From Student to Professional

An Inquiry Into Factors and Activities Precipitating a Successful Transition from Student to Professional in Business Administration

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Preface

In the words of the institution itself, the purpose of the five-year study programme in Business and Administration at the University of Agder is to provide the student with: “A solid theoretical and empirical insight into the subjects of economics, business and administration in addition to the analytical skills that will allow the student to make use of these insights in the professional sphere and society as a whole later on” (UiA, 2023). It has been five years since the authors last read these words, during the course of which the main subject in conversations with fellow students have changed notably. Where the topic of any conversation during the bachelor programme predominantly discussed nightly escapades and were of a more personal and unrestrained nature, current conversations with fellow master students heed to that of the professional variety. This may or may not be a change for the better. What is certain, however, is that this change in conversation also demonstrates a change of the times.

Faced with the imminent transition into the professional sphere and possibly even adulthood, both authors began, rather naturally, to wonder whether they themselves felt mentally prepared. In conclusion, while we both agreed that we have gained a considerable amount of theoretical experience, we also realized that someone else at the hiring firm ought to know what to do, how to do it and most importantly, how to teach it onwards.

Consequently, driven by our initial sense of wonderment and, dare we say, a slight concern, we embarked on the exploration of the idea that would eventually evolve into our thesis. The result, perhaps even more disturbingly, from a combined total of more than a hundred exams and nearly forty years of schooling, is the thesis that you are currently reading. In this sense, while we have invested a great deal of personal effort and time, we could never have completed the thesis without our ten interview subjects. Their perspectives have proven instrumental in illuminating a wide set of highly important successfactors and activities behind a successful transition to the professional sphere, a great deal of which completely unanticipated by the authors. In accordance with these revelations, it is with perhaps an even greater sense of appreciation that we would finally like to thank our counselors John Arngrim Hunnes and Stine Rye Bårdsen for the freedom to pursue our rather untraditional subject. Their honesty, support and most importantly, patience, has been crucial to the completion of our thesis and thus, we remain ever grateful.

Abstract

This master's thesis aims to investigate the factors influencing the successful transition of university graduates into their professional careers within the fields of business administration. By identifying these factors, the study seeks to shed light on their impact on professional success and explore how current and future students can leverage them to improve their own career outcomes. The research questions revolve around identifying success factors, understanding how students utilize them, and proposing adaptations to university policies and curriculum to better facilitate successful career transitions.

Recognizing that factors beyond education play a significant role in determining professional success, this study engages with successful alumni to equip students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools for excelling in their professional lives and ensuring a smoother transition. The findings highlight several crucial elements for a successful transition, including fundamental academic interest, personal motivation, lifestyle, networking, personal traits, and a diverse skill set. Moreover, the study acknowledges the value of in-class activities, extracurricular activities, internships, case-work, and experience with programming and presentations.

The implications of this research extend beyond the classroom, benefiting not only students but also employers and society as a whole. Academic institutions can play a vital role in developing a highly skilled workforce by optimizing students' preparation for their professional lives. Nurturing a love for learning, personal growth, and intellectual curiosity among business administration students emerges as a significant factor with a lasting impact on their career trajectories. Additionally, recognizing and utilizing one's strengths as a new professional, along with the value of diverse skill sets including proficiency in MS Excel and programming languages, can enhance the competency of business administration students.

In summary, this thesis enhances our understanding of effective approaches to business administration education and provides insights into practices that optimize students' preparation for their professional lives. By identifying and leveraging success factors, academic institutions and students can collaborate to enhance career outcomes and contribute to the development of a skilled workforce.

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1 Introduction

When any given student graduates from his or her university, it is a common misconception that the education they have attained strictly adheres to the academic tenure itself. Rather, as professor Randall V. Bass (1997) explains, an education is “the sum total of everything I have learned up until this point” (Bass, 1997, p. 128). Hence, it is with a particular emphasis on the students' own experiences that we now ask ourselves the question of whether recent alumni students attribute their professional success to something more than just their academic education. In fact, as empirical studies have shown, professional success may be equally, if not more dependent on a wide range of external factors such as whether or not the students engage in part-time employment during their tenures, pursue extracurricular positions, maintain a healthy lifestyle, cultivate their networks or even possess some distinct genetic traits. (Bergemann & van den Berg, 2008; Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Kivimäki et al, 2013; Belsky et al., 2016).

Accordingly, it is our intention to inquire with alumni students in business administration of which factors and activities they themselves attribute their newfound success in the professional sphere. Moreover, we seek to determine whether or not any such successfactors may be adapted by universities and their students and further, leveraged in the pursuit of a higher overall level of knowledge and preparedness for the professional sphere. In essence, through cooperation with successful alumni students, our ultimate goal is to aid and equip current as well as future students with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in their professional careers while making the transition thereto as seamless as possible.

1.1 Main Research Questions

From the context outlined above, we propose the three following main research questions:

1. What are the factors that contribute to a successful transition of university graduates into their professional careers?
2. How can these factors be utilized by current and future students to improve their own career success?

3. How should university policy and curriculum be adapted to incorporate the identified success factors, in order to better facilitate the successful transition of current and future students into their professional careers?

1.2 Significance of the Study

We believe that our thesis can enhance our understanding of what constitutes an effective approach to an education within business administration. As Bass (1997) notes, an education may very well encompass a wide array of insights and experiences, therein activities and/or factors that may have gone unnoticed and unrecognized. Eventually, by leveraging these potential findings, we may be able to improve the individual performance of every related stakeholder in addition to benefiting society as a whole.

To the academic institutions, it is our firm belief that a more targeted investigation of different activities and successfactors may enable a more impactful learning experience. Moreover, the execution of the study at a relatively young university renders it especially intriguing for newer institutions seeking to enhance their knowledge, traditions, practices and overall reverence. In general, our thesis serves a high purpose in detailing any implementable successfactors to an academic education in business administration.

To the students themselves, as research has shown, certain extracurricular activities can offer substantially positive effects (Kanar & Bouckenooghe, 2021). Hence, the students themselves will benefit through the realization that certain factors may improve their chance of success later on and change their current participation and efforts accordingly.

Lastly, the study could also have far-reaching implications beyond the classroom. To the professional sphere, an improvement of the practices and results of either other participating stakeholder will result in a higher performance and while this effect may vary greatly, the monetary motivation for attaining said effect is nonetheless strong.

In essence, by equipping future students with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their careers, the study could contribute to the development of a highly skilled workforce, an event which would benefit both the individuals themselves and the wider society (Casillas, Kyllonen, & Way, 2019).

2 Empirical Foundation

In this section, from empirical evidence, we explore the prevailing activities and factors that comprise a successful transition from first-year student to established professional and derive the relevant theory that pertains to said passage.

2.1 Activities and Factors

Historically, in the analysis and facilitation of a successful transition from student to professional, the prevailing components have proven to be: In-class activities, part-time employment during an academic tenure, the pursuit of extracurricular positions, a healthy lifestyle, networking and distinct genetic and/or personal traits (Bergemann & van den Berg, 2008; Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Kivimäki et al., 2013; Belsky et al., 2013). These activities and factors, while they are not conclusive, comprise the empirical foundation for our inquiry and our interviews later on. Hence, in addition, we aspire to uncover additional factors of importance through our interviews and to assess them before the final conclusion. We begin, however, by addressing the most fundamental successfactor, i.e. the academic education itself and in-class activities.

2.1.1 In-Class Activities

In the past, studies have been made on the subject of a transition from student to the professional sphere within a multitude of fields, albeit with students, institutions and professionals outside of Norway. For instance, one such article by Leigh, N. W. et al., (2015), addresses similar alumni to our own thesis, i.e. students within business administration, and the effectiveness of in-class activities pertaining to an education. They state that while there is little doubt concerning the notion that a theoretical understanding of business administration and the financial markets is advantageous also in the practical sphere, there exists at the same time a difference in opinion as to exactly how such an understanding is best obtained through education (Leigh, N. W. et al., 2015, p.7).

When questioned for whichever in-class activities students found the most useful in regards to the transition into their professional lives, the participants in the study by (Leigh, N. W. et al., 2015, p. 7) revealed that case-studies and/or problem based learning activities were the most important at 30.8%. Lectures, on the other hand, were considered the least effective among the same students, with only 9.2% of students finding traditional lectures effective. Surprisingly, an identically low percentage was found for practitioner guest lectures.

Inverting the question and simply asking the same students of which in-class activities they found the least useful, traditional and practitioner guest lectures differed somewhat more while still being the two predominant responses at 49% and 22.3% respectively. Case-studies and/or problem based learning activities on the other hand, were only chosen by 1.5% of the students and indicate that the students favor newer, more interactive and and possibly less traditional approaches to learning (Leigh. N.W. et al., 2015, p. 8).

2.1.2 Part-Time Employment

As a research subject, the effects from part-time employment alongside an academic tenure has been measured extensively across a wide range of subjects. However, as the following study by Wenz and Yu (2010) indicates, the relationship between part-time employment and education is highly complex and may provide the student engaging in both activities with a wide range of results that are not always guaranteed to be positive.

In their study, based on students at Winona State University, a traditional regional state university, Wenz and Yu explored the impact of term-time employment on academic achievement. Their aspirations, through a custom built dataset, was to conduct a study specifically aimed at addressing the endogeneity problems that typically have affected existing literature (Wenz & Yu, 2010, p. 372).

In essence, their findings suggest that term-time employment, i.e. employment that occurs alongside and during an academic semester, has a modest but statistically significant negative effect on student GPA regardless of the time spent. Specifically, they found that each additional hour of work would result in a decrease of approximately 0.007 points in one's GPA, 0.004 if one were to remove individual specific unobserved characteristics and re-estimate using first differences. That being said, their cross-sectional model also suggests that the act of choosing to work at all is typically associated with higher grades in general than for those choosing not to work (Wenz & Yu, 2010, p. 372).

In Essence, Wenz and Yu conclude that while the effect from term-time employment is generally both statistically significant and negative on student GPA, the effect is also dependent on other factors such as distance (off- vs. on-campus employment), academic relevance and/or the individual motivation behind said employment. Hence, from these results, we expect to find differences in opinion from our interviewees later on.

2.1.3 Extracurricular Activities, Positions and Affiliations (ECAs)

The effects of extracurricular activities, related positions within the academic institution and of relevant affiliations in general on the success of graduating students has been explored by numerous studies.

One such study, published by Lau, Hsu, Acosta, & Hsu (2014) in the *Journal of Educational Studies*, investigated how college graduates evaluated their employability skills in relation to their participation in various ECAs. The sample consisted of 28,768 business school graduates who were planning to enter the workforce immediately after graduating in 2008. The findings, obtained through propensity score matching analyses, revealed that students who had been core members of ECAs were more likely to positively assess their communication, leadership, creativity, and self-promotion skills. Moreover, the results indicated that different types of ECAs had varying impacts on the employability of graduating students. Involvement in sports clubs was found to have the greatest influence on leadership skills, while participation in music clubs had the greatest impact on creativity skills. Communication and self-promotion skills showed moderate benefits across all ECAs. Surprisingly, time management skills were found to have minimal benefits from extracurricular involvement when compared to other employability skills (Lau, Hsu, Acosta, & Hsu, 2014, p.1).

Another study by Seow & Pan (2014), published in the *Journal of Education for Business*, proposes three theoretical frameworks (Zero-Sum, Developmental, and Threshold) to explain the impact of ECA participation on students' academic performance. It emphasizes the need for further research in the accounting education field to explore the effects of ECA participation on academic performance. The study aims to contribute to identifying factors that influence students' academic success and improve educational practices. The research method involves content analysis and literature review, while the theoretical frameworks provide different perspectives on how ECA participation can affect academic performance. The Zero-Sum framework suggests a negative effect due to time allocation, the Developmental framework highlights the indirect positive effects through non-academic benefits, and the Threshold framework proposes a positive effect up to a certain point. By understanding the relationship between ECA participation and academic performance, educators can better support students' overall development and achievement (Seow & Pan, 2014, p. 1).

Finally, a third study by Bakoban & Aljarallah, (2015) published in the *Journal of Educational Research and Reviews,* aimed to investigate the impact of ECA participation on students' GPA at King Abdulaziz University, Faisaliah campus, while also examining student satisfaction with ECAs. In total, 239 students were selected as the study sample using a simple random sampling method and the researchers employed inferential statistics to analyze the data collected. Furthermore, in order to achieve the study's objectives, a questionnaire consisting of 19 questions was developed. The findings revealed a positive association between ECA participation and students' GPA, indicating that students who engaged in ECAs obtained higher GPAs compared to those who did not participate. Interestingly, the study also discovered that the time spent on ECAs did not interfere with the students' regular study time, suggesting no significant relationship between the two. Moreover, the study indicated that students, across various faculties, generally expressed satisfaction with the range of extracurricular activities available on campus (Bakoban & Aljarallah, 2015, p. 1).

2.1.4 Lifestyle

A number of studies have been conducted exploring the relationship between physical exercise, wellness, personal growth, and successful achievement among students and employees. The results of these studies suggest that maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including regular physical exercise, can have a positive impact on educational achievement, career development, job satisfaction, and job performance.

