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# CHAPTER 1

## ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

*“The distinctive signs of phenomenology are: a method of showing, or uncovering or laying bare, of making explicit which is meant to bring light to the forgotten being, to rediscover what lay covered” (Thēvenaz 1962).*

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This interpretive phenomenological study aimed to make sense of the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at the University of South Africa, hereafter referred to as Unisa. Unisa is indisputably the single South African University with the highest number of Public Administration undergraduate and postgraduate students from all over the country. Due to Unisa’s subsequent influence on Public Administration scholarship, it represents the immediate context for the study. The study is significant considering the scholarly debate – globally and nationally – about the alleged low quality of Public Administration research, possibly related to the *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates. The significance of the study is demonstrated by firstly turning to scholarly literature to generate a deeper understanding of the doctorate in Public Administration and the concept “methodological preparedness” (see Chapter 3 to 4). Secondly I turned to methodological preparedness as a phenomenon experienced by the doctoral candidates and supervisors that participated in this study (see Chapter 5 to 8). Thirdly my understanding of methodological preparedness, both as a concept and a phenomenon, informed the generation of a conceptual framework aiming to deepen understanding of the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa (see Chapter 9).

Following a preliminary review of the applicable scholarly literature, this chapter provides a background to and rationale for this study. The research problem is a direct response to the identified scholarly knowledge gap. The phenomenon methodological preparedness of this study is identified and contextualised. My position and role as an

interpretive phenomenological researcher is clarified, as it informs my choices of the research design and research methods, the measures to ensure trustworthiness, as well as the ethical considerations related to this study. An overview of the various chapters of this thesis is provided to guide the reader through this thesis.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

Being a lecturer and serving in the Higher Degrees Committee of the Department of Public Administration and Management at Unisa for more than five years gave me exposure to interact with master's and doctoral candidates' scholarly work. In many instances the Committee expressed concerns about the poor quality of doctoral research proposals. It became clear to me that doctoral candidates experienced various challenges seemingly related to them not having a solid understanding of their chosen methodology. Being a scholar, I realised the need to substantiate my anecdotal observations with trustworthy evidence; hence, my decision to conduct a study focusing on the topic of Public Administration doctoral students' methodological preparedness.

My scholarly curiosity prompted me to undertake a preliminary literature review. I departed from the assumption that the low quality of Public Administration research proposals may be related to the *methodological preparedness* of the doctoral candidates (Cameron 2013; Wessels & Thani 2014). A critical analysis of the literature on the state of the field of Public Administration done by Cameron (2013:567) laments the "poor state of research in the field of Public Administration". In a previous co-authored study, I participated in the assessment of the research preparation of future scholars in Public Administration at three South African universities (Wessels & Thani 2014:47). We found that the formal tuition of Public Administration research methodology may not constitute sufficient methodological preparation due to the "absence of applied teaching" (Wessels & Thani 2014:62-63).

The following argument evolved from my personal experiences as an academic scholar, previous research on the methodological preparation of researchers in Public Administration and considering the work done by Cameron (2013):

- Premise 1: Public Administration research, abroad and in South Africa, is perceived to be of a low quality;
- Premise 2: The low quality of Public Administration research is attributed to inadequate methodological preparedness of researchers.

Consequently, literature confirmed that the quality of Public Administration research is a consequence of the state of methodological preparedness of researchers in general and doctoral candidates in particular. This confirmation is further discussed in Premise 1 formulated below:

**Premise 1: Public Administration research, abroad and in South Africa, is perceived to be of a low quality**

At the time of conducting this study, I conducted a literature search survey that failed to identify recent literature on this discourse both globally and nationally. Seemingly, the scholarly discourse on the low quality of Public Administration research was prominent in the 1980s and early 2000s. A review of the scholarly literature since the early 1980s has revealed a vibrant discourse on the quality of research amongst Public Administration scholars in especially the United States of America (USA). Stallings (1986:235), one of the early contributors to the discourse, contributed to this discourse by highlighting the necessity of theoretical significant research problems for quality doctoral research that can contribute to new knowledge in the field. A subsequent study on the types of research designs and methods used in the *Public Administration Review* journal from the period 1940 to 1984, confirmed that Public Administration research demonstrates little theory testing (Stallings & Ferris 1988). In addition, studies by Adams and White (1994:565), White, Adams and Forrester (1996), and Felbinger, Holzer and White (1999) concluded that doctoral research within the USA made a minimal contribution to a critical analysis of

theoretically significant problems, new knowledge, and theory development in the field. Although Cleary (2000:454) reported on improvements in the quality of doctoral research in the period from 1990 to 2000, a study by Bolton and Stolcis (2003:630) confirm that the theory and knowledge contribution of doctoral research in Public Administration remain minimal. The discourse on the quality of Public Administration research amongst US scholars has clearly attributed the perceived low quality of Public Administration research to a lack of theoretical significant research problems.

Deducing from the above arguments, the concerns about the quality of South African research in Public Administration is similar to scholars from abroad who also question the quality of research in Public Administration on a global scale (Lowery & Evans 2004; Bolton & Stolcis 2003; Cleary 2000; Brewer, Douglas, Facer II & O'Toole 1999; Felbinger, Holzer & White 1999; Forrester 1996; White & Adams 1994; Cleary 1992; White 1986; Stallings 1986). From a South African perspective, the discourse on the quality of Public Administration research has started on the paradigmatic and epistemological levels in the late 1980s and early 1990 (Marais 1988; Schwella 1990:101–112). As part of this discourse, Mokgoro (1992:31) ascribed the perceived low quality in Public Administration research to the “administrative process” conceptual model used by researchers. The first noteworthy South African attempt to assess the quality of South African Public Administration research, was reported by Wessels (2004:168–184). One of the attributes of quality research identified by him, is the “theoretical input or scientific value added to the topic” (Wessels 2004:184). Several other attributes for quality Public Administration research were identified in subsequent South African studies, namely the contribution of new knowledge to the field (Hanyane 2005:40), the relevance of research agendas (Clapper 2005:46), methodological rigour (Clapper 2005:46; Hanyane 2005:40), and theory development (Clapper 2005:185). With reference to the quest for relevance identified by Clapper (2005:46), a study by Wessels (2008:288) reveals an absence of generally accepted big questions providing a focus for South African Public Administration research. Consequently, scholars set their own research agendas resulting in a low percentage of research contributing to theory development (Cameron & McLaverty 2008; Cameron & Milne 2010).

Within the South African context, the study by Cameron and Milne (2010) is noteworthy in a discussion of the quality of especially Public Administration doctoral research. In their assessment of the quality of doctoral research in Public Administration, they applied four criteria, namely the methodology used, the research purpose, the orientation of the thesis (theory versus practice) and the significance of the contribution to the knowledge in the field. Their study revealed that most of the doctorates were practice oriented at the expense of theory, resulting in 71,6% of the theses analysed failing to contribute to knowledge in the field.

Although the scope of the discourse on the quality of Public Administration research has shown to include more than just doctoral research, there seems to be no difference in the assessment of the quality of Public Administration for the purpose of obtaining a doctoral qualification, or for contributing to scholarship after obtaining a doctoral qualification. Furthermore, the literature review confirms a shared concern amongst Public Administration scholars in the United States and in South Africa about the perceived inferior quality of Public Administration research, whether it is for doctoral or post-doctoral purpose. The consequence of research of inferior quality has shown to result in an inability of Public Administration research to make an original contribution to relevant theoretical and policy agendas in the field. Considering the serious implication of such a consequence for this subject field, the logical next question is thus: What could be the reason for the low quality of Public Administration research? A possible answer to this question is formulated in Premise 2, which is discussed below.

**Premise 2: The low quality of Public Administration research is perceived to be influenced by inadequate methodological preparedness of researchers**

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of the possible influence of inadequate methodological preparedness of Public Administration researchers on the quality of Public Administration research. The literature implies that inadequate



methodological preparedness of researchers may be the reason for low quality research as indicated by:

- irrelevant research topics (Cleary 1992:5561);
- research problems that are not theoretically significant or researchable (Enders 2004:423);
- ignorance about critical and complex questions related to the research topic and problem (Kuye 2005:526);
- non-researchable questions (Okech, Astramovich, Johnson, Hoskins, Rubel & Deborah 2006:138);
- inappropriate methodology for the selected topics (Wessels 2010:544); and
- inappropriate research design and strategies for data collection and analysis (Okech et al. 2006:138).

The methodological flawed research designs and executions can be reasonably ascribed to researchers being methodologically inadequately prepared for their task. Scholars broadly agree with one another that the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates is necessary for sound Public Administration research (Brewer, Douglas, Facer & O'Toole 1999:380; DeLorenzo 2001:139; Lowery & Evans 2004:307). The literature review revealed that the inadequate preparedness of doctoral candidates is especially attributed to their formal methodological curricular preparation. For the purpose of this discussion, the following views are noteworthy.

Felbinger, et al. (1999:461) question the academic preparation of doctoral candidates for conducting rigorous research. Furthermore, they question the sufficiency of one research module for methodological preparation of doctoral candidates. With the methodological preparation of doctoral candidates in mind, Brewer et al. (1999:380) suggest that doctoral programmes need some fine-tuning to solve the quality problem in Public Administration research. DeLorenzo (2001:139) proposes that “the quality and focus of methodological training in public administration programs be improved...”. This indicates that *methodological preparedness* is associated with the formal methodological curricular

preparation. It appears that the methodological incompetence of Public Administration scholars is ascribed to inadequate methodological training of doctoral candidates.

Lowery and Evans (2004:307) suggest that the training curricula of PhD and master's candidates should be revisited in order to expand it to include a range of research strategies and methods. Their recommendation confirmed a similar proposal by Felbinger et al. (1999), only five years earlier, that the academic preparation of doctoral candidates need to be revisited. Wright, Manigault and Black (2004:747) conducted an empirical study where they reviewed the data collection and measurements methods reported in six public administration journals over a three year period. They conclude that "researchers often failed to report information that would allow their readers to appropriately judge the accuracy of reported research findings, interpret these findings within the context of other research and learn from the research methods used" (Wright et al. 2004:759). They admit that this failure could be caused by the "weaknesses in the field's research preparation". The literature review has thus shown that various scholars from abroad (Brewer et al. 1999:380; Felbinger et al. 1999:461; Lowery & Evans 2004:307) attribute the perceived low quality of the doctoral research produced in Public Administration to the inadequate methodological preparation of the candidates. For these scholars the methodological preparation of Public Administration researchers relates thus directly to the curriculum followed at universities.

In order to increase the relevance of the tuition of Public Administration, Vyas-Doorgapersad and Ababio (2009:72) propose that methodology courses comprising of, inter alia, sampling techniques, statistics and computer competencies need to be included in the Public Administration curricula. In relation to this proposal, Wessels and Thani (2014:47) found that research methodology tuition in three South African Universities indicated a preference for quantitative paradigms, taught at a conceptual level. Similarly, Hanyane (2015:9) observes that master's and doctoral candidates in the Department of Public and Management at Unisa face methodological challenges such as an "inability to reflect on understanding the basics of research methods and lack of applying basic research techniques". The literature review has shown that various researchers ascribe

the perceived low quality of doctoral research to the quality of the methodological preparation of doctoral candidates.

### 1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

In lieu of the background, I conducted a literature survey of multiple electronic databases, explicitly searching for literature on the topic of methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates. The survey indicated a lack of scholarly contributions on the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates, nationally as well as internationally. The databases include SA-e-publications, Unisa Library federated search engine, ProQuest (Social Science Premium Collection, Political Science database and ABI-INFORM Search), and EBSCOhost (Academic Search Premier, Africa-Wide Information, Business Source Complete, Political Science Complete, Education Source and ERIC). I used the key words: “methodological preparedness”, “methodological preparation”, “research methods in Public Administration” and “methodological competence”. However, I could not retrieve any South African studies that focused explicitly on the *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates.

The preliminary literature review has identified a number of scholarly contributions on the quality of research in Public Administration as mentioned in the background (see Section 1.2). Furthermore, only four South African studies (Thani 2009, Cameron & Milne 2010, Wessels & Thani 2014; Hanyane 2015) focused on the methodological preparation of scholars in Public Administration. However, these studies have not established or attempted to establish conceptual frameworks for understanding this phenomenon. In addition, the literature survey failed to provide a clear description of the concept *methodological preparedness* in the context under study. Consequently, I deduced that the lack of scholarly contributions on the *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates indicates a knowledge gap that compromises scholarly understanding of *methodological preparedness*, both as a concept and a phenomenon.

Supervisors are directly involved in the successful completion of doctoral candidates' studies. They need to be sensitive to the needs of these candidates during their research journeys (Halse 2011:557) from a student-centred approach or 'learner-centred approach' (Frick, Albertyn & Rutgers 2010:76). Such scholarly understanding could therefore inform doctoral education and supervision practices, ultimately addressing some of the concerns on the low quality of Public Administration research. Increased understanding could also assist supervisors in contributing to the throughput and success rate of doctoral candidates at Higher Education Institutions, in particular at Unisa where the throughput of Public Administration doctoral candidates has received considerable attention since the early 2000s.

Moreover, the failure to address this knowledge gap will continue to influence the quality of Public Administration research as a science and a practice. Public Administration is concerned with how the government functions, thus, it is reasonable to argue that the research conducted in Public Administration informs the quality of public services and the ultimate well-being of a state (Pauw & Louw 2014:7). For Public Administration research to inform government practices it should be of high quality. Hence, the consequences of not dealing with the problem could affect the practice and the discipline as a whole.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The background and rationale has identified the gap in the literature and the problem statement has justified the necessity of conducting this study. The main research question is thus: What constitutes methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa?

With this in mind, the following research questions were formulated according to three interrelated research phases:

**Phase 1:** A theoretical perspective: Turning to the scholarly literature and institutional documents. This perspective served as scholarly context for a deepened understanding

of the concept *methodological preparedness* relevant to Public Administration doctoral candidates.

The following theoretical questions were asked in this phase:

- *What are the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration offered by South African Universities? (Chapter 3)*
- *What constitutes the concept “methodological preparedness” of a doctoral candidate? (Chapter 4)*

**Phase 2:** Turning to Public Administration doctoral candidates and supervisors to explore the phenomenon of *methodological preparedness at Unisa*.

- *How do the Public Administration doctoral candidates enrolled at Unisa from 2000–2015 make sense of “methodological preparedness”? (Chapter 5, 6 & 7)*
- *How do the Public Administration doctoral supervisors at Unisa make sense of “methodological preparedness”? (Chapter 8)*

**Phase 3:** A conceptual framework for understanding the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa (Chapter 9).

- *What constitutes methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates, as a concept and phenomenon, at Unisa? (Chapter 9).*

## **1.5 RESEARCH PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES**

The main purpose of this study is to understand what constitutes *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa. Consequently, this study was carried out in three interrelated phases to answer the research questions set out above.

**Phase 1:** A theoretical perspective was sought, turning to the scholarly literature and institutional documents. As stated above, this perspective served as a scholarly context for a deepened understanding of the concept *methodological preparedness* relevant to Public Administration doctoral candidates.

- Objective 1: Provide an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration as an immediate context for methodological preparedness (*Chapter 3*)
- Objective 2: Conduct a concept analysis to identify and describe the meaning of the concept “methodological preparedness” with reference to a doctoral candidate (*Chapter 4*)

**Phase 2:** Turning to Public Administration, doctoral candidates and supervisors to explore the phenomenon of *methodological preparedness at Unisa*.

- *Objective 3:* Explore how Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa (2000–2015) make sense of *methodological preparedness* (*Chapters 5 to 7*).
- *Objective 4:* Explore how Public Administration supervisors at Unisa make sense of *methodological preparedness* (*Chapter 8*).

**Phase 3:** Provide a conceptual framework for understanding the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa (*Chapter 8*).

