfaction with each other and this may impact on how CAs can develop the necessary skills and competencies during the transition. This will form part of the discussion in the next paper.

The following section of the paper utilises the thematical observations presented above in the preparation of an early stage framework that informs the transition of a CA from practice to industry. This will be followed by concluding remarks and next steps in the research.

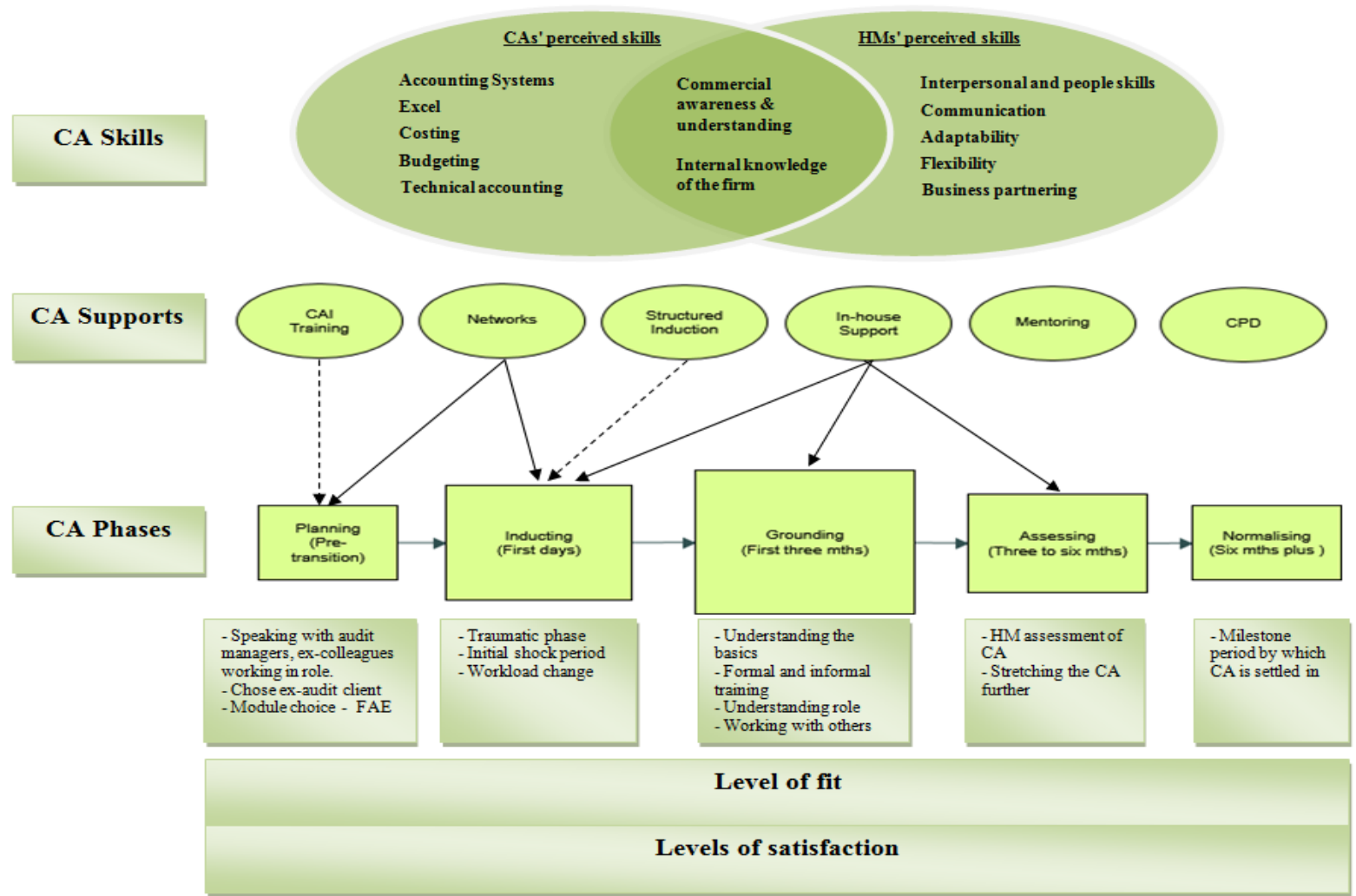
7.0 Early visualisation of the framework development

One of the objectives of this study is to develop a framework that informs the transition of a CA from practice to industry. An early stage framework has been developed based upon the emerging themes from the interviews held to date. The framework, which is presented in Figure 2 below is centred around the skills that CAs require in industry, supports that are provided to help develop these skills and the phases of transition that the CA goes through when moving from practice to industry. All of these factors influence the level of fit of the CA with the new role and the culture in industry, as well as influencing the level of satisfaction of both the HM and CA with one another.

A number of supports, which have been outlined previously in this paper, are included in the framework which are used by CAs in development of skills required for the role along with helping the CA adapt to the culture of the industry organisation. Skills required of industry that are in need of development are also presented. However, there is a divergence in opinion as to what these skills may be and a deeper exploration of this

aspect is required prior to presenting the final framework. The phases of transition are also clearly emerging as important in the development and growth of the CA in becoming a fully functional professional in an industry role. An early attempt has been made to translate these timeframes captured by the interviews to date into meaningful phases of a CAs' transition. These phases are currently categorised into the following stages: planning; inducting; grounding; assessing and normalising. An early stage visualisation of the framework capturing the above comments is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 - Initial framework to inform the CA transition from practice to industry



8.0 Next steps and concluding remarks

This paper has been limited to the analysis of a small number of interviews and as such, it is deemed that "data saturation" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 202) has not yet been reached and further interviews are required. In addition, the initial interviews have been held solely with CAs and HMs. However, the sampling strategy chosen is to consider multiple stakeholder views. This strategy is considered essential due to the exploratory nature of the study (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, consultation will be held with other groups including two individuals from CAI involved in the training and development of trainee accountants, a CPD provider and a recruitment expert in the area of accounting. This multiple stakeholder perspective will serve to ensure alternative voices are heard in relation to the CA transition process which will aid in exploring all viewpoints.

The data from the study to date has revealed a number of emerging themes including: the phases of the transition into industry; the CA and HM perspectives on industry; employer's and employee's levels of satisfaction; fit with the role and culture; skills gap perceptions and the supports that can be used to close the gaps in skills required. Each of these themes are guided by theoretical lenses and the use of theoretical pluralism seeks to demonstrate the utility of theory in a field of study that is generally renowned for its under-deployment of theoretical frameworks (McPhail, 2001; Tight, 2004; Haggis 2009; Coady, 2014).

Further findings and discussion of same will be presented in the next Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion' of the DBA Paper Series. At that stage, a deeper analysis and understanding of the existing and forthcoming data will be undertaken which will remain cognisant and deferent to the theoretical lenses that guide the study. In line with the pragmatic, utilitarian nature of the research, an output of the study, which will be developed and presented in Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion', will be a framework that will inform CAs making this transition in future. This early stage analysis has identified a number of themes which will be explored in greater depth as the research progresses. It is anticipated that refinement of analysis completed to date along with the completion of the data gathering will illuminate insights which will help guide this final framework which may aid the professional development of accountants making this transition in the future.

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Appendix 1 - Interview guide for CAs

Date:		Time:	
Interviewee			

Background to the study

Explain the background to the study and the reasons why it is of interest.
Explain that the participants' perceptions are being sought and their contribution is highly valued.
Reminder of confidentiality/anonymity terms and/or other relevant ethical matters.

Background of the participant

Q1:	Who did you train with?
Q2:	How long did you remain there post qualification?
Q3:	When did you move to industry?
Q4:	Is your current employer an ex-client?
Q5:	If so, how did this relate to your transition?

Transition to industry

Q6:	How did you find the transition from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Why did you feel this?
Q7:	How did you prepare in advance for the transition to industry?
Prompt	Please expand giving examples.
Q8:	How was your job commencement supported by your new employer?
Prompt:	What elements of support were you satisfied with and worked well?
Prompt:	What didn't work so well?

Q9:	What do you feel were the main challenges you encountered in making the transition to industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q10:	How were these challenges overcome or how are you currently overcoming these challenges?
Prompt:	Please expand giving examples.
Q11:	What do you feel was the main support in helping you make the transition?
Prompt:	Explain why this was the case.

Skills/competencies developed in practice relevant for industry

Q12:	How do you perceive CAI training prepared you for a role in industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q13:	Did you find any of the skills that you developed while training in practice were directly transferrable to your role in industry?
Prompt:	Why so?

Skills/competencies in industry

Q14:	Did you perceive that further skills were needed for your role in industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q15:	How did you develop competency in these skills?
Prompt:	Please provide examples.

Maintaining skills/competencies

Q16:	How do you maintain the development of key skills?
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Prompt:	Any examples?
Q17:	How do you view CPD training in relation to transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q18:	How do you view mentoring in relation to transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q19:	Do you have a mentor?
Prompt:	If yes - tell me about your mentoring experience and how it works for you

Managing skill development in future transitions

Q20:	What skills do you perceive are in most need of development for accountants transitioning from practice to industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q21:	Finally, is there any advice that you would give to a CA making the transition from practice to industry in the future?
Prompt:	Explain why. Any further advice?

Other issues

Is there anything that you perceive as relevant to our discussion that you would like to add?	
Thank you for your time.	Reassurance of anonymity/confidentiality
Inform the respondents that they will be provided with the transcripts and be given access to the executive summary if they so desire.	

Appendix 2 - Interview guide for hiring manager

Date:		Time:	
Interviewee			

Background to the study

Explain the background to the study and the reasons why it is of interest.
Explain that the participants' perceptions are being sought and their contribution is highly valued.
Reminder of confidentiality/anonymity terms and/or other relevant ethical matters.

Background of the interviewee

Q1:	Are you a member of an accountancy body?
Prompt:	If yes, please confirm the accountancy body you are a member of?
Q2:	Who did you train with? (Industry or Practice?)
Prompt:	If practice, when did you transition to industry?

Transition to industry

Q3:	How do you prepare in advance for CAs joining your company?
Prompt:	Expand with examples.
Q4:	How do you manage the induction of CAs into your business?
Prompt:	Please expand in detail.
Q5:	How do you support CAs in the first six months of their new role?
Prompt:	Expand with examples.
Q6:	What do you feel are the main training and development needs of CAs transitioning from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?

Q7:	How do you satisfy the training needs for CAs?
Prompt:	In house or external? Provide details.
Q8:	What do you see as the main challenges involved for CAs making the transition from practice?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q9:	How are these challenges overcome?
Prompt:	Please provide examples.

Skills/competencies in industry

Q10:	How do you feel CAI training prepares trainee accountants for industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q11:	What are the skills that you look for in an individual when hiring a CA in your industry?
Prompt:	Clarify why so?
Q12:	Do you feel that the CAs hired are competent in these skills when you hire them?
Prompt:	If not clarify why for each skill mentioned.
Q13:	How do you help the CA develop a competency in these skills?
Prompt:	Please expand.

CPD, mentoring and maintaining skills/competencies

Q14:	How do you keep your accounting staff up to date with the development of key skills?
Prompt:	Please provide examples.
Q15:	How do you view CPD training in relation to the transition into industry?

Prompt:	Why so?
Q16:	How do you view mentoring in relation to the transition into industry?
Prompt:	Why so?
Q17:	Do you act as a mentor to CAs?
Prompt:	If yes - tell me about your mentoring experience?
Prompt:	If no - do you think CAs would benefit from having a mentor?

Managing skill development in future transitions

Q18:	What are the key skills that you see as vital to the success of accountants in Industry?
Prompt:	Why do you feel this?
Q19:	Finally, is there any advice that would you give to a CA making the transition from practice to industry in the future?
Prompt:	Explain why. Any further advice?

Other issues

Is there anything that you perceive as relevant to our discussion that you would like to add?	
Thank you for your time.	Reassurance of anonymity/confidentiality
Inform the respondents that they will be provided with the transcripts and be given access to the executive summary if they so desire.	

Appendix 3 - Information sheet

Researcher's name: Alan Murphy

Project title: “Exploring the transition of newly qualified Chartered Accountants from practice to industry”

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to specifically answer the question of how newly qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) develop the skills and competencies which will assist them in the transition from practice to industry-based roles. The study seeks to also address:

- To understand how CA's skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.
- To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation phases of transition.
- To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry

Why am I being asked to participate?

As this study seeks to understand the skills and competencies of CAs transitioning from practice to industry, it is appropriate that individuals who have recently experienced this change in career along with hiring managers of such individuals are interviewed.

Other viewpoints are also being sought from stakeholders such as Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) training representatives, a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provider and an accountant recruiting firm. These individuals are being asked to participate as they are experts in their fields which directly relate to the purpose of the research.

Do I have to participate?

No, participation is voluntary, and you will have the option to withdraw at any point from the study. If you choose to participate you will be asked to sign an informed consent form.

What would participation in the study mean for me?

Participation on the study will involve an interview which will take approximately one hour. You will be asked several questions about skills and competencies required of CAs transitioning from practice to industry-based positions. The interview will be recorded, with your permission, in order to accurately capture the conversation. The recordings will

be transcribed, but anonymity is ensured as your name and the name of your organisation will not be included in the transcription.

What are the benefits of participating?

There are no direct benefits to the participant in this research. However, the study seeks to enhance understanding of skills and competencies required of Chartered Accountants transitioning to industry and how these can be best developed. An objective of the study is to develop a framework which may be of benefit to Chartered Accountants that will make the transition from practice to industry in the future.

What are the risks associated with participating?

The risks associated with participating in the study are limited. You may be asked to provide details of difficulties in your own transition from practice to industry which may cause discomfort. If you wish, you may also skip any question, but continue to participate in the remainder of the study.

Can I withdraw at any point?

Yes, you may withdraw at any point and have any data you provided destroyed.

How will data gathered be managed and used in the study?

All information collected in this study will be kept completely anonymous and will adhere to the Data Protection Act's (Ireland) 1988 and 2003. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. You will be assigned a random numerical code. The code key and the data will be destroyed within five years of the date of completion of the study. All data provided will be used for the purpose of this study as outlined above and may also be used as the basis for future published articles. Anonymity is ensured as your name and the name of your organisation will not be included in any publications.

Can I verify aspects of the work and view a summary of the findings?

Yes, you will be able to verify all information that is transcribed as part of the interview. A copy of the transcript will be typed up and returned to you in order to provide an opportunity to retract any information provided.

Appendix 4 - Consent form

I have read and understood the information sheet provided and by choosing to give consent:

(please tick the box)

6) I am voluntarily participating in this study.

7) I grant permission to record my interview.

8) I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any point.

9) I understand that my own and my organisation's details will be anonymised.

10) I understand that the anonymised data will be cited in the project/thesis and other publications.

Signature

Participant _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix 5 - Sample research memos

Memo 1- 23/05/2017 20:47 - Lessons learned from pilot study with CA:

The following were the lessons learned from the CA:

1. There is a need to ensure that the person is still in their first role in industry. In the case of the pilot while the person interviewed was within the specified parameters for the sample, she mentioned after the interview that she was moving between examples from her first and second roles in industry. Furthermore, she felt that the question relating to is your current employer an ex-audit client suggested that you are still in your first role post practice.
2. I found it difficult when I got to the mentoring question not to phrase question in a leading manner. Care will need to be taken in interviews and if asked in a leading manner, care will need to be taken in using any data collected in such cases.
3. The participant suggested that the two mentoring questions should be switched around with how do you mentor first, followed by do you have a mentor.
4. She was positive on the need for the study and mentioned post interview that it can be a bit of culture shock even when you have previously audited the company, although that does make it a little easier. I think these comments also came through in the interview.
5. I felt that the participant did not require a significant amount of probing but reflecting back and after re-reading the interview, I could have possibly done a little more probing throughout the interview.
6. In terms of the questions, they seemed to flow well, and the participant also felt this with the exception of the mentoring questions.
7. She did mention that she felt she repeated herself a bit. However, I think that this is positive as it means that we get to the root perceptions of the individual which are reinforced throughout the interview.
8. It was noted that the information sheet needs to be updated for the revised objectives of the study as presented in Paper 2 'Methodology'.

Memo 2 - 24/05/2017 12:45 - Lessons learned from pilot study with HM:

The following were the observations and lessons learned from the HM:

1. Overall, the response from the interviewee was positive and the HM was happy to help out on the pilot. While the HM never thought about it too much before, it was mentioned that it was a nice niche that was felt maybe did require some research.
2. It was suggested that the interview was just about right in length and was not overly onerous in relation to a professional's time.
3. In terms of the questions, the participant felt that they flowed well but did mention that I should try and not lead the witness so to speak.
4. The participant mentioned that he found that he was repeating answers a little and felt that the probing questions were sometimes difficult to answer. The repetitive nature of the answers is to my mind a good thing as it means I am getting a full exploration of the participant's perceptions.
5. I personally felt that the probes gave further enlightenment in many cases. In addition, I believe I used more probes in this interview than the first pilot interview.
6. The participant suggested that most people would consider that the first six to twelve months is the transition phase and he mentioned that there are further development stages in a person's career that may also be worth exploring. However, I would believe this to be outside the scope of the study.
7. I found that maybe I should have a prepared introduction and conclusion to the interviews so that I do not miss anything relating to anonymity and ethics. Furthermore, in my opinion, it may be more professional to have these few sentences prepared and standardised across all interviews.
8. The HM suggested that views of other accountants may be as valid and less biased.

Memo 3 - 23/07/2017 20:35 - Specific Skills Identification

I felt the need to write this memo to provide an understanding of why I have included specific skills as nodes in my analysis. I first of all included generic nodes of skills required in industry, skills needing development and skills developed in practice. However, it has become clear that I need to delve deeper into each of the skills mentioned

by the interviewees. This requirement is being driven by the emergence of very clear differences of opinion between the industry-based hiring managers and the CAs in relation to what skills they believe need to be developed and in terms of what skills they feel the CA's already possess.

Memo 4 - 23/07/2017 20:40 - Structure versus unstructured

It has become apparent as I re-read the transcripts of the interviewees to date that there is a lot of talk about the structure of practice versus the unstructured nature of industry. This was a little bit surprising for me to identify and I did not anticipate this observation before commencing the interviews. However, it has become clear to me that many CAs have called this out as a difference between practice and industry.

It may be a case that this adds to the adjustment required of CAs when they move to industry and potentially they are surprised by this fact.

Memo 5 - 23/07/2017 20:47 - Culture Change

A surprising outcome from initial interviews held was the change in the social side of work that CAs encounter when they move from practice to industry. This is an outcome that I am surprised to see be called out by the CA, but it is clear that they feel they have moved from being in a company with people their own age which clearly has a social element with work colleagues to one that is void of this social element.

Some CAs have identified that they have moved into more mature cultures and one in which they are sometimes the youngest employees. While this observation does not relate to skills and competencies it is relevant from the point of view of the adjustment from practice to industry.

Memo 6 - 24/07/2017 12:45 - Stages of transition

A guiding theoretical lens in the study is Nicholson's transition cycle theory so it should not be surprising that the discussion should relate to different phases of the transition. This is very evident in the interviews held to date with many CAs talking about three month and six-month periods or relaying how they adjusted in the first week.

This initially resulted in my segregation of these time frames as they were called out by the interviewees into five categories:

1. Pre-transition
2. First Week
3. First 3 months
4. Up to 6 months
5. 6 months plus

I have now created one parent node that each of these nodes link up to in order to try and structure the data a little better.

Memo 7 - 01/09/2017 09:30 - Naming the stages of transition

After the reading and re-reading of the interviews held at this point, there are clear indications of time periods that are important to both the CA and the HM. There has been much mention of two months, three months, six months, the first few days and before the move. It seems that the interviewees mention the periods in time rather than describing them. It would seem somewhat important therefore to attempt to categorise these time periods based on some of the responses received from the interviewees.