For instance, Redondo-Flórez, Ramos-Campo, & Clemente-Suárez, (2022), aimed to examine the relationship between various highly physical factors in relation to the academic performance of university students. A total of 261 bachelor's degree students, the majority of which young males (87,7%), in physical activity and sports science participated in the study. Based on their academic performance, the students were divided into two groups: low academic performance group (LAPG) and high academic performance group (HAPG). The study measured various parameters including body composition, blood pressure, physical activity levels, sleep habits, and estimated maximum oxygen uptake using the Cooper's 12-minute run test. The results indicated that students with high academic performance had significantly higher maximum oxygen uptake. Additionally, the HAPG group exhibited lower diastolic blood pressure and lower levels of insomnia caused by breathing problems compared to the LAPG. These findings indicate a significant association between academic performance and factors such as VO2 max, diastolic blood pressure, and insomnia caused by breathing problems. The study highlights the importance of implementing interventions targeting physical activity and sleep habits to enhance academic achievement (Redondo-Flórez, Ramos-Campo, & Clemente-Suárez, 2022, p. 1).

Similarly, Shaw, Gomes, Polotskaia, & Jankowska, (2015) acknowledges that the link between student health and academic performance is gaining importance due to the worldwide decrease in physical fitness levels and the rise in obesity rates among school-aged children. Evidence-based interventions exist to improve nutrition and increase physical activity for all school-aged children, including those at risk or already obese, demonstrating the positive impact of these programs on student health. However, they also note that the relationship between physical fitness and academic performance is complex, with multiple explanations (Shaw, Gomes, Polotskaia, & Jankowska, 2015, p. 128).

Lastly, in another study by Etemadi, Kamyar, Hassan, Zakaria, Khairudin, & Hara (2016), the relationship between exercise, work engagement, and job performance was explored among the professional sphere and employees in various industries. The study found that employees who engaged in regular exercise had higher levels of work engagement and job performance in addition to less stress compared to those who did not prioritize their physical health. These findings suggest that maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including regular physical exercise, may benefit employees across different industries in terms of their job performance (Etemadi, Kamyar, Hassan, Zakaria, Khairudin, & Hara, 2016, p. 1114).

Taken together, the results of these studies suggest that maintaining a healthy lifestyle, with the inclusion of regular physical exercise, is something that may be beneficial to the professional success of students and employees.

2.1.5 Networking

Seemingly, in the digital age, applications such as LinkedIn play an increasingly important if not crucial role in terms of professional advancement, thus emphasizing the need for both students and professionals to continuously build their professional network. Networking, however, as a skill or artform, is as old as business itself and stretches back thousands of years to the time of the Silk Road network and beyond (Blaydes & Paik, 2021, p.117). Naturally, numerous studies have since attempted to document the effects from networking on professional success.

For example, as was demonstrated by the longitudinal study by Wolff & Moser (2009), while no causal effect was found on the growth of career satisfaction from networking, a subjective measure of success, an effect was indeed found on salary, the more objective measure of career success (Wolff & Moser, 2009, p. 23). This finding aligns with the understanding that networking can have tangible benefits in terms of financial rewards and professional growth. It further supports the notion that building and maintaining a strong network can significantly contribute to an individual's career advancement and overall success.

Subsequently, we can now address the role of LinkedIn, a social networking platform designed for professionals which has become increasingly popular in recent years. It allows individuals to create a profile that highlights their education, work experience, and skills, and connect with others in their industry or related fields, thereby providing new opportunities to engage with professionals in their field through groups, discussions, and sharing of industry news and insights (Van Dijck, 2013).

From the studies of Davis, Wolff, Forret, & Sullivan (2020), it has been found that effective use of social media and social networking sites (SNSs) such as LinkedIn, enhance individuals' ability to expand their professional network and seek advice, expertise, and resources. The findings also indicate that extraversion and a protean career orientation significantly predict networking ability, which, in turn, predicts the number of contacts and the frequency of LinkedIn usage. Consequently, online networking is associated with various career benefits, including work-related resources, information, and ideas. However, they also found that job search assistance and social support may be more available through face-to-face interactions and that the number of contacts on LinkedIn is not a dominant predictor of benefits attainment. Rather, it is the frequency of usage that drives benefit attainment on SNS. (Davis, Wolff, Forret, & Sullivan, 2020, p. 11).

In conclusion, networking remains a highly important activity to practice for aspiring professionals in the pursuit of their career goals. Furthermore, while the advent of LinkedIn and other digital applications of a similar nature now allows for a visual and universally accessible representation of yourself, something that many may find scary and/or challenging, it can also present one with interactions and possibilities that otherwise would not exist through traditional outlets.

2.1.6 Genetics and Personal Traits

Lastly, in terms of professional success, the role of genetics and/or personal traits plays an important yet somewhat controversial part. Numerous studies hereon have sought to examine the effects that stem from predispositional and unchangeable factors, two of which being the studies by Belsky et al. (2013) and Bui (2017).

In the former study, the authors examined the presence, absence and variations of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) and its effect on the genetic score of a 1000 participants in New Zealand, followed from birth to an age of 38. SNPs are variations in single nucleotides, (i.e. the building blocks of human DNA), that occur at a specific position in the genome. From previous research, certain SNPs have been identified that are associated with educational attainment and various life outcomes such as occupational success, income and socioeconomic status. On this basis, in the study by Belsky et al. (2013), a genetic score was first computed by summing the number of alleles associated with educational attainment across the SNPs analyzed and then examined in relationship with occupational success, income, and socioeconomic status after accounting for environmental and social factors. Luckily, while the results showed a positive significance between genetic score and the included indicators for success, the effects were small in magnitude and only accounted for a small proportion of the total variance (Belsky et al., 2013, p. 2046).

On the subject of personality traits, the latter study by Bui (2017) is one of the few focusing on the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and job satisfaction and confirms that these traits are valuable for understanding the dispositional source of job satisfaction. The study challenges previous research by highlighting the importance of agreeableness as a predictor of job satisfaction, along with neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. It also reveals differences in the impact of these traits based on gender and age cohorts. Furthermore, it was found that young employees exhibit a greater number of significant traits, while older employees show a reduced impact of conscientiousness (Bui, 2017, p. 27).

2.2 Theories

From our empirical exploration, in explaining the mechanisms behind a successful transition from student to professional, we have noted the relevance of three theories. Namely, these are Human Capital Theory, Constructivist Learning Theory and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. Furthermore, as we expect to encounter additional successfactors and activities during our interviews from the advent of implicit knowledge, we have seen great value in the additional recognition and utilization of Tacit Knowledge Theory.

2.2.1 Human Capital Theory

In order to understand the underlying motivation and reasoning for pursuing higher education or any other experience within one's personal career interests, we begin our theory section by addressing Human Capital Theory.

An academic pursuit, or any pursuit that otherwise relates to relevant professional experience, is to be considered an investment in one's “human capital”. Human Capital Theory suggests that individuals acquire knowledge, skills and abilities through education and training, and that this can be a valuable resource for organizations by increasing their productivity and overall value, hence “human capital” (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). Furthermore, the theory suggests that business schools, for instance, can play an important part in developing the human capital of their students by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and credentials that are valued in the job market. Professionals and organizations, in turn, can benefit from the human capital of graduates by hiring them for their knowledge and skills, or by partnering with the business schools in order to access and share their expertise. (Becker, 1964).

One key implication of Human Capital Theory, however, is the importance of ensuring that business school curricula and training programs align with the needs of the job market (Becker, 1964, p. 9). If students are acquiring skills and knowledge that are not valued by employers, they may struggle to find employment or to contribute effectively in the workplace. Similarly, if professionals and organizations are not providing opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills, or if they are not valuing the human capital of graduates within business administration, they may miss out on valuable resources.

Overall, Human Capital Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the role that business schools and professionals can play in developing and leveraging the human capital of business administration graduates (Schultz, 1961, p. 5).

2.2.2 Constructivist Learning Theory

In the context of education, Constructivist Learning Theory or simply, Constructivism, suggests that learning is most effective when learners are engaged in active, hands-on experiences that allow them to interact with the world and construct, rather than the traditional learning approach whereby students adapt their own understanding (BADA, 2015, p. 66). Accordingly, Constructivism is a prominent concept in education that potentially carries significant implications for both the process of teaching and the development of teachers themselves.

Rooted in psychology, constructivism explains how individuals acquire knowledge and learn and how people actively construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences, rather than passively receiving information. At its core, constructivism emphasizes the learner's role as an active participant in the process of learning and proposes that learners build their understanding by integrating new information and experiences with their existing knowledge and beliefs. This process of constructing meaning involves reflection, interpretation, and the creation of mental models or frameworks to organize knowledge (BADA, 2015, p. 67).

Constructivist learning environments, for instance case-work, are designed to support this process of knowledge construction. These environments foster student-centered learning, where learners are encouraged to explore, inquire, and collaborate with others. They provide opportunities for students to engage in authentic, real-world tasks and problem-solving activities that promote critical thinking and deep understanding (BADA, 2015, p. 69).

Other key characteristics of constructivist learning environments include promoting active participation, herein encouraging student autonomy and responsibility, fostering social interaction and collaboration, and valuing the diversity of learners' experiences and perspectives. Teachers play the role of facilitators, guiding and supporting students' learning journeys rather than simply transmitting information. (BADA, 2015, p. 68). Furthermore, in addition to increased experience and participation, Constructivism offers several more pedagogical goals for educators to consider such as fostering meaningful learning experiences, promoting the development of higher-order thinking skills, nurturing a positive attitude towards learning, encouraging metacognition and self-regulation, fostering creativity and innovation, and cultivating lifelong learning habits (BADA, 2015, p. 68).

The benefits of constructivism in education are manifold. Students who engage in constructivist learning experiences are more likely to develop a deep understanding of the subject matter, retain information longer, and transfer their knowledge to new situations. They also tend to be more motivated, actively involved in their own learning, and better equipped with critical thinking and problem-solving skills (BADA, 2015, p. 69).

In summary, constructivism is a powerful theory that guides teaching and learning practices. By acknowledging the active role of learners in constructing their knowledge, educators can create dynamic and student-centered environments that promote deep understanding, critical thinking, and lifelong learning skills.

2.2.2.1 Empirical Applications of Constructivist Classroom Theory in Economics

While their findings are not directly comparable to business administration, a study by Ford & Leclerc (2000) aimed to explore the impact of constructivism and active learning on students within economics at a college level in the US. The study concludes that not only is a constructivist approach monumental in the promotion of increased participation from the students, it is also instrumental in providing the students with a clearer critical consciousness and understanding of economic reality (Ford & Leclerc, 2000, p. 493).

2.2.3 Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's Transition Theory is a framework for understanding how individuals experience and navigate transitions in life. Developed by Nancy Schlossberg, a renowned scholar in counseling psychology, the theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the nature of transitions, the role of individual factors and the importance of social support during periods of change (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 4). As a result, the theory aims to provide a framework for understanding the process of transition and for supporting individuals as they navigate periods of change (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p.3).

A key concept of Schlossberg's transition theory includes the four S's: situation, self, support and strategies (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p.4). The situation refers to the external circumstances that prompt the transition, while the self includes the internal characteristics and abilities. Support refers to the people and resources that can assist the individual during the transition, and strategies refer to the coping mechanisms and problem-solving techniques used to manage the change (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 4).

A key principle of Schlossberg's transition theory is based on the idea that a transition is a process, rather than a single event (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p.5). Thus, the theory also proposes a model for this process that consists of three phases: (1) Ending or letting go of the past, (2) the neutral zone or liminal period of uncertainty and exploration, and (3) the new beginning or the integration of the change into the individual's life. (Schlossberg et al., 1989, pp. 5-6).

2.2.4 Tacit Knowledge Theory

Implicit- or Tacit Knowledge Theory, is a concept that was first developed in the mid-twentieth century by the hungarian-British philosopher and scientist Michael Polanyi (1891-1976). According to this theory, knowledge is not limited to a collection of objective facts, but rather a wide range of experiences that also includes the implicit or tacit knowledge, knowledge that is difficult to express or communicate to others. Simply put: "We can know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4).

Polyani states that tacit knowledge stems from the personal experiences that we encounter and that our intuition and skills are uniquely developed as a result. Consequently, we are rarely made aware of the uniqueness and presence of such skills and we thus experience difficulties in articulating them explicitly (Polanyi, p. 5). A skilled carpenter, for instance, may not be able to explain the true source of beauty to his furniture, only the technical procedure he applies in its making.

The reason, according to Polanyi, for why tacit knowledge is difficult to articulate is due to the fact that it is deeply ingrained in an individual's skills, experiences and beliefs. In consequence, it is often subconscious and is not easily transferred from one person to another. However, Polanyi suggests that tacit knowledge can be detected through its manifestation in experienced behavior (Polanyi, 1966, p. 21). For example, through their ability to quickly identify and solve problems that arise within their area of expertise, an expert in a particular field may demonstrate their tacit knowledge.

3 Methodology

A method is a way of proceeding to collect empirical data about reality. The method is a tool for describing reality (Jacobsen, 2015). A good research method will therefore help to ensure that the collected empirical data is as reliable as possible and provides an answer to the research questions.

3.1 Research Method and Design

The research setting is the physical, social and experimental context within which research is conducted.

There were two main research directions that were considered, positivism and hermeneutics. With regards to the data collection it was concluded that positivism would not fit the data collection. Therefore, it was decided to go for a hermeneutical approach as it is based on qualitative methods, and the fact that knowledge is collected by moving from empirical data to theory. When choosing a research method, there are two main methods to choose from, quantitative and qualitative methods. Whilst quantitative methods provide us with data in the form of measurable units, qualitative data provide us with data that is not able to be quantified or measured but rather oriented towards capturing meaning and experiences (Dalland, 2017)

There are various ways to conduct research within social science methodology. Due to the choice of carrying out personal interviews that often provides data that is not able to be quantified in measurable units, it was decided to approach the data collection with a qualitative approach to capture these experiences from the interview subjects.