- *Objective 5:* Generate a conceptual framework that describes what constitutes the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates, as a concept and a phenomenon at Unisa (*Chapter 9*).

## **1.6 TURNING TO THE POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER**

Cooney, Dowling, Murphy and Sixsmith (2013:19) encourage researchers to “acknowledge and identify their pre-understandings so that readers of their research are clear about the study’s context and possible influencing factors”. This section aims to

achieve what these authors recommend. As mentioned earlier, my lecturing of research methodology modules and involvement in the Higher Degrees Committee of the Department of Public Administration and Management at Unisa have motivated me to undertake this study. I commenced my academic duties as a postgraduate assistant, typing agendas and minutes for this aforementioned committee. The main objective of this committee is to evaluate master's and doctoral candidates' research proposals and guide these candidates until their proposals are acceptable. Reading through the comments that were provided by the panel of reviewers of the research proposals kept me thinking and wondering if doctoral candidates are adequately prepared to undertake their doctoral studies. I was also part of the team who was organising the yearly research indabas for master's and doctoral candidates.

During the yearly research indabas most doctoral candidates were looking for research topics and others wanted to share their research ideas to see if they were feasible for a doctoral study. It was very rare to find a candidate who seemed to be methodologically prepared to embark on the doctoral journey. I came to this conclusion because the doctoral candidates resembled themselves as struggling to formulate acceptable research proposals. At this stage, I perceived the ability of submitting an acceptable research proposal as being methodologically prepared. I was appointed as a lecturer in the department and continued to serve in the Departmental Higher Degrees Committee. At this point I got involved in reviewing research proposals for master's candidates. In most instances I was frustrated not knowing where to start providing feedback because substantive parts of the research proposals were not adequately conceptualised. These concerns that I had were also specified by other reviewers of the master's and doctoral research candidates' proposals. I was thus exposed to various viewpoints of both the doctoral candidates and doctoral supervisors. At a certain stage I was supposed to send feedback to candidates and I was the contact person working closely with the Chair of the Higher Degrees Committee and the doctoral candidates. Being a doctoral candidate and a lecturer in the department created some level of uncertainty and fears as I engaged in this research process. My pre-understanding and knowledge was critical in this study as I have adopted the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The researcher's belief,

pre-understanding and knowledge as indicated by Fade (2004:648) help the researcher in making sense of participant's experiences. As this can be seen as subjective, the measures to ensure trustworthiness in IPA research are discussed in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4).

## **1.7 CONCEPTS CLARIFICATION**

The topic under study involves several key concepts. Bearing in mind that a concept serves as a thinking tool and “has one meaning that can be expressed in many words” (Pauw & Louw 2014:8). The background, rationale and the problem statement provided in the previous sections, assisted in identifying the key concepts or “thinking tools” relevant to this study, namely: Unisa, Public Administration, Public Administration doctoral candidates (2000–2015), methodological preparedness, constitutes, doctorate and doctoral qualification or degree qualification.

### **1.7.1 Unisa**

Unisa constitutes the immediate context of the participants relevant to this study. However, it also represents a South African as well as an international context. As an immediate context, Unisa is the largest Open Distance Education and Learning environment in Africa and has a large number of Public Administration master's and doctoral candidates (280 students in 2017 academic year) in South Africa.

Unisa was founded in 1873 and in 1946 it commenced teaching exclusively by means of distance education. Unisa is 141 years old and offers study opportunities to more than 400 000 students, which include mostly African students and females students (University of South Africa 2017, online). Unisa adheres to the following principles: learner-centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning facilitation provisioning, removal of barriers to access, recognition of prior learning, provision of relevant learner support and construction of learning programmes (University of South Africa 2017, online). It further uses blended techniques which include integrated and mixed media. Since 2013, the



university has effected new admission and re-admission policies to adhere to the principles mentioned here (University of South Africa 2017, online).

### **1.7.2 Public Administration**

Public Administration refers to the “academic subject that makes a study of the object, public administration” (Wessels et al. 2014:1). Public administration with lower case refers to “which is investigated by the subject” (Pauw & Louw 2014:7).

### **1.7.3 Public Administration doctoral candidates**

If *methodological preparedness* is a *state of being*, the term “Public Administration doctoral candidates” refers to a group of participants that experience this state of being. The participants of this study represented three groups of doctoral candidates (2000 – 2015) that were selected based on the belief that they would be able to assist me to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences of how prepared they were methodologically at the commencement of their doctoral journeys: currently registered, successfully completed, and terminated their studies before completion.

### **1.7.4 Methodological preparedness**

*Methodological preparedness* as a construct, or a theoretical creation is “based on observations but which cannot be observed directly or indirectly” (Babbie & Mouton 2001:111). This construct refers to a *state of being* of doctoral candidates, representing the point of focus (phenomenon) in this study. The concept “methodological” seems to be used before a noun (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* 2000:740). Preparedness as a noun refers to “a state of being ready of willing to do something” (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* 2000:917). My pre-assumption of methodological preparedness is consistent with the definitions obtained from the dictionary. I could not secure a specific definition for this concept in scholarly literature. Based on the preliminary literature review, a methodologically prepared doctoral candidate is ready, and competent, to make

independent methodological choices during the doctoral journey. In addition, being inadequately prepared denotes lacking the ability and competence to make independent methodological choices during the doctoral journey.

#### **1.7.5 Constitutes**

This concept seems to be a qualifier of *methodological preparedness* and indicates the empirical referents, namely “classes or actual phenomena that by their existence or presence demonstrate the occurrence of the concept itself” (Walker & Avant 2013:174). By using the phrase “constitutes”, implies that this study intends to identify the defining attributes or components of *methodological preparedness* amongst Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa.

#### **1.7.6 Doctorate and doctoral qualification or degree qualification**

The two terms are used interchangeably because they both refer to the doctorate. A doctorate is an National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 10 qualification which makes it the highest qualification (Council of Higher Education 2013:40). It is expected that doctoral candidates who enrol for this qualification should “undertake research at the most advanced academic levels culminating in the submission, assessment and acceptance of a thesis” (Council of Higher Education 2013:40).

### **1.8 ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY**

Trafford and Leshem (2008:54) sees originality as a doctorate “that has not been done before”. This study indeed makes an original contribution in the field of Public Administration because the literature has confirmed that a similar study has not been done. This original contribution is three-fold, namely scholarly, pragmatic and methodological. The scholarly contribution is made by extending this discourse in the field of Public Administration and proposing a framework to deepen understanding on the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates in a particular

context (Unisa). I envisioned that the conceptual framework would inform supervision practices and improve the throughput and success rate of Public Administration doctorates at Unisa, but also at other Higher Education Institutions sharing similar characteristics, challenges and/or opportunities. This study further makes a pragmatic contribution by informing doctoral education in general and Public Administration in particular. As already alluded to, the supervisors and the doctoral candidates are the main beneficiaries. In addition I also make a methodological contribution by employing the IPA approach for the first time in the South African Public Administration fraternity.

## 1.9 METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

A qualitative theory generating research design composing of complementary approaches, actualised in three interrelated phases (Phase 1 to Phase 3) was used in this study. Phase 1 involved turning to the scholarly context for a deepened understanding of the concept *methodological preparedness* relevant to Public Administration doctoral candidates.

In Phase 2, an interpretive phenomenological approach complemented by interpretive phenomenological analysis was adopted to explore the phenomenon *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates in a particular context (Unisa) from the life world experiences of two groups of participants, specifically doctoral candidates and supervisors. The purpose of adopting an interpretive approach complemented by IPA is identified by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014:8) who argue that it “investigate[s] how individuals make sense of their experience”.

Phase 3 involved generating a conceptual framework for understanding the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa. For a detailed discussion on the methodological design and its application see Chapter 2.

## 1.10 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

**Chapter 1** provides an overview of the entire study.

**Chapter 2** discusses the research design, approach and methods approach that were followed in this study. It further outlines the research methods that I used in dealing with the research objectives.

**Chapter 3** provides an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration as an immediate context for methodological preparedness.

**Chapter 4** undertakes a concept analysis to identify and describe the meaning of the concept “methodological preparedness” with reference to a doctoral candidate.

**Chapter 5, 6 & 7** explore how Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa make sense of *methodological preparedness*.

**Chapter 8** explores how Public Administration supervisors at Unisa make sense of *methodological preparedness*.

**Chapter 9** generates a conceptual framework that describes what constitutes *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates, as a concept and a phenomenon at Unisa.

**Chapter 10** provides the summary and conclusions. Limitations and recommendations for further research are also discussed in this final chapter.

## 1.11 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The concerns about the low quality in Public Administration research relate to the methodological preparation of scholars and candidates in the field. This chapter provided

a justification for conducting a research study focusing on *understanding what constitutes the methodological preparedness for doctoral candidates in Public Administration, first turning to scholarly literature* for a deepened understanding of the concept *methodological preparedness* relevant to Public Administration doctoral candidates, *then turning to* Public Administration doctoral candidates and supervisors to explore the phenomenon of *methodological preparedness at Unisa*. A preliminary background with an international and South African perspective was provided. Well focused objectives were outlined in order to answer the main research question. This chapter clarified the key concepts and provided a brief overview of the methodological design. Chapter 2 discusses the research design, approach and methods.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH DESIGN, APPROACH AND METHODS

*“The findings of interpretative phenomenological research lead us to include understanding the meaning of experience for self and others, liberating us from our assumptions, preconceptions, and myths, legitimizing differences among peoples, and emancipating us from outdated beliefs and stereotypes which often oppress people and cultures” (Munhall 2013)*

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 has set the scene by highlighting the importance of undertaking this research. The main purpose of the study was to generate a conceptual framework that could deepen scholarly understanding of the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa. This purpose was dealt with through a qualitative theory generating research design comprising of complementary research approaches, actualised in three interrelated phases (Phase 1, Phase 2 & Phase 3). In this chapter I aim to justify the methodological choices that I made to achieve the purpose and objectives of the study (see Section 1.6 & Figure 2.1). I describe each phase guided by the specific research questions, objectives and methods used to answer each research question. I further discuss the measures that I undertook to ensure trustworthiness in my research and the ethical considerations that informed my ethical conduct throughout the research. To indicate the interrelatedness of the three-phased approach followed in this study, a graphical representation is provided in Figure 2.1.

**Purpose:** To generate a conceptual framework to understand what constitutes *methodological preparedness* of South African Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa from the period 2000–2015.

**Research design:** Qualitative theory generating design realised through:

- Qualitative concept analysis [Phase 1: Chapter 4] and systematic literature review [Phase 1: Chapter 3]
- An interpretive phenomenological approach, complemented by IPA [Phase 2: Chapter 5 to 8]
- Qualitative concept analysis [Phase 3: Chapter 9]

**Phase 1: A theoretical perspective: turning to the scholarly literature and official documents**

- **Objective 1:** Provide an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration as an immediate context for methodological preparedness [Chapter 3].
- **Objective 2:** Concept analysis to identify and describe the meaning of the concept “methodological preparedness” with reference to a doctoral candidate [Chapter 4].

**Unit of observation:** Official documents and scholarly literature.

**Method:** Systematic literature review, followed by the application of five of the eight steps of concept analysis as identified by Walker and Avant (2013) to achieve objective 2.

**Phase 2: Turning to Public Administration doctoral candidates and supervisors to explore the phenomenon of methodological preparedness at Unisa**

- **Objective 3:** Explore how Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa make sense of methodological preparedness [Chapters 5, 6 & 7].
- **Objective 4:** Explore how Public Administration supervisors at Unisa make sense of methodological preparedness [Chapter 8].

**Participants:** Nine registered Public Administration candidates, eight candidates that terminated their studies before completion, eight successfully completed Public Administration doctoral candidates and ten postgraduate supervisors.

**Data collection:** Semi-structured interviews, field notes and naïve sketches.

**Analysis:** Shinebourne’s (2011) four stage process for analysing an IPA study was used.

**Phase 3: A conceptual framework for understanding the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa.**

**Objective 5:** To generate a conceptual framework that describes what constitutes the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates, as a concept and a phenomenon at Unisa [Chapter 9].

**Method:** Five of the eight steps of concept analysis as identified by Walker and Avant (2013)

**Figure 2.1: Graphical representation of the research design, approach and methods**

## 2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

To achieve the purpose and objectives of the study, I chose a qualitative theory generating design (Kuczynski & Daly 2003:383). Qualitative research is in essence theory generating (Cresswell 2014:33). Denzin and Lincoln (2013:7) argue that qualitative research “is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world and consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible”. Aligned to this definition, Cresswell (2014:32) defines qualitative research as “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. According to Cresswell (2014:32) qualitative research is conducted solely to understand the contexts or settings in which the social or human problem is situated. The researcher cannot divorce the participant experiences from its context, whether this context is personal, social or cultural (Cresswell 2014:12). Focusing the attention on participants (doctoral candidates and supervisors) with an affiliation to Unisa indicates that the intention of the study was not to generalise the findings, but rather to understand methodological preparedness in this context, yet, recognising that the findings may be applied to similar contexts.

An interpretive theory generating design means that the researcher plays a critical role in “organising and assigning meaning to the data as a way of constructing higher-order categories and theory” (Kuczynski & Daly 2003:383). The researcher is theoretically sensitive to “existing concepts, ideas and theory” (Kuczynski & Daly 2003:383).

To this end, the main purpose of this research was to generate theory, by means of the development of a conceptual framework, in response to the identified knowledge gap in the literature (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). Initially, I thought that I would exclusively use phenomenology to understand the life worlds of the participants in relation to the phenomenon (methodological preparedness). However, during the course of my own doctoral journey, I realised that the topic of my study resisted “a fixed, pre-determined design and approach” (Polit & Beck 2014). My own sense-making of the concept, first, and then trying to understand the “concept” as a phenomenon, or a state of being,



culminated in a re-thinking, not only of the design, but also the approach and methods that would allow me to achieve my envisioned destiny. I realised that I could not deny my own experiences and beliefs (Fade 2004:648). Consequently, the qualitative theory generating research design was actualised in three interrelated research phases, making use of complementary research approaches (see Section 2.2.1.3).

Phase 1 entailed a turning to scholarly literature and official documents in the field of doctoral education, research training, supervision and methodology by means of a systematic literature review (Petticrew & Roberts 2006) and the application of five of the eight steps of concept analysis described by Walker and Avant (2013). In Phase 2, the experiences of the doctoral candidates and the supervisors were taken into consideration in order to make sense of the phenomenon “methodological preparedness” within the particular context. At its heart, this study was inductive in nature because my “research findings emerged from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas 2006:238).

I considered the voices of other scholars by re-contextualising the findings back to existing literature by means of a literature control in Phase 2 (Morse & Field 1995). Finally, influenced by my interaction with the different sources of information, I set out to generate a conceptual framework that describes what constitutes the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates, as a concept and a phenomenon at Unisa. The following section focuses on phenomenology as a research approach and provides an overview of the three main types of phenomenology, followed by a justification for choosing IPA.

### **2.2.1 Phenomenology as a research approach**

This section commences with a brief overview of the three main types of phenomenology, namely descriptive, interpretative and IPA – followed by a comparison between these approaches (see Table 2.1). This was done, first to justify why I deem interpretive phenomenology, complemented by IPA, the most appropriate approach to understand

the phenomenon (methodological preparedness) from the participants' perspective. In the second place, I wanted to provide an overview of the historical development of phenomenology to substantiate my methodological choices. A comparison of these approaches, follows, culminating in Table 2.1. Preference has been given to the original sources in this section considering the fact that the following sections provide a historical overview of these approaches.