Pre-transition - This really appears to be what you could describe as a **planning phase**. Whether or not the CA's realise it, they have made a decision to leave their current employer, identify a role that they believe may suit them, prepared a CV, talked to people in advance of their move, prepare for and completed an interview before finally making the move. Each of these activities require preparation and planning and occur prior to entering industry.

Early days of transition - The first week or first number of days are really the **inducting phase** when CAs gain their first experience of life outside of their practice firm. It was very clear that this phase was a bit of an emotional rollercoaster. I will try and understand how this initial inducting phase differs from the inducting phase into their practice firm as one would have expected that this should not have been as big a deal as it is given that these CAs have already transitioned from University to practice.

First three months - I have called the first three months the **grounding phase** which was a term used by CA1. Grounding seems to be an appropriate word as it seems to be all about building up the basics of the role in this period. It seems that this grounding can be two or three months for some while others seemed to suggest that it may have taken them six months.

Four to six months - There appears to be some evidence that employers decide to stretch and test CAs during this phase to assess their ability for the role in the longer term. As a result of HM1 suggesting that CAs are stretched further at this stage, I have decided to describe this phase as an **assessing phase**.

Six months plus - While the term normalising was not used by the interviewees, I believe **normalising phase** is a good term to describe this stage as it is at this point where the CA appears to be settled in and falling into a normal routine and as CA4 described "handed everything I was going to do going forward". It would therefore appear things are normalising at this point.

Appendix 6 - Early stage coding nodes

Hierarchical Name
Nodes\Culture & Fit
Nodes\Culture & Fit\Culture
Nodes\Culture & Fit\Fit with role
Nodes\Development of Skills
Nodes\Individual Skills
Nodes\Individual Skills\Business Partnering
Nodes\Individual Skills\Commercial Understanding
Nodes\Individual Skills\Communication
Nodes\Individual Skills\Interpersonal Skills
Nodes\Individual Skills\IT Skills
Nodes\Individual Skills\Technical Accounting Skills
Nodes\Practice Versus Industry
Nodes\Practice Versus Industry\Practice versus Industry differences
Nodes\Practice Versus Industry\Practice versus industry similarities
Nodes\Practice Versus Industry\Structured versus Unstructured
Nodes\Satisfaction
Nodes\Satisfaction\Satisfaction with Employee
Nodes\Satisfaction\Satisfaction with Employer
Nodes\Skills from Practice
Nodes\Skills needing development
Nodes\Skills required in Industry
Nodes\Stages of Transition
Nodes\Stages of Transition\Emotional Context of Move
Nodes\Stages of Transition\First 3 months
Nodes\Stages of Transition\First 6 months
Nodes\Stages of Transition\First Week
Nodes\Stages of Transition\Pre transition Preparation
Nodes\Stages of Transition\Six months plus phase
Nodes\Supports to aid transition
Nodes\Supports to aid transition\CAI Training
Nodes\Supports to aid transition\CPD
Nodes\Supports to aid transition\Induction
Nodes\Supports to aid transition\Mentoring
Nodes\Supports to aid transition\Networks - Importance
Nodes\Supports to aid transition\On Line Training
Nodes\Supports to aid transition\Structured Reviews & Training Plans
Nodes\Supports to aid transition\Supports Provided

Preface to Paper 4 – Findings and discussion

The findings and discussion paper was developed between May 2017 and March 2018 and was presented for external examination in April 2018. Revisions were made based on the examiner's commentary and the final approved submission of the paper is presented in this thesis. In reflecting back to this stage of the research, there was a definite appreciation acquired of the time taken to perform a research study. The interviewing process was a big consumer of time with the researcher completing 28 interviews which took a total of 18 hours and 22 minutes. In addition, there was significant time taken to arrange the interviews and then the time to travel to many of the interviews. This paled in comparison with the approximate 110 hours that it took to transcribe the interviews. However, the researcher found this time to be well spent as it resulted in greater familiarity and intimacy with the data which was beneficial in terms of analysis. A new-found respect was developed for those who perform research on a continuous basis given the arduous nature of data collection and analysis.

This paper itself was an exciting stage of the research process as themes began to emerge from the data. A worry for any DBA researcher is the ability to contribute to both theory and practice and while the tentative practical implications of the study began to emerge early on in the process, contribution to theory was always a worry. There were a number of theoretical lenses being used for the study, but the question was how the findings could contribute further to theory. Whilst the initially identified theoretical lenses were considered in the qualitative analysis process, it became apparent that particular lenses lent more explanatory utility in the analysis and in the illumination of the findings. It was identified that Nicholson's transition cycle theory (Nicholson, 1964) and the person-job and person-culture fit theories represented and informed the experiences of the interviewees. After much reflection regarding theory, it was found that the theory of work adjustment and neo-correspondence theory which were presented in Paper 1 'Conceptual Paper' were much less relevant and as a result have been less influential in the discussions presented in Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion'. Neo-correspondence theory was initially considered relevant given its premise of alignment of skills between those acquired by CAs and those desired by HMs and also its prior use in accounting education skills research. The initial thinking of the researcher was to lean towards quantitative methods and this theory supported this viewpoint. As the research progressed it became clear that

phases of transition and fit with culture and job became the predominant themes. Likewise, the theory of work adjustment became less relevant as the research unfolded. The researcher was not speaking to CAs and their specific HMs and therefore it was difficult to gauge levels of satisfaction between employees and employers on this basis. Furthermore, discussion relating to satisfaction was less frequent than some of the other themes found. The overall consideration of theory potential was fully considered by the researcher at this stage of the research.

Much of the commentary received from the examiners related to structure, finessing between sections and to provide greater detail in the introduction. These changes were made but the elaboration of the introduction may result in the reader of the entire thesis finding the introduction section to be a little repetitive with previous papers which was for the benefit of the examiners of the individual paper at a particular point in time. Other comments related to expanding on how the findings contribute to theory and how the matrix and model presented in the paper were actually developed and these comments are addressed in the final version of the paper.

A struggle in the completion of this paper was the volume of findings and the length of the initial drafts of the paper which were almost double the acceptable word-count. This may have contributed to the examiner's conclusions regarding structure and lack of sympathy to the reader. It seemed that the presentation of the paper to the examiners allayed a number of the questions that they had identified so the editing process undoubtedly contributed to the examiner's commentary. This high volume of word count in initial drafts also necessitated that choices be made in relation to what findings were most relevant to the research objectives of the study. For example, there were some very interesting findings in relation to perceptions regarding the cosiness of the 'Big 4' and CAI and the model of education that is employed in Chartered Accountancy. While this hegemonic influence is referred to in the paper, it is not a primary finding directly contributing to the research objectives and therefore warranted reduction. The researcher learned the importance of careful editing (Matarese, 2016) to ensure representative quotations were being presented, duplication of data was avoided, and the layout and natural flow of the thesis was not compromised.

Another area that was explored is assessing the benefits of joining an ex-audit client. There were only four of the thirteen CAs interviewed that joined an ex-audit client and these were CA1, CA3, CA6 and CA9 so sample size is an issue in drawing conclusions.

It is evident that CA1, CA3 and CA6 were all found to be in the progressor quadrant of the fit matrix which would suggest that pre-auditing the company is beneficial. However, CA9 was dissatisfied in their role and resided in the conflicted quadrant. This may have been an outlier but due to the sample size it is difficult to draw conclusions as to differences between those who joined ex-audit clients and those who did not. Based on this sample limitation it is appropriate that this is included as an area for further study in Section 3 of this thesis.

As the researcher continued through the interviewing process with the CAs, common themes repeated themselves. A recommendation from the external examiners following Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' was taken on board to interview longer qualified Chartered Accountants (LQs) who had already been through the transition and who had successfully come out the other end. This proved to be a good decision as it was more apparent of what supports worked best to help CAs through the transition. One disappointment is that maybe it would have been interesting to interview some who had not successfully navigated the transition, but it may have been difficult to identify these people and for these people to speak about such an experience.

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Paper 4: Findings and discussion

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Date: 19th March 2018

RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

Paper 4:

Findings and Discussion

An exploration of the transition of newly-qualified Chartered Accountants from practice to industry

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the findings of an exploratory study relating to the transition of newly-qualified Chartered Accountants (CA) from practice to industry and explores how skills and competencies can be developed during the stages of transition. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with: CAs transitioning from practice to industry; industry-based hiring managers (HMs); longer qualified CAs; Chartered Accountants Ireland; a continuing professional development provider and recruiting professionals. Key themes which have emerged include fit with the role and culture; practice to industry transition phases; skills gap; supports in developing skills along with employer and employee satisfaction. The paper also presents a theoretically informed framework which is empirically based to help inform accountants navigating this transition in the future.

Keywords: *Chartered Accountants, transition, person-job fit, person-culture fit, industry, skills, competencies, accounting education*

1.0 Introduction

There has been limited research undertaken in relation to professional accounting education (Byrne and Flood, 2003) and the requirements of industry-based accountants as opposed to practice-based accountants. This has resulted in calls for research into the skills required of industry settings (Lawson *et al.*, 2014; Rebele and St. Pierre, 2015). While most Chartered Accountants' longer-term careers result in employment in industry, the majority of these individuals train for professional membership within a practice-based setting (IAASA, 2016). Chan *et al.* (2008, p.155) posit that "junior staff view articling as the ticket to move on" while Farmar (2013) identifies that over half of newly qualified Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) members transition from practice to industry within a year or two post qualification. However, very little is known about this transition or how the skills and competencies required for industry are developed which led Drew-Sellers and Fogarty (2010, p.715) to call for future research to investigate this "conversion process".

This paper extends upon the findings presented in Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' and explores this conversion process further. The paper will set out the research findings which consist of five major themes and concentrates on how these themes address the overall research objectives. The paper includes a theoretically-informed framework which seeks to assist newly-qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs) making the transition from practice to industry-based roles. Based on the lack of knowledge relating to the transition phase of CAs entering industry from practice and drawing on the theoretical lenses discussed in previous papers, the study sets out to address the research objectives outlined below in Table 1. This table also identifies the relationship of these objectives with the themes that have emerged, and which are discussed later in this paper.

Table 1 - Objectives and associated themes

Objective	Paper 4 Themes
1. To understand how CAs' skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.	T3 Skills gap
2. To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition.	T2 Practice to industry transition phases T4 Supports in developing skills
3. To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.	T1 Fit with role and culture T5 Employer and employee satisfaction

This paper offers a number of findings in relation to these objectives including demonstrating how CAs role in industry differ from practice, identifying the existence of a skills gap, illustrating how the skills gap can be overcome and through the provision of a theoretically informed framework which depicts the transition from practice to industry. The paper also provides insight into viewing the transition through person-job fit and person-culture fit (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011). This is demonstrated through the development of a matrix of the two fits to help identify how best to aid the transitioning CA. Furthermore, the paper elaborates on and offers an extension to Nicholson's transition cycle theory (Nicholson, 1987).

This following section briefly outlines the research design and is followed by discussion of how the research has built on the initial findings and themes presented in Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings'. The paper culminates in the presentation and discussion of a theoretically informed framework model.

2.0 Research design

The research method used in this study is semi-structured interviews and whilst working within a small sample size is a constraint of qualitative designs, the approach enabled the capturing of an in-depth understanding of a complex transition process. Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' which included the pilot interviewing phase was limited to interviews with seven CAs and two industry-based hiring managers (HMs) and "data saturation" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 202) had not been reached. In the intervening period, additional stakeholder interviews were conducted with longer qualified Chartered Accountants (LQs), recruiting professionals (RECs), a continuing professional development provider (CPD) and a representative from Chartered Accountants Ireland (INST). This multiple stakeholder approach is considered essential due to the exploratory nature of the study (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002) and is consistent with the Research Design presented in Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' which has remained fundamentally intact. However, a change was made in relation to the interviewee sample target groups as illustrated in Table 2 with the pool of CA interviews being extended to include CAs who have completed the transition (LQs). A full profile of the interviewees which includes contextual descriptive data relating to the interviewees and the reference key used in the presentation of the quotations in this paper is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 2 - Sampling grid

Sample Target Group	Interviewee selection criteria	Total
Newly-Qualified Chartered Accountants (CAs)	Chartered Accountants who have qualified in practice no more than two years prior to the date of the interview and who have transitioned to and remain in their first role in industry for at least three months.	13
Longer Qualified Chartered Accountants (LQs)	Chartered Accountants who have qualified in practice and who have moved to industry more than two years before the date of the interview.	5
Industry-based Hiring Managers (HMs)	Industry-based hiring finance managers who are qualified accountants who have hired at least two CAs (as defined above in this table).	6
Recruiters (RECs)	Recruitment experts in the area of accounting.	2
Chartered Accountants Ireland (INST)	Representative from CAI involved in the career development of trainee accountants.	1
Continuing Professional Development Provider (CPD)	Continuing professional development provider.	1
Total		28

Paper 2 ‘Methodology’ outlined protocols that would be followed in conducting the research which included the stages in conducting the data analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006, pp. 87-88) six step approach: "familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining themes and finally producing the findings". These six stages were iteratively used through the data analysis phase for this paper. The researcher used a self-transcription process and completed repeated reading of the transcripts (Braun and Clarke's 2006, step one) which allowed an intimacy and familiarity with the data. The qualitative analysis software package NVivo was used as a tool to aid in the analysis process and improve the rigour of the data review (Richards and Richards, 1994). The use of the memo tool in NVivo aided in producing reflexive work and allowed a clear audit trail which can provide evidence of a systematic, iterative and multi-faceted approach to the qualitative data analysis (Houghton *et al.*, 2016). The coding was based upon the literature review provided in Paper 1 ‘Conceptual Paper’ and also on the researchers professional practice knowledge and experience of the research topic being explored (Braun and Clarke's 2006, step two). Completed interviews were loaded into NVivo and the process of reviewing the transcripts for themes commenced (Braun and Clarke's 2006, steps three to five). These themes have been built upon from Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ and the following section discusses the findings of each theme in more detail (Braun and Clarke’s 2006, step six).

3.0 Building on initial findings

A number of themes emerged from this analysis of the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006, pp. 87-88) six step approach. Consistent with the five themes that emerged in Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings', further data collection and analysis reinforced and refined these themes which are: fit with role and culture; practice to industry transition phases; skills gap; supports in developing skills; employee and employer satisfaction. This section also seeks to illustrate the interaction of these themes with the theoretical lenses.

3.1 Theme 1 - Fit with role and culture

The concept of fit was discussed in Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' but has emerged as a more significant theme through the collection of further data from the wider stakeholders. The literature identifies person-job fit (Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011) and person-culture fit which O'Reilly *et al.* (1991, p. 491) identifies as the "idea that organisations have cultures that are more or less attractive to certain types of individuals". The data collected has centred on these two types of fit in the context of accountants transitioning to industry-based roles. The importance of person-job fit and person-culture fit is identified by HM6 who believes "*it is very important that you get the role that fits you and the company culture that fits you*". HM6 goes on further to state "*a hell of a lot of it is about the role and making sure that you think you are going to be a fit for that role*". However, the data collected seems to suggest that person-culture fit is a stronger influence on the transition process outcome. This was supported by LQ3 who commented "*the culture was the main part ... there are different work styles and the routines are different, but I thought the culture was a huge element*" and REC2 who believed "*if people aren't enjoying a certain role we usually find that it is due to the culture*". REC2 concludes that dissatisfaction with a role is caused by "*the culture and the people*" in the organisation. The importance of fit with the organisational culture was captured dramatically by CA12 who identifies:

I think I am an excellent fit to the role, but I don't think I am an excellent fit to the organisation. There is a number of elements about how the organisation goes about its business that I don't enjoy ... there are a number of senior figures within the organisation that if I was to put on the line I wouldn't see eye to eye with. Their world view and their modus operandi isn't in line with what I would consider is the best way to do things ... You know there is a degree of professionalism that I would expect from everybody I work with that I don't get.

This lack of fit with culture was not an isolated occurrence with interviewees. The first transition of HM6 into industry was also a bad experience from a cultural change perspective with HM6 commenting:

I didn't enjoy it from the cultural perspective. The culture was extremely the opposite of what I was used to ... it was an organisation that was very much a culture towards, the culture was very hard to change, you know it was set in stone and I suppose it was the public sector then as well, so it was very difficult to implement change ... To be honest, I was there for a year and I couldn't get out of it quick enough.

There were many interviewees who identified culture as one of the major elements to cope with upon transition to industry. CA11 stated that "culture is one of the biggest challenges when you are coming in" while HM5 provided the advice that CAs should "be prepared for the culture change". HM5 goes on to explain that the culture in industry is very different from that of practice when commenting:

It is definitely a big culture change to go from, not the nursery in practice, but a kind of a comfortable environment where everything is very structured and very formulaic, and then you go somewhere which not quite like that, and it is a lot more practical, and it is a lot more hands on.

Many suggested that CAs should attempt to understand a company culture prior to joining:

Get a flavour of what it is like and whether you are going to be a good fit there because you really can't underestimate job satisfaction when it comes to how you get on with your co-workers let's say and how you fit into the culture of that new company so yeah try to garner as much information as you can from your peers who have gone before you, and not rushing into the decision and then picking and researching as best as you can on your perspective employer (LQ1).

HM6 provided advice believing CAs should "try and research as much as you can about the culture of that organisation" and ask themselves the question "can I find out what their culture is and will I be able to adapt to that culture". CPD1 however observed a challenge here:

I think there is a cultural difference in terms of how the teams operate ... I think there are variances within industry. We met one financial controller who was very open, and we met another one who ruled with an iron fist. I think culturally and operationally, they will be different.

REC2 identified the importance of organisational culture-fit but believed it is impossible to guarantee that CAs will always fit commenting "*ultimately I think it is impossible to one hundred per cent determine whether it is the right option for you until you have gone in there*".

The findings support the importance of person-job fit and person-culture fit (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011). However, the findings suggest that in the accounting setting, person-job fit may outweigh person-culture fit. It would seem that a person-job misfit is a problem that exists, but it is one that interviewees noted could be overcome in a professional setting, which is likely due to the professionalism and intellectual capability of CAs that make the transition. This is supported by HM6: "*I think if you are a qualified Chartered Accountant ... you know your employer is nearly expecting that*" you can perform the task while according to HM5 there is "*an assumption that if you have passed your exams you have the technical skills*". HM6 goes on to suggest "*if you are to shine in your organisation and showcase yourself to get to the next level ... I think you have to be able to fit in with the culture of the organisation*".