In terms of the data itself, the research questions stated earlier are quite open and exploratory and the primary data comes from a smaller sample of key informants. Because of these factors the choice for a more exploratory intensive research design was chosen. This choice came quite naturally as a qualitative approach was already chosen, which fits well within the intensive research design.

3.2 Implications from the Empirical Foundation

From our exploration of the empirical foundation pertaining to the thesis, we will now assess the role of the different factors, activities and theories as well as the implications they may entail to our qualitative studies and interviews.

3.2.1 Activities and Factors

3.2.1.1 In-Class Activities

From the Australian study by Leigh, N. W. et al., (2015), we can derive a couple points of great importance to our own thesis. First of all, when we conduct our interviews with Norwegian alumni students, it is of interest to compare the existing results from the Australian study to our own findings in the interviews on the prevailing opinions concerning effective learning methods. Secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, the results from the Australian study indicate that preferred in-class activities align with the principles behind Constructivist Learning Theory.

3.2.1.2 Part-Time Employment

In our own qualitative studies and interviews, it is of interest to determine the overall level of part-time engagement pursued by the alumni students during their tenure. In this sense, our goal is not to measure the direct effect on the GPA but rather, explore the opinions of our participants. It is our intention to discover in what way part-time employment affected the students with regards to their academic achievements, their level of engagement, motivation and/or their transition to the professional sphere in general. In essence, we wish to explore the general prudence and fruitfulness of part-time employment from the perspectives of our ten interviewees and whether current business administration students should pursue similar engagements.

3.2.1.3 Extracurricular Activities, Positions and Affiliations

In our interviews, we aim to inquire with successful alumni students from the Agder School of Business and Law of their extracurricular participation during their academic tenure and whether they themselves attribute part of their newfound success to such positions in any particular way. Preferably, should said participation have proven itself fruitful, our aim is to be able to motivate current and future students towards their own participation in all manner of extracurricular activities.

3.2.1.4 Lifestyle

In our qualitative studies, we seek to inquire with the interviewees of their perspectives and their approaches to personal physical health or different lifestyle choices in general in the context of past academic and current professional success. Specifically, should any common approaches prevail through repetitive mention, it is of a particularly high interest to our studies to examine their possible adaptability by others.

3.2.1.5 Networking

In our study, we seek to inquire with the alumni students of both their previous and current practices in regards to LinkedIn and networking in general and how this insofar has affected their career advancement. Moreover, we seek to uncover any experiences and insights that may be transferable to others in regards to networking and thus be of use to new students.

3.2.1.6 Genetics and Personal Traits

Ultimately, an examination of the role of distinct genetics and/or personality traits on perceived professional success is beyond the scope of this thesis. The findings as detailed in chapter 2 on these factors do however, present us with increased leverage when we conduct our interviews.

For instance, we can inquire with the alumni students of whether they themselves feel that personality was an important aspect of their initial hiring. Further, in relation to their current work, we can explore the role of personal traits in terms of job fulfillment and, alternatively, whether they experience contentment and/or increased productivity from the ability to act naturally. Accordingly, in relation to tacit knowledge theory it is of utmost interest to detect any instances where the participants may have drawn on personal experience and attributes in order to deliver unique results, as opposed to strictly following orders or common procedure.

Regardless, rather than focusing on directly addressing the subject of personal traits, our aim is to encourage the participants to behave as they otherwise would, hence presenting any questions related to personality and/or genetics in a more unscripted and natural manner as they may naturally come to arise during the interviews from the interviewees reasoning.

3.2.2 Theories

In addition to the role of the empirically attributed activities and factors behind a successful transition, we must also note the expected role of the theories in regards to our interviews.

3.2.2.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, as a tool, effectively assists us in illuminating the inevitable conflict of interest between universities, students and the professional sphere. Rather than solely educating individuals, the main purpose of the professional corporation or business is to deliver a product or service to its customers whilst sustaining a profitable operation and surviving financially. This prerequisite creates conflict with the goals of the two other stakeholders, i.e. universities and students, when the objective of gaining a theoretical understanding of business administration is replaced by the duty of optimizing an entity's performance, mainly by performing highly specific tasks. While there is no reason to believe that future tasks will change to become any less specific, the preconditions to which the tasks are approached, could.

Within the context of our research questions and Human Capital Theory, it is of high interest to explore the perspectives of newly minted and successful professionals in regard to building human capital. We wish to explore whether or not alumni students in the professional sphere have any insights regarding the academic institutions approach to building human capital based on what they have experienced in both the professional and academic sphere.

Most importantly, as the goal of every stakeholder is to maximize the human capital in question, it becomes our interest to shed light on any ways in which both current and future students may leverage the successfactors to increase their current human capital.

3.2.2.2 Constructivist Learning Theory

The Constructivist Learning Theory provides strength to the methodical foundation of our thesis when we begin to inquire with alumni students of their views of current curricular structures and how these are perceived today in relation to their professional success. Regardless of what each alumni student may have experienced during their tenure, the Constructivist Learning Theory provides a modern, contrary and thought-provoking viewpoint on what constitutes an effective approach to learning (BADA, 2015, p. 66).

3.2.2.3 Schlossberg's Transition Theory

On the basis of what we uncover in our interviews, we expect to be able to utilize Schlossberg's Transition Theory when analyzing the transition from student to professional. Specifically, Schlossberg's Transition Theory is highly instrumental as a potential starting point in the examination of the wide range of emotions that may be felt from what is in all aspects a monumental life transition. Furthermore, in relation to our research question, it is of utmost interest to utilize the theory in the later consideration of how current students may be better prepared to deal with their future transitions through the use of the coping mechanisms as described by Schlossberg (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 4)..

3.2.2.4 Tacit Knowledge Theory

In our interviews, we expect to encounter tacit, i.e. implicit knowledge extensively through examples of skilled behavior by our participants. Moreover, from their newfound professional experience and semi-structured interviews, our participants are freely allowed to highlight any discrepancies between what is perceived to be important and what actually is considered valuable activities and experience. In that regard, the empirical evidence of prevalent activities and successfactors serves as a highly useful and important foundation from which we can easily uncover any additional and unexpected insights manifesting themselves.

Furthermore, additional tacit knowledge may be detected by asking open-ended questions that allow the interviewee to describe their experiences and thought processes in detail. For example, instead of asking a question that can be answered with a simple yes or no, the interviewer may ask the interviewee to walk them through a particular situation or problem they encountered and how they went about solving it. By asking follow-up questions and actively listening to the interviewee's responses, the interviewer may be able to detect instances where the interviewee is drawing on tacit knowledge to inform their actions and decisions. Lastly, observing the interviewee's body language and nonverbal cues may provide insight into the role that tacit knowledge is playing in their thought processes and behavior during the interview.

3.3. Data Foundation

It was decided early on that the data collection would be conducted through personal interviews with a smaller sample of interview subjects due to time constraints. The best choice for this data collection would naturally be by conducting the interviews face-to-face and in-person, but due to scheduling constraints this was not deemed feasible and the choice to conduct the interviews through digital channels was thus taken.

With the setting chosen, it was necessary to decide upon which population the data should be taken from. Being students ourselves with unique experience from the University of Agder, the choice to interview alumni students from the same university was obvious. Within this population we chose to go for two main groups, alumni students that have a master degree in either Business Administration or Accounting and Auditing.

A short overview of both these directions will be given to give the reader an understanding why the interview subjects have been divided up into these groups.

3.3.1 MRR (Master of Auditing and Revisions)

The Accounting and Auditing program equips students with practical and analytical skills to manage and analyze financial data and provide assurance on the financial performance of businesses. The program covers Norwegian GAAP accounting standards, enabling students to assess how these standards affect financial statements, evaluate assets, and determine company value. Students learn how to develop and apply relevant strategies, management forms, marketing practices, and business management systems to address the challenges faced by companies.

The program also provides an understanding of how multinational companies operate in an international market, as well as the challenges small and medium-sized enterprises face in entering the global arena. Graduates within this specialization are typically well-suited for positions in companies operating in international markets, and may also establish their own accounting or auditing business once approved by the Financial Supervisory Authority (University of Agder, n.d.).

3.3.2 Master of Business Administration

The Master's program in Business Administration provides students with a comprehensive theoretical and empirical understanding of various fields within the realms of business administration. The program not only equips students with analytical skills, but also emphasizes the practical application of their knowledge to address real-world challenges in both professional and societal contexts.

In addition to the core curriculum, the program fosters an awareness of ethical issues and dilemmas that professionals may encounter in their respective fields, offering insights into how organizations can effectively navigate such complexities. The program also places significant emphasis on global issues, exploring the implications of globalization and global conditions on businesses and markets, and examining strategies that enable organizations to adapt and respond to these dynamics.

Furthermore, the program offers students the opportunity to specialize in one of three areas: Analytical Finance, Financial Management, or International Business. This specialization enables students to delve deeper into their chosen field and acquire specialized knowledge and skills relevant to their future careers.

3.3.3 Dividing the Sample Groups

The choice to divide the sample group into two was taken on the basis that the groups have quite differing educations within the field of business administration. Whereas the alumni students that hold a Master of Auditing and Revisions are more likely to engage in a professional career in the field of auditing, the Master of Business Administration alumni students usually have a larger area of application within the professional sectors. Therefore, to eliminate different expectations and experiences that would differ in one sample group, they were divided into two.

3.4 Data Collection

Every interview was recorded as two separate files, one audibly through microphone and one in writing as a written transcript. Both recordings were performed by using tools within MS-Teams.

When discussing qualitative interviews, they can have different structures. In our task, we used semi-pre-structured interviews, and therefore, an interview guide was set up containing questions we were interested in finding answers to. Despite this pre-structuring, we allowed the interviews to proceed as a normal conversation as far as possible.

Subject	Sex	Age	Position	Years Working	Specialization
N1	M	29	Consultant	2	M.E
N2	M	30	Consultant	3	I.B
N3	M	27	Analyst	1	Analytical Finance
N4	M	28	Accountant	1	M.E
N5	M	26	Recruiter	1	M.E
N6	M	27	Accountant	1.5	MRR
N7	F	29	Analyst	1	Analytical Finance
N8	F	28	Accountant	2	M.E
N9	F	26	Consultant	1	I.B
N10	F	25	Tender Estimator	1	I.B

Table 1 - An overview of the sample group’s relevant information

3.4.1 Primary Data - Personal Interviews

Personal interviews are characterized by the fact that the investigator and respondent talk together in a regular dialogue. The data collected comes in the form of words, sentences, and stories. The individual interviews in this task were conducted online using the "Teams" program and the interviews were recorded so that it was possible to transcribe what the respondent said.

Individual interviews, of course, have their strengths and weaknesses, but Jacobsen says that they are best suited when relatively few units are to be studied, when we are interested in what each individual says, and when we are interested in how each individual interprets and adds meaning to a particular phenomenon (Jacobsen, 2015, pp. 146-147). To incorporate this we included the tacit knowledge theory in our interviews.

3.5 Data Analysis

When analyzing the data there are some considerations that have to be taken. This must be carried out to eliminate bias, improve reliability and to consider validity. Due to this and in consideration of our own study, validity and reliability will now be discussed briefly.

3.5.1 Validity and Reliability

All research aims to minimize issues related to validity and reliability. This also means that qualitative methods must be subject to critical discussion when it comes to assessing whether the data collected can be considered valid and reliable. It is important to critically evaluate the quality of the data that has been collected, (Jacobsen, 2005).

3.5.1.1 Internal Validity

Internal validity refers to whether the results are perceived as correct. It is therefore necessary to make a comment on the concept of "correct." In social science, "correct" is based on the concept of "intersubjectivity," which means that the closest we come to the truth is when several people agree that something is a correct description, (Jacobsen, 2005, p. 214). Thus, we can only say that something is correct if others agree with the description. The more people who agree, the greater the likelihood that the description is correct.

3.5.1.2 External Validity

While internal validity is about whether we have described a phenomenon correctly, external validity is about the extent to which the findings from a study can be generalized, (Jacobsen, 2005, p. 222). It should be noted that the purpose of a qualitative method is usually not to generalize from a sample to a population, but it can be done based on the individual study.

There are two different forms of generalization, (Dey, I. 1993).

The first form of generalization is to generalize from data in a smaller sample of study units, in this case interview subjects, to a more theoretical level. This is called theoretical generalization, i.e., going from empirical data to theory.

The second way is to generalize the frequency of a phenomenon. This is about whether one can, with a certain degree of certainty, state that the findings made in the smaller sample will also apply to a larger population. This is called statistical generalization, that is, going from a sample to a population.

The main strength of qualitative methods lies in the first form, that is, theoretical generalization. This is because it would present a challenge to perform statistical generalization as one is usually interested in a specific purpose with a qualitative approach. Despite this, there may be data that is similar from each interview subject, and one may wonder if this can be generalized.

3.5.1.3 Reliability in Interviews

The reliability of a study depends on many factors, but there are two factors that stand out when the qualitative method uses interviews to collect primary data, (Jacobsen, 2005).