### **2.2.1.1 Descriptive phenomenology**

The founding father of descriptive phenomenology is Husserl (Lopez & Willis 2004:727). It is the aim of Husserl's philosophy to "seek answers to questions about the world and objects in the world". This leads to descriptive accounts whereby the essence of the phenomenon is revealed (Mackey 2005:181). The phenomena is studied as it appears through consciousness (Lavery 2003:23). Furthermore, Husserl also believes that there are common lived experiences to all people who have a certain experience (Lopez & Willis 2004:728). The epistemological nature of descriptive phenomenology regards experience as an important source of knowledge. In addition, Husserlian phenomenology emphasises the importance of bracketing. Bracketing is seen as a way of achieving objectivity because preconceptions are bracketed, the outer world and individual biasness is put aside and the researcher examines his/her prejudices (Finlay 2014; Pringle, Hendry & McLafferty 2011; Dowling 2007; Lavery 2003). Finlay (2014) further describes bracketing as a process whereby "theory, explanation, judgements and the researcher's experience and beliefs are temporarily pushed aside to probe the "is-ness" of the phenomenon". Moreover, Racher and Robinson (2002:471) state that this is a technique of holding "subjective, private perspectives and theoretical constructs in abeyance and allow the essence of the phenomena to emerge". Husserl strongly believes that in order to obtain essential lived experiences of those studied (participants), researchers need to shed personal knowledge (Dowling 2007:132).

During the bracketing exercise the researcher can use field notes as a reflective diary in order to write down "observations, assumptions and confusions" (Wojnar & Swanson

2007:175). Through bracketing the researchers can achieve phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction is defined by Dowling (2007:132) as a process that involves “attempting to meet the phenomenon as free and as unprejudiced as possible in order that the phenomenon present itself as free and as unprejudiced way as possible so that it can be precisely described and understood”. This also requires a level of reflexivity. Koch and Harrington (1998:887) describe reflexivity as a process that involves an “on-going self-critique and self-appraisal”. This is possible in descriptive phenomenology because the researcher engages in this process before and during data collection (Lytle & Hutchinson 2004:14).

#### **2.2.1.2 Interpretive phenomenology**

Heidegger, the founding father of interpretive phenomenology, challenged Husserl on the importance of description than understanding (Dowling 2007:133). Heidegger was Husserl’s student. Heidegger strongly believed that interpretive phenomenology goes beyond description but seek meaning (Dowling 2007; Lopez & Willis 2004:728; Racher & Robinson 2002). Heidegger’s philosophy is more on lived experiences than what people perceive. The distinguishing characteristic between Husserl and Heidegger is that Husserl held the view of descriptions on what people consciously know and Heidegger strongly believed that meaning of unique experiences is of paramount importance (Dowling 2007:133; Racher & Robinson 2002). Van Manen (1990) and Finlay (2014:138) argue that every phenomenon is interpreted and Van Manen maintains, “there is no uninterpreted phenomenon”. Lavery (2003:24) argues that Heidegger believed that a person cannot put aside pre-understanding because “nothing can be encountered without reference to a person’s background understanding”.

Moreover, Lopez and Willis (2004:729) put forward that Heidegger’s philosophy also emphasises that experiences of people are influenced by the world they live in. They point out to the term “being in the world” meaning that “humans cannot abstract themselves from the world”. Heidegger’s philosophy further aims at answering ontological questions such as “what does it mean to be” (Mackey 2005:181; Lavery 2003; Racher & Robinson

2002). The main aim of interpretive phenomenologists is to be as close as possible to the experience itself (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson & Spence 2008:1390). Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:191) see unity between the researcher and the phenomena. They further argue, “human behaviour cannot be understood without appreciating the context in which it takes place. Although the meaning of human existence is not equated with its context, it cannot be separated from it”. Smythe et al. (2007:1392) also affirm that the researcher’s understanding “is already there and cannot, nor should, be divorced from our thinking”. Dahlberg, Drew and Nyström (2001:92) say that for Heidegger’s philosophical reasoning the experience that the researcher has, remains important. They put “once we are there (in that experience), understanding depends on recognising what we bring with us, namely pre-understanding and interpretations”. Even though pre-understanding and interpretations are important, some interpretive phenomenologists acknowledge that it is necessary to explain how that past knowledge will be used in the inquiry (Lopez & Willis 2004:729). Just like Smythe et al. (2008), Dahlberg et al. (2001), Lopez and Willis (2004) and Earle (2010:288) regard pre-understanding to be necessary and important in interpretive phenomenology.

#### **2.2.1.3 Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)**

Interpretive phenomenological analysis is situated in interpretive phenomenology. Interpretative phenomenological analysis method is mostly used in Psychology studies (Pringle et al. 2011:14; Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014:7; Chapman & Smith 2002). Just like interpretive phenomenology, IPA examines how individuals make meaning of their life experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014:7). Chapman and Smith (2002:126) see IPA as a method that aims to understand what participants think and believe about the topic under investigation. A more detailed definition was later provided by Smith and Osborn (2007:53) who argue that IPA “involves detailed examination of the participant’s life world; it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual’s perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself”. IPA seek to explore personal experience. Making sense of experiences is critical in IPA studies (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014; Palmer,

Larkin, De Visser & Fadden 2010; Biggerstaff & Thompson 2008; Smith & Osborn 2007; Chapman & Smith 2002).

Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008:4) acknowledge that in IPA meanings that are ascribed to certain events can be accessed through interpretation. That is why Smith and Osborn (2014:1) see humans as sense-making organisms. In IPA participants “interpret their experiences into some form that is understandable to them” (Brocki & Wearden 2006:88). IPA is not only concerned about interpretation but the meanings of participants’ experiences and how participants make sense of that meaning (Smith 2004:41). The sense-making is achieved by conducting interviews with participants (Smith 2004:41). Conducting the interviews can assist in interpreting and understanding the participant’s accounts or experiences (Brocki & Wearden 2006).

During the data analysis a double hermeneutic is required to make sense of the experiences. This involves a two-stage approach: firstly, whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant experiences and secondly, the participants trying to make sense of their own experiences (Smith 2011:10). Researchers cannot detach themselves from the participants’ experiences. As Cooney et al. (2013:19) explain “the researcher is considered inseparable from assumptions and preconceptions about the phenomena under investigation, and that these must be acknowledged and integrated into the research findings”. The researcher’s belief is as indicated by Fade (2004:648) help the researcher in making sense of participants’ experiences. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014:8) share a similar view by stating that the researcher plays an active role in influencing the extent in which they gain access to the participant’s experience. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014:8) raises critical questions that the researcher can ponder on during the interpretation process: “What is the person trying to achieve here? Is anything meaningful being said here which was not intended? Do I have a sense of something going on here that the person himself or herself is perhaps less aware of?”. These questions indicate that through the interpretation process the analysis can get richer and more comprehensive (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014:7).

In addition, IPA is idiographic in nature (Smith & Osborn 2008). An idiographic approach refers to “an in depth analysis of single cases and examining individual perspectives of study participants in unique contexts” (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014:8). IPA does not produce general statements, but it aims at exploring every single case (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014:8). This shows the richness of the analysis and allowing the participants to share their experiences.

After discussing the three approaches; descriptive, interpretive phenomenology and IPA the following deductions were made (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1: Comparison of descriptive, interpretive phenomenology and interpretive phenomenological analysis**

DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY	INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGY	INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
Founding father: Husserl (Lopez & Willis 2004)	Founding father: Heidegger (Dowling 2007; Lopez & Willis 2004)	Founding father: Smith (Pringle, Hendry & McLafferty 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014)
<p><b>Assumption 1:</b> It is believed that there are common characteristics in any lived experienced (Lopez &amp; Willis 2007; Wojnar &amp; Swanson 2007)</p> <p><b>Assumption 2:</b> Bracketing is essential (Finlay 2014; Pringle et al. 2011; Wojnar &amp; Swanson 2007; Mackey 2005; Racher &amp; Robinson 2002)</p> <p><b>Assumption 3:</b> Epistemological questions (Mackey 2005)</p>	<p><b>Assumption 1:</b> Understanding a phenomenon is important and experiences differ (unique experiences and meanings) (Dowling 2007; Racher &amp; Robinson 2002; Van Manen 1990)</p> <p><b>Assumption 2:</b> Bracketing is not achievable (Earle 2010, Smythe et al. 2008; Lopez &amp; Willis 2007; Welman et al. 2005; Lavery 2003; Koch &amp; Harrington 1998; Van Manen 1990)</p>	<p><b>Assumption 1:</b> Understanding a phenomenon and meaning of that phenomenon (Pietkiewicz &amp; Smith 2014; Chapman &amp; Smith 2002)</p> <p><b>Assumption 2:</b> Researcher’s experience or belief important (Fade 2004)</p> <p><b>Assumption 3:</b> Ontological questions</p>

DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY	INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGY	INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
	<b>Assumption 3:</b> Ontological questions (Mackey 2005; Racher & Robinson 2002)	(Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014)
<b>Focus:</b> Attention is based on what participants consciously know (Lavery 2003; Racher & Robinson 2002; Mackey 2005; Dowling 2007)	<b>Focus:</b> What participants experience and the meaning attached to those experiences (Dowling 2007)	<b>Focus:</b> Personal experiences of participants and meaning (Smith & Osborn 2007)
<b>Objective:</b> Seek essences, themes or purely descriptive categories (Mackey 2005; Racher & Robinson 2002)	<b>Objective:</b> Seek meaning and interpretation (Dowling 2007; Lopez & Willis 2007; Racher & Robinson 2002)	<b>Objective:</b> Sense-making, seek meaning and interpretation (Palmer et al. 2010; Smith & Osborn 2007), Single cases (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014)

Considering these three approaches, I decided to follow interpretive phenomenology complemented by IPA as a tool to understand the participant's experiences. Heidegger's philosophical reasoning was more appropriate for this study because it required interpretation and meaning creation. The meaning that people attach to any experience provides for rich and detailed interpretation. My intention was to understand the experiences of the participants (doctoral candidates and supervisors) with regard to the phenomenon *methodological preparedness*.

I opted not to use descriptive phenomenology because I believed that bracketing would be difficult to achieve in this study, based on my personal experiences as a doctoral student. This is confirmed Lopez and Willis (2004:729) who argue that descriptive phenomenology uses bracketing to shed past personal knowledge, but in interpretive phenomenology "expert knowledge on the part of the researcher is valuable guides to inquiry and make the inquiry a meaningful undertaking". Bracketing is not necessary in interpretive phenomenology because past knowledge is essential in the meaning-making process. Furthermore, Van Manen (1990) argues that it is impossible to shed past

experience, thus bracketing is not achievable. I concur with Koch and Harrington (1998:887) that “the interpreter can never be separated from the ongoing traditions in which he/she is engaged”. In addition, looking at one’s history, can bring meaningful interpretation (Koch & Harrington 1998:888). Being in the doctoral journey myself, added another layer of meaning-making to the interpretative process, thus assisting me in making sense of the participants’ experiences not as an outsider, but from an insider’s position. As mentioned in the orientation chapter, the master’s and doctoral candidates used to share their anxieties and frustrations with me (see Section 1.6). Being familiar with the context in which the experiences were captured, played a major role during the interpretation stage of this research.

## **2.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design and approach has been discussed in the previous section. This section focuses on a discussion of the research methods employed during the three interrelated phases. Visagie’s (2009:50) method of discussing the research phases has been adopted with reference to the research questions of each phase, followed by the objectives, unit of observation/population and sampling, data collection and analysis.

### **2.3.1 Phase 1: A theoretical perspective: Turning to the scholarly literature and official documents**

This perspective served as scholarly context for a deepened understanding of the concept *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates. This was achieved by systematically reviewing scholarly literature and official documentation such as reports and institutional policies, followed by a concept analysis pertaining to the concept ‘methodological preparedness’ of a doctoral candidate.



### 2.3.1.1 Research questions

Two research questions (see Section 1.4) guided this phase:

- *What are the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration offered by South African Universities? (Chapter 3)*
- *What constitutes the concept “methodological preparedness” of a doctoral candidate? (Chapter 4)*

### 2.3.1.2 Research objectives

Two research objectives (see Section 1.5) were identified in this phase namely:

- **Objective 1:** Provide an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration as an immediate context for methodological preparedness.
- **Objective 2:** Concept analysis to identify and describe the meaning of the concept “methodological preparedness” with reference to a doctoral candidate.

### 2.3.1.3 Unit of observation

In this phase, I turned to the body of scholarly literature and official documents in the fields of doctoral education, research training, supervision and methodology, first, to provide an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate as an immediate context for methodological preparedness (see Chapter 3) and secondly, to contextualise the concept “methodological preparedness” by means of concept analysis (Walker & Avant 2013) (see Chapter 4).

#### 2.3.1.4 Methods

##### a) Critical literature review

I conducted a critical literature review in Chapter 3 to provide an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration as an immediate context for methodological preparedness. A critical literature review means that the researcher “adopts a critical approach which might assess theories ...with an emphasis on background and contextual material” (Jesson, Matheson & Lacey 2011:76). The author selects materials in order to make an important contribution to the knowledge base and develop arguments (Jesson, Matheson & Lacey 2011:76).

In Chapter 3 the critical literature review aimed to provide an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate as an immediate context for methodological preparedness. The question I intended to answer was: *What studies have been done on methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates?* To deal with this question a variety of scholarly literature and official documentation have been consulted. I considered literature as well as some official documents on the doctorate as offered in South Africa, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, and the USA to distil a common understanding of the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration offered by South African Universities and other selected countries.

The scholarly literature and official documentation was surveyed for contributions related to the following key words: *methodological preparedness, methodological preparation, research preparation, research preparedness, research competence and research methods in doctoral programmes*. A comprehensive collection of search engines was utilised (see Section 1.3). Preference was given to the analysis of the most recent and relevant scholarly literature on research and methodological preparation. Recent refers to sources that were published between 1999 and 2017. Relevant refers to sources that contributed to understanding the concept under study.

The first step that I used in determining the relevance of the sources was to read through the title of the source, abstract, introduction and conclusion. Undertaking this first step assisted me in screening the literature and selecting the most relevant sources (Jesson et al. 2011:115). Some of the titles were misleading because they contained the key concepts that I searched for, yet the contents did not contribute to my chosen topic. After reading the introduction and some parts of the body of the articles, it became evident that the sources were focused on other aspects not related to my topic. All these academic sources were excluded from sources that I used for this chapter, because they were not answering the question as identified in the previous sections. Sources that focused on research methods in doctoral programmes, methodological preparation of doctoral candidates and research preparation or preparedness of doctoral candidates were included in the sources that I consulted (see Table 2.2). Table 2.2 provides a list of journal articles that mostly contributed to the understanding of the concept. I decided to provide the following information for reference purposes; authors, year of publication, title and my own deduction on the specific area of interest.