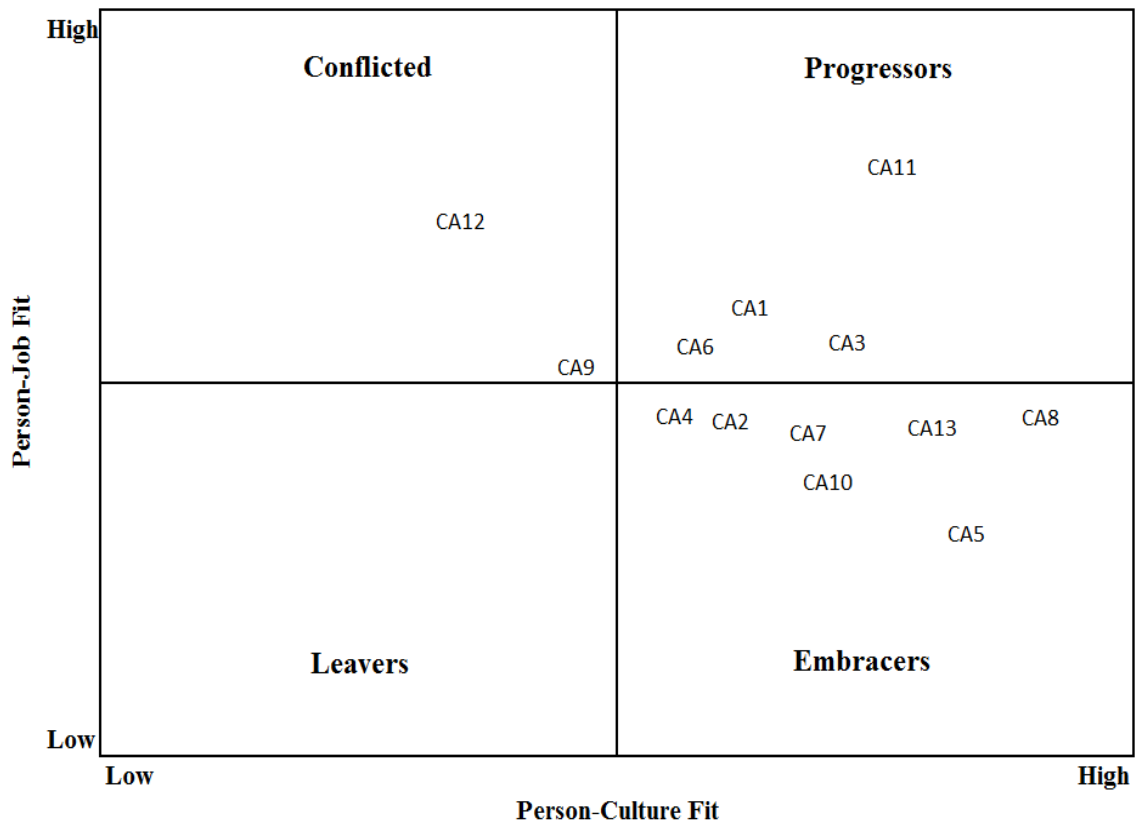
As these concepts of person-job fit and person-culture fit frequently emerged in the interviews, it would seem that these are important determinant to the success or otherwise of the transitioning accountant. Prior research has demonstrated the importance of these types of fit. Person-job fit can be broadly defined as the CA compatibility with the role (Kristof, 1996) but also considers Chuang *et al.*'s (2015) assertion that it consists of the dimensions of knowledge skills and abilities. Empirical evidence has shown that person-job fit is related to job satisfaction (Cable and DeRue, 2002), role performance (Wang *et al.*, 2011) and intention to quit (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Wang *et al.*, 2011). Person culture fit emerged from research relating to person-organisation fit (O'Reilly *et al.* 1991) and it has been shown that recruits whose values align with those of the firm adjust more quickly (Chatman, 1991), feel more satisfied (Chatman, 1991; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006) and intend to remain with the firm longer (Chatman, 1991; Nazir, 2005; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006). The empirical evidence found in this study supports the need to consider both fits in order to assess the new employees' transition. It is therefore reasonable to argue that person-job fit and person-culture fit should not be viewed in isolation but instead viewed simultaneously as possession of one fit without the other does not ensure a successful transition and can lead to an employee vacating

their position. This is supported through the data collected from the interviews for this study with evidence of HM6 vacating a role and CA12 who intended vacating a position due to lack of fit. This observation led the researcher to develop a fit matrix shown in Figure 1 which shows that both person-culture fit and person-job fit must be considered in order for the CA to progress further within the organisation and CAs with high levels of fit in each are therefore titled 'Progressors'. Individuals with high levels of person-job fit but with lower levels of person-culture fit appeared to have doubts whether to remain within their role and are thus termed 'Conflicted'. CAs with higher levels of person-culture fit but with lower levels of person-job fit seemed to embrace learning their new role through the various supports provided and are therefore labelled 'Embracers'. Finally, those who neither aligned with culture or job are destined to leave the organisation resulting in this quadrant titled 'Leavers'.

The use of matrices is an acceptable "way of displaying data in a format where they are readily accessible for the process of interpretation" (Nadin and Cassell, 2004, p. 292). CAs interviewed are plotted against this matrix in an attempt to illustrate how fit impacts upon their progression and understanding where CAs reside on the matrix also helps in understanding how transitioning accountants can be best supported and also how CAs can decide on the roles that provide greatest opportunity to progress their career. There were general indications of where CAs reside within the matrix shown in Figure 1. The researcher reviewed interview transcripts multiple times in an effort to gain perceptions of how the CAs interviewed aligned with the matrix and a judgement was made by the researcher based on the data collected as to where the CA resides on the matrix. This approach is consistent with Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 91) who explain that through the matrix development process "the researcher typically moves through a series of analysis episodes that condense more and more data into a more coherent understanding". Examples of where CAs reside include CA12 fitting the 'Conflicted' category when stating that *"I think I am an excellent fit to the role, but I don't think I am an excellent fit to the organisation"*. CA9 also appeared conflicted stating *"I don't know what the next step is for me"*. There was evidence of many CAs being categorised as 'Embracers', those who were culturally aligned but in need of skill development. 'Progressors' included CA11 who joined internal audit and had an agricultural background joining the agricultural sector. Others fitting this category were CA1, CA3 and CA6 who had the benefit of previously auditing the company they joined which ensured they knew that

they would fit the culture and they were also more aligned to the role due to the knowledge of the business that they already possessed. Finally, ‘Leavers are those who neither fit the role or the culture. In theory such a category might exist, and while there was no CA interviewed that fitted this category but HM2 spoke of letting "somebody go" due to misfit.

Figure 1 - Fit matrix



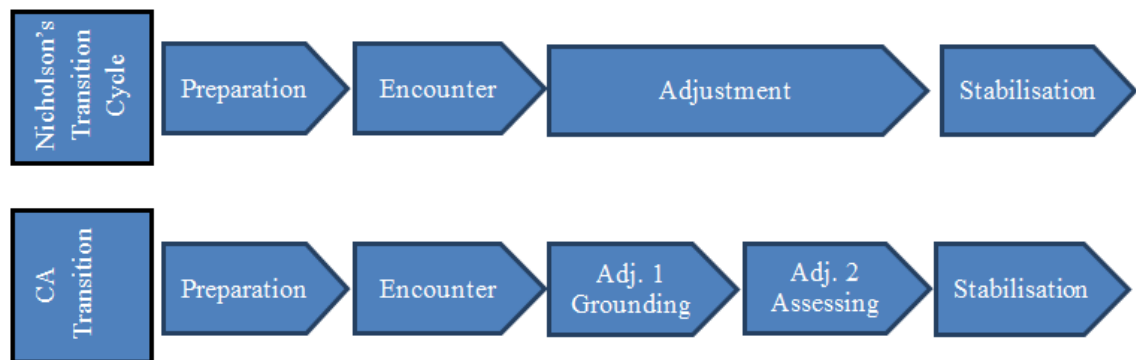
Person-culture fit is based on a fit of company culture with an individual's attributes and personality which can be difficult to change, and which may result in CAs vacating their position as CA12 and HM6 demonstrated. However, HM4 posits that "my experience is that they learn quickly, they have a very good work ethic and willingness to learn". Based on this observation person-job misfit is not insurmountable in transitions and might be addressed through training and development interventions through the different phases of transitions which is the second theme discussed in the following section.

3.2 Theme 2 - Practice to industry transition phases

Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ identified distinct phases of transition which emerged from the interview data shown below in Figure 2. Subsequent data collected has

reinforced these phases of transition. Viewing the findings through Nicholson's transition cycle (Nicholson, 1987) facilitated the identification of theoretically supported phases but furthermore by way of extension, identified that one of Nicholson's phases contains two distinct components in this context. Nicholson's transition cycle theory suggests that transitions go through a cycle of preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. Preparation describes the period before embarking on a new role. Encounter involves the early stages of the new role. Adjustment is concerned with identifying how to perform in the role and involves role development in order to minimise job misfit. Finally, stabilisation is based on the assumption that the transition finally reaches a position whereby the CA is comfortable completing the role. The relationship between the data collected mapped to Nicholson's transition cycle theory is illustrated in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2 - Theoretical analysis of CA phased transition to industry



It would appear from the data collected that the adjustment phase identified in Nicholson's theory could be further refined with consideration given to the phases of adjustment required in the transition. The discovery of the extension of Nicholson's adjustment phase is an important finding as it elaborates that there are two distinct phases within the adjustment phase: grounding and assessing which are discerned from the data collected for this study. The identification of the extended adjustment phase underpins the importance of the provision of supports to the CA to ensure employer expectations are met which would seem central to the successful completion of the adjustment phase of the transition cycle theory (Nicholson and West, 1989). The following sub-sections examines each of the phases in turn.

3.2.1 Preparation phase

The preparation phase was presented in Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' as a planning phase where it was found that CAs do little planning prior to their move into

industry. It was identified that CAs spoke with ex-colleagues or others in their network before joining companies in industry but there did not appear to be any real concerted effort to understand either the role or industry or complete any skills training in advance of the move. Under this preparation phase there were a number of findings that emerged including an information deficit, differing perspectives on industry roles, the 'Big 4' influence and the benefits derived from secondments. Each of these findings in the preparation stage are now discussed in turn.

3.2.1.1 Information deficit

It appeared that many CAs made the move blindly with some offering that CAI should do more to support CAs to better understand the nature of the move. Interviewees frequently mentioned a lack of information to inform their decision on industry, company and role preferences. INST1 believed *"I don't think there is enough information out there"* and this lack of clarity was described by LQ5 who stated *"when I was coming out, you weren't sure of even what type of roles there are out there. You would have thought to a degree all industry roles are the same"* which was concurred with by REC1. There would appear to be a level of immaturity and a lack of ownership of one's own career amongst CAs with LQ5 commenting:

I would say that people coming out when they are 25 and 26 probably aren't that aware of what they want themselves to do because that is probably the only job they have ever really worked at.

REC1 believed that CAs *"are career aware but they are not career informed"* and INST1 suggested that it is important that CAs *"take control and inform yourself before you make your move"*. CPD1 suggests *"the Institute could do a huge amount here on personal and career development"*. A potential reason as to why this information gap exists was provided by REC2 who believed that *"when you are in the Big 4 there is absolutely zero emphasis on what you can do after you leave the Big 4"*. HM6 believed that the information gap goes further back to third level education believing that there was:

... a gap when you are studying, and I think it could be clearer when you are going through college, more explanation as to what reality is going to be like or what is [sic] the different roles or opportunities out there.

Based on this data, it would seem that there is a requirement for information to be provided to individuals throughout their accounting career-path to final qualification in

relation to the opportunities and roles that exist in industry-based settings and how best these opportunities can be met.

3.2.1.2 Differing perspectives on industry roles

Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ demonstrated differences in perception of roles in practice versus roles in industry. The differences between the role of the accountant in industry versus practice were reinforced through the collection of further data with similar findings reoccurring following discussion with the wider stakeholder groups. Building on the data presented in Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’, it was clear that the two roles are very different from the points of view of culture, skills required, supports provided and structure of the roles as illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3 - Perceptions of practice versus industry

	Practice	Industry	Difference found
Culture	LQ5 "you are working with a lot of younger people"	LQ5 "once you went into industry again that is a cultural difference" LQ2 "there are people who have been there maybe 10 years or that but they have been in the same role for 10 years"	The age profile was identified as a cultural difference between practice and industry.
Skills	LQ3 "you are constantly being updated, you are constantly being forced to do professional development in practice especially in the Big 4"	CA9 "the commercial awareness is key for anyone moving to industry and call it what you like commercial awareness, savvy or whatever, you still have to have that"	Skill development is based on technical training which is provided within practice firms. Skills required of industry are different and built up through experience.
Supports	INST1 "I think it is a little bit of a reality check. They have been cocooned" REC1 "there is a little bit of a comfort blanket in the Big 4 support network"	CA10 "you are thrust into a role of responsibility" CA9 "you realise, God I am in the real world here and there is nobody looking after me whereas in practice there are"	The CA is supported within practice and is surrounded by like-minded people who can be consulted. That level of support was not found in industry.
Structure	LQ1 "your life in [practice firm] is quite rigid and it is dictated to you" CA8 "there is a lot more structure and you know exactly what you are doing"	LQ1 "in industry where you have a certain amount of flexibility in your month as to what you are going to do" CA12 "it is very much less structured in industry"	The role of the CA in practice is defined and understood. The CA in industry was responsible for identifying what was needed to be done rather than instructed.

As evidenced above there are significant differences in culture, skills, supports and structure between a role in practice and a role in industry. It may be a case that CAs are unaware of these differences as they appeared to be overlooked by many CAs in advance of the transition to industry as evidenced by CA9 who comments *"I got my eyes opened in industry"*.

3.2.1.3 The 'Big 4' influence

REC1 identified that accounting position advertisements frequently express a wish to hire a *"Big 4 trained accountant with your PQE (Post Qualified Experience)"* and this emerged as a discussion point in a number of interviews. HM3 believes *"it's a bit like the Ivy League schools in America, you know it is a signal"*. CA11 also concurs that the branding of the 'Big 4' is important stating *"I look down through the CVs and it's probably a snobbery attitude, but we are kind of looking for 'Big 4' trained people"*. REC1 suggests *"that is the way the market often looks at it or informs people to look at it"* and goes on to purport that:

... the biggest conspiracy that has ever occurred in the accounting profession in Ireland which is the fact that if you are [Big 4 company] trained, Chartered Accountant that came out of articles in 1990, and is now the CFO of abc plc., he is going to hire someone who is trained the same way and that he understands.

LQ5 who is 'Big 4' trained believes *"it is merely perception"* and goes on to explain *"I have just had experience now of people not just from [practice firm] but from other 'Big 4' as well that I wouldn't be too impressed with"*.

3.2.1.4 Secondment benefits

It was clear that those who were provided opportunity to fill a seconded role in industry found transitioning easier. CA8 suggested that *"doing more secondments and work placements within industry during your training even to a couple of different industries"* would prove beneficial which was supported by others. Secondments made the journey more comfortable and ensured CAs knew the move would suit them with CA13 commenting *"I knew that then that was what I liked"*. CA13 also believed that *"secondments are pretty unique to Dublin"* and as a result it is not a panacea for all. CA10 believes obtaining a secondment is *"the ideal scenario"* but acknowledged that *"probably not everyone can have that"*.

3.2.2 Encounter phase

There was continued evidence found in relation to the emotional context of the initial move into industry. While Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ suggested that HMs expected CAs to get straight into their role from day one, this was based on interviews with just two HMs. Subsequent data collected illustrates that larger industry-based companies appear to afford the CA more time during the encounter phase with HM6 confirming "*a full five-day induction programme*" was provided in that company.

3.2.3 Adjustment phase

Based on the data collected, it was found that Nicholson’s adjustment phase could be elaborated in that there are two distinct phases within the adjustment phase: grounding and assessing. First of all, the CA seeks to attain what CA1 describes as a "*good grounding*" and following this the employer has "*expectations*" (HM4, HM6) of the CA and seeks "*to stretch them further*" (HM1). Both of these elements within Nicholson’s adjustment phase are now discussed in turn.

3.2.3.1 Grounding phase

The grounding phase identified in Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ is aligned to Nicholson’s adjustment phase (Nicholson, 1987). HM4 believed that "*you consider that the first three months is really learning, getting used to the organisation, getting used to the systems and the processes*". However, there was some suggestion that this grounding phase may be longer than three months depending on the capabilities of the CA with HM4 stating "*I would say in between three to six months, they are comfortable in doing what the previous person was doing, you know in that type of period three to six months*". This was further supported by HM3 who believed "*I think it can take two months depending on how competent the person is but I would give it six months*". This time taken to gain a good grounding does seem to depend on the individual with HM4 witnessing "*some people who really drive on and who have progressed through*" the transition quickly.

3.2.3.2 Assessing phase

This phase identified in Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ is an extension of the adjustment phase of the transition cycle theory (Nicholson, 1987). Nicholson and West

(1989, p. 182) identify the adjustment stage of the transition cycle theory as “subsequent personal and role development to reduce person-job misfit” and this definition would appear to match the grounding phase outlined above. However, extending on this phase of the theory and based on the data collected through the interviews held with the HMs, it was discovered that an assessment phase takes place where an evaluation of how well this process of development has worked to ensure person-job fit and by extension person-culture fit also takes place. This is an important finding as it is essential that CAs are aware of the expectations being placed on them by their employer once they are grounded in the organisation. Some of these expectations were outlined by HM6 who was:

... expecting them to own the role from there on and they don't need that micro management or the basic tipping, that they are familiar, and they are confident in the role then you know.

HM4 purported *"my expectation is that month four to six is that you are really progressing and really grabbing a hold of the job"* while additionally stating *"my expectation is that they have replaced the person that was there before them at that stage"*. The distinct phases of grounding and assessing align with Nicholson's broader category of adjustment with suggestion that there are two distinct sub-categories of adjustment discernible from the empirical data.

3.2.4 Stabilisation phase

Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ presented evidence that CAs became stabilised within their role after six months and it would appear that this continued to be supported with LQ2 outlining that

... definitely after the six-month period, there was definitely more stuff coming my way even in terms of helping out other units if people that were a bit behind, I would start to get thrown stuff similar to how the rest of the team were.

Overall, there was little discussion beyond the six-month period which would suggest that the transition is normally completed at that stage, with only CA9, CA11 and CA13 appearing to need a longer time-frame. The reasons for this appear to be due to lack of support for CA9 and business complexity for CA11 and CA13.

To conclude the phases of transition theme, there appears to be strong support from the data that CAs follow the phases of transition outlined by Nicholson (1987). However, the

finding that Nicholson’s adjustment phase includes two phases of grounding and assessment offers an elaboration and refinement of the theory. It is the closure of the skills gap that is being assessed and the following theme discusses the skills gaps of CAs in greater detail.

3.3 Theme 3 - Skills gap

The theme of skills gap is broken down into two sub themes: differences in perceptions of required skills and lack of fundamental accounting skills.

3.3.1 Differences in perceptions of required skills

Consistent with the findings of Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’, CAs' perceived that hard skills such as information technology, technical accounting ability and specific management accounting tasks as important skills required in industry while in contrast HMs' perceived soft skills such as communication, adaptability, flexibility, interpersonal skills along with commercial awareness as most important. Two additional skills that emerged from the data collected were continuous learning and time management. A sample of some of the HMs comments in relation to skills required in industry is shown below in Table 4.

Table 4 - HMs' perception of skills required in industry

HMs' perceived skills
HM3 <i>"able to move across the departments supporting and adding value to the departments and that is what I think is the key to a successful business version of an accountant"</i>
HM4 <i>"need to understand what we are doing, what the site strategy is, what the sites products is, what the business context is and then how our finance team and our finance operation can support business"</i>
HM5 <i>"time management and problem solving ... communication skills ... outside finance you are dealing with people who have no finance background ... quite important that accountants nowadays are flexible"</i>
HM6 <i>"Communication, accuracy and organised time management ... networking and develops those relationships and looks at the softer side and the softer skills are so important"</i>

In contrast CAs continued to identify the hard skills as areas for development with only two of the 13 CAs interviewed identifying soft skills. CA10 identified people skills stating, *"managing a team on a day to day basis and probably the personal skills was the toughest thing"* while CA13 identified *"personal skills, they are pretty important in terms of not taking your own role seriously and being flexible, working in a team"*. CA10 acknowledged that CAs do not know the skills required of industry until they are in that environment stating:

Some of the skills that I needed, I may not even have known in a skills-based audit, so it is not until you are in the job maybe three, six, nine months that you realise oh I didn't realise I needed this skill.

Samples of some of the CAs comments in relation to skills required in industry are shown below in Table 5.

