A mixed methods investigation of Master's students' year in the UK: career adaptability and lived experience

Doctor of Philosophy thesis in the Leadership, Organisations and Behaviour

Henley Business School

University of Reading

Sahar Barghouthi

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List of abbreviations

CA   Career adaptability

CAAS   Career Adapt-Ability Scale

CCT   Career Construction Theory

CSE   Core Self-Evaluation

HESA   Higher Education Statistics Agency

HEIs   Higher Education Institutions

IBM   International business management

IHRM   International human resource management

IMDS   Information management and digital studies

IPA   Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

PGT   postgraduate taught

TA   Thematic analysis

UG   Undergraduate

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Abstract

In a socio-economic context undergoing continuous change, career adaptability emerges as a central psychosocial construct reflecting individuals' resources for managing career tasks and challenges. Literature shows a need for more research on career adaptability change and qualitatively investigating that. This research investigated the lived experience of master's students to explore how career adaptability (CA) changes during the year and what factors might influence that change. In order to do so, a sequential mixed methods design was used. First, quantitative data were collected from Postgraduate taught (PGT) students at Henley business school who completed the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale at two different points six to eight months apart. Paired sample t-test and hierarchical multiple regression analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data. After that, the lived experience of the students, who took part in the quantitative study, was explored through semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis

The quantitative results showed that students' CA has changed in different directions (increasing and decreasing) there was no significant change in CA for the students.

The **qualitative** data analysis showed that personal and contextual factors impacted their career adaptability change. Students with increased career adaptability at the end of the year showed a high level of self-management with a clear goal, time management and planning. The one-year master's experience allowed students to know themselves better through engaging in different activities inside and outside the university. In addition, students with higher career adaptability showed maturity and the ability to see things differently by enhancing their critical thinking skills. Focusing on the learning process itself and dealing with feedback constructively helped them enjoy the journey and lower stress levels. Social support from family, friends and teachers assisted students' stability and the ability to develop in a new diverse environment. Networking helped them feel more confident about their abilities and increased career adaptability.

Value of this study: By quantitively and qualitatively investigating the change in career adaptability, this study offers new insights into the factors that can influence career adaptability development. In addition, it gives insight into the lived experience of master's students, which is under-researched in the literature, and it provides theoretical and empirical implications for universities and career counsellors in addition to future research ideas for researchers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an introduction to the study by first discussing the background and context, followed by the research problem, the research aims, objectives and questions, the significance and the final section outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background and context

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the number of students pursuing postgraduate education in the United Kingdom has increased significantly over the past two decades, surpassing the expansion of the undergraduate (UG) sector over the same time frame (HESA, 2021). Postgraduates provide a substantial and expanding contribution to the UK economy and the higher education sector. The increase in postgraduate taught (PGT) enrolment is favourable for institutions, the majority of which are actively researching methods to increase revenue and diversify income streams (Robertson, 2010). Students' capacity to properly transition to and engage in postgraduate education is crucial to their advancement, accomplishment, and overall pleasure, all of which are important for institutions (Evans et al., 2018).

In a highly competitive higher education market, universities have to dedicate themselves to graduating individuals who are employable in today's world of work (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019). Literature has recognised many factors that can impact students' employability, such as human capital, social capital, and psychological aspects (Tomlinson, 2017). Universities commonly use strategies to improve graduate employability and focus on these factors through teaching and assessing graduate qualities (Hammer, Ayriss & McCubbin, 2021), and career development learning (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019).

Even with the fast expansion in the higher education sector and the rise of postgraduate students in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the experience of these students has been relatively unexplored (Tobbell et al., 2010). It is unclear how successfully these students can navigate the transition between undergraduate and postgraduate education and between postgraduate levels (Tobbell et al., 2010). Employers suppose that more might be done to guarantee that postgraduates receive the greatest return on their investment in PGT education and that they graduate well-prepared to thrive in their career paths (Universities UK, 2010). Thus, exploring the PGT students' experience is vital to comprehend their motivations and expectations and how being a master's student prepares them for the world of work.

Institutions are increasingly being measured by funding, quality agencies, and in terms of their apparent ability to prepare their graduates for the job market. Therefore, the higher education sector is expected to produce well-prepared graduates to adapt quickly to the changing work environment with skills and resources that make them work-ready (Knight & Yorke, 2004; Browne, 2010). Nevertheless, the learners are responsible for interpreting and reflecting on their learning, taking it forward and engaging with the development actively (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden, 2010). Employable graduates can find rewarding employment, but maintaining this over a lifetime is not easy. To remain employable, they will need both the knowledge and skills for the current job and the skills to develop, learn and adapt to a constantly changing environment.

The emphasis on employability in higher education policy is also related to the evolution of career views (Clegg, 2010). This emphasis suggests that students and institutions must consider future employment as the most critical factor when selecting a course of study. Brooks et al. (2020) discovered that students' conceptions of the purpose of higher education incorporated several factors, with future employment being one of them.

The world of work today has created a new challenge for traditional skills development strategies and approaches. The modern new context is constantly evolving in many dimensions. HEIs should keep up

with the ever-changing job market and focus on building successful employable individuals (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019). The significant changes in the work environment, for example, changes in job stability due to financial breakdowns, have considerably decreased the opportunity for an individual to work for one organisation for their whole life with an ascending path. Workers and employees have to develop new skills and competencies to align themselves with new occupational prospects, which look unpredictable and indefinable (Savickas, 2011). Only a few numbers of employees have long-term jobs.

Career success is essential for both individuals and organisations. Work has a significant impact on individuals' self-concept. Being flexible and adaptable is critical for employability (Inkson, 2006; Super, 1957). The shift of career progress responsibility from organisation to individual gives individuals more freedom and responsibility to manage their careers and life (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Volmer & Spurk, 2011). The new career indicates a continuous learning process, and individuals should enhance adaptability and self-knowledge (Hall, 1996).

Many studies have addressed the significant connection between adaptability and employability (e.g., Hirschi, 2012; Savickas, 2012). There has been a significant interest in career literature over the last few years, which addresses the concept of new careers and focuses on the flexibility and self-management of individuals (Sullivan, 1999). One of the essential and well-known concepts in this regard is career adaptability (CA). Career adaptability is "a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, and traumas in their occupational roles" (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Career adaptability is crucial for career success and well-being (Morrison & Hall, 2002).

Career adaptability is a crucial psychological meta-capability for successful adaptation in various life domains, including careers (Coetzee & Harry, 2014). As a psychological construct, career adaptability refers to an individual's self-regulation skills or capacities for managing unexpected, complicated, and uncertain challenges posed by developing vocational demands, occupational transitions, and work

traumas. Individuals' general and professional well-being are profoundly impacted by their career adaptability (Maggiori et al., 2013). In addition, career adaptation resources may improve graduates' job-finding prospects and support a smooth school-to-work transition.(Koen et al., 2012; Tian & Fan, 2014).

Career adaptability is a multidimensional concept composed of four psychological resources: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012; Savickas, 2013). These four aspects indicate the adaptive coping skills of individuals in response to environmental change. They are influenced by both the individual and the environment (Savickas, 1997; Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Some research focussed on the impact of individual and environmental variables on career adaptability (e.g., Creed, Fallen & Hood, 2009; Tian & Fan, 2014; Zacher, 2014; Johnston, 2018). However, empirical information on the importance of environmental and contextual variables in career adaptability research is still relatively limited (Autin et al., 2017; Pajic et al., 2018; Mei, Yang & Tang, 2021).

While environmental and contextual factors are distinct, they can also interact and influence each other. For instance, socio-economic status can impact where people live, work, and play, which can expose them to different environmental conditions. Similarly, environmental changes, such as climate change, can affect economic and social conditions, such as food security and migration patterns. In the context of career adaptability, environmental factors refer to the external conditions and opportunities that can impact an individual's ability to adapt to changes in the workplace or job market. These can include factors such as technological advancements, economic conditions, industry trends, and demographic shifts. For example, the rise of automation and artificial intelligence may lead to the obsolescence of certain jobs, while creating new opportunities in emerging fields. Contextual factors, in the context of career adaptability, refer to the social and cultural conditions that shape an individual's career development and decision-making. These can include factors such as family expectations, educational background, values, beliefs, and social networks. For example, an

individual from a family with a strong tradition in a particular profession may feel pressure to follow in their footsteps, even if their interests and abilities lie elsewhere.

Career adaptability involves the ability to adjust to changing circumstances and develop new skills and competencies to stay relevant in the job market. Environmental and contextual factors can impact an individual's career adaptability by creating new opportunities, constraints, or pressures that may influence their career choices and development. Understanding these factors is important for developing effective strategies for career development and lifelong learning. For example, individuals who are aware of emerging industry trends and the skills needed to succeed in these fields may be better equipped to adapt to changes in the job market and pursue new career opportunities. Similarly, individuals who can identify and challenge limiting beliefs and social expectations may be more open to exploring new career paths and pursuing their true interests and passions.

Environmental and contextual factors play a critical role in shaping the career paths and development of Master's students during their Master's year. These factors can influence Master's students' beliefs, values, motivations, and decision-making processes, which, in turn, can impact their ability to adapt to changing circumstances in the job market.

The literature on career adaptability is dominated by quantitative research (Johnston, 2018). Although there are several qualitative studies, there is a need for more qualitative studies to provide important richness and depth to the concept that highlights the importance of career adaptability in personal life (Johnston, 2018). Bimrose and Hearne (2012) advised that "fresh attention needs to be given to how to best support the development of career adaptability, a crucial resource for career development". Further, cross-sectional research would not suit a study trying to explore the change in career adaptability. At least two time points of research are required to understand how career adaptability changes over an extended period and in specific conditions and situations (Johnston, 2018). Career adaptability responses (like, planning, exploring and making decisions) relate to

individuals' behaviour. It is reasonable to show these behaviours when needed and not consistently (Hirschi & Valero, 2015).

More than one measurement point would be necessary to determine if career adaptability dimensions change over a short period of time, how career adaptability dimensions change, and if they change cohesively (Rudolph, Lavigne & Zacher, 2017). Career adaptability has gained increased attention from researchers in the past few years, mainly among university students (Ismail, 2017; Celik & Storme, 2018). However, less attention was given to Master's students (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013).

Individuals differ in their readiness to participate in adapting behaviours (Teixeira et al., 2012). Hence, it can be claimed that career adaptability is associated with personality characteristics or factors. Relationships between personality characteristics such as the Core self-evaluation (CSE), big five personality traits, optimism, proactive personality, and self-efficacy have been demonstrated in recent research.(Lent, Brown & Hackett ,1994; Van Vianen et al., 2012; Zacher, 2015; Fang et al., 2018; Hui et al., 2018). Graduates need career adaptability skills in order to be able to adapt to an ever-changing work environment. However, it is said that students graduating from higher education lack the skills and abilities required for today's world of work (Vashisht, Kaushal & Vashisht, 2021). Therefore, it is vital to comprehend how new graduates might be better equipped to navigate an increasingly complicated work world.

This study was conducted for several reasons. First, career adaptability has been associated with a number of outcomes, including academic satisfaction (Duffy, Douglass & Autin, 2015), career building (Merino-Tejedor et al., 2016) and career motivation (Fang et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding the factors that influence a positive change in career adaptability is essential theoretically and practically to students, universities and employers. Second, many studies have reported correlations between personality traits and career adaptability. However, very few studies focused on personal behaviour and contextual factors and their influence on career adaptability change. Therefore, applying mixed-method research techniques to examine these factors quantitatively and qualitatively is worthwhile.

1.3 Problems and gaps in the literature

Educational paths are determined mainly by a person's decisions. Much research has examined students' decisions about transfer to higher education, frequently focusing on the effect of socioeconomic status (Reay et al., 2007). Research on students' selection of higher education degrees has concentrated primarily on undergraduate degree selection (Wolniak, 2012). The transition from a bachelor's to a master's degree has received less attention than the transition from secondary school to a bachelor's level (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). This may be due to the perception that students who choose to continue their education at the graduate level are already "expert students" in their field (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). Research on decision-making has focused on students' information-gathering abilities in a few cases (Jepsen & Varhegyi, 2011; Towers & Towers, 2020).

Most quantitative research has evaluated career construction theory CCT using large and relatively homogeneous samples of students, employees, and job seekers. More studies on a new set of individuals are required to apply and maybe extend the CCT to explain job choices, behaviour, and adjustment in more particular, underrepresented, or marginalised groups. Identifying the theory's boundary conditions might be developed by investigating career construction theory propositions in different groups (Rudolph, Zacher & Hirschi, 2019). A group of Master's students would be an addition to the studies that focussed on higher education students since not much attention was given to this group and how their career adaptability changed during the year.

To improve one's employability nowadays, one must acquire an increasing number of qualifications. The study of Master's students' experience still calls for closer examination from research. Particularly regarding understanding the Master's experience and how that experience contributes to preparing the students for today's job market. Most studies of students' decisions during this transition phase have used a quantitative approach, highlighting the necessity to investigate the details and difficulties of the students' decision-making process. Postgraduate students have a variety of human, social, and cultural capital (Umbach 2016). They achieve a wider variety of social and cognitive competencies during their education and attain more independence (Wu, 2014). They develop and change and

frequently adjust their professional goals throughout their programmes. Therefore, it is essential to understand these students' perspectives on their experiences and transformations.

The present study contributes to filling this gap by investigating how being a Master's student would impact career adaptability change and which personal and contextual factors might influence that change. This study illustrates the value of linking the literature on higher education graduate employability and career development, as well as the significance of theory-driven research (Healy, Hammer & McIlveen, 2022). Through the lens of CCT, this present investigation has identified new findings that can help educators and practitioners understand university students' motivations and interests in engaging in activities that are likely to support the transition from university to work. The career construction theory (Savickas, 2005;2013) is employed to investigate students' accounts of their planned and actual participation in career adaptive behaviours.

Research on career construction theory has often used cross-sectional studies and neglected to investigate dynamic changes in constructs across different periods. Most research on the antecedents of career adaptability has disregarded the impact of time except for very few studies (i,e Zacher, 2014). This has limited our knowledge of the factors that can predict and influence the development of career adaptability. Given that CCT states that career adaptability develops from the dynamic interaction of individuals and the environment over the life course, this is quite surprising (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). There is a need for more empirical research to study the change in career adaptability and the factors that might influence positive or negative change.

Few qualitative studies have investigated how career adaptability encourages proactive or reactive responses to professional obstacles. Career development practitioners (Bimrose et al., 2019), mid-career changes (Brown et al., 2021), refugee job seekers (Wehrle et al., 2019), and retirees have been the subject of qualitative research on career adaptability (Luke, McIlveen & Perera, 2016). There is a need to explore qualitatively how career adaptability resources enable Master's students' involvement in adaptable career behaviours (Creswell, 2014; Johnston, 2018; Spurk, 2020). The current study tackles this gap in the literature using a post-positivist research perspective.

More qualitative and quantitative research is needed to investigate how adaptability and adapting develop over time (Brown et al., 2021; Spurk et al., 2020). This research tracked the changes in career adaptability of Master's students. This study used a mixed-method design to ensure that sampling participants for qualitative research have different career adaptability profiles. This will help further explain the interaction between career adaptability and adapting responses.

Qualitative research can provide a more in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of Master's students concerning their career adaptability development. Here are some examples of what we could learn from more qualitative research that we may not already know from existing research:

Personal experiences and perceptions: Qualitative research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Master's students experience career adaptability development during their Master's year. For example, we could learn about the specific challenges and opportunities that Master's students encounter with their career development, as well as how they perceive and respond to these challenges.

Social and cultural contexts: Qualitative research can also provide insights into the social and cultural contexts that shape career adaptability development for Master's students. For example, we could learn about how cultural norms, institutional policies, and social support systems affect career adaptability development for Master's students.

Individual differences: Qualitative research can help us understand the individual differences in career adaptability development among Master's students. For example, we could learn about how personal characteristics, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience, contribute to career adaptability development.

Strategies for career adaptability development: Qualitative research can also provide insights into the strategies and resources that Master's students use to develop their career adaptability. For example, we could learn about the types of support and guidance that Master's students find most helpful in

developing their career adaptability, as well as the specific strategies that they use to navigate career-related challenges.

Overall, qualitative research can complement existing quantitative research by providing a more in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of Master's students concerning their career adaptability development. Qualitative research can help identify the specific factors that contribute to career adaptability development and inform the development of tailored interventions and programs that meet the individual needs and preferences of Master's students.

1.4 The research question and objectives

More research is encouraged and recommended on career adaptability, given its importance in all life stages (Hirschi, 2009; Savickas, 2012; Johnston, 2018). Much research studied career adaptability, focusing on adolescents and young adults transitioning from school to work. Many studies investigated the career adaptability of undergraduate students. However, little attention has been given to postgraduate students, especially in taught postgraduate (PGT) programmes.

The readiness of the PGT students to engage in the labour market is vital since this Master's year is considered a transition stage and a preparation for the world of work. For example, career motivates students to seek out PG programmes (Donaldson &McNicholas, 2004; i-graduate, 2013). Usually, postgraduate students tend to be very diverse in their previous experience and background. Some students might have moved from an undergraduate to a postgraduate programme, and some might already have some work experience, which might enhance their employability or help them transition to new career paths (Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013). Whatever the background and the reasons of individuals to undertake PGT programmes, these groups of people are under-researched and under-represented in the literature. Even though a quarter of the UK universities' students are postgraduate and half of the international students in the UK are postgraduate students (HESA, 2021).

Given the lack of research regarding the Master's students' experience, this study aims to identify and characterise the experiences of Master's students in the UK and explore how they develop their career

adaptability and readiness for the demanding world of work. Using career construction theory, this research also aims to connect higher education employability literature to career development literature. It will do so by focusing on how career adaptability changes during a Master's year experience and exploring what factors might impact that change.

The subject of postgraduate taught (PGT) education at universities is under-researched compared to research in undergraduate education, which makes it more challenging to determine what resources postgraduate students need to be at the level required to enter or return to the workforce (Drennan & Clarke, 2009; Hall & Wai-Ching, 2009; Bamber, 2015; Bamber et al., 2019;). This gap in the research makes it challenging to connect theory with practice in postgraduate teaching and learning experience (Bamber, 2015). In addition, there is a lack of literature about the transition to PG but an abundance of literature about other transitions in other areas. Hall and Wai-Ching Sung (2009) suggest that because of the expansion of postgraduate provision overseas, more attention must be given to students' learning experiences in UK universities. Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) suggest that international students may face more difficult transitions than UK students because of the cultural shifts and challenges of using a second language. They show in their study that little research has explored this area. Accordingly, this research aims to understand postgraduate experiences in the UK. The study's main aim is to understand the impact of being a Master's student in a UK university on students' readiness for the new world of work by exploring the development of their career adaptability. The postgraduate participants are expected to be diverse in age, gender, nationality, undergraduate courses, work experience and cultural and social background.

A lived experience is a person's first-hand experience of living in a particular place. A person's lived experience will be made up of their thoughts, feelings, opinions and attitudes towards the place that they live in. These experiences are shaped by a range of factors, including their background, culture, identity, relationships, and environment. Lived experience is subjective and can differ widely from person to person, even if they have similar backgrounds or circumstances. Lived experience accounts

from residents, if gathered and recorded, is important qualitative research. Examples of lived experience may include a person's experiences with discrimination, their upbringing in a particular culture or religion, their struggles with mental health or physical disability, their career and educational experiences, their relationships with family and friends, and their experiences with social and political issues.

This research is concerned with the detailed examination of the students' lived experiences. The research aims to conduct this examination in a way which is as far as possible enables that experience to be expressed in its terms, rather than according to predefined category systems. Situate participants in their particular context exploring their personal perspectives and starting with a detailed examination of each case before moving to more general claims. Reflecting on everyday lived experience can be either a first-order activity or a second-order activity like remembering, regretting, desiring and so forth. The research is concerned with experience which is of particular significance to the person. The study concerned where ordinary everyday experience becomes an experience of importance as the person reflects on the significance of what has happened and engages in considerable intense awareness in trying to make sense of it.

Experience tempting and elusive. In a sense, pure experience is never accessible we witness it after the event. People are physical and psychological entities. They do things in the world, they reflect on what they do, and those actions have meaningful existential consequences. When people are having major experiences and facing big issues the multidimensional aspect of their response to that experience comes to the fore so holistic analysis is particularly appropriate.

In the context of master's students' career adaptability development, lived experience refers to the unique and personal experiences that a student has had throughout their life that have influenced their career aspirations, goals, and decisions. These experiences may include their upbringing, education, work experience, personal relationships, cultural background, and social and political context.

Lived experience can play a significant role in shaping a master's student's career adaptability development. For example, a student who has faced challenges such as discrimination or economic hardship may have developed a high level of resilience and adaptability, which can be applied to their career development. Similarly, a student who has had positive experiences in a particular field or with a certain skill set may be more likely to pursue a career in that area.

Understanding a master's student's lived experience can be important in supporting their career adaptability development. By acknowledging and valuing their unique experiences, counsellors and advisors can help students build on their strengths and address any challenges or barriers that may be hindering their career development. Additionally, by creating a supportive and inclusive environment that respects the diversity of students' lived experiences, institutions can foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

Studying how students experience career adaptability development involves exploring the personal and unique factors that shape their individual experiences, such as their background, identity, values, and aspirations. This approach can help us gain a deeper understanding of the nuanced ways in which Master's students engage with and develop their career adaptability skills. Studying the lived experience provides a more holistic understanding since the research focuses on the subjective experiences of Master's students. This helps us gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and dynamic process of career adaptability development. This also can help us identify areas where students may need additional support or resources, as well as areas where they may be thriving.

In addition to that, understanding how students experience career adaptability development can help inform the development of tailored interventions that meet their individual needs and preferences. For example, students who struggle with a particular aspect of career adaptability development may benefit from a targeted intervention that addresses their specific challenges. Master's students may

become more self-aware and better equipped to navigate their future career development. This can help them develop a stronger sense of agency and ownership over their career trajectories.

Studying how students experience career adaptability development can provide a more nuanced and personalized understanding of this process, which can inform tailored interventions and support the development of self-awareness and agency among Master's students. According to that the research.

The research questions highlight the relations between human beings, their interactions and their context. This proposed research aims to explore the experience of business-taught postgraduate students during their master's year and how that impacted their career adaptability.

The research's question is:

How does the experience of being a Master's student impact career adaptability?

The research intends to answer this question quantitively and qualitatively in order to give a holistic and deep understanding of the issue. Therefore the objectives of the research are:

- *Investigate if there is a significant positive change in career adaptability and its four dimensions during the Master's year.*

- *Investigate if Core self-evaluation (CSE) positively predicts the change in overall career adaptability and its four dimensions.*

- *Explore the personal and contextual factors that influenced a positive career adaptability change by the end of the year.*

1.5 The structure of the thesis

This section briefly summarises each chapter's purpose and contents and explains what each chapter will cover to orient the reader. This thesis consists of eight chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction of the thesis, the context of the study is introduced. The literature gaps, problems, research question and objectives have been identified.

The relevant literature review is explored in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Two focuses on reviewing postgraduate programmes and students. The chapter also focuses on the importance of postgraduate taught (PGT) with data from HESA (2021) showing the number of international and national students and the economic importance of PGT. The importance of PGT for students, universities and employers is discussed, followed by the challenges that PGT students face, especially international students. PGT employment and employability are discussed in addition to human and social capital and their importance to students.

Chapter Three reviews literature related to career development theories focusing on CCT theory and career adaptability context. The chapter started with the world of work today and the importance of being employable and adaptable. An overview of different career-related theories and concepts is discussed. System theory framework (STF) is chosen as a meta-theory to give an idea of the complexity of the context of the experience. Then the idea of self and environment concepts are discussed. CCT is discussed next, focussing on the concepts of adaptivity, adaptability and adapting concepts with a primary focus on adaptability and its four dimensions. Self-regulation theory concerning CCT is discussed. Career adaptability change and the factors that might cause a change were discussed with a focus on personal traits and behaviour. CSE was given special attention among other personal traits associated with CA. The chapter concluded by discussing the integration of postgraduate literature and career development theories and literature and its benefits.

Following the literature review, Chapter Four describes the methods and methodology used in this study, including the research question and Hypotheses. The theoretical and practical aspects of using mixed methods research design are discussed. This chapter also describes the methods and procedures used to access and collect the responses, including the recruitment of participants, rigour of the study and ethics.

The findings of this study are presented in Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five presents the results of the quantitative part. The results focussed on investigating if there is a significant change in career

adaptability and if CSE could predict the change in overall career adaptability and its four dimensions. The chapter ends with a discussion about the significance of the quantitative results and attempts to explain the results by referring to relevant literature.

Chapter Six presents the analysis of the in-depth interviews with Master's students. The interviews were analysed using inductive thematic analysis using open coding. The participants were encouraged to explore their whole experience and life as Master's students until the point the interviews were conducted. The themes generated by the interviews focused on the personal and environmental factors that led to a positive change in career adaptability.

In Chapter Seven, the empirical findings are brought together and discussed concerning the previous literature on personal and career development. This discussion chapter starts with a summary of both quantitative and qualitative results. The chapter then discusses how quantitative results informed the qualitative study. The central part of this chapter focuses on exploring the factors that led to higher career adaptability by the end of the year.

Chapter Eight concludes this study. This chapter starts by giving an overview of this study, including a reminder of the research purpose and key findings. Following this, the study's contributions are discussed, and the limitations of the present study are explored. Chapter Eight closes by offering suggestions for future studies which can build upon the work presented in this dissertation.

Chapter 2: Postgraduate educations

2.1 Introduction

Postgraduate education is an essential component of higher education that plays a critical role in preparing students for leadership roles in various fields, advancing knowledge in specialized areas, and enhancing professional and personal growth. Postgraduate education in this research typically refers to master's programmes that are pursued after completing an undergraduate degree. At the master's level, students have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge in their chosen field, gain advanced skills and expertise, and engage in research that contributes to the advancement of their field. This level of education often requires a significant commitment of time and resources, but the rewards can be significant, including increased earning potential, career advancement, and personal fulfilment. In this chapter, we will explore the various aspects of postgraduate education, including its benefits, and challenges, especially for international students. It will also examine the role of postgraduate education in employability. Finally, it will discuss some of the impacts of master's education on social and human capital.

2.2 Postgraduate students

Despite the significant changes to the character of UK-taught postgraduate (PGT) provision in recent years (Fawns et al., 2021; McEwen et al., 2009), PGT education at universities has received less attention compared to undergraduate education (Bamber, 2015; Bamber et al., 2019). Therefore, it is more difficult to determine, firstly, the resources that postgraduate students require to be at the level required to begin their programme and, secondly, the resources and skills that they have gained and developed during the Master's experience. It is also challenging to describe what the students expect from the programme (Drennan & Clarke, 2009; Hall & Sung, 2009; Bamber, 2015; Bamber et al., 2019). One of the changes in the nature of the postgraduate programmes has been adding more taught courses to prepare the students for vocational life (McEwen et al., 2008).

PGT has been the subject of research by a few authors, including Coates and Dickinson (2012), Heussi (2012), Kember, Ho & Leung (2016) and Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013). However, empirical research on what these student groups bring to their Master's learning experience is limited (Morgan, 2013). There are identity changes from undergraduate (UG) to postgraduate (PG) and many complex roles within and beyond the university (Bamber et al., 2019). The lack of research to understand the taught postgraduate experience might be because these students were successful UG students thus, there is the impression that these are experts who do not have many struggles. However, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) found in their study that, by connecting the competencies with learning identities, the image of experts emerges as unrealistic, and the context of PG is complex and has many dimensions.

This lack of research is a missed chance to close the research-practice gap in higher education (Bamber, 2015). While there is much research on previous transitions, the shift to PG has been mostly ignored. Considering the growth in postgraduate offerings for international students at UK institutions, Hall and Sung (2009) argue that studying the students' educational experiences is essential. Cultural confusion and difficulties with using a second language may make transitions more difficult for overseas students than for UK students (Scudamore, 2013). This study tries to understand how these different backgrounds, personal differences and roles they play in life might impact their Master's year in the UK and how that will impact their personal and career adaptability development.

2.3 The importance of postgraduate programmes

Postgraduate education is vital to the economy, employers, the high-education sector and individuals since it gives higher skills (BIS, 2010). The destination of leavers from higher education (DLHE, 2017) survey shows that PG students benefited from higher earnings and better employment. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the number of students pursuing postgraduate education in the United Kingdom has increased considerably over the past 20 years. This growth is significantly faster than the growth in the undergraduate sector over the same period (HESA, 2022).

In the academic year 2020/21, the number of students enroled in taught postgraduate programmes rose by more than 18% from the previous year to 628,940 students (HESA, 2022). This represents 23% of students enroled in Higher Education (HE) programmes in the UK during that academic year (HESA, 2022). As a result, these postgraduate students constitute a considerable portion of the total student population and a significant source of income for higher education institutions in the UK. In 2015, this income was estimated at approximately £39.9 billion, equivalent to approximately 2.7% of the GDP (Towers & Towers, 2020). Even though the United Kingdom is now quite successful at attracting overseas students, it needs to work to keep its position since there is high competition from other countries (BIS, 2010).

In the academic year 2020/21, the field of study that attracted the most significant number of students was Business and Administrative studies (HESA, 2022). 38% of PGT students study business and management. According to HESA (2022), around 39% of PGT students are non-UK students, and 87% of these are non-EU students. The percentage of non-EU students has increased by 5% compared to the 2018/2019 academic year. Italy has the highest number of EU countries sending students to the UK, with a slight increase in the last five years, while there is a decrease in the number of students coming from Spain and Germany (HESA, 2022). Chinese students have increased by 50% over the five years, from 2016/17 to 2020/21. China has the highest number of students coming from overseas. However, there has been a considerable increase in Indian students in the last five years. In 2020/21, 19% of the non-EU enrolments were from India.

The government always tries to make PG more responsive to employers. This is crucial to high-value businesses in the UK and to creating new employment opportunities in the growth sector (BIS, 2010). The business and public sectors highly acknowledge the advanced skills and knowledge of the PG level. Employers expect PG students to have skills beyond the knowledge they have been taught (BIS, 2010). PG skills are increasingly required in a knowledge-driven economy. It is anticipated that PGT programmes will equip students with the abilities needed to work in various occupations and will play

an essential part in retraining and upgrading existing skills. Students enroled in Master's degrees are expected to possess the skills needed for employment in situations that call for good judgement, personal responsibility, and initiative in complicated and unexpected career settings. The PGT level needs to supply the right skills that meet the labour market's changing needs and requirements (UKCES, 2010).

The master's degree programs at Henley Business School typically consist of a combination of core modules, elective modules, and a final project or dissertation. The specific structure of each programme can vary, but in general, the programs are designed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the theories and practices in their respective fields, as well as the practical skills needed to succeed in their careers.

For example, the Master's in Management program at Henley Business School is a full-time program that typically lasts for one year. The program is divided into three terms, with each term consisting of a combination of core and elective modules. The core modules cover topics such as organizational behaviour, marketing, accounting, and finance, while the elective modules allow students to tailor their learning to their interests and career goals. In addition to the core and elective modules, students in business programmes typically complete a final project or dissertation. This project allows students to apply their learning to a real-world problem or research question and can be a significant part of the overall assessment for the program.

The start and end dates of the academic year can vary depending on the specific program and intake. However, in general, the academic year at Henley Business School typically starts in September and ends in July. For example, the academic year for the full-time Master's in Management program usually begins in September and ends in July of the following year.

Throughout the programmes, students have access to a range of resources and support services, including academic advising, career services, and networking opportunities. Henley Business School is

well-regarded for its industry connections and practical approach to learning which is why it was chosen for this research.

2.4 Challenges for international students in UK HE

Many countries rely on the money from tuition fees paid by overseas students to fund their higher education (HE) sectors (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). However, these students also contribute to improving the educational opportunities available to local students. In business education, there is widespread acknowledgement of the importance of cultural and geographic variety to the overall quality of the educational experience (Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Coates & Dickinson, 2012). International students enroled in PGT programmes at UK universities are an important segment of the market for higher education in the UK, and they lay an essential basis for maintaining the variety of these programmes. This is especially true for programmes in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as business, which have the most significant concentrations of PGT students (BIS, 2013).

International PGT students often face more complicated challenges than national students, who are familiar with local educational and social surroundings. This is because domestic students are more likely to have grown up in the country they are now studying (Universities, 2016). Issues of social integration, accommodation, and the quality of teaching and learning facilities all assume great importance. The personal and family responsibilities of overseas students studying for their PGT are typically more complicated than those of their home institutions. PGT students, in addition, carry with them the essential comparison of their own college study experience in their home countries which they can use throughout their time in the PGT programme (Universities, 2016).

International students comprise a high percentage of Master's students in the UK. These students come from different backgrounds, cultures and educational systems and have more challenges than national students. That makes understanding the experience of these students essential in order to understand the challenges faced by Master's students in the UK. According to Sedgley (2015), there is

a hierarchy of serious challenges that international students must overcome to successfully transition into higher education in the UK. These challenges include: "learning and teaching", which refers to meeting academic expectations; "socio-cultural factors", which refers to meeting academic and personal relationships; and "language", which is a term for the creation of literary works in a foreign language.

The different educational systems and the new ways of teaching and studying might be challenging for international students. For example, studying in depth might be difficult for students from different cultures and practising critical thinking might be a significant shift for them (Wu et al., 2015). Overseas students, such as Chinese students, emphasise the obstacles they experience in Western educational institutions regarding exercising critical thinking skills and the significance of cultivating critical thinking for students across Master's programmes (Fakunle et al., 2016).

Students' daily challenges and duties affect their academic achievement (Caruana, 2014; Tobbell et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2015). According to Bamber et al. (2019), the ability of PGT students to deal with instability and ambiguity requires more research as one of the essential skills required when moving to the job market. Learning is a social process (Hannon, 2000); recognition by academic members, interaction with peers and tutors, and opportunities to be engaged in academic practices. Ridley (2004) has observed that the methods of learning and teaching utilised in the UK are distinct from those utilised in the overseas students' home countries.

Different findings have emerged from research that investigated students' social backgrounds. Researchers found that when prior attainment included socioeconomic status, parents' professionals and the environment they lived in their home country had little impact on them (Morgan, 2015; Stuart et al., 2008). Nevertheless, it was found that the institution where the students complete their undergraduate programme significantly impacts the likelihood of students continuing their studies (Machin & Murphy, 2010). However, these findings are critiqued since they only considered students

who progressed to PG in the same UG institution and did not consider financial issues like fees and funding (Igwe, 2018; Morgan, 2015). Another study (Wakeling et al., 2009) found that the professional or managerial social class background significantly influences participation in PG. However, most of the participants were PhD students. Generally, the social background is more difficult to measure for PG than UG since they are less connected to their parents and families. Social background significantly impacts how they see the world around them, and the ability to understand it in detail through interacting with students will be of much benefit (Mateos-González & Wakeling, 2022; Wakeling, 2017).

Researchers observed that postgraduate students might have difficulty juggling their studies with their other obligations (Cluett & Skene, 2006), as well as finding an acceptable match between the demands of their academic life and those of their familial, career, and personal lives (Watson & McMahon, 2005). Hamlin et al. (2016) pointed out that many postgraduate coursework students had the challenges of a work-life balance and a work-life-study balance. As increasingly diverse pressures impacted this cohort's time, they required more flexibility in their academic programmes than undergraduate students (Forsyth et al., 2009). The students reported good support from family and friends, but some experienced difficulties with financial issues. On a personal level, social interactions were reported as being an essential part of the learning environment for many taught postgraduate students (James & Beattie, 1996). Cluett and Skene (2006) found that many PGT students expressed an interest in becoming involved in social activities and said that making friends was one of the most enjoyable aspects of undertaking taught postgraduate programme. These social interactions gave them the necessary stimulus and support during their studies (James & Beattie, 1996). However, only around half of the cohort engaged in social activities related to the university (Cluett & Skene, 2006). This may have been related to the many demands on their time, such as family and work responsibilities (Lang, 2000).

Much of the literature available on the taught postgraduate experience focuses on quantitative surveys that aim to gain insight into students' teaching and learning experiences. More work should be done in order to understand postgraduate experience. Students should be encouraged to think about and explore why they are pursuing postgraduate study, why they are doing so now, and how this pursuit fits into their broader aspirations for personal development. Individuals may develop a realistic vision if they understand the potential and limitations of their studies. Through articulating their formal and informal learning paths, paying attention to the goals, they have set for themselves and the tools and resources they will need to attain them (Comings, 2007; McEwen et al., 2008; White & Ingram, 2021).

2.5 PGT and Employability

A Master's degree is a period of personal growth and identity shift (Tobbell et al., 2010). During this phase, individuals build their personalities and professional goals as they acquire new skills and encounter a new environment. For international students, undertaking an MSc programme abroad is considered an investment in their future since more opportunities will open up for them. An effective post-education system must educate all students, regardless of their prior educational or occupational experiences, about the ever-evolving world of work. Additionally, it needs to make it possible for those already employed to receive additional training and improve their skills (CIB, 2018). Even though not all PGT study is career-related, career and job-related goals are expected to be the primary motivation for students worldwide to enrol in the PGT programmes. Despite this expectation, there is scarce research on career-related outcomes of pursuing a master's degree (Fakunle, 2021; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014).

There are inseparable links between learning and more comprehensive social identities. Master's students are expected to undergo identity shifts in response to environmental shifts (Barnacle, 2005; Fry et al., 2007). Students' focus is not limited to university change but every other aspect. Moreover, the interactions between the university and broader life are not one-way but multi-linear. Despite this

fact, most research concentrates on the actual educational experience. Nevertheless, this should not come as much of a surprise given that students are joining a Master's programme to gain knowledge. However, the broader contextual experience must be taken into consideration, especially for overseas PGT students.

Graduates with vital employability skills have a greater chance of succeeding in obtaining employment in an increasingly competitive labour market. Some of the research brought attention to the notion that decisions about postgraduate education may be regarded as adult career decisions, in contrast to the majority of decisions regarding an undergraduate study that young unmatured individuals in transition make (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014). Therefore, universities need to do more to ensure that students develop transferable skills for their future careers, such as communication skills, self-management, and business awareness. These skills should be obtained in addition to the academic content covered in university courses. The teaching and development of these skills should not be considered optional since they are necessary for preparing graduates to use the knowledge they have gained in their degrees in the real world of work (CBI, 2009). Employers are generally satisfied with graduates' employability, although they aware are that there is still room for improvement. Employers place a high value on the skills and qualifications that applicants bring to the table regarding their employability (CBI, 2009).

According to Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) 2018, the reasons for enroling on the PGT programme are twofold: to advance in one's chosen professional path, or to improve one's job chances. Thus, employability is the main reason for enroling in a Master's programme. The employees emphasise how important it is for postgraduate students to have the ability to adapt quickly and use their skills in the workplace (CBI, 2009). Accordingly, being adaptable is crucial to PG students and needs more investigation into how it helps achieve a high career adaptability level. Nevertheless, there is a shortage of qualitative research examining the employability of postgraduates and the general and specialised need for postgraduate skills among employers (Universities UK, 2014**).**

Employers highly recognise the additional skills that postgraduate students may bring, which is the case when firms actively recruit persons with appropriate Master's degrees. Those pursuing a Master's degree are expected to have a higher level of maturity and more robust learning and analytical abilities than students pursuing a Bachelor's degree. Notably, a Master's degree does not guarantee better employability skills. Moreover, some of the valuable qualities found in Master's graduates may not necessarily have been developed through further study, but through self-selection, with able or interested candidates being seen as more likely to study at the postgraduate level (Universities UK, 2014). It is unclear if a Master's experience enhances employability skills or if individuals possessing these skills may be more likely to advance their education to a higher degree. Therefore, tracking the change before and after the programme shows the impact of a Master's programme on students. In-depth qualitative research would help understand what factors would impact that change.