The Researcher-Effect or Interviewer-Effect, depends on how the interviewer behaves during the interview. There are several factors that can affect the results of the interview. We have tried to counteract this by allowing everyone to ask questions during the interview, and by changing interviewers for different interviews to see if we arrive at the same results on the questions. Context-Effect is related to the context in which the information is collected. In an interview context, technical problems and disturbances may arise that may affect the results.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Social science research almost always involves studying people. What they think, what they do, and how they do it, (Jacobsen, 2005, p. 44). This means that anyone who wants to conduct studies involving other people faces ethical dilemmas. These ethical considerations must be clarified before starting the investigation, while choices must be made during the investigation process based on ethical principles. To eliminate the main ethical consideration, each interview subject and relevant information has been provided with total anonymity.

3.6.1 Informed Consent

The fundamental premise of the concept “informed consent” is that the individual being examined is expected to participate voluntarily in the study, and their voluntary participation should be based on their comprehensive understanding of the potential risks and benefits associated with such involvement (Jacobsen, 2005, p. 46).

To achieve this, we applied for research-based consent through “Sikt”, formerly known as NSD. This process outlines different requirements when dealing with sensitive knowledge, therein informed consent.

To make sure the interview subjects were informed and therefore could consent, all of the subjects were either sent a consent form or asked when the recording started before carrying out the interview. These forms contain information regarding the paper, data storage, what information is collected and various rights the subject has. The consent form can be found in Appendix A.

3.6.2 Ethical Requirements for Presenting Data

Jacobsen (2005, p. 50) says that to all extent possible, one should strive to present results and data in their entirety and in the correct context to avoid situations where quotations and other data convey a meaning different from its original intent.

While complete adherence to this requirement may be challenging, significant efforts were taken to avoid misrepresentation. Primary data has been collected by conducting personal interviews, all of which have been recorded to capture the data in its original form. By using these recordings all the interviews have been transcribed to the fullest extent possible, with occasional disruptions and technical issues resulting in minor omissions that have not affected the original intent.

To maintain academic integrity, the presentation of data has been refined to remove any random pauses or filler words while preserving the original context. This involves analyzing the sentences, comprehending its intended message and making necessary adjustments without distorting its original meaning.

4. Results and Discussion

As a basis for our qualitative study, we have conducted several personal interviews in order to gather the empirical data required to answer the research questions as presented. In this regard, we conducted ten interviews through Microsoft Teams that held an average duration of 20 minutes. The findings are presented based on the interviewee's perceived value and acknowledgment of different activities, covered either by the theory section or discovered naturally in the interview.

The structuring of the findings below follows the structure of the semi-structured interview guide. In order to provide a more clear overview, all the interview subjects will be treated as a sample group instead of presenting the findings of each participant.

Moreover, the chapter will also contain an analysis and discussion that is based upon the personal interviews that have been conducted. It is important to note that the analysis has been carried out on the grounds that the subjects are all former students at the university of Agder. Therefore, a potential generalization has to be considered with this in mind.

4.1 The Choice and Rationale for Pursuing an Education

For the majority of our interview subjects, their choice and rationale for pursuing an education within business administration (henceforth used to describe the sample group as a whole) was as expected and similar to each other. The main reasoning for the majority of the sample group was, as subject N3 states:

> *"I was already interested in the business sector before pursuing my degree and therefore the choice was quite obvious to me. Before enrolling in my degree within analytical finance I had actively engaged in the stock market and finance on my own, so I chose a path that aligned with my interests".*

The majority of the sample group aligned with N3's statement and expressed choosing an academic pursuit that was in line with their already existing interests. This was mainly expected

due to the nature of people's personal orientations. However, except for one subject, the sample group as a whole also pointed out that their choice revolved around another factor.
N1 explained it like this:

> *"Whilst I obviously was interested in the field beforehand, that was not my primary reason for seeking an education within business administration. My primary reason was that it had opportunities in multiple sectors within business and, more often than not, secured you a stable position in the workplace".*

From this, it is obvious that although the subjects had already existing interests that aligned with the education, the more weighted factor in pursuing an education within business administration was the opportunities and freedom within the professional field that the degree entailed.

In essence, the sample group's individual answers align well with these two central statements given some minor adjustments from personal experience and language, as will always be the case in an interview setting. To promote transparency in the study, there must be noted that there was a subject whose answers differed from the rest of the sample group. This subject was N2, who stated that his *"main factor in pursuing an education was to impress his significant other"*, however, the statement is seen as an outlier due to the prevailing agreement in the rest of the group.

4.1.1 The Effect of Fundamental Academic Interest and Personal Motivation

Rather unsurprisingly, a fundamental academic interest or lack thereof in any other subject is what led our participants to their degree, their professional position and thus, their current success. This suggests that the passion and curiosity that underpin academic pursuits are in fact critical to developing the competencies and skills required for success in the professional world. It is a finding that underscores the importance of nurturing a love for learning and intellectual curiosity in business students, as it will have a lasting impact on their career trajectories.

Furthermore, an overall interest and a sense of belonging has provided the interview subjects with great support both during their academic tenure as well as later on in the workplace, thus making the transition from student to professional more approachable and easier to maneuver.

Although this factor in itself is difficult to measure precisely in regards to how it directly contributes to a successful transition, it must be stated that it is important to note the impact it can have on other factors. In essence, with the exception of one outlier, we observed the sample group's choice and rationale for pursuing an education and noted that most of the sample group had similar lines of reasoning.

Concerning the outlier, the reasoning was all the more interesting despite being highly different. In the case where most of the interview subjects either chose their education based on personal interests or because of the possibilities that a degree in business administration gave them, the outlier chose their path due to wanting to impress another. This difference was visible throughout the interview where a lack of motivation and interest was brought up multiple times, leading to the subject deeming other successfactors less impactful. This may very well be due to a lack of actual personal interest in the field.

When we observed the other interview subjects' opinions and experiences, all of them had some form of personal attachment to their education. As a result, they deemed more factors as being impactful to their success when compared to the outlier. Therefore, even though the choice and rationale for choosing an education may rarely impact their success directly, as noted, it is observed to have an indirect impact on success through its effect on other successfactors.

4.2 The Impact of Personal Successfactors and Activities

During the interviews, the semi-structuration allowed the subjects to freely steer the conversation which revealed which positions and sectors the subjects were employed in. This information can be found in table 1 but will not be elaborated on individually.

In this part of the interview, we were interested in how the subjects would describe their current success in the workplace and which personal factors had contributed to this success. This question was asked early in the interviews to avoid interview bias, then elaborated on further later in the interview in a natural manner whenever necessary.

It was revealed that there existed a general consensus between the subjects that there were multiple factors that contributed to their success within the workplace, as subject N1 states:

"At the very least, in my own experience, there are a couple things that have contributed to me being able to succeed, or you know, being proud of the work I deliver. The main one is my structure and lifestyle, the fact that I follow a schedule and hold myself to it. This especially helps in maintaining a healthy work and life balance.

… I guess there are also personal traits such as time-management and that I'm friendly towards others have also contributed to it. That being said, I would not have gotten this job if it had not been for networking, so I would say that while it has not specifically helped me in doing a better job, it has aided in my professional success… ."

We observed that N1 pointed out all three of the personal successfactors that the study expected to look at, and the information found in table 2 we observe a pattern formed concerning the personal successfactors of "lifestyle" and "personal traits". Eight of the ten interview subjects agreed that lifestyle and personal traits had a significant impact on their success in their workplace, although only two subjects agreed that networking had an impact.

4.2.1 Lifestyle

From the interviews and data gathered therein, one can conclude that lifestyle choices play a significant role in shaping the success of university graduates in their professional careers. Three specific aspects were concluded as being impactful on success and in making the transition easier to maneuver.

The first aspect uncovered through the interviews was that maintaining a healthy work-life balance was crucial for long-term success. The interview subjects who prioritized self-care, personal relationships and participated in leisure activities alongside their professional commitments were more likely to experience higher job satisfaction, lower stress levels and an overall better well-being. By having a balanced lifestyle, it enabled the subjects to bring their best selves to the workplace and sustain productivity over a longer period in order to avoid burning out.

In line with work-life balance we have the second aspect, health and well-being. Whilst it is entirely possible to succeed without this aspect, as confirmed by N2, the study shows that physical and mental well-being are essential for optimal performance in the workplace. As N5 emphasized, by engaging in regular exercise and maintaining healthy eating habits, he improved his focus which in turn, led to higher energy levels. These perks made the transition less stressful and thus positively influenced productivity and job satisfaction, leading to a higher degree of success.

Lastly, the aspect of continuous learning and skill development furthered the interview subjects' success. By adopting a lifestyle of continuous learning after their university period, one can achieve professional growth. The subjects who embraced opportunities for upskilling, pursuing additional certification, or other forms of engagement to learning and skill development demonstrated a commitment to personal development. In doing so, it was revealed that these individuals, for instance N3, were better equipped to adapt to constantly changing industry demands, seize new opportunities and thereby, enhance their professional success.

4.2.2 Networking

While effective networking skills may be able to significantly contribute to the success of university graduates in their professional careers, the study shows that networking has had little significant impact on success for our sample group. It was also found difficult to draw any form of correlation between networking and making the transition easier from the sample group's experiences. Despite this, it must be noted that it may be of help in specific circumstances as shown briefly in chapter 4.2.

4.2.3 Genetics and Personal Traits

The data reveals that personal traits, including personal attitudes and mindset, significantly impact the success of university students and the transition to the professional field.

Earlier studies that looked at these factors showed that self-esteem has an effect on occupational prestige and income (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2007). As a result, the study expected that self-confidence and assertiveness had a significant impact. From this study one can observe that a strong sense of self-confidence and assertiveness can further graduates' success. The data shows that confidence and self-esteem enables graduates to take calculated risks, voice ideas and opinions as well as seizing opportunities for growth. It is also evident that it fosters assertiveness in negotiations, decision-making, and the ability to advocate for oneself in the workplace, leading to further career advancement and increased job satisfaction.

That being said, the interview subjects pointed out that one has to be considerate when taking advantage of this factor. Whilst it is impactful in a positive manner when used sparingly and in a non-obvious manner, it can quickly be viewed in a negative light if one does not possess qualifications and skills that one can base its assertiveness upon. If this is the case, we observed that it will often put the subject in a negative light and be seen as delusional when considering the subject's actual skills.

When looking at personal traits, there was also evidence that some specific traits contributed to a more successful and maneuverable transition, specifically adaptability, flexibility and perseverance. The ability to adapt to new situations and embrace changes was determined to be crucial in today’s dynamic work environment. The subjects who demonstrated adaptability and flexibility reported an easier transition due to being able to quickly adjust to different priorities and technologies, as well as organizational cultures.

Additionally, if the subjects experienced setbacks or difficulties with the transition and in their workplace it was observed that those who had the personal traits of resilience and perseverance made them much more likely to bounce back from these setbacks and at the same time maintain a positive attitude in the face of these challenges. Due to this, they were able to learn from failures and use the knowledge obtained to further their own success.

4.3 The Impact of Academic Successfactors and Activities

Having established the personal successfactors of the interview subjects early on in as part of the introductive conversations, we were then interested in how the subjects had experienced what the study refers to as “academic successfactors”. In the interviews, an observation was made that there was a need for further clarification by what the term “academic successfactors” entailed. This clarification demanded describing the three factors the subjects might experience over the course of their education and asking whether they had any impact on success. Once the subjects had a clear understanding of what was asked, patterns were formed within the sample group.

4.3.1 ECAs

The minority of the interview subjects put a significant weight on extracurricular activities, positions and affiliations, henceforth referred to as ECA's. This was an unexpected revelation as earlier studies have shown that ECA's can have a large impact on success, results from which we initially expected the opposite of what was then actually observed in the interviews. That being said, it must be noted that the majority of the interview subject had little to no experience with relevant ECA's and as N5 stated:

> *"I don't feel like extracurricular activities and positions have had any impact for me personally as I have not held any such positions, but I think that if the activity or position is relevant, for example in being a financial manager for a student club, it would probably be positive. Although, from what I have heard, I view it more as something decorative that can help you get a job offer rather than being something directly experience-worthy"*

Although N5 did not have any personal experience with this factor, as stated, he did express that a relevant position could have a positive impact on success. He believed that ECA's has value in regards to one's job application, which was a sentiment that the sample group as a whole shared despite their limited experience. As N4 states:

> *"... but there have been multiple times during a job interview where I have been asked why I didn't have any ECA's on my CV, so I believe hiring managers value them…"*

4.3.2 Part-Time Positions

The interviews revealed a difference in opinion considering the impact of part-time positions with six out of the ten interview subjects viewing such positions as having a positive impact on success and the other four viewing them as having little to no impact on success in their professional career. Further, although the group of six viewed their employment as something with a positive impact, there were also differences in opinion as to what degree of impact it had and in which way. The reason for this, however, was typically in relation to what the part-time position had entailed in terms of relevance and overall value to their current position.

Accordingly, this was the similar reasoning for why the other four viewed part-time positions as something having little to none impact.

The data presented us with an expected general consensus that if the part-time position was in a relevant field, where the subjects did work pertaining to their education and overall career goals, then it would have a largely positive impact on success. This proposition is in consideration of both the competitive advantage one would have in the hiring process and in the actual work carried out once hired. On the other hand, while seemingly being in a relevant field, it was also stated that the past experience of most part-time positions were not relevant to their current careers as it often consisted of menial labor or "boring" tasks. This latter insight, however, was also a source for divided opinions of the sample group.