**Table 2.2: Sources consulted during the concept analysis process**

<b>AUTHOR (S)</b>	<b>YEAR OF PUBLICATION</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>RELEVANT THEMES</b>
Gube, J, Getenet, S, Satariyan, A & Muhammad, Y.	2017	Towards “operating within” the field: doctoral students’ views of supervisors’ discipline expertise.	<i>The role of the supervisors’ discipline expertise in doctoral students’ research progress</i>
Ali, PA, Watson, R & Dhingra, K.	2016	Postgraduate research students’ and their supervisors’ attitudes towards supervision.	<i>Experiences of doctoral students and supervisors in research supervision and student-supervisor relationship</i>
Hanyane, BR.	2015	Assessing the level of preparedness in research-based qualifications of postgraduate students in Public Administration and Management.	<i>The level of research preparedness of postgraduate students</i>

AUTHOR (S)	YEAR OF PUBLICATION	TITLE	RELEVANT THEMES
Heraalal, P.J.	2015	Improving postgraduate supervision in an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environment: a case study at the College of Education University of South Africa (Unisa).	<i>Experiences of postgraduate students in an ODL environment</i>
Nasiri, F & Mafakheri, F.	2015	Postgraduate research supervision at a distance: a review of challenges and strategies.	<i>Lessons learned from postgraduate supervision cultures</i>
Murakami-Ramalho, E, Militello, M & Piert, J.	2013	A view from within: how doctoral students in educational administration develop research knowledge and identity.	<i>Experiences of doctoral students in educational administration</i>
Ya Ni, A.	2013	Comparing the effectiveness of classroom and online teaching: teaching research methods.	<i>Teaching research methods in an online environment</i>
Evan, C & Stevenson, K.	2011	The experience of international nursing students studying for a PhD in the UK: a qualitative study.	<i>Doctoral students' learning experiences</i>
Ismail, R & Meerah, SM.	2011	Evaluating the research competencies of doctoral students.	<i>Key research competencies during doctoral training</i>
Lambie, GW & Vaccaro, N.	2011	Doctoral counsellor education: students' levels of research self-efficacy, perceptions of the research training environment, and interest in research.	<i>Perceptions of research training</i>
Wang, J, Lin, E, Spalding, E, Klecka, CL & Odell, SJ.	2011	Quality teaching and teacher education: a kaleidoscope of notions.	<i>Perspectives on quality teaching</i>
Ayee, JR.	2009	Renovated pedagogical methods and curricula in the training institutes of Public Administration in Africa. In <i>African institutes of</i>	<i>Curricula in training institutes in Africa</i>

AUTHOR (S)	YEAR OF PUBLICATION	TITLE	RELEVANT THEMES
		<i>Public Administration: new challenges, new roles, new perspectives</i> , edited by United Nations.	
Gardner, SK.	2009	Conceptualising success in doctoral education: perspectives of faculty in seven disciplines.	<i>Experiences of doctoral students and faculty members</i>

The systematic literature review was fundamental for undertaking the concept analysis, described below, because it managed to answer the question, “*What studies have been done on methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates?*” as stipulated above. In addition, it provided the data source for doing a concept analysis.

#### **b) Concept analysis process**

I applied five of the eight steps of concept analysis as identified by Walker and Avant (2013) to identify and describe the meaning of the concept “methodological preparedness” with reference to a doctoral candidates (see Chapter 4). Objective 2 of the study aimed at undertaking a concept analysis to identify and describe the meaning of the concept “methodological preparedness” with reference to a doctoral candidate (see Section 1.5, Objective 2). In order to answer this research objective I deemed it necessary to use five of the eight steps of Walker and Avant (2013). These five steps assisted in understanding the concept “methodological preparedness”, ultimately exploring the scholarly context. The other three steps, “identify a model case”, “identify borderline, related contrary, invented and illegitimate cases” and “defining empirical referents” were not applicable at this stage, because the concept methodological preparedness is not used in the literature. This shortcoming made it difficult to undertake these three steps. I have used other complementing research methods to counter for this steps that were omitted

### **b.i) Select a concept**

Walker and Avant (2013:166) identify this as the first step in concept analysis where the researcher selects a concept that is important and useful or that furthers theoretical understanding. In this study, the concept *methodological preparedness* was selected because it relates to my area of interest. The preliminary literature review discussed in Chapter 1 revealed no exact definition of this concept (see Section 1.2). Although I offer a tentative definition of this concept in Chapter 1, it was not sufficient for the purpose of this research, thus, justifying the need for undertaking the concept analysis in this phase.

### **b.ii) Determining the purpose of the concept analysis**

The purpose of analysing the concept is to clarify the meaning for scientific usage of the concept (Walker & Avant 2013:167). At this phase the purpose of employing a concept analysis was to understand the concept “methodological preparedness” of a doctoral candidate based on scholarly literature and official documents by producing a preliminary definition.

### **b.iii) Determining the defining attributes**

When characterising the defining attributes, Walker and Avant (2013:168) argue that they are “the heart of the concept”. This step entailed the identification of the attributes that are “frequently associated with the concept” (Walker & Avant 2013:168). This was a demanding task, because the concept “methodological preparedness” is not used in the literature. I had to refer to related concepts and see what they seemed to constitute research preparation/training of doctoral candidates. After I identified the defining attributes I had to engage with my supervisors to justify why I deemed these attributes as relevant. Such engagements assisted me in refining the defining attributes and making sense of the concept.

#### **b.iv) Identifying antecedents**

Walker and Avant (2013:166) define antecedents as “those events or incidents that must occur or be in place prior to the occurrence of the concept”. Without the identified antecedents, *methodological preparedness* will not occur. During the literature review, I thoroughly engaged with the scholarly literature and official documents in order to identify what the scholars deem as important for doctoral candidates to complete their doctoral studies.

#### **b.v) Identifying consequences**

Walker and Avant (2013:173) define consequences as the outcomes of the concept. In addition, consequences refer to the events and incidents that occur because of the concept (Walker & Avant 2013:173). The consequences were identified by looking at the defining attributes, the antecedents, the official documents and scholarly literature.

### **2.3.2 Phase 2: Turning to Public Administration doctoral candidates and supervisors to explore the phenomenon of *methodological preparedness* at Unisa**

In this phase, I took on an inductive stance to make sense of the lived experiences of Public Administration doctoral candidates and supervisors by exploring the phenomenon “methodological preparedness” in its real life context.

#### **2.3.2.1 Research question**

The central research questions (see Section 1.4) asked in this phase was:

- *How do the Public Administration doctoral candidates enrolled at Unisa from 2000–2015 make sense of “methodological preparedness”?*
- *How do the Public Administration doctoral supervisors at Unisa make sense of*

*“methodological preparedness”?*

### **2.3.2.2 Research objectives**

This phase aimed at answering objectives 3 and 4 (see Section 1.5) as stated below:

- **Objective 3:** Explore how Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa make sense of *methodological preparedness*.
- **Objective 4:** Explore how Public Administration supervisors at Unisa make sense of *methodological preparedness*.

### **2.3.2.3 Selection of participants**

A population refers to the “theoretical specified aggregation of the elements in a study” (Babbie 2005:486). The accessible population in this phase consisted of all Public Administration doctoral candidates that were registered during the period 2000 to 2015 at Unisa. In addition, it included all postgraduate supervisors employed by Unisa to supervise Public Administration Doctoral candidates at the time of conducting the interviews. The students were categorised in three groups: Public Administration doctoral candidates who were registered (9), those who have terminated their studies before completion (8) and those who successfully completed their studies (8). The three categories were mutually exclusive. Choosing a period of 15 years assisted in identifying candidates belonging to all three categories. Furthermore, I deemed the period sufficient to ensure that the participants had rich experiences of the phenomenon to share. This period was not applicable to the supervisors.

The participants were purposefully selected as suggested by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014:10) in alignment with IPA. The main criterion for selecting the participants was that they must have had the experience (Griffiths 2009:128). Purposeful sampling means that participants are selected to be “information-rich cases” (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014:10). The selection is done based on a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Pre-knowledge



and experience of the researcher remain important (Robinson 2014:32; Welman et al. 2005:69). Chapman and Smith (2002:127) further explain that purposive sampling is used to “attempt to find a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant”. Elliot and Timulak (2008:150) states that this open-ended strategy is more flexible and can be adapted to deal with the problem, at the same time allowing participants to share their unique experiences.

IPA made use of small samples because it focuses more on the richness of the data to be collected rather than the number of participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014:9, Smith 2004). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014:9) indicate that the number of participants selected depend on four factors: (1) the depth of the analysis, (2) the richness of the individual cases, (3) how the researcher wants to compare or contrast single cases and (4) the pragmatic restrictions one is working under. The sample size of this study consisted of 35 participants, including the doctoral candidates and supervisors (see Figure 2.1) . I selected these participants because they had/were experiencing the phenomenon and I believed they were going to share rich experiences. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants (see Chapters 5, 6 & 7).

The following participant characteristics informed the selection criteria: registration status, time (2000–2015), work status, gender and voluntary participation. In order not to distort the study, thus nullifying the credibility (Polit & Beck 2007:499), I was sensitive not to include participants who had reservations to participate. Some doctoral candidates (3) who successfully completed their doctoral studies were not willing to participate. Table 2.3 provides details about the sampling criteria by focusing on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

**Table 2.3: Sampling criteria: inclusion and exclusion of doctoral candidates**

SAMPLING CRITERIA	JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
<b>Registration status</b>	I used this criterion to determine whether a student is currently registered or not. It indicated whether the candidate is in the first	I excluded students who were not registered for the 2015 academic year due to deferment.

SAMPLING CRITERIA	JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
	year of registration or is towards completion. I ensured that I selected newly registered, candidates who were writing their research proposals and candidates who were busy with their chapters. but have not yet completed their doctoral degree.	Students who were registered but were not willing to participate.
<b>Completion status</b>	This category was used for candidates who have successfully completed their doctoral degrees and graduated.	I excluded students who had submitted their theses for examination. Students who successfully completed their studies but were not willing to participate.
<b>Candidates who terminated their studies before completion</b>	This category included candidates who terminated their studies after their research proposals were accepted, those who terminated their studies during the proposal writing stage and candidates who terminated their studies while writing their chapters.	I also excluded students who were not willing to participate.
<b>Time period</b>	The time period ranged from 2000 to 2015.	I excluded students who were registered prior to or after this selected time frame.
<b>Work status</b>	A large number of candidates who successfully completed their doctoral degrees were academics at the time of the interviews. Candidates who were academics were also selected to capture their lived experiences on how they experienced the concept <i>methodological preparedness</i> . This criterion was used to ensure that candidates who were not academics were also included.	I excluded students who were not willing to participate.
<b>Voluntary participation</b>	Participants were expected to participate voluntarily and they had to sign an informed consent form prior to participation.	I excluded students who agreed initially but after receiving the informed consent form did not respond.

Considering the fact that there are a small number of supervisors (13 supervisors including my supervisor for this thesis) for doctoral students in the Department of Public Administration and Management at Unisa, I aimed to include all of them. I came to a realisation that two of the supervisors could not participate because of other commitments. The following participants' common characteristic informed the selection criteria: years of supervision, doctoral research outputs, committee work and voluntary participation (see Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4: Sampling criteria: inclusion and exclusion criteria of supervisors**

<b>SAMPLING CRITERIA</b>	<b>JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
<b>Years of supervision</b>	I used this criterion to determine the number of years in which the supervisor has been involved in the supervision process. This criterion assisted me to include supervisors who were more experienced and those who were less experienced.	Supervisors who were not willing to participate.
<b>Doctoral research outputs</b>	I used this criterion to determine if the supervisors have supervised doctoral students up to successful completion. I ensured that the selected supervisors had at least produced one doctoral student at Unisa.	Supervisors who had not produced any doctoral student(s). I believed that supervisors who had not supervised students up to successful completion might not have richer experiences. I also excluded supervisors who were not willing to participate.
<b>Committee work</b>	This criterion assisted me to understand the active involvement of the supervisors in various departmental committees. This assisted me in ensuring that supervisors who are involved in the Departmental Higher Degrees Committee and Departmental Research Committee were selected.	I excluded supervisors who were not willing to participate. I realised that all the supervisors were actively involved in various departmental committees.
<b>Voluntary participation</b>	Participants were expected to participate voluntarily and they had to sign an informed consent form prior to participation.	I excluded supervisors who were not available to participate.

<b>SAMPLING CRITERIA</b>	<b>JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
<b>Employment status</b>	I included currently employed supervisors and supervisors who are supervising doctoral students on contract basis.	I excluded supervisors who are currently employed but who were interviewed as doctoral candidates.

#### **2.3.2.4 Data collection process**

I depended on multiple sources of evidence as recommended by Creswell (2013). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, naïve sketches and field notes. The next section provides a description of my role as an interpretive phenomenological researcher, how I negotiated access into the field and how I collected the data.

##### **a) Role of the researcher**

The researcher is seen as a key primary data collection instrument in qualitative research (Creswell 2013:237). It is important for the researcher to identify “their biases, values and personal backgrounds” (Creswell 2013:237). My perceptions about the experiences of the doctoral candidates were shaped by my involvement in the Higher Degrees Committee (see Section 1.6). I knew some of the participants personally because at the time of their enrolment I was the secretary of the Higher Degrees Committee. Having written two articles on methodological preparation of Public Administration students also influenced my line of reasoning. In an attempt to ensure that these personal experiences did not distort my interpretations and contribution to this discourse, I used paraphrasing and probing skills during the semi-structured interviews (see attached CD). In addition, inductive and deductive reasoning was employed throughout the course of the research.

##### **a.i) Paraphrasing**

As a phenomenological researcher I valued the experiences of the participants. It was important to me to retain the true meaning of their experiences. I paraphrased the participant’s main thoughts during the interviews in order to clarify the meaning of their

experiences. This refers to the double hermeneutic as already alluded to in the previous sections (see Section 2.2.1.3). I tried to make sense of their experiences as they were making sense of their own experience.

#### **a.ii) Probing**

Probing is defined by Polit and Beck (2014:388) as “eliciting more useful or detailed information from a respondent in an interview than was volunteered in the first reply”. I used probes to stimulate inner thoughts and emotions during the interviews. I provided a statement followed by a question to derive richer experiences from the participants. An example of a probe was: “Please tell me more about ... ”.

#### **a.iii) Reasoning strategies**

I used deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning entails that “researchers look back at their data from the themes to determine if more evidence can support each theme or whether they need to gather additional information” (Creswell 2013:234). I simultaneously interpreted the interviews, naïve sketches and field notes. The *voyage by ocean metaphor* was conceived at this stage. This assisted me in developing the themes and the subthemes. I also used a literature control to re-contextualise my findings back to the literature (Morse & Field 1995:130).

Inductive reasoning as described by Creswell (2013:234) “illustrates working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researcher has established a comprehensive set of themes” (see attached CD “sense making document”). At this stage I also involved the supervisors to ensure that the conclusions that I drew were relevant. Leedy and Ormrod (2010:35) acknowledge the importance of consulting experienced professional colleagues in order to deal with the researcher’s “certain perspectives, assumptions and theoretical biases”. I also used the literature control to inform my conclusions and make adjustments where applicable.

## **b) Negotiating access into the field and participant recruitment**

I gained entry into the field through multiple gatekeepers. These gatekeepers included the Unisa Research Permissions Subcommittee of the Senate Research Committee, the Information Communication and Technology Department and the Department of Public Administration and Management. The Unisa Research Permissions Subcommittee granted me permission to undertake this study (see Annexure 2). Furthermore, I needed access to the personal information of the participants that was stored by the other two departments. The University Registrar granted me the permission to access the doctoral candidates' personal information. All institutional gatekeepers required proof of a valid research ethics approval certificate prior to granting me permission or access (see Annexure 1). I took the initiative to contact the participants telephonically to recruit them to participate in my study. I called fifty participants and 35 agreed to participate. During the telephonic calls, I introduced myself as a doctoral candidate undertaking this study. I explained the purpose and the objectives of the study. I also sent them the informed consent documentation so that they could read it before committing for an interview. I also noticed that some participants recognised my voice because we had informal discussions in the past about their doctoral studies. I assured them that I was not representing the department, I was a researcher and doctoral candidate like them.

As the primary researcher, I collected the data from the participants by means of different data collection methods. One of my supervisors sat in during the first five interviews as part of mentoring. Explicit consent was sought from the participants about the role of the observer (see Annexures 3 & 4).

## **c) Data collection**

I used three data collection methods namely, individual interviews, naïve sketches and field notes in order to capture the lived experiences of the participants.

### **c.i) Individual semi-structured interviews**

According to IPA, semi-structured one-to-one interviews were appropriate for use in this research. Chapman and Smith (2002:127) argue that semi-structured interviews give the researcher an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the participants. Questions can be modified to suit each participant. When using semi-structured interviews, May (2011:134) states that during the interview the researcher can ask for clarity and elaboration from the answers provided by the interviewee.