Success in one's career is vital for both individuals and businesses. Work has a substantial effect on an individual's sense of self. Being adaptable and flexible is essential for employment (Inkson, 2006; Super, 1957). Significant changes in the workplace, such as declining job stability due to economic crises, have significantly diminished the likelihood that an individual will work for a single organisation throughout his or her career on an upward path. The duty for professional advancement is shifting from the organisation to the person. This implies that individuals have greater autonomy over their jobs and lives (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Volmer & Spurk, 2011). Consequently, new skills in self- and career management should be developed. Individuals should improve their adaptability and self-awareness because the new job suggests a process of ongoing learning. These are referred to as "meta-skills" since they are deemed indispensable for learning how to learn (Hall, 1996).

During this transition stage, students face many challenges. Students struggle to attain their career goals and make career decisions(Hurtado et al., 2007). Students are at a stage where they should consider employment options and how to reach their professional objectives (Chong & Leong, 2017). Inadequate career preparation can, directly and indirectly, impact vocational issues (Skorikov, 2007).

Students need to identify their career identity in today's fast-paced world. Indecisiveness, peer pressure, parental interference, the realisation that their first-choice department is not a good fit, and overall discomfort are common obstacles for college students to face while choosing a major. Based on the career construction theory, individuals develop professions via adaptive techniques that incorporate their personality into job responsibilities. This adaptation is motivated and directed by bringing inner demands and external possibilities into harmony, with sufficient harmony to strengthen the current actions of primary preoccupations and goals. Adaptation, or a successful adaptation, is evidenced by success, enjoyment, and growth (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

2.6 Employability

Employability skills can be developed in different contexts, and through different experiences, they include a range of abilities and attitudes that can be useful in different occupations and careers. Students in higher education can develop employable skills in different ways, including teaching and learning processes, extracurricular activities, interaction within the university community, or job experience. So, employable skills can be developed from the experience of being at a university, not only teaching and formal education. Students learn to be proactive, work in groups, organise and compare data from different resources and think critically. These skills can be developed from formal education and experience in higher education. When formal education complements the lived experience, the likelihood of an employable graduate is greater (Helyer & Lee, 2014).

Global competition in the job market has increased the need for employable graduates. The Higher Education sector expects to produce work-ready graduates and postgraduates with the needed skills to adapt to the changing work environment (Browne, 2010; Knight & Yorke, 2004). Employable graduates can find rewarding employment and also maintain this employment over a lifetime. To remain employable, they will need both the knowledge and skills for the current job and the skills to develop, learn and adapt to a constantly changing environment. The current graduate labour market is unstable, and graduates need to adapt to different conditions and work circumstances. Therefore,

employability requires individuals to adapt to change and develop their 'career adaptability' (Savickas, 1997). Savickas identified adaptability as the readiness and resources to cope with transitions and traumas. Career adaptability has a significant impact on positive young adults' development and on preparing students for the world of work (Savickas, 2005; Hirschi et al., 2015). Individuals and the university sector need to conduct additional research on the predictors of career adaptability development.

2.7 Social and Human Capital

Social capital theory and human capital theory should be explored in order to discover prospective aspects that may impact Master's students' experience at Henley Business School. The quantity and significance of social networks and individual components such as education, employment experience, and training are referred to as social and human capital. It has been stated that education and experience are the most important predictors of job advancement (Fugate et al., 2004). This issue has received the most significant attention in career literature and is linked to "knowing how" and "knowing whom." Human capital refers to "what" a person knows, whereas social capital refers to "who" a person knows (Luthans, Youssef-Morgan & Avolio, 2015).

2.7.1 Human capital

The pool of knowledge, skills, creative potential and the ability of human beings to perform to generate economic value is referred to as human capital (Goldin, 2014). Adam Smith, writing in the 18th century, is generally credited with having originated the concept of human capital. Schultz was a pioneer in the field of economics and was one of the first thinkers to recognise the relevance of human capital and its worth to the economy. Nevertheless, the modern theory did not become popular until Becker (1964) defined capital as something that "yields income and other useful outputs over long periods." However, human capital is distinct from other types of capital because it is inseparably linked to specific individuals and their abilities, skills, and knowledge (Becker, 2007). The stance advocated

by labour economists was taken up by Mincer (1958), and Schultz (1993), amongst others. These academics saw the worth of human capital in the market as an improvement in a company's profitability, which, in turn, benefited the educated individual worker through improved salaries. Although these scholars believed that education led to higher wages for workers, it was not because education led to an increase in human capital; rather, it was because education led to an increase in the compliance and reliability of corporations. However, other scholars, such as Goldin, believe that education is an investment in human capital that pays off in the form of higher productivity (Goldin, 2014; Tomlinson, 2017).

Research has suggested that human capital can increase one's employability and career success. In more recent times, the connection with professional success has been brought into question. The researchers concluded that human capital, directly and indirectly, influences the objective indicators of professional success (Andresen et al., 2022). According to research, even though human capital is made up of a wide variety of components, it should not be seen as a single entity but rather as its parts, each of which should be distinguished from the others and evaluated separately. This is particularly significant since there may be interrelationships between the criteria, such as the level of education, that may affect tenure due to the length of time spent on attaining an education. This is one of the reasons why this is such an essential point (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Human capital refers to the skills, knowledge, and talents that individuals learn and acquire via the contribution of higher education degrees. The individual's production level is expected to rise due to acquiring these skills and talents, which will justify the financial investment required (Hornbeck & Salamon, 1991).

Various institutions and organisations create many different assessments and rankings. On the one hand, a proficient and well-designed ranking system assists prospective undergraduate and graduate students in making judgments regarding their studies based on a good set of quality factors such as attractiveness, research success, student contentment, and graduate employment. On the other hand, this has put colleges under pressure to re-evaluate their long-term goals, and the appropriate

work style, and, subsequently, to appraise their portfolio and the quality of the services that they provide (Hudec, 2007).

2.7.2 Social capital

It has been demonstrated that social support predicts both professional engagement (Hirschi & Freund, 2014) and career flexibility (Hirschi, 2009; Hou et al., 2019). Despite the importance of social capital in professional growth, few research studies have examined the link between social capital and career engagement. Similarly, minimal research examines the link between social capital and job flexibility. Social networks, a crucial component of social capital, are interpersonal relationships that are created, developed, and sustained via secure links and regular contacts. Formal and informal social networks are typical social networks (Gu & Xiao, 2021).

The social capital theory (Coleman, 1988) should also be considered to identify the prospective aspects that might impact the adaptability of Master's degree students' careers. The appreciation of social connections and social capital is another factor that might influence education. Coleman (1990) defined social capital as any component of a social organisation that generates value and makes it easier for individuals to behave within that social structure. In other words, social capital is any aspect of a social structure. The transformation of interpersonal relationships in ways that make the collective goal-directed activity easier gives rise to the concept of social capital (Seibert et al., 2001). According to Putnam (2004), social capital may result from social networks, connected norms, and trust. According to the preceding author, social networks, both within and outside business schools, substantially contribute to the educational process (Putnam, 2004). Putnam also accepts the good and harmful elements of social capital, namely that networks can be advantageous for individuals already part of a community. However, they can adversely affect individuals who are not a part of that group (Putnam, 2001).

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, p. 243) describe social capital as "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit". According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), social capital may be divided into three categories: structural, relational, and cognitive. These conceptual differences are helpful for the ease of analysis. Nevertheless, social capital entails complicated interrelationships between the three categories. The social network characteristics are relevant to structural social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The phrase refers to the impersonal configuration and pattern of connections between individuals, as well as the roles, norms, precedents, and processes that are representations of this configuration. Additionally, the term denotes the impersonal configuration and pattern of connections between people (Uphoff, 2000). Compared to the relational and cognitive aspects of social capital, the structural component of social capital is more immediately observable and has a more tangible presence.

The intangible benefits from solid interpersonal connections are referred to as relational social capital (Bolino et al., 2002). In the context of social capital, it is concerned with the expectations and duties that arise from such relationships. It can capture the norms and the quality of connections that are determined by the history of interactions between individuals. Relational social capital entails trust in addition to rules and duties (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). It is also comparable to Adler and Kwon's notion of "goodwill" (2002). What we call "shared representations," "shared interpretations," and "common systems of meaning" are examples of cognitive social capital. Standard vocabulary and narratives exhibit cognitive schemes and systems of meaning. When people have much in common regarding their ideas, beliefs, and values, they have much cognitive social capital (Gooderham, 2007). The three dimensions can explain how Master's students benefit from their environment, especially when connecting and contacting new people in new environments and how that might develop them as individuals and their career adaptability.

According to the findings of several studies (Bassani, 2007; Schaefer, 2004), the theory of social capital has not made a considerable effort to investigate the function of young people's networks in the educational context. For this reason, educational research should emphasise students' engagement in the networks within which they build social capital (Weller, 2010). According to Covay and Carbonaro (2010), the values that students hold and the support they receive from their classmates also substantially impact the amount of effort that students put forth in their academic pursuits. In addition, the support, friendship, and active participation of students' peers in their educational pursuits are other factors that contribute to students' success (Mishra, 2020). However, Pillai et al. (2017) caution against placing too much emphasis on social capital. They say that when people try to adhere to the status quo, it can lead to an overcommitment of an organisation or other people within the network, stifling the individual's capacity for learning and development. This might be the case for some international students who come to study in the UK and create a group with other students of the same nationality, which could impede their social growth during the Master's year.

2.8 Summary

This chapter on postgraduate education explored the importance of this level of education and the challenges faced by international students pursuing such programmes in the UK. Additionally, the chapter discusses the development of employability skills and human and social capital in the context of postgraduate education.

The chapter begins by highlighting the significance of postgraduate education in advancing knowledge and skills, and developing critical thinking and research abilities. It then discusses the specific importance of master's programmes, including the acquisition of specialized knowledge and the potential for increased earning potential and career advancement. The chapter goes on to address the challenges faced by international students pursuing master's programmes in the UK, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and adjustment to the academic system. Next, the chapter focuses on the development of employability skills in the context of postgraduate education, including

the importance of practical experience, research, and networking opportunities. The chapter emphasizes the critical role of postgraduate education in preparing individuals for success in the job market and promoting career advancement. The chapter also explores the potential for international students to develop human and social capital through their studies, such as through networking and exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the development of human and social capital through postgraduate education, including the acquisition of specialized knowledge and the potential for networking and relationship-building opportunities. The chapter highlights the importance of developing both human and social capital to achieve professional growth and success in the global marketplace.

Overall, the chapter emphasizes the significance of postgraduate education, including master's programmes, in promoting career advancement and enhancing employability skills, human and social capital. It also highlights the challenges faced by international students pursuing postgraduate education in the UK and the potential for postgraduate education to facilitate the development of employability during the master's year.

Chapter 3: Career development and career adaptability theories

3.1 Introduction

The chapter on career development and career adaptability theories explores the various theoretical frameworks and concepts related to career development and adaptability. The chapter begins by introducing the the world of work today and the importance of being adaptable concept of career development and its significance in the context of individual and organizational success. The chapter then goes on to explore the key theories and frameworks related to career development, including trait-factor theory, social cognitive career theory, and career construction theory. Next, the chapter focuses on the concept of career adaptability and its importance in promoting career development and success. The chapter discusses the four components of career adaptability, including concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, and emphasizes the critical role of adaptability in navigating the complex and rapidly changing job market.

The chapter then goes on to examine the various factors that can influence career development and adaptability, including personality traits, demographic characteristics, social and cultural factors, and organizational and environmental factors. The chapter highlights the importance of considering these factors in the development of career development and adaptability programs and strategies.

Overall, the chapter emphasizes the significance of career development and adaptability in promoting individual and organizational success and highlights the importance of considering various theoretical frameworks and factors in the development of effective career development and adaptability programs and strategies.

3.2 World of work today

The substantial technological development has characterised the work environment, which appears unpredictable and indefinable compared to the 20th century. Work in the 21st century is associated

with decreased permanent employment, increased contract work, and a need to continuously update skills (Hall, 2004; Werner, 2021). In the digital age, workers must be flexible, employable and constant learners who can use advanced technology and create opportunities. It is about being flexible and mobile (Hall, 1996, 2004). The relationship between the organisation and the worker is built through tasks. Individuals can enhance their skills and abilities through challenges at work and relationships with the surrounding people. In this sense, Duarte et al. (2017) explain that the notion of work life in the 21st century identifies that a career belongs to the person, not the organisation. In order to adapt to this new environment, continuous development and learning are required. According to Hall (1996, 2004), careers in the 21st century are measured by "continuous learning and identity changes rather than by chronological age and life stages". A career is considered a series of short learning stages. The traditional psychological contract does not work anymore, and it has been changed by a contract of continuous learning and identity building (Hall, 2004). Due to the new social arrangements, the modern theory of career development and occupational choices is insufficient to explain and understand the new world of work (Savickas et al., 2009).

One of the consequences of changing the work nature is the evolution of the new perspective of self as a project (Savickas, 2011). People can no longer count on building a 30-year career in one organisation and then retiring with a pension and health care (OECD, 2015). With the move to an information society and a global economy, the corporate structure that sustained career ladders has become less of the norm. Although full-time jobs are still the main form of work, temporary assignments and part-time positions replace permanent, full-time jobs. Long-term careers exist for only a minority of workers. For many individuals, work takes the shape of a project with a starting and ending time with a specific outcome or product. A quarter of workers have not completed one year with their employer. Half have been with their current employer for five years or less (Mullins, 2009). Insecurity at work is very high these days. For employees to maintain employability, they should be able to learn and adapt throughout their lives. Instead of making plans, individuals must prepare themselves for possibilities and opportunities.

3.2.1 Protean and boundaryless careers

The protean and boundaryless career attitudes have become critical in recent years. The protean career concept emerged in 1976 from Hall's work based on anecdotal evidence about the social and economic instability following the Vietnam War. The term protean originates from the "Greek sea god Proteus, who could change shape at will" (Hall, 2002). According to Hall, in a protean career, the needs mean that individuals are autonomous, self-directed and ready for frequent change. As part of the protean career attitude, a person attempts to develop progress and conceptualise a career as a "calling" and a way of self-fulfilment (Hall, 2002). It can be categorised into a value-driven attitude and a self-management attitude. A boundaryless career attitude is characterised by "high physical and psychological mobility" (Volmer & Spurk, 2011).

The protean and boundaryless career concepts appear suitable for the times (Savickas, 2013). The meanings of the terms and the metaphors that they convey are in harmony with situations of rapid changes in technology, organisation and society. These concepts praise individual agency and support individual adaptability and proactivity in unstable conditions (Inkson, 2006). A protean career needs personal responsibility and self-awareness. People appreciate the autonomy of the protean career, but many consider it as a lack of support from society. The 21st-century version of careers focuses on enhancing adaptability in changing environments rather than maturation in a stable medium.

Individuals must be adaptable and flexible in order to be employable. Work is an essential part of people's self-concepts, and success in a career is crucial for individuals and organisations (Inkson, 2006; Super, 1957; Werner, 2021). Significant changes in the work environment today, such as fast technological developments and job stability due to financial breakdowns, have decreased the opportunity for the individual to work for one organisation for their whole life with an ascending path. There is a shift of career progress responsibility from organisation to individual. That means that individuals have more freedom to manage their careers and life (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Volmer & Spurk, 2011). Consequently, individuals must acquire new self-management and career-management

skills. The individual must learn to cultivate self-awareness and flexibility, as the new vocation entails a continual learning process. These are referred to as "meta-skills" since they are essential for learning (Hall, 1996).

According to Hall (1996), learning has two dimensions "one describing the time span of the learning (long-term or short-term), and one describing what the learning is about (task learning or personal learning)". The combination of these two dimensions results in a matrix. Performance or skill learning refers to the learning of a task in a short time. Short-term self-education entails learning about one's attitude, such as forming a team commitment during a team-building exercise or evaluating stereotypes during diversity training. Changes in behaviour and attitudes have an impact on the present workplace experience. However, enhancing task performance over time involves adapting to changing work conditions. Moreover, reflecting and building perspectives on self over the long term means that individuals understand self better and learn about identity and the world around them. The more an individual can adapt to changing work conditions and build new self-images as the environment changes, the more they learn how to learn. Adaptability and identity are the meta-skills for learning how to learn and are at the heart of the self-directed protean career of the 21st century (Hall, 1996; Savickas, 2013).

<mark>Figure 3.1: Career Theories</mark>
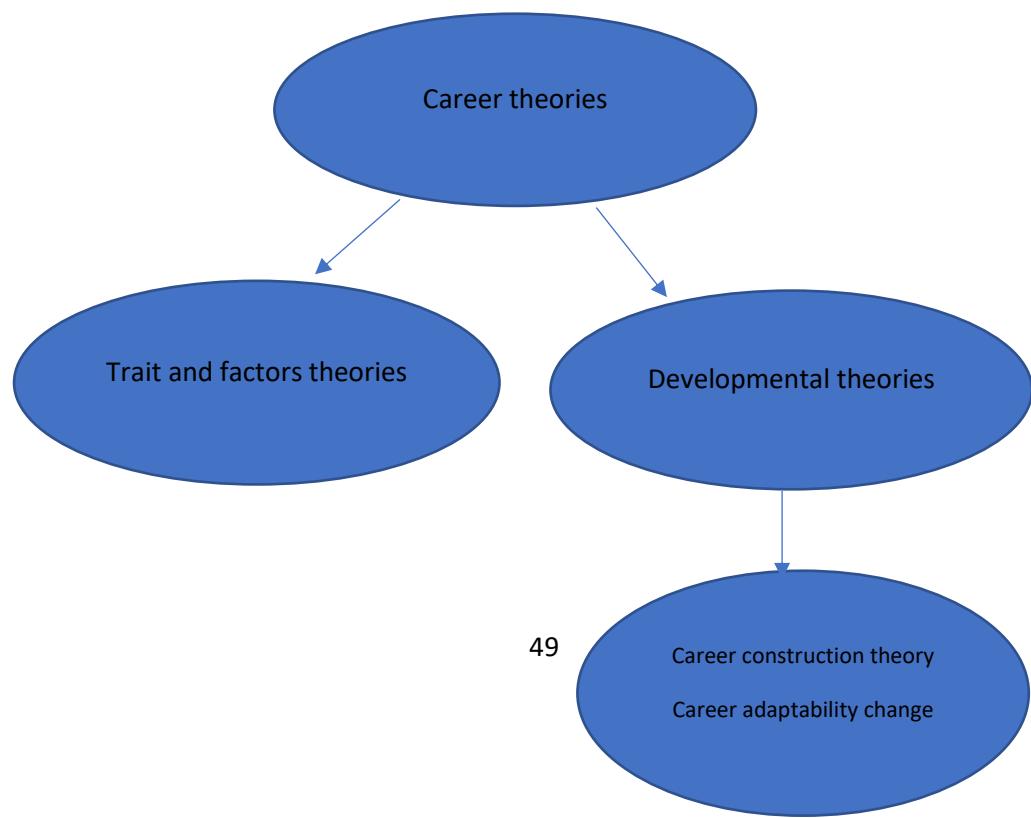
3.3 Career theories and career adaptability concept

The career and vocational theories of the 20th century had to be developed to fit the post-modern economy (Savickas et al., 2009). The earlier career theories are based on the assumptions of relatively high stability in the environment, individuals' characteristics, and the security of jobs in the bounded organisation. The theories were used to predict individuals' adjustment to the environment. Societal needs have shaped the career stages defined in the extant theories (Super, 1957). Accordingly, a relatively stable labour market might hold to the career stages while these stages are no longer available in a changing labour market. Human behaviour is a function of both individuals and their surroundings. No matter how stable one's characteristics are, an individual needs to adapt to the changing environment to survive. According to the 21st century, career theories should focus on adaptability and long-life learning aspects. People's vocational interests appear to be able to change, contrary to what vocational theories such as Holland's (1973) have assumed.

100 years of research in career counselling and guidance in the Western world has established a comprehensive system of theories and strategies of intervention. It started at the beginning of the 20th century by Frank Parson (1909) as a trait-factor approach (Betz et al., 1989; Zunker, 2002). Following that, many scholars elaborated on Parsons' work, such as Holland (1959) who expanded Parson's work to build his six personality types model, while Ginzberg et al. (1951) and Super (1953) improved this concept of the person-environment model by paying attention of the developmental aspects of the career choice. There are different models based on the social condition of training or individuals as actors in their individual development. Nevertheless, the big theoretical question in the 21st century is the individual's self-construction (Duarte, 2009). In the 21st century, where occupations are unstable, employment is uncertain, and traditional society is changing, we cannot restrict vocational theories to career choice only. It exceeded that to focus on how individuals choose their path in life or design their lives (Guichard, 2007; 2009).

Career adaptation and employability literature is extensive and based on various theories and frameworks. The theories of vocational interest constituted an essential part of the career development theory history. The career theories can be gathered into groups. The first group are content theories such as the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) (Dawis, 2002; 2005; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) and Holland's theory of vocational personalities. Although the content or the matching theories are still considered valuable in answering the question of *what*, they are not sufficient for answering the question of *how*. The process or developmental theories aim to clarify why an individual might be a good fit for specific careers and give advice on how to find a promising career path. Examples of process theories would be Super's lifespan life-space theory (1953, 1991) and the social career construction theory (SCCT) based on Bandura's theory (1986). The other group is the constructivist approach theories like career construction theory (CCT) which has its basis in Holland's theory and Super's lifespan life-space theory. Developmental theories give attention to the changes happening to people and the environment. Researchers and career counsellors can use career theories to help understand how people construct their lives, specifically their working lives.

Over the past two to three decades, the concept of new careers has been the main interest of the career literature, where flexibility and autonomy are the main characteristics of individuals (Sullivan, 1999). One of the most central concepts is "career adaptability", considered one of the main factors of career success (Morrison & Hall, 2002). The most influential theory is the career construction theory CCT from Savickas (1997, 2002). Savickas' model of the four C's (concern, control, curiosity, confidence) has widely been used as a guidance framework to measure career adaptability (e.g., Hirschi, 2009). This study will use CCT theory as a guiding framework to assess the career adaptability of Master's students at Henley Business School.

There is a need for comprehensive models in which psychological, and contextual differences must be considered. The system theory framework (STF), which will be explained later (section 3.3), attempts to include the psychological, and contextual differences in one theory or conceptual approach. We

can find many similarities between different career development theories. According to CCT, adapting to vocational development tasks, occupational changes and career traumas is done mainly by five sets of behaviours, which are named according to their adaptive purposes: "orientation, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement" (Savickas, 2009). Adaptation is measured as the outcome "resulting from adaptivity, adaptability, and adapting" (Savickas, 2013, p.157). Adaptivity can be seen as the "personal characteristic of flexibility or willingness to meet career tasks, transitions, and traumas with fitting responses" (Savickas, 2013). Adaptivity is the ability, readiness, and willingness to use all of one's resources of adaptability. The differences among the key terms used in the CCT (i.e., adapt, adaptation, adapting, adaptivity, adaptability) might overlap together and also with the terms of other career theories. For example, the concept of preparedness in Lent's theory might be seen as a combination of adaptability and adaptivity. There should be careful use of terms from different career theories to build on the concept of divergent or convergent theories that have now been studied for many years (Savickas, 2009).

3.3.1 Self-concept

Individuals in knowledge societies at the beginning of the 21st century must realise that career problems are only a piece of much broader concerns about how to live a life in a post-modern world shaped by a global economy and supported by information technology. For instance, the issue of how to balance work-family activities and interactions is becoming prominent in people's reflections on their competencies and aspirations (Savickas et al., 2009). Such postmodern conceptions of vocations and professional choice include a continuous reflection on the self and the environment, openness to feedback, and flexibility about the future. Individuals make decisions that reflect their self-concepts. Individuals' self-concepts are also built through the different experiences that individuals will go through in a specific environment. The interaction between an individual and the environment may alter the self-concept, and the behaviour and attitude of others may also impact the self-concept. Self-concept is never stable and fixed; it is in continuous reconstruction (Savickas et al., 2009).

3.3.2 Context (environment)

The context and the social beliefs shared in a society are very important for dealing with career development issues. Three social factors determine career development issues and constitute self-construction, focus on individuals, work centrality and future uncertainty (Guichard, 2005)**.** The first is a focus on individuals. Succeeding in life in Western cultures is focused on achieving individual potential; individuals are seen as free and responsible for their individual development. Nevertheless, according to Hofstede (1991), most cultures do not share the concept of individualism as understood in Western culture. Other cultures measure the success of individuals by how individuals contribute to the success and development of the group or community. The centrality of occupational activities in our lives is the second factor. A career is considered the best route to self-achievement. The concept of self-actualisation through work shows how societies have changed, especially in Western countries. For instance, in ancient Greece, work was only for enslaved people. A third characteristic is the conception of time, mainly the future. Employers cannot predict what will happen in employment if they hire or fire employees. Moreover, the idea that we are living in a "risk society" (Beck, 1996) has gained ground in the last few years (Guichard, 2005)**.**

3.4 Systems theory framework

Various approaches have been used to explain the complexities of communication and interaction between individuals and their environments. One of these is the Systems Theory Framework (STF), which is especially pertinent to the current study since it allows the researcher to investigate complicated, multifaceted issues in human behaviour. STF requires observing persons in the context of their lives (McMahon, 1995). The practical value of STF has been evident since its first publication as a contextual framework for analysing adolescents' career decision-making (McMahon, Patton & Watson, 2005). According to McMahon (2002), the various elements that influence occupational development are interrelated and dynamic. McMahon (2002) also states that STF gives a road map for examining complicated relationships and interactions and their significant impact on individual lives. STF emphasises how intrapersonal characteristics such as personality, ability, and gender

influence people's career development. According to STF, people's personal and social systems and environmental systems are inseparably linked. These systems, political viewpoints, and geographic location all impact career development (Patton & McMahon, 1999). STF depicts career development as a dynamic process whose recursiveness varies over time and in terms of chance (Figure 3.1).
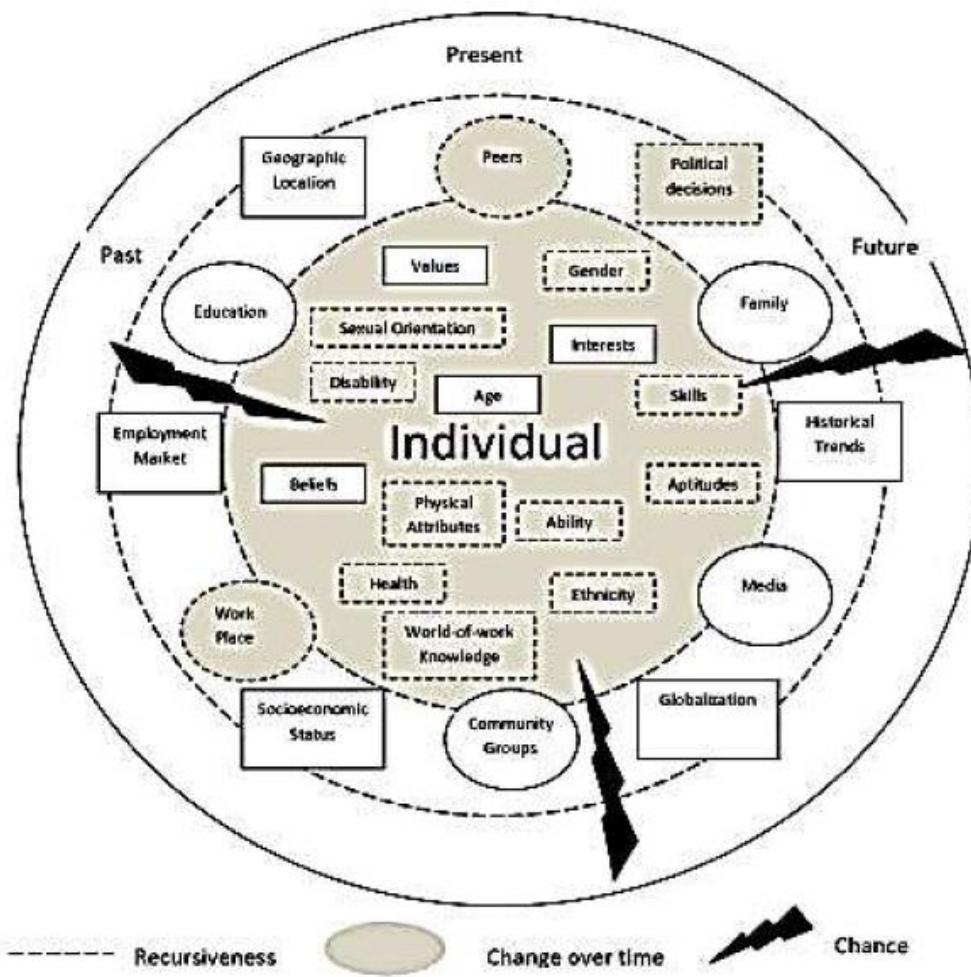
Figure 3.1: The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development (from Patton & McMahon, 1999)

All systems in STF are open systems that can be influenced by outside forces that extend beyond their bounds. This type of interaction is known as recursiveness and is depicted in diagrammatic form by broken lines that show the permeability of each system's borders.

 It is well-accepted that an individual's influences can shift throughout time. The last step, chance, is depicted as lightning flashes on the STF diagram, referring to the importance of chance in career

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growth. The influence systems are situated in the context of the time (past, present, and future). Times are linked because the past influences the present and impacts the future (Patton & McMahon, 1999). STF, with its holistic approach, is seen as a good point of reference for describing the internal and environmental elements that impact career adaptability growth among foreign Master's students in a European context such as the UK.

3.5 Career construction theory (CCT)

The CCT examines how people design their professional lives through personal and societal constructivism. It asserts that a person creates a representation of reality, not reality itself, and this image is based on their experiences. In addition to the constructionist viewpoint, the theory also considers the contextual viewpoint. It postulates that change occurs not as a result of maturation from within but as a response to environmental changes.

The self is produced from the outside in, whereas reality is constructed via the social and interpersonal ties people have. Object, subject, and project are the three self-concepts that make up the tripartite model of personality theories (McAdams, 1993). The self as an object (actor) is a concept that emerged in the early 20th century and reached its peak in Holland's (1997) RIASC model, which compares workers to their respective jobs. It essentially tries to match individuals to occupations. The concept of self as subject (agent) appeared after the Second World War. The need for self-discovery and self-actualisation was the incentive for the beginning of this subject. Individuals as subjects set their own goals and climb the hierarchical ladder in a bureaucratic structure. The self as project (author) coincided with the digital revolution, where individuals need to be flexible, adaptable and lifelong learners to be employable. The rise of the digital society and the global economy have impacted the nature of different types of employment (Savickas, 2011). The career-building model of adaptation emphasises the job role, which serves as a means of social integration or connection, hence maintaining oneself in society.

Individuals use psycho-social adaptability resources to adapt to major life challenges such as vocational development tasks (preparing to enter the world of work), occupational transitions (changing jobs, retirement), and work traumas and challenges (unplanned and undesirable career events). The primary component of CCT is the career adaptation model, which outlines how various personal attributes and dispositions interact with psycho-social resources to enable individuals to engage in activities that lead to goal achievement (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

The adaptation process involves bringing inner demands and outward possibilities into harmony, with the key elements of a successful adaptation being success, contentment, and well-being. The CCT characterises adaption outcomes stemming from adaptivity, adaptability, adapting and adaptation. The adaptation process consists of (adaptivity) readiness, (adaptability) resources, (adapting) responses, and (adaptation) results (Savickas, 2005; 2013).

Adaptivity, the first part of the four components, is a person's readiness to respond to occupational and developmental activities, occupational changes, and work traumas (Savickas, 2013). Adaptivity can include proactive personality (Brown et al., 2006; Hirschi, Herrmann & Keller, 2015), core self-evaluations (CSE) (Hirschi et al., 2015), psychological capital (Pajic et al., 2018), as well as resilience (Santilli et al., 2020), hope, and optimism (Santilli et al., 2017).

The second component, adaptability, consists of the psycho-social resources that an individual employs in response to career developmental demands, work-related changes, and traumas (Savickas, 2005). These resources for adaptability are concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2005, 2013). Savickas' 4Cs are four career adaptability dimensions, and the development of these four dimensions is the main focus of the current research.

The third component, adapting, refers to the execution of adaptive career behaviours that address professional issues (Savickas, 2013), including career planning, exploration, occupational self-efficacy, and decision-making self-efficacy. Evidence suggests that adapting is positively associated with adaptation results (Rudolph et al., 2017).

These three first components of the adaptation process build a chain that starts with adaptive readiness followed by adaptability resources, mainly behavioural aspects and ends with adapting responses that mainly constitute proactive behaviour that leads to aspired adaption results.

Adaptation results, the fourth component, are the outcomes determined by success or satisfaction. Success in career adaptability affects the following: a sense of power (Hirschi, 2009); career management strategy (Chong & Leong, 2017), academic satisfaction (Buyukgoze-kavas et al., 2015, Hirschi, 2009); life satisfaction (Santilli et al., 2017); and academic achievement (Negru-subtirica & Pop, 2016).

Most of the research has studied the impact of adaptive readiness on adaptability resources and adaptability resources on adapting responses. Some other studies have studied the mediating effect of adaptability resources between adaptive readiness and adapting responses (Johnston, 2018; Zacher et al., 2017). Few studies have investigated the parallel change of adapting responses and the adaptability resources. Adapting responses, like self and environment exploration, planning, and decision-making are examples of proactive behaviours. Spurk et al. (2020) found in their study that adapting responses and adaptability resources can change together, and the impact of these two components is reciprocal (Spurk et al., 2020). Being a Master's student requires the involvement of many different activities that imply using different adaptive proactive behaviours.

Adaptivity, adaptability, and adapting can be considered factors of individual employability (Savickas, 2013). Therefore, the current study aims to explore what factors and actions might have impacted a positive change in career adaptability resources for a one-year Master's programme. The following sections focus on career adaptability resources, proactive and adaptive behaviour, and the most important personal traits that found a positive correlation to career adaptability resources.

3.6 Career adaptability

Attitudes, Beliefs and Competencies are the ABC's of career adaptability that was identified by Savickas (2005, 2008) (Savickas et al., 2009). According to Savickas, these Attitudes, Beliefs and Competencies are considered the problem-solving strategies that influence the adaptation process

and how individuals adapt to new experiences. The adaptability resources are impacted by the following Attitudes, Beliefs, and Competencies: whether or not they are "concerned" about the future; how much "control" people believe they have over their choices in life and their future; and whether or not individuals are "curious" to explore the environment around them to find new opportunities; and whether or not they have "confidence" that they will be able to do what they have set out to do. Savickas says that career adaptability ABCs are formulated through interaction with others. Our attitudes and views will be subconsciously influenced by the attitudes and ideas of others around us, including our family members, friends, classmates, colleagues and employers. For instance, if the people around us at work do not believe that we can complete a task, this might make us feel less confident in our ability to complete the assignment. This case indicates that "self-efficacy" confidence does not reside in the individual alone. Instead, it is influenced by other people's actions (Del & Rehfuss, 2011). Thus, our environment and the people we interact with influence adaptability, resources, and responses (Johnston, 2018).

3.6.1 Career adaptability definitions in the literature

Adaptability is considered a meta-skill that allows individuals to build other abilities (Morrison & Hall, 2002). Scholars define adaptability as the ability or inclination to sustain conscious and continuous integration of person and environment. Identity exploration, response learning, and integrative potential are all products of adaptive competence and motivation. Adaptability is also said to be the result of adaptive skill and motivation. Kossek et al. (1998) define adaptability as adapting to changing conditions. They suggest that adaptability is a willingness to change and the ability to deal with the difficulties of a new environment.

There are many definitions of the term "career adaptability" in literature. Rottinghaus, Day and Borgen (2005) define career adaptability as "a tendency affecting the way an individual views his or her capacity to plan and adjust to changing career plans… especially in the face of unforeseen events" (p. 5). Career adaptability is also conceptualised as a component of the psycho-social employability construct (Fugate et al., 2004). The scholars refer to optimism, a propensity to learn, openness, an

internal locus of control, and generalised self-efficacy as characteristics that contribute to personal adaptability. These definitions reference self-regulatory mechanisms and emphasise the significance of the relationship between the individual and their environment and their ability to manage different situations.

Career adaptability has been established in literature with many other career skills and competencies. For example, career decision self-efficacy and choice commitment, outcome expectations, planning, perceptions of educational barriers (Duffy & Blustein, 2005; Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005), proactive personality, boundaryless mindset (McArdle et al., 2007), career exploration, and career planning (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). According to Savickas (1997; 2013), career adaptability can be implemented by utilising the developmental qualities of self- and environment exploration, career planning, and decision-making. All these qualities are considered self-regulatory practices.

Environmental exploration in this context refers to acquiring knowledge relevant to career development (Blustein, 2013). Self-exploration, on the other hand, is the examination of own interests, experiences, and values to better comprehend the self-concerning world of work (Whiston & Keller, 2004; Zikic & Klehe, 2006; Creed, Fallon & Hood, 2009; Rudolph et al., 2021). Such exploratory approaches and abilities enable individuals to deal effectively with changes in their work and personal domains, especially during pandemics and crises (Rudolph et al., 2021). A focus on the future and an awareness of the steps needed to achieve one's objectives are necessary components of effective career planning (Blustein, 2013). Self-exploration and career planning continue throughout one's life and are particularly important during changes (Rudolph et al., 2021). These activities can be characterised as adaptive processes (Hirschi, Herrmann & Keller, 2015; Zikic & Klehe, 2006).

Decision-making requires evaluating one's knowledge and options available to arrive at a conclusion to which one can fully commit (Blustein, 2013). Many young individuals are eager to make their first job selection and intend to find a specific career path (Gati et al., 2003; Gati, Levin & Landman, 2019). Despite this, one of the most significant challenges university students must contend with is making

decisions on their future careers (Amir & Gati, 2006; Gati, Levin & Landman, 2019). Because there are no precise methods to help with decision-making, many people let their parents, instructors, and friends steer them in the right direction (Gati & Kulcsár, 2021). Finally, self-regulation encompasses a vast array of mechanisms by which people exercise control over their impulses, thoughts, feelings, and task performances to realise the objectives that they have established for themselves (Boekaerts, 2010; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011; Baumeister, Tice & Vohs, 2018).

Individuals can adapt more effectively if they respond to changing situations with increased awareness and information seeking, followed by educated decision-making and trial behaviours that lead to the desired steady commitment. Career adaptability abilities and competencies are critical in post-industrial economies when workers shift employment every five years (Mullins, 2009). Individuals who are more able to self-regulate are better able to adapt to their environments' shifting emotional and behavioural demands (Vohs & Baumeister, 2016; Baumeister, Tice & Vohs, 2018).

3.6.2 Self-regulation theory

More contemporary viewpoints have superseded the initial ideas on self-regulation theory (Bandura, 1986). The theoretical concepts of self-regulation are now being applied to essential areas in the workplace, such as employee motivation, goal-setting behaviour, and personal projects (Cervone et al., 2006)

The action regulation theory is a meta-theoretical framework that incorporates theories that concentrate on human behaviour at the mid-range level (Raabe, Frese, Beehr, 2007). In the last several decades, the action regulation theory has evolved into a fundamentally important aspect of applied psychology, notably within the industrial, work, and organisational psychology subfields (Frese, Rank, & Zacher, 2017; Zacher & Frese, 2018). Several industrial, labour and organisational psychological phenomena have been explained using action regulation. These phenomena include proactive work behaviour, work-related learning, entrepreneurship, occupational stress and well-being, reciprocal

influences between personality and work, innovation, teamwork, career progression, and effective ageing in the workplace.