4.3.3 In-Class Activities

The majority of the interview subjects responded in favor of in-class activities, something which was to be expected as this is the most central part of an education within business and administration and serves as the very foundation of knowledge to be utilized later on in the workplace. Whilst this was expected, the subjects were aware of the fact that the term "in-class activities" served as an umbrella-term and had further opinions on specific activities within the term, as exemplified by subject N10:

> *"The education itself has, of course, helped with my success despite the fact that what we learned is not very relevant to the work I'm doing. For example, I would not have gotten the job if I did not have my master degree. ... but there were activities that have provided more value for me than others. I think there was too much focus on lectures and theoretical frameworks that weren't very effective".*

The interviews, for the most part, followed some variation of the above quote where the subject would exemplify their experience with specific activities. Due to this tendency of voluntary exclaims, the subjects were asked to further explain their thoughts and experiences with various in-class activities. In this sense, it is critical that we also note how the interview guide already contained further questions aimed to cover the different in-class activities, specifically; lectures, studying, internships, presentations, and case-work and active learning.

4.3.3.1 Lectures

The sample group, as a whole, viewed lectures as having the smallest direct amount of effect on success with none of the interview subjects viewing them as having a significant impact, as seen in table 2. This was an expected result as earlier studies show that other forms of learning are often more effective when compared to lectures in terms of gained educational experience (Leigh. N.W. et al., 2015, p. 8).

Despite none of the subjects viewing lectures as something having a significant and direct impact on career success, with the majority of the subjects stating that they preferred other avenues towards gaining an education, lectures nonetheless demonstrated their definitive importance in the curriculum. Subject N8 summarizes the general consensus in the following manner:

> *"While lectures are one of my least favorite forms of in-class activities, I believe that without them it would be very challenging for the other activities to function. … For example, imagine if you're given a case or presentation and you haven't had any lectures related to them. It would be difficult to complete those tasks without the foundation that the lectures give …"*

This sentiment, of lectures being a critical educational foundation, is something that was shared amongst many others in the sample group. It serves as a highly interesting insight from the fact that initially, none of the subjects weighted it significantly, yet believed it served as an important theoretical foundation to build upon with other forms of learning. It was, however, when compared to other activities, specified that the general strain from lectures currently felt too draining. Furthermore, the prevailing sentiment advocated a reduction and/or change in the design of lectures with a concurrent increase in other prudent activities as one of the most effective ways to instantly achieve a higher degree of preparedness for professional success.

4.3.3.2 Self-Studies

In the interviews, it was clarified that the term "studying" in this context concerned self-studies, for example reading syllabi and doing other academic work that was not specifically anchored to plenary curricular participation.

Out of the ten interview subjects, we observed three subjects who viewed studying as something having a direct and significant impact on success. These subjects expressed that without studying, a student would experience great difficulties throughout their academic career, which, in turn, would likely lead to a lower degree of success in their professional career. This was mainly due to two reasons, the first being the rather unchallenged view that a smaller attainment of knowledge would typically impact academic grades and consequently, result in a competitive disadvantage in the professional market. The other reason, however, was more interesting, with the subjects relating the process of studying to the lifestyle- and personal trait factors with special regards to motivation and discipline. For example, as N3 states:

> *"Studying is a bit better than lectures in regards to effectiveness in my opinion, but that alone is not why I look at it as a successfactor. I think that if you study and do your own work outside of what is obligatory, it reflects on your motivation and discipline which you need to succeed…"*

Furthermore, we observe that from all three subjects that view studying as having a significant impact, they also view lifestyle and personal traits as factors that have a significant impact on success.

4.3.3.3 Internships

In the context of successfactors, we expected internships to be viewed as a significant factor due to the unique value of practical experience that students achieve within a relevant field and workplace. Moreover, if particularly fruitful, an internship presents the intern with a potential entry to a future employer. Despite this expectation, only two of the interview subjects viewed internships as having a significant impact as a successfactor. Subject N10 was one of those two and presented her thoughts on internships in the following way:

> *"Before I started working full-time at [her workplace] I had an internship here that was really valuable in multiple ways. Though I didn't do the same work in my internship as I do now, it gave me insight into the work I do now and how the company works towards something. That was really helpful. … and I also benefited from my internship when I applied for a full-time position, because I knew the people and already had experience with the company…".*

Subject N3 also shared similar lines of thought with N10's, explaining that he possessed similar reasons and experiences for why he felt it had a significant impact.

Although the other eight subjects did not view internships as something having a significant impact, most of them stated that the rationale behind their opinion was that they did not have any real experience with the factor. Hence, they could not fairly consider whether or not internships would have imparted any actual impact on their own success. When the subjects were asked of the same activity without regards to their own success in a more hypothetical question, most of the subjects expressed unsolicitedly that they believed that it would be beneficial in regards to success on much of the same basis as N3 and N10. In consequence, the column regarding internships in table 2 may misrepresent the actual impact that internships can have on success.

4.3.3.4 Presentations

As expected, from their academic education, all of the interview subjects held some previous experience and encounters with presentations. From table 2, we observe that half of the subjects viewed presentational experience as something having a significantly positive impact on success in their professional career.

While the reasoning for why said factor had an impact differed between the subjects, two main reasons were generally agreed upon. The first reason was that the subjects expressed a higher degree of attained learning, whenever working with and presenting tasks in a presentational form and context. This higher degree of learning was due to a couple of factors, as elaborated upon by subject N7:

> *"I felt that presentations were one of the best forms of learning that we had at the university, yet, of course, it depends from person to person and what you make of it. From my perspective, however, it forced the students to actually put in more work in what they did, simply from the fact that they had to present it in front of other people and it might be embarrassing if they have not done well. ... and often you had to do the work in groups and as a result you could engage in discourse with your peers. This process really helped me understand the topics better and perform better in teamwork-*

settings in addition to preparing me for the job of presenting something in meetings at my workplace as similar expectations of delivery are to be met here".

As one can observe, subject N7 draws on three aspects for why she believes presentations have had a significant impact on her success. Whilst not all of the four other subjects agreed with N7 on all three factors, the three aspects were brought up multiple times freely by these subjects. Essentially, the general sentiment was that presentations were viewed favorably on professional success by those who actively and frequently encounter presentations in their position and careers, for example in board meetings and/or when presenting reports.

Lastly, in terms of the effectiveness of different learning forms, it must be noted that a majority of the sample group generally viewed presentations as something belonging to the more effective forms, especially when compared to traditional lectures.

4.3.3.5 Case-Work and Active Learning

The last category within in-class activities that the study wanted to inquire of was the subject of case-work and other forms of active learning taking place within an organized academic context. Typically, these activities align with the Constructivist Learning Theory as somewhat of an alternative to traditional learning methods and thus, are found to be particularly intriguing. (BADA, 2015, p. 66).

As it seemed the most relevant and prudent in regards to the academic background of our subjects, our interview question was mostly directed towards case-work. However, as it quickly proved, active-learning manifested itself in a variety of manners beyond what we initially expected. Accordingly, in any such instance, the participants were allowed to elaborate freely.

Essentially, in relation to the aforementioned rendition and with seven out of the ten interview subjects viewing the adjoining experience as something having a significant impact on their own success, it was indeed highly interesting that this category was attributed the most significant impact on professional success out of the five categories, While the reasons for this may be attributed to the fact that the category is relatively unspecific and broad compared to the others, the interview subjects' reasoning mostly dispute such claims. In example, this is seen from subject N9 statements:

"Case-work, and other forms of interactive learning like it, was definitely my favorite way to understand a topic throughout my education. Whenever I had in class case-work it was much more fun and interesting because you actually got to use the theoretical foundation in a more practical setting. This made the work more engaging and I was able to visualize how the stuff we learned could actually be used in the real world. It was also often done through group work, which gave room for discourse and proper discussion to what solutions would work better than others".

In the sample group, the general consensus advocated case-work and other active learning forms as they, through the practical utilization required, lead to a significant impact on their current success. In accordance, the prevailing sentiment has also been that such forms are considered more effective in the overall attainment of knowledge and the understanding of whichever business and administration subject is in question. On account of the fact that the subjects had the opportunity to use the overall theoretical knowledge from lectures and studies in a real-life setting by applying it to practical tasks, they themselves maintain that this resulted in a higher degree of learning.

4.3.4 The Effects of Academic Successfactors and Activities

This part will serve as a summary to chapter 4.3 to provide an overview and discussion of the factors identified that impact success and facilitate a smoother transition from student to professional life.

The interviews conducted with the sample group sheds light on the importance of extracurricular activities (ECA's) in relation to success. While most subjects had limited experience with relevant ECA's, they recognized the potential value in terms of job applications and decorative value. While ECA's were perceived as aiding in job opportunities, they were not considered directly experience-worthy leading to a generally lower impact on success. It must also be noted that they may make for a easier transition depending on the ECA, although one can not draw any concluding remarks from the data gathered

Part-time positions emerged as a more influential factor affecting success and the transition to professional life. More than half of the sample group believed that relevant part-time positions had a positive impact, particularly when relevant to their education. However, four subjects expressed skepticism, citing past experiences involving unrelated or menial tasks that they felt did not contribute significantly to their success or to make the transition easier. That being said, with a majority of the sample group citing a positive impact, it is clear that part-time positions have their place when considering success and streamlining the transition.

In-class activities played a crucial role in shaping academic and professional success while at the same time preparing students for professional settings. While lectures were considered to have the smallest direct impact on these factors, they were widely acknowledged as providing a theoretical foundation for the other activities that were inquired about. Self-studies were viewed favorably by three subjects, who recognized the reflection of motivation and discipline in this independent learning approach. Additionally, internships were perceived as beneficial for success, although only two subjects had experienced its impact firsthand. As a result, the authors find it difficult to draw any positive conclusions regarding internships and their place when regarding success and transitional ease based on the data. Presentations were seen as effective for learning and developing teamwork skills, while case-work and active learning activities were identified as having the most significant impact, offering an area to use their theoretical knowledge foundation in practical applications and fostering group discussions and problem-solving.

In conclusion, the perspectives shared by the interview subjects highlight the importance of aligned extracurricular activities and part-time positions, and especially engaging in in-class activities with focus on the more active learning activities. Through proper use of these factors, it is shown that one can shape their own success and facilitate a smoother transition to professional life. By considering and leveraging these factors in a manner aligned with the findings, students can better prepare for success and a successful career.

4.4 The Impact of Tools

After the assembly of data on in-class activities, the study aimed to examine whether or not there exists any specific tools that the interview subjects felt could be implemented more frequently in academic curriculums. The question was aimed towards answering whether the interview subjects experienced any insufficient levels of experience in any tools once employed.

The study found that the interview subjects frequently brought up the necessity of different softwares and other tools in the specific professions, yet they viewed their roles as being specialized to such a degree that it would not make sense to incorporate all of these tools into the curriculum. Despite the level of specialization that required the specific tools as mentioned in the manner above, there were three specific software programs that were brought up in the interviews that the subjects deemed prudent to incorporate into the curriculum in a more consistent manner. These three will be addressed individually in the following sections.

In addition to the three tools mentioned beneath, an additional observation was made from one of the alumni students that specialized in accounting. He specified that while there exists a plethora of different accounting software, tools such as 24SevenOffice, Visma Business and many others, rather than mainly focusing on the theoretical foundation behind the software, it would be of benefit to incorporate some form of practical accounting software into the curriculum to better reflect the actual state of the accounting sector. That being said, he also revealed that it might be a challenge to adapt a standardized curriculum from which the knowledge can be easily transferred to such softwares.

4.4.1 Programming Languages, Python and R

Unexpectedly, subjects N3 and N7, who specialized in analytical finance, brought up the programming language R which is already incorporated into the curriculum, but they expressed a need for a broader understanding and more practical applications regarding the programming language. We also observed that subject N9 brought up programming languages, although more specifically Python which was a sentiment that N3 and N7 also shared.

Hence, from the interviews, it is understood that Python is a more widely used programming language than R in the financial sector, with a few exceptions. Due to this, all three subjects expressed a need for Python to be introduced somewhat into the curriculum, as they viewed it as having a significant impact on success in their professional work. Furthermore, the transition from academics to professional would often be easier if one already had a basic understanding of the language. For example, as seen directly in the job of at least one of our subjects, N1, a prerequisite for success is that he can serve as an intermediary between computer experts and customers. Hence, in order to serve his customers, he needs to be able to understand programming and the product this represents.

4.4.2 MS PowerBI

Moving on from programming languages, we observed a pattern emerging with interview subjects addressing a need for PowerBI to be introduced into the curriculum. This software is developed by Microsoft and serves as a tool to assist in data visualization regarding business insight.

Out of the ten interview subjects, four subjects brought up a lack of PowerBI in the curriculum. The four subjects expressed that there was a need for a higher competency in data analytics as it can be employed to uncover insights, identify patterns and provide information that can be used to make informed decisions. Accordingly, an integration of PowerBI to the education of students would enable them to develop practical skills that are deemed essential by employers, explained through subject N1's statement:

> *"PowerBI would be one of the most important tools that could be integrated into the curriculum, as I have been asked in most of my interviews if I have experience with the software. From my perspective, employers both utilize and value it highly and thus, any applicant that has experience has a competitive advantage. It also gives you a much more visualized understanding of the data you are handling and consequently, you can use the data in a much more effective manner"*

Though PowerBI was brought up by a less than half of the sample group, it is clear that it would be of benefit to the students to introduce this software or similar tools into the curriculum to enable students to effectively communicate and present insights derived from complex datasets.