I first conducted five pilot interviews, to determine the relevancy of the questions. I started the interviews by re-introducing myself and thanking the participants for their willingness to participate in the interview. I first confirmed if they have read the informed consent form and agreed with its contents. I also asked if they had any questions based on the informed consent. I then reminded them of the purpose and the objectives of the study. I also assured them that they were welcome to ask questions for clarity. I used open-ended questions and prompts during these interviews. This allowed the participants to share their lived experiences. In cases where the participants were deviating from exploring the phenomenon, I redirected them by using prompts. I also controlled myself from showing my emotions when they were sharing their experiences. I maintained my neutrality and listened more without intimidating my participants. I interviewed 35 participants at a place that was convenient to them. These interviews lasted for 35-50 minutes. These interviews were also audio-recorded because the participants granted me permission to do so (see Annexure 5 & 6). These recordings are kept in a password-protected computer for verification purposes.

I asked the following questions during the semi-structured interviews:

#### **Doctoral candidates (see Annexure 5):**

- ***What was it like when you enrolled for your doctoral studies?*** [I asked this question because I wanted the participants to reflect on their first experiences when they enrolled. I especially wanted them to think about their first day when they decided

to pursue a doctoral degree. I assumed that they would be able to recall important experiences about their time of enrolment].

- ***Reflecting on your experience of your doctoral study, tell me how prepared you were with regard to the research methodology (design and methods) when you enrolled?*** [Indirectly I was guiding them to reflect on the phenomenon of methodological preparedness].
- ***Reflecting on your experience, what would have facilitated your methodological preparedness at the time of enrolment?*** [Indirectly I was asking the participants to identify the antecedents. I asked this question to allow the participants as one of the beneficiaries to share their experiences about what they deemed to be necessary for them to be methodologically prepared].

#### **Supervisors of doctoral candidates (see Annexure 6):**

- ***Please tell me about your supervision in this department.*** [I was exploring the supervisors' supervision experiences, practices and encounters. I believed they were going to share their "old" and "recent" supervision experiences].
- ***Reflecting on your supervision experience, tell me how methodological prepared were your doctoral students when they enrolled?*** [I wanted the supervisors to reflect specifically on the methodological preparedness of the doctoral candidates at the time of enrolment. I was very specific considering the years of experience that the supervisors had (see Table 2.3). I was afraid that if the question was too abstract they might share experiences that were not related to methodological preparedness].
- ***Reflecting on your own supervision experience, what do you believe is needed to facilitate the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates in this department?*** [I expected supervisors to share their experiences on what they were currently doing to facilitate the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates, also to propose what they believed could be a useful interventions in the future].



### **c.ii) Naïve sketches**

According to Giorgi (1985:48) naïve sketches are “a candid description such as an essay, short story or notes”. I firstly introduced the concept “methodological preparedness” by sending the naïve sketches to the participants. I requested them to write short guided descriptions on the phenomenon “methodological preparedness” (see Annexure 8) by providing them with three questions (the three questions are the same as the ones provided in section c.i)) on a piece of paper relating to the phenomenon “methodological preparedness”. These naïve sketches assisted me to make sense of their individual experiences. The majority of the doctoral candidates completed the naïve sketches. The supervisors were willing to participate in the interview, not necessarily writing about their own experiences. Considering their work load, I decided not to persuade them to complete the naïve sketches. This was also an ethical consideration because I respected their decisions in terms of their participation in the study.

### **c.iii) Field notes**

I used three types of field notes namely, observational notes, methodological notes and personal notes.

- **Observational notes**

Polit and Beck (2014:294) define observational notes as “objective descriptions of events and conversations and the contexts in which they occur”. I observed the participants’ emotions when they shared their experiences. I made notes of critical aspects that I observed in the field and this assisted me to recall of what transpired during the interview (see Annexure 9).

- **Methodologic notes**

Methodologic notes are “reminders about how subsequent observations should be made” (Polit & Beck 2014:294). Methodologic notes involved reminding myself about the data collection methods. This entailed observing what happened in the interviews, especially the behaviour of the participants. I further made notes on each interview about the highlights of each interview. I wrote consolidated methodologic notes for each group of participants. This helped me to improve my interviewing skills (see Annexure 10).

- **Personal notes**

Personal notes entail reflecting about your own feelings during the research process (Polit & Beck 2014:294). I undertook an evaluation of self because I wanted to be aware of my own biasness and feelings. I had my own experiences as a doctoral student. The engagement interview that I had with my supervisors served as a reminder of my own biases. I had to separate my own experiences from the participants’ experiences and perceptions (see Annexure 11).

**d) Data analysis**

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by myself and analysed using Shinebourne’s (2011:56) four stage process for analysing an IPA study. As already alluded to, I analysed the three data sets simultaneously. The comparisons between the three data sets assisted me in making sense of the experiences of the participants. The four stage process is discussed below:

- **Initial stage:** I read the original manuscripts for several times. In most instances, I took a break after reading it several times and re-read it once more. Shinebourne’s (2011:56) process of engagement was taken into consideration, which included “content, use of language, context and interpretive comments”. After the transcription I printed all the transcripts. I started reading and making notes on the original

manuscripts, naïve sketches and considering my reflective notes on my Facebook account (see Annexure 7). I started with one group of participants to avoid confusing myself.

- **Second stage:** This stage involved “formulating concise phrases that contain enough particularity to remain grounded in the text and enough abstraction to offer a conceptual understanding” (Shinebourne 2011:57). The second step required me to read through the manuscripts, naïve sketches and field notes again and create some themes. I then developed a document called “sense-making document” where I wrote the themes and added verbatim quotes that supported the themes (see attached CD). This document was sent to my supervisors for their opinions and insight. We scheduled a meeting to review this “sense-making” document.
- **Third stage:** This stage involved looking for patterns in the emerging themes and producing a structure that was helpful in highlighting converging ideas (Shinebourne 2011:57). I used the “sense-making” document (see attached CD “sense-making document”) to look for patterns between the themes. It was at this stage that a *voyage by ocean metaphor* was realised and adopted. A metaphor is described by Semino (2008:1) as a “phenomenon whereby we talk about and potentially think about something in terms of something else”. This definition by Semino (2008) fits in this research because the phenomenon that is being explored, *methodological preparedness*, is likened to something else. The use of a metaphor in this thesis originated from engaging with the experiences of the participants during the data analysis stage. This metaphor was used to construct the reality of the participants.
- **Final stage:** In this stage, I produced a table of themes, which showed the major themes and subthemes. With the metaphor in mind, I reverted to the sense-making document to extract the major themes and subthemes. It was at this stage that I started making sense of the information shared by the participants.

### **2.3.3 Phase 3: A conceptual framework for understanding the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa**

The aim of Phase 3 was to generate a conceptual framework for understanding the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa. The conceptual framework was informed by the integrated findings and re-engagement with the literature from the systematic literature review and concept analysis conducted in Chapters 3 and 4, as well as the findings and literature control reported in the findings and interpretation chapters (see Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9). This conceptual framework served as a thinking tool for understanding what constitutes methodological *preparedness* of doctoral candidates in Public Administration (see Chapter 9).

#### **2.3.3.1 Research question**

The question (see Section 1.4) that was posed at this phase was: *What constitutes methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates, both as a concept and a phenomenon, at a South African university?*

#### **2.3.3.2 Research objective**

This phase answered **objective 5** (see Section 1.5), which aimed to generate a conceptual framework for understanding *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa.

#### **2.3.3.3 Method used in generating the conceptual framework**

I utilised five of the eight steps process of concept analysis as proposed by Walker and Avant (2013:165) (see Section 2.3.1). These steps, also previously explained in Section 2.3.1 were applied (see Chapter 9) in order to analyse the concept *methodological preparedness* as experienced by the doctoral candidates. In essence in Phase 1 I used the five steps to understand the concept “methodological preparedness” of doctoral

candidates from a more generic perspective by turning to scholarly literature and official documentation. In this phase I used the five steps to understand the concept by re-engaging the consolidated findings (see Section 9.2) and the conceptual framework derived from the literature (see Figure 4.1) situated in the Unisa context.

**a) Select a concept**

The concept was already identified in Phase 1, based on scholarly literature and official documents. In this phase I intended to understand the usage of the concept from the literature. This required me as a phenomenological researcher to have engagements and re-engagements with my supervisors to make sure that my pre-understanding did not distort the meaning of the concept. It was necessary at this phase to revisit the concept and see how its meaning unfolded beyond the initial definition of the concept during Phase 1 of the research.

**b) Determining the purpose of the concept analysis**

In Phase 1 I derived a preliminary definition of the concept. In Phase 3 I compared the conceptual framework derived from the literature with the consolidated findings (see Chapter 9) and the preliminary definition. These conceptual frameworks are context-specific, yet transferable to related contexts.

**c) Select a concept**

As mentioned previously, Walker and Avant (2013:167) suggest the use of “dictionaries, thesauruses, colleagues, and available literature” in identifying the use of the concept. This assists in supporting and validating the choices of the defining attributes and it would provide the evidence base for the analysis. In this research, the concept analysis method was used to develop the conceptual framework. A preliminary definition was already formulated in Chapter 1, but it was not sufficient because I derived it without exploring the concept “methodological preparedness”. Having completed the literature review chapters

and interpretation chapters I had to reconsider how the concept is presented in the literature in comparison to how it emerged from the lived experiences of the participants. I re-engaged with verbatim quotes to make sense of the use of the concept. Therefore the use of the concept was identified by using the integrated empirical findings (see Section 9.1) because it captured the experiences of both the doctoral candidates and the supervisors. Reference was also made to the previous interpretation Chapters 5 to 8 in order to make sense of the usage of this phenomenon.

**d) Determining antecedents**

The antecedents were derived from the integrated findings (see Section 9.1) by assessing the integrated findings and reading the verbatim quotes in the interpretation chapters to identify what the participants deemed as necessary for them to be methodologically prepared. It was worth noting that unconsciously the doctoral candidates and the supervisors reflected more on the antecedents (see Section 9.2; Chapters 5 to 8).

**e) Determining consequences**

The consequences were identified by re-engaging the interpretation chapters, literature review and literature control, antecedents and defining attributes.

## **2.4 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS IN QUALITATIVE INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH**

Guba (1981:79) provides a model that is widely applied by qualitative researchers to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research. This model consists of the following elements: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Literature has shown that these elements are relevant to phenomenological researchers.

### **2.4.1 Truth value**

Anney (2014:276) defines “credibility” as the confidence placed in the truth of the research findings. This entails focusing “on making clear links between data and analysis so that the reader can recreate the line of reasoning” (Harvey 2017:online). In a phenomenological study there is a need to know more about a particular phenomenon and the common experiences of individuals involved with it (Creswell 2007:103). Truth value was achieved in this study through employing prolonged engagement, triangulation, authority of the researcher, peer examination, structural coherence and creating a chain of evidence and referential adequacy.

#### **2.4.1.1 Prolonged engagement**

Anney (2014:276) sees prolonged engagement as an important aspect. This requires the researcher to spend enough time with the participants in the field. Anney (2014:276) adds that if the researcher spends enough time with the participants it would be easier to “understand the core issues that might affect the quality of the data because it helps to develop trust with study participants”. My time with the participants was prolonged prior, during and after the interviews. I joined the Departmental Higher Degrees Committee in 2007 and since then I had direct communication with doctoral candidates. I informally communicated with the participants before the interviews, asking them about the phenomenon under study. I also reminded them of the purpose and objectives of the study before the interviews. During the interviews, I spent 35 to 50 minutes with each participant. After the interviews we had informal discussions about their experiences. I realised that such engagements were helpful because the participants were summarising what they shared during the interview. I have spent 35 hours conducting these interviews and have been engaged in this context since 2007.

#### **2.4.1.2 Triangulation**

Guba (1981:85) explains that when a researcher engages in triangulation, the researcher attempts to use a variety of data sources, different investigators, different theories and different methods. Guba (1981:85) adds, “no item of information ought to be accepted that cannot be verified from at least two sources”. In this study triangulation of data sources entailed using field notes, naïve sketches and individual qualitative interviews. I further triangulated by using literature sources, including a wide variety of scholarly literature and official documents.

#### **2.4.1.3 Authority of the researcher**

My role as a researcher was linked to my identity as a doctoral student in the Department of Public Administration and Management who have successfully completed a master’s degree. My master’s degree investigated the various research methods that were used by doctoral candidates in Public Administration from the period 2000 to 2008. In my master’s dissertation, I pointed out the need to revisit the research methodology curricular. Hence, this research can be viewed as an extension on the research that I already conducted at master’s level, using a different research design and having a different focus. I have also published two articles on research preparation of Public Administration researchers and have been involved in postgraduate research in the field of Public Administration since 2007. My supervisors are both established researchers with experience of conducting research from a qualitative paradigm. Even though I initially had limited experience in interviewing and data analysis, my two supervisors have extensive experience in these research methods. They offered the necessary guidance through ongoing contact mentoring sessions and doing quality checks on the data collected, to ensure that I developed my interviewing skills and became well equipped to conduct qualitative interviews from an interpretive phenomenological stance. They suggested that I commenced the interview process by interviewing them before I interviewed the research participants to make sure that the interview questions were suitable and to build my confidence as a qualitative interviewer.



#### **2.4.1.4 Peer examination**

Guba (1981:85) explains that during a peer examination process the researcher “ought to regularly detach themselves from the site and to seek out and interact with other professionals who are able and willing to perform the debriefing function”. This was done by conducting regular meetings with the supervisors of this research. Moreover, peer examination was done by interacting with the *Knowledge and Methods of Public Administration* focus group. This focus group consists of experienced researchers and emerging researchers in the Department of Public Administration and Management. The constructive criticism that I obtained from the peers in this focus group helped me to refine my interpretation. During the engagements with the group I never revealed any personal information of the participants, because I wanted to protect their privacy and confidentiality throughout the study. I also presented a paper on “*The supervisor as coastguard: a reflection on the role of the supervisor in the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates*” at the 2017 Postgraduate Supervision Conference as another avenue to engage with scholars and enhance my understanding of the findings.

#### **2.4.1.5 Structural coherence and creating a chain of evidence**

Guba (1981:85) acknowledges that the researcher needs to test interpretation “against all other to be certain that there are no internal conflicts or contradictions”. This was achieved by providing direct quotations to substantiate the findings and make sure that there is a chain of evidence. Structural coherence was achieved by providing “a well-structured and densely described research design and method, including management of data and dense description of findings” (Visagie 2009:84). Furthermore, I conducted a literature control to verify the empirical findings as well as to create a chain of evidence by identifying the similarities and differences of the findings in literature and comparing it to the findings of this study. I aimed to include references that were current and relevant to the study. I also made sure that references were accounted for in the list of references.

#### **2.4.1.6 Referential adequacy**

Guba (1981:86) explains that the researcher can provide raw materials that other experts can use to verify the findings. Referential adequacy materials as described by Guba that are provided in this study, include a copy of the interview questions, de-identified transcripts, naïve sketches, field notes, informed consent forms, ethical clearance certificate and permission to conduct research certificate (see Annexures 5 to 6).

#### **2.4.2 Applicability**

Guba (1981:86) believes that it is not possible to produce “truth statements” but the researcher needs to be content with descriptive statements or interpretative statements. This study provided interpretive statements as provided by the participants. Applicability was sought by conducting dense descriptions and using nominated sampling techniques.

##### **2.4.2.1 Dense description**

As already alluded to in Section 2.3.2, I provided direct verbatim quotations from the participants to enhance the applicability of this study (see Chapters 5 to 8). A sample of the raw data will be made available for verification and the rest will be stored securely for future verification. I further used the literature control to re-contextualise the findings.

##### **2.4.2.2 Nominated sample**

I purposefully selected the participants in this study. I was guided by the sampling criteria already discussed in Section 2.3.2.4. In addition I also considered relevant inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Tables 2.3 & 2.4).