Table 5 - CAs' perception of skills required in industry

CAs' perceived skills
CA9 <i>"One thing you didn't get enough exposure in was Microsoft Office"</i>
CA10 <i>"The hard skills like Excel but also dealing with people and people issues"</i>
CA11 <i>"technical skills because you don't really do any accounting when you are in the Big 4"</i>
CA12 <i>"I think the financial accounting around local GAAP is something that I feel we could be better equipped in"</i>
CA12 <i>" more systems experience is something that we would all benefit from"</i>
CA13 <i>"technical knowledge because I guess when you are in practice your knowledge is quite broad, but it isn't deep"</i>

LQs, INST and RECs also perceived that particular skills are required of CAs in industry as illustrated in Table 6 below.

Table 6 - Other stakeholders' perception of skills required in industry

Other stakeholders perceived skills
INST1 <i>"an analytical mind-set and that is something that perhaps some of them are missing ... ability to work with non-finance people and often that can be an issue for them"</i>
REC1 <i>"it is communication skills ... being able to produce a set of accounts, being able to properly use an ERP system such as SAP or Oracle ... analytical skills"</i>
REC2 <i>"you need to communicate with different people in different ways ... it is just recognising how to adapt your interpersonal skills"</i>
LQ2 <i>"you needed so much Excel and when you are dealing with large volume"</i>
LQ3: <i>" just keeping that mix that is still 60% soft skills and 40% in my own opinion technical skills"</i>

Based on the replies from the LQs it would appear that skills identified by CAs as skills required in industry are valid in the initial phases of transition. However, it would seem that HMs have greater expectations and it is potentially the soft skills which act as a differentiator which influences the career progression of accountants in industry. This is supported by LQ5 who suggests *"I am at that point that technical skills, technical knowledge and all that kind of stuff gets you to a point but any further now, it is about the softer stuff"*. This view was also supported by HM6 who commented:

I think you can get to a certain level whereby it is taken for granted that you have the technical capabilities and really to get to the next level and you want to be the site head or the head of finance I think it is the guy that

does the networking and develops those relationships and looks at the softer side and the softer skills are so important once you are trying to get to that next or you want to get to the highest level.

On this basis it would appear important for a CA to certainly get to grips with the hard skills that they have identified but it is equally important to be mindful and address gaps in soft skills if career progression is of importance. HMs in large manufacturing companies also perceived gaps in the CAs abilities to contend with commercially focussed roles seeing these roles as a career progression with HM6 stating:

I don't think we would recruit an individual from practice straight into a commercially focused management accounting role that is responsible for the delivery of our budget ... it would be too much of a jump.

This was supported by HM4 whose perception was "*I don't think they are overly prepared for industry to be honest*". It would appear that the skills gap has necessitated a change in hiring strategy by HMs in these organisations with HM4 expanding:

Maybe five or six years ago we would have gone out to the marketplace looking to hire ... and I found that the experience and the capability then when I met the people wasn't there.

This observation by HMs appears to have driven a strategy of hiring CAs into more readily aligned roles and then helping to progress them further with HM4 purporting:

... you need to bring them up to an understanding of the business, but you can't do it all in the one day so essentially to start them off in different roles maybe some more of the junior roles within the finance team.

This approach was supported by HM6 who believed it important to start CAs in "*financial reporting or an internal controls role first*" which is "*a role that is more aligned and that they are more familiar with*". HM6 believed it was important that:

They go into that role for eighteen to twenty four months and they develop their relationships across the business, they have got to know who their key contacts are and they have got to showcase their ability ... once they have got that bit of experience then, we look at it and well they know more about the business now, they know how we operate, they have got to know a few key contacts and we can transition them across to more of the management accounting side of the house.

3.3.2 Lack of fundamental accounting skills

There were many that believed that some CAs were deficient in the most basic fundamental skills of accounting. LQ5 believed that *"you can become a qualified Chartered Accountant and not know the first thing about putting a set of accounts together"*. CA11 attributed this problem to 'Big 4' training believing:

... that is one knock I would definitely put on the 'Big 4' is that your actual basics of accounting, although on a high level you are excellent, and you are aware of all these things, your accounting basics are probably poor.

CA11 went on to claim, *"I am probably still poor at double entry but actually your double entry when you are in the 'Big 4' is horrendous"*. LQ1 suggests:

... a lot of people in the bigger offices can get pigeon-holed if they are unlucky, so I would definitely say there is an element of people who qualify, comfortably probably, but when they get to industry then the core necessities that you need may not be there.

REC2 comments *"lot of accountants are very weak on the double entry and the journal side of things"* while in contrast graduates of smaller firms were viewed as more rounded in their training with INST1 believing an *"accountant coming from a small to medium size ... are highly placeable"*. CA12 elaborated that it may be the exam system that fails to prepare accountants adequately in these fundamental skills:

I think it is partly the role and partly the fact that in any exam system you will have people who cover up understanding gaps with hard work and learning off things.

CPD1 believes that the reason for the lack of fundamental accounting skills is a result of computerised systems. CPD1's manager *"made me do it on an extended trial balance and that is the issue because you see everything is done now on a software package"* and as a result *"the methodology of debits and credits and the impacts of having it wrong is lost on the vast majority of young accountants"*. If left unchecked, this lack of fundamental accounting skills is a concern to CAI and the profession as a whole with INST1 opining that *"a lot more companies, particularly like your Americans are asking for it, for accounting tests as part of the interview process"*. This may suggest that employers may have begun to identify this fundamental accounting skills gap.

Having identified the skills gaps that exist, it is important to understand the supports that are provided to overcome these gaps and these supports are now discussed in more detail in Theme 4 below.

3.4 Theme 4 - Supports in developing skills

Throughout the interviews, there were many suggestions of supports that help CAs close these gaps in skills required of industry. These supports included: CAI training, mentoring, in-house supports, CPD training, utilising networks, and induction programmes which are now discussed in turn.

3.4.1 CAI Training

CAI training is broken down into two elements: preparing students for roles in industry, training directed towards practice and the hegemony of the 'Big 4'.

3.4.1.1 Preparing students for roles in industry

The level of training provided by CAI continued to be commended by both CAs and HMs. Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' identified the scenario based multi-disciplinary case study as being particularly praised in its attempt to prepare students for roles in industry and this finding was consolidated through further data. While Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' suggested that the overall view of CAI training was positive, there appeared to be some negativity found in how this training prepares CAs for roles in industry. While REC2 held a balanced assessment that *"in some ways it prepares you exceptionally well but in others naturally there is that knowledge gap"*, there was evidence of contrasting views which are shown below in Table 7.

Table 7 - Views of CAI training

Positive Views	Negative Views
<p>HM3 <i>"It is brilliant training. It is the best training"</i></p> <p>CA9 <i>" I would say a lot of it is more applicable to industry, a lot of the stuff that you would touch on especially in management accounting, you don't use that in practice"</i></p> <p>LQ1 <i>"The Chartered Accountant training is very good for industry and you build on that experience, you get that foundation and that stays with you basically for life"</i></p>	<p>CA11 <i>"I don't know what benefit they added to work"</i></p> <p>CA13 <i>"Not great. It is very practice focused. It is extremely practice focused".</i></p> <p>LQ2 <i>"To be honest with you, the Chartered Accountants, I am not sure is really geared towards industry"</i></p> <p>LQ2 <i>"I felt it was definitely geared towards those who are going to be staying in practice"</i></p> <p>LQ3 <i>"I would have said they are trying to get there but it is still not great"</i></p>

There was a belief that CAI have attempted to modify training for the better with CA10 explaining *"they are trying to do the right thing in terms of having a broad base"* while CPD1 purporting *"I think they have made strides in the last ten years and I think that has improved dramatically"* while LQ3 believes *"it wasn't great but it is definitely changing"*. The Final Admitting Examinations (FAEs) were viewed positively on many occasions with CA10 stating *"I believe the way the FAEs are structured, I believe they are on the right track"* while lauding *"having all that in one exam sort of tried to replicate what you may face in a scenario in work"*. CPD1 also commended the FAEs suggesting:

I think the Chartered Institute with the changes they have made and the FAE the way it is, I think they have done as much as they can do from a training perspective.

3.4.1.2 Training directed towards practice

There was evidence from some interviewed who suggested that CAI training was directed towards practice with CA13 alluded to inflexibility in CAI training:

... like ninety-five per cent of the people doing those exams are practice-based and the people who are industry-based generally tend to do the ACCA for the flexibility.

CPD1 poses the question *"so what could the Chartered Institute do, could they do modular, could they begin to do exams more like CIMA, ACCA, possibly"*. INST1 believes *"it is down to the individual"* and *"the shining stars are the ones who maybe have commercial awareness, read the papers, tune into Bloomberg"* which would suggest that CAs must attempt to prepare themselves for roles in industry and accept that the training provided by CAI may be directed towards a career in practice even though just 33 per cent of qualified members remain in practice post qualification (IAASA, 2016).

3.4.1.3 The hegemony of the 'Big 4'

The influence of the 'Big 4' on CAI was referred to frequently with CA13 stating the training *"is very Big 4 dominated so it was pretty much aimed at the Big 4"*. LQ3 did not believe there is an appetite to focus on industry-based training stating, *"I can't see why Chartered Accountants Ireland would now try and push people into industry"* which may suggest that CAI may see the 'Big 4' as their customer and not the trainee accountants most of whom will ultimately end up in an industry-based role (IAASA, 2016). This hegemonic influence of the 'Big 4' and impact on CAI training was described by LQ1

who felt *"it is quite audit centric which is fair enough because obviously you know the firms are paying the fees"*.

3.4.2 Professional mentoring

It was surprising to find no use of formal mentoring to aid the transition despite CAI providing a formal mentoring programme and many interviewed believing it would be of benefit. This may be due to the lack of marketing of the programme with CA9 suggesting *"there could be a bit more support from Chartered Accountants Ireland on the mentoring side and also being more informative for people in making that transition"* and CA12 stating:

I only really found out about it in any detail at the time of my conferring ceremony, but it is certainly something that I would be interested in getting involved in, the CAI mentoring programme.

The reason for the lack of use of mentoring despite its commendation from many may also be due to what HM3 describes as *"people don't want mentors"*. HM3 is a volunteer on the CAI mentoring programme but was yet to be engaged as a mentor. The mentoring described by interviewees was informal and would be more appropriately described as in-house coaching or networking. It may be the case that this informal style of support is more appropriate with REC1 believing if you arrange a structured *"meeting once a month, it falls apart"*.

3.4.3 In-house support

The findings from data collected for this paper were consistent with those presented in Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' in that the most frequently offered internal supports to CAs was first, arranging meetings with key stakeholders and internal customers of that role and second, providing opportunity to sit next to someone within the organisation who took them through the tasks of their role. Consistent with Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings', both of these supports were widespread in the subsequent interviews held, but it would appear that these supports were more informal, unstructured and ad-hoc in smaller organisations with larger organisations having formal inductions and support. The impact of a formal and structured approach versus an informal and unstructured approach on satisfaction will be discussed in further detail in Theme 5 below.

3.4.4 CPD Training

Consistent with the findings of Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ there were few CAs who had engaged with CPD courses which was highlighted by CA12: *"I haven't done formal CPD during the year, but it is something that I am going to have to get over a three-year average period"*. Again, the question of CPD ownership emerged with INST1 suggesting that CAs *"are not aware of CPD. They perhaps view it as something down the line rather from day one where you have an obligation"*. CA12 believed that *"building more awareness of the CPD requirements, how you can discharge those requirements and what resources that are available would be the best starting point"* while INST1 felt an opportunity exists for the CAI who *"could do CPD workshops for people"* where CAs *"come in and we explain what it is all about, your obligations and how you can do it"*. LQ1 agreed with this sentiment believing *"there is probably a little bit more that the institute can do"* in educating CAs on *"the risks or the challenges from the transition"*. A summary of perceptions garnered in relation to CPD as a support to CAs is shown below in Table 8.

Table 8 - Perception of CPD in relation to transition from practice to industry

Perception in using CPD as a transition support	
HM4	<i>"I don't think it is a solution to all but I think there is some key courses on it that people can use you know to help them with the transition"</i>
HM3	<i>"It needs to be back to basics and this is where there is a gap. It could be like a mixer ... an event where there is networking"</i>
CA9	<i>"There probably could be courses developed and I suppose it would provide more information for anyone who is in practice and who is thinking about making the move to industry"</i>
CA8	<i>"people coming in to actually explain what they do and what their experience has been, so a few into the classroom to explain what they actually do on a daily basis"</i>
CA13	<i>"It really would be helpful, like even to understand the difference between financial accounting and financial analysts, group accountant, an SG&A analyst, business analyst, like they are so different but to the untrained ear they are just an accountant in industry"</i>

It emerged that in many cases industry employers are not proactive in advancing CA skills through CPD training. HM3 asserted *"we don't really do a lot of CPD"* with HM6 stating *"it is not something we have used"*. Instead, it is the CAs' responsibility to conform to CPD regulations with HM5 believing that it:

... is probably one thing that we could probably formalise more. At the moment it is very much self-driven ... We wouldn't have really formal training that we would run internally, it would be more self-driven so people are responsible for their own CPD.

In contrast LQ4 states that practice employers *"provide the CPD and you automatically have the tick for the year because they provide enough training"*.

3.4.5 Networks

The importance of building relationships and networks was evident in all of the interviews held. Many of the CAs interviewed used their network as a support in particular in advance of their transition to industry but also throughout the early stages of their new role. Many CAs noted having contacts or personal acquaintances in their new employment who seemed to act as informal mentors. These were people who were either former ex-colleagues from their practice firm or contacts made while previously auditing their new employer in industry. A selection of some of these perceptions highlighted below in Table 9.

Table 9 - Importance of networks

Network importance	
CA9	<i>"The people from [practice firm] were the greatest support that I have had in my career"</i>
CA11	<i>"You would definitely bounce ideas off them and they are a support particularly on those more unusual cases"</i>
CA12	<i>"I would have thought about the feedback that I would have received from friends who had moved from practice into industry previously, so I would have listened to what they had to say about the differences in their role and the differences in their work-life balance"</i>
LQ1	<i>"You really do forge strong friendships"</i>
HM3	<i>"I would say like network and gather as much advice as you can".</i>

Internal and external networks thus emerged as important supports to transitioning CAs.

3.4.6 Structured inductions

Structured inductions were in evidence in larger organisations as HM3 spoke of an *"induction day held by our HR Director"* and HM4 explains *"typically we have our general site induction programme which is maybe three to four days"*. HM6 expanded:

... when I joined it was a full five-day programme and it was a full five-day induction programme and it was an introduction to [Company Name], what the company is about, what our products are, what are our key departments.

There was also mention of buddy systems as a support which was explained by LQ2:

... they have almost like a buddy system. So, when you first start everyone on the team is allocated somebody to show you, so it is not so much about the transfer of the knowledge on the job, but it was more about sitting with the members of the team for half an hour.

In contrast smaller companies tended to expect CAs to hit the ground running. The different approaches and their link to satisfaction are discussed further in Theme 5 below.

3.5 Theme 5 - Employer and employee satisfaction

The theory of work adjustment suggests two main indicators of work adjustment: satisfaction of the individual with the work environment and satisfaction of the work environment with the individual (Dawis and Lofquist, 1981). As the interviews held with the HMs did not involve questions relating to specific CAs it was difficult to ascertain the employer's level of satisfaction with CAs. HM4 suggested that there are "mixed results" in the levels of satisfaction with CAs:

I have seen some people who really drive on and who have progressed through the organisation. I have seen others then who have gone to a certain level and who are quite happy at that level and maybe have settled at that level. There are a couple of others then that maybe then are continuing to progress ... my view is if people aren't growing that is a problem.

The levels of satisfaction of the CAs with their employer was more attainable and can be somewhat ascertained from the data provided by the CAs as shown in Table 10 below.

Table 10 - CA satisfaction with employer

	Quote supporting level of satisfaction	Summarised Satisfaction Level
CA11	<i>"I couldn't say a bad word about my line manager here and I am fierce lucky that way because I know that is not the case right across the board"</i>	Very satisfied
CA8	<i>"I suppose when you are working for a family business, I suppose you are a little bit more motivated and a little bit more purposeful in your job"</i>	Very satisfied
CA13	<i>"He didn't get fazed by the mistakes you were making which makes it easier when someone is not breathing down your neck and is allowing you space to learn"</i>	Satisfied
CA10	<i>"Enjoyable but tough, enjoyable in that you are only looking at one set of accounts. You are only worried about one company. Tough in respect to managing a team"</i>	Somewhat satisfied
CA9	<i>"I struggle to get job satisfaction"</i>	Dissatisfied
CA12	<i>"It was very much a deep end jump"</i>	Dissatisfied vacating role

In an attempt to uncover why there are different perceived levels of satisfaction, a deeper exploration of the data was warranted. A review of some of the main supports provided to CAs was performed and this is shown in Table 11 below. This analysis reveals that the level of support that was provided by the employer impacts upon the CA level of satisfaction with their new role. It would appear based on the evidence provided in Table 11 that the provision of developmental support to the CA, aids in aligning the fit of skills and competencies to the requirement of the role, which also results in the likeliness that CAs will be perceived as satisfactory by their employer (Dawis and Lofquist, 1981). The data collected appears to support the proposition that the more formal the induction and support, the more satisfied the CA will be. This may potentially be due to CAs being more accustomed to structured roles. The one exception to this observation appears to be CA8 but in this case the transition was to a family business.

Table 11 - Impact of employer support with employee satisfaction

	Structured Induction	In-house Support	Mentoring/ Coaching	Summarised Satisfaction Level
CA8	<i>"I moved into a family business"</i>	<i>"My mom and dad still work in the business so yeah you are always talking about it"</i>	<i>"I was starting from the start and I needed some sort of guidance"</i>	Very satisfied - family business
CA11	<i>"She had training folders...I think it was about a two-week period before I did any work"</i>	<i>"I think I have been fortunate"</i>	<i>" I would go and sit with her for a half hour of an hour and go through things"</i>	Very satisfied
CA13	<i>"They gave you a welcome pack and they gave you a little tour of the building"</i>	<i>"I guess the VP was pretty helpful"</i>	<i>"I feel more valued"</i>	Satisfied
CA10	<i>"They would have gone through the non-financial stuff for the first couple of weeks and explained terms"</i>	<i>"You have probably a little less support"</i>	<i>"I definitely recommend some sort of mentoring ... I came in working under a Chartered Accountant which was good"</i>	Somewhat satisfied
CA9	<i>"pushed in at the deep end"</i>	<i>"You are the one who has to support yourself really, you know to a degree"</i>	<i>"God, I am in the real world here and there is nobody looking after me"</i>	Dissatisfied
CA12	<i>"I thought the onboarding process was minimal "</i>	<i>" I suppose it was supported in that there was ready access to my boss"</i>	<i>"I did a lot of work on my own initiative ... I was a little surprised by ... the way that people treat each other"</i>	Dissatisfied - vacating role

It would seem that employers taking a less formal onboarding approach risks having dissatisfied employees with intentions to quit as was identified with CA12 stating *"that is the decision I have taken so I am back at the hamster wheel of recruiters, direct applications and polishing a CV"* and CA9 suggesting *"I don't know where my career is going"*. CA9 spoke of *"nobody looking after me"* while CA12 commented *"I was very much left to my own devices"* which indicates that there was very little engagement by their employers to support them through their transition into industry.