Control in action regulation theory refers to how humans direct their actions according to some purpose (Frese & Zapf, 1994). According to the self-regulation idea, people's interactions with their surroundings "allow an individual to guide his or her goal-directed behaviours through time and across changing conditions" (Vohs & Baumeister, 2016). Interventions to apply self-regulation theory aim at enhanced control and self-regulation and have been effective for short-term employee behaviours such as job attendance (Raabe, 2007). According to Frese and Zapf (1994), the components of an action sequence are as follows: goals, information collecting, planning, execution, and feedback. People keep an eye on their surroundings and collect data to make strategic decisions on how to proceed. They come up with plans because of the knowledge and the goals that they have. Putting the plan into action implies actively shaping the surrounding environment, and the outcomes provide feedback about the individual's activities (Raabe, Frese, Beehr, 2007).

Goals are expected and desired outcomes of actions that have a motivating impact because they establish ideal standards for conduct and can "pull" behaviour (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). For individuals to take action, they must first visualise a desirable future state (goal) and acknowledge a gap between this desired future state and their existing circumstances or results.

Therefore, according to the action regulation theory, acts are hypothesised to contribute to the growth of the human psychological system (Frese & Keith, 2015). In contrast to the behaviourist views, the actions regulation theory places a significant emphasis on cognitive processes such as the formation of goals, the planning of acts, and the processing of feedback. At the same time, the theory diverges from solely cognitive and information processing theories in that it places a significant emphasis on the connections that may be drawn between cognitive processes, behaviour, and the external environment, as well as the objective results of action.

In addition, the action regulation theory assumes that activities are intimately connected to and ingrained in the objective environment (material, social, and societal). Actions can be triggered and

shaped by the environment. Actions can also affect the environment in a way that is compatible with a person's aims (Rudolph, Lavigne & Zacher, 2017). The action regulation theory assumes that employees can adjust and develop cognitive representations of their surroundings through their actions, reactions, and interactions with their surroundings (Frese & Keith, 2015).

Throughout their lives, people work on many goals related to their careers and families. They employ a variety of goal management strategies in order to make the most of the resources at their disposal and adapt to shifting conditions within themselves and in their environments (Heckhausen, Wrosch & Schulz, 2010). Career self-management is an action-regulation process at work and non-work roles (Hirschi, Zacher & Shockley, 2022). Individuals actively pursue goals in their lives professional and personal spheres by formulating and putting into practice various action plans.

In more recent times, there has been a growing demand for a more sophisticated conceptualization of skills that takes into account the factors that affect the post-university transitions of graduates. Bridgstock (2009) has developed the concept of "career management skills" in an effort to move the broad schema of generic skills to more efficacious ground. These skills refer to a range of high-impact and longer-term career-salient competencies that have a genuine gain in graduates' post-university lives. This comprises the capabilities to self-manage proactively and traverse potential future paths in an anticipatory manner. The recent research on career management competencies that Jackson and Wilton (2016) conducted sheds light on the significance of self-management and career insight. This is especially true concerning graduates' ability to plot out future goals and enhance their self-confidence and self-perceived employability. They explain the significance of engaging in employment that provides enough opportunities for experiential learning for the development of such competencies.

It is common practice to anchor the career management conceptions in career construction theory (e.g., Strauss et al., 2012; Johnston, 2018) and social cognitive career theory (SCCT, Lent & Brown, 2013; 2019). Despite the little study done on the topic, there is a correlation between career adaptability and career self-management. It is also in the best interest of organisations to consistently

search for methods to strengthen the career self-management behaviours of their workers since these behaviours are essential to surviving and succeeding in the world of work (Rodrigues et al., 2015; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2018;).

Since both career self-management and career adaptability resources represent attributes and resources that enhance self-regulation, focusing on actions that take longer to detect, ranging from several weeks or months to multiple years, career self-management was found to be deeply connected to career adaptability resources. This is because career self-management and career adaptability resources represent self-regulation-enhancing attributes and resources (Raabe et al., 2007). In action regulation theory, people are viewed as active agents of their own development. They are the ones who generate and set goals, evaluate the available supports and restrictions for goal achievement, translate goals into action plans, execute plans through a variety of behaviours, and monitor both their actions and the outcomes of those actions. And make sure to make use of the feedback in order to adjust your goals, action plans, and behaviours as necessary (Frese & Zapf, 1994; Lord et al., 2010; Zacher & Frese, 2018).

3.7 Career adaptability and change over time

While Savickas (2005) has theorised that career adaptability is a construct that can be learned, others have questioned whether this is, in fact, the case (Verbruggen & Sels, 2008). Recent research by Koen et al. (2010) suggests that career adaptability is flexible rather than fixed. They claim that career interventions boost career adaptability over time. Savickas (2013) states that development patterns of career adaptability have different tendencies. There might be regressions, disparities across dimensions, and aberrant growth patterns. Each facet of adaptability in the workplace or one's profession corresponds to various conditions or needs. Thus, Savickas (2013) has encouraged investigating the four dimensions' development to understand how they change and why. Zacher (2014) showed that demographic and personality traits could predict positive and negative changes in career adaptability dimensions over six months. For example, in a two-wave study of Australian

employees, Zacher discovered that educational achievement predicted only changes in concern, whereas core self-evaluation predicted changes in control and confidence over time.

Individuals' past and present experiences and future goals integrate and establish a life theme into their careers (Savickas et al., 2009). They get the meaning of their work lives from the significance that they derive from their life themes. When individuals reflect on their work experiences and aspirations, it can lead to changes or adjustments in career adaptability (Savickas, 2013). This idea of time aligns with the aforementioned system theory framework (STF) concept that individuals' past, present and future are part of their personalities and actions. According to the viewpoint of time expert writers (e.g. Shipp, Edwards & Lambert, 2009; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999; Mohammed & Marhefka, 2019). A person's current and future attitudes, behaviours, judgments, and decisions are impacted by their perceptions of past and present events and future expectations. For example, individuals who meet short-term goals or sacrifice the immediate need for a long-term aspiration will reflect on and analyse their past and present experiences and their expected future in order to decide.

A Master's experience is a rich field for research because of the multi-layered interacting, multifaceted journey that Master's students go through (White & Ingram, 2021). During the study, PGT students encounter a variety of emotions and pressures associated with psychosocial-cultural processes interacting with and in response to various dynamic systems that challenge their study journey (Tomlonson, 2017). A Master's experience is a scenario in which students acquire skills that will contribute to their long-term professional adaptability. By participating in Master's courses, students may establish their professional goals and acquire self-regulatory abilities to nurture concern, control, curiosity, and confidence via learning and facing challenges (White & Ingram, 2021). Career adaptability grows in a psychological learning environment, not a physical vacuum. Learning experience helps students be realistic about their career aspirations and helps in developing career-relevant skills (Morgan, 2014; Coneyworth et al. 2019). It is significant to explore if the experience of being a Master's student contributes to developing career adaptability characteristics and changes students' occupational self-concept (Coneyworth et al., 2019).

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Most research on the antecedents of career adaptability has disregarded the impact of time except for very few studies (Zacher, 2014). This has limited the knowledge of the factors that can predict and influence the development of career adaptability. Given that CCT states that career adaptability develops from the dynamic interaction of individuals and the environment over the life course, this is quite surprising (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Based on these theoretical considerations the first hypothesis H1 was developed

- *H1: A Master's year experience can positively change students' career adaptability and its four dimensions (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence).*

3.7.1 Factors that impact career adaptability change.

Both personal characteristics and individual behaviours might impact the change in career adaptability. Since career adaptability resources are dynamic and behaviour responses are changeable as well as, shown when needed, Spurk et al. (2020) suggest that adaptability resources and adaptive responses can change together in a parallel way. First, we will have a look at the traits and personal characteristics that might impact change in career adaptability. Second, focus on proactive and adaptive behaviours that are connected to career adaptability resources. Proactive behaviour might result from career adaptability resources (Savickas & profeli, 2012). At the same time, proactive and adaptive behaviours might lead to a development in career adaptability resources (Spurk et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021).

According to the literature, some adaptive characteristics and adapting and proactive behaviours might predict and influence change in career adaptability. These are discussed in the following sections.

3.7.2 Traits and characteristics

Several studies reported that there are relationships between demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, and career adaptability. Some studies found a difference between males and females regarding career adaptability. For example, Hou et al. (2012) found that female students in

China had lower scores than male students on control, curiosity and confidence. Other studies, Such as Zacher (2014), found no difference between males and females regarding career adaptability change.

Many studies have examined the association between individual differences and career adaptability. For example, the big five personality traits extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience, were positively related to CA while neuroticism was negatively related to CA (Teixeira et al., 2012; van Vianen et al., 2012). Previous cross-sectional research has indicated a positive relationship between career adaptability and other categories that are part of or resemble core self-evaluations. These constructs include self-esteem (van Vianen et al., 2012), locus of control (Pouyaud et al., 2012), job search self-efficacy (Guan et al., 2013), and tenacious goal pursuit (van Vianen et al (Tolentino et al., 2013). This shows the importance of CSE as a higher-order construct that integrates four lower-order personality dimensions: self-esteem, generalised self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability (Judge, 2009; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998) It is a higher-order construct that involves individuals' actual appraisals of themselves (Judge, 2009; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998). Given the importance of CSE and its association with career adaptability as a High order construct, the following section explores it in more detail.

3.7.2.1 Core self-evaluations

The "Core self-evaluation theory" proved to be an exceptional psychological concept for assessing personality characteristics and variables in organisational psychology (Judge, 2009). Core self-evaluation (CSE) represents individuals' original assessments of their self-worth and skills. It reflects a solid personality structure, including individual subconsciousness, self-evaluation, and self-control.(Chang et al., 2012). Core self-evaluation indicates how individuals evaluate themselves, their attitude towards the environment and situations they find themselves in, and how they perceive their self-esteem and competencies (Judge, 2009). It was established that this is a robust and highly consistent psychological concept that depicts a significant relationship between personality qualities and pleasures, motivation, and stress (Ferris et al., 2011). The main idea is that persons with a high

CSE value are believed to be skilful in performing work-related tasks and vulnerable in decision-making because they utilise favourable environmental resources (Crocker & Park, 2004). These individuals are confident in their talents and feel in control of the situation. In the decision-making process, such a person executes tasks cheerfully and without undue stress and accepts the role of leader (Judge et al., 2002).

It has been demonstrated that core self-evaluations are related to various indicators such as adaptability by showing more significant adjustment to foreign tasks. This is one way adaptability may be demonstrated (Johnson, Kristof-Brown, Van Vianen, De Pater & Klein, 2003). Within the context of employability, core self-evaluation is a notion that is quite beneficial. Previous studies (Hirschi et al., 2015; Tolentino et al., 2014; Zacher, 2014) found that core self-evaluation (CSE) is significantly and positively related to all four career adaptability dimensions. Students with high core self-evaluations should be more likely than those with low core self-evaluations to take an interest in and assume personal responsibility for their career development and their impact on the work environment. Moreover, students with high core self-evaluations should have more confidence in their skills to confront work problems and realise their career objectives successfully. In turn, these impacts of core self-evaluation on control and confidence should influence core self-evaluations on changes in total career adaptability.

However, few studies have examined individual differences' effects on career adaptability changes over time. Thus, our limited understanding of the extent to which particular individual variations might predict and impact whether students' career adaptability would increase or decrease with time. Few studies such as Hirschi's (2009) study, found that some personal traits boosted career adaptability levels over the academic year of Swiss students in high school. These factors were that good emotional disposition, perceived social support, non-immigrant origin, and continued vocational education. Zacher (2014) also studies some personal characteristics and traits that might predict change in career adaptability and its four dimensions such as big five personalities and CSE.

Based on these theoretical considerations the second hypothesis H2 was developed

- *H2: Core self-evaluation (CSE) positively predicts the change in overall career adaptability and its four dimensions (concern, control, curiosity and confidence)*

3.7.3 Proactive behaviour

Proactive career behaviours can be defined as 'the degree to which somebody is proactively developing his or her career as expressed by diverse career behaviours' (Hirschi, Freund, & Herrmann, 2014, p. 577). The few research that have examined change in either career adaptability or proactive career behaviours have mostly overlooked individual development over time. Whether and how career adaptability grows or decreases over time (Guan et al., 2017; Hirschi & Freund, 2014; Negru-Subtirica et al., 2016). This is surprising since CCT makes assumptions about dynamic career processes and emphasises the necessity to explore developmental factors in career adaptability research.

People engage in proactive behaviours when they evaluate their circumstances in such a manner that they behave in self-valued directions, as opposed to just reacting to change after it has occurred (Crant, 2000; Fryer & Payne, 1984). Proactive career behaviours relate to how individuals actively develop their careers by engaging in various career behaviours (Hirschi et al., 2014). This includes career planning, networking, skill development, career advice, and career exploration (Strauss et al., 2012; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015; Guan et al., 2017). In the context of CCT, proactive career behaviours have been labelled as indicators of adaptability since individuals utilise these behaviours to manage professional development objectives and change work and career settings.(e.g., Guan et al., 2017; Hirschi et al., 2015).

Most studies found a positive association between individual differences, career adaptability, and proactive career behaviour (Guan et al., 2015; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015). Proactive career behaviour is considered a result of career adaptability resources. Proactive behaviour is seen as a specific adaptive response to more general career adaptability resources (Hirschi et al., 2015; Savickas,

2005). In this sense, career adaptability is believed to assist in developing strategies for directing proactive behaviour (Nilforooshan & Salimi, 2016). It emphasises personal initiative and responsibility for one's career construction (Urbanaviciute et al., 2016), which should result in proactive behaviour. Empirical research provided positive correlations between career adaptability and proactive career behaviours (Tolentino et al., 2014; Nilforooshan & Salimi, 2016; Rudolph et al., 2017).

According to Savickas (2012), career development is a dynamic process by which individuals transform their career experiences into life meanings. These assumptions implicitly indicate intraindividual changes. Despite that, previous research on CCT has focused mainly on interindividual connections and transformation processes. However, it is difficult to apply the results of research on interindividual variability to questions about intraindividual changes (Boker, Molenaar, & Nesselroade, 2009; Molenaar, 2004). intraindividual changes should be included in addition to interindividual linkages to justify and understand the nature of dynamic psychological phenomena in career adaptability development (Heslin et al., 2019) and CCT dynamics (Johnston et al., 2016).

Lately, studies have examined intraindividual interactions between the broad concepts of adaptability and proactivity (Zhu, Frese, & Li, 2014). In essence, these studies suggest that when adaptability improves, that works as a source of proactive development, which will lead to an increase in adaptability. So it goes a full circle (Klehe et al., 2021). Applied to the CCT setting, these assumptions may manifest themselves in parallel development processes: The more substantial an individual's intraindividual development in career adaptability and proactive career behaviours, the stronger his or her intraindividual growth in career adaptability and proactive career behaviours, respectively (Spurk et al., 2020). Specifically, improving career adaptability (increase in concern, control, curiosity and confidence) involves enhancing one's psycho-social resources, promoting goal clarity, perceived skills, and motivation to engage in job-related behaviours (Guan et al., 2015, 2017; Rudolph et al., 2017). Increases in goal clarity and motivation, for instance, should be followed by increases in proactive professional behaviour, as it is often simpler to initiate and maintain behaviour under such circumstances (Locke & Latham, 2002).

In contrast, a career actor who participates in proactive professional behaviours more often over time, e.g., proactive skill development (e.g., pursuing training opportunities), networking, career planning, and career exploration, should also show a positive change in career adaptability. Increases in proactive behaviours induce changes in a person's career (environment) toward personal standards (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010) and tend to collect resources such as recognised competence or vitality (Cangiano, Parker, & Yeo, 2019). For example, when one demonstrates career exploration behaviour that would develop curiosity, Guan et al. (2017) help the individual search and collect new information. It might also increase concern by familiarising individuals with themselves and the environment. It also increases confidence through facing challenges and learning new things. And confidence. and control by making careful and dwell thought goals and decisions. In general, career adaptability as a psycho-social resource should improve due to acquired resources and more person–job compatibility through proactive career behaviours.

Only a few empirical research focused on the links between changes in career adaptability and proactive career behaviours. A study on adolescent students showed that career adaptability and exploration as a proactive career behaviour slightly decreased within four months (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2015). Although these two measures were not studied, the results showed that they decreased together, and the supposition that they are connected is valid. Another study supports this idea by Guan et al., 2017 which found that career adaptability mediated the positive correlation across time between future work self as a stable trait and career exploration as a proactive behaviour. The empirical studies imply that proactive career behaviour might influence a positive change in career adaptability resources. Career adaptive behaviour and career adaptability resources may co-develop over time (Spurk et al., 2020).

Career adaptive behaviours

Career adaptive behaviours can be proactive and reactive behaviours that are used to enhance a career. Theoretically, according to Savickas (2005), adaptive behaviour is considered adaptive responses to adaptability resources. Fugate et al., 2004 consider adaptive behaviour personal

adaptability, and King's (2004) career self-management behaviour. The postgraduate experience involves adaptive career behaviour like networking, international exchanges, mentoring, and soft skills development (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021; Kinash et al., 2016). However, some focus on achieving high grades (Dunn et al., 2016). Graduates appreciate the importance of activities that convey to employers the development of personal qualities and talents (Thompson et al., 2013; Wilton, 2014). A cross-cultural study of graduates in three nations discovered that they engaged in activities that signified their fitness for a job, which aligned with the hiring processes of that country (Saito & Pham, 2018). Australian grads, for example, stress their job experience and solid academic accomplishments; Japanese graduates try to demonstrate a good cultural fit with the organisation; and Vietnamese graduates prioritise personal networks.

3.8 Summary

According to research on students' usage of adaptable career behaviours, involvement in activities that enhance job outcomes is lower than predicted. This lower engagement is connected to a lack of career planning (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Thompson et al., 2013). According to Jackson and Tomlinson (2020), students' proactive activities rose as their perceptions of job market prospects fell. These findings also show that few higher education employability literature studies use established theories. Such research can add to the understanding of the students' experiences and explain how students participate in career adaptive behaviours that improve employability. Healy et al. found that researchers in two independent disciplines of study have investigated the features and circumstances that enhance or limit the job success of graduates: Graduate employability and career development. This study is rooted in the career development literature and employs CCT (Savickas, 2005; Savickas, 2013) to inform the higher education literature.

The higher education literature focuses on graduate characteristics (Oliver & Jorre de St Jorre, 2018), human, social, and psychological capital, and career identity (Clarke, 2018; Tomlinson, 2017), as well as the effectiveness of institutional strategies and programmes such as work-integrated learning, extracurricular activities, and employability awards. It can benefit from the career development

literature, which contains long-established and well-defined ideas detailing how individuals participate in career exploration, professional decision-making, perform career adaptive behaviours, and attain career outcomes (Healy et al., 2020).

The university environment provides a solid foundation for the development of several personal and social characteristics (Poropat, 2009 & Richardson et al., 2012). It is reasonable to believe that it also influences the development of people's professional adaptability. As described before, professional adaptabilities are positive psychosocial resources and coping mechanisms that assist individuals in dealing with occupational challenges. (Savickas, 2005). For instance, Tolentino et al. (2014) obtained data from 108 Australian university students at two measurement intervals four weeks apart. According to their findings, occupational flexibility may rise or diminish over a relatively short period. Tolentino et al. (2014) did not investigate whether individual differences predicted changes in job adaptability over time. Numerous research studies have also demonstrated that career concern is the essential adaptability and the strongest predictor of good adaption dimension.s (e.g., Hirschi, Herrmann, & Keller, 2015; Zacher, 2014).

Career adaptability refers to an individual's ability to adapt to changing work environments and career opportunities throughout their lifespan. In the context of the research question, career adaptability was chosen as the focus because it is a critical factor in facilitating successful career development. The rationale for examining career adaptability in people who are not currently working is that it allows us to focus on the proactive career behaviours and attitudes that individuals exhibit when they are not in a specific job or career path. It also allows us to identify the challenges that individuals face in developing and maintaining their career adaptability when they are not currently employed, such as a lack of resources or support. The application of career adaptability theory in individuals who are not currently working is similar to its application in employed individuals. However, there may be some differences in the strategies and resources that individuals use to develop and maintain their career adaptability when they are not currently employed. For example, individuals who are not currently

working may need to rely more heavily on personal resources such as self-efficacy and resilience or seek out external resources such as career counselling or training programs.

Generally, examining career adaptability in individuals who are not currently working can provide valuable insights into the proactive career behaviours and attitudes that individuals exhibit when they are preparing themselves for future career opportunities, and the challenges they face in developing and maintaining their career adaptability. In order to understand and explore all these issues further research is needed to explore the positive effects of these resources over more extended time frames and in specific situations. As career adaptability responses are behavioural, it is plausible that these are not consistently displayed but only as needed. Moreover, if career adaptability resources and responses change over time, as suggested above, the positive contribution of these may be boosted or diminished.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodological approaches used in this study to answer the research question. The research explores how the experience of being a Master's student impacts career adaptability development. In order to do so, the research investigates whether there is a change in career adaptability during the year and explores how students' lived experiences might have impacted their career adaptability. An explanatory sequential mixed-method approach was used to answer the research question. This chapter details and justifies the mixed methods approach used in the study. It explores the study's context, epistemological stance, and influence, followed by the general mixed-method design, then a detailed explanation of the quantitative and qualitative parts outlining each stage of the research process, namely participants, materials, procedure, and analytical strategy.

4.1.1 Study Context

Postgraduate taught (PGT) education in universities is under-researched compared to research in undergraduate education, especially at a Master's level (Tobbel & O'Donnell, 2013). That makes it more challenging to know the resources required so that the Master's students can reach the level needed to start or return to the job market (Bamber, 2015; Bamber et al., 2019; Drennan & Clarke, 2009; Hall & Sung, 2009). This gap in the research makes it challenging to connect theory with practice in postgraduate teaching and learning experience (Bamber, 2015). Literature is absent about the transition to PG but much literature about other transitions in other areas. Hall and Wai-Ching Sung (2009) suggested that more attention must be given to students' learning experiences in UK universities because of the expansion of overseas postgraduate provision. Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) found that international students may face more difficult transitions than UK students because of the cultural shifts and challenges of using a second language. They showed that little research had explored this area (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). Accordingly, this research aims to better understand Master's students' experience in the UK. The study's main aim is to understand the impact of the

Master's year in a UK university on students' readiness for the new world of work by exploring the development of their career adaptability. The study focuses on the experience of postgraduate students at business schools in the UK, the first part of which focuses on how career adaptability resources changed during the year of Master's study. This is measured quantitatively using a survey. The second part is a qualitative exploration of experience, using interviews to understand students' lived experiences and how the year is perceived to have impacted them and their career adaptability development.

4.2 Research Design

The philosophy behind this study is essentially one of pragmatism. The research applied a sequential mixed-method approach to answering the research question. The following sections discuss and justify the research design choices in detail.

4.3 Research Philosophy

In social research, it is vital to investigate the beliefs and assumptions behind the study process. Many conceptualisations have been offered to make sense of these philosophical foundations and their role in guiding research. Kuhn (1962) was the first to develop the concept of paradigms, which are unique worldviews comprising distinct sets of ideas and assumptions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) elaborated on this expansive conception by proposing a three-part model in which paradigms encompass three distinct belief systems: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. The ontology contains perceptions of reality (Bhaskar, 1998), but epistemology is the philosophical basis for how we come to know this reality; it is concerned with determining which types of knowledge are reliable and legitimate (Maynard, 1994).

4.3.1 Pragmatism

The philosophical school of pragmatism focuses on meaning and action rather than abstract thinking. Pragmatic philosophy holds that all truth and knowledge are only provisional (Maxcy, 2003). While classic dualist techniques have been discarded, pragmatism emphasises the need for several ideas and

viewpoints when studying reality (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism contradicts the incompatibility thesis, which claims that quantitative and qualitative methodologies are based on different epistemological frameworks and should not be combined (Bryman, 2008; Howe, 1988). On the one hand, quantitative purists (Popper, 1959; Maxwell & Delaney, 2004) believe that reality is objective and can be quantified. Quantitative purists were able to formulate general laws because of their (post)positivist worldview (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Greene, 2007; Creswell, 2014). On the other hand, qualitative purists (Schwandt, 2000) propose various subjective realities in which broad and universal laws are neither practicable nor desirable (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Greene, 2007).

According to quantitative and qualitative purists, fundamental paradigmatic differences are unsolvable (Greene, 2007). Nevertheless, metaphysical distinctions are ignored or set aside by pragmatism, which uses a "what works" epistemological approach to focus on finding the most effective method for solving the research topic at hand (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Morgan, 2007, 2014). For this reason, pragmatism has become increasingly prominent in studying the "real world" and has benefited from this trend (Bryman, 2008; Morgan, 2014).

Throughout the whole research process, including epistemology, data collection, analysis, and conclusions, this study employed mixed-methods pragmatism to achieve its objectives by combining quantitative and qualitative investigation. Although pragmatism is not devoted to any one method, it is now the dominant paradigm in mixed methods research (Greene, 2007; Morgan, 2014). Its emphasis on practical implementation allows researchers to combine methods. The paradigm's support of pluralism permits this mixing and actively values the employment of diverse approaches and, consequently, methodologies (Morgan, 2014). Pragmatism implies that knowledge is subjectively generated yet based on a shared reality from an ontological viewpoint. (Creswell, 2014). Recognizing many and single realities facilitates the examination of several worldviews within a single research, even if they present divergent or contradictory viewpoints (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Miles & Huberman,

1984). In the present study, pragmatism permits the study of the phenomena of interest through many epistemological lenses, fostering a more thorough understanding. These epistemological viewpoints are discussed further in detail below.

4.3.2 Mixed Methods Design

Literature about careers in general and career adaptability, in particular, is dominated by quantitative research (Johnston, 2018). Although there is some qualitative research, there is a recognised need for more qualitative studies, which are necessary to provide significant depth to the concept that clarifies the impact of career adaptability skills in lived experiences (Johnston, 2018). Bimrose and Hearne (2012) advised that fresh attention needs to be given to best support the development of career adaptability, a crucial resource for career development. Further, two-time points research is required to understand how career adaptability changes over a longer time and in specific conditions and situations (Johnston, 2018). Multiple measure points will help understand how career adaptability dimensions change and if they change in a unified manner (Rudolph et al., 2017).

When analysing particular hypotheses, the generally deductive character of quantitative approaches is proper. Inductive research can help investigate less established or more complicated phenomena (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mertens, 2015). Additionally, various methodologies provide differing degrees of attention, as desired in this study; Creswell and Clark (2011) noticed that quantitative inquiry focuses on the many and overlooks the individual, whereas qualitative inquiry focuses on the person and overlooks the many. In this study, both methodologies were employed to address their respective shortcomings directly and to generate a more thorough knowledge of how and why the career adaptability of this cohort of Master's students evolved. Greene Caracelli and Graham (1989) suggested that this architecture may be improved by employing techniques from similar paradigms. Nonetheless, the particular characteristics investigated in the two strands of the present study offer different paradigmatic viewpoints to answer the research question most

effectively. This method reflects the pragmatism and support for different worldviews adopted by the current study.

This research utilised an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to address the research aims, comprising both a quantitative and a qualitative strand, in which the approach to one strand is informed by findings from the other (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). An explanatory mixed methods design involves data collection for quantitative and qualitative parts sequentially to answer the research question. Consistent with adopting pragmatism as the guiding principle, its design is influenced by the research question and methods chosen to answer the research question most effectively. The quantitative strand used questionnaires to address changes in career adaptability during the master's year, which is difficult to address through qualitative methods. At the same time, the qualitative strand used semi-structured interviews to address the behaviours and factors that influenced a positive change in career adaptability in Master's students. The qualitative part focused on the lived experience of participants which gave an in-depth understanding of their experience which cannot be addressed through the quantitative method. Using a mixed method approach in answering the research question helped track the change and understand the lived experience at the same time.

4.4 Priority

Priority refers to the approach, quantitative or qualitative (or both), to which a researcher gives greater weight or consideration during the data gathering and analysis phases of a study (Morgan 1998; Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell (2003), it is a difficult decision that may rely on the researcher's interests, audience, and what the researcher wants to emphasise in this study (Creswell, 2003). Priority is often given to the quantitative approach in sequential explanatory designs because quantitative data gathering occurs first in the sequence and is frequently the most important part of the mixed-methods data-collecting process. A minor qualitative element is included in the second part of the investigation. Nonetheless, depending on the study's objectives, the breadth of quantitative

and qualitative research questions, and the design of each phase, a researcher may prioritise qualitative data collection and analysis (Morgan, 1998) or both. Such decisions might be made either during the study's design phase, before data collection, or after data collection and analysis had begun.

In this study, from the very beginning, the priority is given to qualitative data collection and analysis despite being in the second phase of the research process. The purpose of the study, which is to understand and explore the students' experience during the Master's year, identify and explain the factors that affect students' career adaptability during a Master's programme, influenced the decision. The first quantitative phase of the study focused primarily on revealing if there was a change in career adaptability resources during the year. Consequently, data were collected from students twice using a questionnaire—the data analysis employed mainly three statistical techniques: descriptive statistics, paired sample t-test and multiple hierarchical regression analysis. The goal of the qualitative phase was to explore and understand the change detected in the statistical results in the quantitative phase. Inductive thematic analysis was employed to enhance the depth of qualitative analysis since the research focused on understanding the students' lived experiences. Analysis was done following the six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013). The integration across the quantitative and qualitative approaches will be discussed first before focusing on each strand separately.

4.4.1 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Strands

Integration refers to the stage or stages in the research process where quantitative and qualitative methods are mixed or integrated (Creswell, 2003). In this study, the possibilities range from mixing during the formulation of the study's purpose and introducing both quantitative and qualitative methods for answering the research question (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) to integrating quantitative and qualitative findings during the data interpretation phase of the study.(Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). In addition, as this study is a mixed-method sequential design, the quantitative and qualitative phases are connected (Hanson et al., 2005) in the intermediate stage when the results of the data

analysis in the first quantitative phase of the study informed and guided recruiting participants for the second qualitative phase. In this sequential explanatory design, the two phases were connected while selecting the participants for the qualitative data collection based on the quantitative results from the first phase (Creswell et al., 2003). Based on their numeric scores from the career adaptability questionnaire, participants who took part in Time 1 and 2 in the first quantitative part were selected for the qualitative study. The researcher interviewed participants with both increased and decreased career adaptability. However, with a primary focus on students with increased career adaptability to understand what factors influenced that change in their experience. The following sections will focus on each approach, starting with the quantitative and then qualitative strand, following the research timeline order.

4.5 Quantitative strand

The quantitative strand uses a deductive, two-time points design to address the research question and track the change in career adaptability during the year. The quantitative part aims to investigate how career adaptability and its four dimensions, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, change over the year of Master's study. Furthermore, the quantitative study aims to understand the students' characteristics by including CSE measures and testing if CSE can predict change in career adaptability and its four dimensions (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence). This study chose CSE because it is a higher-order construct that integrates four lower-order personality dimensions: self-esteem, generalised self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability (Judge, 2009; Judge et al., 1998). CSE is one of the significant constructs that is associated with CA in different contexts. This study tries to test if CSE can predict change in CA and its four dimensions in a new context and a new group of participants that have not been tested before (Zacher, 2014) (refer to CSE section in chapter 3). In a two-time points observational design, exposure and outcome data are collected at two different time points. Two points of data collection were enough to investigate the change in career adaptability during the year. This design allows temporal relationships between variables to be analysed and infer

causality (Szklo & Nieto, 2014; Woodward, 2014). Before discussing in detail the quantitative research design, a short theoretical standpoint is introduced.

4.5.1 Theoretical standpoint for the quantitative part

Post-positivism is a philosophy that arose from positivism and is primarily based on the work of Popper (1959) and Kuhn (1962). It evolved due to the empirical emphasis on human experiences, which is difficult to comprehend (Mertens, 2015) and is interesting for the current study. Post-positivism investigates general laws but also pays attention to "theory falsification". In this sense, it does not claim absolute truth but offers probabilistic interpretations rather than absolute truths (Ponterotto, 2005; Popper, 1959). Due to biases and restrictions in the research process, post-positivism views knowledge as imperfect (Creswell, 2014). The hypothesis is believed to be based on the existing consensus, and prior research cannot be objective (Kuhn, 1962; Popper, 1959; Shadish et al., 2002).

The current study adopted post-positivism as a lens to address the research question quantitively by testing two hypotheses. It covers a specific issue and hypotheses and focuses on the internal and perceived processes that cannot be immediately seen. Consequently, outcomes are contextually established within the study's sample and method. In addition, results are not presented as isolated facts but rather contribute to the broader career literature, particularly that which focuses on development and change.

4.5.2 Quantitative Sample

This research aimed to study a diverse group of postgraduate students from Henley Business School who undertook a one-year taught postgraduate programme in 2019/2020. The quantitative data was collected twice at the beginning (Time 1) and the end of the year (Time 2). Namely, (October-December) 2019 and then again (May-July) 2020. Six to eight months between the two data collection points were enough to track changes (Hirschi, 2015; Zacher, 2014). In order to recruit Time 1 participants, invitations were sent to all Master's students at Henley Business School through the school's administrative team. The researcher had no access or direct contact with the students at Time

1. Around 800 Master's students at HBS in that year received an invitation email with a link to the questionnaire. 336 students clicked on the survey link, and 200 of them decided to continue past the information sheet. 132 of these respondents provided basic demographic data. After providing baseline demographic information, 109 students began responding to the survey, and 87 individuals submitted complete data on the study's key components at Time 1. As expected, the response rate was low, around 10%, which is typical in social studies (Zacher, 2014). Nevertheless, the number of participants is enough for the purpose of the study.

Participants, who completed the questionnaire at Time 1 and provided their email addresses agreed to be contacted for a follow-up survey, were contacted at Time 2 (May-July) 2020 before the student finished and left the university. Students normally submit their final projects and finish their final assessments around August-September, the researcher wanted to contact the students when they still have contact with the university before they leave and lose the connection. This time the researcher sent a direct email to the students with a link to the questionnaire. Around 75 students clicked on the survey link, and 71 chose to proceed past the information sheet. 67 students started answering the survey, and 64 participants completed the questionnaire fully. The students filled out the Career Adapt-ability Scale (CAAS) questionnaire in both data collection waves. Details about the measurements that were used are discussed later in this chapter.

4.5.3 Characteristics of participants Time 1 and Time 2

The response rate in T1 was 10% (N = 87); 63.4% of the participants were female, with a mean age of 24.64 (SD= 5.31). 69% (N=60) said they have work experience, with 63.3% having less than one year of work experience. 73.5% (N=64) of participants from Time 1 took part in the Time 2 questionnaire. At Time 2, 68.8% of participants were female. The mean age of participants was 24.55 (SD=4.92). 43.8% (N=28) said they have work experience, with 45.7% having less than one year of work experience.

4.5.4 Data Collection Method

Quantitative Materials

The questionnaire was built using an online survey platform called Qualtrics. It provides many useful features, especially its mobile-friendly look feature. The questionnaire's landing page comprised an information sheet about the study and the researcher. It also includes a consent form explaining how the data will be protected, confidential, and anonymised. The respondents consented by ticking a box before proceeding. (See Appendix C for the questionnaire, information sheet and consent form).

For Time 1 data collection, the first part of the questionnaire focused on demographic information, including their email address. The second part of the questionnaire was about the career adaptability resources using the CAAS questionnaire and core self-evaluation (CSE). The questionnaire was piloted by a group of students who were not part of the Master's students at HBS in 2019/2020. For Time 2 data collection, the questionnaire only included the Career Adaptability Scale CAAS to track the changes and asked if they agreed to be contacted for a follow-up interview. The questionnaire took around 5-7 minutes to be completed at Time 1 and 3-5 minutes at Time 2. Measures used in the questionnaires were derived from literature and will be discussed below.

4.5.5 Measures

Career adaptability resources

The four factors of career adaptability were assessed with the career Adapt-Ability scale (CAAS) (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The scale consists of 24 items that are divided equally into four subscales: concern (e.g., "concerned about my career"), control (e.g., "making decisions by myself"), curiosity (e.g., "becoming curious about new opportunities"), and confidence (e.g., "performing tasks efficiently"). Participants answered the question about how strongly they have developed the abilities mentioned in each item on a five-point scale ranging from 5 (strongest) to 1 (not strong at all).

At Time 1, reliability measurements using Cronbach's alphas were .81 for concern, .83 for control, .84 for curiosity, .90 for confidence and .94 for the overall scale. At Time 2 Cronbach's alphas were .83 for concern, .85 for control, .80 for curiosity, .90 for Confidence and .93 for overall career adaptability.

Core Self-evaluation.

Core self-evaluations (CSE) were assessed only at Time 1 using the CSE scale developed by Judge et al. (2003). The scale consists of 12 items (e.g., "I am confident I get the success I deserve in life." And "Sometimes I feel depressed"). The participants responded on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 6 (completely agree) to 1 (completely disagree). A high level of internal consistency reliability for the CSE scale was evident, with Cronbach's alpha of .84.

Demographic variables

Demographic variables were collected only at Time 1, Students reported their age in years, gender (male, female), the Master's programme that they are enrolled in, and if they have years of work experience if existed.

4.5.6 Data preparation

Data were prepared for analysis; raw item scores were reversed where required, and total scores were calculated for each scale or subscale used. No missing data were identified since the questionnaire was short, and the Qualtrics platform would not move to the next page unless all questions were answered on that page.

Independent sample t-tests were used to compare Time 1 students who also participated at Time 2 with Time 1 students who did not participate at Time 2 regarding Time 1 study variables. These drop-out analyses showed that there were no significant differences between the two groups in any of the variables except for concern (T2 participants: $M = 3.69$, $SD = .68$; non-respondents: $M = 3.29$, $SD = .66$; t[87] = -2.62, $p < .05$). Thus, T2 participants were more concerned about the future compared to those who participated at T1 but not at T2.

4.5.7 Data Analysis Techniques

In order to answer the research question quantitively, these two hypotheses were formulated relying on the discussion in Chapter 3 section 3.6:

- *H1: A Master's year experience can positively change students' career adaptability and its four dimensions (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence).*

- *H2: Core self-evaluation (CSE) positively predicts the change in overall career adaptability and its four dimensions (concern, control, curiosity and confidence)*

SPSS software (version 24) was used to conduct descriptive and statistical analysis. In order to test the first research hypothesis H1, paired-sample t-tests were used to detect any significant differences in career adaptability and its four dimensions between Time 1 and Time 2. Before starting the analysis, the required total sample size for t-test statistical analysis was calculated to be 54 students on the assumption of a significance level of 0.05, a power of 0.95, an effect size of 0.5, and two-tailed, using the G-power 3.1.9.7 programme. Given these conditions, the sample size in this study is sufficient to measure the effect of a year of Master's study on career adaptability.

The second hypothesis H2 was tested using three hierarchical linear regression analyses predicting overall career adaptability, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. The demographic variables age, gender, and work experience were added in Step 1, followed by core self-evaluations in Step 2. These analyses allowed the investigation of lagged effects of individual differences at Time 1 on career adaptability at Time 2. In the third step, the overall career adaptability at Time 1 was incorporated into the analysis used to predict the overall career adaptability at Time 2. Similarly, career adaptability dimensions are evaluated. Each dimension value at Time 1 was included independently of the remaining analyses predicting the associated career adaptability dimensions at Time 2. These analyses made it possible to examine the impact of core self-evaluation on changes in total career adaptability and its dimensions across time while controlling for demographic factors (Zapf et al., 1996; Zacher, 2014).

After completing the quantitative data collection phase and beginning the analysis phase, preparations were made to collect qualitative data to acquire a deeper understanding of the students' lived experiences. Next, the qualitative strand will be explained in detail.