### **2.4.3 Consistency**

Guba (1981:80) maintains that consistency determines if the findings can be consistently repeated if “the inquiry were replicated with the same or similar subjects in the same or similar context”. I have used the following consistency measures:

#### **2.4.3.1 Dependability audit, including a dense description of the research method**

Guba (1981:87) argues that the researcher can select an external auditor to check the “processes of inquiry”. This was achieved in this study by providing a clear description of the research design, data collection methods and analysis so that my supervisors and the examiners could understand how I achieved the purpose and objectives of the study. I am also willing to provide the raw data, interviews, documents and field notes collected from the field to an external researcher who might want to audit my study (Guba & Lincoln 1981).

#### **2.4.3.2 Stepwise replication research**

In a similar vein like Polit and Beck (2014), Visagie (2009:86) sees stepwise replication of research as a process whereby the researcher describes “the entire research process so that other researchers can follow similar steps”. A similar approach was adopted in this research. I took care to explain the research design, complementary approaches and the methods used to achieve the purpose and objectives in this chapter. Peer examination also fostered dependability by means of engaging with other scholars outside my field of expertise.

### **2.4.4 Neutrality**

De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005:347) sees neutrality as a way of finding out if the study can be confirmed by other studies. De Vos, et al.. (2005:347) further poses a question that can be used when ensuring neutrality which is, “do the data help confirm

the general findings and lead to the implications”. Neutrality in this study was ensured by conducting a confirmability audit, which I discuss below.

#### **2.4.4.1 Confirmability audit**

Guba (1981:87) emphasises that when a researcher wants to ensure confirmability, the researcher needs to provide evidence for every claim. To ensure confirmability I kept records of raw data, naïve sketches and field notes. I also used various sources and made use of direct quotations to support any claims that I made in this study. Peer examination also assisted in achieving confirmability. According to Guba (1981:87) confirmability can also be ensured by triangulation and reflexivity. I used multiple data sources (see Section 2.3.2.4) and I used Facebook for personal reflections in particular during the data collection phase of the study (see Annexure 7). The academics that I socialise with on Facebook commented on my reflections which contributed and enriched my interpretation.

## **2.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Policy on Research Ethics of Unisa (2016) acted as an institutional guide to engaging with research ethics. This policy supports the application of the conditions that follow from the ethics principles for conducting human participant research, in particular respect of autonomy, beneficence (benefit-risk analysis) and justice (Amdur & Bankert 2011). The following sections show how I adhered to these conditions.

### **2.5.1 Respect for autonomy**

Gunnar, Andersson, Chapman, Dekutoski, Dettori, Fehlings, Fourney, Norvell and Weinstein (2010:3) state that respect for autonomy entails “respecting the decision-making capacities of autonomous persons, enabling individuals to make reasoned informed choices”. Similarly, Wessels and Visagie (2015:160) argue that the human subject’s personal dignity and self-determination need to be recognised. The selected

participants were inclusive of the Public Administration doctoral candidates and the supervisors affiliated to the Department of Public Administration and Management that met the inclusion criteria. After receiving ethics approval/clearance (see Annexure 1) and permission from the Research Permissions Sub-committee of Unisa (see Annexure 2) to gain access to the prospective participants' contact details, I personally recruited them to voluntarily participate in my study. I was aware of my obligation to make sure that participants' decisions to participate in the study were not unduly influenced by factors such as prior researcher-participant relationships or an unequal power relationship (I am a lecturer in the Public Administration and Management Department).

I provided the participants with both verbal and written information about the aim of the study, why they were selected to participate and how they would be involved (see Annexures 3 & 4). The information form was sent to them electronically prior to meeting them in person in an attempt to allow them sufficient time to consider participation. Once participants indicated that they have read the information sheet and understand their intended involvement in the study (see Annexures 3 & 4), I requested them to sign the informed consent clause. Before I commenced with the formal interviews, I asked them if they understood the contents of the informed consent form and I re-iterated the purpose of the research, their role as participants and the fact that they could withdraw from the study at any time without fear of penalty (Silverman 2010:158). I believe that the informed consent process is critical to foster an environment that is conducive for the participants to share rich experiences. One of my supervisors was present in the first five interviews with the doctoral candidates as part of his mentoring role. Participants were explicitly asked permission for the presence of one of the supervisors during the first five interviews.

Silverman (2010:158) provides some precautions that researchers need to be clear and concise about in their information sheets. During the data collection stage, the participants were given a number and were asked not to use their supervisor's names to avoid easy identification. I further ensured that the audio-recordings were deleted from the recorder and kept in a password-protected computer. During the transcribing and data analysis

stage, privacy and confidentiality were ensured by using pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

### **2.5.2 Beneficence**

Casey (2016:203) argues that beneficence entails a researcher's duty of "doing good" by respecting participants well-being throughout the research process. In a similar vein, Wessels and Visagie (2015:160) acknowledge that beneficence "involve an obligation to protect subjects from harm by ensuring a favourable risk-benefit ratio". I designed my research in such a way that it would be unlikely to cause risk of harm to the participants financially, psychologically, emotionally, socially or legally (Van Heerden, Visagie and Wessels 2016:35). Hence the Departmental Research Ethics Committee declared my study as fitting the low risk category. Low risk study is defined by the Unisa Standard Operating Procedure for Research Ethics Risk Assessment (SOP) as "research involving human participants directly in which the only foreseeable risk of harm is the potential for minor emotional discomfort or inconvenience, however the risk can easily be mitigated by the researcher" (Unisa 2015:6). In a similar vein Van Heerden et al. (2016:47) classify low risk as "mostly acceptable and tolerable as the involvement (no or indirect) of human subjects constitutes a low risk of harm. The risk should not require specific monitoring interventions".

I thought of the risk factors during my mentoring session with my supervisors. I took into consideration that the research questions might trigger the emotions of doctoral candidates who terminated their studies before completion. During the interviews I listened careful to the experiences and observed their facial expressions, in instances where I became aware of some emotional discomfort, I assured the participants that I was neutral; it was safe for them to share their experiences. I also asked if they were comfortable to continue with the interview. I was cautious not to create false expectations for the doctoral candidates who have registered for their doctoral studies. I identified myself as a doctoral student and I was clear about the purpose of the interview. I needed to do this because some of the doctoral candidates were aware that I am a lecturer at

Unisa. I also indicated to the participants, both the supervisors and doctoral candidates, that the main benefit of this study is to advance the knowledge field of Public Administration and Management focusing on the methodological preparation of researchers in this field by means of a conceptual framework aiming to generate deeper understanding of the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates. The long term benefit would be to enhance the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates. I believed that the conceptual framework would inform doctoral education particularly at Unisa. I received funding in the form of the Academic Qualifications Improvement Programme (AQIP).

### **2.5.3 Justice**

The principle of justice entails that there should “be fair procedures and outcomes in the selection of research subjects” (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research 1978:18). Upon receipt of the information on the study population, I purposively selected my participants by following the selection process discussed in Section 2.3.2.3 I also considered the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Section 2.3.2.3) to avoid undue influence from others.

## **2.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

In summary, this chapter has achieved to identify and describe the research method that was employed by this research. It first discussed the three methodological lenses in phenomenological approach, which are descriptive, interpretive complemented by IPA phenomenological methods. An interpretive approach complemented by IPA was the most suitable approach. I decided to follow the Heideggerian philosophical reasoning because I also believe that I cannot detach myself from the phenomenon “methodological preparedness”. Being a doctoral student and having been a secretary for the Departmental Higher Degrees Committee gave me reasonable experience to be able to understand the “lived experiences” of the doctoral candidates and the supervisors. A purposive sampling method was used in this study and a justification for selecting this

method was discussed in detail. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow the participants to share their rich and lived experiences.

This chapter has further addressed ethical issues in terms of respect for persons, beneficence and justice. Chapter 3 discusses the doctorate as an immediate context for methodological preparedness.



## **PHASE ONE**

### **A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: TURNING TO THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE AND OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS**

## CHAPTER 3

### THE DOCTORATE: A CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

*“As core function of universities, doctoral studies provide invaluable education and training in research aimed at producing highly skilled knowledge workers ...”*

(Teffera 2015:9)

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 I have explained my reasons for embarking on this research journey by arguing that the quality of research in Public Administration may be directly related to the methodological preparedness of especially doctoral candidates. While Public Administration doctoral candidates are a group of participants that experience the state of being (see Section 1.7.3), the ultimate understanding of their *methodological preparedness* is directly related to the immediate context of this collective, the doctorate being a degree qualification on level ten of the qualification framework (Council on Higher Education 2013). With this statement, I assume that the *methodological preparedness* for a master's qualification (level nine of the qualification framework) will most probably have different characteristics than methodological preparedness for a doctorate. The doctorate thus serves as an immediate context for understanding the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate as a degree qualification for which these candidates are, or have been enrolled.

This chapter consequently reports on the analysis of this context by reviewing the literature (see Table 2.2) as well as some official documents on the doctorate as offered in South Africa, the UK, Australia, and the USA. Australia and the UK was selected because, like South Africa, they are part of the British Commonwealth. The USA was selected for diversity purposes. This analysis distinguishes the doctorate in Public Administration as a degree qualification with specific admission requirements, diverse purposes and characteristics, offered within various generic fields. The chapter is

concluded by identifying the implications of this contextual analysis for understanding the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates.

### **3.2 THE DOCTORATE AS A DISTINCT HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATION**

This section aims to describe the doctorate as a distinct higher education qualification offered by Unisa and other universities. Within the South African context, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework “provides the basis for integrating all higher education qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)” (Council of Higher Education 2013). The doctorate is the highest qualification amongst the eleven higher education qualifications in this South African sub-framework. This qualification “requires a candidate to undertake research at the most advanced academic levels culminating in the submission, assessment and acceptance of a thesis” (Council on Higher Education 2013:40). In comparison to the doctorate, a master’s degree aims at educating and training graduates “who can contribute to the development of knowledge at an advanced level” (Council on Higher Education 2013:38). The master’s degree thus serves to prepare doctoral candidates to undertake research at the advanced level of the doctoral degree. The Council on Higher Education (South Africa) (2013) thus recognises the doctoral qualification as a distinct degree qualification within the sub-framework with attributes that differ from the other qualifications such as the master’s and the honours degree.

The expected level of independency of doctoral candidates resonates with Finn’s (2005:8) definition of the doctorate as a process of transitioning from dependency to independency, ultimately conducting original research in a field of study. This definition by Finn emphasises the importance of originality at doctoral level and is confirmed by the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF) as a defining characteristic of the doctoral degree that makes a “significant and original academic contribution at the frontiers of a discipline or field” (Council on Higher Education 2013:40). It is thus an implied expectation that doctoral candidates are independent and competent researchers, able to apply the necessary research competencies.

The literature review consisting of scholarly sources and official documents revealed various views on what constitutes the research competencies required for a doctorate. Petre and Rugg (2010:2) for example, identify the following key competencies that need to be demonstrated by doctoral candidates: (1) mastery of a subject, (2) research insight, (3) respect for the discipline, (4) capacity for independent research and (5) ability to communicate results and relate them to the broader discourse. Similarly, Denicolo and Park (2013:194) outline the following expectations from the scholarly component of a doctorate: “contribution to knowledge, stated gap in knowledge, explicit research questions, conceptual framework, explicit research design, appropriate methodology, correct field work, clear/concise presentation, engagement with theory, coherent argument, research questions answered and conceptual conclusions”. The doctorate is thus noticeably distinct from the other qualifications in the sub-framework due to the high-level competencies of doctoral candidates necessary for them to make significant and original academic contributions to their respective fields. The literature has also shown that there are various categories of doctorates meeting these defining characteristics as discussed above. The following section briefly outlines these doctorates as offered in South Africa, the UK, Australia, and the USA.

### **3.3 CATEGORIES OF DOCTORATES**

The literature review revealed the existence of various categories of doctorates, namely the traditional doctorate, the PhD by publication, the professional doctorate, and the higher doctorate. This section outlines these categories as offered in countries such as South Africa, the UK, Australia, and the USA. For this purpose, the qualification frameworks of the selected countries were consulted (see Table 3.1 for a comparison).

#### **3.3.1 Traditional doctorate**

The traditional doctorate is probably the most widely offered variation of doctorate. In South Africa, the Council on Higher Education (2013:40), although not using the term “traditional doctorate”, describes the doctorate (distinct from the Higher Doctorate and

Professional Doctorate) as a qualification that trains individuals for an academic career. This is a similar purpose to the purpose of the traditional doctorate in the US (PhDPortal 2017 online). In line with the nature of an academic career, the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency (2008:23) describes the traditional doctorate as a qualification awarded to candidates who have shown "the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication". The scholarly nature of the traditional doctorate is also shared in Australia, where their traditional doctoral degree (referred to as Doctor of Philosophy) aims to "make a significant and original contribution to knowledge" (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013:63). The common purpose of the traditional doctorates is thus to train doctoral candidates for academic careers, independent research and for making original contributions to a selected discipline or field of study.

**Table 3.1: Defining characteristics of the traditional doctorate**

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS	SOUTH AFRICA	UK	AUSTRALIA	US
Nature of the contribution	Making an original contribution to knowledge (Bitzer 2012, Backhouse 2011, Sehole 2011, Wisker 2010, Backhouse 2010a and Kiguwa & Langa 2009)	Making a new contribution to knowledge (Crossouard 2011, Charity 2010 Bournier & Simpson 2005; Park 2005; Chiang 2003)	Making a significant and original contribution to knowledge (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013:63)	Making an original contribution to knowledge (Lovitts 2005)
Type of training	The doctorate is discipline-based and prepares doctoral graduates for an	Creating and extending knowledge and producing and training new	Academic career (Jackson 2013, Boud & Tennant 2006; Usher 2002)	Developing powerful scholars (Walker 2008) and

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS	SOUTH AFRICA	UK	AUSTRALIA	US
	academic career (Wolhuter (2011:127; Kiguwa & Langa 2009:50)	generations of academics (Taylor 2012:123; Denicolo & Park 2013:2)		producing the next generation of professors (Nerad 2008)
Key competencies	Demonstrate that they have applied sound appropriate research design and the final thesis "evidences conceptual, critical and sufficiently creative work" (Wisker 2010:224)	"Independency, sustainability, rigour, originality, cutting-edge research and contribution to the body of knowledge" (Kirkman, Thompson, Watson & Stewart 2007)	"Cognitive skills in demonstrating theoretical knowledge, intellectual independence, creative skills and communication skills" (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013)	
<b>Interpretation:</b> Irrespective of the country where the doctorate is offered, this qualification aims at making an original contribution to knowledge. Since it aims at developing academics, seemingly the methodological preparedness of the candidates enrolled for this qualification might be deemed to be of high standard. Moreover, the key competencies identified by the literature seem to relate to methodological preparedness because doctoral candidates are expected to work independently, apply appropriate research designs and demonstrate theoretical knowledge.				

### 3.3.2 PhD by publication

The PhD by publications is offered in Australia and several other countries. It was first introduced in the United Kingdom in 1966 (Peacock 2017:125). Peacock (2017:125) further argues that this type of PhD attracts practitioners entering academia. In Australia a PhD by publication, is described by Jackson (2013:359) as a category of doctorate that

consists of “a series of published works, as opposed to the traditional dissertation”. Jackson (2013:3) sees the PhD by publication as an opportunity for academics to obtain their PhDs while increasing their publications. Jackson identifies three types of PhDs by publication, which are PhD by prior publications, PhD by publications and the Hybrid PhD by publication (Jackson 2013:7). Powell (2004:17) maintains that the candidates has to demonstrate the ability to conduct independent and original research. While it is not the intention of this chapter to compare the various types of PhD by publication with one another, the above review revealed that, similar to the traditional doctorate, the main characteristic of this qualification is also the making of an original contribution to the field of knowledge.