3.6 Recap on themes discussed

This paper has presented five themes: fit with role and culture; practice to industry transition phases; skills gap; supports in developing skills; employee and employer satisfaction. The concept of fit was discussed extensively in the interviews and is shown to be important in identifying how the CA can best progress through the phases of transition. These phases of transition align well to Nicholson's transition cycle theory, but it was also found that the theory could be extended further with the identification of an assessment phase prior to the stabilisation phase being reached. There was evidence supporting gaps in the CAs' skills due to the different roles of practice and industry and supports that are provided in developing these skills were also outlined. Finally, the previous section discussed how a structured approach seems to work best in reducing the likelihood of the CAs intention to quit. All of these themes identified from the data form the basis for the development of the framework model which is discussed in the following section.

4.0 Framework model

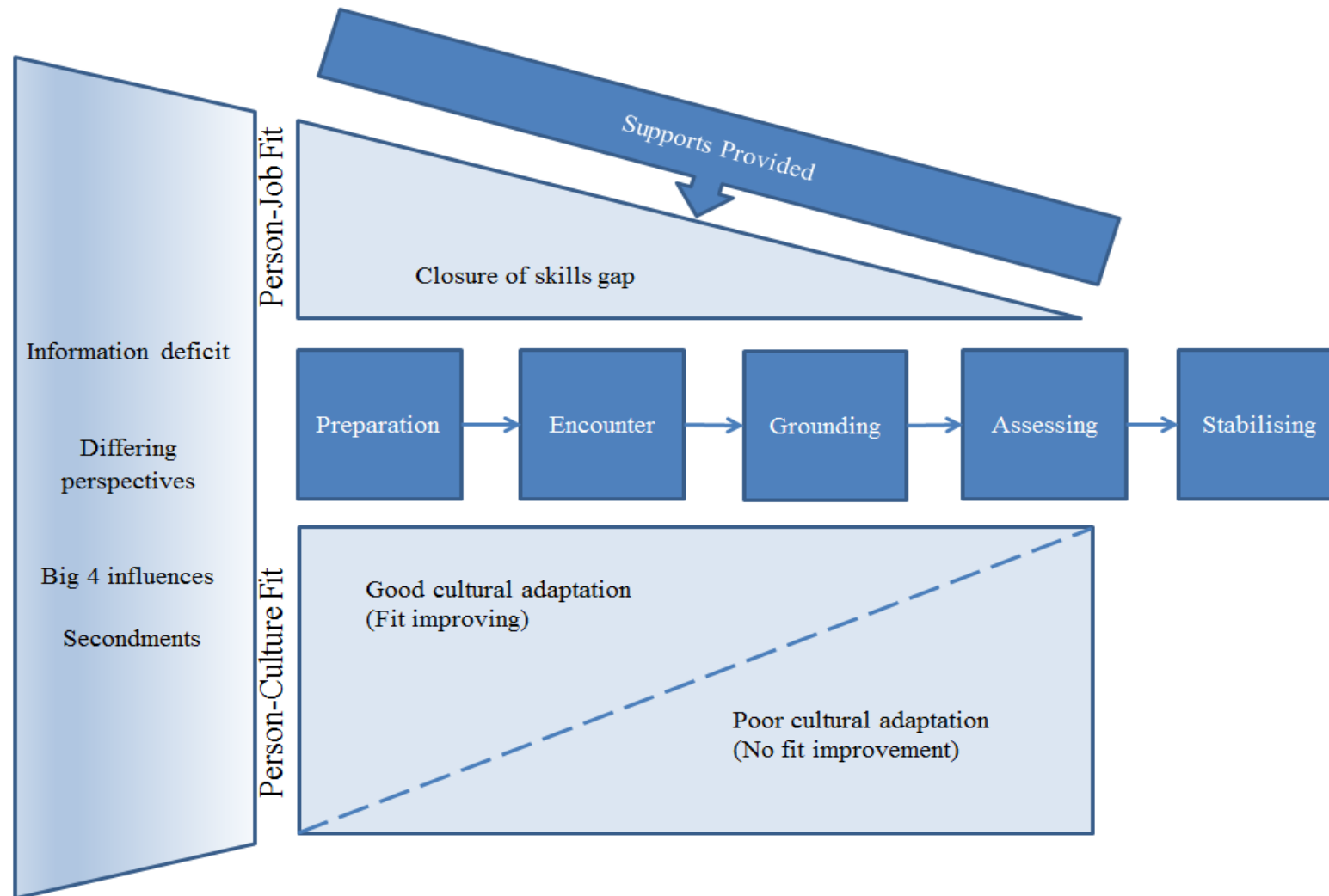
An objective of the study was to develop a framework that informs the transition of a CA from practice to industry and this framework has been developed based upon the themes identified above and building on the findings of Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' is guided by the underlying theoretical lenses. The framework which is presented below in Figure 3 centres on the CAs' phases of transition which are congruous with Nicholson's transition cycle theory (Nicholson, 1987). These phases of transition of preparation, encounter, grounding, assessing and stabilising which were identified from the data collected form the journey that the CA follows in the transition into an industry-based role. The discovery of two distinct elements within Nicholson's adjustment phase

elaborates and refines the theory and demonstrates that the employer has expectations of the transitioning CA and skills gaps must be closed before the stabilisation phase is reached. However, in order to pass through the assessment phase, the CA must fit both the role and the culture of the organisation.

As previously outlined in this paper, it emerged that person-job fit and person-culture fit (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011) are central to ensuring the CAs' progression. The empirical evidence supported the need to fit both the job and the culture simultaneously in order to succeed. As a result, both person-job fit and person-culture fit should not be viewed in isolation but instead viewed collectively, as a mis-fit in either will likely lead to an employee vacating their position (Chatman, 1991; Cable and DeRue, 2002; Nazir, 2005; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006; Wang *et al.*, 2011). On this basis, both types of fit are included in the framework model. Initially, there is a potential gap in the correspondence of skills required for a CA to achieve person-job fit in an industry-based role. The closure of this gap depends upon the level of support provided by the employer. There is also a need for the CA to adapt to the organisational culture when commencing in their industry-based role in order to attain a person-culture fit. However, as previously outlined with the cases of CA12 and HM6, the CA is sometimes just not compatible with the organisation and cannot adapt to the culture which can result in the CA leaving the organisation (Chatman, 1991; Nazir, 2005; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006).

The framework shown in Figure 3 demonstrates the utility of the differing theoretical lenses: Nicholson's transition cycle theory; person-job fit and person-culture fit in a field of study that is generally renowned for its under-deployment of theoretical frameworks (McPhail, 2001; Tight, 2004; Haggis 2009; Coady, 2014). The model also contributes to practice through the provision of an aid to offer an understanding of the dimensions involved in how a CA transitions from practice to industry-based roles.

Figure 3 - Framework to inform the CA transition from practice to industry



5.0 Conclusion

This paper has revealed a number of themes which have emerged from the data collected including: fit with role and culture; practice to industry transition phases; skills gap; supports in developing skills as well as employer and employee satisfaction. The paper has offered a deeper analysis and understanding of the data collected which is cognisant and deferent to the theoretical lenses that guide the study. Furthermore, contextual factors including: differing perspectives on industry roles; the CA information deficit and the 'Big 4' influence provides insight into the uniqueness of the CA transition.

Objective 1 was to understand how CAs' skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements. It was shown that the CAs role in industry is very different to that of practice and that a skills gap exists which requires personal development. However, it was demonstrated that the CA's focus appears to be on development of the harder skills while HMs consistently identified softer skills as more in need of development.

Objective 2 related to understanding how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition. Support for skill and competence development was found in CAI training, in-house support, networks and structured inductions. Surprisingly, CPD was used less frequently and there was no evidence of the use of mentoring by any of the CAs interviewed.

The final objective of this study was to develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry and this theoretically informed framework was presented and discussed in the prior section. In developing this framework, the fit matrix which was developed previously was considered. There was evidence of CAs' first move into industry not working out and the underlying issue in these cases was person-culture fit where the CA could not adapt to the new culture that was encountered. There was no evidence to suggest that person-job fit was an insurmountable obstacle and could be overcome through embracing the challenge and the provision of support. Another interesting finding related to the identified phases of transition of the CAs move into industry with evidence that supports five phases of transition as opposed to four outlined in Nicholson's transition cycle theory. While the phases of transition were closely aligned to the theory, the empirical findings suggest two stages overlap with Nicholson's adjustment phase.

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Appendix 1 - Profile of interviewees

Findings Reference Key	Job title	Time in industry	Industry	Firm size	Moved from	Where held	Company location	Interview duration	Included in paper
CA1 (Pilot)	Financial Analyst	21 mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Wexford	Wexford	20 min	3
CA2	Control Officer	9 mths	Financial Services	Large	Big 4	Wexford	Wexford	41 min	3
CA3	Management Accountant	8 mths	Agri. Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Waterford	Waterford	57 min	3
CA4	Financial Accountant	12 mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Wexford	Cork	37 min	3
CA5	Company Accountant	7 mths	SME	Medium	Mid-Tier	Dublin	Dublin	32 min	3
CA6	Financial Accountant	9 mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Telephone	Waterford	24 min	3
CA7	Associate	23 mths	Financial Services	Large	Big 4	Telephone	London	27 min	3
CA8	Company Accountant	24 mths	SME	Small	Mid-Tier	Telephone	Armagh	21 min	4
CA9	Company Accountant	18 mths	SME	Medium	Mid-Tier	Tyrone	Tyrone	38 min	4
CA10	Company Accountant	24 mths	Technology	Small	Mid-Tier	Telephone	Armagh	29 min	4
CA11	Internal Auditor	24 mths	Agri. Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Kildare	Kildare	60 min	4
CA12	Financial Accountant	4 mths	SME	Small	Big 4	Wexford	Wicklow	45 min	4
CA13	Financial Reporting Manager	10 mths	Aircraft Leasing	Large	Mid-Tier	Dublin	Dublin	40 min	4
LQ1	Financial Accountant	4yrs	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Wexford	Wexford	40 min	4
LQ2	General Ledger Accountant	3yrs 11mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Telephone	Cork	33 min	4
LQ3	Internal Auditor	3yrs 11mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Wexford	Waterford	56 min	4
LQ4	Senior Accountant	4yrs 3mths	Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Telephone	Dublin	39 min	4
LQ5	Finance Business Partner	4yrs 1mth	Energy	Large	Big 4	Telephone	Dublin	51 min	4
HM1 (Pilot)	Director of Finance & Administration		Manufacturing	Large	Industry	Wexford	Wexford	33 min	3
HM2	Chief Financial Officer		SME	Large	Big 4	Dublin	Dublin	35 min	3
HM3	Financial Controller		Retail	Large	Small	Antrim	Antrim	48 min	4
HM4	Financial Controller		Manufacturing	Large	Industry	Telephone	Waterford	27 min	4
HM5	Head of Finance		Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Telephone	Dublin	37 min	4
HM6	Finance Manager		Manufacturing	Large	Big 4	Telephone	Waterford	43 min	4
REC1	Managing Partner		Recruitment	N/A	N/A	Dublin	Dublin	50 min	4
REC2	Senior Associate		Recruitment	N/A	N/A	Telephone	Dublin	51 min	4
CPD1	Owner and Director		CPD	N/A	N/A	Wexford	Wexford	58 min	4
INST1	Recruitment Specialist		CAI	N/A	N/A	Dublin	Dublin	30 min	4

**Section 3:
Discussion,
conclusions and
recommendations**

1.0 Introduction

The data analysis provided a number of key findings which were presented in Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion'. This section of the thesis now discusses these research findings and focuses on how they address the overall research objectives:

1. To understand how newly qualified Chartered Accountants' (CAs) skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.
2. To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition.
3. To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.

The findings in support of these objectives offer new insights into the transition of CAs from practice to industry and will be of particular interest to CAs, HMs and CAI. Some of the key findings which are discussed include the development of a fit matrix, advancement of a framework that informs the CA transition from practice to industry and the identification of an extension to one of the phases of Nicholson's transition cycle theory. Additional findings are also discussed such as the differing skills perceptions of industry requirements and the perceived lack of fundamental accounting skills of CAs which was commented on by HMs, CAs and LQs.

This chapter of the thesis provides discussion in relation to the themes identified in Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' and Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion'. This is followed with a presentation of a final framework which helps inform the transition of CAs from practice to industry. Findings from analysis of the data collected and recommendations for CAs, HMs and CAI are then presented before an outline of how the research has contributed to both practice and theory are provided. The chapter culminates in the identification of limitations, opportunities for further research and concluding remarks.

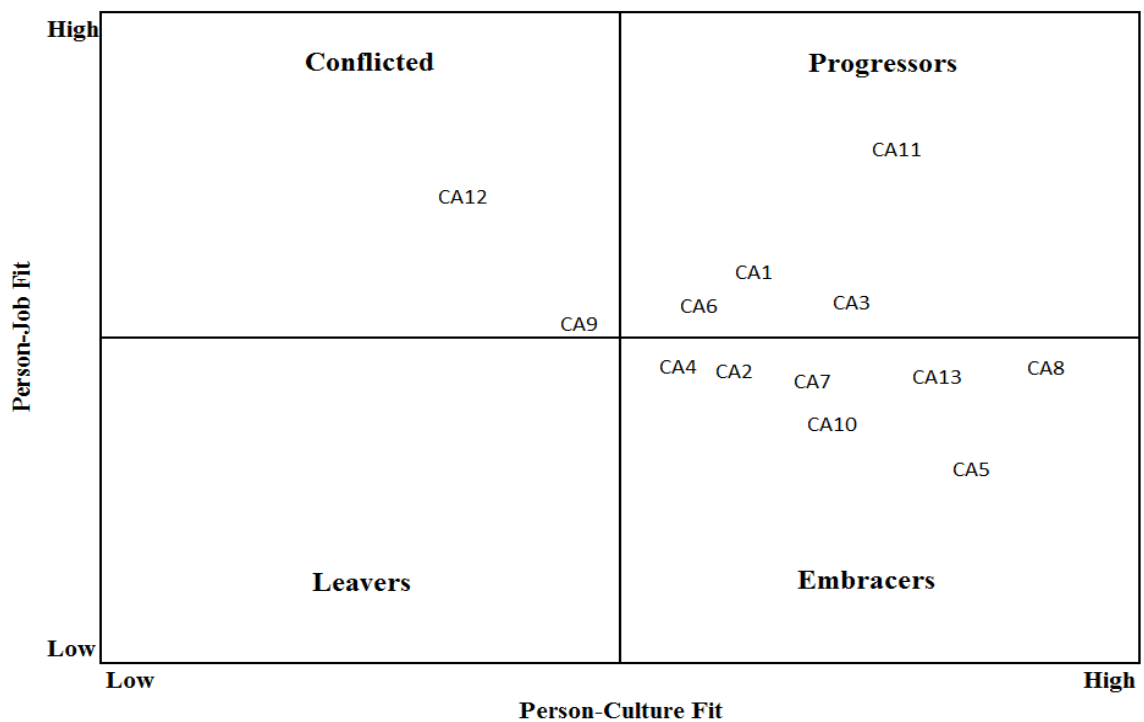
2.0 Thematic analysis discussion

Paper 3 'Design and Initial Findings' and Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion' revealed a number of themes which emerged from the data collected namely: fit with role and culture; practice to industry transition phases; skills gap; supports in developing skills as well as employer and employee satisfaction. This section offers an analysis and discussion of these themes and examines these findings in the context of existing literature.

2.1 Theme 1 - Fit with role and culture

A frequently emerging theme in the findings was the alignment between CAs skills with their particular roles in conjunction with alignment of the CAs to the cultures of their respective organisations. This theme finds strong conceptual support in the literature on person-job fit (Kristof, 1996; Wang *et al.*, 2011; Chuang *et al.*, 2016) and person-culture fit (Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly *et al.* 1991; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006). While previous research has often examined these concepts separately, this study attempts to include both concepts in the analysis of CA transitions which has led to the development of the matrix previously presented in Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion' and which is shown below in Figure 1. Each of the CAs interviewed are positioned on this matrix based upon the researcher's interpretation and analysis of the qualitative data gathered as outlined in Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion'. The matrix seeks to offer an understanding of how the varied job and culture alignments of CAs might be positioned when considering job and culture fits as continua of high and low. Classifications of the four categories of CAs in transition are designated Leavers, Conflicted, Embracers and Progressors.

Figure 1 - Fit matrix



It was found that the majority of those interviewed were Embracers which is categorised as those who are culturally aligned but in need of skill development. While there has been

little analysis of the roles of CAs in industry, there have been a large number of studies analysing management accounting roles which suggests industry-based roles can be varied and complex (Jablonsky *et al.*, 1993) and this aligns with the identification of the need for many CAs to develop skills specifically required of industry. CAs categorised as Progressors were individuals with high levels of fit with both culture and role. In some cases, Progressors were those who had the benefit of previously auditing the company, while in other cases, they were individuals who went into an internal audit function which aligned well with their practice training. Two participants were identified as Conflicted as they had lower levels of person-culture fit with both questioning their future with their current employers (Wheeler *et al.*, 2007). Leavers were the final category, which are those who neither fit the role or the culture. This quadrant is of interest in this study but none of the CAs interviewed could be aligned here which is perhaps due to the constraint of the sampling frame chosen where CAs were classified as Chartered Accountants who have qualified in practice no more than two years prior to the date of the interview and who have transitioned to and remain in their first role in industry for at least three months.

It was found that CAs who had previously audited the organisations in which they are now employed showed an alignment of values (Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Nazir, 2005) and thus had higher levels of person-culture fit (Westerman and Yamamura, 2006). Furthermore, many interviewees joined companies with other like-minded and similarly trained professionals already in place (Schneider, 1987) which aided in the alignment of shared values. It was found that CA9 and CA12 matched the conflicted category as they displayed lower levels of alignment with culture but reported that they were capable of undertaking the role. It was found that both of these CAs joined SMEs and a factor in this mis-alignment with culture may have been that they did not have the support of other professional accountants working in their organisations. This resulted in less congruency between their values and those of the organisation and impacted upon their socialisation within their respective organisations (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991). Socialisation in this sense is defined as "the learning and adjustment process by which individuals assume an organisational role that fits the needs of both the individual and the organisation" (Klein *et al.*, 2015, p. 263).

The high frequency of interviewee discussion regarding fit with the organisational culture suggests that socialisation is of importance to transitioning CAs which is consistent with Gibson *et al.* (2003) who posit that individuals are more aware of the socialisation process

when they change jobs or organisations. In the case of CAs moving from practice to industry, there is a change in both the skills required of the new job and a change in organisation which results in the need for a greater effort by both the employee and employer to ensure congruence. However, it was found that both CA9 and CA12 found socialisation into their new organisation difficult due to insufficient engagement from their employers to support them through their transition into industry.

It was found that HMs placed importance on finding CAs that would fit the organisational culture during their selection process and sought individuals with shared values. It was found that most CAs appeared culturally aligned with the exception of CA9 and CA12. However, there is limited research in relation to addressing cultural gaps (Nazir, 2005) following the hiring process with Gibson *et al.* (2003) offering that the most effective way is changing values to impact upon behaviour. It would seem that where person-culture misfit occurs, there is an incentive on the employer to support the socialisation of the CA which thereby increases employee satisfaction (Chatman, 1991; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006) and ensures the CA remains with the company longer (Chatman, 1991; Nazir, 2005; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006). This study found that this socialisation effort can be achieved through the employer offering inductions, onboarding supports and buddy systems.