4.6 Qualitative strand

The qualitative strand of the current study used interviews to gather data from Master's students at Henley Business School in the UK. All interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed by the researcher using inductive thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). The qualitative strategy was used to answer the second question. Qualitative research is exploratory and explanatory (Braun & Clarke, 2013); it can yield new or unexpected information. Qualitative research seeks to comprehend the significance of individual experiences (Willig, 2008). It sheds light on how individuals make sense of their reality (Braun & Clarke, 2013; May, 2002; Willig, 2008), with Braun & Clarke (2013, p.8) arguing that this form of research gives "access to individuals' subjective worldviews and meanings." Qualitative techniques successfully investigate such complications (Willig, 2008) because they encourage in-depth and comprehensive analysis of complicated and multidimensional human events.(Braun & Clarke, 2013; Morrow, 2007). Additionally, since there is little research about Master's students' experience, a flexible, open-ended data collection method was advantageous.

4.6.1 Theoretical standpoint for qualitative strand

Social context, language, concepts, and social placement all warp and impact our perception of reality, making it impossible to grasp in its purest form (Danermark et al., 2002). Because of this, the only way to see reality is through the lens of another person's perspective. Ontological principles influenced a critical realist perspective for the qualitative study (Bhaskar, 1998). With the goal of "better comprehending what happens in the world," critical realists acknowledge that this reality cannot be wholly accessed due to the context in which we see it (Willig, 2013, p.11).

Contextualism, which broadly corresponds to a critical realism ontology, is founded on the premise that there is no one representation of reality. However, the reality constantly changes concerning context and the researcher's position (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The study focuses on the person-in-context, emphasising the importance of understanding the person – as a thinking, feeling, experiencing human being with a distinct identity, personality, and history – in relation to the situation in which they are positioned (Ushioda, 2009). Within the contextualist perspective, the researcher

conducting this type of research must consider their perspectives and presumptions. (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

One of the key facets of the study's qualitative strand is its exploration of the factors that impacted a positive change in career adaptability dimensions through exploring the lived experience of students. This allows investigating day-to-day lives to understand how these are subjectively experienced and understood (Eatough & Smith, 2006b). Practically, greater insight into how individuals think about their experiences can facilitate a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the change in this context.

That is, exploring lived experiences of these phenomena can facilitate a greater understanding of the ways that different aspects of an individual's life relate to one another and change over time.

This level of analysis may elucidate underlying processes such as transactions across "risk factors", the role of stress, and the areas and resources that early adolescent girls draw on in navigating these areas of their lives. The focus on individual lived experience reflects an ontological assumption that there is no fixed objective reality and, thus, that it is necessary to access others' constructions of reality in order to develop understanding (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015; Smith et al., 2009).

Analysis is an iterative and inductive process, wherein the researcher enters the participant's "life world" and engages in a close, systematic analysis of their account to develop experiential themes. This is carried out separately for each participant before exploring convergences and divergences across the sample, or *corpus* of cases (Smith et al., 2009).

Understanding how Master's students experience career adaptability development involves exploring the subjective and personal factors that shape their individual experiences as they navigate their Master's program and prepare for their future careers. This approach emphasizes the importance of considering the unique and diverse backgrounds, identities, values, and aspirations of Master's students when studying career adaptability development.

4.6.2 The rationale for a thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a popular choice when dealing with individual lived experiences (Steffen & Hanley, 2014). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) shares many similar features with Thematic Analysis (TA). IPA was considered a method of analysis at the beginning of the study. However, TA was selected as an appropriate method for this study. IPA is focused on making meaning and offering extensive accounts of people's experiences, much like TA (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, the analytic methods for these methodologies are primarily comparable; both are centred on the development of codes and themes through data immersing oneself in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Smith et al., 2009).

However, the phenomenological IPA focuses mainly on the participants' lived experiences and how they try to make sense of these. It does not give enough attention to social context and how that shapes the experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Parker, 2005; Todorova, 2011). This limited engagement with the context and society is potentially problematic, given the importance of the social focus and how it impacts the students' experience. Conversely, TA is a technique that aims to identify repeating patterns or themes in a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013; 2022). Individual experiences can be examined in terms of how they are affected by the larger sociocultural framework in which they exist. Career adaptability is a psychological notion that refers to the tools people require to deal with life's ups and downs, affecting their capacity to integrate into society successfully (Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Social context plays a significant role in this sense.

Researchers can perform TA investigations in one of two ways: either based on existing theory, which is theoretical thematic analysis (deductively), or inductively, which is inductive thematic analysis. Otherwise, the researcher's interpretative frameworks and philosophical convictions will always impact how they engage with the data in what is known as inductive theme analysis, which is driven by the facts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As mentioned in the literature review, there is not enough research exploring the experiences of Master's students. Since the study aimed to focus on the

participants' experience and how that impacted their career adaptability level at the end of the year, inductive TA was chosen, with themes identified through the data.

4.6.3 Qualitative Sample

In order to recruit participants for the qualitative study, data collected in the quantitative part from Time 1 and Time 2 were reviewed. The participants who said they were happy to participate in an interview were contacted. The qualitative strand aimed to explore the factors that assisted in developing career adaptability resources by investigating students' lived experiences in that year. In choosing the participants, the researcher focused on students with increased and decreased career adaptability, primarily focusing on the increased ones.

The qualitative sample included 16 students who completed the questionnaire in Times 1 and 2. The sample contained 12 students with positive, 4 with negative changes and 2 with no overall change in their reported career adaptability (Table 4.1) (See appendix B for more details). That contributed to a deep understanding of the lived experience of the students and what factors might have impacted their positive change.

Looking at the participants' main characteristics, four were married and lived in the UK with their own families. They were international students older than the other students in the sample, and the four had some work experience. Two students had two years of work experience, one with six years of experience and the other with ten years. One of them had two children. These four students started with high career adaptability levels at the beginning of the year. However, only two completed the academic year with higher career adaptability than at the beginning. (Table 4.1)

The other 12 students lived independently, mainly in university residences. Three were from the UK, and the others were international students, with four from China 10 out of 12 finished the year with an increased career adaptability level. However, only two ended it with a lower career adaptability level; both worked part-time during their Master's. One was an international student, while the other was from the UK. The table below gives details about the participants. Typically for the

postgraduate (PGT) programme, a large percentage of students are in their early twenties and have little or no work experience since it is not required for admission to the programme. A small percentage is older with relatively long work experience. Although the programme is pre-experienced in any one year there is typically a small number with work and life experience and the researcher sought to reflect this in the sample.

Table 4.1
Qualitative sample characteristics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Family status	Nationality	Work experience	Scholarship	Career Adaptability Change
Carlos	Male	31	Married	Peru	6 years	No	Positive
Sofia	Female	28	Married	Peru	2 years	No	Positive
Mingli	Male	21	Single	China	Non	No	Positive
Numa	Male	21	Single	Azerbaijan	Non internship	No	Positive
Jessica	Female	22	Single	UK	Non (internship)	Full scholarship	Positive
Sorina	Female	22	Single	Romania	Non	No	Positive
Daniel	Male	22	Single	UK	Non (internship)	Full scholarship	Positive
Dorra	Female	22	Single	Tunisia	Non		Positive
Bingwen	Female	22	Single	China	Non	Partial scholarship	Positive
Chun	Female	25	Single	China	5 years	No	Positive
Ping	Male	22		China	Non	No	Same
Kayin	Female	28	Single	Nigeria	2 years	No	Same
Charlette	Female	23	Single	UK	Non (internship)	Full scholarship	negative
Roja	Female	33	Married	India	10 years	No	negative
Olympia	Female	23	Single	Greece	Non	No	negative

					(internship)		
Adriana	Female	28	Married	Albania	2 years	Full scholarship	negative

4.6.4 Data Collection Method

Qualitative material

Interviews

The research utilised qualitative information gathered through in-depth interviews. To elicit a rich first-person description, the researcher facilitated a discussion of the participants' experiences and impressions of a particular phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were conducted, in which researchers were directed by an interview schedule but could also respond to participant narratives (Brinkmann, 2014; Harding, 2013). All interviews were conducted one-on-one, fostering rapport and permitting a personal conversation that produces rich experience data (Reid et al., 2005). Interviews were conducted online due to the pandemic when face-to-face interviews were impossible. Initially, face-to-face interviews were planned since they can generate rich data by enabling non-verbal and paralinguistic communication, particularly for participants (Vogl, 2013). The interview participants received an information sheet and a consent form, which they had to sign and send back before the interview.

First, the interviewer recapped essential information at the beginning of the online meeting. I explained the purpose of the study again, and the utilisation of data reminded them that participants did not need to answer all questions and could stop at any time, and I reminded them of confidentiality procedures. The interview began with preliminary questions (e.g., tell me about yourself? and what you were doing before starting the master) before moving on to the main body of the schedule and ending with impartial questions. Interviews lasted approximately 45-90 minutes.

Finally, I thanked the participants, reiterated vital information, and provided further opportunities for questions. As a "thank you" to each participant, I prepared a report about career adaptability changes during the year, including an explanation of what that might mean and some tips. I explained it to

them and gave them time to go through it and ask questions. I shared that report at the end of the interview, so the report would not impact the discussion. Since the interview did not constitute the participants explaining the results, it did not constitute them talking about their experiences during the year.

4.6.5 Interview Schedule

To support the creation of an interview, a focus group was scheduled with four students from the previous year's group (class of 2018-19). The 75-minute focus group discussion assisted in formulating questions and rehearsing, conducting, and directing interviews and group discussions. Following this, the researcher generated ten questions, each of which included recommended interview prompts. The questions were meant to be open-ended and impartial, avoiding phrases that would steer the person in a specific direction (King & Horrocks, 2010). Various sorts of questions were employed to elicit varied stories and comments. Patton (2015) proposed six significant kinds of interview questions that were incorporated into the interview schedule: (a) Experience and behaviour questions aiming to elicit accounts of behaviours, actions and experiences, (b) opinion and value questions focusing on understandings and interpretations, (c) feeling questions exploring emotions, (d) knowledge questions inquiring about knowledge on a given subject, (e) sensory questions building on experience and behaviour questions by eliciting accounts of sensory stimuli, and (f) background/demographic questions identifying and exploring demographic characteristics. For example, a "feelings" question that related to the "emotions" topic was "What was your best/worst experience during the Master, and how did that make you feel?" Possible prompts here encouraged the participant to unpack the emotion by asking for more detail, or exploring examples, for instance, "How does this impact you as a person?" and "Why?" The use of prompts gives different directions on the information the inquiry intends to elicit and encourages a high degree of specificity and thoroughness(King & Horrocks, 2010).

4.6.6 Data Analysis Methods/Techniques

Qualitative Analysis

Interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) model of TA, which included the following six phrases:

Phase one: Familiarise myself with the information. Otter was used to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews. Otter allows one to listen to the records while reading what was transcribed. This entailed verifying the accuracy of all transcripts about what was said and how it was said. This required a great deal of reading and listening. After confirming that each interview was transcribed correctly, I inserted the interviews into NVivo software. I began the analysis by reading transcripts many times and taking notes on what I noticed, thought, and reflected on regarding the study's fundamental question. I used the annotations option in NVivo to add these comments in the first reading.

Phase two: Generating the starting code. This step entailed going systematically through the whole dataset to generate codes. Exciting data characteristics were divided into relevant pieces and coded with a single word or phrase. Two types of coding are possible: semantic coding, which captures descriptive information, and latent coding, which focuses on collecting the implicit meanings within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I have written code at both levels. Each interview was separately coded using NVivo. Open coding for all interviews resulted in 1000 initial codes. These codes were revised before moving to the next phase to remove any repetitions or similarities between codes and to combine some codes. It is normal to generate a couple of hundreds of codes when performing an inductive analysis. All coding was done manually but CAQDAS programmes like NVivo facilitated refining codes and their organisation within the software.

Phase 3: Looking for recurring themes. During this stage, I sorted all the dataset's codes into various potential themes based on their meaning. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme should be able to capture a significant feature of the data concerning the research question. As a result, a significant amount of consideration and work was invested in connecting the various codes and

themes, ensuring that codes collated within each theme captured meaningful and relevant aspects of the data.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes. During this step, I checked to see if the themes that we found in the previous phase still fit within the parameters of our study goals. During this period, I made many passes at refining the themes, during which I abandoned some and altered others. I examined each topic to ensure that it was understandable, unique, and pertinent to the study issue (Braun & Clarke, 2013; 2022). In addition, I examined the validity of the themes to ensure that they accurately represented the participants' narratives by confirming that the meaning of the individual codes mirrored the themes. This was done by comparing the meanings of the individual codes to the meanings of the themes. The comprehension of the connection between codes and themes was enhanced by constructing a thematic map seen in Figure 6.1. This map offered a graphical depiction of the meanings and patterns that were present in the data. For example, two overarching themes were developed and then further developed to assist the reader in comprehending the intricate narrative of the data. The first overarching theme focused on the participants' relationship with themselves, and the second overarching theme focused on the participants' interaction with the environment. These overarching themes were developed to assist the reader in comprehending the intricate narrative of the data.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes. For each of the themes, I crafted a scenario that assisted me in explaining and defining their core characteristics. In a few of the cases, some quotations from the participants were utilised as a part of the themes' title; this allowed the researchers to be as accurate as possible to the student's stories.

Phase 6: Producing the report. This approach entails explaining the "complicated story of your data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.23), thus highlighting the significance of capturing the narrative of the data and persuading the reader of the validity of the analysis. This was achieved by using sufficient participant quotes to clarify the link between analysis and data. In addition, these quotations were

intertwined into the topic descriptions so that the reader could more easily follow the intricate

narrative that the data were trying to convey (Braun & Clarke, 2021)

4.7 Quality and Rigour

4.7.1 Quantitative Strand

The postpositivist principles of reliability, validity, replicability, and generalisability guided the process

of quantitative research (Mertens, 2015). These postpositivist principles also guided attention to

general reporting standards from the APA Publications and Communications Board Task Force

(Appelbaum et al., 2018) as well as standards for reporting observational epidemiological research

(von Elm et al., 2008, 2014).

Reliability and Validity

The degree to which a set of measurements accurately and consistently captures the target concept

is known as its validity (Mertens, 2015). All the measurements have their internal consistency, as

measured by Cronbach's. Under the recommendations made by Terwee et al. (2007), the previous

evidence of validity and reliability is described, paying particular emphasis to the areas of content

validity, construct validity, and internal consistency.

Replicability and Generalisability

Both replicability and generalisability need transparent reporting. Replicability refers to providing

adequate information to allow study circumstances to be re-created. At the same time,

generalisability refers to the extent to which conclusions might be used within different contexts

(Appelbaum et al., 2018). Clear details have been supplied regarding the sample, the materials and

techniques for data collection, and the analytical processes. The unstandardized and standardised

results for the main analysis were reported together with the sensitivity analysis.

4.7.2 Qualitative Strand

The qualitative strand was guided by fundamental principles from Yardley (2000, 2015), namely

sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and

importance, alongside specific thematic analysis guidance (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

Sensitivity to Context

This concept demonstrates attention to the study setting, which includes a more extensive theory and body of literature, the data and their sociocultural context, the viewpoints of the participants, and ethical issues. The researcher attempted to immerse themselves in the lived experiences of the participants and to make sure that their interpretations and the written narrative were properly integrated into their respective stories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Following the advice of Braun and Clarke, illustrative quotes have been supplied for each participant in a particular subject (2022). Rather than choosing a single theoretical lens or strictly matching conclusions with quantitative data, all alternative pathways of explanation were considered before describing the findings. This was done in order to avoid any potential biases.

Commitment and Rigour

This refers to developing a comprehensive research plan (Yardley, 2000, 2015). In this case, measures were taken to include a purposeful sample with a wealth of expertise pertinent to the topic. The researcher attempted to improve competence and skill in inductive theme analysis by participating in training, reading about thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2022), and receiving support from peers to assure commitment to the approach. The researcher worked hard to conduct an in-depth and methodical study that would go beyond simple findings and establish important themes encompassing personal and communal experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry et al., 2017).

Transparency and Coherence

This concept ensures that reporting is clear and consistent throughout (Yardley, 2000; 2015). A concerted attempt was made to construct a research design consistent with the study topic and embrace epistemologies that informed the whole procedure (Yardley, 2000; 2015). There is a comprehensive narrative of the findings reported in chapter four, along with a detailed description of each stage of analysis. Many different approaches were used to make reflexivity more accessible, which is an essential factor in reflexive theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; 2006; Trainor & Bundon, 2020). To make it easier to conduct an audit, each step of the analytical process was meticulously

recorded so that a third party could go from the raw data to the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Yin, 1989). The reader was provided with a comprehensive description of the study's particular context, participants, settings, and situations so that they could evaluate the feasibility of applying the research to a variety of other contexts and settings (Yardley, 2015).

4.7.3 Mixed Methods

Quality and rigour in mixed research techniques studies relate to the coherence of the overall design and the extent to which meta-inferences provide insightful knowledge (Bryman et al., 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). The methodologies employed are congruent with the objectives of the study. Each method provides insight into the same phenomena and population, considering their unique epistemologies. The integration of findings was driven by Tashakkori and Teddlie's (2008) theory of integrative efficacy, focusing on completeness, elaboration, comparison, and contrast. The priority of this study is the qualitative phase. Nevertheless, the findings and contributions of each strand in answering the research question are addressed separately. Examining and comparing what the two strands gave to answer the research question was introduced by the end of the discussion chapter (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

4.8 Ethical considerations

Clear ethical considerations were adopted in this research. First, the research was approved by the University of Reading's research ethics committee. I adhered to the Ethical Guidelines of the University of Reading. These guidelines enabled me to consider all aspects of the process of conducting research, such as gaining informed consent, starting the survey with an information sheet and consent form, informing all participants about the research before interviews, contacting the students for the first time through the administrative team of Henley Business School. After gaining their consent, the students' contact information for the follow-up survey and interview was used only for data collection. The researcher followed the procedure that was outlined by Podsakoff et al. (2003) to reduce the potential impact of common method bias. In addition to assuring participants of their anonymity and

confidentiality, I informed them that their responses were individual, and stated that their responses would be analysed collectively rather than individually. Additionally, the questionnaire was not affiliated with any organisation or professional body in any way.

I strived to treat all participants with dignity and respect during the interviews. I clarified that the interviews were recorded for analysis purposes only and that no personal information would be shared with any other parties. Zoom application records audio and video at the same time. All video files were deleted after each interview, and only the audio recording was kept for transcription and the first stages of analysis.

All participants were given the option to terminate their participation in the study at any time. This was made very obvious in both lines of inquiry, with the reassurance that participants were free to drop participation for any or no reason.

Careful consideration was given to preserve the confidentiality and security of data. Compliant with the Data Protection Act 1998 (The Stationery Office). Each interview recording was stored on my personal laptop's password-protected hard drive. All participant names were changed to pseudonyms, and any information that could identify the participants after transcription was removed, to protect the identity of the participants.

4.9 Summary

The study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to understand how and why career adaptability changes among Master's students. The quantitative strand included 87 participants at Time 1, from which 64 participants took part in Time 2, using paired sample t-tests to study the change of career adaptability and its four dimensions. Additionally, using multiple hierarchical regression analysis to determine whether CSE may predict change in total career adaptability and its four aspects. In the qualitative section, inductive thematic analysis was utilised to investigate the lived experience of 16 students whose career adaptability was evaluated statistically. Different strategies were followed to ensure quality and rigour, and ethical considerations were considered.

Chapter 5: Quantitative Results

5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the quantitative results relating to the research questions. It presents an overview of preliminary analyses before addressing the specific research questions. The change of career adaptability and its four dimensions were tested using the paired sample t-test. Using hierarchical multiple regression analysis tests, CSE was then tested as a predictor of change in career adaptability, along with its four dimensions.

5.2 Descriptive statistics and correlation

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics mean value (M) and standard deviation (SD), Cronbach alpha (α) for the variables, and correlations.

The correlation values between career adaptability variables measured at Time1 and respective variables measured at Time2 were r = .64 for overall career adaptability, r = .60 for concern, r = .54 for control, r = .64 for curiosity, and r = .41 for confidence. For all p<.01.

Age appeared to have no significant correlations with career adaptability or its four dimensions except for the significant negative correlation between age and concern at Time2 (r=-.31, p<.05), which shows that older students have less concern than younger students. As mentioned in the methodological chapter, when comparing the participants' group who took part in Time1 but not Time2 and the participants' group who took part in both Time1 and Time2, the students who participated in Time2 were more concerned. There was a statistically significant difference between the two groups using an independent sample t-test (t[87] = -2.62, $p < .05$).

Gender appeared to have no significant correlation with career adaptability measurements, neither at Time1 nor at Time2, with no exceptions.

Core self-evaluation was positively and moderately correlated with career adaptability and its four dimensions (r between .21 and .40 r<.01, .05). The highest value was between CSE and confidence at Time1 (r=.40, p<.01)

Work experience had no significant correlation with career adaptability or its four dimensions, neither at Time1 nor at Time2. However, work experience appeared to have a significant positive correlation with core self-evaluation (r=.38, p<.01) and an expected significant positive correlation with age (r=.64, p<.01).

Table 5.1

Descriptive statistics means (M), standard deviations (SD), Cronbach's alphas (α), and correlations of variables.

		M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	CA T1	3.71	.52	.94														
2	Concern T1	3.65	.66	.81	.84**													
3	Control T1	3.82	.61	.83	.80**	.56**												
4	Curiosity T1	3.55	.63	.84	.82**	.57**	.52**											
5	Confidence T1	3.82	.62	.90	.82**	.58**	.53**	.58**										
6	CA T2	3.73	.51	.93	.64**	.58**	.50**	.49**	.53**									
7	Concern T2	3.69	.66	.83	.60**	.60**	.40**	.47**	.47**	.75**								
8	Control T2	3.86	.65	.85	.50**	.42**	.54**	.24	.37**	.85**	.56**							
9	Curiosity T2	3.63	.55	.80	.63**	.48**	.46**	.64**	.50**	.80**	.44**	.54**						
10	Confidence T2	3.74	.66	.90	.4**	.35**	.25*	.27*	.41**	.83**	.40**	.64**	.65**					
11	CSE	4.13	.73	.84	.35**	.31*	.32*	.21*	.40**	.37**	.21*	.30*	.29*	.38**				
12	Age	24.72	4.93		-.08	-.05	-.05	-.08	-.08	-.21	-.31*	-.19	-.1	-.07	.23			
13	Gender	.69	.467		.07	.13	-.03	.08	.04	.13	.20	.12	.03	.04	-.02	.12		
14	Work experience	.38	.488		.08	.06	.09	.01	.12	-.03	-.21	-.03	.06	.11	.38**	.64**	.04	
15	Years of work	2.63	3.91		-.08	-.02	-.09	-.10	-.05	-.21	-.24	-.21	-.14	-.08	.11	.89**	.14	.60**

Note. N = 64. T1 = Time1, T2 = Time2 (6-8 months after T1). Variables 11–15 were at Time 1. ∗ p <.05. ∗∗ p <01.

5.3 Statistical tests assumptions

Before starting the statistical analysis, the researcher reviewed the data against analytical assumptions for paired sample t-test and hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Table 2 briefly describes the outcomes, while Appendix A provides a more comprehensive account of the tests.

Table 5.2
Summary of data assumption review

Assumptions	Summary of data review
T-test assumptions	
Level of measurement	✓ Continuous variables
Random sampling	
Independence of observations	✓ Each student filled out the questionnaire individually
The difference in observations between T1 and T2 is Normally distributed	✓ Skewness and kurtosis did not exceed the absolute value of 1 Shapiro-Wilk values are insignificant for all measurements.
Multiple regression assumptions	
Sample size	
Multicollinearity and singularity	✓ Bivariate correlation coefficients did not exceed .70
Outliers	One of the overall Career adaptability is identified as an outlier
Normality	✓ Skewness and kurtosis did not exceed the absolute value of 1 Shapiro-Wilk values are insignificant for all measurements.
Linearity	✓ Normal probability Plot (P-P) Of the regression standardised residuals form an approximate diagonal straight line.
Homoscedasticity	✓ Data points were evenly distributed around the zero line in a residual plot

5.4 Test hypotheses

In order to investigate if there was a significant change in overall career adaptability and its four dimensions, paired sample t-tests were conducted for career adaptability, concern, control, curiosity and confidence, respectively. Table 3 represents the results.

5.4.1 Change in Career adaptability.

A paired samples t-test was conducted to determine the effect of the Master's year on overall career adaptability. The results indicate a nonsignificant difference between career adaptability before Master's (M=3.70; SD=.52) and career adaptability score after Master's (M=3.75; SD=.51); [t(64) = .4, p = .68].

Change in Concern

A paired samples t-test was conducted to determine the effect of the Master's year on the concern. The results indicate a nonsignificant difference between concern before the Master's (M=3.65; SD=.66) and concern score after the Master's (M=3.70; SD=.66); [t(64) = .5, p = .62].

Change in control

A paired samples t-test was conducted to determine the effect of the Master's year on control. The results indicate a nonsignificant difference between the control before the Master's (M=3.82; SD=.61) and control score after the Master's (M=3.87; SD=.66); [t(64) = .55, p = .58].

Change in curiosity

A paired samples t-test was conducted to determine the effect of the Master's year on curiosity. The results indicate a nonsignificant difference between curiosity before the Master's (M=3.54; SD=.63) and curiosity score after the Master's (M=3.63; SD=.55); [t(64) = 1.27, p = .2].

Change in confidence

A paired samples t-test was conducted to determine the effect of the Master's experience on confidence. The results indicate a not significant difference between confidence before the Master's (M=3.81; SD=.62) and confidence score after the Master's (M=3.75; SD=.66); [t(64) = -.79, p = .43].

Table 5.3

Paired sample t-test.

Variables	T1	T2		
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	t	P
Career adaptability	3.70 ± .52	3.75 ± .51	.40	.68
Concern	3.65 ± .66	3.70 ± .66	.50	.62
Control	3.82 ± .61	3.87 ± .65	.55	.58
Curiosity	3.54 ± .63	3.63 ± .55	1.27	.20
Confidence	3.81 ± .62	3.75 ± .66	-.79	.43

5.4.2 CSE and CA

Table 5.4 shows the results of the five hierarchical multiple regression analyses used to test the hypothesis of this study.

To test the hypothesis, five hierarchical multiple regressions were used to assess the ability of core self-evaluation (CSE) to predict the change in overall career adaptability and the four dimensions of concern, control, curiosity and confidence, respectively, after controlling for age, gender and work experience. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity assumptions, as shown in Table 2 (See Appendix for more details about testing assumptions).

Core self-evaluation predictor of change in overall career adaptability

As shown in Table 4, demographic variables (age, gender, work experience) were entered in Step 1 explaining 9% of the variance in overall career adaptability at Time2 when entered in Step 1. Overall career adaptability at Time2 was significantly predicted in Step1 by age (β=-.35, p<.05). When overall career adaptability at Time1 was entered in Step 2 to control for Career adaptability at Time1 and examine if there were any effects of demographic variables (age, gender, work experience) on change of career adaptability. The results show that none of the demographic variables could significantly

predict change in overall career adaptability. In step 3 core self-evaluation (CSE) was entered to examine the effects of core self-evaluation on change in overall career adaptability over time. The outcome was a positive significant regression coefficient (β = .23, p < .05). Thus, core self-evaluation can predict change in overall career adaptability. For the overall career adaptability, the hypothesis was supported.

Core self-evaluation predictor of change in concern.

As shown in Table 4, demographic variables explained 17% of the variance in concern at Time2 when entered in Step 1. Concern at Time2 was significantly predicted in Step 1 by age (β=-.34, p<.05), and gender (β=.24, p<.05). To control for Concern at Time1 and examine the effect of demographic variables on change of concern over time, concern at Time1 was entered in Step 2. The results show that none of the demographic variables could significantly predict change in concern over time.

To examine the effects of core self-evaluation on change in concern over time, CSE was entered in step 3. The outcome was not significant. Thus, core self-evaluation could not predict change in concern over time. For this dimension of career adaptability, the hypothesis was not supported. Table 4 shows that age can predict change in concern over time (β=-.25, p<.05).

Core self-evaluation predictor of change in control

As shown in Table 4, demographic variables and Core self-evaluation explained 7% of the variance in control at Time2 when entered in Step 1. Control at Time 2 was not significantly predicted by any of the demographic variables. To control for the Control variable at Time1 and examine the effect of demographic variables on change of control over time, control at Time1 was entered in Step 2. The results show that none of the demographic variables could significantly predict change in control over time.

When CSE was entered in Step 3 to examine the effects of CSE on change in control over time. The outcome was not significant. Thus, core self-evaluation could not predict change in control. For this dimension of career adaptability, the hypothesis was not supported.

Core self-evaluation predictor of change in curiosity.

As shown in Table 4, demographic variables could predict 4% of the variance in curiosity at Time2 when entered in Step 1. To control for curiosity at Time1 and examine the effect of demographic variables on change of curiosity over time, curiosity at Time1 was entered in Step 2. The results show that none of the demographic variables could significantly predict change in concern over time.

When CSE was entered in Step 3 to examine the effects of CSE on change of curiosity time. The outcome was a significant positive coefficient (β = .22, p<.05). Thus, core self-evaluation could predict change in curiosity. For this dimension of career adaptability, the hypothesis was supported.

Core self-evaluation predictor of change in confidence.

As shown in Table 4, demographic variables and Core self-evaluation explained 5% of the variance in Confidence at Time 2 when entered in Step 1. To control for confidence at Time1 and examine the effect of demographic variables on change of confidence over time, confidence at Time1 was entered in Step 2. The results show that none of the demographic variables could significantly predict change in confidence over time.

When CSE was entered in Step 3 to examine the effects of CSE on change of confidence over time. The outcome was a significant positive coefficient (β = .30, p<.05). Thus, core self-evaluation could predict confidence changes. For this dimension of career adaptability, the hypothesis was supported.

Table 5.4

Hierarchical regression analysis.

Step/predictor	Career adaptability T2			Concern T2			Control T2			Curiosity T2			Confidence T2		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Step1															
Age	-.35*	-.20	-.22	-.34*	-.25	-.25*	-.31	-.30	-.22	-.23	-.23	-.13	-.25	-.15	-.18
Gender	.18	.11	.13	-.24*	.18	.19	.15	.16	.17	.05	.02	.01	.08	.05	.07
Work experience	.20	.06	-.01	.003	-.08	-.14	.16	.06	-.02	.2	.15	.05	.29	.18	.10
Step2															
Career adaptability T1		.63**	.55**												
Concern T1					.58**	.53**									
Control T1								.53**	.47**						
Curiosity T1											.62**	.60**			
Confidence T1														.36**	.25*
Step3															
CSE			.23*			.16			.22			.22*			.30*
ΔR²		.38**	.04*		.32**	.02**		.28**	.03*		.38*	.04*		.12**	.06*
R²	.09	.47	.51	.17*	.49	.51	.07	.35	.38	.04	.42	.46	.05	.18	.24
F	1.96	12.43**	11.42**	3.89**	13.64**	11.53**	1.52	7.45**	6.86**	.7	10.05**	9.30**	1.16	2.98*	3.37*

Note. N = 64. Standardized regression coefficients (β) are shown. * p < .05, ** p < .01.

5.5 Summary of findings

The quantitative study aimed to answer the research question by testing these two hypotheses

- *H1: A Master's year experience can positively change students' career adaptability and its*

  four dimensions (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence).

- *H2: Core self-evaluation (CSE) positively predicts the change in overall career adaptability*

  and its four dimensions (concern, control, curiosity and confidence)

For H1, no significant change was detected between Time 1 and Time 2 scores in career adaptability

and its four dimensions concern, control, curiosity and confidence. For H2, core self-evaluations

positively predicted change in overall career adaptability, curiosity and confidence over time. Finally,

of all individual difference predictors investigated in this study, only age could predict change in concern.

Possible explanations will be discussed in the following section.

5.6 The significance of the quantitative findings

Only very few studies have repeated measures of career adaptability to track the change. The current study is the first study that focuses on the change of career adaptability for Master's students. The results showed that no statistical differences emerged, which suggests that Master's years did not carry any observable change in career adaptability resources of the graduates participating in this study.

However, some statistical factors could play a role in this occurrence. The sample size might have played a role in that maybe it is the insufficient sample size. Despite that before starting the analysis, the required total sample size for t-test statistical analysis was calculated to be 54 students on the assumption of a significance level of 0.05, a power of 0.95, an effect size of 0.5, and two-tailed, using the G-power 3.1.9.7 programme. Given these conditions, the sample size in this study was considered sufficient to measure the effect of a year of Master's study on career adaptability.

A possible explanation for such results may relate to the pandemic crisis, which started before the end of the Master's year and coincided with the participants' experience. This had repercussions in terms of ambiguity, sudden change of circumstances, and difficulty finding jobs. Previous research suggests that job insecurity may result from decreased career adaptability resources (Maggiori et al., 2013). Hence, a climate of uncertainty in the labour market might have affected the new graduates in terms of their activation of career adaptability resources. on the one hand, doing a master's has stimulated new graduates to an increase in career adaptability, on the other hand, facing general and job insecurity might have mitigated this expected process. Johnston (2018) proposed this possibility when she suggested that career adaptability may be depleted in situations that are appraised as threatening,

which is compatible with the pandemic scenario these new graduates faced, even in the cases of those who have already found a job.

Although the change for the sample was not significant in any direction, it has been noticed that many students have positive changes and others have negative changes. The Master's experience can be prosperous and change the students' lives. There are several factors, both personal and contextual, that could have affected the experience. A qualitative study is necessary to fully understand the experience and the range of personal and environmental elements that may have contributed to the students' increased career adaptability by the school year's conclusion.

The study's second hypothesis, H2, aimed to examine the results of empirical testing of Core self-evaluation, demographic variables and career adaptability and its four dimensions. While several recent cross-sectional studies have examined bivariate associations between demographics, CSE, and career adaptability, this study was one of the few studies (Zacher, 2014) to examine the effects of these characteristics on change in career adaptability over time among Master's students. Previous studies on career adaptability with two or more measurement waves used either shorter time intervals than six months or collected data from high school and undergraduate students (Guan et al.,2013; Hirschi, 2009; Tolentino et al., 2014).

Age, gender and work experience were part of the regression model as control variables. The results suggest that gender and work experience do not need to be considered to understand and predict the change in career adaptability and its four dimensions. Age, gender and work experience did not predict the change in career adaptability and its four dimensions, except for concern, where age appeared to significantly predict a change in concern. The current study results comply with Hirschi's study about Swiss teenage students (Hirschi, 2009), where age and gender had no impact on career adaptability. Gender also did not predict change in Zacher's longitudinal study (2014). However, a cross-sectional study conducted in Korea obtained different results, where men expressed higher career adaptability than women (Han & Rojewski, 2015). This possibility is related to greater family responsibilities than

women and the quality of support from the family, which is not the case in the current study, where most students are at a young age with no family responsibilities.

Age seemed to impact concern change negatively. That means when the students are older, they tend to be less concerned by the end of the year. There might be two reasons for that. First of all, most of the older students have had work experience before their Master's. So there was a gap between undergraduate and postgraduate, which might make them more concerned about returning to the educational context again than going back to work again. Another reason might be that older students know more about the work market since most of them already have work experience and have a specific plan at the beginning of the year.

Consistent with the current study findings, previous cross-sectional research has found career adaptability to associate positively with constructs that are integrated with or resemble core self-evaluations, including self-esteem, locus of control (Guan et al., 2013, Pouyaud et al., 2012; Tolentino et al., 2013; van Vianen et al., 2012). As hypothesised, based on core self-evaluation theory and findings (Judge, 2009), core self-evaluations positively predicted change in overall career adaptability, curiosity and confidence over time, which is consistent with Zacher's findings (2014) but only regarding confidence. However, the expected effects of core self-evaluations on concern and control were not found. The high levels of confidence and curiosity among Master's students with high core self-evaluations may lead to a trade-off among the dimensions of career adaptability, such that these students do not view it as necessary to additionally aim for high levels of concern and control (as they are already convinced of their capabilities).

Chapter 6: Qualitative Results

6.1 Introduction

This section presents the themes generated during the analysis of 16 interview transcripts (table 6.1) for more information about the participants and career adaptability change). The question guiding this enquiry was how the experience of being a Master's student impacted career adaptability and what factors led to a positive change during the Master's year. Analysis of the dataset generated two overarching themes that captured how the participants made sense of the Master's experience: "Looking inside myself: personal factors" and "Interaction with the environment".

It can be noted that the overarching theme "Looking inside myself: personal factors" assesses the impact of the students' self-management, self-awareness, beliefs and skills upon the participants' experiences and development. It focuses on the students as individuals and how they worked to change and develop, whilst the overarching theme "Interaction with the environment" focuses on the influence of the participant's context concerning social support and networking opportunities and how that helped in increasing their career adaptability levels. Figure 6.1 presents all the themes and sub-themes associated with each overarching theme. As shown in Figure 6.1, there are five main themes and eight subthemes. The findings below start with themes connected to "Looking inside myself; personal factors" and then follow with themes connected to "Interaction with the environment".

Figure 6.1: Overview of themes

Enjoying the journey

Students' perception of recognition and feedback.

Theme 2.2:

Building my professional network

Theme 1.2:

Focusing on the process, not the results

Theme 1.3:

Maturity: flexibility and critical thinking

Overarching Theme 1:

Looking inside myself: personal factors

Overarching Theme 2:

Interaction with the environment

Theme 1.1:

Self-management

Theme 2.1:

Support and belonging

Determination: I have a goal

Time management and Planning

I know myself: aware of weaknesses and strengths

My family supports me

I belong: peers and friends in a diverse community

Developing personal relationship with teachers

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6.2 Overarching theme 1: Looking Inside Myself: personal factors

This overarching theme focuses on what the students did as individuals to help themselves change and develop while successfully facing different challenges in a new environment, such as a new language, educational system, and culture. Being involved in a one-year Master's programme can be stressful. However, students who took responsibility for their learning and development managed their time carefully and created a balance between the different duties they had during the year. They could enjoy the journey more, know themselves better and reduce stress. This overarching theme incorporates three main themes: "Self-management", "Maturity: flexibility and critical thinking", and "Focusing on the process, not the results". These main themes are then broken into several sub-themes: "Determination; I have a goal", "I know myself: awareness of weaknesses and strengths", "Time management and planning", "students' perception of recognition and feedback", and "Enjoying the journey" (Figure 1).

Table 6.1
Participants' career adaptability detailed change.

	Concern	Control	Curiosity	Confidence	CA	CSE
Carlos	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	5.15
Sofia	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	5.67
Mingli	Inc	Inc	Same	Inc	Inc	3.17
Numa	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	3.25
Jessica	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	5
Sorina	Inc	Inc	Dec	Same highest	Inc	4.08
Daniel	Dec	Dec	Inc	Inc	Inc	3.92
Dorra	Same	Dec	Same	Inc	Inc	3.17
Bingwen	Dec	Same	Inc	Inc	Inc	4.67
Chun	Dec	Same	Inc	Inc	Inc	4
Peng	Inc	Dec	Inc	Dec	Inc	3.5
Kayin	Same highest	Same	Inc	Dec	Inc	5.75
Charlette	Dec	Dec	Inc	Dec	Dec	4.42
Roja	Dec	Dec	Same	Same	Dec	3.5
Olympia	Inc	Same	Dec	Dec	Dec	4.25
Adriana	Dec	Inc	Dec	Inc	Dec	6

6.2.1 Theme 1.1: Self-management

The theme of Self-management – with its three subthemes of "Determination: I have a goal", "I know myself: awareness of weaknesses and strengths", and "Time management and planning" – focused on participants' self-regulation and perception of themselves. The students indicated that dealing with challenges successfully required determination, management skills and self-knowledge. Evidence from interviews highlights that to develop, it was essential for the students to take responsibility for their learning and have a clear goal that motivated them to keep going and manage their time and responsibilities. From the beginning of the year, Bingwen, whose career adaptability has increased (see table 6.1 for more information about each candidate), came from a completely different culture and education system, she realised that she should rely on herself, not the community, to achieve her goals:

"I think it still relies on me, not others, no matter how many sessions you have learned, but if you cannot transform or apply what you learned in your life, you won't make it".