### **3.3.3 Professional doctorates**

The professional doctorate is offered in several countries, such as the UK, Australia, and the USA. In South Africa, the professional doctorate was introduced for the first time in 2013 through the Revised HEQSF (Council of Higher Education 2013:41). The purpose of this doctorate is to "provide education and training for a career in the professions and/or industry and are designed around the development of high level performance and innovation in a professional context" (Council on Higher Education 2013:41). At the time of conducting this research the professional doctorate was not offered in any of the South African Higher Education Institutions.

In a nearly similar formulation, the professional doctorate is described in the UK and Australia as aiming at developing "an individual's professional practice and to support them in producing a contribution to (professional) knowledge" (United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency 2008:25) and aiming at "making a significant and original contribution to knowledge in the context of professional practice" (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013:3). It is evident that the professional doctorate is concerned with professional knowledge, professional practice and the professional context of candidates who are already part of a profession when they enrol for their doctorate.

### 3.3.4 Higher Doctorate

In South Africa, the Council on Higher Education (2013:40) indicates that the higher doctorate can be awarded "on the basis of a distinguished record of research in the form of published works, creative works and/or other scholarly contributions that are judged by leading international experts to make an exceptional and independent contribution to one or more disciplines or fields of study". Similarly the South African provision, the higher doctorate may also be awarded in the UK and Australia, based on published work (Green & Powell 2005:60; Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013: 64). The higher doctorate is distinguishable from the other variants of doctorates discussed above in the sense that it is not obtained through a process of a doctoral programme under supervision, but it is awarded based on the candidate's "internationally recognised original contribution to knowledge" (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013:64). The higher doctorate is thus not an applicable context for understanding methodological preparedness.

**Table 3.2: Deductions on the categories of Doctorates**

CATEGORIES OF DOCTORATES	PURPOSE	METHOD OF OBTAINING IT	FOCUS
Traditional doctorate	Conduct independent research and make an original contribution	Producing a thesis	Scholarship
Professional doctorates	Make an original contribution to professional knowledge	Producing a thesis	Professional practice
PhD by publication	Making an contribution by producing a series of published work	Producing a series of published work	Scholarship
Higher Doctorate	Make an original contribution to knowledge	Producing creative works or scholarly contributions	Scholarship
Regardless of the category, all the doctorates aim at making an original contribution to knowledge. The only distinguishing factor is that the contribution is made to either the discipline or professional practice.			
<b>Interpretation:</b> Considering the various categories of doctorates, it is evident that these doctorates are similar because their main purpose is to make an original contribution. The main distinction that can be drawn with			



CATEGORIES OF DOCTORATES	PURPOSE	METHOD OF OBTAINING IT	FOCUS
regard to methodological preparedness is that the higher doctorate is not obtained through the process of writing a thesis. It is rather a recognition for work of high quality. In this instance, it becomes difficult to assess the methodological preparedness of the doctoral candidates compared to the traditional doctorate and the professional doctorate. Seemingly, the methodological preparedness of candidates enrolled for the traditional doctorate might differ from the professional doctorate because of the focus as identified in this table.			

This section focused on the various categories of doctorates. As already alluded to in Table 3.2 the methodological preparedness of candidates enrolled for the traditional doctorate might differ from the professional doctorate because of the focus namely scholarship or professional. The following section focuses on the traditional doctorate as an immediate context in which the doctoral candidates in Public Administration are/were enrolled for.

### **3.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADITIONAL DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OFFERED BY SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES**

To identify the characteristics of doctoral degrees in Public Administration, I had to first identify the generic fields and focus on the qualifiers and admission requirements as captured in Table 2.2.

#### **3.4.1 Generic fields (designators) of Public Administration**

The Council on Higher Education (2013:19) defines a designator as “the second name given to a qualification, to indicate its broad area of study, discipline or profession”. Furthermore, it is regarded as an indication of “the desired educational training and outcomes and their associated assessment criteria” (Council on Higher Education 2013:9). Within the South African higher education context, doctorates in Public Administration are offered in several generic fields such as literature and philosophy (DLitt

et Phil), administration (DAdmin), philosophy (DPhil, PhD), literature (DLitt), commerce (DCom), and technologiae (DTech).

#### **3.4.1.1 Doctor in Literature and Philosophy (DLitt et Phil)**

The Doctor in Literature and Philosophy (DLitt et Phil) in Public Management and Governance, is offered by the University of Johannesburg and Unisa (until 2014). The University of Johannesburg (2016:19) expects this doctoral degree to “make an original contribution to the field of Public Management and Governance on a topic selected in consultation with the head of the Department of Public Governance”. Making an original contribution will require the doctoral candidates to demonstrate the high-level research capability. For them to demonstrate the high-level research capability, the research competence is a necessity. In addition to this the University of Johannesburg expects the doctoral candidates to defend their thesis (University of Johannesburg 2016:76). Similarly, at the University of South Africa (2018 online) the doctoral candidates are expected to “demonstrate high-level research capability and make a significant and original academic contribution at the frontiers of the discipline or field”. The main similarity between these two institutions is that the doctoral candidates need to demonstrate high-level research capability. Focusing on these institutions, it is clear that the documents reflect on the outcomes of the doctoral degree which is to produce a quality thesis and make an original contribution.

#### **3.4.1.2 Doctor of Administration (DAdmin)**

The Doctor of Administration (DAdmin) in Public Administration is offered by the University of Venda, University of Fort Hare, University of KwaZulu-Natal and University of South Africa (until 2014). The University of Venda offers the DAdmin in Public Administration or Development Administration. Candidates are expected to write a thesis and it should make a new contribution in the field (University of Venda 2017 online). While the University of Fort Hare (2017 online) expects the doctoral candidates to prove “capability of conducting research”. At the University of KwaZulu-Natal doctoral

candidates are expected to “demonstrate comprehensive and high level of thinking, enquiry and insight by exploring untapped scientific territories in pursuit of universal knowledge within a changing local, provincial, national, regional, continental and international environment through African scholarship and critical engagement with communities”. The thesis written by doctoral candidates need to create new knowledge and merit publication in an accredited journal (University of KwaZulu-Natal 2017 online). The University of KwaZulu-Natal provides detailed information on the DAdmin, for example candidates are also expected to attend research and writing workshops to improve their research skills (University of KwaZulu-Natal 2017 online).

At the University of Pretoria candidates can specialise in Public Administration, Public Management or Municipal Administration. Before candidates are admitted to the DAdmin programme they need to prove their research expertise/competence by submitting published articles or reports. Candidates are also expected to “engage in research, analysis and application”. It is also expected from candidates to choose topics that deal with democratic changes in South Africa (University of Pretoria 2017 online). To improve their research skills candidates are expected to engage in professional conferences and colloquia (University of Pretoria 2017 online), while at the University of Zululand, candidates are expected to write a thesis that is based on original research (University of Zululand 2017 online). At the University of Fort Hare the DAdmin aims at equipping students “with both theoretical and methodological grasp, towards building conceptual and empirical oversight” (University of Fort Hare 2017:169). The intended outcome is the ability to work at the paradigmatic level of development. A DAdmin at the University of South Africa expects doctoral candidates to prove a certain “level of research capability and make an original contribution in the field of study”. The produced thesis should satisfy peer review and be suitable for publication (University of South Africa 2017 online). The University of Pretoria and the University of South Africa have discontinued offering the DAdmin. Various expected outcomes are evident in this doctoral programme: new contributions, new knowledge, original research, research capability and original contributions. These outcomes relate to the research competence that needs to be demonstrated by the doctoral candidates.

### **3.4.1.3 Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil or PhD)**

Seemingly, the Doctor of Philosophy has two acronyms, which are DPhil and the PhD. These two categories have the same outcome, which is to make an original academic contribution to a specific discipline. The Doctor of Philosophy in Public Administration (DPhil) is only offered by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. The doctoral degree has this specific purpose: “to demonstrate high-level research capability and make a significant and original academic contribution at the frontiers of the discipline or field” (Nelson Mandela University 2017 online). This qualification requires doctoral candidates to produce research of high academic standard and excellence, leading to an acceptance of a thesis. The work produced by the doctoral student needs to pass a peer review process and result in a publication (Nelson Mandela University 2017 online).

The Universities of Pretoria, Cape Town, Free State, Stellenbosch, Witwatersrand and Western Cape offer the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Public Administration. The University of Pretoria offers a PhD in Public Affairs. The PhD can specialise in Public Administration or Public Management. Candidates enrolled at the University of Pretoria are expected to make “a considerable contribution to the discipline in both its domestic and international contexts, and have the skills to understand and deal with the public sector problems that confront their countries and the world” (University of Pretoria 2017 online). The University of Cape Town expects candidates to write a thesis of 80 000 words in length (University of Cape Town 2017 online). The University of Free State offers a PhD in Governance and Political Transformation in which candidates are expected to write a thesis (University of the Free State 2017:144). At the University of Stellenbosch the PhD in Public Management and Development Planning requires candidates to “conduct original and advanced research on an issue or topic related to subjects” (University of Stellenbosch 2017 online). The PhD in Public and Development Management is offered by the University of Witwatersrand. Doctoral candidates are expected to make original contributions to the advancement of knowledge. It is also a requirement that doctoral candidates need to “seek to advance the state of knowledge in their particular domain by gathering substantial data, evaluating theory and generating

original arguments regarding a significant public management and development issue” (University of Witwatersrand 2017 online).

The University of Western Cape offers a PhD in Public Administration. Doctoral candidates are expected to achieve the following research capabilities: (1) conduct independent research in a new area, (2) make a unique contribution, (3) coherently and logically structure and organise the thesis, (4) good writing skills, (5) analysing research findings and (6) analysing and conceptualising existing literature (University of Western Cape 2017 online). A doctoral student is awarded the PhD if these research competencies are demonstrated in the thesis. The University of North West offers the PhD in Public Management and Government where doctoral candidates engage in research “at an advanced level and scientifically report on it at the highest level”. Upon completion of the PhD the doctoral graduate will be able to occupy his/her profession with advanced understanding and confidence (University of North West 2017 online). In the PhD programme at the University of South Africa doctoral candidates are expected to prove a certain “level of research capability and make an original contribution in the field of study”. The produced thesis should satisfy peer review and be suitable for publication (University of South Africa 2017 online). Unisa introduced the PhD after terminating the other doctoral programmes because they all shared the same outcomes. The main outcomes derived from this programme include the following: making considerable contributions to the field, conducting original and advanced research, making a unique contribution and conducting independent research. Doctoral candidates are expected to conduct research at an advanced level and be able to demonstrate these competencies. This requires doctoral candidates to possess the high-level research competency that will demonstrate the aforementioned competencies.

#### **3.4.1.4 Doctor of Commerce (DCOM)**

The Doctor of Commerce in Public Administration is offered by the University of Zululand and Unisa (until 2014). The thesis should satisfy a peer review process and produce a publication. At the University of Zululand doctoral candidates are expected to write a

thesis that is based on original research (University of Zululand 2017 online). The DCOM from the University of Zululand emphasises the importance of making an original contribution or conducting original research in the Public Administration field of study. It is necessary to note that Unisa offered this qualification and it was discontinued when the PhD was introduced because the outcomes were the same as the other doctoral programmes offered in Public Administration. In this qualification candidates are expected “to demonstrate high-level research capability and make a significant and original academic contribution at the frontiers of the discipline or field” (University of South Africa 2014 online). This outcome is similar to the outcomes of the other doctoral programmes at the Department of Public Administration and Management at Unisa.

#### **3.4.1.5 Doctor of Technologiae (DTech)**

The DTech in Public Management is offered by the Universities of Technology such as the Tshwane University of Technology and Durban University of Technology. At Tshwane University of Technology DTech candidates are expected to write a research thesis, while at the Durban University of Technology the DTech doctoral candidates are expected to show that they understand the purpose of their research and they have used appropriate methodologies. The final product needs to “demonstrate novelty in research findings, which should contribute to new knowledge” (Durban University of Technology 2017 online). The purpose of the DTech at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology is to “develop the competence to conduct independent research under expert guidance in the field of public management. Such research should contribute significantly to the body of knowledge through the understanding, application and evaluation of existing knowledge” (Cape Peninsula University of Technology 2017 online). Two main purposes and outcomes are evident in this qualification which is contributions to new knowledge and conducting independent research. Doctoral candidates are expected to demonstrate a high level of research competence.

Emanating from the literature review the purposes and outcomes of the Public Administration doctoral degrees in South African universities can be summed up as

follows: regardless of the various generic fields, a doctorate is a qualification that aims at making a new contribution based on advanced independent research that merit publication.

### **3.4.2 Qualifiers for doctorates in Public Administration**

According to the Council on Higher Education (2013:15), a qualifier indicates “a field of specialisation”. The qualifiers for Public Administration doctorates include: Public Management and Governance, Public Administration/Development, Public Governance, Public Administration and Management, Governance and Political Transformation. Public Management and Development Planning and Public Management. Regardless of the fact that the purposes of the generic fields are the same, the qualifiers are distinct as captured in Table 3.3. This implies that the qualifiers are determined by specific universities and not necessarily the Department of Higher Education and Training. This further entails that my study focusing on students doing the doctorate in Public Administration is also relevant for other institutions that use different qualifiers. It is relevant because the outcomes of the various generic fields are the same.

### **3.4.3 Admission requirements in Public Administration Departments**

The Council on Higher Education (2013:40) specifies that the minimum admission requirement to a doctoral programme is a relevant master’s degree. The South African Departments of Public Administration adhere to the requirements prescribed by the revised HEQSF published by the Council on Higher Education (2013). Qualifiers may differ, but the admission requirements are the same.

**Table 3.3: South African Doctoral degrees in public administration or related fields: qualifiers, universities, admission requirements, outcomes and generic fields**

QUALIFIERS	UNIVERSITY	ADMISSION REQUIREMENT	OUTCOMES	GENERIC FIELD
Public Administration	University of South Africa	Master's degree	Original contribution to knowledge High-level research capability	DLitt et Phil DAdmin DCom PhD
	University of Cape Town		Original contribution to knowledge	PhD
	University of the Western Cape		Unique contribution Independent research	PhD
	Nelson Mandela University		Original academic contribution Merit publication	DPhil
	University of Zululand		Making an original contribution Merit publication	DCom
	University of Fort Hare		Ability to work at the paradigmatic level of development Capability of conducting research	DAdmin
	University of Limpopo		Making an original contribution to knowledge	DAdmin
Public Administration and Management	University of Pretoria		Make a considerable/original contribution	PhD
Public Management and Governance	University of Johannesburg		An original contribution in the discipline	DLitt et Phil
	North-West University		Conduct original research	PhD
Public Governance	University of KwaZulu-Natal		Conduct original research and make an original contribution.	DAdmin



QUALIFIERS	UNIVERSITY	ADMISSION REQUIREMENT	OUTCOMES	GENERIC FIELD
			High level of thinking Merit publication	
Administration	University of Venda		New/original/ contribution and ability to conduct independent research	PhD DAdmin
Public and Development Management	University of Witwatersrand		Original contribution to the advancement of knowledge	PhD
Public Management	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	MTECH	Contribution to new knowledge Conduct independent research	DTECH
	Tshwane University of Technology			

**Researcher's interpretation:** This table shows the various qualifiers and generic fields. The qualifiers and generic fields differ at the various institutions. Regardless of this difference, the outcomes are the same, namely to make an original/new/unique contribution. It is possible to assume that since the outcomes are the same, the methodological preparedness of the doctoral candidates should be the same regardless of where they are enrolled.