It was found that the majority of CAs are Embracers with higher levels of cultural alignment but in need of skills development to align with the role. This was mainly due to practice-based training not being congruent with the skill requirements of industry (Brewer *et al.*, 2014). As CAs are typically trained in practice there appears to be a challenge for HMs in identifying CAs with the skills that align with the requirements of the role. This finding resulted in HM4 and HM6 implementing changes in their hiring strategy, selecting CAs firstly for development roles before later promoting these individuals to more strategic and commercially focused roles once they have been adequately developed. While the concept of person-job fit is traditionally viewed as the basis for employee selection (Werbel and Gilliland, 1999), it is evidenced that in some cases, HMs have accepted that CAs which have been categorised as Embracers will have a certain level of misfit upon entering roles in industry. However, HMs did observe that CAs' prior experience and professionalism acquired while training in practice aided in their ability to learn and develop throughout the transition. This professionalism aids in narrowing any gaps that exist upon entering industry, thereby increasing job satisfaction

(Cable and DeRue, 2002), ensuring better role performance (Wang *et al.*, 2011) and reducing intentions to quit the organisation (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Wang *et al.*, 2011).

It would appear that research in the area of person-job fit is focused on predicting job performance (Li and Hung, 2010), job satisfaction (Cable and DeRue, 2002) and job turnover (Wang *et al.*, 2011). However, much less research exists in terms of actually reducing the gap in person-job fit and this study provides insights to the supports that could be used to narrow the alignment gap between person and job. Sutarjo (2011) does offer the obvious solution which is provision of training but goes further in suggesting career planning and development processes as a method to manage fit. This study finds that person-job misfit is not insurmountable in CA transitions and consistent with Sutarjo's (2011) recommendations may be addressed through training and development interventions through the different phases of transitions which are discussed further below.

2.2 Theme 2 – Practice to industry transition phases

It was found in this study that CAs pass through phases of transition when moving into an industry-based role consistent with the theoretical lens of Nicholson's transition cycle theory (Nicholson, 1987) which posits that transitions go through a cycle of preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. The phase of preparation describes the period before embarking on a new role. Encounter involves the early stages of the new role. Adjustment is concerned with identifying how to perform in the role and involves role development in order to minimise job misfit. This study finds that the adjustment phase can be extended into two phases of grounding and assessing which is discussed further below. Finally, stabilisation is based on the assumption that the transition finally reaches a position whereby the CA is comfortable completing the role. Each of these stages is now considered in turn.

2.2.1 Preparation phase

This study found that the majority of CAs do very little to understand what the transition to industry involves and very little groundwork is completed to prepare for the new role and the development of skills required in advance of the change in role despite the opportunity to undertake ancillary CPD activities in advance of the transition. Nicholson and West (1989, p. 182) specify that the preparation phase is a "process of expectation and anticipation before changes". This view of preparation confines it to the emotions of

change without suggestion of need for practical researching, formulating plans and completing training in advance of the role change. In contrast, Drew-Sellers and Fogarty (2010) suggest that individuals should take charge of their own developmental trajectory when moving organisations and preparation for a job transition provides opportunity to take measure of developmental needs.

It was found in this study that many CAs were influenced to move to industry for a better work-life balance, greater earnings potential and career opportunity consistent with the findings of Sidaway *et al.* (2013). It was perceived that industry-based roles are more advantageous to remaining in practice in fulfilling these outcomes. However, it was found that few CAs understood what different types of role are available within industry and what they would entail from a skills perspective. Additionally, many saw industry roles as generic with no appreciation of the differing cultures that permeate within industry depending on the size of company, the sector in which it operates and the various employee dynamics that exist. It was found that CAs perceived a lack of information exists to aid in informing their decisions relating to industry, company and role preferences.

A finding that permeated from many interviews was the perceived differences between practice and industry roles. These differences were found in the organisational structures, culture, skills required and supports provided. It was found that the structure of CAs' roles in practice is defined and understood while the CAs role in industry was more self-directed. Culturally, the age profiles of practice were younger with more social interaction with colleagues outside of work and a move to industry resulted in a different age and cultural dynamic. Skills development in practice was found to be based on technical training whereas skills in industry were perceived as being different and built up mainly through experience. In terms of support, trainee accountants in practice are heavily supported in their training firms in the development of skills but that level of support was not found to be available once CAs reached industry. It was further found that many CAs were not fully aware of the differences they would encounter until they commenced their new roles. Mitigation of this lack of awareness was found in the CAs who either audited the company they joined or those who had availed of secondments in industry.

2.2.2 Encounter phase

As outlined in Paper 3 ‘Design and Initial Findings’ and Paper 4 ‘Findings and Discussion’, it was evident that the initial sense-making (Louis, 1980) in the first days and weeks of the CAs’ role in industry was traumatic for the majority of interviewees. This initial shock is consistent with the findings of Stanley (2013) who found that students transitioning from education to the workplace found the experience daunting. Much of the research relating to transitions suggests that they can be a struggle for the individual and the process is one of anxiety (Ecclestone, 2009).

This study found that CAs appear conditioned from their experiences in practice and their prior experience ensures that CAs are highly professional in their approach to their new role which helps in addressing person-job fit. However, this conditioning is tested when the CA transitions to a company that lacks like-minded individuals and this observation suggests that there is a socialisation required of accountants when entering industry. As Van Maanen (1976) describes there is essentially a breaking in of new employees. This socialisation of the CA is an attempt to achieve greater person-culture fit. However, there was evidence to suggest that CA12 could not adjust to the differences from their practice role which resulted in a clear intention to quit. This finding would suggest that CAs are better able to close gaps in person-job fit but in certain cases, person-culture fit may not be attainable due to the CAs prior experience in practice, their social influence and behavioural responses.

2.2.3 Adjustment phase

The findings from the data align with Nicholson’s adjustment phase in the first instance but upon closer examination, it was found that Nicholson’s adjustment phase could be elaborated into two distinct phases: grounding and assessing. Grounding refers to the bedding-in of the CA into both the role and culture of the organisation. This phase was found to be about understanding the skills required while developing the basics of the role and gaining what CA1 described as a ‘good grounding’. This ‘good grounding’ was achieved through supports from the employer, CAI and the CAs’ network. Furthermore, it was found that this phase was about gaining an understanding of the organisational culture along with the vision, goals and strategy of the organisation. This alignment to the culture of the organisation was found to be achieved through socialisation of the new employee by way of inductions and onboarding which is defined as "formal and informal

practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organisation or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment" (Klein and Polin, 2012, p. 268). This finding is supported by Nicholson's adjustment phase in showing evolving job fit through the transition process and whilst Nicholson's theory focused primarily on person-job fit (Nicholson and West, 1989), the findings show that the CAs' person-culture fit is also relevant at this point in the transition process. It was evident that this phase of adjustment was crucial to ensuring a closure in any gaps in person-job fit and person-culture fit. It was clear that both the CAs and the HMs understood that this phase of adjustment existed. However, it was found that the assessment phase which emerged from the data collected from HMs was less obvious to CAs.

HMs were found to place expectations on CAs and an assessment of the CA against these expectations was carried out. These assessments sometimes resulted in the lengthening of the timeframe that it took to reach the next transition phase of stabilisation (CA9, CA11 and CA13). In one instance, it was found that CAs did not reach the stabilisation phase and were let go by their employer as evidenced by HM2 who dismissed a CA from the organisation due to their inability to adjust. This finding is important as not only does it offer an extension to Nicholson's transition cycle theory, but it also has implications in a practical sense for CAs making the transition and offers a better understanding of the journey to stabilisation in their new role and company.

2.2.4 Stabilisation phase

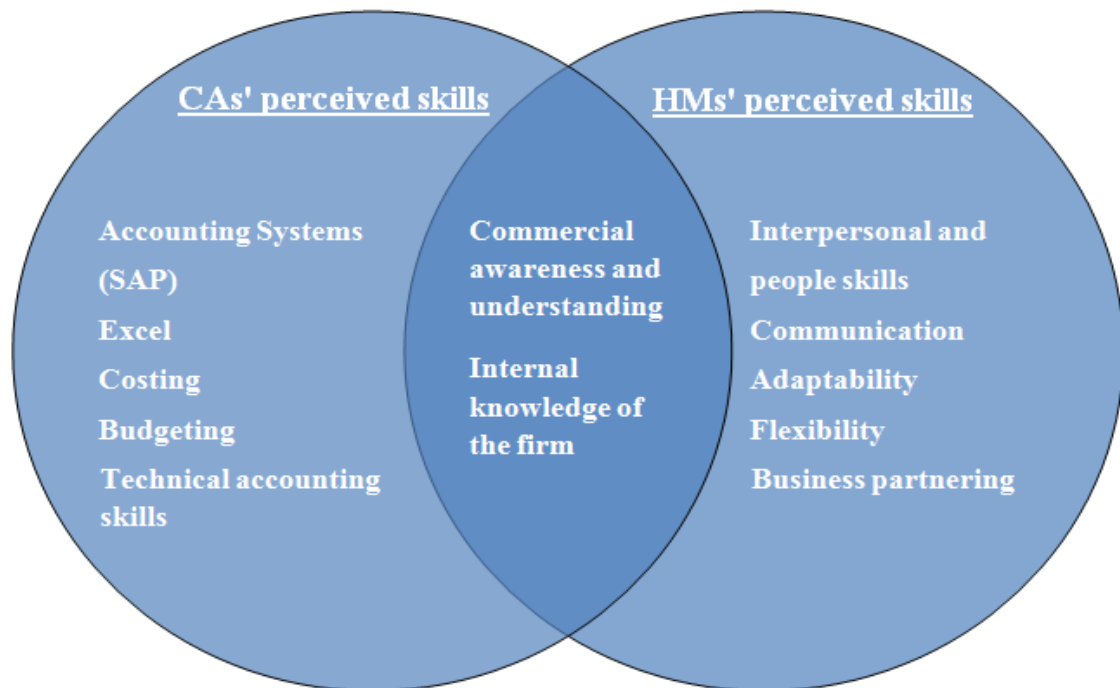
The findings showed strong support for CAs experiencing a stabilisation phase whereby they became comfortable with their role requirements and the skills developed were now more aligned with the role. This study found that most interviewees had reached this phase at the time of interview. An example of a participant who had not reached this stage was CA12 who had only been in the role four months at the time of interview but who expressed an intention to quit due to the cultural challenges encountered. This suggests that CA12 was only in the grounding dimension of the adjustment phase while approaching the assessing dimension. The length of time to reach the stabilisation phase varied in each case and this seemed to be due to the level of support provided to the CAs in order to close skills gaps and to understand the complexities of the business and its culture. These skills gaps that have been identified in this study are discussed in further detail in the following theme.

2.3 Theme 3 – Skills gap

Objective 1 of the study seeks to understand how CAs' skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements. It was found that a skills gap exists which was acknowledged across all of the interview participant groups. This finding is consistent with the findings of Tatikonda and Savchenko, (2010); Siegel *et al.* (2010) and Brewer *et al.*, (2014) who all argue that US accounting education is preparing student for careers in practice despite almost two thirds of US accounting graduates being employed in industry (Siegel *et al.*, 2010). While these US studies focus on higher education, it would seem that this situation may have also formed in a professional sense in the Irish Chartered Accounting context. Chartered accounting in Ireland is influenced by the 'Big 4' practice firms (Byrne and Flood, 2003) who recruit the vast majority of trainee accountants. This hegemonic influence of the 'Big 4' results in a programme that is primarily designed for the needs of practice. This is understandable as it is the practice firms that pay for the education of the trainee accountants. However, Farmar (2013) identifies that over half of newly qualified Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) members transition from practice to industry within a year or two post-qualification.

It is therefore important to know where these gaps exist in order to understand how to best address them throughout the transition phases (Bauer, 2010). While there was an acknowledgment by all participant groups that a gap exists, it was found that there were clear differences between CA and HM perceptions of the skills requiring development in industry. There is a focus by most CAs on the requirement of hard skills such as information technology, technical accounting ability and specific management accounting tasks such as costing and budgeting. In contrast, HMs tend to focus on soft skills such as interpersonal skills, communication, business partnering and being adaptable and flexible as highlighted in Figure 2 below. This is consistent with other studies which found different perceptions between employers and graduates (Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008).

Figure 2 - Perceived skills in need of development for industry roles



It was found that both CAs and HMs perceived commercial awareness and understanding along with internal knowledge of the firm to be gaps which is consistent with the findings of Kavanagh and Drennan (2008) in a study relating to accounting graduates. CAs also focused on the hard skills of management accounting such as costing and budgeting which they would not have been exposed to in practice, but which are of importance in industry-based roles (Siegel *et al.*, 2010; Tatikonda and Savchenko, 2010).

This study further found that CAs perceive accounting systems such as SAP and Excel as skills requiring development which is somewhat surprising given that younger generations are often thought to be more proficient in information technology. However, this finding is consistent with Cory and Pruske (2012) who found that entry-level non-public accountants perceived Excel as the most important skill required of new accounting graduates. In contrast, HMs do not identify IT skills as important and again this is consistent with the literature with Arquero Montano *et al.* (2001) finding that employers do not view IT skills as a high priority, as students at both entry level and newly-qualified levels are proficient in this area. Consistent with the findings of this study, Hassall *et al.*, (2005) go further suggesting that IT skills are no longer a priority to employers and resources would be better utilised to aid in the development of softer skills. These mixed empirical findings and juxtaposition in perception is an interesting one and it is posited by this researcher that CAs understand the need to also focus on soft skills on

the basis that these soft skills are perceived as most important by employers. This view is consistent with the findings of Jackling and De Lange (2009) who found that communication followed by problem solving and personal skills was the most important qualities required for career progression of accountants. Furthermore, Kavanagh and Drennan (2008) found that employers expect communication skills, ethical awareness, professional skills, teamwork, and an understanding of the nature of business and it is this rounded skill-base that Byrne and Flood (2003) proffer in a study of CAI, where they suggest that a versatile skills base enables CAs to become valued business advisors as opposed to custodians of technical knowledge.

A surprising finding of this study was that many interviewees in the HM, CA and LQ participant groups perceived a lack of fundamental accounting skills among CAs. Despite the multitude of skills that are required in industry, it would seem reasonable to expect that Chartered Accountants have acquired basic double-entry understanding which is regarded as the most fundamental of all accountings skills. These basic accounting skills are recognised by Kavanagh and Drennan (2008) as one of the top three skills valued most by employers and it is therefore very surprising that this study found that some Chartered Accountants are perceived as lacking in this area.

In the following section, Theme 4 outlines the different supports that have been identified to aid CAs in their development and ensure a smoother transition and potentially address the skills gaps noted above.

2.4 Theme 4 - Supports in developing competency in skills required for industry

Throughout the interviews, there were many suggestions of supports to aid a CA in developing competency in the skills required as they transition to industry. The use of these supports encourages a workplace environment that enables CAs to build on and transfer acquired skills (Howieson *et al.*, 2014). These identified supports address the second objective of the study which is to understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs. Each of these supports are now presented and discussed in turn.

2.4.1 Inductions and onboarding

It was found that there was an inconsistency in the use of structured inductions with CAs transitioning to SMEs often expected to find their own way, while larger companies

tended to afford the CA an induction period and the allocation of a 'buddy' to aid in their induction. While inductions can help the CA to adapt to their new environments, it is accepted that onboarding plays an important role in helping to socialise these new employees (Morrison, 2002; Klein *et al.*, 2015). Onboarding facilitates the newcomer's adjustment to the culture of the organisation (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2004; Klein and Polin, 2012) thereby reducing gaps in person-culture fit. Simms and Zapatero (2012, p. 153) purport that "improving the career induction process in public accounting is a crucial objective", and this assertion could be extended to the career inductions of industry-based accountants. It was found that larger organisations tended to on-board employees through provision of clear guidance of the expectations placed on the CA, arrangement of meetings with key leaders of the organisations and through communication of the company mission, values and strategies while also providing some context in relation to the people dynamics of the company. Companies predominantly in the SME sector tended to be more informal in their onboarding approach, whereby the CA uncovered their role and the company culture without any explicit plan. This approach risks employees becoming dissatisfied with intentions to quit emerging as was identified with CA12 and CA9 which was outlined previously.

2.4.2 Networks

This study found that all CAs interviewed fully understood the importance of networks as a support when transitioning from practice to industry with many utilising their own peers who were also going through a similar process along with prior work colleagues as a support network during the preparation and encounter phases of transition in particular. This finding is consistent with Drew-Sellers and Fogarty (2010) who identify that early career management accountants understand that social networks are valuable resources that can work for them.

The identification of the importance of networks in the early stages of transition demonstrates that CAs understand that they can learn from the experiences of others who have been through such a process. It also suggests that the transition experience actually requires support from others and those coming from smaller practices may not always have an appropriately sized network support to help them through this process. There were also some CAs and LQs who spoke of the need to expand their network within their new organisation with many HMs also recognising this need and who made efforts to set

up meetings with key leaders of the organisation to support in the CAs indoctrination into the culture of the new organisation.

2.4.3 Ongoing in-house training and support

The provision of in-house support was found to be one of the most frequently mentioned support mechanisms provided by employers and this involved first, arranging meetings with key stakeholders and internal customers of that role and second, providing opportunity to sit next to someone within the organisation who took them through the tasks of their role consistent with the observations of Klein *et al.* (2015). It was found that these supports were more informal, unstructured and ad-hoc in smaller organisations with larger organisations having formal inductions and support. The provision of informal support may suggest that such companies expect CAs to take ownership of their roles without much aid and see them as qualified to complete the role without formally supporting them. It was found that this provided a challenge to some CAs who were coming from a very structured and supportive practice background. It was found that informal in-house support led to lesser CA perceived satisfaction with the role while those who were formally supported were found to have higher levels of perceived satisfaction with the role.

2.4.4 CAI training

It was found that many of those interviewed believed that CAI professional examination training should be directed more towards the needs of industry which is consistent with the findings of Siegel *et al.* (2010) and Brewer *et al.* (2014) in the US higher education context. This is an important finding given that industry is where most accountants are ultimately employed (IAASA, 2018). However, it would seem that CAI has recognised the need to adapt to this shift in employment trends and have adopted a competency-based framework which involves a multidisciplinary case study approach in examinations (CAI, 2018). In addition, the introduction of electives has brought some balance between industry and practice requirements. These changes are widely commended by the participants in this study but there were some who suggested that CAI training could provide more focus on industry requirements. This focus could be provided by way of information. As the prospective members are mostly training in practice (IAASA, 2018), it was found that an information gap exists and CAs are unaware of what to expect of roles in industry. This lack of information available to CAs to inform their decision

making on industry, company and role preferences was frequently mentioned by interviewees. This study supports that it is in the interest of professional accounting institutes to provide information on different industry career opportunities to entry level CAs (Sidaway *et al.*, 2013) and this finding provides an opportunity to CAI in supporting its members through the preparation stage of the transition into industry.

2.4.5 CPD training

It was found that CAs struggled to manage their own CPD upon transition which is likely due to training firms managing and providing CPD while they were employed within practice. This finding has implications on the guidance provided to CAs regarding lifelong learning and how the CA can use CPD to shape their future career path (DeLange *et al.*, 2010; DeLange *et al.*, 2013) and ensure career adaptability (Lindsay, 2016). It is surprising that the CAs interviewed did not take greater control over their continuous learning as it contrasts with Kavanagh and Drennan's (2008) finding that accounting students rate continuous learning as the most important skill to their future careers. A possible reason for this may be that CAs have come through an intense educational process from second level leaving certificate examinations to third level education and then through professional exams. It was also found the CAs interviewed believed that there is limited guidance provided by CAI on how CPD should be undertaken by industry-based accountants (DeLange *et al.*, 2015) which is a likely contributor to the CAs lack of control over their continuous learning.

An interesting finding that emerged from the data was the calls by many CAs and LQs for CAI to offer some form of continuing professional development (CPD) training in relation to guiding the CA through the transition from practice to industry. However, there was no agreement on the form and content of this course, with some suggesting information evenings would be appropriate while others suggested varying lengths of formal CPD training. However, the common theme suggested that more could be done to help inform future CAs making the transition.