Essentially, a familiarity with additional MS tools such as PowerBI may present new professionals with even more leverage, this being either during the process of securing a job position or in establishing professional rapport once hired. However, our findings indicate a lessened and more varied use of PowerBI and similar tools than what is the case with MS Excel. In general, while highly advantageous, a proficiency in PowerBI and similar tools is not considered by our inquired professionals to be an equally essential prerequisite when compared to MS Excel.

4.4.3 MS Excel

While the sample group brought up several different tools that could potentially be integrated, there was one tool that the sample group as a whole, with the exception of N2, all agreed should be more widely integrated into the curriculum of business and administration students. This tool is also widely known and utilized on a global scale and it is the spreadsheet software Microsoft Excel.. In regards to what the utilization of MS Excel can provide, subject N1 had this to say:

> *"For one, the utilization of MS Excel and similar tools allows for the creation of visual connections between economic principles, formulas, and theory, leading to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of business administration. As the brain processes information through visual associations, this approach can facilitate the identification and comprehension of interrelationships between different economic factors, inputs and formulas, resulting in a more holistic grasp of the subject matter"*

Regarding academic education in business and management, and the significant potential of MS Excel within this context, we found N1's statement to be the most profound. Furthermore, although the perspectives of our eight remaining supporters of MS Excel varied in terms of potential academic implementation and overall necessity, the prevailing sentiment was that an intermediate proficiency in Excel, beyond what is typically provided academically, is something currently considered a prerequisite by numerous professions and firms. This latter insight is perhaps best summarized by N5, who, in his job as a recruiter, works on behalf of many different firms and thus frequently assess their expectations.

> *"I actually remember it quite well, the slight embarrassment that resulted from hardly having used a tool as menial as Excel during my studies. Its applicability may seem rather trivial and thus perhaps unobvious, but the fact of the matter is that MS Excel is actually used both extensively and effectively for a wide array of tasks related to business and administration. While I may not be expected to be an expert, there is still the rather frequent and troublesome existence of a discrepancy between what is demanded by employers and what is supplied by employees in terms of experience and skills in MS Excel. Accordingly, whether it be through increased overall implementation in the curricula, its very own subject or both, a higher degree of familiarity and*

knowledge of Excel should definitely be on the agenda of students as well as the university"

In essence, on the subject of specific tools and skills, we tried as researchers to maintain our distance for as long as possible from influence. However, we were surprised to learn that most, if not all, of our participants strongly advocated MS Excel, a finding that we have since taken cognizance of. Consequently, it is our firm belief that a proficiency in Excel precipitates higher levels of technical skills through familiarization as well as enhancing one's general knowledge through visual association. Specifically, Excel allows for the integration of a theoretical business administration foundation into a practical and standardized context that is also used by professionals, mainly by facilitating numerical problem solving and a real-time visualization of interrelationships between different factors, formulas, numbers.

4.4.4 The Effect of a Diverse Skill Set

Our study identifies the importance of diversity in the skillsets of business administration students and that having an understanding of certain tools, not to mention other fields of specialization such as IT, is something that highly improves their competency.. By pursuing a diverse set of skills, business administration students will not only improve their own product later on but also advance in the role they may fill as an intermediary between customers and specialists. In essence, business administration students are not only more able at performing systems analysis and utilizing digital tools when serving their customers on the demand side, the supply side also benefits through precise communication and more effective feedback by mitigating miscommunication and the costly mistakes that may follow from an ineffective supply chain.

Moreover, on the subject of tools and skills, we tried as researchers to maintain our distance for as long as possible from specific influence. However, we were surprised to learn that most, if not all, of our participants advocated MS Excel, a finding that we have since taken cognizance of. Consequently, it is our firm belief that a proficiency in Excel precipitates higher levels of technical skills through familiarization as well as enhancing one's general knowledge of business administration through visual association. Specifically, Excel allows for the integration of a theoretical foundation of business administration into a practical and standardized context that is also used by professionals, mainly by facilitating numerical problem solving and a real-time visualization of interrelationships between different factors, formulas, numbers.

Further, a familiarity with additional MS tools such as PowerBI may present new professionals with even more leverage, this being either during the process of securing a job position or in establishing professional rapport once hired. However, our findings indicate a lessened and more varied use of PowerBI and similar tools than what is the case with MS Excel. In general, while highly advantageous, a proficiency in PowerBI and similar tools is not considered by our inquired participants to be an equally essential prerequisite in comparison to MS Excel.

Lastly, and perhaps most interestingly, in addition to the most predominant MS-tools, our study has also revealed the growing importance of programming in the field of business administration, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis among professionals. In general however, our participants expressed the belief that an early introduction to programming is prudent, as it serves both as a language and a tool for gaining practical experience. Specifically, the success and current positions of at least two participants, N3 and N7, have been attributed to their previous experience with R, while another participant, N1, credited their understanding of Python for part of his success. These findings suggest that proficiency in programming languages can be a valuable asset for future business administration students and may contribute to their career advancement. They also suggest that former knowledge in these areas prior to transitioning to the professional world makes for an easier transition by making the wave of new knowledge encountered during the transition more surmountable.

4.5 Empirical Findings Weighted According to the Sample Group

Valuable Skills, Factors and/or Activities most accredited by the participants unsolicitedly.

	Academic Successfactors			Personal Successfactors			Tools			In-Class Activities				
N	In-Class	Part-Time Job	Extracurricular Activities, Positions and Affiliations	Life-style	Networking	Personal Traits	R/Python/ Programming	Excel	PowerBI	Presentation	Case/A.L.	Lectures	Study	ExC.A
1	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			
2	X	X								X				
3	X			X		X	X		X		X		X	X
4	X					X		X						
5	X	X		X		X		X	X	X	X			
6				X		X		X	X					
7	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	
8	X	X	X	X				X			X			
9	X	X		X		X	X	X		X	X		X	
10	X			X		X		X			X			X

Table 2 - Visual representation of data gathered and its significance from the interview subjects, categorized as explained beneath.

Blue = Empirically Prevailing Successfactors, Yellow = Specific Tools, Red = Other, Specific Activities, Factors or Traits of accredited value.

4.6 Value of the Thesis to Stakeholders

Finally, in the last section of the fourth chapter, we discuss the value of the findings above as they pertain to the three main stakeholders relating to our thesis. Namely, these are the Universities, the Students and the Professional Sphere.

4.6.1 Universities

The first three successfactors, while being less explicit in nature, deserve a thorough consideration on the basis that they can be utilized as great sales points in the overall presentation of the university. We believe that in addition to providing the necessary knowledge within business administration, a university has the additional opportunity to influence the way in which they establish the identity of its students. The modern business administration student is expected to fulfill a complex role, a role that is both anchored in tradition and highly subject to change. Yet, as we have seen in our interviews, the prospect of being a graduate within business administration is something which may also invigorate and motivate many students and hence, it is a highly leverageable insight that should be exploited. In essence, we believe that great value can be derived from recognizing and exploiting the fact that while business administration students begin at the university, they should always feel like they can go anywhere.

Concerning the fourth and final successfactor, i.e. a diverse skill set, we were astounded by the extent to which certain tools were advocated. As a result, we simply ask that policymakers take note and promote the use and familiarization of these tools to a greater extent. In doing so, universities may improve the overall accolades of students through increased familiarization with common digital tools in business administration..

4.6.2 Students

Possibly, as was our aim, the findings of our study are of the greatest value to the students themselves. We strongly encourage that each student, in the pursuit of a better understanding of single subjects as well as business administration as a whole, explore the applicability of Excel as well as other tools and skills mentioned. It is our firm belief that a proficiency in Excel and programming will only entail positive effects and in this sense, it is most regrettable how we did not pursue such experience ourselves. Consequently, it is with utmost sincerity that we implore current and future students to behave differently. Additionally, in addition to the in-class activities, students should actively seek out activities that align with their professional aspirations and interests. The successful students we interviewed highly emphasized such an importance, of pursuing activities that are personally fulfilling.

4.6.3 Professionals

To the professional sphere, while the implications of the study will vary, the findings may yet provoke a sense of both relief and smugness in that we now feel certain tools may have been advocated for a long time with little or no recognition. Consequently, while we have found no evidence of any employer being dissatisfied with current academic curriculums, we have also concluded that one can maintain the interests of both parties without sacrificing the knowledge of the students. In fact, it is our firm belief that each party, including the professional sphere, may only gain from an increased implementation of the specific tools mentioned.

5. Conclusion

This study has investigated the transition from student to professional as it pertains to students within business administration and in that sense demonstrated the prevailing factors behind a success. In accordance, we conclude our thesis by answering the research questions, addressing key limitations, proposals for future studies and lastly, some personal remarks.

5.1 Research Questions

1. What are the factors that contribute to a successful transition of university graduates into their professional careers?

In the author's opinion, the difference between student and professional is particularly curious and discernable to students within business administration on account that these students are to begin earning money, some for the very first time, within a field that typically concerns money. Regardless, as is always the case, the transition into professional life will feel very different from one individual to the next. What we have found, however, is that most, if not all of our participants have transitioned both naturally and highly successfully despite having completely different backgrounds, levels of prior knowledge and/or overall personal aspirations, interests or traits. As expected, we have confirmed that the reasons behind each student's successful transition cannot be attributed to a single factor. Rather, the professional paths they embark on vary greatly, leading to a diverse range of factors contributing to their achievements.

2. How can these factors be utilized by current and future students to improve their own career success?

Through our insightful interviews, it has become evident that the academic foundation currently provided is robust and reliable, warranting its preservation without alteration. However, there is room for improvement in how we approach theory and knowledge. By incorporating modern elements such as MS Excel and programming, we can make the learning experience more engaging and enriching for our students in addition to building their overall human capital, motivations and interest.

3. How should university policy and curriculum be adapted to incorporate the identified success factors, in order to better facilitate the successful transition of current and future students into their professional careers?

Lastly, from our thesis and combined academic experience, when concerning the preparation of future students to the professional sphere, we see some clear challenges from the current standing of smaller institutes in the opposition of larger and more revered universities. However, we see no reason for why said disadvantage should not be translatable into a positive and highly leverageable feature. The former category is subject to freedom where the latter category find themselves forcefully anchored in tradition. Accordingly, it is with reference to our entire study and the discovered successfactors in particular that we now urge policymakers at smaller universities, while naturally less probable, not to fall victim to the hazards of tradition.
Hence, as our very last and perhaps most important remark, in order for universities and curriculum to better facilitate the transition from student to professional, we implore a higher degree of standardization through the use of a few very specific and highly universal tools, as well as looking at the possibility of altering the general curriculum to include a more varied set of in-class activities without it being too impactful on the theoretical foundation.

5.2 Limitations

While we strive to make our conclusions universally sound, they are in fact based on the results from interviews with young Norwegian professionals and will be biased thereof. In consequence, while we aspire in our concluding remarks to cater to all students of a similar nature, the results may not translate efficiently to other populations. Furthermore, the study employed a relatively small sample size of only ten participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a larger population of business students. Also, the sample was drawn from a single university and the findings may not be applicable to students from other institutions or contexts.

Secondly, the study relied solely on self-report data, which may be prone to biases or inaccuracies. Future studies could employ mixed-methods approaches that incorporate multiple sources of data, such as employer feedback or performance metrics. Additionally, the study did not explore the causal relationships between the identified success factors and the successful transition to professional, which is a potential limitation. Future studies could use experimental or longitudinal designs to better understand the causal relationships between these factors and the transition to professional.

Thirdly, the study was conducted with recent graduates and may not fully reflect the experiences or perspectives of more seasoned professionals. This limitation may impact the external validity of the study, particularly in regards to the applicability of findings to mid-career or senior-level business professionals. That being said, the insights are meant to cater current and future students that typically face similar conditions to that of those having attended a few years prior.

Additionally, we must address the limitations that stem from time. The writing of this thesis itself is naturally restricted by both time and space, but more importantly, so is the validity of our findings going into the future. Acknowledging the fact that our global society evolves at an ever-growing pace in both complexity and scope, we cannot expect to be able to create a universal set of guidelines that lasts indefinitely. From this insight, we have chosen to focus on what is actually possible to achieve today in terms of change and what is expected to be of benefit to the students today as well as ten years going forwards. That being said, we do aim for our thesis to remain relevant for as long as possible and have strived to construct it accordingly.

5.3 Future Studies.

Overall, this study has shed light on some of the key factors that contribute to a successful transition to professional for business administration students. However, there is still much to be explored in this area and several avenues for future research can be identified.

On the subject of personality and own motivation, with basis in the three first successfactors, it is of high interest for future studies to examine the effect of an increased sense of identity on the overall motivation and performance of business administration students. Furthermore, there is a need for research that examines the intersectionality of identities and how this may influence the transition to professional for underrepresented groups. From the feedback of the individuals inquired with, it is also of utmost interest to see how the most frequently discussed tools, for instance Excel or Python, could be applied in the overall curricula and potentially further the overall academic understanding of the students as a result. On the basis of the interviews we have conducted and positive experiences from the professional sphere, it would be of utmost interest to study the effects of such an approach within a multitude of business administration subjects in comparison to existing curricular structures.