When students started the Master's programme, they had many hopes and goals that they aspired to achieve. Students with clear goals were willing to step outside their comfort zone and develop new skills, ways of thinking and behaviours to achieve them.

"When I first started, I did not even know that everything I do depends on me, not anyone else. Before starting this experience, I felt like I needed certain people, certain things to happen in order for me to move forward". (Kayin)

Most overseas students had difficulty adapting to the new educational system since they had grown up in a different educational system and relied heavily on the system or the environment around them to aid and guide them. Students who took charge of their growth and did not rely on others for support could develop more quickly and effectively.

Sub-theme 1.1.1: Determination: I have a goal.

This sub-theme captures the participants' commitment and determination to keep going and deal with the challenges facing them in this experience. Students with a clear goal and a positive mindset were more motivated and determined. The main goal for most students was to enhance their opportunities in the job market. Some students believed that a Master's would guarantee them better job options: "*Well, growing up, I always heard about the economic crisis, how it is very hard to find a job, and how much education is important". (*Dorra, positive change in career adaptability)*. Jessica whose career adaptability has positively changed, had a goal of being in a managerial position exemplifies the sort of aspiration held by students: "A *Master's degree is really going to help me because I'd like to be in a managerial position in the future and this Master's has taught me how to work towards that… I'm not saying I'm anywhere close yet, but I'm developing my skills and qualities needed for a manager or leader. I feel like I understood a bit more what that entails, which I didn't have the opportunity before the Master's".*

Other students wanted to start their businesses, and that is why they joined the Master's programme such as Carlos, whose career adaptability has increased: *"I am 33 years old now. And I also wanted to start a family, so I probably have to work somewhere. While working, I will start to develop my own business. I started the programme with the business ideas I wanted to develop but didn't know where to start… I know that because I always had these entrepreneurial minds, I always dream of doing my own business or developing my own ideas".* The belief that the Master's degree has made them more employable has boosted their self-confidence and sense of control over their future: "*I want to further my studies and be more competitive in the job market"* (Bingwen).

Adriana believed that, after a long break and starting her own family, having a Master's degree would make re-entering the job market easier: "*To be honest, I wanted this experience so much because I've had before doing the Master's more than four years out of my job when I want so much to go back to it. I did not care about being too tired. I was so determined that I will do it".* She also believed that failure was not an option since she could visualize her future and knew what she needed to do: *"I need*

to stick to it, I need to go back to work and study. Kids will grow up, and I do not need to be forever home looking after them… my profession requires me not to stop studying".

For some, that goal was connected to their families in the first place. They wanted to make their families proud, especially when they had to pay a large sum of money for them to be able to join the Master's programme in a foreign country. Kayin was determined to carry on and do her best: "*I cannot afford to go back or fail. Back home, that is definitely not an option".* This was a simultaneous pressure and a motivation for her; she did not want to disappoint her mother. Numa, with a positive change in career adaptability also did not want to disappoint his family: "*fail is not an option. I have no choice but to only be successful here".* Despite some health difficulties Numa faced during the year, he was always determined to depend on himself and meet deadlines. Some days: "I *did not sleep at night, and in the end, I managed to submit the assignments on time and pass the modules".* This made him feel more confident in his abilities.

A goal played a significant role in keeping the students going and being determined to do their best. Additionally, having a positive mindset and a proactive disposition enabled students to persevere. For example, Bingwen had a positive way of thinking about failure: "*I never liked failure to overcome me if I failed this time, I just tried to reflect from that failure and how I could improve next time. That equipped me to overcome the challenges".* Bingwen was proactive in seeking assistance from others. This mindset helped her gain confidence in coping with failure and challenges. For example, when she got a low grade on her first assignment, she was not hesitant to ask for assistance: "*I had to ask for some help and tips from students who have already more experience. Or for students in my class who got higher grades…So it works quite well".*

The data showed that students with a clear goal and positive mindset could cope with challenges, reduce stress, and increase confidence. In contrast, Olympia expressed her uncertainties about obtaining a promising career*: " Okay, In the beginning, I had a general plan. I said that I wanted to finish my studies. And then I said that maybe I would find a job, but it was very general, and I don't*

know if I believed it from the beginning or just pretended". Olympia did not have a clear goal or an apparent reason for doing a Master's programme. That impacted her determination and, accordingly, her development. Determination is the key to reaching a particular goal: "*I am just going to do the very best I can".* (Jessica).

Committing to a goal motivates the students to develop their skills and competencies to reach their targets. Whether aiming for a dream job, returning to the job market after a long break or even making their family proud, all these goals helped the students be determined and have a positive mindset. While working hard toward goals and targets, students learned about themselves and realised their weaknesses and strengths. The interviewed students explained how being master's students for one year enabled them to recognise their strengths, accept their flaws, and seek to improve. This is discussed in the next section.

Sub-theme 1.1.2: I know myself: aware of my weaknesses and strengths

This sub-theme explains how being a Master's student helped them understand their weaknesses and strengths, focus on what they need to improve and evaluate their decisions. Students realised that self-knowledge was essential to achieving one's goal since one knew what to develop and why.

Many students who pursued a Master's degree enhanced their grasp of their professional identities and goals, especially those with no prior work experience. Knowing oneself and being aware of one's capabilities and shortcomings helped to invest and use time and opportunities in the best way possible. Sofia, who has higher career adaptability at the end of the year, explained: *"The key is to know yourself, and I know my weaknesses. My weaknesses are definitely numerical stuff. My strengths are everything that has to do with literature and history and humanities and whatever entitles and asks for skills needed to learn…So I knew where my strengths lie. And I did also know where my weaknesses were".* Sofia could save time and be more productive, and that helped her grow since she realised the skills and the weaknesses that she needed to focus on to meet her goals:

"I think I still have a long way to go in my confidence when approaching people. Sometimes people tell me, but you're super extroverted! But I have to play a role, right? So I just go into a room and say, okay, I am an extrovert right now, And I have to play that role, because how are you going to network if you just sit on your own in a corner, right? So that's something I do work on. Or the other day, I had to do a presentation in front of an audience of 50 people. From another culture, another country. I was nervous, but I thought what the worst thing could happen. But I do have to work on it constantly. It's not like it comes naturally".

This illustrates how even hard-to-change personal attributes could be improved and developed if the student understood herself well, had a purpose and knew what to do.

Jessica, who also had a higher career adaptability level by the end of the year, felt that she discovered herself during her Master's: *"I think it showed me where my strengths lie, which I did not really have the opportunity to explore before".* Jessica learned the importance of looking at the broader picture since she was *"naturally a very analytical person... So I am very detail-driven, and I feel like it's also important to look at the wide perspective as an HR person. But sometimes, I get very lost in the details".* Jessica described the Master's experience as *"the best thing because I have learned a lot about myself",* which explains the level of satisfaction she felt about the experience and herself.

The Master's degree provided students with new challenges to overcome while also giving them opportunities to discover and develop their abilities and skills. Chun, for example, was able to understand herself during her graduate studies due to various experiences: *"I tried different things because I did not know what I really wanted, But I know what I did not want…So I've tried different things to see if it suits me, at least it works for me".* Exploring and trying new things made Chun realise some weaknesses that she needed to change and some strengths that she is proud of: *"Consistency, I get bored easily. Yeah, this is one of my main weaknesses… But at the same time, I was reassured that I am good at learning new things. I am really active and curious about everything. I want to try everything, which is one of my strengths".* Students learn about their strengths and weaknesses by

taking on new experiences and overcoming obstacles. Self-awareness and understanding one's skills and flaws helped students gain self-confidence and clear their path.

For the first time, many students had the opportunity to live away from their families in a new nation, allowing them to understand their personalities better. It was Peng's first time travelling alone to a foreign country: *"This is the first time for me to live away from my family…this can also be a way to access our ourselves".* Since Peng came from a different culture and educational system than in the UK, this was a significant change for him, and dealing with problems that came along by himself made him *"grow up and be more aware of himself".*

The process of learning and acquiring new information as part of the Master's programme helped students change and develop their way of thinking and perceiving themselves and the world around them. Sorina (increased career adaptability) believed she gained *"more knowledge now than at the beginning, but I still understand that I have to work and study more".* She changed her perception of herself and the learning process *"Now I think we should learn every day. I think I had much self-development this year".* Carlos also described how learning and gaining knowledge from modules and courses altered his way of thinking:

"I have been trying to gain more knowledge and be aware of emotional intelligence, mental health and all that. So I've been trying to learn as much as I can on that subject. Now I'm a very patient person, I like to listen and learn from experience. I enjoyed it. And they gave me much personal knowledge as well, not only in an academic way, but I'm also in personal growth".

It is clear from the interviews that most students had higher self-knowledge by the end of the year. Nevertheless, not all of them reached a point that could help them choose their career path or have higher confidence in what they can do. Four of the students who were interviewed had lower career adaptability by the end of the year. Among these, three had lower confidence levels accompanied by self-doubt. It appears that they have different expectations about this year which impacted how they see themselves or reflect on the experience. For example, Charlette, who had lower career

adaptability by the end of the year, realised she no longer had a clear vision of her future: "*I think that's probably I knew that I was going to go to HR at the beginning of the year, and I kind of had a plan, but now I don't. I think I have competence in my career path, but I don't know if that's what I want to do…*". Self-knowledge can sometimes change self-perception negatively if not accompanied by a positive mindset, clear goal, and inner motivation.

The students' self-perception at the start of the year impacted their confidence level. Olympia and Roja, who both had lower career adaptability at the end of the year, have changed their perspectives during the year, but they still have self-doubts. Olympia stated: "*Lots of days I felt very stressed. I was unsure if I could finish my Master's and deal with all these changes. If I can get used to the new life and adapt to the thing, it was a very stressful time*".

Master's programmes are very intensive, allowing students to go through different experiences during this year. When students accepted their flaws, they were more flexible and had reasonable expectations from themselves and their environment. Self-knowledge allowed students to create realistic expectations of themselves and others.

Given the programme's intensity, students who were satisfied by the end of the school year could plan and manage their time and have a life-work balance during the year. This will be discussed in the next section

Sub-theme 1.2.2: Time management and planning

This sub-theme captures the participants' experience developing their time management and planning skills and how that helped them feel more in control and release stress.

Students discussed the importance of time management throughout the Master's year. Jessica felt less stressed when she learned how to manage her time: "*Although it has been really quite hard, I think it has become easier as the second semester has come around because I have learned how to*

deal with Stress, how to deal with the workload and distribute my time in a way that makes it effective". This experience made her appreciate managing time more: "*It has made me learn the value of time and the value of personal time".* Students with a positive change in career adaptability showed good planning skills in the interviews. The scope of planning might range from daily tasks and responsibilities to a long-term goal. Carlos described how the Master's experience changed his mindset: "*I'm not any more afraid of having too many ideas because I know I understand how to organize them and prioritize and start slowly, little by little*".

Students had challenges in managing time and planning their studies for different reasons. However, managing time and planning effectively have increased their confidence. For example, Adriana had to manage her time and find a balance between family responsibilities and study duties: "*I think it's one of the things I developed during my studies; I was under much pressure, and there were times I had to deal with deadlines while my kids were very sick at home. But I was calm. Compared with what I was doing before, I would panic and just lose my mind".* Although Adriana's career adaptability level has slightly decreased, her confidence has improved. Her ability to balance her responsibilities as a student and a mother has boosted her confidence. Some international students had more difficulty managing their work since they needed more time to study a foreign language. Mingli whose career adaptability has positively changed needed more time than others because working in English was new for him: "*I'm not good at English and I do not have the background. So I have to spend a lot of time understanding the lecture to learn. Maybe other students already know. I think I spend much time in the library [at the weekends]".* Peng also had the same issue. He needed to start early in order to meet deadlines: "*I liked to study in the library. I usually plan for assessments so I do not get overwhelmed and finish on time. I think it is too much information I need to write into the assessment, so it needs to have nearly 15 days before planning and finishing step by step".* Planning and a step-by-step approach make things manageable. This is what Sorina did to face different challenges:

"At the beginning, I spent all my time studying…English language was a challenge, I have never appropriately spoken in English and finance modules were a challenge. So I studied more to have the same level of knowledge as my peers. Then I started to learn about the job application process and so on. So I had that challenge, but I also worked on that part".

Kayin was not good at managing her time before her Master's: "*Obviously, because working with school projects, we have lots of work to do most of the time, so I have to manage my time accordingly, which has always been a bad thing for me. I've always had a very bad experience managing my time or prioritizing duties. But now, with my degree, and at this stage, I feel more peace in myself and more confident in managing my time at this moment".* Kayin feels that her Master's has motivated her to work harder than before: *"I know what I am doing now and am more driven than ever at the moment".* Students with a clear goal learn how to plan and manage their time accordingly to lower their stress levels and maintain productivity at high levels.

On the other hand, Olympia was not as successful as Kayin in developing her time management skills. She found it difficult at times to organize her time and strike a balance between her personal life and her academic obligations*: "It was very stressful. I had an assignment to deliver. I asked for an extension, but it did not work. The deadline was two days. I passed out, it was very stressed because I could not finish".* It was especially difficult for Olympia since she worked in a restaurant at the weekend. Finding a balance between all the different duties was not easy for her, which increased her stress levels and reduced her confidence and sense of control.

Students who were able to organize their time did manage to find some free time to participate in sports activities. This year, according to the students, sports could relieve stress and enhance concentration abilities. All students who said they continued participating in sports or going to the gym this year improved their career adaptability. It could also signify how well-organized and knowledgeable the students were about maintaining an overall healthful lifestyle.

So, for Sofia, having a healthy lifestyle was something she had to do to keep going: *"I woke up at 5 am, I went to the gym, and then I went and did my whole day, So it was like spent between doing some sports in the morning or yoga, then I cook my food. I need to have healthy food and do sports".* A healthy lifestyle helped her boost her energy and relieve stress. For Jessica as well, sport was the way to relieve stress. She tried to go to the gym regularly: *"I also tried to go to the gym every day as well or most days just to relieve stress".* Carlos also *"woke up very early. I did some sport, some exercise".* Being active and involved in sports was a great way to reduce stress and get some sense of control. Numa, who was part of a university sports team, asked about the university gym before arriving in the UK: *"I always believed in the one thing if I did sports, everything would be okay".*

Effective time management allowed students to feel more in control, relieving stress and increasing productivity. Students learned to manage daily duties and even manage and plan for long-term projects. Although not all students could manage their time effectively, all those who did so had a higher career adaptability level by the end of the year. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance can be achieved by mastering time management skills. Possessing a sense of mastery over one's life decreases unwanted stress and makes the experience more enjoyable. The interviews showed that students who focused on the learning process more than the results; enjoyed the journey, appreciated the recognition and openly accepted constructive feedback. This will be explored in the next theme.

Students felt that their Master's year informed them about their industry, especially for those students who did not have any prior work experience: *"So I had very little knowledge about the industry, about the career process in general…I thought that I had more confidence about securing a good job. And that is because now I am more informed. I just knew I wanted the job but now I know what to do to get the job I want in the industry". (*Sorina*).*

"I became better this year, probably in business culture. I feel now I understand what employers or industries want… I really like the concentration they gave to my personal development in business. In my Bachelor's degree, they did not really teach you for the wider world, as they did in my Master's".

(Daniel). Master's made the students believe their career goal is more doable by teaching them the tools to plan and develop.

6.2.2 Theme 1.2: Focus on the process, not the results

The theme "Focus on the process, not the results" has two subthemes: "Enjoying the journey" and "Students' perception of recognition and feedback". This theme captures the participants' feelings and emotions about the experience and how they perceived feedback and recognition from others. Students who tried to focus on the learning process, not the result, enjoyed the experience more and appreciated both positive and negative feedback.

Most Master's students had high ambitions and aspirations when they began their studies. However, students needed to know when to slow down, relax, and take a break to maintain focus and avoid burnout: *"So when you have downtime, make sure it is downtime so that I can step away and then come back to it and be more productive the following day". (*Jessica).

According to data, students whose career adaptability increased by the end of the year focused more on the process than the outcome. It is essential to have an ultimate goal by the end of the year, such as graduating with honours or finding a suitable job. Nevertheless, instead of letting that goal overwhelm them, they maintained a good focus on day-to-day tasks and felt happy with their modest achievements. The idea is that if students focus on the tasks at hand, the outcome will follow. When faced with a problem, the most important thing to remember is that one must take action in some way to solve it. Time management that has been discussed above could help, but this theme is more about feeling and perception of the journey itself. The idea is that human beings develop through experiences, not results.

Sub-theme 1.2.1: Enjoying the journey (the role of expectations)

This sub-theme captures how participants who had positive mindsets and appreciated the experience could enjoy the journey better and focus on the positive things despite the difficulties. Students' expectations for the experience could sometimes impact their feelings about the journey.

Most students whose career adaptability increased by the end of the year showed gratitude and delight in being Master's students during that year. They reflected on the whole experience positively. Some of them could not recall any bad experiences during the year: *"It was a very nice experience. I would do this repeatedly every time"* Sorina. Appreciating little things made a big difference: *"… for me, it was a pleasure to study and then do a walk, I could not feel any pressure".* Sorina expressed how satisfied she felt: *"I think everything went beyond my expectations… even though I spent three years of my Bachelor's in Romania, here even three months felt better than three years back then. Maybe it is because of the university or people… everything contributed to my good experience at Reading".* The way students, whose career adaptability has increased, talked about the experience showed a connection between being positive, trying to enjoy little things and being adaptable.

Sometimes, expectations play a significant role in how students evaluate the experience. As Jessica said, *"I feel like I have met the expectations like it has been really fun. I have really enjoyed it, it's definitely the best thing I've done".* Jessica showed a positive mindset during the interview; for example, she described one of the most challenging modules that most students struggled with to be one of her best modules: *"So that is the module that has shown me where I want to go, my future. I really quite enjoyed it there. And like the strategic stuff".* Jessica explained: *"Because of the self-development that I have gone through I would 100% recommend Master's it to others".* Carlos also enjoyed the experience and would recommend it to others *"I'm really happy. I would definitely recommend Master's experience to others if they would ask me".* This shows a high level of satisfaction and enjoyment.

Even though all students encountered numerous difficulties, speaking about their time in the programme demonstrated how much they valued it. The first semester was quite demanding for most

students since they lived in a new environment and had new modules, especially for students who had not previously studied business and management. For Sofia, the first term proved challenging her, but *"after that, I think everyone felt a shift in the environment, I guess…some modules were complicated, but because we wanted to learn, that was fine. …..And we started to enjoy it a lot".* Sofia did not only enjoy most of the modules. She enjoyed the whole experience *"I think my favourite was the life experience as a whole… the people I met, the friends I made. It is not just the academic part of it, which is what I went for, but it's what I learned from it. That was my favourite thing".*

Dorra endured the burden of undertaking a one-year Master's programme in a foreign nation. However, she still had a great time: *"It was stressful. But well I was prepared, I knew that you had to put a lot of effort into a Master's degree. And also I liked the classes I had, so I was happy to study them".* Expectations and preparation played a significant role for Dorra. She has no memory of any adverse events during the year: *"I don't think anything negative has happened. None".* Bingwen also had no recollection of any unpleasant experience throughout the year: *"Oh, there's nothing that is less favourites. I would say everything was so good".* Bingwen's first assignment was a failure, but she did not dwell on it. She concentrated on the knowledge and experiences she gained: *"I loved the lectures, I learned so many things that I will remember for my life. And I was very happy about my decision".*

Students who focused on educating themselves and gaining new knowledge more than focusing on results were happier, more flexible, and more adaptive. For Mingli, learning more about the banking sector was a high-priority goal he enjoyed: *"It's good. Knowledge in the financial industry changes and updates fast, and we can learn the latest knowledge. We had very good professor who can answer all your questions. And there are not too many students in class. You can have more concentration and a chance to ask questions and practice. I really enjoyed the experience".*

Other students were not as flexible. Charlette, who had lower career adaptability by the end of the year, could not accept anything other than what she planned for and expected: *"I'm not used to getting lower grades. I'm quite privileged to say that I do work hard. And I did work hard for it".* She

focused on getting high grades: "*The only challenge that was kind of evident for me was getting good grades*". The constant stress over the results made the experience less enjoyable and less satisfying.

Although Olympia believed she made the proper choice by pursuing a Master's degree, she could not meet some deadlines, which stressed her. She worked as a waitress on the weekends and throughout the afternoons on some days: "*In a weekend, I had to work for five hours in a restaurant in the afternoon. So I was working two days per week, and I had to study and be prepared for next week's classes*". This job reduced her leisure time and exhausted her, which was one of the reasons that negatively impacted her career adaptability level by the end of the year.

Adriana and Roja had lower career adaptability by the end of the year. Both were older than other students with work experience and some gap years because of family issues. Both joined the Master's programme because they wanted to recommence professional work as soon as possible. Adriana was disappointed that she had completed her Master's degree but had not yet found suitable employment: "*The only thing that I was hoping for is to find a job earlier*". She did not expect this, which made her less happy with the experience because she only wanted to find a job. Roja had a similar challenge. She was surprised that she had to find a job by herself: "*Looking for jobs on your own and like reaching out to employers on your own and not something that the business school or the university was arranging for you*". She was hoping that the school would help her find a job. She felt she had no control over her career now: "*I don't have much control over what I can do, and rather I rely more on what opportunities I might have, which I didn't think of before. Earlier I thought before I graduate, I would be able to have a full-time role in hand*".

This sub-theme talked about how and why students could enjoy their journey. Several factors contribute to whether or not the students enjoyed the experience, including their perspectives, aspirations, and expectations. Flexibility is vital for enjoying the journey. Balancing what one can and cannot control made students more satisfied and happy with the journey. Many students talked about feedback and appreciation and what that meant to them. It made a big difference between students

who were waiting to be appreciated and recognized and students who were doing their best for themselves, not waiting for others to notice them. This will be discussed in the next section.

Theme 1.2.2: Students' perception of recognition and feedback.

Students received feedback and comments from their peers, family and teachers during the year. This sub-theme captures how students respond to recognition or feedback from people around them. The section focuses on the students' reactions, what that meant, and how that impacted their experience.

When instructors, supervisors, colleagues, friends or family recognized the students' hard work, this significantly raised their confidence and ability to adapt to new situations and fostered a sense of community. However, some students struggled with criticism or feedback from tutors or lecturers. Students were delighted to get recognition from their peers and teachers for their hard work. For some students, hearing compliments on their academic achievement and work was one of the students' favourite year-end memories. This exemplifies the importance of receiving acknowledgement from others.

It will be imprinted in Jessica's memory when, in front of the entire class, students from two different groups she worked with commended her on her leadership abilities and the value she brought to the group,

"They (students) said the leadership that I had shown during that assignment had really helped them, and they really enjoyed it. It was quite fun for them. And then another teammate in the class said, 'Oh, yeah, it was really good'. And just heard that little comment from them to say; actually, it's stuck in their mind so much that they have spoken about it a few months later, was really quite touching and made me really happy that they had enjoyed that time together. Because sometimes team meetings can be quite draining and negative, hearing them have such a positive experience was lovely".

Receiving these kinds of unexpected comments increased her self-confidence: "*So knowing the way I was doing it has a positive impact… I hope to keep using that leadership style going forward".* That played as a confirmation for her and her leadership skills.

Olympia was overjoyed when a teacher in one of her classes acknowledged and appreciated the valuable participation she made in the class: "*I felt that the class's contribution resulted, and someone recognised my contribution and my ideas".* She described the recognition as *"the most important thing in my life. I saw that my thoughts were heard, and someone recognized me".* It seems that Olympia was desperate for recognition and positive feedback. Indeed, she was delighted when the teacher finally acknowledged her efforts*.*

Having high grades was also a kind of recognition for some students. At the end of the year, students who placed a higher value on grades than on learning opportunities showed lower levels of career adaptability. For Charlette, having high grades was a matter of life or death. For one exam, she studied a lot, but the mark she received was lower than what she had hoped for. She became unwell as a result of her disappointment:

"What happened was really frustrating. I kind of said, Why am I here? if they are just here to punish me. And just to scare me when I'm working hard anyway if that was their purpose, I can't do any more. I was in bed three days after that. And that was really like that knocked me back quite bad. And from that point onwards, I did not enjoy all of the module assignments. I did not want to be there in them. I did not want to be in the lectures. I did not even go to most of the lectures".

Charlette was preoccupied with her academic performance and the opinions of those around her. Getting such recognition and positive feedback was what she aspired to achieve. Whatever the purpose, receiving recognition and positive comments is critical to building confidence and enjoying the experience.

Raising two young children and undertaking a full-time Master's degree simultaneously, Adriana was recognised for her dedication and hard work: "*They're like, wow, go for it, you can totally do it. They were so supportive all the time. Even in the groups that I've been part of, they would not expect me to be so collaborative".* That recognition she received was a motivation for her to keep going and build confidence.

Recognition and appreciation from one's relatives and friends make a significant impact. This is how Numa described it:

"My relatives and friends just really appreciate my studying here. And the ways they look at me are different now, with different eyes and different points of view. Because they still think that if I studied here, this guy would be wiser, as they are just getting advice from me even if I did nothing very special. It makes me feel good that people come to me to get advice even in their businesses or about their lives".

The recognition he received from relatives changed how he perceived himself: *"I couldn't say I really changed. But because people started to look at me like that, it directly impacted how I see myself… that, I started to think I really changed so much".*

All praise and acknowledgement are always welcome and appreciated. However, dealing with negative feedback is the only way to develop oneself. Students benefit more from the learning process and their personal growth when they value and act on their comments from tutors. The way Bingwen responded to feedback has played a crucial role in her development: *"Well, but I am just continuously reflecting on my tutors' feedback and proving my ability to write reports….So, I'm in reflection I just found the whole process and how I think has improved a lot".* Bingwen sought out why her final grade was not as good as she had hoped. She did it by asking questions and analysing the feedback she received: *"I asked why I failed that report. Can you help me analyse it, I will say that really gives me a lot of help from that conversation".* Bingwen's behaviour shows that she understood that the negative feedback did not define her as a person. The outcomes and feedback served as a way to learn and develop.

Students are generally in high spirits when they receive acknowledgement or positive feedback. However, there is a big difference between students waiting or expecting positive feedback to feel respected and appreciated and students who are happy with the process and enjoying the experience. Good feedback or recognition would be a push for them to keep going.

Students demonstrate maturity when they accept responsibility for their growth and value the experience rather than the outcomes. However, students would not develop unless they were prepared to modify their thinking and move out of their comfort zone. Many students used the word "maturity" to describe the change they felt about themselves. The following section will discuss how students perceived maturity and what factors enhanced their maturity.

6.2.3 Theme 3: Maturity: flexibility and critical thinking.

Most students used the word "mature" to describe how their way of thinking changed this year. There are many definitions of maturity, but for most students, it refers to cognitive maturity (flexibility, critical thinking) and emotional maturity (empathy and respect for others, especially in a diverse community).

Many students mentioned that a Master's degree was an opportunity for them to engage in different new experiences, which required them to apply new ways of thinking. They reflected in the interviews on how they see things differently and feel more mature than at the beginning of the year. They accept and tolerate ambiguity and differences more than before. Two main factors have impacted that change; living within a diverse group and the new educational system.

Flexibility and the ability to manage tasks and direct efforts and energy in the right direction showed Sofia's cognitive maturity: "*I know which battles to fight for, so I knew which courses I had to go for good grades and which I didn't".* Nevertheless, she has the confidence to do well in other subjects and keep her competitiveness: *"I am very competitive. But I know when to lower my bar… So I had to adjust expectations and just work through it".* A swift adjustment to the new scenario displays her ability to think logically and adapt quickly. That showed her flexibility and led to higher career adaptability at the end of the year.

Sorina thinks that she is more flexible now than before and can tolerate others' different ideas: *"I think now I am more open to new ideas, because in the past, while I was working with a group, I was very focused on my ideas, and I was thinking that they are the best, but now I am trying to understand*

everyone's ideas and to think in different perspectives and to accept all ideas to think how to form the

perfect idea from all". Respecting others' efforts and ideas was very important for Jessica, reflecting

her maturity: *"If someone has an idea, but they do not quite know how to express it, I have patience,*

and I listen, because what they are trying to say is so valuable". Respecting other people's views is a

sign of maturity. People have different opinions on a variety of subjects. Understanding is

demonstrated by respecting views and viewpoints without passing judgment. Even if one disagrees

with someone's point of view, showing respect by listening to what they say displays maturity and

open-mindedness. Jessica described herself as more mature than before: *"I have become a lot more*

understanding and rational. A lot more mature, I would say".

Olympia also explained that she felt more mature by the end of the year: *"I feel different now. I feel*

mature". She realised that she no longer judges differences between people; instead: *"I like to learn*

about the differences". This was an outcome of living in a diverse group for the first time.

Daniel also felt the change in his personality: *"I feel great. I feel like it has really developed me*

massively as a person and matured me, I think I got a lot out of it". Reflecting on his Master's year,

Daniel felt that *"I am a bit more serious than undergrad".* This revealed a change in his mindset, a

result of the new experience and new stage of his life.

Critical thinking was new learning requisite for most international students. Analysing and comparing

facts and ideas and making judgments was a new learning approach for most international students.

Students connected critical thinking with maturity since it impacted how they saw the world around

them. Most interviewed students came from different educational systems, which made the new way

of approaching modules and assignments challenging but rewarding.

"I developed critical thinking skills like soft skills that I did not expect. The professors talked about

critical thinking in the many lectures. In the beginning, I did not really understand what critical thinking

was. However, after practising and doing many assignments and working on my presentations, I

started to understand critical thinking. And I feel like it is something that we in China are missing, especially in my undergraduate study". (Chun).

Chun used to perform well in exams by simply regurgitating previously memorised material in the past. Nevertheless, thinking critically, questioning others' opinions, and comparing them made her *"think in different ways. You always need to question other people's previous work; you need to think more and try to express more. So this is one thing that I did not expect. However, it is really helpful for me".* She also emphasised how critical thinking helped her evolve and allowed her to accept and comprehend other viewpoints, suggesting a more mature thinking style:

"[It] impacted my attitude to life, to everything like my opinion. So before, I held on to my opinion and did not accept opposite opinions. I would take one side. But, now I feel like I'm more open-minded, I can understand why people think the other way, and I can understand both sides". One may learn a lot by listening and respecting the ideas of others, which is a sign of maturity.

Peng also was first introduced to the idea of critical thinking. Studying in their native nation compared to the United Kingdom was an eye-opening experience for them: *"…here we learned to do more research and practice to express our thoughts".* This new way of thinking and learning pushed students out of their comfort zones and required them to go above and beyond in deciding and comparing different resources. Peng described: *"It improved my ability to gather information and distinguish which are better and why critically".* Critical thinking developed the self-reflection and evaluation of his actions and beliefs: *"I feel I am more mature now I see things differently I do not accept one idea as a fact anymore".* Critical thinking can generate well-informed opinions, make sure that opinions are founded on facts, and eliminate irrelevant information.

Mingli believed that critical thinking made him *"become more logical".* This kind of thinking did not exist in his native land. The critical training in every assignment, essay, and lecture *"changed my thoughts and me".* We can witness how students' mentality and perceptions of themselves and the world alter when they are exposed to new learning methods and experiences.

Most of the Master's students in this research have little or no professional experience. Studying abroad for the programme was their first time venturing far from their home counties. An important turning point in their lives necessitated them to try new things and adapt to an entirely different way of living. That made them believe that they had grown up and matured. Respecting people's differences, flexibility, and critical thinking were mainly the factors that enhanced the feeling of maturity in this context.

Looking inside oneself and accepting responsibility can put students under pressure and stress. However, independently accomplishing tasks can also help develop resilience, confidence, and self-awareness. They were able to reflect, think, and discover themselves. Taking responsibility did not mean they did not require support from their surroundings, but it indicated that they could not rely on others. Support proved to be a significant factor in helping students grow this year, and it will be examined next in this chapter.

6.3 Overarching theme 2: Interaction with the environment

This overarching theme focuses on how the students interacted with their environment, especially the people around them. Students came to the new environment with expectations and goals shaped by their past experiences and background. Having a support system and feeling that they belong, especially in a diverse community like the one they lived within during their Master's year, played a significant role in developing their career adaptability. Having a personal relationship with their teachers and supervisors also enhanced their feeling of belonging and made them feel welcomed in the new community. In addition, participating in various events allowed students to engage more with each other and with people outside their group, which helped them build a professional network and increased their confidence in and satisfaction with the Master's. This overarching theme consists of two main themes: Personal support system/ Support and belonging and Building my professional network.

6.3.1 Theme 2.1: Support and Belonging

The theme support and belonging – with its three sub-themes: My family support me; I belong/Making friends in a diverse community; Developing a personal relationship with teachers – focused on how the participants perceived the support they had during the Master's year and how they felt within the diverse community. Most of the Master's students were fresh graduates, and this experience was their first time living abroad alone. Support from family, friends and teachers was necessary for them to keep going. The participants described how support helped them cope and adapt to the new environment. *"I mean, my family support was huge. And because of that only, I did manage to pursue the Master's. Otherwise, this stage would have been very difficult for me".* (Roja). This shows how support was necessary for students; without it, the experience would be difficult or even impossible for some.

Sub-theme 2.1.1: My family supports me

This sub-theme captures students' perception of their family supporting them in pursuing a Master's degree and how that impacted their experience. Many of the students were in their early twenties. They had little or no work experience. Most of them were living with their parents before starting their Master's. They still had a close relationship with their parents and family. Support from their parents, financially and emotionally, was vital for them.

A Master's degree in the UK is costly, especially for international students, who make up a high percentage of the Master's students at Henley Business School. Money was a big issue for Olympia: "*In order to be able to afford to do a Master's in Europe, I had to plan my Master's year carefully. Money was very important because we had to spend lots of money to go to UK*".

Some students were supported financially by a sponsor or the university, but their families supported them the most. This was the case of Mingli: "*My parents sponsored me to this day; they spent a lot of money, about 500,000 Chinese yuan to support my study here".* For him, this was normal since most Chinese students have their parents as their sponsors. Numa also was supported by his family.

However, for Numa, the situation was different. Numa attempted to apply for scholarships but was unsuccessful: "*Unfortunately, I applied for a scholarship through the agency in my country, which was the presenter of Reading. But unfortunately, it was too late, and I could not do anything. So my family supported me financially*". His family made a concerted effort to assist financially. That made him feel responsible for the <aster's success and his family's happiness. Numa feels that his family has high expectations for him, which adds to the pressure: "*Everyone is waiting for something from you in my country, with my family, parents, and other relatives. This increased the responsibility on my shoulders*". Financial support was important for all students. It might, at times, be stressful. However, it would motivate, especially when families try their best to support their kids to continue their studies. Even students like Charlette, who worked part-time and had a scholarship, needed support from her partner*: "I live with my fiancé. And so that, obviously, was a decision that we both had to make because it means that we are living another year on one income, and it does affect our lifestyle. being a student is not the cheapest thing in the world".* For some students, money was not an issue, but many were working hard to make sure that they made a good investment by applying for a Master's.

In addition to financial help, students also needed emotional support from their families. Graduate students felt better about continuing their education when families showed support. Jessica's parents supported her decision from the beginning: "*I live with my parents at home. Both of them were very, very supportive of me doing my Master's. I suggested it back in my undergraduate, and they were very supportive".* Jessica described her family as: "*my support system, just like workwise and emotionally, everything. They have just encouraged me and chatted to me about problems".* After completing their undergraduate degree, students felt more confident in their decision to pursue a Master's with the support of their families. Even Chun, who has some work experience, was grateful for her parents' support: *"there are fully supported me. They talked with me about why I made the decision, but they fully supported me".* Chun worked in China for around five years after graduating from college. Leaving her job and pursuing a Master's degree in the United Kingdom was a major transition, but her parents were supportive in the long term.

The regular contact with Sorina's parents was significant for her to keep going: "*I was calling my parents every day and every time I was having some problems, I was telling them what is happening and explaining to them and so on, and they were encouraging me every time*". The support of her family served as a source of inspiration for Sorina, enabling her to carry on. For Peng, a video call would release stress and improve his day: "*When I am stressed, I have a video call with my parents. We did not need to talk about the problem, just about life here or earlier in China. What happens? They would tell me something interesting that would help me deal with a bad mood*". Regular communication with family helped students adjust to their new environment since they felt they were not alone and their families were still there for them.

Sofia's family greatly supported her in difficult times: "*My family back home I talked with them. And my mom was like, oh, if you fail everything, don't worry, I don't care, you are super anyways. So nobody put any pressure on us. And that was really nice to know*". Sofia is a hard-working student; throughout her life, she has always been one of the brightest students. Her family tried to support and motivate her. Sofia also had support from her husband, a Master's student himself: "*My own environment was great. I was with my husband. And he was amazing. We have a very good relationship, and everything went super smoothly, even though we were both completely stressed out. So that was very great to have like a peaceful home, even though we were both very stressed inside*". Support from partners was vital during Master's year for many other students. Having someone to talk to about everything made a significant difference. Daniel's primary support was his "*girlfriend having that person there every day that you could just talk to, and just say whatever you need to say, because she wasn't involved in the bubble I was in that made it easier*". It was beneficial that his girlfriend was outside the university environment so he could disconnect from that environment for a while. However, Carlos' partner was a student herself: "*My wife and I support each other. She is studying finance. And she spent a lot of time in the library studying*". Having his wife with him in the same environment encouraged him to work more. Kayin's mother was also a huge motivation and support for her to continue her studies: "*I came to the UK to study for my Master's literally because my mom thinks that*

I need to progress and study for a Master's. She always wants me to be better and to do better".
Dorra's parents also supported and motivated her to continue her studies and go for a Master's directly after her undergraduate degree*: "I was between finding a job or pursuing Master's, but I knew that my parents encouraged me to do Master's first and supported me financially".* Her parents were keen to do her Master's before joining the world of work: "*They thought it is better if I just finish everything and then work".* Her parents' trust during the year made her feel confident.

Olympia's parents were not supportive at the beginning. They were concerned about their daughter leaving them for the first time and going to study abroad: *"I believe that they were stressed because it was the first time that I left the house and moved to a different country".* This might have put her under pressure to prove that she could do it: *"It took lots of conversation to convince them"* Her parents' approval and support were vital for Olympia: "*In the end, they were very supportive because they wanted me to go to an English speaking country, they were happy and proud that I could manage things by myself".*

Without the encouragement and support of family, friends, and partners, this year's school year would not have occurred. The majority of the students had never been away from their families before. They were greatly influenced by their families' emotional and material support. Even though it put pressure on them, it encouraged them to keep going and devote their time to the UK.

Although parents' and families' financial and emotional support encouraged the students to do their best and helped them adapt, students needed to have close relationships with people they met and interacted with daily. Building new friendships was not only a way for the students to feel that they belonged to this new community, but it was massive support for them to keep going and do their best. This will be further illustrated in the sub-theme below.

Sub-theme 2.1.2: I belong/ Building friendships in a diverse community.

This sub-theme covers how students assessed the significance of forming friendships in a varied setting and how they saw their connection with their peers. Moreover, this affected their sense of belonging to the academic community.

Interestingly, the interviews showed that being in a diverse group made it easier for some students to fit in. Because of the wide range of cultural backgrounds represented among the students, many had an easier time fitting in and feeling a sense of community in their new surroundings. It is comfortable because each student is distinct and unique. For them, it is possible to remain who they are and feel like an integral part of a larger community. For example, Numa found working in a diverse group easy: *"…even though there were so many international students, especially Chinese when I came here; it made me feel comfortable about the people and their culture".* It was not long before Sorina became a part of the school community. Students from various backgrounds contributed to her positive experience*: "It was totally different and people were different. The culture was a bit different. But here, everyone was so unique, and we were like, all of us International, so we were all implied. It felt very good, and I felt I was part of society here. I think I didn't feel like any cultural shock".* Sorina felt that she belonged to the new diverse community.