2.4.6 Mentoring

It was surprising to find that professional career mentoring was not used by CAs during the transition from practice to industry as mentoring is advocated as an important tool to use to aid the onboarding of entry-level accountants (McManus and Subramaniam, 2014). This finding contrasts with Howieson *et al.* (2014, p. 270) who found that undergraduate

student interviewees indicated that they expected “significant mentoring”. There was evidence found that internal coaching is provided to accountants training in practice but this appeared to be informal and unstructured and formal mentoring appears absent in an accountant’s early career in practice. This lack of formal mentoring in practice-based roles has ensured that CAs have not been made aware of the benefits of mentoring and this lack of familiarity may then extend into the CA’s industry-based role. It was also found that some coaching was provided by some industry-based employers but this appeared informal and ad-hoc. While CAI offer a mentoring service to all members, it would appear that CAs making the transition from practice do not avail of this support despite many of the interviewees reflecting that it would have been beneficial to engage in mentoring throughout the transition from practice to industry.

The final theme presented below discusses the satisfaction of the employer and employee of one another with employee satisfaction with employer clearly influenced by the supports that were discussed above.

2.5 Theme 5 - Employer and employee satisfaction

The theory of work adjustment suggests two main indicators of work adjustment: satisfaction of the individual with the work environment and satisfaction of the work environment with the individual (Dawis and Lofquist, 1981). As the interviews held with the HMs did not involve questions relating to specific CAs it was difficult to ascertain the employer’s level of satisfaction of any specific CA. It was possible however to gather HMs perceived satisfaction with transitioning CAs in general. It was found that HMs were largely satisfied with CAs but there were some mixed results in the levels of satisfaction with CAs found. There was also evidence of mixed levels of satisfaction with employers and it was found that the level of support provided by the employer influenced the CAs level of satisfaction with their new role. This complements a study by Na-Nan and Pukkeeree (2013) who found that job characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, task variety, autonomy and feedback as determinants in the work adjustment of new graduates into the workplace. Whilst Na-Nan and Pukkeeree (2013) identified important links between job characteristics and the transitioning of graduates, this study extends beyond the job to consider the CA occupying the position and the fit between them. It would seem based on the evidence gathered that the provision of developmental support to the CA, aids in aligning the fit of skills and competencies to the requirement

of the role, which also results in the likelihood that CAs will be perceived as satisfactory by their employer. This finding is supported by Chan *et al.* (2008) who found that there is a direct relationship between employee support and employee commitment.

The next section presented will provide a framework informing the transition which will incorporate the themes identified above in its development.

3.0 Framework informing transition

Objective 3 of the study is to develop a framework that informs the transition process of CAs from practice to industry. This framework was outlined in Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion' but has been modified further in this section to outline the supports that were found to aid in closing the person-culture gap. This modification is made on the basis that the findings demonstrate that the cultural-fit gap may remain unresolved whilst job-fit gaps may be addressed. This narrowing of person-culture gap is supported through the induction and onboarding efforts.

The framework firstly identifies that prior to the transition and during the preparation phase, there are a number of factors to consider including information deficits, 'Big 4' influences and differing perspectives of industry-based roles. It was identified in Paper 4 'Findings and Discussion' and previously in this section that CAs perceived a lack of information exists to aid in informing their decisions relating to industry, company and role preferences which impacts upon the preparation phase. It was further found that the perceived benefit of hiring 'Big 4' trained CAs was questioned by some participants who believed that employees from smaller firms may have more rounded experience. There were varying perceptions in relation to differences between industry and practice roles. It was found that the roles were very different from the points of view of culture, skills required, supports provided and structure of the roles. It was found that some CAs were unaware of these differences and they appeared to lack appreciation of the changes that occur upon transition.

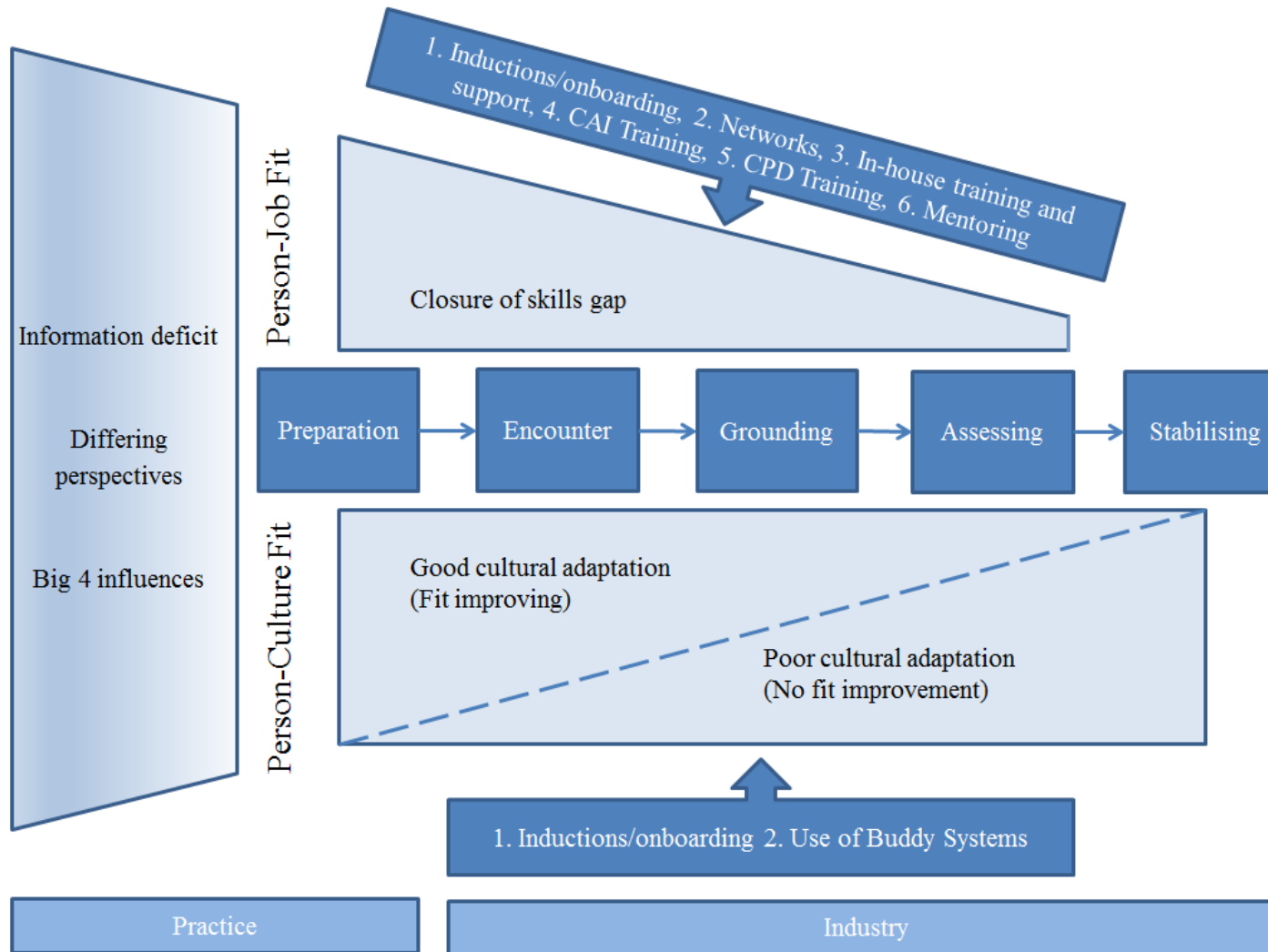
The framework concentrates on the phases of transition the CAs pass through which are congruous with Nicholson's transition cycle theory (Nicholson, 1987). These phases of transition of preparation, encounter, grounding, assessing and stabilising are identified from the data collected. The discovery of two distinct elements within Nicholson's adjustment phase elaborates and refines the theory and demonstrates that the employer has an expectation that the CA is aligned to the role and culture of the organisation before

the stabilisation phase is reached. However, in order to pass through the assessment phase, the CA must demonstrate fit with both the role and the culture of the organisation.

As previously outlined in this paper, person-job fit and person-culture fit (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011) are central to ensuring the CAs' progression. The empirical evidence supported the need to fit both the job and the culture simultaneously in order to succeed which is portrayed in the framework. The findings demonstrate that CAs and HMs attach significant merit to both job and cultural alignment and thus both are included in the framework model. Initially, there is a potential gap in the correspondence of skills required for a CA to achieve person-job fit in an industry-based role. The narrowing of this gap depends in part upon the level of support provided by the employer. There is also a need for the CA to simultaneously adapt to the organisational culture when commencing in their industry-based role in order to attain a person-culture fit and a failure to do so can result in the CA leaving the organisation (Chatman, 1991; Nazir, 2005; Westerman and Yamamura, 2006).

The framework shown in Figure 3 offers a basis through which the transition can be viewed which is supported in theory, academic literature and the data collected. The framework further demonstrates the utility of the differing theoretical lenses: Nicholson's transition cycle theory; person-job fit and person-culture fit.

Figure 3 - Framework to inform the CA transition from practice to industry



The supports to aid in person-job fit have been discussed previously and although mentoring was not found to be a support used by any of the CA's interviewed and CPD training was found to be sparsely used, many of those interviewed suggested that in hindsight, these supports would be of benefit to the transitioning accountant. These supports align to the development of skills and competencies to ensure person-job fit. However, as evidenced previously, it was found that person-culture was also important in ensuring a successful transition. Supports that were found to aid in person-culture include inductions, onboarding and the use of buddy systems. However, based on the findings of this study, it appeared that person-culture fit was not always attained and this is reflected in the framework.

4.0 Summary of key findings

The above discussion regarding themes has outlined the findings of the study and the purpose of this section is to consolidate and summarise these findings into an all-encompassing table that provides easier reference to the findings of the study. The section disaggregates the themes back to the original research objectives of the study and demonstrates how the findings specifically address these objectives. These findings are now presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Summary of findings

Objective 1: To understand how newly qualified Chartered Accountants' (CAs) skills and competencies correspond to industry requirements.
#1: It was shown that the CA's role in industry is different to that of practice and that gaps in skills and competencies exist.
#2: The CA's focus appears to be on development of a competency in the harder skills such as accountings systems, excel, budgeting, costing and technical accounting skills.
#3: HMs consistently identified competency in softer skills such as interpersonal skills, communication, adaptability, flexibility and business partnering as more in need of development.
#4: Both CAs and HMs perceived commercial awareness and understanding along with internal knowledge of the firm as a skills gap.
#5: Both CAs and HMs interviewed perceived a lack of fundamental accounting skills existed among many Chartered Accountants.
#6: The development of the fit matrix aids in the assessment of CAs skills and competencies. This also informs Objective 3.
Objective 2: To understand how skills and competencies required for industry are developed by CAs during the phases of transition.
#7: Support for skill and competence development for industry-based roles was found in CAI training, in-house support, networks and structured inductions.
#8: CPD was used less frequently and there was no evidence of the use of mentoring by any of the CAs interviewed.
#9: An information gap of what CAs expect of roles in industry existed.
#10: In-house supports were more informal, unstructured and ad-hoc in smaller organisations with larger organisations having more formal inductions and support.
#11: Formal in-house support led to greater perceived CA satisfaction in their role.
#12: There is limited guidance offered to transitioning accountants on how CPD should be undertaken.
#13: There were many calls on CAI to offer some form of CPD in relation to guiding the CA through the transition to industry itself.
#14: Informal onboarding risks CAs becoming dissatisfied which can potentially result in them leaving the organisation.
Objective 3: To develop a framework that informs the transition from practice to industry.
#15: The findings concur with Nicholson's phases of transition with the refinement of the adjustment phase into two sub-phases of grounding and assessing.
#16: The encounter phase is an emotional period with many expressing shock which is consistent with extant literature.
#17: The length of time to reach the stabilisation phase was different in each case which seemed due to the level of support provided to the CA in order to close gaps.
#18: The level of support provided by the employer influences the CAs movement through the transition process.

5.0 Contribution to practice

The framework presented informs the process of CAs transition from practice to industry and can be utilised to better understand how to best navigate the transition based on a multiple stakeholder perspective which included CAs, HMs, LQs, CAI, recruiters and CPD providers. Furthermore, the development of the fit matrix will be of interest to those who hire CAs in the future and this matrix provides a means by which to acquire a better understanding of how to support the CA through the transition in an effort to reduce the time taken to reach the stabilisation phase.

The study has implications for CAI as it calls for a rethinking of the positioning of training and supports required for CAs. The evidence supports that most members are employed in industry but are trained in practice and as such, there is a duty on CAI to ensure accountants are trained appropriately for the sector in which they will ultimately be employed. The findings and recommendations provided in this research may offer a direction in how members could be best supported. The study is directly relevant from the researcher's perspective as a HM in industry and has resulted in changes in the management of the transition process. Onboarding has now become more important with the researcher creating more time with new hires to ensure they understand the mission of the organisation and how their position contributes to this purpose. In addition, clarity of expectations of the performance in the role is set out upon commencement, regular review meetings occur and structured training is provided to support the new employee embed into both the role and the culture of the organisation. This structured approach aligns more closely with the experience that CAs acquired in practice as was found in the data.

The study is also relevant to aspiring accountants in training contracts and those who intend becoming accounting students as it is beneficial for them to fully understand the transition that many CAs will take upon entering industry. The importance of understanding that a skills gap exists upon entering a new role, despite being fully qualified, is important. Furthermore, it is important to understand what industry-based employers' expectations are and the skills that they most value in newly transitioned accountants. This study also offers a number of different supports that can be used to address any skills gaps that may exist.

These contributions can be elaborated through discussion of specific recommendations for practice specifically directed towards CAs, CAI and HMs. These recommendations seek to provide a better understanding of how CAs transition from practice to industry and how they can be best supported in the future. To do this, the profession must understand the types of role that their graduates' transition to in industry (Albrecht and Sack, 2000) and appreciate the need for competencies in new skills which may be less developed when coming from a practice-based setting. It is in the interest of all stakeholders that transitions from practice to industry are made as seamless as possible and as a result each of the recommendations provided below are linked directly to the findings identified in this study.

5.1 Recommendations for CAs

The study has resulted in a number of recommendations for CAs as outlined below:

Table 2 – CA Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Findings Addressed
1.	Seek out supports and leverage networks.	#7, #8
2.	Become informed regarding the transition utilising the framework presented (See Figure 3).	#9, #15, #16
3.	Anticipate a significant change in job and culture when entering industry.	#1, #9, #17
4.	Understand and clarify expectations of industry employers.	#3, #4
5.	Seek out CPD supports to help align to requirements of industry role.	#8
6.	Consider CAI mentoring as a transition support.	#8
7.	Focus on development of soft skills as well as hard skills.	#3

Both HMs and LQs identified that there is much that can be done by CAs to help themselves through the transition from practice to industry. This involves informing oneself of the changes that will occur by using the framework presented and utilising their own network. They should also anticipate a significant change in both job and culture. Understanding the expectations of the industry employer is of importance and clarity should be sought in this regard. Utilising supports such as CPD and in-house supports will help to narrow any gaps in alignment with the role while utilising any induction

process offered will help narrow gaps in fit with culture. Another underutilised support is mentoring, and it is recommended that CAs consider engaging in the CAI mentorship programme by aligning with a mentor engaged in the industry sector in which they wish to transition.

It was found that many CAs experienced an initial shock and cultural change when entering industry and this appears to evolve from a lack of understanding of what to expect of industry-based roles. It is important that CAs prepare for this culture shock which can be mitigated through the utilisation of the framework presented in this section which informs CAs in relation to development needs and supports through the phases of transition. In addition, it is important that CAs get clarity from their employer in relation to expectations being placed on them and question their HM in relation to what skills and competencies are important in the role.

5.2 Recommendations for HMs

The recommendations for HMs are outlined below:

Table 3 – HM Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Findings Addressed
8.	Provide a structured formal induction process.	#14, #18, #19
9.	Provide structured support to CAs through the phases of transition.	#10, #11, #18, #19
10.	Utilise the fit matrix to help understand CAs fit to the organisation and role. Embracers (high culture fit, low job fit) should be supported through skills training and career planning and development to help them become Progressors. Conflicted (low culture fit, high job fit) should be supported through support, communication and influencing behaviour to help them become Progressors.	#6, #12, #13, #15
11.	Encourage the development of soft skills as CAs will primarily focus on the development of hard skills	#2

The HM also play an important part in supporting the CA successfully navigate the transition from practice to industry and it is clearly in the HM’s interest to ensure that the CA moves through the phases of transition as quickly as possible. It was found that

provision of a structured induction and structured support throughout the phases of transition resulted in increased satisfaction with the employer, with the CA appearing to take less time to reach the stabilisation phase. This formal approach is therefore recommended, if resources allow, in favour of an unstructured approach. The findings of this study suggest that HMs believe soft skills are in need of most development, but this is in contrast with the perceptions of CAs. It is therefore recommended that HMs support and emphasise the need for soft skills development.

The fit matrix illustrates the varying degrees by which a CA can be aligned to the role and the culture of the organisation. It is important that the HM assesses the CA for alignment with both which currently happens in the assessment phase but it is equally important for the HM to understand how the CA can be best supported to achieve a better alignment with both person-job fit and person-culture fit and this can be achieved by understanding where the CA is positioned on the fit matrix.

5.3 Recommendations for CAI

A summary of the recommendations for CAI are outlined below:

Table 4 – CAI Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Findings Addressed
12.	Continue the evolution of CAI training to involve more industry-based training.	#1
13.	Appraise the requirements of industry-based roles which include interpersonal skills, communication, adaptability, flexibility, business partnering and commercial awareness.	#3
14.	Better inform CAs regarding the nature of industry-based roles. This can be achieved through provision of a CPD course relating to transition to industry which would include offering an understanding of the roles and tasks involved in industry-based roles.	#13
15.	Support regarding CPD requirements of CAs in industry	#12
16.	Focus should be placed on ensuring the fundamental accounting skills issue is addressed	#5

There is much that CAI can do to provide members support in this transition. Firstly, an information gap was found to exist in relation to the types of roles available in industry,

what these roles entailed, and how one could prepare to align to these roles. It is recommended that CAI's career development support be provided to student members to address this finding. This support could possibly be incorporated into the CAI training course. Alternatively, it could be provided as a CPD course which many of the interviewees suggested.

Secondly, some interviewees suggested that CAI could do more to align CAI examinations to industry-based requirements. It was acknowledged by interviewees that CAI are addressing this need and much effort has been made in recent years to provide case study examinations and provide industry-based electives. CAI should continue to incorporate industry-based skills requirements into the syllabus while balancing the need to ensure the fundamental accounting skills are covered along with the needs of practice.

Thirdly, it was found that industry-based accountants were not clear on CPD requirements. In response to this finding it is recommended that clear guidance be provided to CAs, possibly during their FAE year, so as to promote the value and benefit of engagement in CPD.

6.0 Contribution to knowledge

This study attempts to expand upon the theoretical lenses utilised thereby contributing to theory. In relation to Nicholson's transition cycle theory, it was found that there are five phases of transition encountered by CAs transitioning from practice to industry as opposed to four outlined in Nicholson's theory. While the phases of transition were closely aligned to the Nicholson's theory, the empirical findings suggest that Nicholson's adjustment phase has two dimensions of grounding and assessing, and this finding offers an extension to the theory. The grounding phase was found to be about understanding the basics of the role and gaining an understanding of the organisational culture along with the vision, goals and strategy of the organisation. This finding supports Nicholson's adjustment phase in showing evolving job fit through the transition process but whilst Nicholson's theory focused on person-job fit (Nicholson and West, 1989), the findings of this study show that the CAs' person-culture fit is also relevant at this point in the transition process. Additionally, the discovery of an assessment phase through discussion with HMs is important as not only does it extend Nicholson's transition cycle theory but it also has practical implications for CAs making the transition and offers a better

understanding of the journey to stabilisation in their new role and company. This finding may also extend to transitions outside of the sphere of accounting.