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7. Appendixes

7.1 List of figures

1. Table 1 – An overview of the sample groups' relevant information

Subject	Sex	Age	Position	Years Working	Specialization
N1	M	29	Consultant	2	M.E
N2	M	30	Consultant	3	I.B
N3	M	27	Analyst	1	Analytical Finance
N4	M	28	Accountant	1	M.E
N5	M	26	Recruiter	1	M.E
N6	M	27	Accountant	1.5	MRR
N7	F	29	Analyst	1	Analytical Finance
N8	F	28	Accountant	2	M.E
N9	F	26	Consultant	1	I.B
N10	F	25	Tender Estimator	1	I.B

2. Table 2 – Visual representation of data gathered and its signifiance from the interview subjects

Valuable Skills, Factors and/or Activities most accredited by the participants unsolicitedly.

	Academic Successfactors			Personal Successfactors			Tools			In-Class Activities				
N	In-Class	Part-Time Job	Extracurricular Activities, Positions and Affiliations	Life-style	Networking	Personal Traits	R/Python/ Programming	Excel	PowerBI	Presentation	Case/A.L.	Lectures	Study	ExC.A
1	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			
2	X	X								X				
3	X			X		X	X		X		X		X	X
4	X					X		X						
5	X	X		X		X		X	X	X	X			
6				X		X		X	X					
7	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	
8	X	X	X	X				X			X			
9	X	X		X		X	X	X		X	X		X	
10	X			X		X		X			X			X

Table 2 - Visual representation of data gathered and its significance from the interview subjects, categorized as explained beneath.

Blue = Empirically Prevailing Successfactors, Yellow = Specific Tools, Red = Other, Specific Activities, Factors or Traits of accredited value.

7.2 Approval from NSD/SIKT

Sikt

Meldeskjema / Masteroppgave / Vurdering

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Referansenummer	Vurderingstype	Dato
110229	Automatisk	28.04.2023

Prosjekttittel
Masteroppgave

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon
Universitetet i Agder / Handelshøyskolen ved UiA / Institutt for økonomi

Prosjektansvarlig
John Arngrim Hunnes

Student
Håvard Huglen

Prosjektperiode
01.01.2023 - 01.07.2023

Kategorier personopplysninger
Alminnelige

Lovlig grunnlag
Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 01.07.2023.

Meldeskjema

Grunnlag for automatisk vurdering
Meldeskjemaet har fått en automatisk vurdering. Det vil si at vurderingen er foretatt maskinelt, basert på informasjonen som er fylt inn i meldeskjemaet. Kun behandling av personopplysninger med lav personvernulempe og risiko får automatisk vurdering. Sentrale kriterier er:

- De registrerte er over 15 år
- Behandlingen omfatter ikke særlige kategorier personopplysninger;
  - Rasemessig eller etnisk opprinnelse
  - Politisk, religiøs eller filosofisk overbevisning
  - Fagforeningsmedlemskap
  - Genetiske data
  - Biometriske data for å entydig identifisere et individ
  - Helseopplysninger
  - Seksuelle forhold eller seksuell orientering
- Behandlingen omfatter ikke opplysninger om straffedommer og lovovertredelser
- Personopplysningene skal ikke behandles utenfor EU/EØS-området, og ingen som befinner seg utenfor EU/EØS skal ha tilgang til personopplysningene
- De registrerte mottar informasjon på forhånd om behandlingen av personopplysningene.

Informasjon til de registrerte (utvalgene) om behandlingen må inneholde

- Den behandlingsansvarliges identitet og kontaktopplysninger
- Kontaktopplysninger til personvernombudet (hvis relevant)
- Formålet med behandlingen av personopplysningene
- Det vitenskapelige formålet (formålet med studien)
- Det lovlige grunnlaget for behandlingen av personopplysningene
- Hvilke personopplysninger som vil bli behandlet, og hvordan de samles inn, eller hvor de hentes fra
- Hvem som vil få tilgang til personopplysningene (kategorier mottakere)
- Hvor lenge personopplysningene vil bli behandlet

- Retten til å trekke samtykket tilbake og øvrige rettigheter

Vi anbefaler å bruke vår mal til informasjonsskriv.

Informasjonssikkerhet
Du må behandle personopplysningene i tråd med retningslinjene for informasjonssikkerhet og lagringsguider ved behandlingsansvarlig institusjon. Institusjonen er ansvarlig for at vilkårene for personvernforordningen artikkel 5.1. d) riktighet, 5. 1. f) integritet og konfidensialitet, og 32 sikkerhet er oppfylt.

7.3 Semi-structured interview guide

1. Hva var ditt valg og din begrunnelse for utdanning?
2. Hvordan endte du opp i ditt nåværende arbeid?
3. Med bakgrunn i forrige spørsmål og nåværende arbeid, hva har vært forklaringen på suksess?
4. På hvilke måter har dine tidligere studier vist seg å utgjøre forskjellen?
5. Fortell litt om ditt eget syn og forhold til de følgende aktivitetene/faktorene:
   Ulike skoleaktiviteter, deltidsjobb, verv o.l., livsstil og networking.
6. I henseende av din suksess og de faktorene som her har spilt inn, hvor overførbart vil du si at din viktigste innsikter til andre?
7. Hvilke aktiviteter ser du størst nytte av å forfølge under et studieløp?
   a. presentasjon, case/a.l., forelesning, studere, praksis
8. Er det mulig og/eller hensiktsmessig å overføre praktiske arbeidsmetoder, kunnskaper eller verktøy til/fra akademia? Eks: Programvare, arbeidsmetoder, kunnskapskilder som aviser etc.
9. Hvordan opplevde du overgangen som student til arbeidslivet
   a. Andre programvarer

7.4 Consent Form

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet: "From Student to Professional: Inquiry into Factors and Activities Precipitating a Successful Transition from Student to Professional in Business Administration"

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å se på hvordan utdanningsløpet i akademiske institusjoner kan forbedres i forhold til overgangen til arbeidslivet. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål
Prosjektet har som mål å utrede hvordan tidligere studenter har opplevd overgangen fra akademiske institusjoner til arbeidslivet innenfor den økonomiske sektoren. Det vil være et mindre utvalg av intervjuobjekter som vil bli benyttet til å oppnå en generalisering av en populasjon.

Vi skal se på ulike opplevelser og egne tanker om hva du har opplevd gjennom din overgang, enten positivt eller som kan forbedres, og se på ulike metoder som kan benyttes for å gjøre overgangen enklere.

Dette er en mastergradsavhandling ment til å tjene til videre forskning.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?
Universitetet i Agder er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Du får spørsmål om å delta da du er et medlem av facebook-gruppen som inneholder alumnier fra økonomi-linjene ved UiA og har sagt deg villig til å gjennomføre intervju.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det et 20 minutters intervju som følger en løs intervjuguide. Opplysninger registreres gjennom lyd- og videoopptak som i senere anledning vil transkriberes elektronisk.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Håvard Huglen og Even Kvalfoss vil ha full tilgang til opplysningene, samt veileder etter forespørsel.
- Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil gjøres anonyme om ønskelig, og datamaterialet vil bli lagret på en harddisk med kodelås som ingen andre enn ovennevnte vil ha tilgang til.

Deltakerne vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjoner av forskningsprosjektet.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes når oppgaven blir godkjent ca. 1. juli. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet bli slettet fra alle lagringsplasser.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Universitetet i Agder har Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Universitetet i Agder ved John Arngrim Hunnes, e-post:
- john.a.hunnes@uia.no eller Håvard Huglen, e-post: Huglen@live.no eller telefon: 477 11 129
- Vårt personvernombud: *Personvernombud@uia.no*

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til vurderingen som er gjort av personvern tjenestene fra Sikt, kan du ta kontakt via:

- Epost: personverntjenester@sikt.no eller telefon: 73 98 40 40.

Med vennlig hilsen

John Arngrim Hunnes, Håvard Huglen og Even Kvalfoss
(Forsker/veileder)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet *[sett inn tittel]*, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- ☐ å delta i intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

----

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

7.5. Discussion Paper - Even Kvalfoss

For the first time in more than 20 years, it comes as something extremely relieving and bittersweet to be able to finally say that I am no longer a student, but rather a soon-to-be working professional. It has taken a total of 7 years, 40+ exams, hundreds of reading hours before each of them and more than a 100 000 km off my trusted VW Golf in order for me to get this far and all of which, it now feels like, lasted only for a few days. If I were to describe it all in just one word, strange is what I would say. If I were to use a second word, it would be interesting. Strange and interesting then is the recount of my academic experience and further, on account of what we have produced in our thesis, perhaps also what I have aspired to leave behind.

Choice of Research Topic

In the days leading up to the final decision of the subject of our masters thesis, my writing companion Håvard and I chose to engage in a team building exercise. More precisely, we rode a jet ski together along the shore of Agder, getting caught up in a thunderstorm along the way. It was here that we took shelter in Frederiksholm Fort, a more than 450-year old stronghold that currently serves as a historical landmark and the home of three Norwegian Wild Sheep, while waiting for the storm to pass (National Library of Norway, n.d.). Amidst the surrounding lightning, heavy rain and three sheeps, we came to recognize that in order for our thesis to remain interesting, accessible and relevant for as long as possible to the largest possible number of interessants, we should better utilize the accumulated knowledge from our studies rather than focusing on the most recent and highly specific learnings.

Before long and somewhat unrelated, we had begun discussing the rapid approach of our new lives as professionals and how we, i.e. today's business and economics students, face an immensely varied job market. Further, we argued that, while students within business and administration do in fact have an abundance of opportunities, perhaps even more so than what holds true for most other professions, they can still be quite challenging to locate, navigate and exploit. It was from this revelation that we then suddenly came to realize that we wanted to inquire with already successful students of their perceived successfactors, factors that they have either possessed naturally or utilized actively in order to achieve their current success and/or professions. To the best of our ability, we concluded that it would be highly interesting to detail the determinants for achieving said success, particularly as it would pertain to students of a similar nature to ourselves.

Thereon, from our initial exploration of empirical evidence, we discovered that while luck at times can play an important part, for instance through distinct genetic and/or personal traits, as seen by Belsky et al. (2013) and Bui (2017), professional success is typically attributed to one's personal conduct within the following activities: In-Class activities, part-time employment, extracurricular activities, a healthy lifestyle and networking. (Bergemann & van den Berg, 2008; Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Kivimäki et al, 2013; Belsky et al., 2013).

From our own qualitative studies and the results of our interviews, we have since chosen to conclude along similar lines. As students, we find it our responsibility and unique privilege to be able to actively create favorable circumstances and be well prepared to make the most of them on the basis of a fruitful academic tenure and by utilizing our learned skills and behaviors effectively. The manner in which to proceed, however, will of course vary greatly with each individual and with the complexity that currently exists in our highly globalized world. Henceforth, within the context of our thesis and international trends and forces, some of the most important factors to consider will now be discussed.

Our Thesis and International Trends and Forces

Discussions of global trends and forces that relate to future worldwide development often revolve around two opposing views on the degree of globalization, typically whether it will decrease or increase. From this prerequisite, going forwards, we can derive that while we may experience increased developments towards either direction, globalization remains a highly important element for employees in the professional sphere. Bearing an overall context of globalization in mind, I propose the following five trends and forces to be the most important in the discussion paper: globalization, cultural differences, economic conditions, technological advancements and environmental concerns.

1. **Globalization**

In its own right, globalization provides the context and is the current “name-of-the-game” rule of business that all employees, institutions and firms should recognize. While we may, as mentioned, experience increased protectionism and a trend towards what is more self-sufficient politics worldwide, the individual countries that make up our globe remain unequivocally intertwined with one another. Simply put, by having created new opportunities for businesses to expand into new markets, globalization has entailed increased international trade, investment, and cultural exchange.

In consequence, globalization presents all students of today as well as current professionals with challenges such as increased competition and the need to adapt to different cultural and regulatory environments. From our findings, we suggest the development of a growth-mindset, to pursue an understanding of different cultures and to seek a high proficiency in an international language, typically English, in order to cope with the effects of globalization. Furthermore, as studies by Doherty & Dickmann (2008) have also shown, networking and international work experience is becoming increasingly important for attaining professional success and is thus something we encourage greatly.

2. Cultural Differences

Depending on what constitutes professional success to the individual in question, the search for it nonetheless leads a multitude of students and professionals to pursue either academics, work or both abroad from their native country. Furthermore, to those who choose to remain in their respective native country, globalization is soon encountered regardless and consequently, so are the cultural differences. This inevitable encounter is highly important to recognize as studies have shown that cultural differences, in general, can significantly impact the professional success of students and workers in today's globalized world (Hofstede, 2001, p. 23).

In order to succeed professionally then, students must be made aware of the ways in which cultural differences may be encountered and further impact the results they deliver. For instance, communication styles vary across cultures, which may lead to conflicts in the workplace (Adler, 2002, p. 67). Work-life balance is also valued differently across cultures, which highlights the importance of understanding these differences (Aycan & Kanungo, 2002). Furthermore, attitudes towards teamwork and collaboration, as well as hierarchy and status, can differ greatly across cultures, and being aware of these differences can help individuals build effective relationships with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017, p. 45).

In essence, by being cognizant of cultural differences and adapting one's behavior accordingly, students and workers may navigate cross-cultural interactions more effectively and achieve greater success in their careers. The ways however, in which students are made aware of and further, taught how to handle such differences, will obviously vary greatly, thus emphasizing the need for a students active participation in a variety of settings aside from those encountered in one's immediate surroundings.