The international environment at the university made the adaptation process somehow effortless for some students. Dorra was happy with the group of international students in her class: *"I do not know, my class made me happy. I felt like, I was very lucky to be in that specific class where everyone was so nice to each other. And we got along and we went out together, which really made me happy. It was good".*

Kayin's confidence in communicating with people from different backgrounds has also increased thanks to communication with colleagues and peers from different backgrounds: *"Yeah. With Henley, we had a lot of group work. And most of the time, I'm literally the only black person sometimes in my class. It's quite intimidating. But learning how to work with people whose culture is quite different, my confidence has developed because I always used to be scared of speaking to strangers".*

In addition to facilitating adaptation, diversity also serves as a way for learning and growth. Carlos found working with different groups of students an opportunity to understand different people and cultures: "*I see it as an opportunity to learn how to work with different groups with different people with different cultures. And trying to understand that and learn from them and try to help them as well. Because I think that you can always learn from anyone, even if there is someone with no work experience. You can always learn. You need to be like that*". Carlos was older than the other students. He had six years of work experience and preferred to study alongside more experienced pupils. However, working with students from various backgrounds and cultures enriched his educational experience.

Reflecting on the whole experience, Mingli regretted not engaging more with students from nationalities other than his own: "*I wish I had more foreign friends or flatmates. I think it is my mistake. I could have tried to find some foreign friends*". Mingli came to appreciate the value of the international experience he had gained. More exposure to students from diverse backgrounds would have further improved his experience. However, Bingwen benefited from the experience as much as she could: "*So I just like tried to push myself and chose to engage more with non-Chinese students*". Bingwen is sociable and knows what she wants: "*Most Chinese students, when they get around, they just form a block together. They never talk with foreigners. So it was different to study in China or study in a foreign country. So I pushed myself not to stay with Chinese students and try to have friends from different nationalities*". Chun also tried to make friends with different nationalities other than Chinese students: "*I had a lot of friends from a different country, not only from China, I have like few close friends who are from China because, with no language barrier, it's easier for us to make friends. But I have another friend from Tunisia who is really close, so my friends' circle is more like a mix. It's not like a bunch of Chinese people hang out together. I don't really care about the nationality, just like the people I get along with*". The Master's year allowed the students to interact with people from all over the world. Students who took advantage of this opportunity showed good development and adapting levels.

Sofia's friends during her Master's year helped her network more as they regularly went to different events outside the university: "*I attended many events with my friends. We were good as a team. So we went together to a lot of events, and we could easily start engaging in conversations and just get the ball rolling".* This exemplifies the importance of choosing friends during the Master's degree. Despite this, not all students were able to find friends who could assist them in their personal growth and academic development.

Although many students found that diversity made adjusting to a new environment and making friends more accessible, not all students shared this view. Being surrounded by people from various cultural origins made it difficult for Charlette to make new friends and engage in social interactions*: "It was quite a dynamic group of very different people who had friends of different types of people. So we were not massive like a cohort. But we did not go above and beyond socializing together".* Charlette believed they had time to socialize and get to know each other more, but *"I think our group was quite divided…. But I also had friends outside the group in London, so it was quite hard for all of us to get together".* To finish her education, Charlette remained in her native country and enrolled in the same university; thus, making friendships from other places was not something she had hoped or expected to do.

For Olympia, the situation was different, coming to the UK to meet new people and make new friends: "*I wanted to go abroad and meet people and understand the differences in cultures and our everyday life".* Before coming to

the UK, Olympia had never been within a diverse group. Olympia mentioned that she might have prejudices about people from other backgrounds: *"I didn't know or I misunderstood some things from the media and everything. So I didn't know lots of things".* It was not easy for her to build friendships during the year, but at least she felt happy because she *"met so many people who made me so happy and learned so many things about different cultures".* She wanted to meet new people but was unsure

how she felt about people from very different backgrounds, so she tended to stick with pupils who spoke her language and shared her cultural heritage.

Roja was older than most of her peers and felt like an outlier. She had worked for around eight years in her native country. However, having students from different backgrounds and cultures added to her anxiety about fitting in at a school where most pupils were much younger with no work experience: "*I tried to adapt now to the environment and the culture here, but I was still very much sceptical given the fact that most of my classmates would be just like fresh graduates and much younger than me. So that was a big apprehension for me before joining".* That does not mean she did not meet some older students that made her feel better about herself: "*But in the university, you do have a lot of mature students where you tend to meet students who are in the same situation as yours. so that was a big motivation".* Despite this, she could not form deep relationships with any of the students in her group: "*I mean because I was not staying on campus, it was difficult. So because I did socialize, but it was not like to that extent, it was like basic interactions related to project work and normal interaction and meetings after the lecture. It just halted midway. so we did not kind of get that opportunity much".*

In some cases, students could form close ties with fellow students that lasted after the Master's ended. Others had friends who only supported and aided each other during the Master's. All students agree that making friends and establishing a sense of community in a new setting is essential to developing one's personal and intellectual identity. Having a good relationship with students and peers helped students adapt and feel a sense of belonging, which positively impacted their career adaptability.

A close and good relationship with peers was necessary for a smoother adaptation. Building a personal relationship with teachers impacted the students' experience and sense of belonging; how the students perceived their relationship with their teachers will be discussed next.

Sub-theme 2.1.3: Developing a personal relationship with the teachers (supportive university and teachers)

This sub-theme captures how students perceived the relationship with their teachers during their Master's and how that impacted their feeling of belonging, especially for students from a different education system where teachers are not as reachable as in the UK.

All students who were interviewed appreciated having a good and friendly relationship with a tutor or lecturer. That was a pleasant surprise for international students since they had different experiences in their homeland. Numa did not expect a close relationship with the lecturer: "*Relationship between a professor and a student, I thought they cannot talk to each other. I thought they were strict, but it's not like that here. There is a close relationship between lecturer and student*". When students felt that professors and people in the university were friendly, they appreciated the experience more. As Chun said: "*So far it's quite like, beyond my expectation, all the people I met were really friendly, and all like the professors in the uni are really helpful*". It was surprising for Chun and also for Mingli, who compared the situation between the UK in his homeland: "*there were hundreds of students in one class in Chinese University, maybe the professor could not concentrate on every student, and they left fast after class. There were no office hours in China. But here you can contact your professor, and they will answer your questions*".

Adriana was impressed with the support from the programme director: "*The university has been very supportive, very supportive. I cannot highlight this enough. I mean, starting from the programme director*". This kind of relationship and support made the students feel welcomed and appreciated. This did not render them inferior in the relationship, which has been the case in previous experiences, which enhanced their confidence levels.

Some students were used to this kind of relationship. However, even students with high hopes for their tutor-student relationship were delighted to hear from them throughout the pandemic. Sofia talked about the programme director of her husband: "*When it was the pandemic, for example, His programme director. He is amazing. He sent messages to their students. He is like, guys, how are you*

doing? Are you all right? He sent messages to my husband on WhatsApp asking if he was all right".

Sofia also appreciated the good relationship with teachers, especially in masterclasses: "*We had many teachers who were invited to have a masterclass in shipping. I thought that was amazing too because you got to interact with somebody from the industry that was already out there, and they could give advice and stuff like that, and that was amazing".* Her enthusiasm was bolstered by the teacher's encouragement, which Sofia valued highly. She felt that the school was concerned about her and her future. This personal connection with professors helped Sofia: "*We had a finance professor who leads a meditation group. And I think that was amazing because he is teaching everyone that you as a head of school or whatever, you also have this human side, and you are sharing it with the people. I went to meditate with him in the auditorium. So this was something really great".*

All students appreciate seeing this side from their lecturers, tutors, professors or programme directors. This reinforced the students' sense of belonging and compassion. Daniel was satisfied with the excellent relationship with his tutors: "*Lecturers are people; they help us whatever. I had really helpful and welcoming tutors*". Bingwen also felt the same about her programme director: "*He is very supportive. We could email our tutor or have a conversation even just about personal life, talking about what happens. How is your feeling? How's your experience?".* We can see how the personal relationship between students and tutors made them more appreciative of the experience. Dorra also appreciated meeting her teacher outside classes: "*They had a lot of parties and events organized so you would not be alone for too long. I had to meet people also the teachers were very welcoming…My main teacher was very welcoming, she made me feel very safe from the first day".* These great results come from the welcoming and friendly attitude of the teachers and professors. Having a good first impression influenced the students' experience and made adaptation more manageable and less stressful.

Not all students had the same experience. A few students suffered from poor relationships with some teachers. For Charlette, although the programme director was good to all the students, some lecturers

made her feel inferior. They were frightening: "*We are supposed to go in there with any question, whether it is stupid or not. Teachers should be there to help us rather than scare us and almost act superior in the situation. It very much felt like we were trying to tick that lecture as boxes rather than a collaborative two-way approach. How do we get the best out this year?".* Olympia had the same experience; some lecturers were intimidating to her: "*I was really scared to ask any questions. He (the professor) made us feel that we do not understand anything".*

Students came from many nations and educational systems. Close relationships with teachers in a welcoming setting boosted their confidence and made them feel secure. At the end of the year, all students with higher career adaptability perceived their relationships with teachers and professors as constructive and friendly. Other students perceived the relations with some teachers as scary and destructive, negatively impacting the Master's experience.

Most students enrolled in Master's programmes to increase their employability and opportunities in the job market. Throughout the year, it was crucial for them as students to cultivate positive relationships within the university's community. However, as time progressed, students realised the significance of a professional network that extended outside the campus community. The following Theme will examine how students view the value of networking.

6.3.2 Theme 2.2: Building my professional network: introducing myself to the market

This theme captures the students' perspectives on the importance of developing a professional network. In addition, it reveals what the students did to network inside and outside the university. Additionally, it captures how pleased the students have been so far regarding expanding their connections and professional network. It explained how that influenced them as individuals and impacted their career adaptability.

For Kayin, building a professional network was one of the main reasons for doing a Master's: "*When I decided to do the Master's, I chose Henley business school, based on the ratings, and I just needed a way to build my network. So I felt this would be a good opportunity to build my network and meet*

people who can do business together. So basically, networking is part of the whole experience. And also, because I had several business ideas. So I wanted to work with the entrepreneur society in Henley because I read about it".

A Master's was a way to network for Adriana as well. She wanted to network and enter the market after a long break*: "During the five-year gap, I thought about doing the qualification, not a Master's at all. Because I was re-established in the UK and I did not have a network here, like the one I left there, I thought that the Master's would give me a title and more knowledge, so I used this Master's for networking and kind of creating my own brand in Reading if I could say so. The main reason was networking".* Adriana had high expectations regarding networking during her Master's year and enjoyed being active and interacting with people as much as possible. She felt her LinkedIn profile was more attractive after joining the Master's: "*My profile on LinkedIn now has much more attention than it had before doing the Master's".*

Carlos, who has work experience, realised the importance of networking in a new context: "*So yeah, I understood the importance of networking in a country, which is not my country, because if I go back to Peru, I have a very big network of friends and people. So, I realised the importance of networking very fast".* Carlos knew that networking could be a critical component of success.

Sofia realized it was her responsibility to network and get to know people in the market: "*My life changed a lot in the second semester. I attended a lot of events. We went three or four times a week to London. We got invited, and it's like a ball that starts rolling. You speak to somebody they invite you to the next event. It goes on like that. I really liked it".* Going to many events and engaging with people increased her confidence and made her more sociable.

Interacting and networking with a wide range of people this year has given students the confidence to approach others. Roja, for example, was unsure about her abilities at the start of the year: " *I used to have a lot of self-doubts because obviously, I have moved to a new country. And even though I was trying to adapt, I was still not comfortable approaching people or reaching out to someone".* Although

she could not build friendships with students, she gained some confidence in her interpersonal skills after engaging with the students and people worldwide*: "I am more confident in reaching out to people or having a conversation now. I still need to work a lot on my communication skills, but that is the biggest takeaway from my course".*

Networking with people that students meet in lectures and seminars is good but expanding one's network beyond that is essential. Students could meet new people and network with them at conferences, events, social functions, or in any other setting where they come into contact with people they have never met before. Sofia has explained how interacting with people from the industry boosted her confidence,

"So it definitely gave me a lot of confidence in networking, approaching people, and presenting myself. I've had to present myself 500 times since last year. 'Hello, my name is Sofia'. And I know that by heart already, I've said so many times. And that is something that I was so nervous the first time I said it. And I thought like, why I am nervous? Saying, like, who I am and where I come from, like, it's so simple. But it's confidence. So you have to be confident in whatever you're saying. So I think that it has boosted a lot of my confidence and that I no longer care what will happen because nothing bad happens. And you experience it when you go places. Because everyone is human...I have adapted to so many situations lately as well".

It is all about practising and doing things over again and reflecting on what one has done, which helped Sofia gain confidence. Sofia gave an excellent example of how Master's students could network and gain confidence in their communication skills and approach people in the market.

Students did many things to network. Carlos and Chun tried to help in social events as a way of networking. Carlos *"started the academic year assistant to many events, I could give talks in the uni, the entrepreneurship society. I joined the society and tried to assist in all the talks and events there and learn how to network in English because that was new for me".*

Chun also tried to use different resources and ways to communicate and network: "*I tried participating in job fairs and looking for jobs from different websites. I tried to join activities organised by social events by Henley Business School, but still really hard for international students to find a job here in the UK. But I enjoyed and learned from all events I helped or attended".* Many students like Chun had attended the Henley Career Centre as a way to communicate outside the classroom, such as Numa: "*I attended at least two or three seminars or conferences by Henley career in the Henley Business School. Face to face and online".*

Students employed a variety of strategies to expand their network. Many students knew the value of networking and communicating with other students, faculty, and experts inside and beyond the university. Nevertheless, students who thought connecting with new people would help them find a job by the end of the year were stressed and frustrated since they were waiting for an instant return. In comparison, other students who enjoyed networking events and tried to be helpful to others were more relaxed and happier to expand their network without expecting instant results.

Relying on the power of networking to secure her a position sooner, Kayin hoped to land a job before the end of the year. Nevertheless, it did not work, so she went to get help: "*That's what I'm facing now. I related this to my career counsellor he suggested trying something different, So I decided to reach out to some of my old contacts in Nigeria. So they introduced me to certain people who might be able to help. So now I'm giving up my CV, trying to be more friendly, keeping in touch with more people now".* She focused at the beginning on building an international network: "*Since I'm studying international business, and I hope to build an international network".* Some students, such as Kayin, Roja and Adriana were anxious about finding a job as soon as possible, hoping networking was the solution.

For others such as Daniel, that was not the case; he was conscious but not worried about networking: "*Oh, you can always do more, because you can always have more people that you know, and favours and things like that. But that will come I can't worry about it. Let it be more organic. I think people see*

that when you're genuine. So I'm trying not to worry about that too much personally. But it's definitely something I'm conscious of". The purpose of networking as a postgraduate student is to assist students in finding suitable jobs in the future and helping them grow personally. It is possible to create a relationship with someone without the intention of receiving anything in return. That was Daniel's strategy which saved him from being disappointed or frustrated.

Networking helped students to explore more options and opportunities. Every other person that a Master's student meets could be the person who could help them go up the professional ladder by a few steps. It depends on how the students perceive the situation. Daniel believed that one never gets to know enough people: *"I think I definitely need to network, but I've learned from people in the industry and university that you can never have enough people that you know can help you out".* As a result of networking, students are motivated to work on their soft skills, which will allow them to interact with others quickly and avoid misunderstandings. Students need to learn how to attract others' attention and interest by developing soft skills such as self-confidence, listening skills, curiosity, genuineness, and humility.

6.4 Summary

The attainment of a postgraduate degree elevates academic accomplishment to a new level. It does not ensure that students will land their dream careers or launch successful businesses. It depends entirely on how pupils see and interact with their surroundings and how they view themselves.

In this chapter, the qualitative findings of this study were presented. Each of the 16 students interviewed described and reflected on their experience as Master's students. Their Mater's journey accounts were complex descriptions of their lived experiences and so thematic analysis was used to identify areas to explore more fully. Whilst each participant's story was unique there were, a number, of common emergent themes.

From table 6.1 it can be seen that 12 students had positive change in career adaptability and 4 of them had negative change in career adaptability. The analysis focussed on understanding the experience of

master's students, but the developed themes concentrated on the factors that influenced positive change in career adaptability in that experience. The fact that the career adaptability of four of the students has negatively changed helped in deepening and supporting our understanding of how career adaptability has positively changed during the master's year for the other 12 students.

Perhaps unsurprisingly the theme of self-management was prominent in the data (Fig. 6.1). since the idea of career adaptability is connected to self-regulation theory. Some other findings were new in this context like critical thinking which has added a new perspective of understanding change in career adaptability. Participants gained support from both professional and personal circles to support them to gain perspective. Being a student in a new context made it more challenging for some participants. So the support they received from their surrounding was important and helped in enhancing career adaptability.

The next chapter involves a more detailed discussion and interpretation of the findings from the overarching themes of "personal factors: looking inside myself" and "interaction with the environment" and how the main themes and subthemes relate to previous empirical research and the conceptual framework.

Chapter 7: Discussion chapter

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the study's findings. It begins by summarising the findings of the research question. After that, the results are explored in greater depth, considering how existing theories and literature may explain and examine the unique contributions to knowledge made by this research. The focus here has been on how the experience of being a Master's student impacted career adaptability. The research question was answered by investigating two main issues: the change in career adaptability during the year and the lived experience of the Master's students and how it impacted their change and development.

7.2 Findings summary

The research followed an explanatory sequential mixed method approach to answer the research question:

- ***How does the experience of being a Master's student impact career adaptability?***

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to generate a comprehensive understanding of the Master's students' career adaptability development through their experience. The quantitative data measured the change in career adaptability during the Master's year and assessed if core self-evaluation (CSE) could predict change in career adaptability and its four dimensions. The qualitative data explored the lived experience of the Master's students, focusing on how being a Master's student influenced career adaptability level.

Quantitative results showed that CSE could predict changes in curiosity, confidence and overall career adaptability. However, no significant change was detected in overall career adaptability and its four dimensions. Although many students' questionnaire results showed a positive change in career adaptability, some showed a negative change and no change. The positive change was not correlated

to gender, age or work experience. In order to understand what caused a positive change in career adaptability for some students and not others, qualitative data was collected, and thematic analysis resulted in five main themes that were categorised under two overarching themes:

The first overarching theme is "Looking inside myself: personal factors". It focused on the cognitive, emotional, psychological and behavioural factors that impacted the students' experience and career adaptability. This overarching theme includes three main themes. The first theme, "Self-management", with its three subthemes, captured the participants' self-regulatory skills and how that impacted their career adaptability. Participants who had a clear goal knew their weaknesses and strengths and could plan and manage their time effectively showed cognitive and behavioural development and influenced career adaptability positively. The second theme, "Focusing on the process, not the results", with its two subthemes, captured the students' perception of feedback and results and how they handled negative and positive feedback. It also captured the students' ability and willingness to enjoy the journey despite all the challenges and difficulties. Focussing on the process showed emotional and cognitive development, which increased their confidence and sense of control and decreased their stress level. The third theme, "Maturity: flexibility and critical thinking", captured the students' perception of themselves as individuals at the end of the year. Most students used the word "mature" to refer to how much they changed and grew during this year. For most students, maturity refers to flexibility, critical thinking, empathy and respect for others.

The second overarching theme, "Interaction with the environment", focused on the influence of context on the students. The way environmental, social and professional relationships impacted their development. It mainly captured students' social support and the development of social capital. This overarching theme includes two main themes: the first theme, "personal support system: support and belonging", with its three sub-themes, captured the social support during the Master's year and how the students interacted within the diverse community. Support from family, peers, friends and teachers helped and motivated them to keep going. The second theme, "Building my professional

network: introducing myself to the market", captured how students perceived the importance of building a professional network and how the university and the environment helped them network inside and outside the university and develop their social capital.

7.3 Discussion of the main findings

This section discusses qualitative findings considering the quantitative findings, examining how existing theories and literature may assist in understanding the participants' experiences combined with the insights generated in the current study. This discussion is structured according to the themes offered in the findings chapter. Each section corresponds to one of the main themes, and the discussion points within the main themes may focus on a single subtheme or bring together multiple subthemes. This approach facilitates a more in-depth discussion, given the rich information captured in themes. This exploration and discussion of the themes are not restricted to any one theoretical lens, in line with the study's pluralistic approach and the use of thematic analysis as an inductive process. The discussion draws on theory and the broader literature as relevant.

The discussion starts with the overarching theme "Looking inside myself: personal factors" and discusses the main themes related to this overarching theme. Namely, "Self-management", "Focus on the process, not the results", and "Maturity: flexibility and critical thinking","". Then the discussion moves to the second overarching theme, " Interaction with the environment", and the focus is on the two main themes, "Personal support system: support and belonging" and "Building my professional Network: branding myself".

7.3.1 looking inside myself: personal factors

This overarching theme encapsulates most of the themes and subthemes, even though there is always a reciprocal impact between individuals and context (Savickas, 2013; 2020), however, this overarching theme captures mainly students' perception of themselves and the environment around them.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the quantitative results showed no significant change in career adaptability for the Master's students group. Nevertheless, many students had higher career adaptability by the

end of the year. Some had lower career adaptability; for a few, career adaptability did not change. It can be noticed that there is no one direction of change. Despite the visible similarities between students' experiences during the Master's year since they all did their Master's in the same year at the same university, each student has a unique experience influenced by many personal factors. These factors range from cognitive, emotional, and psychological to behavioural factors. These factors are discussed next in light of the study themes and subthemes supported by relevant literature.

Self-management

One of the significant findings was self-management. The theme of Self-management includes its three subthemes: "Determination: I have a goal", "I know myself: aware of weaknesses and strengths", and "Time management and planning") focused on participants' perceptions of themselves and how this impacted their attitudes and behaviour. Students who realised that learning and developing were their responsibility from the beginning of the year could make the best out of it. Goals were intrinsic motivations that kept them going despite the challenges (Dweck, 1086; Elliot & Harackiewicz,1996).

Students who concluded the year with a higher level of career adaptability showed self-regulatory behaviours. They had a clear goal for joining the Master's programme, and all the efforts were oriented toward achieving their goal. They showed flexibility and were ready to learn. Individuals who focus on learning see their abilities as changeable, and their competence depends on their efforts. They managed to engage in adaptive behaviours, which enhanced their competencies, such as goal-striving and welcoming feedback from teachers and colleagues. These characteristics result from mastery orientation and can be explained by learning goal orientation theory (Dweck & Legget, 1988). These students engaged in exploring and planning activities and felt more in control, increasing their confidence. These findings are in line with studies about the association between learning goal orientation and career adaptability (e.g., Creed et al., 2011; Garcia et al., 2012; Tolentino et al., 2014).

The focus on progress and effort among goal-oriented students enhanced the self-regulatory skills and behaviours that support effective career adaptation. Self-regulation theory has been proven to be a

sound framework for career management. The theoretical career self-management model includes goal commitment, plan quality, and knowledge of strengths and weaknesses (Raabe et al., 2007) Which complies with the current research findings. Consistent with the current study findings, positive correlations between self-regulation and career adaptability were found considering the dynamics of the personal agency involved in both concepts (Merino-Tejedor, Hontangas & Boada-Grau, 2016).

Accepting responsibility for one's actions was the first step in enhancing the learning experience. It is related to the idea of agency when students develop their sense of control over their lives and the ability and willingness to influence their thoughts and actions, which make them believe that they can handle any situation or challenge (Savickas, 2012). Self-management behaviours were evident in all students whose career adaptability had a positive change by the end of the year. Recently career self-management has attracted growing scholarly attention (King, 2004; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Lent & Brown, 2013; Wang & Wanberg, 2017).

The findings revealed that students with clear goals showed proactive behaviours by engaging in different activities. That made them understand themselves better and be aware of their weaknesses and strengths. Although actions are connected to personal characteristics, having a clear goal would trigger individuals to do and try things they had never done. One of the students who described herself as an introvert was motivated to network and interact with people. She mentioned that people started to think that she was a super extrovert. She could play the role very well. This could not be the case unless she had a goal she was working towards and unless she had friends and surroundings that pushed or encouraged her to do so. This is an example of how having a goal will encourage and motivate students to engage in proactive behaviour that will lead to more confidence and self-control. This finding does contradict other studies focusing on stable traits that showed that being introverted is negatively associated with career adaptability (e.g., Teixeira et al., 2012; van Vianen et al., 2012).

Results showed that having a clear goal made the student determined to face challenges and overcome problems. Goals worked as intrinsic motivations for them. The analysis indicates that these determining students with high self-management had a goal when they first started the programme. It did not matter whether that goal was for a short term, like building some skills during the Master's, or a long-term goal, like starting their own business or whether that goal was connected to their families or future careers. Having a clear goal made the students more determined when dealing with challenges (Bargh & Barndollar, 1996; Latham & Piccolo, 2012). Action is driven by goals or intention to undertake the activities (Ajzen, 1988; Bandura, 1986). People are more likely to act on their objectives when they are clear, explicit, aligned with personal beliefs and proximate to actions(Lent & Brown, 2013).

The university environment may encourage certain behaviours. It focuses on elements that impact the individual's goal-directed behaviour rather than assuming that people act alone in envisioning or accomplishing their objectives (Lent & Brown, 2013).

The current research showed that Self-knowledge and awareness of strengths and weaknesses were among the most critical aspects of increasing career adaptability resources. It is slightly connected to the students' goals and motivation. When the students have a goal, they will work harder and be involved in different activities that will let them know themselves better or even discover new things about themselves. Being abroad for the first time made the students face life by themselves in a new environment and new challenges that put them in situations they would not face if they were living with their families or their homeland. Knowledge itself and gaining new information also helped them look at themselves differently, discover what kinds of things they may like, and start to see the world differently. For international students, this was their first time living abroad by themselves. They were able to get insight into both their strengths and flaws. This is consistent with Reitman and Snneer (2008) also found that it is essential for individuals who want to attain career success to manage their

careers to be sure about their strengths and to have marketable skills and strong professional networks

In this context, self-management refers to the inclination to proactively manage one's experience by gathering information regularly to improve self-knowledge and learn about one's identity, competencies, and skills. This can aid in the development of realistic goals and action plans to attain these goals, as well as in obtaining feedback to improve career decision-making, updating one's abilities, and seeking work prospects.(Bezuidenhout, M. (2011).

The current study found that students who developed planning skills had higher career adaptability by the end of the year. This finding is consistent with Zacher (2014) found that individuals who score high at concern as a career adaptability dimension were more likely to plan. Wendlandt and Roch-len (2008) also found that for students to successfully transition into the job market, they must possess time management and adaptability skills (Ghosh & Fouad, 2017).

Planning in the current study consists of developing and amending a plan when needed. Students might have a goal and try hard to build a plan and work toward that goal. However, if the students are not flexible enough to revise and modify the plan, they will not be able to reach their goals. Sometimes they have to be selective in what to do and when taking into account the abilities and skills needed. In the process, they are discovering themselves, and through that, they should be aware of how to execute the plan to reach a long or short-term goal. For instance, one student in this research desired to start his own business. He anticipated having a completed business plan by the conclusion of his Master's programme. When he started his Master's, he discovered this would not be possible. He did not give up the goal, but he changed his plan and decided to apply for a job in a company after his Master's to gain more knowledge. He wanted to give himself more time to build his business plan to start his own company. These findings are consistent with Leung, Mo and Cheng's (2021) results, which found a positive correlation between flexibility and career adaptability. Career adaptability mediates the relationship of competence and flexibility with decision-making difficulties.

This is also consistent with Raabe et al. (2007) results that showed that self-knowledge and goal commitment mediate the relationship between interventions and planning qualities. That shows that individuals need to be flexible and amend their goals as needed.

Most students who started their Master's year had a goal that made them start this journey in the first place. However, only students who had a plan and could develop and manage their time showed higher career adaptability by the end of the year. This does not mean that they were not flexible with their plans. Some of them changed their plans, especially with the pandemic situation, and some changed their short-term goal, for example, finding a job in the UK after graduation. However building the habit of planning and managing their time made a difference and made them feel more confident and more adaptable to the changing situation, these findings are consistent with Merino-Tejedor et al. (2016). The latter found positive correlations between self-regulation and career adaptability (Handoyo & Sulistiani, 2018).

Some students' concern has decreased, although their overall career adaptability has increased. However, they showed dynamic behaviour, participated in many activities, and were eager to explore potential career options. Nevertheless, these activities were unplanned, or they looked only for short-term goals, which showed a decrease in the dimension concern in their questionnaire. This lack of planning has been highlighted in other research (e.g. Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Thompson et al., 2013). Lack of long-term planning in this context was not an indication of lower career adaptability (cf. Savickas, 2013). Since the pandemic began towards the end of the year (March 2020), students with high flexibility could modify their objectives and goals and concentrate on the immediate future, demonstrating their ability to adjust to changing circumstances. Another reason might be that students who secured a place in the job market before the end of the year were less inclined to use proactive behaviours and engage in planning activities (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Brown et al., 2021). Thus, this study highlights career concerns centred on flexibility, optimism, planning, and decision-making based on an individual's needs and the context's status quo (Wehrle, Kira & Klehe, 2019).

According to action theory, plans facilitate the transformation of general objectives into precise implementation intents, resulting in goal-directed behaviour (Gollwitzer, 1993; Gollwitzer & Brandstaedter, 1997). Effective plans require particular characteristics, like defined action stages and timing (Gollwitzer & Brandstaedter, 1997) and alternate plans in the event of unanticipated issues arise (Frese & Zapf, 1994).

Most studies to date in this field have focussed on UG students, but in this study, we are trying to extend that to postgraduate study, specifically PGT. Students at this stage differ from undergraduate students since they are older, and some already have their own families. Keeping a balance between career and personal goals plays a significant role at this stage. The action-regulation model of work-family balance proposed by Hirschi et al. (2019) considers career self-management an action-regulation process at the interface of work and non-work responsibilities. (Hirschi, Zacher, & Shockley, 2022).

Consistent with that, students develop and set career goals, develop action plans, and execute career behaviours, considering how this affects the possible attainment of non-work goals and vice versa (Hirschi et al., 2019). For instance, a student had to choose between staying in the United Kingdom and finding a career or moving with his wife, who found a good job in another country. Having a backup plan indicates one's level of adaptability to change and difficulty.(Hirschi, Zacher, & Shockley, 2022)

Focus on the learning process more than results.

The theme "Focus on the learning process, more than the results" has two subthemes: "Enjoying the journey and students" and "Perception of recognition and feedback" _ it captures the participants' feelings about the experience and how they perceived feedback and recognition from others. Students concentrated on learning enjoyed the experience more and appreciated all kinds of feedback. Emotional self-regulation (Cole, Michel & Teti,1994). It is not only about the results and expectations that can motivate an individual to keep going, but it also talks about how individuals perceive their

abilities. However, how the students perceive unexpected or disappointing results is an important factor. This is quite connected to the ability to regulate their emotion and reactions.

Students' expectations about the education system, people, environment, culture and the whole experience impacted their feelings about the journey. Although most students indicated that their expectations had been met or even surpassed, others desired additional assistance in areas such as obtaining a job after graduation, more significant interaction with the job market during the year, and less stress and workload. The problem was not that these expectations were not met, but rather how the students reacted or responded. By the end of the year, students with higher career adaptability showed flexibility and the ability to accept changes and deal with distractions. This helped these students to enjoy the year more. Career adaptability indicates an individual's preparedness and resources to handle job demands and pressures. It is a crucial psychological capability that assists individuals in constructing their vocational self-concept (Savickas, 2002). Satisfied individuals are more capable of developing (Savickas, 2002). This shows that highly conscientious individuals who like working and pursuing their goals are more likely to enhance their career adaptability and manage their work successfully (McCrae & Costa, 1997).

This study showed that focusing on the process more than the results encouraged students to accept failure and learn from it; not being afraid of failing since failing itself was a learning process (Shin & Lee, 2017). One student mentioned that failure was part of the process, and she always tried to learn from it not. Treating failure as an opportunity for learning shows an optimistic approach toward the journey itself and the future. Pessimistic persons are more likely to avoid failure and less likely to be genuinely driven, according to research by Elliot and Church (2003). This study provides empirical support for the substantial negative correlation between pessimism and intrinsic drive (Thompson & Gaudreau, 2008). According to a prior qualitative study, college students with pessimistic dispositions have a greater fear of failure and heightened preoccupation with others' perceptions, indicating a lack of self-determined desire to engage in academic pursuits (Martin, Marsh, & Debus, 2001). These

findings imply that pessimistic thoughts relate to a lack of intrinsic drive and inadequate career adaptability (Shin & Lee, 2017).

Feedback may be described as the extent to which individuals actively seek feedback from others on their talents and career development requirements in order to analyse their strengths and shortcomings and determine what action plans are required to improve their performance in the workplace.

The results from this study suggest that not all students can handle negative or unexpected feedback in a good and constructive way. Some students were very disappointed about some exam results or negative feedback they received, which impacted their career adaptability level negatively. For example, one student who was used to get high grades and considered herself one of the brightest students did not accept having a lower grade than the friend she worked with in preparing for the exam, and this made her lose motivation to keep going. That was an example of her attitude toward results and feedback, which was reflected in an adverse change in her career adaptability level despite her excellent academic achievement. These findings were consistent with Praskova and Johnston's (2021) research which found that when people received a low level of negative career feedback, their sense of future orientation became more robust. That enhanced their proactive career behaviours. Therefore more positive perceptions of employability and career adaptability were stimulated.

Praskova and Johnston (2021) also found that for people who received a high level of negative career feedback, the indirect effect became non-significant. Negative feedback can motivate one to improve, but it depends on how an individual perceives it. For example, another student perceiving negative feedback from her colleagues made her work harder. Another one receiving a bad grade and negative feedback did work more for the next assignment. In contrast, increased exposure to negative feedback counteracted the favourable effect of future orientation (goals) on active involvement, indicating a "suppression" effect(Praskova and Johnston, 2021).

Students received negative, unexpected feedback or results that lowered their confidence and overwhelmed them. Consistent with previous theoretically relevant research, which found that people

who received more negative feedback had less confidence in their ability to achieve goals, made slower progress toward their goals, had lower career expectations and showed fewer adaptive behaviours (Creed et al., 2015; Hu et al., 2017; Choi et al., 2018). Too much negative feedback is likely to harm people's motivation to engage in goal-related activities (Ilgen & Davis, 2001; Gregor et al., 2021).

The findings showed that all students who could not deal with negative feedback or results had lower career adaptability by the end of the year. the fear of failing and not achieving the expected results could lead students to burnout that impacts them even physically. This can be explained by the fact that individuals who undergo lengthy and continuous exposure to stresses and lack suitable coping methods may reach a state known as burnout.(De Lange et al., 2010; Jordan et al., 2010; Lee & Choi, 2010). These findings are consistent with Pouyaud et al. (2012), who found that career adaptability is negatively related to general anxiety and fear of failing (Pouyaud et al., 2012).

On the other hand, receiving positive feedback and recognition plays a motivational role that influences individuals' behaviours and performances and gives them the power to cope with challenges. All students were happy to receive recognition from their peers, teacher or family. Students with higher career adaptability by the end of the year were less occupied by receiving positive feedback, which shows that they were intrinsically motivated. This is consistent with the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985), which states that intrinsic motivation enables individuals to behave for self-pleasure and self-satisfaction.

This research results show that students with positive career adaptability change focused on daily activities and tried to focus on learning and achieving some daily goals. These students were able to enjoy the journey more and feel more confident and in control over their lives. The ability to enjoy the small steps that students achieved, helped them achieve higher goals (Zacher, 2018). Enjoying the journey is connected with flexibility and celebrating little achievements. Students who had positive change by the end of the year showed the ability to control their emotions and enjoy the little

achievements, delivering a good presentation, receiving a good grade, or even attending seminars and learning new things.

Findings showed that Master's students with a positive mindset had lower stress levels and felt more in control. These findings are consistent with research on students in Australia, which found that optimism correlates with career adaptability (Tolentino et al., 2014). Another study's results on Italian high school students concluded that expectations have a significant relationship with all subcategories of career adaptability. Optimism correlates with three dimensions of career adaptability: confidence, concern and control. However, it does not correlate with curiosity (Wilkins et al., 2014).

Burnout is viewed as a persistent, negative, work-related state of mind in "normal" individuals, primarily characterised by exhaustion and distress, diminished professional effectiveness, increased feelings of incompetence, and decreased motivation and productivity.(Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010; Boudrias et al., 2012; Brand-Labuschagne, Mostert, Rothmann Jnr & Rothmann, 2012).

However, there was evidence of a contrary situation with students with positive mindsets who experience stress and who engage in positive coping behaviour and are less inclined to burnout (De Lange et al., 2010; Jordan et al., 2010; Lee & Choi, 2010). Such students focused more on the learning process, not the result itself. Low burnout rates are also associated with social coping strategies such as talking with others and finding social support (Choi & Jin, 2010), which will be discussed later.

Although age did not correlate with career adaptability in this study, the data showed that students who described a burnout situation during the year were young students with no work experience. That is consistent with research that found that younger workers seem to be more prone to experiencing burnout than older workers because, with increased age, people generally become more stable and mature (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010; Harry & Coetzee, 2013). My findings also showed that students who mentioned burnout situations and remembered it as the worst experience during the year had decreased career adaptability by the end of the year this is consistent with the Merino-Tejedor, Hontangas and Boada-Grau (2016) research that found negative correlations between career

adaptability and burnout. This is related to the harmful nature of burnout and, in the end, leads to a lack of dedication to the tasks being carried out (Merino-Tejedor, Hontangas & Boada-Grau, 2016).

Previous research has linked career-choice pessimism to career-related issues, such as job indecision and limited career flexibility. (Creed, Patton, & Bartrum, 2004), which is consistent with our findings. Students who could enjoy the journey had a more optimistic view about the Master's year itself and the future. Despite the unstable situation or any challenges or surprises, they could keep going and take things as they tried to enjoy the little steps they were doing.

It has been observed that intrinsically driven persons are motivated to participate in activities for their benefit to fulfil their desire for autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It appeared that this was the case for Master's students. Individuals with a high intrinsic drive in career decision-making are likely to demonstrate enthusiasm and curiosity. They view uncertainty as a challenge as opposed to danger. Given that intrinsic drive makes individuals energetic and enables them to behave willingly with high-level self-regulated methods,

It is plausible that pessimistic ideas will make individuals less active and less motivated to engage in the career decision-making process. This study's findings are in agreement with Hirschi's (2010) study which was conducted in one-year longitudinal research with Swiss teenagers and discovered that intrinsic motivation was the primary element that characterised students' capacity to investigate, plan, and make decisions during the professional decision-making process. The results of Pouyaud et al. (2012) found a strong correlation between intrinsic motivation and career adaptability among French high school students. In addition, Shin (2012) found that intrinsic motivation significantly affects the relationship between career calling and career adaptability in Korean college students. The previous empirical findings implied that intrinsic motivation, created by perceiving one's behaviour as self-initiated, was a significant factor that influenced CA, and such association may be a universal phenomenon.

Pessimism may be viewed as an inner foundation that hinders people from seeing the positive side when facing challenges (Chang, 2001). Individuals with pessimistic inclinations may be more inactive

because they are more likely to find reasons not to voluntarily engage in career-related activities (Kelly & Shin, 2009). In addition, a lack of intrinsic desire is one of the primary causes of professional hesitation or indecisiveness, which is indicative of low career adaptability (Pouyaud, Vignoli, Dosnon, & Lallemand, 2012; Shin & Kelly, 2013; Shin & Lee, 2017)

Maturity: flexibility and critical thinking

Career adaptability originated from the term "career maturity", created by Super (1980). Career maturity can be described as the awareness of individuals to plan, prepare and make appropriate decisions related to their career and readiness to defeat challenges encountered in each individual's life journey following their abilities. However, maturity in the current study describes the change in students' perceptions of themselves and their surroundings during the Master's year. There are many definitions of maturity, but for most students in this study, it refers to flexibility, tolerance of differences and ambiguity, especially in a diverse community and practising critical thinking.