The identification of the fit matrix provides the means to a better understanding of the job and culture fit dimensions of the transitioning CA. The findings support the importance of person-job fit and person-culture fit (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2011) and the emergence of these fits in the empirical data collected supports the need to consider both fits in order to assess the new employees' transition. Therefore, person-job fit and person-culture fit should not be viewed in isolation but instead viewed simultaneously as possession of one fit without the other may limit positive transition outcomes and can lead to an employee vacating their position. This exploration of the two fit theories viewed simultaneously can be viewed as a tentative theory which offers opportunity for further exploration. In addition, the fit matrix developed could be used as both an indicative and predictive tool when recruiting CAs into industry and may offer wider utility to other professional transitions.

Finally, accounting education research is noted for its under deployment of theoretical frameworks (McPhail, 2001; Tight, 2004; Haggis 2009; Coady, 2014). In an analysis of 50 accounting education studies published over a 30-year period, Coady (2014) found that 76 per cent did not have any theoretical foundation. This study aims to address the under deployment of theory and predominantly utilises the Nicolson's transition cycle theory along with person-culture fit and person-job fit in presenting a framework to inform the transition of CAs from practice to industry.

7.0 Limitations

It is also acknowledged that this study focuses on CAI graduates transferring from practice to industry in an Irish context and as such caution is advised regarding the level of external reliability through transferability to practice. However, it is contended that other worldwide professional bodies such as AICPA, ICAEW, ICAS, ICAA, CPA and ACCA have members that take a similar career path. Thus, given these similarities, the findings of this study may also be relevant to other professional bodies.

Positioning on the fit matrix was a qualitative assessment based upon the perceptions of the CAs of their respective fits with jobs and culture. As these constructs were not measured there exists a limitation in terms of certainty of the placement of each CA upon

the matrix. Furthermore, it is recognised that the sample size utilised for the development of this matrix included just thirteen CAs. This limited number of CAs in the development of the fit matrix is a limiting factor and an increase in sample size would have contributed to increasing the matrix's validity.

The use of Nicholson's transition cycle theory as a guiding theoretical lens suggests that a CA's transition follows a linear pathway. While the study did not observe non-linearity in the CAs transition, it is nevertheless possible. Due to the pragmatic nature of this study, the framework developed to inform the transition from practice to industry has been purposely designed to be easily understood. This simplicity limits the study by not taking into account the many complexities and social structures that the CA may encounter. It is acknowledged that the CA transition to industry will not be the same for each individual but it is hoped that the practical findings of this study will aid future CAs in making the transition.

The study involved a multiple stakeholder approach with CAs, LQs, HMs, CPD providers, recruiters and CAI all being interviewed. While, many voices were heard, the research may have benefitted from perceptions from further stakeholders such as higher education institutes and practice-based firm managers.

Finally, there is potential for recall bias in this study as interviewees were asked to recall their experiences from the past. The interviewees' recollection may be different from that of the actual experience at the time and their ability to recount the experience may have been diminished over time. This bias is somewhat mitigated through the design of the interview guides.

8.0 Further research

The study has focused on Chartered Accountants Ireland. It would be meaningful to extend this to other professional accounting bodies throughout the world that follow a similar pathway to accounting roles in industry. The existing study could be adapted and replicated in other geographical regions such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand on the basis that CPA and Chartered Accountant training in these countries follows a similar route to membership for industry-based accountants. Furthermore, a comparative based study would seem an appropriate

extension to the research. In addition, the study could be adapted to other professions such as the legal or medical profession which go through similar training programmes.

There were many skills captured in the data for this exploratory study and these provide an initial step in identifying a profile of skills that would support a survey instrument for a quantitative based study. Further work could seek to develop an industry-based skills inventory that could be used to survey skills gaps in wider contexts. Such a study may further support the skills gaps that were found to exist between practice and industry-based accounting and would further investigate which are perceived as most important by both the employers and the transitioning accountants. The completion of a quantitative study may also offer a broader perspective of the range of skills required across different industrial sectors.

The subject area would benefit from wider research and in particular from a longitudinal study to better understand the transitional process as it evolves and unfolds. This could be achieved through the logging of experiences through diaries. Further research could also be undertaken by speaking with those in practice that are anticipating a move to industry in the near future in an attempt to understand the extent of preparation that is undertaken and the type of skills that they perceive are missing.

Both the matrix and framework presented in this paper offers a number of avenues for further research. As the matrix was developed from a small sample exploratory study, future work could seek to develop the matrix with the inclusion of more CAs. The framework could be tested to identify those supports that are more effective in addressing the gaps identified. This research would be of importance not only to the professional accounting bodies but also higher educational institutes.

The influence of the 'Big 4' on CAI was referred to frequently within the data collected which suggests that there is potential for a further study to review this further and understand how this suggested hegemony may impact upon the development and training of CAs.

There was some evidence found to support that transition to an ex-audit client may be beneficial, but it is felt that sample size was not sufficient to draw conclusion. Of the four CAs who transitioned to an ex-audit client CA1, CA3 and CA6 were found to fit the Progressor category. However, CA9 was dissatisfied with their transition and was clearly

in the Conflicted category. A further study that expands on the sample size used would help determine the differences of transitions to ex-audit clients versus those who do not transition to ex-audit clients.

Finally, further dimensions that may be worth exploring include researching how the differences in culture of the 'Big 4' firms' impact upon transition into industry, comparing the outcomes of 'Big 4' versus smaller practice firm transitions to industry and identifying different requirements of industry based on role, industry or firm size. There is further opportunity for a cross tabulation analysis which could compare experiences of CAs joining different industries such as manufacturing, financial services, retail and other categories. An increased sample size may highlight potential challenges which are industry dependent.

9.0 Concluding remarks

This study offers new insights into the transition of CAs from practice to industry. The key findings discussed included the development of the fit matrix, presentation of a framework that informs the transition and the identification of an extension to Nicholson's transition cycle theory. These findings aid in our understanding of how CAs align with industry requirements and how any gaps identified can be addressed through the different phases of transition. The framework presented informs the transition and it is hoped that the practical findings and recommendations produced in this study can be of some guidance to professional accounting bodies, accountants, CPD providers, recruiters and employers in support of accountant transitions from practice to industry in the future.

The next step for this research is to disseminate the findings. From a practice perspective, the researcher will share the findings with CAI and through submission of an article to Accountancy Ireland (the CAI's professional journal). In addition, it is intended that a paper will be prepared for submission to an academic journal (e.g. *Accounting Education*) over the coming months.

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Section 4: Reflective log extracts

Introduction

The value of maintaining a reflective journal is promoted by a number of authors (Boud *et al.* 2013; Wain, 2017; Cunningham, 2018). Dewey defines reflection as the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). Schon (1987) built on Dewey’s work and was particularly interested in how reflection benefits professionals. Schon (1987) purports two types of reflection: reflection-in-action which relates to reflection as the action occurs and reflection-on-action which is the process of reflecting on actions after they have already taken place. Killion and Todnem (1991) expanded on Schon's work suggesting that both reflections can also be considered reflection-for-action and can be used to guide future actions. Cranton (1996) believed reflection should take account of feelings and beliefs which is called “transformative learning, learning that changes behaviour, attitudes, and skills into a new way of thinking and acting” (Horton-Deutsch and Sherwood, 2012, p.7). Reflecting can be viewed as a tool to transform perspectives through a method of self-directed learning (Mezirow, 1991). Reflection is not reserved for academics. I have shared the value of reflection with my workplace peers and leaders. The DBA programme has also pushed me into seeking a better understanding of the value of reflectiveness based on the literature and my organisation has now also engaged with an outside education consultant to further encourage a reflective mind-set within our management and leadership team.

The following section outlines some of the researchers own reflections throughout the doctorate programme and offers the reader some insight into what was learnt along the way and how some of these learnings are being utilised in the researcher’s everyday work life. Due to the personal nature of reflections, it seemed appropriate that the following section be written in the first person.

Emotions and reflections

16 October 2014: *"Day 1 has finally arrived. It is with a plethora of emotions that I begin this research journey: nervousness, apprehension, fears of the unknown, self-doubt but at the same time, excitement and a determination to prove to myself that I can complete the course. Two comments stick in my head from today's workshop: trust the process and become a reflective practitioner."*

At an early stage the need to become a reflective practitioner was identified and based on the emphasis placed on reflection in the first workshop, it seemed important to try and get on board even though this was an entirely new concept to me. It was clear that my emotions were at opposing ends of the spectrum at that time but by placing trust in the process allowed these emotions to be pushed aside in order to gain clarity and direction in the early stages of the programme.

Research topic identification

16 October 2014: *"Today, I learned this is a four-year journey and therefore the importance of passion for your subject arose. Am I passionate about continuous improvement in administrative functions? I am interested in it certainly, but would I use that word passionate? Some soul searching is required."*

This reflection was required in order to focus on what I am passionate about in terms of research. At the time I felt lost, as I came into the process with a clear focus in my mind but after day one of the first workshop I was unsure in my choice of topic. Reflection helped me identify that education of accountants was important to me. I had completed my Chartered Accountant training in University College Dublin which is unusual, but which afforded me a well-rounded training in all aspects of accounting with the exception of auditing. I then moved into manufacturing and it was a relatively easy transition for me given that I had broad experience in management accounting, financial accounting and taxation. In contrast, conversations with my peers who had moved from practice indicated that many found the transition into industry tougher. This got me thinking about newly qualified accountants who have made to move to my organisation from practice and I noticed that there seemed to be a steeper learning curve for these individuals. This spurred me to consider the topic I ultimately chose to research which is something close to my heart.

Managing under pressure

3rd May 2015: *"Second workshop in Advanced Business Theory is completed. It was a very interactive session and sometimes you feel everyone else is much more prepared. I must admit I feel like everyone else knows exactly where they are going and what they need to do to get there. I just feel like it is impossible given the pressure I am under in work right now and sometimes I think I am never going to get through this."*

It was this reflection that really focused my attention on the need to plan my time better. At the time I was under a lot of work pressure and I had just been given another assignment after Workshop 2. I had felt overwhelmed and lost and even began questioning my ability to see the programme through. It was by putting a plan of action in place for both work and the DBA that I was able to get through the workload. I identified that early mornings over the weekend really worked well for me. Over time, I built up a resilience and the knowledge that I was able to maintain a work-life and study balance gave me confidence that no matter how pressurised the situation, given proper planning I can get through it. I have noticed a change in my approach to workplace pressure also. Previously, I felt somewhat flustered in such situations but now I believe I have gained calmness under pressure that wasn't possessed previously.

Theory struggles

17th May 2015: *"I am finding identifying theory for my study to be difficult. I came across Gramsci's hegemony theory but apart from this and correspondence theory I am struggling. I am really concerned that I will not identify the three or four theories required for the theories paper. It is clear from researching that there are not many theoretical frameworks used in accounting education."*

Looking back through my reflective log, I find this extract amusing now. At the time I felt panic because of the lack of theory in my field of study. However, as I proceeded through the programme, I had to make choices relating to the theoretical lenses that I identified which were of relevance. At one point, I was attempting to use neo-correspondence theory, theory of work adjustment, person-job fit, person-culture fit and Nicholson's transition cycle theory while also discussing hegemony. The lesson from this reflection is that knowledge comes with time and effort and you cannot expect to identify the perfect theories or become a great researcher immediately. In the words of Colin Powell: "A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination, and hard work".

Academic writing process

28 February 2016: *"I have found that writing the conceptual paper has been difficult. I am the type of person who likes to get headings on the page, and then I read. As I read, I might put a line or paragraph together referencing what I am reading. This way I am*

building my paper. However, the synthesis of the information and academic writing in general is really challenging. I sometimes end up deleting more than half of what I write and feel like I am getting nowhere."

This thought demonstrates the rigour required for academic writing especially for a novice like me. I don't believe I am alone in this difficulty but reflecting on my style and method of writing helped me identify what worked best for me. I found that over time, I became familiar with how to reference and format a paper, how to connect paragraphs and how to format my papers. The support from my two supervisors provided me with reassurance of my development. However, I believe I have also brought this thoroughness into my everyday work where I often find myself rewording emails and editing the layout of information being provided to others and this discipline of fine-tuning data has added to my professionalism in the workplace and I now have more ownership over my writing.

Who am I?

18 October 2015: *"I presented that my topic would use correspondence theory and I went on to say that I thought that that theory fits the functional perspective. However, I am unsure that the objectiveness required of a functionalist would remain when a chartered accountant is performing a study relating to chartered accountant training. The panel commended me for my reflection but called into question if I am staying true to myself and my quantitative leanings as an accountant. I had presented that I was conflicted, so I think this was a very fair comment to make. Right now, I am not sure what my chosen philosophy should be."*

This was a very important reflection for me as it illustrates the complexities in understanding my research identity. Being an accountant, I clearly have pragmatic, functionalist tendencies which I believe I have remained true to in my research study. However, I questioned my ability to remain unbiased when I am so close to the research topic. In addition, I was commencing a qualitative study when it appeared clear that my accountant tendencies are quantitative. However, there was a lack of research in my area of study based on the literature, which demanded that an exploratory approach be taken. This lack of research informed the use of qualitative research as there was no survey instrument that could be used for a quantitative study. I was personally fine with the qualitative approach as while I may be an accountant, I do not like being pigeon-holed and enjoy the opportunity to expand into new horizons.

Learning to receive constructive criticism

1st May 2016: *“This week I received the written feedback from the examiners for the Doctoral Colloquium. The commentary ran to three pages and mainly centred around the need to pin my colours to a mast and stop sitting on the fence from both a research method and strategy point of view. The examiners want to understand how the theoretical lenses used stack up against the explorative and descriptive nature of the research. They also wanted to understand how the research will occur, in what format it would take and with which stakeholders it would take place with. This seems like a lot of change despite the many drafts and meetings I had with my supervisors. It feels like I took three steps forward and two steps back”.*

After the submission of the first paper, it felt like despite putting in a lot of work, that my paper wasn't up to standard. It seemed that part of the process is to learn how to take constructive criticism. While writing this section, I read back the commentary provided to me relating to the conceptual paper and I now see that the comments were not posed to anger me but to provoke further thought and to strengthen the paper in terms of exposition of the research question and by providing better structure to aid the reader. This form of feedback is something I have not been used to before but learning to accept it helped me to develop as a researcher.

Making Choices

25th July 2016: *“I am not sure which method I should use to collect data. My initial thought when I set out on this journey was to conduct a survey, but I have learned since that you cannot just choose a method. It must be decided upon based on its appropriateness to the research being undertaken. It seems to me based on discussions with my supervisors that a survey instrument must be available for use before it can be performed and to my mind there are none available due to how exploratory this research is. This got me thinking about using mixed methods, interviewing first to gather data for use in a survey but I really don't think that is practical given the time available to me. I need to think some more on this but at the moment my thinking is that interviewing may be the way forward but then how many and with who?”*

The above reflection demonstrates that choices must be deliberated upon. Research cannot be simply a process of following the predetermined easiest path. Instead, a

researcher should make informed decisions regarding methodology and have a clear understanding of the choices they make. The reflective journal was an invaluable way to deliberate on the different choices that were available. This lesson can also be taken into the workplace when making complex analytical choices regarding future strategy and direction ensuring one weighs up all options available.

Gaining confidence

8th October 2017: *"I was delighted to get through the presentation of paper 3 this week which was recommended by the examiners without changes but with some recommendations for refinement. The process doesn't get any easier even though I have been through the delivery of a paper twice before. However, the work done previously really helped me in being confident in my delivery of the information through the slides. I have also noticed this confidence build in work over the last number of months especially when I attended a company finance conference in the USA. I no longer had that fear of speaking up in a large group and offered many suggestions and recommendations. I feel that I have grown as a person through this process".*

I have always had apprehension about presenting but as I progressed through the process I became more immersed in my research which led to a greater confidence. This confidence also transferred to my work where I felt my voice was equal to others who in the past always seemed to dominate the room. The process also taught me that it is important to listen to the recommendations and advice of others and understand that they are helping you to produce the best work that you can possibly complete.

A deepening understanding of the value of reflection

8th March 2018 *"I have found that reflection is as applicable to my workplace as it is to my doctoral studies. I work in a fast-paced multinational organisation with the emphasis being on action and getting the task completed. This environment greatly compliments my pragmatist mind-set of finding a solution and implementing it to get to the desired end result. However, the pragmatic mind-set, at least from my own experience struggle with reflection. For me, the practice of reflecting back on my experiences seemed somewhat unnatural at first and I truly questioned the relevance or necessity for doing so. This was a genuine battle which was fought throughout the process as my tendency was always to revert back to the action of completion of papers over all else. However, over time I*

began to understand the value of reflection and there would seem to be truth in John Dewey's comment that we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience (Dewey, 2004).

Reflection did not come easily to me and very often I found myself asking why I am taking time to write all this down, so it was when I came across John Dewey's quote and started thinking about it, that I finally got it. This quote was my Eureka moment in understanding the necessity for reflection because the quote is actually self-fulfilling in that if one stops and thinks on this quote, one is now reflecting on the quote and learning something new.

So what?

8th August 2018 *“So as I am on the final stages of wrapping up the thesis I find myself asking the question so what? What have I learned? What will I do differently now when hiring a CA? In actual fact, when I read back through some of my findings I can see that my approach first of all in the hiring process must change. Person-culture fit is so crucial but difficult to identify in the interview process. Person-job fit is a little bit easier to assess when hiring but for me culture fit is as important as attitudes are more difficult to amend. The importance of creating a structure for CAs is so important. They are so used to structure that they find the unstructured environment a big challenge at first, so this is one thing I will be putting in place. I will be ensuring clarity of role, structured inductions and structured training is put in place prior to their arrival. The roles for the CAs need to be linked initially to their training in practice so they find it easier to adjust and slowly over time, I think I will be putting the emphasis on the commercial aspects of the business. It would seem wise to encourage soft skill development and mentoring also but I think these will be life-long endeavours for the CAs, at least that is what I will encourage.”*

This reflection related to what I had learned and how I would change in my own position when dealing with CAs as a result. While the research is relevant to all stakeholders, the initial motivation was for the researcher to better understand what could be done to support these individuals to make their transition as smooth as possible. The study was utilitarian and there are many recommendations that can be put into action so taking these into the researchers own workplace is significant in answering the question of so what?

Concluding comments

There are some who discuss their research as a journey with a beginning and an end (O'Dwyer, 2014). However, one could question where the journey begins and ends? Did my journey begin when I entered the DBA classroom on the 16th October 2014, or the day I applied to enter the programme or was the seed of learning sowed earlier when solving crosswords with my dad? The joy of learning and solving problems is an intrinsic quality that I have always possessed, and I have been lucky to have been afforded opportunity to satisfy this desire. My choice to embark on the DBA programme served to nourish this desire further and was a natural progression into a new chapter of my continuing learning journey. However, there is no final destination on this journey and it will not end upon the conclusion of this programme. Instead, my continued learning will be greatly enhanced by the reflection process. As stated previously, reflection was something that was very new and challenging to me and involved a change in mind-set. However, I have found that I have learned so much more than I realised based on the reflections presented above. Furthermore, I feel more committed to my profession and in a sense, I have transcended into a state of habitual reflection in my work life which has resulted in greater objectivity and better decision making.

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