3. Economic conditions

Following an academic tenure, as a proxy for the availability of jobs and of opportunities in general, any variability in the general economic conditions will be of significance to the facilitation of professional success as economic factors such as GDP, R&D expenditure, and international trade significantly impact a country's scientific and technological performance. Moreover, the global economy and competition have increased the demand for skilled professionals with scientific knowledge and expertise, making it important for academic institutions to incorporate market-oriented education to best prepare students for the job market.

Thus, in order to achieve professional success, it is crucial for business- and economics students to stay up-to-date with the latest developments in the global economy and acquire relevant skills and knowledge to meet the demands of the international job market. Furthermore, it is equally important that each individual, as an employee, eliminates their expendability in the event of adverse developments to either the systematic and/or unsystematic economic conditions. This can be done, in our opinion, by pursuing favorable activities and gaining invaluable experience during an academic tenure that is not gained otherwise.

4. Technological advancements:

Among the five categories, it is my firm belief that technological advancements involve the fastest rate of change and the greatest overall progress. For business and economics students in particular, staying informed about emerging technologies, developing technical skills, building a strong network, and embracing lifelong learning are all essential strategies for succeeding professionally in the context of technological- and general advancement.

Firstly, attending industry conferences and networking events is important for getting an overview of the latest technological developments and innovations. Secondly, the importance of developing strong technical skills, particularly in areas such as coding, data analytics, and artificial intelligence is going to be highly important. Thirdly, the need for students to develop a strong network to stay informed about new technologies and job opportunities. Finally, students who are committed to lifelong learning and continuous professional development are more likely to succeed in the age of technological advancements.

In conclusion, while technological advancements may not always be accessible to all or of any obvious value, successful professionals know how to frequently explore and utilize such tools whenever they can.

5. Environmental Concerns

In today's globalized world, for students and young professionals whose aim is to succeed in their field, an ability to maintain environmental- and/or sustainability concerns is rapidly becoming of essential importance. For example, as one study by Glavas (2012) indicates, sustainability in business may improve financial performance, reduce environmental risks, and enhance corporate reputation. Another study, by Eriksson & Kovalainen (2015), notes that incorporating sustainability into business practices can lead to competitive advantages, as consumers increasingly favor environmentally responsible companies.

Therefore, for the students examined in our thesis, it is important to understand how one's choice of career path may impact the environment, not to mention one's success, and to take steps to minimize any negative effects. By prioritizing sustainability, students and young professionals can align their goals with a growing global trend towards eco-friendly practices, something that may position them for long-term success.

Concluding Remarks

As was mentioned earlier, in addition to being interesting, the aim of our thesis has been to remain both accessible and relevant for as long as possible. In this regard, while we may not have addressed international trends and forces directly in the thesis itself, we have always sought to produce results that maintain such concerns and international relevance. As students, it is our responsibility to always pursue the skills and experience that will allow us to remain competitive among fierce competition on a global scale. I would like to conclude this discussion paper by highlighting the particular importance of openness and a growth mindset. Regardless of how diverse, specialized, challenging or simple a task may be, openness combined with a growth mindset is enough to conquer them all if not the globe itself. Thus, in retrospect, it is wrong to say that I am no longer a student, my best guess is that I have only just begun.

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7.6 Discussion Paper - Håvard Huglen

Discussion paper – Competency Goal «Responsible»

Abstract of the thesis

Our thesis investigates the factors that contribute to successful transitions of university graduates into their professional careers in the fields of business and economics. The study aims to identify the influence of various factors on professional success and explore how current and future students can leverage these factors to enhance their own career outcomes. The research questions focus on identifying success factors, understanding their utilization by students, and proposing adaptations to university policies and curriculum to better facilitate successful career transitions. The study recognizes the significance of external factors beyond education in determining professional success. By engaging with successful alumni, the research seeks to equip students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to excel in their professional career while ensuring a smoother transition.

The findings highlight the importance of fundamental academic interest, personal motivation, self-assurance, awareness, assertiveness, and a diverse skill set as crucial elements for a successful transition. Additionally, the study acknowledges the value of extracurricular activities, internships, and programming proficiency beyond the classroom, benefiting not only students but also employers and society as a whole. Academic institutions can contribute to the development of a highly skilled workforce by optimizing students' preparation for their professional lives. The study concludes by emphasizing the significance of nurturing a love for learning, personal growth, and intellectual curiosity among business students, as these qualities have a lasting impact on their career trajectories. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of recognizing and utilizing one's strengths as a new professional and highlights the value of diverse skill sets, including proficiency in MS Excel and programming languages, to enhance the competency of new graduates.

Overall, this thesis enhances our understanding of effective approaches to economic education and provides insights into practices that can optimize the preparation of students for their professional careers. By identifying and leveraging success factors, academic institutions and students can collaborate to enhance career outcomes and contribute to the development of a

skilled workforce. The findings presented in this study have the potential to inform curriculum development and improve the performance of stakeholders in the field of business and economics.

1. How a master thesis in itself relates to the theme of responsibility

A master's thesis will always relate to the theme of responsibility, independent of the thesis' theme, and this relation will be discussed first.

Whilst the theme of a master's thesis will not always be in direct relation to the theme of responsibility, a master's thesis encompasses several dimensions of responsibility. Firstly, it entails academic responsibility by adhering to ethical and academic guidelines and therefore ensuring the integrity of the research process.

Secondly, it involves intellectual responsibility through critical engagement with existing literature, research, theories, and methodologies. Additionally, a master's thesis can address social issues or contribute to practical knowledge, highlighting the researcher's social responsibility.

Furthermore, it reflects professional responsibility by adhering to disciplinary standards and knowledge within the field. Lastly, completing a master's thesis requires significant personal responsibility, including time management, perseverance, and self-discipline. Overall, a master's thesis represents a commitment to responsible and accountable research that contributes to knowledge in a meaningful manner.

2. The Relationship between the Thesis and Responsibility

Responsibility, within the context of business and economics education, encompasses ethical decision-making, sustainable practices, and the integration of societal values into professional activities. As we explore the factors that contribute to successful career transitions, it is essential to consider the ethical challenges and promote responsible practices. By aligning the thesis with the concept of responsibility, we can foster an environment that values ethics and societal well-being alongside professional success.

3. Ethical Challenges and Responsible Practices

3.1 Ethical Challenges related to the Topic and Research Questions

One ethical challenge lies in ensuring equal access to opportunities for all students. Discrimination or bias in assessing success factors can hinder fair and equitable career transitions. To address this challenge responsibly, academic institutions should implement inclusive policies that promote diversity and provide mentorship and support for underrepresented groups. Transparency and fairness should also be maintained in evaluating success criteria.

3.2 Ethical challenges related to findings and unit of analysis

In conducting research on successful career transitions in business and economics, there are ethical challenges that arise when interpreting and presenting findings, as well as considering the unit of analysis. These challenges require careful consideration to ensure responsible practices and the accurate representation of data.

3.2.1 Interpretation and presentation of findings

Ethical challenges can arise when interpreting and presenting research findings. It is crucial to avoid misrepresenting or distorting data, as this can lead to inaccurate conclusions and misinform stakeholders. Researchers have an ethical responsibility to present findings honestly, objectively, and transparently, ensuring that they reflect the actual outcomes of the study. Responsible practices involve accurately representing the data, acknowledging any limitations or uncertainties, and avoiding biased interpretations. To avoid misrepresentation, we implemented Tacit Knowledge Theory in our study to strengthen the context the data were gathered and be more sure that they were presented as the participants meant it to.

3.2.2 Fair and balanced representation

Ethical challenges can arise when representing the experiences and perspectives of participants. Responsible practices involve providing a fair and balanced representation of the data, ensuring that no particular group or perspective is misrepresented or marginalized. Researchers should take care to present findings in a way that accurately reflects the diversity of experiences and avoids reinforcing stereotypes or biases. This includes acknowledging and addressing any potential biases that may have influenced data collection or analysis. We encountered an unbalanced representation in the start of our sample group where we realized that we only had interviewed male participants. This was due to the fact that there were no women who initially reached out, but to combat this we widened the sample group to try to achieve a gender balance, which we managed in the end with 6 participants being male, and the other 4 being female.

3.3 Ethical challenges related to the operating environment

External factors beyond education, such as workplace practices or industry norms, can pose ethical challenges for graduates. Some organizations may prioritize profit over responsible practices, putting graduates in difficult ethical dilemmas. To manage these challenges responsibly, academic institutions should equip students with critical thinking skills, ethical awareness, and the ability to navigate such situations with integrity. By promoting responsible practices, students can contribute to positive change within their organizations and industries.

3.4 Ethical challenges related to the research process

The research process itself poses ethical challenges that require careful consideration to ensure responsible practices. Ethical challenges in the research process primarily revolve around privacy protection, confidentiality, and informed consent of participants. Respecting the rights and well-being of individuals involved in the research is of utmost importance.

3.4.1 Privacy protection

The research process itself poses ethical challenges that require careful consideration to ensure responsible practices. Ethical challenges in the research process primarily revolve around privacy protection, confidentiality, and informed consent of participants. Respecting the rights and well-being of individuals involved in the research is of utmost importance. To ensure responsible practices, the study has permission from NSD, now SIKT, to gather data and personal information. Within this permission there are guidelines and recommendations on how to store data and personal information to best protect each participant's privacy.

3.4.2 Informed consent

Obtaining informed consent from participants is an essential ethical requirement. Participants should be fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research, potential risks and benefits, the extent of their involvement, and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. Researchers must provide clear and understandable consent forms, allowing participants to make voluntary and informed decisions about their participation. Informed consent ensures that participants' autonomy and rights are respected throughout the research process. Again, this has been carried out with the assistance of NSD through a prepared consent form that each participant signs or verbally agrees to ahead of the interviews carried out. This consent form outlines what the study is about, what data will be gathered, as well as how the data will be used and stored. By giving the participants informed consent, one also has the ability to, at any time, withdraw consent without question if needed.

3.4.3 Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality is crucial in protecting the privacy and identity of research participants. Researchers should take measures to safeguard participants' information and ensure that it is not disclosed to unauthorized individuals or entities. Any personal or sensitive information collected should be stored securely, and data should be anonymized or de-identified to prevent identification of individuals. Researchers must make efforts to maintain confidentiality both during and after the research process, ensuring that participants' data is used only for the intended research purposes. This was managed by informing the participants on what data would be gathered beforehand, as well as providing the opportunity to make whatever the participant wanted confidential, or not included in the study.

3.4.4 Data handling and storage

Ethical considerations extend to the handling and storage of research data. Researchers have a responsibility to protect the integrity and security of data collected during the research process. This involves using appropriate measures to safeguard data from unauthorized access, loss, or misuse. Data should be stored securely and for a specified duration, adhering to data protection regulations and institutional guidelines. Proper data management practices contribute to responsible research and ensure the protection of participants' rights and privacy. To make sure the study upholds the ethical considerations and recommended guidelines on how to handle and store data, we followed SIKT's guidelines. All of the data that has been gathered has been stored on personal devices that has two-factor authentication to access. The amount of people able to access this data has also been limited to the authors and the counselors if needed. To avoid any incidents, the participants personal information that was not subject to be shared in the study has been stored separately from the data that formed the findings of the study.

3.4.5 Ethical rights and compliance

Responsible research requires obtaining ethical approval from relevant institutional review boards or ethics committees. Researchers should adhere to ethical guidelines and regulations applicable to their field of study. Ethical approval ensures that the research design, methodology, and data collection processes are reviewed and meet ethical standards. Compliance with ethical guidelines demonstrates a commitment to responsible research conduct and the well-being of research participants. The process of obtaining ethical approval for this study could have been done through the University of Agder and their confidentiality agreements. We chose not to do this, as we had prior experience with NSD's confidentiality agreements and the process, and felt this offered a more extensive library of guidelines and information regarding ethical considerations.

3.5 Ethical challenges related to curriculum development

Developing a curriculum that encompasses responsible practices can present ethical challenges. It is important to strike a balance between technical skills and ethical considerations. Academic institutions must integrate ethical dimensions into the curriculum, addressing topics such as corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and ethical decision-making. By doing so, graduates will be better equipped to navigate ethical challenges in their careers and contribute positively to society.

4. Relevant theory

To address ethical challenges and promote responsible practices, it is important to draw on relevant theory and research. Ethical decision-making models can provide a foundation for understanding and managing ethical challenges in business and economics education. Social responsibility theories and sustainability frameworks can guide academic institutions in integrating responsible practices into their curricula and preparing students for responsible leadership roles. Additionally, research on responsible leadership and corporate social responsibility can offer insights into best practices and responsible approaches to career transitions.

5. Conclusion

This discussion paper has explored the ethical challenges associated with career transitions in business and economics education. It emphasizes the importance of managing these challenges responsibly to ensure the development of a skilled workforce that contributes positively to society. By leveraging success factors and integrating responsible practices, academic institutions and students can collaborate to enhance career outcomes while upholding ethical standards. The findings from the thesis and the discussion presented here have the potential to inform curriculum development and improve the performance of stakeholders in the field of business and economics, as well as serve as a recommendation for future studies and how to incorporate the theme of responsibility throughout the study. Responsible practices in education are essential for creating a future generation of professionals who are not only successful but also ethically conscious and socially responsible. By addressing ethical challenges and embracing responsible practices, academic institutions can prepare graduates to navigate complex ethical situations and contribute to a sustainable and responsible business and economics landscape. This focus on responsibility ensures that career transitions are not only successful but also aligned with the values of societal well-being and ethical conduct.

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