Flexibility

Data from the current study revealed that students with high awareness of the multiple perspectives on any given situation, problem or issue showed higher career adaptability by the end of the year. These students considered their new situation when making important decisions. They were able to reconsider decisions if new evidence emerged. This flexibility showed a high level of cognitive maturity at this stage. Flexibility and the ability to tolerate different ideas and backgrounds and understand these differences are significant adaptivity components based on Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013).

The ability to adjust thoughts depending on the changing conditions is considered cognitive flexibility (Martin & Rubin, 1995). This was shown when students talked about adjusting expectations in the new environment and how they changed their perception of different thoughts and ideas from people around them. Cognitive flexibility is important because it leads to adaptive behavioural reactions to these conditions (Kirikkanat, 2022). These findings are consistent with the studies showing that

cognitive flexibility is linked positively to career adaptability (Chong & Leong, 2015; Rudolph et al., 2016).

Being in a diverse community and new context during the Master's year provoked a sense of tolerance toward uncertainty, which is one of the main aspects of career adaptability. According to Chong and Leong (2017), cognitive flexibility can raise a person's tolerance for ambiguity (Griffin and Hesketh, 2003) as well as their level of curiosity when confronted with new experiences (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). People with high cognitive flexibility are also more likely to seek out various experiences (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Students with more significant cognitive flexibility have greater career adaptability because they can better overcome vocational uncertainties with greater interest and curiosity to experiment with different ways to help them achieve their career goals. This makes it possible for these students to have greater career adaptability.(Chong & Leong, 2017).

Critical thinking

The other aspect of maturity and seeing the world differently is learning the tools and techniques of critical thinking during the Master's year. Critical thinking is known in the educational literature as an area of challenge for many, especially international students (Fakunle et al., 2016). However, it has not been connected to career adaptability before. It was vital to adopt a holistic lens to understand the students' experiences while studying in the UK. Understanding the lived experience of the students was vital for understanding the challenges and opportunities they had during the year from their point of view. The inductive analysis of the interviews allowed for a deep investigation of the factors that influenced career adaptability. All international students who had a positive change in career adaptability by the end of the year mentioned how developing critical thinking skills changed how they see the world around them.

Learning about practising critical thinking in modules was new for many students. This could be surprising since critical thinking is used in most academic disciplines and is required to meet the necessary academic objectives for success (Facione et al., 1996; Sherblom, 2010). Developing critical

thinking in students is a key aim of higher education in Western countries (Barnett, 1997) and an important criterion for grading student writing in the UK (Brown, 2008; Elander, Harrington, Norton, Robinson, & Reddy, 2006). However, sometimes educational systems in many countries do not encourage or focus on developing such skills, Crenshaw et al., (2011), which does not prepare them with real-world problem-solving skills. So, these students started their Master's in the UK with a new educational system that encourages and focuses on critical thinking. Although this was quite challenging, it changed how students see the world around them, as they explained. This finding is consistent with Barnett and Francis' research (2012), which suggested that sections of an educational psychology course in which the implementation of critical thinking performed significantly better than sections where this approach was not used.

Career adaptability has been widely studied in many different academic contexts. However, critical thinking has not been empirically explored as one of the factors that could be associated with career adaptability. Critical thinking involves specific decision-making skills that allow individuals to engage in unbiased reasoning using logical, systematic modes of thinking (Ennis, 1985; Facione et al., 1996). Showing career adaptability resources is a critical thinking component, so this finding is quite a surprise. There is a paucity of information about how well overseas students adapt to the specifics of the UK educational system, particularly regarding the cultivation of critical thinking abilities at the master's degree level. (Fakunle et al., 2016). For example, Chinese students who came from an educational system widely reported not encouraging critical thinking and argumentation (O'Sulivan & Guo, 2010) were positively impacted by learning critical thinking skills. This is vital when education is accomplished in a condensed amount of time, such as the duration of a Master's Program in the United Kingdom, which is just one year, in contrast to the two-year Master's degrees that are typical in many other nations..

Critical thinking has many different definitions in the literature and includes the ability to analyse arguments, claims, or evidence, make inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judge or evaluate and make decisions or solve problems (Ennis, 1985; Facione, 1990; Halpern, 1998; Paul, 1992; Willingham, 2007).

Students who showed a shift in their way of thinking when introduced to critical thinking skills and tools are the students who applied these techniques in writing the assignments and other non-academic aspects of their lives. Critical thinking can be beneficial when it is put into action when the students use it in their lives and apply it in an academic and non-academic context. Cotter and Tally (2009) conducted research suggesting that giving critical thinking assignments did not positively affect formal operational thought or critical thinking skills. That shows the importance of actively developing these skills in different contexts to impact career adaptability levels (Toppin & Chitsonga, 2016).

The finding from this study revealed that Master's students did not take things they learned for granted anymore by the end of the year, they tried to look at different resources and analyse what they read or saw. This made them more curious and explore the environment around them, which enhanced their career adaptability. Critical thinking skills stimulate thought by analysing situations, looking at evidence and difficulties, challenging assumptions, and locating facts pertinent to a discussion (Rhodes, 2010). When students can think critically and use skills such as analysing and critiquing information at a high level, they can engage in more in-depth and more sophisticated problem-solving strategies, which helps them be more efficient in their academic studies. When students can think critically using skills such as analysing and critiquing information at a high level, they are (Ghanizadeh, 2017; Ramsey & Baethe, 2013). According to Williams (2005), "While critical thinking is not the whole cure for social issues, thinking that is loose, biased, or ill-informed will surely impair society's capacity to be more productive and humane." (p.164). For students to enhance their critical thinking abilities, they need to learn how to dissect an issue and search for a solution without relying on their preconceived notions (Van Der Werff, 2016).

These findings showed that students who exhibited critical thinking skills felt confident and curious. This is consistent with critical thinking disposition, which includes positive habits of the mind, such as being confident, judicious, inquisitive, organised, analytical, intellectually honest, and tolerant (Facione et al., 1996). Although there is no apparent connection in the literature between critical thinking and career adaptability, previous students highlight that College graduates' lack of critical thinking skills can put them at a disadvantage for jobs and future Success (Quitadamo et al., 2011; Nirmala & Kumar, 2018; Smith & Szymanski, 2013). That shows the importance of practising critical thinking.

Individuals' professional competence is developed through the interactions between their internal and external worlds. It is necessary to investigate the roles of contextual factors (Kuijpers et al., 2011). The students' environment in the current study influenced their experiences. Therefore, understanding the environment's impact on the student's career adaptability development is essential. The school environment, physical, psychological, cognitive, cultural, emotional, and educational aspects are crucial to comprehending students' motivating beliefs and career choices (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Imanipour et al., 2015). The environment in this study includes students' family, friends, peers, teachers, the work market, the educational system, and everything that might influence their experience. According to career construction theory, the interaction between people and the environment provides individuals with experience and information, allowing them to actively enhance their career adaptability to deal with changes in the real world (Savickas, 2013; Fu et al., 2022).

7.3.2 Interacting with the Environment

This overarching theme focuses on how the students interacted with their environment, especially those around them. Students came to the new environment with expectations and goals shaped by their past experiences and background. Having a support system and feeling that they belong, especially in a diverse community like the one they lived in during their Master's year, played a

significant role in developing their career adaptability. Having a personal relationship with their teachers and supervisors also enhanced their feeling of belonging and made them feel welcomed in the new community. In addition, participating in various events allowed students to engage more with each other and with people outside their group, which helped build a professional network and increased their confidence and satisfaction with the Master's year. This overarching theme consists of two main themes: "Support and belonging" and "Building my professional network.

Support and belonging

The theme of "Support and belonging" with its three sub-themes about family, friends and peers and relationships with teachers, reflects the impact of the support and assistance students received during their Master's year and how they felt as members of a diverse community. Most Master's students have recently graduated from their undergraduate programme, and this was their first time living abroad. They needed support from family, friends, and teachers to persevere. Much empirical research has identified the environmental component of social support (e.g. Creed et al., 2009; Li et al., 2022; Wang & Fu, 2015).

The current study found that students with a positive change in career adaptability were satisfied with the support they received from parents, family, school, and friends during their Master's year. This finding supported the CCT (Savickas, 2005) and was in line with empirical studies examining the association between social support and career adaptability.(Hirschi, 2009; Fabio & Kenny, 2014; Tian & Fan, 2014; Han & Rojewski, 2015). According to Diemer (2007), social support is a protective resource that influences a person's career confidence and encourages career exploration, hence enhancing career adaptability. Social support includes support from family members, friends, and significant others. This support created a social support system for students, allowing them to get help, both financial and emotional support. Social support, especially personal support such as respect, understanding, guidance, and encouragement, is of great help for Master's students to deal with the challenges during the Master's experience, increase their confidence, and further achieve a higher career adaptability level (Wang & Fu, 2015).

Many studies have investigated the impact of school and social support (Tian & Fan, 2014; Han & Rojewski, 2015; Wang & Fu, 2015). These studies focused on adolescents and undergraduate students. However, The current research focuses on a new group of students, the Master's students' group, which has not been studied enough in the literature. The importance of the relationship between the Master's students and their families, especially their parents, was unclear (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). There has been an assumption that Master's students are disconnected from their families at this stage since they are older than undergraduate students. Although some studies investigated the impact of a family's socioeconomic status on accessing the PGT programme (Mateos-González & Wakeling, 2022), the family role during the Master's year was unclear (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). My findings proved that family support for Master's students is as essential as for undergraduate students. Taking into account that most of the students are still in their early twenties with little or no experience. Even older students with work experience appreciated the support they received from their families.

Students in the current study appreciated the support they received from their parents. Both financial and emotional support had of significant impact on the students' determination and confidence. Many students mentioned how even a phone call could change their mood and boost their confidence. One goal of doing a Master's in the UK was to make their parents proud. When these students felt that their parents were involved in their experience and supported each step, they worked harder, looked for opportunities, and kept going. These findings are consistent with Guan et al. (2016), who stated that high levels of parental support and low levels of parental intervention affected career exploration, predicting career adaptability. In addition, social support from the family is an essential factor in career behaviour, as Hirsche found that perceived social support was a significant predictor of career adaptability development (Hirschi, 2009). Students are more likely to engage in exploratory behaviour when parents are interested in career development and can provide helpful resources. However, students tend to decrease their job exploration behaviour when parents engage in career

development but cannot provide helpful resources. (Tian & Fan, 2014; Han & Rojewski, 2015; Guan et al., 2016).

Students whose families supported them financially did not need to worry about money and could focus on themselves and the programme. However, students with limited resources and substantial barriers needed to think about managing and balancing their personal and work lives, which added to their challenges during the year. McDonald's (2018) previous research found that instrumental social support was positively related to career exploration.

In addition, to support from parents and family, the data from this study revealed that having a human relationship with teachers in a new environment and building good relationships with peers and colleagues enhanced the sense of belonging and emotional attachment during the year. A Master's cannot be an easy decision to make, especially for international students. Students left their homes and went to a new environment and new educational system, language and culture. Most of them were by themselves for the first time, and they had no close contact with the new context. Because of that having a close relationship with a teacher and a close relationship with peers gave them the support and confidence needed. The attachment theory supports this finding. Attachment theory explains behaviour patterns and characteristics related to separation from an emotionally important person throughout life (Bowlby, 1988), which is characterised in the current study by the separation from family and friends in the homeland.

One of the defining features of the attachment system is the secure base, which refers to the attachment figure being a psychological base for the person to use when exploring an environment (Bowlby, 1988). The secure base in the new environment for Master's students who are starting a new experience in a new environment is having close human relationships with teachers and peers. Individuals can take risks and confidently explore the self and environment when the secure base function is met. This close connection in the new context helped them enhance their career adaptability. This can be seen when students explain the importance of building close friendships.

Having close friendships sharing the same interests and goals motivated one of the students to network outside the university and go to events in London with her friends. She mentioned that she could not do it without her friends. They were the support and the secure basis she needed to take the first step in networking and communicating outside the university in the new context and country. At this age and level, a sense of belonging to a social group is crucial for Master's students. Peer groups are an essential source of emotional stability in close relationships for individuals in early adulthood who have experienced the separation-individuation process with their parents.(Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

A sense of belonging played a significant role in enhancing confidence and curiosity. Master's students who felt they were part of the diverse Master's group were less stressed and had a positive change in their career adaptability. These findings are consistent with Felsman and Blustein's research which demonstrated that adolescents with greater levels of peer attachment have greater career exploration and commitment (Felsman & Bluestein, 1999). Therefore, attachment with peers would impact career adaptability since safe attachment with peers encourages exploration and dedication (Blustein et al., 1995). Secure connection with the perception that people can be trusted and available would reduce the pessimistic view of the world, including a career-related worldview (Mikulincer, Shaver & Pereg, 2003).

Students who could not build close friendships and did not feel they belonged to their Master's group, either because they felt older than other students or because of cultural barriers, among other reasons, had lower career adaptability by the end of the year. One of the students had some prejudices against other nationalities and could not form close friendships. However, the Master's experience helped her change her mindset, but she could not form close relationships with others. Students with a negative change in career adaptability, especially in the confidence dimension, mentioned that one module convenor made them feel inferior, and they were scared of approaching him, which increased their stress level and negatively impacted the whole experience. This is consistent with Heinonen's (2004) findings that insecure attachment accounted for a 48% variance of Pessimism in Finland

students. These findings show that insecure peer affiliation may contribute to a more pessimistic job choice (Shin & Lee, 2017). Insecure attachment impairs a person's capacity to deal with obstacles and tasks associated with the professional decision-making process (Blustein et al., 1995; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Shin & Lee, 2017). Prior research suggested that insecurely attached persons tend to adopt ineffective coping techniques for stress and oppose change, which may eventually lead to difficulty in dealing with career-related challenges appropriately and effectively (Allen et al., 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Shin & Lee, 2017).

The Master's year is very intensive, and some students cannot make friendships because of the time limitation and the load of work they need to do. Many Master's students in this research showed interest in becoming involved in social activities. They said that making friends was one of the most enjoyable aspects of undertaking a master's programme. These social interactions gave them the necessary motivation and support during their studies (James & Beattie, 1996). However, not all of them engaged in social activities related to the university (Cluett & Skene, 2006). This may have been related to the many demands on their time, such as family and work responsibilities (Lang, 2000).

Teachers and professors who were less friendly and hard to reach gave some students the feeling of inferiority. That enhances negative emotions and pressure from such relationships and might reduce students' efforts in accomplishing routine tasks (Hon et al., 2013). This is similar to the negative role of abusive leadership in organisational research (e.g., Liu et al., 2012; Sungu et al., 2020; Mei, Yang & Tang, 2021;2020)

The learning environment is an essential component of a master's experience. A welcoming environment is an instrument for students to learn (Henderson2012). Sometimes there is a gap between what students expect to have and what they have in real life. Thus, business schools and educators should make an effort to create a supportive and positive learning environment, allow students to make decisions and treat them differentially according to students' ability or interest so that students' career adaptability will be improved and their transition from university to the world of work will be easier and successful (Tian & Fan, 2014).

Building a professional network

All students who have been interviewed are enroled in Master's programmes to increase their employability and opportunities in the job market. Throughout the year, it was crucial for them as students to cultivate positive relationships within the university's community. However, as time progressed, students realised the significance of a professional network that extended outside the campus community—building professional networks and getting introduced to the market captured the students' perspectives on the importance of developing a professional network. It is essential to have networks when looking for ways to build a career. Networking helped students to explore more options and opportunities. Every other person that a Master's student meets could be the person who could help them go up the professional ladder by a few steps. It depends on how the students perceive the situation.

Networking is vital for developing a person's social capital of contacts who can supply them with assistance and knowledge (Fugate et al., 2004). Social capital is a person's ability to form and maintain mutually beneficial and rewarding connections with others (Baron, 1997). It may also be considered as the quantity and quality of a person's support network that they can organise and capitalise on, hence enhancing their employability (Gazier, 2001).

The current study findings showed that students who focused on networking inside and outside the university felt more confident and willing to approach new people. Networking gave them access to information, resources, and sponsorship (Seibert et al.,2001; Zhang et al.,2010). These findings are consistent with Sou et al. (2022) study, which revealed that students engage in more proactive career behaviours if he or she has more social capital. Social capital is enhanced by more networking and engaging with people. This is also consistent with Oh et al. (2022). The larger the size of the network, the higher the accessibility to help and resources from people within that network (Bezuidenhout, 2011). However, the advantage of network linkages in giving access to knowledge and resources is the core principle of social capital theory.(Liao & Welsch, 2005).

Social capital is highly significant to graduates as they seek out to capitalise on various formal and informal interactions when they wish to learn more about a given occupation, firm, or employment potential. Graduates with the proper contacts are more likely to hear about chances that will increase their marketability to potential employers. Whom individuals know and the strength of their connections with other persons is a unique, valuable, and nonreplicable asset that affords them a competitive advantage. It offers several advantages, including employment chances, promotions, influence, and venture money (Forret & Sullivan, 2002). Additionally, networking is related to the initiative. Individuals with proactive dispositions are often adept at interacting with others, likeable, trustworthy, and cooperative, and are predicted to readily adjust to new work contexts (Wahat, 2009).

Students in this study who were involved in different networking activities inside and outside the university scored higher in career adaptability by the end of the year. Students' confidence increased when they could contact professionals in the market. It also enhances their exploring and curiosity skills. Curiosity, which manifests in exploring behaviour and asking probing questions before deciding (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), should enable people to the adapting behaviour, such as networking and goal planning. These findings are supported by Zacher (2016), who demonstrated that curiosity involves actively investigating potential future selves and considering options (Oh et al., 2022).

The purpose of networking as a postgraduate student is to assist students in finding suitable jobs in the future and help them grow personally. It is possible to create a relationship with someone without the intention of receiving anything in return. As a result, students will be able to assist others in finding employment or training opportunities by sharing their expertise. Their value will grow as a connector, and others will be happy to pay it forward by connecting with them when they have opportunities to do so. As a result, students place a high value on friendships in which they form connections with one another without expecting anything in return. For the Master's, though, having a companion was vital.

Networking was viewed as a means of job seeking. According to research, networking is connected with reduced unemployment rates and a higher likelihood of reemployment, suggesting that those who use networking more often and extensively have the edge over those who use networking less frequently and less expensively.(Wanberg, Kanfer & Banas, 2000).

According to the findings of Nalis et al. (2022), each of the four resources for professional adaptability—concern, control, curiosity, and confidence—helps to increase the connection between increasing job pressures and the adaptive responses of networking and reflection. This study reveals important insights into the dynamic relationship between structure and agency in the process of career self-management.

Attending networking events was seen as the most effective method for students to build their social capital, therefore, they concentrated their attention there. Students voiced their worries and emphasised the need to create professional relationships through networking; nevertheless, many lacked the necessary knowledge and self-assurance to start the process. Those who participated in networking events either had too optimistic expectations regarding their efforts' results or discovered that most attendees were either other students or people looking for jobs. Because universities have extensive linkages to the business world and its alumni, they are in a unique position to assist in introducing students to many significant networks (Bridgstock, 2017; Brown et al., 2021).

Networking behaviours relate to "individuals' efforts to build and maintain ties with those who may be able to aid them in their profession or career." In management research, networking behaviours are extensively examined in a variety of situations because organisations and individuals utilise social networks to acquire resources. In the context of the job search process, networking behaviours refer to the proactive steps individuals take to acquire employment-related information, leads, or recommendations through their social networks. Contact and interaction with people around the students could enhance their communication skills and add to their social capital, positively impacting their career adaptability.

The Master's year was affected by both internal and external forces. However, students were the essential component in developing career adaptability. Despite the effect of their surroundings, what ultimately mattered was how students responded to their environment. Students in the Master's programme can access many materials and learning opportunities to grow and learn. However, progress and achievement would be impossible if students did not first recognise that they were the significant agents of change.

7.3.3 Mixed method discussion highlights

This study followed a sequential mixed method approach to give a holistic understanding of career adaptability change during a Master's year. The priority in this research is the qualitative part (discussed in section 4.4) since it investigates the lived experience of master's students in detail and tries to understand what factors might have impacted career adaptability.

This section highlights the questionnaire results in light of the qualitative results.

The quantitative part showed that students during the year showed different trends in career adaptability development. Some of them had an increase in career adaptability, and others showed a decrease or no change at all. The CSE measure could positively predict change in overall career adaptability, curiosity, and confidence. The qualitative explored the students' lived experience, focussing on the factors that impacted the positive change in career adaptability.

Although CSE is considered an adaptive trait and could predict change in career adaptability, not all students with high CSE had a positive change in CA. The questionnaire results showed that some students with high CSE had an adverse change in CA which implies that career adaptability resources depend not only on personal traits but also on what individuals do.

It can be noted that concern and control do not change in the same direction in most cases (See Appendix B). Almost all students with increased career adaptability have increased curiosity, but some have decreased concern, although their overall CA has increased. Of course, individuals still curious and exploring are not yet ready to make plans. At this stage of life, for master's, students' curiosity is needed, and students need to know more and explore themselves and their environment. The

qualitative results show that curiosity was influenced by self-knowledge, networking, friends, maturity and critical thinking. Students were curiously involved in different exploration actions and thinking, and these actions enhanced their curiosity. It goes in a circle.

In my research, curiosity related to students trying to explore themselves first, then the new environment, educational system, and culture and searching for opportunities. Long-term planning, especially during the pandemic, was complex. However, students showed dynamic behaviour, participated in many activities, and were eager to explore potential career options. Nevertheless, these activities were unplanned or looked only for short-term goals, which showed a decrease in the dimension concern in their questionnaire. This lack of planning has been highlighted in other research (e.g. Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Thompson et al., 2013). Lack of long-term planning in this context was not an indication of lower career adaptability (cf. Savickas, 2013). Since the pandemic began towards the end of the year (March 2020), students with high flexibility could modify their objectives and goals and concentrate on the immediate future, demonstrating their ability to adjust to changing circumstances. Another reason might be that students who secured a place in the job market before the end of the year were less inclined to use proactive behaviours and engage in planning activities (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Brown et al., 2021). Thus, this study highlights career concerns centred on flexibility optimistic planning, and decision-making based on an individual's needs and the context's status quo (Wehrle, Kira & Klehe, 2019).

Why career adaptability might decrease mainly for students starting the year with a high level of career adaptability

Individuals with higher initial values of career adaptability and CSE, as measures of agency and confidence, may lower their proactive professional actions over time since they are overconfident that their goals will be attained. Students who lacked flexibility focussed more on results and could not enjoy the journey had lower career adaptability by the end of the year, especially in confidence, control and concern (Spurk et al.,2020).

A rise in career adaptability (greater interest, concern, control, and confidence) implies strengthening one's psychosocial resources, which promotes goal clarity, perceived competencies, and desire to conduct job-related behaviours over time.(Guan et al., 2015, 2017; Rudolph et al., 2017). In contrast, a career actor who participates in proactive professional behaviours more often over time, e.g., proactive skill development (e.g., pursuing training opportunities), networking, career planning, and career exploration, should also demonstrate gains in career flexibility.

 Increases in proactive behaviours tend to cause adjustments within an individual's profession (environment) toward personal standards (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010) and typically tend to gather resources such as recognised competence or vitality (Cangiano, Parker, & Yeo, 2019). Guan et al. (2017) stated that engaging in activities that require one to be exploratory can help individuals enhance their sense of curiosity. We could only find a handful of empirical research that focused on the links between changes in career flexibility and proactive career behaviours. Overall, these empirical data suggest that a profession's flexibility and proactive career behaviours could grow in tandem over time (Spurk et al., 2020).

Some factors might lower the level of proactive behaviours, as findings showed that negative relationships with teachers or tutors might trigger anxiety, especially for students who showed proactive behaviours This is consistent with Cangiano et al. (2019) who found that proactive work behaviours lead to more job pressure under conditions of punitive supervision. High control and low autonomous motivation lead to anxiety and stress (Strauss et al., 2017). From this perspective, intermittent phases with decreased or not increased proactive career behaviours might not necessarily be detrimental to career development.

According to Spurk et al. (2020), a higher initial career adaptability level might lead to a decrease in proactive behaviours because of the optimistic effect. Individuals who feel they are in a good current position might tend to decrease their effort to achieve a goal since they feel that they are in a good position. For example, confidence in finding a job might impact job search behaviour negatively this is

what (Liu, Wang, Liao, & Shi, 2014) found when they studied the relationship between self-efficacy and job search behaviour in China

Distinguishing Between Prediction and Influence

Many studies in career development literature studied the association between adaptive traits and career adaptability and adapting responses. In this study, the adaptive trait CSE was used to measure the prediction of CA change. The qualitative study was conducted to understand what factors influence the CA positive change. Prediction and influence are not the same (Fabrigar et al., 2005). First, when a trait measure *predicts* some subsequent adaptability resource (i.e., the degree of association between a trait measure and a measure of subsequent behaviour). Second, a trait measure can refer to the degree to which a trait can influence or guide some CA resources (i.e., the extent to which an attitude exerts a causal influence on the performance of a behaviour). These two construals, though related, are not the same.

Variations in the extent to which an attitude or trait influences behaviour generally imply corresponding variations in the extent to which an attitude measure predicts that behaviour. However, variations in prediction do not necessarily imply corresponding variations in influence. Interestingly, although most discussions of moderators of consistency have used the term to refer to the magnitude of influence of an attitude on behaviour, few studies have included design features that permitted this construal to be differentiated from mere variations in prediction. Precisely, most adaptive-adaptability studies measure adaptive traits, and then adaptability resources are assessed later. Adaptive-adaptability consistency is evaluated by computing a measure of association (usually a correlation or regression coefficient) between the adaptive and the adaptability measures. Thus, at the operational level, adaptive-adaptability consistency is defined in most studies regarding prediction. That shows the importance of qualitative studies, where new ideas and factors can emerge from the lived experience—considering that the CAAS questionnaire was built relying on qualitative studies.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter will conclude the study by summing up the significant research results in connection to the research objectives and questions and discussing their significance and contribution. In addition, it will discuss the limits of the study and suggest possibilities for further research.

8.2 Overall findings in relation to the research aims

This study aimed to investigate how being a Master's student could influence career adaptability development. In order to give a holistic answer, a sequential mixed-method approach was conducted. First, the study examined if a Master's experience significantly changed career adaptability level and if CSE could predict positive change in career adaptability and its four dimensions. These were examined through a two time points quantitative study. Second, the lived experience of Master's students was explored in a qualitative study through a semi-structured interview to understand the personal behaviour and characteristics and the environmental factors that influenced a positive change in career adaptability resources.

The quantitative results revealed that career adaptability has changed during the Master's year. Some students had positive change, others had negative change, and the minority had no change. These differences between the students result in no significant change in career adaptability and its four dimensions for the whole group. CSE could predict change in overall career adaptability and change in curiosity and confidence dimensions. Out of the 16 Master's students whose lived experiences were studied, 12 emerged from the quantitative study as having positively increased career adaptability. For these individuals who reported an increase in carer adaptability, the qualitative study highlighted the impact of personal and environmental factors on this change. Personal factors highlighted the importance of a proactive mindset and proactive behaviour, which stems from self-management, like developing clear goals and putting in the effort, plans, and time to understand one's weaknesses and

strengths while working on achieving the goals. In addition to proactive behaviour, emotional and cognitive flexibility appeared to be essential in enhancing career adaptability. Such as focusing on the learning process itself, not only the results. Despite the challenges, students who could enjoy the experience and learn from negative and positive feedback could positively influence career adaptability to change.

Cognitive flexibility, acting with maturity, developing and learning critical thinking techniques and practising critical thinking started in modules and passed to all other aspects of life. For many students, the experience of a programme of study requiring the development and deployment of critical thinking was profound, particularly for students from overseas. Interview data revealed not only that students were aware of this change in thinking and learning approach but also that they were able to take it from the classroom environment and apply it to their lives more broadly.

In addition to personal factors, the interviews revealed the importance of a range of environmental factors focusing on how students interacted with the environment around them. The first factor was social support, specifically from family, parents, peers, friends and teachers. The second was how the experience supported building social capital primarily through professional networking. That, in turn, positively influenced career adaptability since it enhanced curiosity and confidence, as the students explained. These findings had a theoretical and practical contribution. The following sections will discuss contributions, research limitations, and suggestions for future research.

8.3 Importance and key contributions of the study

The study contributes to the literature on graduate students and the change in career adaptability. The linking of literature on graduate employability and career development theories (Healy, Hammer & McIlveen, 2022) demonstrates key contributions to the field. The study showed how PGT students could be more employable by enhancing career adaptability, which is considered an essential concept of career development literature. Through the perspective of CCT, this study has uncovered new findings that can be helpful for students, educators, and universities.

Quantitative studies dominate the literature on career development literature. Conducting qualitative research responding to the call in the career development literature contributed to the understanding and identification of the factors that influenced positive change in students' career adaptability dimensions through analysis of their stories. The students' lived experience analysis uncovered elements, such as critical thinking, maturity, and intrinsic motivation, that might positively support career adaptability, particularly in an educational setting these findings are part of the key contribution of this study.

This study focused on career adaptability change, given the scarcity of prior research into career adaptability changes, this research makes an important contribution to the field by highlighting the factors that influence a positive change in career adaptability.

The theme of critical thinking and the challenge of developing it was prevalent in the findings, particularly amongst international students, for whom it had a more transformational effect. Practising critical thinking and its impact on career adaptability was not studied before, which made this finding an important contribution to the field. Knowing that the career adaptability scale was developed in the Western context can explain why the notion of critical thinking was overlooked. Although the career adaptability scale has proved its applicability and reliability in more than 13 countries worldwide, there are still cultural and educational differences that might influence individuals to think and interact differently. International students introduced to critical thinking practices and techniques explained how this new way of thinking has impacted how they see themselves and the world around them. Practising critical thinking enhanced their curiosity and confidence, increasing their career adaptability.

This research explored individual and contextual factors influencing positive change in career adaptability resources during the Master's years. It showed the importance of social support, especially from family, peers and teachers. Moreover, the importance of building social capital through networking. Therefore, students are encouraged to seek opportunities to develop their social

capital (Hezlett & Gibson, 2007; Hirschi, 2012). Many environmental factors can influence career adaptability development, especially in the context of education, campus, and academic atmosphere. Different campus climate influences on social support still need to be investigated.

Rather than rely on a cross-sectional survey which could lead to the results being potentially limited to causal inference, this study collected data in two different points of time. This approach helped in investigating predictors of change in career adaptability and its four dimensions (concern, control, curiosity and confidence)

In addition to the above-mentioned key contributions, this study shows that proactive, adaptive behaviour can positively change career adaptability resources. Before Spurk et al. (2020), there was not enough work on proactive behaviour and its impact on career adaptability resources. Psychosocial career qualities are associated with individuals' abilities to engage in career behaviours (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2018). All traits associated positively with career adaptability denote individual readiness to engage in proactive behaviour. That means what really creates the difference is the behaviour itself.

These contributions can be divided into theoretical and practical contributions and implications that are discussed next.

8.3.1 Theoretical contributions and implication.

On a theoretical level, three observations can be made. First, career research has largely overlooked active career management behaviours aiming at increasing personal control. The present study showed that students' active career self-management behaviours are a core variable for career adaptability development, and it should be strongly considered as a predictor in further studies.

Moreover, the results indicate an alternate perspective on the dimension of concern (cf. Savickas, 2013). While career construction theory implies that setting short-term objectives demonstrates a lack of concern, our data imply that when confronted with uncertainty and feeling compelled to find a job soon, many students focus their planning toward the short term to get a foothold. Even though actual planning was frequently complicated, they exhibited an enormous concern for the future. Thus,

this research highlights career concerns centred around optimistic planning, future anxiety, and making decisions based on one's requirements and the context's present possibilities (Wehrle, Kira & Klehe, 2019).

Although emotion can be found implicitly in the career adaptability construct this research points to the need to integrate adaptive emotional reactions into career adaptability dimensions, given that several Master's students regulated their emotions to adapt successfully during the Master's year (Wehrle, Kira & Klehe, 2019).

8.3.2 Practical contributions and implications

To help students during their studies, many things can be done or applied in real life by universities, and career counsellors.

Role of university

Given the emphasis placed by HBS and other universities upon student employability, it would be beneficial for PGT programmes to include references to career adaptability and how it might be developed. Such provision could focus on generic strategies to help engage individuals in self-improvement activities towards optimal adaptation (Betz, 1994) upon entry to the job market

For universities, the first element might be to provide professional and employability learning opportunities within the curriculum that enhance students' networking abilities (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019) and career planning that supports selecting practical extracurricular activities. Integrating career self-management skills in the curriculum, created in partnership with career development practitioners and academics, is a crucial element of effective employability methods (Bridgstock, 2009; Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Brown et al., 2019).

Second, universities may cocreate employment strategies and support systems with students. "Student collaboration" initiatives allow students to work with university professionals to create or enhance programmes (Dollinger & Lodge, 2020). Partnership and cooperation opportunities may continue to be offered by universities. This is a means for students to improve institutionally

controlled programmes and services and to get valuable work or volunteer experience. This can be an excellent chance to be included on their resumes, especially for students with no work experience (Taylor & Govender, 2017). In addition, to further understand the demands of the industries in hiring new graduates, consultations and discussions with the industrial sector should be arranged to ensure both parties are aware of the requisite skills and attributes that graduates should possess to become employable in the job market.

University personnel can assist students in identifying associations or networks pertinent to their professional growth and urge them to participate. In addition, they can train students to improve their social and networking abilities to obtain the benefits of these social interactions. Institutions of higher education might assist their students in developing their social capital through a variety of activities, but the students themselves should not be passive receivers. They must be proactive in their pursuit of social capital, which demands an investment of time and effort on the students' end that is based on the foundation of trust and reciprocity (Villar & Albertin, 2010; Sou, Yuen & Chen, 2022).

Counselling Implications

Based on career construction theory propositions, empirical findings are crucial because they serve as a foundation for career development practice. They also inform professional career counsellors about how to assist clients in making vocational decisions and constructing successful and satisfying work lives (Zacher et al., 2019). The outcomes of this study show that career counsellors assisting college students with career-related concerns may need to address the students' peer connections. Consequently, if the student has a more stable relationship with peers, they may be able to establish a good feeling about CA. Despite the possibility of cultural variations in the expression and experience of close relationships, counsellors who deal with college students might reflect on the meaning of stable peer connections in order to determine each student's unique individual and cultural definition

of stable peer relationships. Incorporating personal–emotional treatments should be encouraged among career counsellors (Schultheiss, 2003; Shin & Lee, 2017).

8.4 Limitations of the study

In this section, we identify the study limitations to frame the obtained results accurately and inform further research in the field.

Participants

The selected respondents in this study were graduates from only one university. Future research may include other universities for comparison. In addition, a different technique of analysis with different sets of instruments could be used.

The quantitative research used a convenience (not probability) sample. However, as Highhouse and Gillespie (2008) indicate, using random samples does not present a significant threat to the study's validity in many cases. However, it does limit the generalisation of the results (Hirschi, 2009). Furthermore, although the present study used a convenience sample, it does represent the characteristics of Master's students at Henley Business School and includes students from different disciplines. There might also be some selection bias for the qualitative study since only the students who filled out the questionnaire at Time1 and Time2 were invited to participate in the interview.

The interviews were done online because of the pandemic situation, which limited genuine contact involving body language and different reactions, which would have enhanced the experience and the analysis.

The qualitative sample may be biased because of the over-inclusion of students who are more self-regulated, motivated, and open to sharing their experiences. All the students who were interviewed had a relatively medium-high to high career adaptability score at the beginning of the year. At one point, this made the comparison between them more manageable. However, at the

other point, It was not known how students who started the year with low career adaptability scores would react and how their career adaptability scores would change.

Sample size

A first consideration relates to the sample used in this study, which was impacted by Covid lockdowns. The sample size was relatively small for the quantitative element, which might impact the results significantly and cause a type II error where the null hypothesis might be incorrectly accepted. In fact, before conducting the data collection using G power, it was shown that 54 participants were enough to have significant results with an effect size of .5. Nevertheless, a larger sample size would be needed for smaller values to detect any significant changes in the group. The sample loss between Time 1 and 2 is provided from one university context. Further research should attempt to increase sample variance by enlarging the sample size and increasing the diversity of university contexts.

For the qualitative part, more students could have been interviewed to reach saturation points. Despite that, for this study, sixteen in-depth interviews were enough to give a clear and rich insight into the lived experience of the students.

Methodological Limitations time constraints

Inevitably, there are some difficulties and constraints associated with mixed-methods design. Mixed method research requires more time for data collection and analysis since data were collected on three occasions. In addition, since it was a sequential mixed-method design, data could not be collected simultaneously. The qualitative sample depended on the results from the quantitative sample.

Students normally finish their Master's programme by September each year. The second set of measurements was taken before the end of the Master's between May and July. The researcher wanted to contact the students before they left and lost their connection with the university. Although there was enough time to detect any changes in career adaptability between Time 1 and

Time 2 could be considered as a limitation of the study.

A third wave of data collection could add more clarity to understanding the trend of changes. However, that was not possible because of the time limitations for a PhD. Even with two waves of data collection, it took a long time for the data to be collected and analysed. Despite that, having around 6-8 months between the first and the second time of data collection was enough to track any changes.

Self-reporting questionnaire

The research report is a self-reporting act, which limits the validity of the research because the methodological variance in all constructs is assessed. The report itself allows biased results (Urbanaviciute et al., 2016).

The quantitative component consists only of participant self-reports. The increased relationship between variables due to standard method variation may have been induced by self-reporting.(Podsakoff et al., 2003). Despite this limitation, self-reporting has been widely used in studies on career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The confidential nature of career development itself is a justification for relying on self-reported data. Furthermore, only students have direct access to psychological factors such as career adaptability resources or CSE, making them the most acceptable source of knowledge about these inner states. In addition, there is often no adequate outside observer available for active career self-management behaviours or organisation responsiveness. Kazdin (1974) observed that self-reported data offers more comprehensive data than external observers owing to the variety of target behaviours only known to oneself. Self-reported data must be interpreted cautiously (Godat & Brigham, 1999).

8.5 Recommendations for future research

Future research can do a follow-up qualitative and quantitative data collection to investigate the changes six months after graduation. Also, qualitative and quantitative research is required to

determine whether this study's findings are generalisable to university students in other institutions and countries. Other research has shown that adaptability and adapting develop together over time (Spurk et al., 2020).

Because our participants were only from one university from the business field, the generalizability of the findings to other regional and cultural groups and other fields outside of the business context is limited. Cultural contexts provide different demands and opportunities to develop and express CA (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Thus, future research could attempt to apply the findings to other cultural contexts and disciplines and study the lived experience of Master's students in other universities and countries.

A limitation of this study is that there was a lack of representation of students with low levels of career adaptability, which could have informed how these students approach engagement in career adaptive behaviours. Future research could also interview students who started the year with low career adaptability.

Critical thinking, one of the personal factors that led to higher career adaptability, is not associated with career adaptability in career development literature. It is recommended that future research be conducted to seek to quantitatively study the connection between critical thinking skills and career adaptability. It would be helpful to investigate how critical thinking would enhance career adaptability and how educational systems could be changed or developed to meet the current needs of the world of work. This is more prominent in non-western countries like China, where career adaptability is widely used and investigated in their educational context. There is always a focus on extracurricular activities and how that might impact career adaptability, and not enough focus on the educational system and how that might impact career adaptability development for young adults

More attention should also be given to emotional regulation factors and their impact on career adaptability since emotion regulation appeared to influence in increasing career adaptability in this

research. More empirical research should focus on studying change in career adaptability and focus on personal and contextual factors in different contexts.

More research must focus on investigating Master's students' experiences, PGT employability and career adaptability. The researchers should, especially international students, try to understand the challenges they face during their Master's year in the UK.

Some students showed a positive change in CA while others experienced negative change. Therefore, future research can focus on changes within a person, intra-individual analysis, instead of focusing on the general level. intra-individual analysis can help researchers understand how career adaptability changes within individuals over time and identify the factors that contribute to these changes. researchers would collect repeated measures of career adaptability from the same individuals at multiple time points. For example, a researcher might collect data on career adaptability at the beginning and end of a Master's program, and at various points in between. By comparing the career adaptability scores of each individual across time, the researcher can identify patterns of change and stability in career adaptability.

8.6 Summary

This chapter aims to give an overview and present the conclusions of this study. The chapter started with a discussion of overall findings in relation to the research aims, where a summary of the findings that answered the research question was discussed. Then, the importance and contribution of the study theoretically and empirically were discussed. After that, the quantitative and qualitative parts were explored. The last part of this chapter discussed suggestions and recommendations for future research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics approval form

![Henley Business School - University of Reading logo]

Henley Business School

Research Ethics Committee

Application for Research Project Approval

Introduction

The University Research Ethics Committee allows Schools to operate their own ethical procedures within guidelines laid down by the Committee. The University Research Ethics Committee policies are explained in their Notes for Guidance (http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/res/ResearchEthics/reas-REethicshomepage.aspx) . Henley Business School (HBS) has its own Research Ethics Committee and can approve project proposals under the exceptions procedure outlined in the Notes for Guidance. Also note that various professional codes of conduct offer guidance even where investigations do not fall within the definition of research (eg Chartered Institute of Marketing, Market Research Society etc). A diagram of the Research Ethics process is appended to this form.

Guidelines for Completion

- If you believe that your project is suitable for approval by the Research Ethics Committee you should complete this form and return it to the Chair of the Committee. Note that ethical issues may arise even if the data is in the public domain and/or it refers to deceased persons.

- Committee approval must be obtained before the research project commences.

- There is an obligation on all students and academic staff to observe ethical procedures and practice and actively bring to the attention of the Research Ethics Committee any concerns or questions of clarification they may have.

- Records will be maintained and progress monitored as required by the University Research Ethics Committee, overseen by the School Ethics Committee

- This form should be completed by the student/member of academic staff as appropriate. All forms must be signed by a member of the academic staff before submission.

- This form is designed to conform to the University's requirements with respect to research ethics. Approval under this procedure does not necessarily confirm the academic validity of the proposed project.

- All five parts of the form and all questions must be completed. Incomplete forms will be returned. Students should submit forms to their supervisor, who together with staff should pass these to the REC.

- Student research projects - initial approval may be given by the academic supervisor. At the completion of the project students should submit a further copy of the form to confirm that the research was conducted in the approved manner. The project will not be marked until this form is received. If in the course of work the nature of the project changes advice should be sought from the academic supervisor.

1. Project details

Date of submission: 04/10/2019   Student No.

Title of Proposed Project:- Exploring the extent to which a course of postgraduate study is experienced as a career choice.

Responsible Persons

Name & email address of student

Sahar Barghouthi. s.a.o.barghouthi@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Name and email address of supervisor

Dr. Liz Houldsworth   liz.houldsworth@henley.ac.uk

Dr. Tatiana Rowson   t.rowson@henley.ac.uk

Nature of Project (mark with a 'x' as appropriate)

Staff research	☐	Masters	☐
Undergraduate	☐	Doctoral	☒
MBA	☐	Other	☐

(Student research projects should be signed off in **section 2. 3** below by the supervisor)
(Staff research projects should be signed off in **section 2. 4** below by the Research Ethics Committee)

Brief Summary of Proposed Project and Research Methods

University students need to be concerned with career development and to be actively engaged in career preparation in order to successfully address the challenge of transitioning from university to work (Hirschi & Herrmann, 2013). Career adaptability is considered one of the main indications of career development (Savickas, 2012; Bimrose, 2015).

Environmental factors in addition to various individual characteristics and demographic play a role in the development or enhancement of adaptability resources and responses. Individuals can show different levels of career adaptability depending on the situation (Tian & Fan, 2014; Guan, Wang, et al., 2015).

Longitudinal research, with multiple measurement points would be particularly valuable in contributing to understanding the development trends of career adaptability, as well as identifying if career adaptability consists of traits and stat components. Research with different time frames would also help to determine if all career adaptability resources or responses increases or decreases in a unified manner.

This study examines the change of career adaptability resources and responses over time, the different variables that might impact career adaptability level and the effect of career adaptability in the educational context. The questions would be:

- Do the adaptability resources and adapting responses level change over the master's year? How are they related? Are their quantitatively distinct profiles of career adaptability level for the students?
- How do the students perceive the impact of the context, situations and events during the master's year on their career adaptability level development? What are the factors that lead to higher or lower adaptability level in this context?

This study will be conducted at Henley business school within Business and Management postgraduate programmes. An explanatory sequential mixed method approach will be used, which involves mainly of two-phase of data collection. Quantitative data will be collected in the first phase using two measurement points (At the beginning and the end of the academic year). After analysing the quantitative results, these results will be used to plan the qualitative phase of data collection. The quantitative results typically inform the types of participants to be purposefully selected for the qualitative phase and the type of questions that will be asked to the participants. The intent of this data collection design is to have a qualitative data that help explain in more details the quantitative results. Semi structured interviews will be used in this phase.

3. Please reply to **all** of the following questions concerning your proposed research project and whether it involves:-

		Yes	No
1.	Are the participants and subjects of the study patients and clients of the NHS or social services to the best of your knowledge?	☐	☒
2.	Are the participants and subjects of the study subject to the Mental Capacity Act 2005 to the best of your knowledge (and therefore unable to give free and informed consent)?	☐	☒
3.	Are you asking questions that are likely to be considered impertinent or to cause distress to any of the participants?	☐	☒
4.	Are any of the subjects in a special relationship with the researcher?	☐	☒
5.	Is your project funded by a Research Council or other external source (excluding research conducted by postgraduate students)?	☐	☒

If you have answered **YES** to **any** of these questions, refer to the University's Research Ethics Committee. If you are unsure about whether any of these conditions apply, please contact the secretary of the University Research Ethics Committee, Nathan Helsby (n.c.helsby@reading.ac.uk) for further advice.

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4. Please respond to **all** the following questions concerning your proposed research project

		Yes	No
1.	The research involves archival research, access of company documents/records, access of publicly available data, questionnaires, surveys, focus groups and/or other interview techniques.	☒	☐
2.	Arrangements for expenses and other payments to participants, if any, have been considered.	☒	☐
3.	Participants will be/have been advised that they may withdraw at any stage if they so wish.	☒	☐
4.	Issues of confidentiality and arrangements for the storage and security of material during and after the project and for the disposal of material have been considered.	☒	☐
5.	Arrangements for providing subjects with research results if they wish to have them have been considered.	☒	☐
6.	The arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent of this have been considered.	☒	☐
7.	Information Sheets and Consent Forms had been prepared in line with University guidelines for distribution to participants.	☒	☐
8.	Arrangements for the completed consent forms to be retained upon completion of the project have been made.	☒	☐

If you have answered **NO** to **any** of these questions, contact your supervisor if applicable, staff members should refer to the Research Ethics Committee.

If the research is to be conducted outside of an office environment or normal place of work and/or outside normal working hours please note the details below and comment on how the personal safety and security of the researcher(s) has been safeguarded.

☒ I confirm that where appropriate a consent form has been prepared and will be made available to all participants. This contains details of the project, contact details for the principal researcher and advises subjects that their privacy will be protected and that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time without reason.

☒ I confirm that research instruments (questionnaires, interview guides, etc) have been reviewed against the policies and criteria noted in The University Research Ethics Committee Notes for Guidance. Information obtained will be safeguarded and personal privacy and commercial confidentiality will be strictly observed.

☒ I confirm that where appropriate a copy of the **Consent Form** and details of the **Research Instruments/Protocols** are attached and submitted with this application.

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2. Research Ethics Committee Decision (*delete as appropriate*)

2.1 I have reviewed this application as **APPROVED** and confirm that it is consistent with the requirements of the University Research Ethics Committee procedures

2.2 This proposal is **NOT APPROVED** and is returned to the applicant for further consideration and/or submission to the University Research Ethics Committee

2. 3. For student and programme member projects
SUPERVISOR – AT START OF PROJECT　　　　　　　*STUDENT – ON COMPLETION OF PROJECT*

Signed (Supervisor)　　　　　　　　　　Signed (programme member or student)
& Print Name　　　　　　　　　　　　& Print Name
(*before start of project*)　　　　　　　　(*on completion of project*)

2. 4. For staff research projects

Signed:　　　　　　　　　　Professor Andrew Godley
　　　　　　　　　　　　　Associate Dean, International　　　　**0 9 OCT 2019**
　　　　　　　　　　　　　Head of Leadership, Organisations and Behaviour

(Research Ethics Committee Chair or member)

COMMENTS (where application has been refused)

If these questions cannot be confirmed please contact your supervisor.

Please confirm that at the conclusion of the project primary data will be :-

Destroyed   ☒   Submitted to the Research Ethics Committee ☐

Comments

Appendix B: Change in career adaptability and its dimensions

Table B1

Participants' career adaptability detailed change

	Concern	Control	Curiosity	Confidence	CA	CSE
Carlos	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	5.15
Sofia	Inc		Inc	Inc	Inc	5.67
Mingli	Inc	Inc	Same	Inc	Inc	3.17
Numa	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	3.25
Jessica	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	5
Sorina	Inc	Inc	Dec	Same highest	Inc	4.08
Daniel	Dec	Dec	Inc	Inc	Inc	3.92
Dorra	Same	Dec	Same	Inc	Inc	3.17
Bingwen	Dec	Same	Inc	Inc	Inc	4.67
Chun	Dec	Same	Inc	Inc	Inc	4
Peng	Inc	Dec	Inc	Dec	Inc	3.5
Kayin	Same highest	Same	Inc	Dec	Inc	5.75
Charlette	Dec	Dec		Dec	Dec	4.42
Roja	Dec	Dec	Same	Same	Dec	3.5
Olympia		Same	Dec	Dec	Dec	4.25
Adriana	Dec	Inc	Dec	Inc	Dec	6

Appendix C: Questionnaire

The questionnaires with information and consent sheet for the quantitative study

This research contributes to the attainment of a PhD degree in the department of leadership, organisations and behaviour in Henley business school at the University of Reading.
This research project aims to find out the taught postgraduates' perception of their career and personal development during the Master's year by focusing on their career adaptability. We are interested in exploring and understanding the students' experience during this year and how this year prepares them for the world of work from their point of view.

To undertake this research, we are currently contacting postgraduate students at Henley business school. You have been selected as a participant since you are a postgraduate student in one of the MSc Business and Management programmes at Henley business school. We would be very grateful if you would agree to take part of this study. You will need to complete a series of questions which will take you less than 7 minutes.

The questionnaires include the career adaptability scale CAAS and core self-evaluations scale CSE. Data collection will be administered at the start and near the end of the Master's year. Namely in October/November 2019 and again in April/May 2020.

The project has been subject to ethical review in accordance with the procedures specified by the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee. It has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Sahar Barghouthi on: s.a.o.barghouthi@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Thank you very much for taking time to take part in this survey!
Sahar Barghouthi
Henley Business School

Confidentiality of the Data
Your responses will be treated as confidential. However, for us to collate the data from the different questionnaires in different measurement points, you will need to provide *your name* and *UoR email address* so we can match the responses before anonymising the data set. Your identity will NOT be revealed to anyone other than the researcher conducting this survey. Your responses will generate an anonymised version of the data that will be used for research purposes only. Your data will be kept safe and password protected and will not be shared with external parties. This research complies with GDPR regulations.
Any published results will not contain any identifying information related to you.
Once this project is completed the data collected will be destroyed.
Disclaimer
You are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw at any time during the research study. You may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

PARTICIPANTS CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

I have read the information about this research study I have been asked to participate in. I understand the purpose of the research study and what is being proposed. The procedures that I will be involved in are clear to me. I understand that my involvement in this study and the data from this research will remain strictly confidential. I understand that only the researcher involved in the study will have access to my data. It is clear to me what will happen to the data once the study has been completed. I hereby fully and freely consent to participate in this study which has been fully explained to me. I confirm I am over 18 years old and I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Please choose:

○ Yes, I consent

○ No, I do not consent

Q1.1 Your University of Reading email address:

_____

Q1.3 Gender

○ Male

○ Female

Q1.4 Your age

_____

Q1.5 Do you have any work experience?

○ Yes

○ No

Q1.6 If Yes, how many years of work experience do you have?

_____

Q1.7 Your home country.

_____

Q1.8 MSc programme you are enrolled in

○ MSc Marketing

○ MSc International Human Resource Management

○ MSc Entrepreneurship

○ MSc Management (International Business)

○ MSc Management (International Business and Finance)

○ MSc Management

Q2 Career adaptability.
Different people use different strengths to build their careers. No one is good at everything.
Each of us emphasises some strengths more than others. Using the scale next to the
question text, how strongly have you developed each of the following abilities:

	Strongest	Very Strong	Strong	Somewhat strong	Not Strong at All
1.Thinking about what my future will be like.	○	○	○	○	○
2. Realising that today's choices shape my future.	○	○	○	○	○
3.Preparing for the future.	○	○	○	○	○
4.Becoming aware of the educational and vocational choices that I must make.	○	○	○	○	○
5.Planning how to achieve my goals.	○	○	○	○	○
6.Concerned about my career.	○	○	○	○	○
7. Keeping optimistic	○	○	○	○	○
8.Making decisions by myself.	○	○	○	○	○
9.Taking responsibility for my actions.	○	○	○	○	○
10.Sticking up for my beliefs.	○	○	○	○	○
11.Counting on myself.	○	○	○	○	○
12.Doing what's right for me.	○	○	○	○	○
13.Exploring my surroundings.	○	○	○	○	○
14.Looking for opportunities to grow as a person.	○	○	○	○	○

15. Investigating options before making a choice.	○	○	○	○	○
16. Observing different ways of doing things.	○	○	○	○	○
17. Probing deeply into questions I have.	○	○	○	○	○
18. Becoming curious about new opportunities.	○	○	○	○	○
19. Performing tasks efficiently.	○	○	○	○	○
20. Taking care to do things well.	○	○	○	○	○
21. Learning new skills.	○	○	○	○	○
22. Working up to my ability.	○	○	○	○	○
23. Overcoming obstacles.	○	○	○	○	○
24. Solving problems.	○	○	○	○	○

Q3 The Core Self Evaluations Scale (CSES)
Below are several statements about you with which you may agree or disagree. Using the response scale below, indicate to what extend you agree or disagree with each of the statements below by clicking on

	Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Completely Disagree
1.I am confident I get the success I deserve in life	○	○	○	○	○	○
2.Sometimes I feel depressed (r)	○	○	○	○	○	○
3.When I try, I generally succeed	○	○	○	○	○	○
4.Sometimes when I fail, I feel worthless (r)	○	○	○	○	○	○
5.I complete tasks successfully	○	○	○	○	○	○
6.Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work (r)	○	○	○	○	○	○
7.Overall, I am satisfied with myself	○	○	○	○	○	○
8.I am filled with doubts about my competence (r)	○	○	○	○	○	○
9.I determine what will happen in my life	○	○	○	○	○	○
10.I do not feel in control of my success in my career (r)	○	○	○	○	○	○
11.I am capable of coping with most of my problems	○	○	○	○	○	○
12.There are times when things look bleak and hopeless to me (r)	○	○	○	○	○	○

one of the six choices

The End.

Thank you for taking part in the questionnaire

Appendix D: Participant's information sheet and consent form for the qualitative study

Project name: A mixed methods investigation of Master's students' year in the UK: career adaptability and lived experience

I am a PhD student at the University of Reading. This research contributes to the attainment of a PhD degree in the department of leadership, organisations and behaviour in Henley business school at the University of Reading.

This research project aims to explore taught postgraduates' perceptions of their career and personal development during the Master's year by focusing on their career adaptability. We are interested in exploring and understanding the students' perceptions of how the year prepares them for the world of work.

To undertake this research, I am contacting postgraduate students at Henley business school. I would like to invite you to participate in an in-depth interview which will take approximately an hour of your time. You have been selected as a participant since you are a postgraduate student in one of the MSc Business and Management programmes at Henley business school. You have previously filled out the career adaptability questionnaire. The interview is a follow-up opportunity for me to find out more details about your experience this year. The interview will take place online via zoom, and you are encouraged to express your opinions and thoughts freely. Please be assured that your views are valued and that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions asked. The interview will be recorded to allow for transcription. See below for more details in terms of how data will be handled. The project has been subject to ethical review in accordance with the procedures specified by the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to get in touch with on: s.a.o.barghouthi@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Sahar Barghouthi

Henley Business School

Whiteknights Road

Reading RG6 6AR

United Kingdom

Confidentiality of the Data

Your responses will be treated as confidential. Your identity will not be revealed to anyone other than the researcher conducting the interview. Your responses will generate an anonymised version of the data that will be used for research purposes only. Your data will be kept safe and password

protected and will not be shared with external parties. This research complies with GDPR regulations.

The interview will be audio or video recorded if you agree, and the anonymised transcripts of the audio/video recordings will be used by the researcher working on the project. Once transcribed, the original recording will be deleted. Your anonymity will not be compromised, as only a reference number will be used to identify the transcript.

Any published results will not contain any identifying information related to you.

Once this project is completed, the data collected will be destroyed.

Disclaimer

You are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw at any time during the research study. You may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

 PARTICIPANTS CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

I have read the information about this research study and have been asked to participate. I understand the purpose of the research study and what is being proposed. The procedures that I will be involved in are clear to me. I understand that my involvement in this study, and the data from this research will remain strictly confidential. I understand that only the researcher involved in the study will have access to my data. It is clear to me what will happen to the data once the study has been completed. I hereby fully and freely consent to participate in this study which has been fully explained to me. I confirm I am over 18 years old, and I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

By participating in this interview, you acknowledge that you understand the terms and conditions of participation in this study and that you consent to these terms.

Name: …………………………………………………

Signed: ………………………….…………………………………

Date: …………………………………………………….…………

Appendix E: Interviews suggested schedule

1. Could you please tell me about how you came to join the university?
   (Prompt: Can you tell me about what you did before? How did you arrive at your decision?)
2. What did you expect the university / new environment/ new country/ new culture… to be like?
   (Prompt: What was the source of those expectations? (e.g. previous similar experiences? Family, friends? Media?)
3. Could you please me about the work/activities you do as a student?
   (Prompt: What sort of things are involved? Describe a typical day?)
4. Could you tell me about your weekends/holidays/ no lectures or study time since you came here? (Prompt: whom do you socialise with, and what kinds of things do you do?)
5. How do your family feel about you studying Master's (abroad)?
6. How do you feel about studying Master's (abroad)?
7. Could you tell me about your best experience so far?
8. Could you tell me about your worst experience so far?
   (Prompt: How do you feel after a bad day?)
9. What would be for you a positive career development?
   (Prompt: which career resources should I improve or gain? Which personal resources? How can your situation improve? Can you imagine what it would feel like?)
10. How would you describe yourself as a person?
    (Prompt: How do you feel about yourself)
11. What are your plans for this year and the future?

Appendix F: Statistical Tests Assumptions

- **Paired sample t-test assumption**

Normality of differences

|	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk (Sig.)	Kolmogorov-Smirnov (Sig.)
CA difference	-.08	.21	.38	.2
Concern difference	-.44	-.40	.52	.45
Control difference	-.08	.06	.64	.2
Curiosity difference	.12	-.37	.33	.09
Confidence difference	-.08	.06	.22	.052

Normality, linearity

These all refer to various aspects of the distribution of scores and the nature of the underlying relationship between the variables. These assumptions can be checked from Histograms and normal Q-Q plots. The graphs in the following pages are for CA difference, concern difference, control difference, curiosity difference and confidence difference. (Difference between Time 1 and Time 2).

Histogram

Normal Q-Q Plot of Career adaptability_Difference

Histogram

Normal Q-Q Plot of Concern_Diff

Histogram

Normal Q-Q Plot of Control_Diff

Histogram

Normal Q-Q Plot of Curiosity_Diff

Histogram

Mean = -.05
Std. Dev. = .682
N = 64

Normal Q-Q Plot of Confidence_Diff

Control_Diff

Concern_Diff

Career adaptability_Difference

253
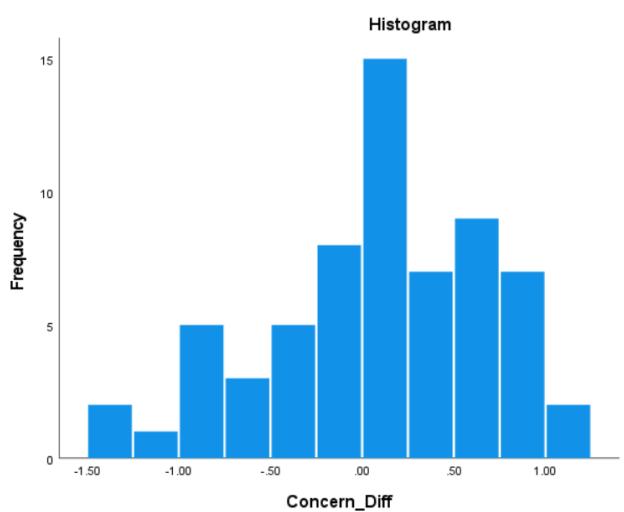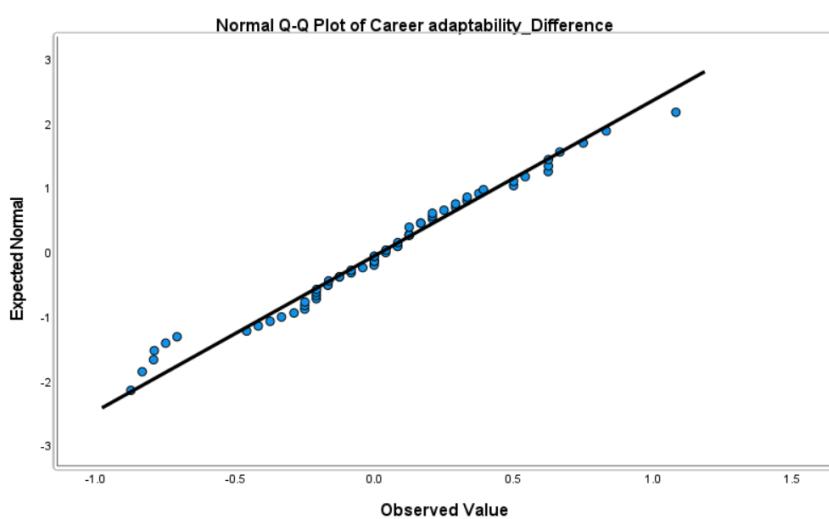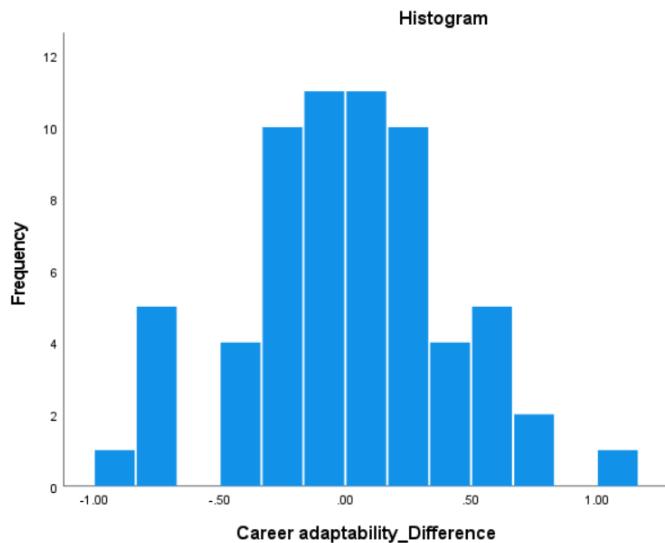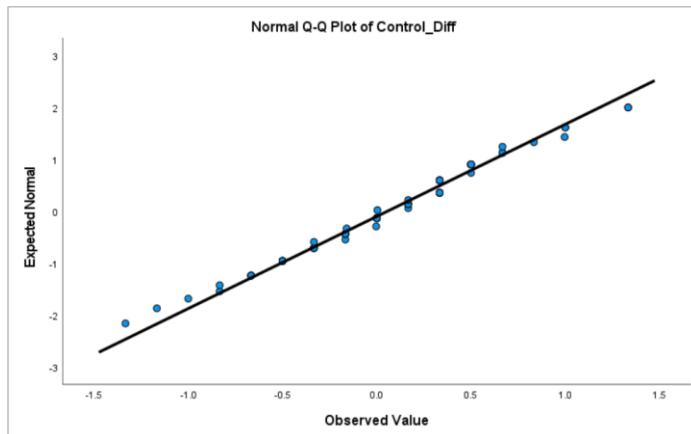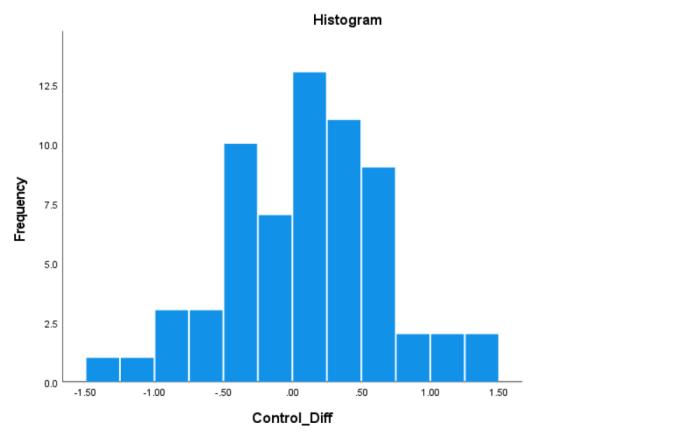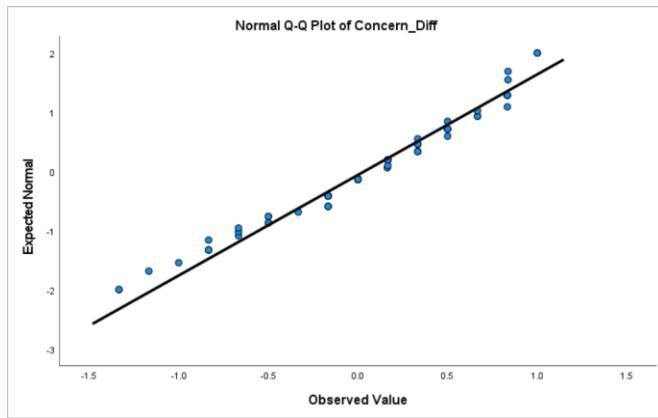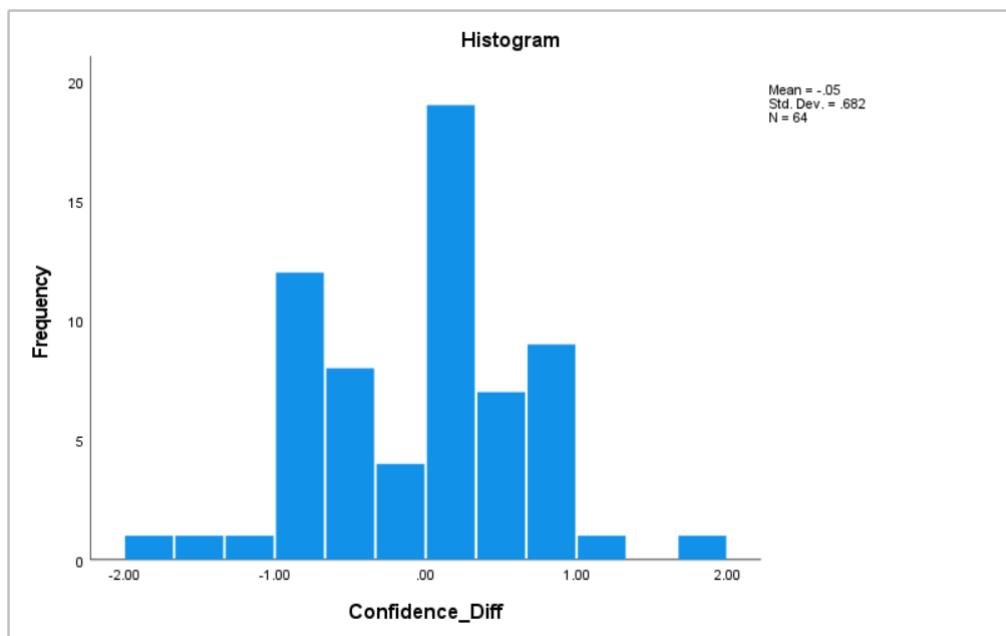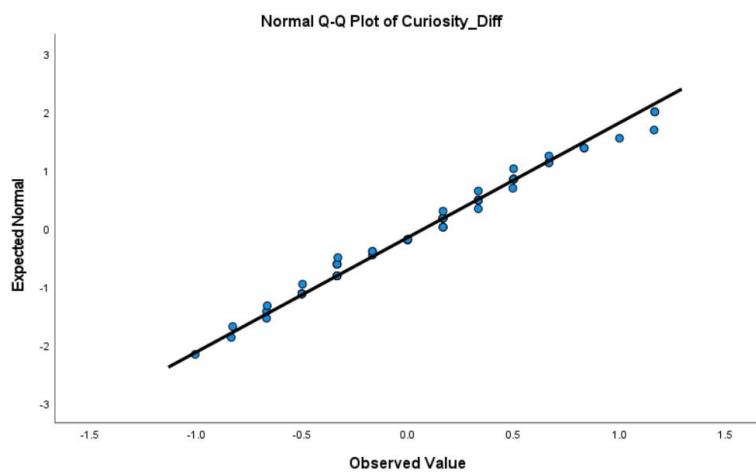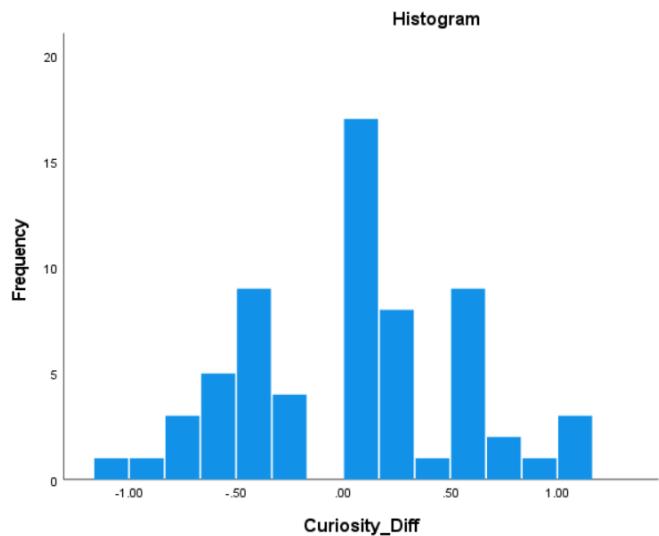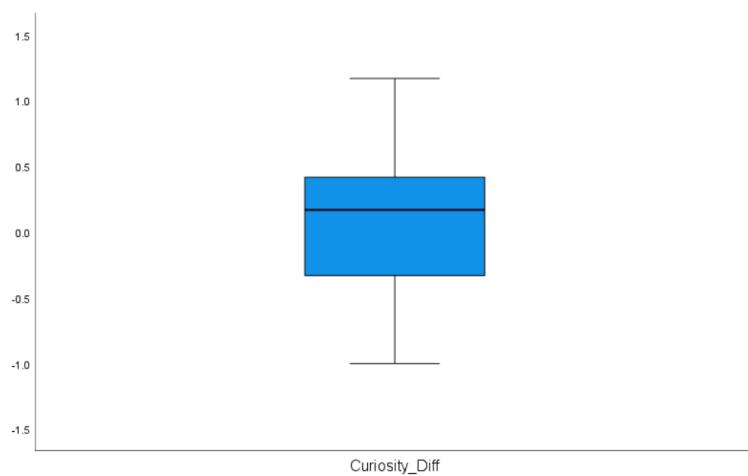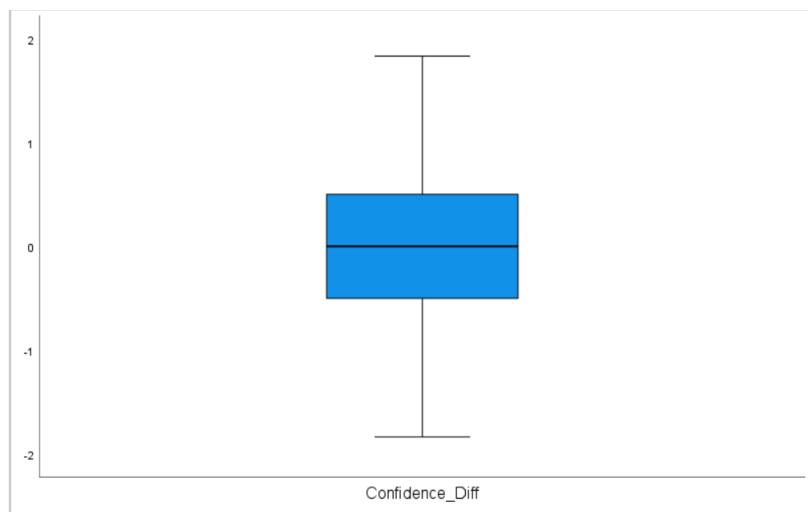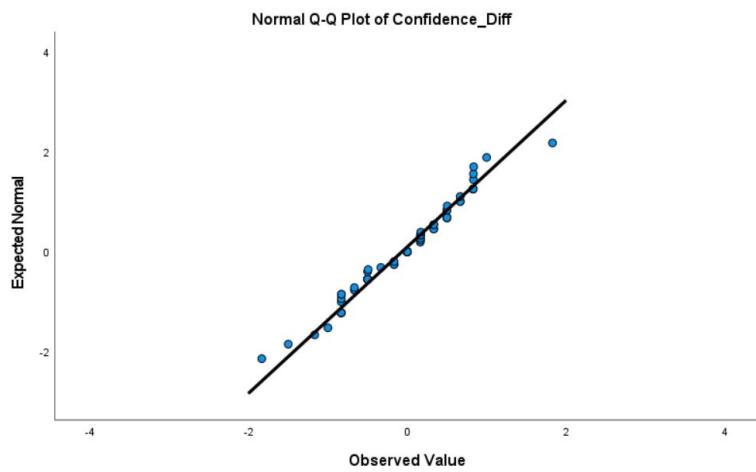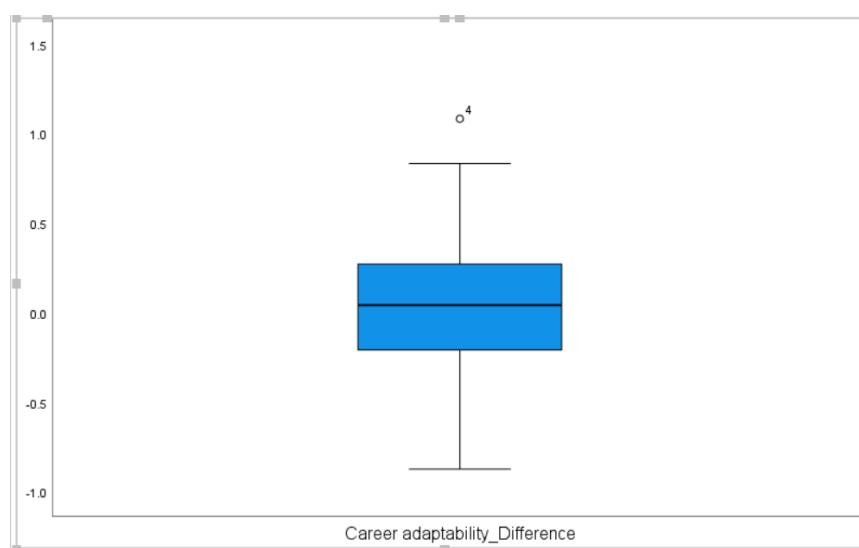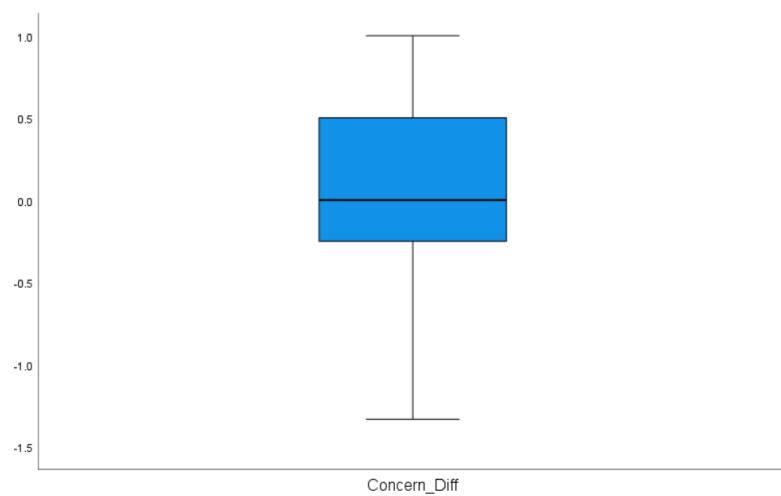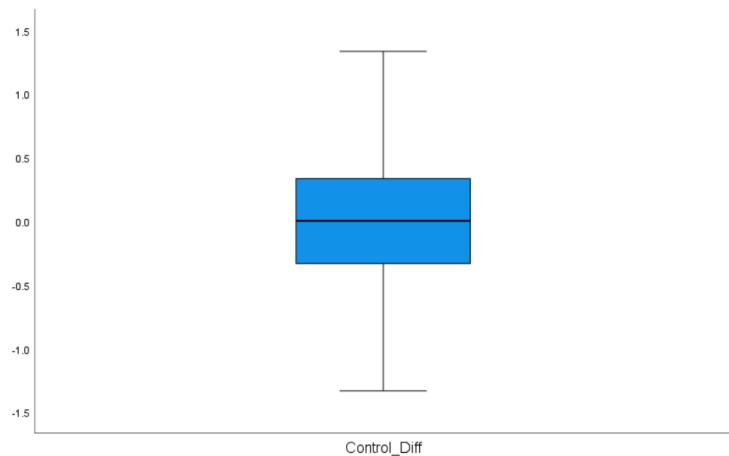
- **Assumptions for multiple regression analysis**

Dependent variable normality

	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk (Sig.)	Kolmogorov-Smirnov (Sig.)
Career adaptability 2	-.06	-.63	.30	.2
Concern 2	.03	-.48	.30	.
Control 2	-.36	-.55	.06	.2
Curiosity 2	-.11	-.70	.26	.09
Confidence 2	-.06	-.83	.06	.052

**Normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, Independence of residuals.**

These all refer to various aspects of the distribution of scores and the nature of the underlying relationship between the variables. These assumptions can be checked from the residual scatterplots which are generated as part of the multiple regression procedure. Residuals are the differences between the obtained and the predicted dependent variable scores.


Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: CA2_2

Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: CA2_2

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: CA_Concern2

Scatterplot

Dependent Variable: CA_Concern2

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Dependent Variable: CA_Control2

Scatterplot

Dependent Variable: CA_Control2

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Dependent Variable: CA_Curiosity2

Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: CA_Curiosity2

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: CA_Confidence2

Scatterplot

Dependent Variable: CA_Confidence2