### 3.5 DEDUCTIONS ON THE OUTCOMES OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

This section aims to provide deductions on the outcomes of the doctoral programmes. These outcomes seem to provide the aim for *methodological preparedness*. As already argued in Chapter 1, *methodological preparedness* refers to “the state of being of doctoral candidates”. My assumption is that *methodological preparedness* is the state of being necessary for a doctoral candidate to meet the envisaged outcomes of a doctoral programme. The analysis of the traditional doctoral programmes in Public Administration offered by South African universities (see Section 3.4) implies a state of being for doctoral candidates, necessary for making contributions, demonstrating originality, conducting independent research and producing theses meriting publication.

#### 3.5.1 Contribution

There seems to be a general agreement amongst scholars on the expectation that a doctorate makes a contribution to a field of study (Wisker & Robinson 2013; Kot & Hendel 2012; Crossouard 2011; Backhouse 2011; Nerad 2011; Herman 2011; Wisker 2010; Backhouse 2009; Kamler 2008; Walker 2008; Boud & Tennant 2006; Park 2007; Manathunga, Lant & Mellick 2006; Park 2005; Pearson 2005; Lovitts 2005; Gilbert 2004; Leonard, Becker & Coate 2004; Chiang 2003).

The notion “contribution” has shown to mean generating knowledge (see for example Wisker & Robinson 2013; Backhouse 2010; Kamler 2008; Walker 2008; Trafford & Leshem 2008; Boud & Tennant 2006; Chiang 2003; Pearson 2005; Park 2005). Furthermore, in their book entitled *The unwritten rules of PhD research*, Petre and Rugg (2010:14) define contribution as “adding to knowledge or contributing to the discourse by providing evidence to substantiate a conclusion that’s worth making”. A doctorate is thus concerned with adding knowledge and contributing to a discourse in a specific field of study. This implies that a doctoral candidate needs to be competent for contributing to knowledge by applying appropriate research designs and methods (Finn 2005:14) for developing (through inductive research) or testing (through deductive research) theory in

their field of study (Trafford & Leshem 2008:50). For doctoral students to develop or test theory, they need to be methodologically prepared.

### **3.5.2 Originality**

While the contribution of a doctorate is an outcome generic to all doctorates, these documents seem to use different words to describe the defining attributes of this contribution, such as new, unique and original. All these words seem to refer to the same concept, namely originality. This concept is also widely used in the literature on the doctorate (see Phillips & Pugh 2010:69; Lovitts 2007; Park 2005; Gilbert 2004; Leonard et al. 2004). Lovitts (2007:10) postulates that originality can be demonstrated in two ways: (1) taking an independent line and (2) taking an imaginative approach. To further clarify these ways, Lovitts (2007:11) argues that if a student takes an independent line this means that they “make up their own minds when reviewing ideas and practice, identify trends and issues, draw their own conclusions and arguing their position”. This might mean that doctoral candidates need to demonstrate their research independency in the thesis. When describing the imaginative approach, Lovitts (2007:11) states that doctoral candidates need to demonstrate the following: take a fresh look at questions, issues and trends, enterprising in interpreting evidence, being speculative and supplementing logic with the intuitive and imaginative. This implies that a doctoral candidate’s voice must be visible in the thesis. Apart from these examples of originality in doctoral research provided by Lovitts (2007), Phillips and Pugh (2010:69) provide the following list of attributes of the concept “originality”:

- Writing new information for the first time
- Original synthesis
- Using new ways to interpret information
- Producing a competent piece of research
- Promoting cross-disciplinarity
- Producing new ideas on existing work
- Producing knowledge in a new way

A doctoral thesis thus contributes new information, new knowledge, original synthesis, new ideas, new questions, new trends and new practice (Lovitts 2005; Phillips & Pugh 2010). Moreover, Graves and Varma (1997:14) admit that originality entails finding new facts and new methods of interpretation. In South African Public Administration departments, doctoral candidates are expected to demonstrate that originality as they engage in their thesis writing project (University of Johannesburg 2016 online; University of Stellenbosch 2017 online; University of Witwatersrand 2017 online; University of South Africa 2017 online; Nelson Mandela University 2017 online).

### **3.5.3 Independence**

A doctoral researcher is a person who has the “knowledge, skills, critical thinking and initiative to design and conduct rigorous research” independently (Petre & Rugg 2010:33). Therefore, independence refers to the ability to “initiate, design and lead a research project” (Petre & Rugg 2010:33) necessary for completing a doctoral thesis. Moreover, independence implies the ability to replace traditional mind-sets in their field of study with original contributions (see Bitzer 2011:432–433). Independent doctoral candidates are thus not consumers of knowledge but producers of original knowledge (Bitzer 2011:432). In addition, Finn (2005:13) regards independence as the ability of the doctoral candidate to “engage in advanced research without supervision and be able to identify research questions which are relevant and significant, selecting an appropriate methodology to test the research questions and be able to communicate the results at an appropriate level of scholarship”. This implies that doctoral students need to be methodologically prepared to act as independent researchers.

### **3.5.4 Merit publication**

The scholarly purpose of conducting and publishing research is to disseminate knowledge (Stubb, Pyhältö & Lonka 2011:253). This scholarly purpose especially applies to research conducted by doctoral students. For contributing to the field of study (see Section 3.5.1), it is expected that doctoral students publish their research. Petre and Rugg (2010:15) see

a good PhD candidate as one that manages to publish an article from the study in a peer-reviewed journal. Wadee, Keane, Dietz and Hay (2010:19) confirm the importance of a publication in a reputable peer-reviewed journal for convincing examiners of the contribution of the study. At some universities, publishing an article is in fact a prerequisite before the conferment of the doctorate (Finn 2005:22). For example, the University of Johannesburg expects from doctoral candidates to produce an article on the contents of their theses (University of Johannesburg 2016:76) while the University of KwaZulu-Natal encourages doctoral candidates to write articles and publish in peer-reviewed journals (University of KwaZulu-Natal 2017 online).

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides a contextual overview of the doctorate as an immediate context for understanding the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates in Public Administration at Unisa. The doctorate has shown to be a distinct degree qualification offered by Unisa and other universities. It differs from other degree qualifications such as the master's and that lies in the high-level research competencies needed by doctoral candidates for making significant and original contributions to their fields of study.

This chapter furthermore revealed that apart from the traditional doctorate offered by Unisa and other South African universities, various other categories of doctorates exist, such as the doctorate by publication, the professional doctorate and the higher doctorate. The main outcome of the doctorate and specifically the traditional doctorate has shown to be a contribution to knowledge. In making, the contribution doctoral students need to demonstrate various competencies such as sound appropriate research design, critical thinking, independency and theoretical knowledge. All these competencies required by doctoral programmes, imply a specific level of methodological preparedness, hence the reason for this study.

Apart from the envisaged generic outcomes of the doctorate, this chapter has shown that doctoral programmes in Public Administration offered by South African universities are

offered in various generic fields. The outcomes of the doctorates in these distinct fields clearly boil down to the same, namely the making an original contribution to knowledge, conducting independent research and producing theses that merit publication (see Table 3.3). Moreover, the outcomes of doctorates with different qualifiers are also similar. Although the doctorate in Public Administration are offered in South Africa by various universities, in a variety of generic fields with different qualifiers, the outcomes of the qualification as well as the expected competencies of candidates, has shown to be the same. This denotes that one can expect that the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa should be similar to those candidates enrolled at other South African universities.

In this study, I assume that methodological preparedness, as the state of being of doctoral candidates, is necessary for them to make original contributions, demonstrate originality, conduct independent research and produce theses meriting publication. For doctoral students to make contributions they need to be methodologically prepared to independently apply appropriate research designs and methods to develop or test theory. In this chapter I have shown that methodological preparedness is a necessary condition for doctoral students to achieve their doctorate. The following chapter explores the concept “methodological preparedness” as I have argued that it is a necessary condition for doctoral candidates to accomplish the outcomes of a doctorate in Public Administration.

## CHAPTER 4

### A PRELIMINARY CONCEPT ANALYSIS OF THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES

*“While one word may have different meanings, a concept has one meaning that can be expressed by different words” (Pauw & Louw 2014:8)*

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 has set the scene for this study, justifying the need to undertake this study by postulating an argument that ascribes the perceived low quality of research in Public Administration to inadequate methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates (see Section 1.2). Methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates is seen as the point of focus for this study (see Section 1.7.4). Chapter 3 provides a contextual overview of the doctorate as a distinct qualification. This chapter aims at exploring the concept “methodological preparedness” within the context of the doctorate by consulting relevant scholarly literature. The aim of this exploration is to provide a theoretical understanding of the concept methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates by identifying and describing the concept’s meaning. I consequently commence by discussing the method followed to review the literature to further deepen understanding of what constitutes the concept “*methodological preparedness*” of a doctoral candidate. I conducted a concept analysis of methodological preparedness by identifying and categorising the defining attributes, antecedents and consequences of the concept based on a literature review. A conclusion concludes this chapter.

#### 4.2 CONCEPT ANALYSIS

I turned to Walker and Avant (2013:164) when conducting the concept analysis. In their seminal work first published in 1983, they define concept analysis as a “careful examination and description of a word or term and its use in the language coupled with

an explanation of how it is “like” and “not like” other related words or terms”. Focusing on this definition, a concept analysis was necessary for understanding the meaning of methodological preparedness within the context of the scholarly discourse at large, and particularly in Public Administration. The first step of concept analysis entails the selection of the concept (see 2.3.1). In Chapter 1, I provided a justification for selecting the concept *methodological preparedness* (of doctoral candidates) as the focal point of exploration in this thesis. The purpose of the concept analysis (step 2) reported on in this chapter, is to identify and describe the meaning of the concept “methodological preparedness” with reference to a doctoral candidate. The next section reports on the process followed to obtain a deepened understanding of methodological preparedness as a concept mainly by identifying and categorising the defining attributes, antecedents and consequences of the concept based on the literature review.

#### **4.2.1 Definition of methodological preparedness**

In Chapter 1 (see Section 1.7.4) I have defined methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates’ as a state of being, which refers to the readiness of these candidates to conduct independent doctoral research. I expected to find a precise definition of the concept “methodological preparedness” in the literature, however this was not the case. The following section provides the process of obtaining a preliminary definition of methodological preparedness. The scholarly literature revealed that the concept “methodological preparedness” is used for referring to a certain ability for conducting research and successful completion of doctoral studies. However the concept “research preparedness” seems to refer to this concept (Lesko, Simmons, Quarshie & Newton 2008; Okech et al. 2006). However, various other, borderline or related concepts (Walker & Avant 2013:170–172) are used in the discourse associated with *methodological preparedness*. Most of the phrases identified during the concept analysis have shown to describe antecedents of methodological preparedness and not necessarily defining the phrase “methodological preparedness”. According to Walker and Avant (2013:173) antecedents refer to “those events or incidents that must occur before or be in place before prior to the occurrence of the concept”. These antecedents are further discussed



in detail in Section 4.2.3. However “research preparedness” has specific defining attributes which are discussed in the next section.

## **4.2.2 Defining attributes**

Defining attributes refer to the characteristics of the concept that are the most frequently associated with the concept (Walker & Avant 2013:168). During the concept analysis step three, defining attributes were identified, namely competence, independence and comprehensive literacy.

### **4.2.2.1 Competence**

Competence entails knowledge acquisition and development of research skills (Faghihi, Rakow & Ethington 1999:3). This competence is demonstrated by the ability to select appropriate methodological approaches. In a study of the preparation process of educational researchers, Labaree (2003:14) associates research competence with methodological sophistication. In this thought-provoking article on the peculiar problems of preparing doctoral researchers, Labaree (2003:14) argues that “it is not enough to be good at a particular mode of research and to be satisfied with a career applying this approach in a series of studies. When the terrain that needs mapping is complex, research need to bring an equally complex variety of research methods to the task if they want to be able to view the subject in its many forms”. This argument indicates that doctoral students need to demonstrate the research competence through the ability to apply various research methods in complex situations. This might enable them to work with researchers who use other approaches. I therefore argue that *methodological preparedness* in this instance includes being conversant in both qualitative and quantitative methods. I argue this way because Labaree (2003:14) contends that researchers or doctoral students need to “develop social understanding of and appreciation for multiple methods for pursuing inquiry”. In addition, research competence can also include “thought, search, logic and creative processes of student’s knowledge mastering” (Yarullin, Bushmeleva & Tsyrukun 2015:139). From a Public Administration

perspective Wessels and Thani (2014:178) argue that Public Administration researchers need to be fully equipped in all the various methods of human sciences so that they can understand particular realities in the discipline. Seemingly competence can be gained “through education, training, experience ...” (Holtzhausen 2012:144). Being competent can be evident when doctoral students conduct independent research as discussed in the following section.

#### **4.2.2.2 Independence**

Aligned to the purpose and characteristics of a doctorate in Public Administration as described in Section 3.3, the literature review has revealed that independence is regarded by several scholars as another defining attribute of methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates (Bitzer 2011; Deem & Brehony 2000:154; Heraalal 2015; Ismail & Meerah 2011:245; Petre & Rugg 2010; Finn 2005). For example Bitzer (2011:855) sees independence as one of the success factors at doctoral level. While Ismail and Meerah (2011:245) associate independence with the ability of conducting independent research and possessing knowledge on research methods. In addition, Petre and Rugg (2010:33) see independence as the ability of initiating, designing and leading a research project. Finn (2005) states that independence can be demonstrated when doctoral candidates are able to conduct their research without supervision. Considering the arguments by these scholars, it is evident that independence can be associated with methodological knowledge.

The possession of methodological knowledge and experience does not automatically imply being methodologically prepared as confirmed by a study on postgraduate supervision within an ODL environment conducted by (Heraalal 2015). Deem and Brehony (2000:154) found that even though doctoral candidates were offered research-training courses, they found it challenging to conduct independent research. The ability to apply their methodological competence independently has shown to be crucial for methodological preparedness (Heraalal 2015). Furthermore, it is generally an expectation that doctoral candidates work independently at doctoral level (Baker & Pifer 2011).

Independence as an attribute is thus an indication of methodological competence (Ismail & Meerah 2011:245). In fact, a study by Gardner (2009) on success in doctoral education confirms that doctoral candidates, who lack methodological independence, drop out.

For doctoral students to be methodologically prepared for making an original contribution to their field of study (see Section 3.5.1), they do not only need to be competent and independent, but also be comprehensively literate, as will be argued in the following section.

#### **4.2.2.3 Comprehensive literacy**

The third defining attribute of methodological preparedness is comprehensive literacy as identified by De Beer (2016). Comprehensive literacy is more than the mere ability to read and write, but includes “thought, being, making sense and inventing meaning” (De Beer 2016:25). In this regard Golde (2007:344) refers to the ability “to build, juxtapose multiple theoretical perspectives and explanations, connect research studies to one another, synthesise and reappraise others written work”. This attribute directly links to the concept “doctorateness” as used by Trafford and Leshem (2008) in their book, *Stepping stones to achieving your doctorate by focusing on your viva from the start*. They define doctorateness as “the underlying purpose of the doctorate that guides your action, reading and the thinking as they are transformed to text” (Trafford & Leshem 2008:52). Furthermore, they also argue that doctoral students need to “assemble an intellectual argument”, a conceptual ability for discovering and reasoning that demonstrates the comprehensive literacy of candidates (Trafford & Leshem 2008:48). For doctoral candidates to be methodologically prepared for their journey, thus implies making sense and inventing meaning through their doctoral thesis.

#### **4.2.3 Antecedents**

Considering the definition of antecedents provided in Section 2.3.1, the following antecedents for the concept “methodological preparedness” were identified from the

literature: doctoral or research training, mentoring, academic socialisation and student-supervisor relationships. These antecedents can be regarded as necessary conditions and are not mutually exclusive but are interrelated.

#### **4.2.3.1 Doctoral or research training**

The antecedents most commonly used in the literature are doctoral or research training. The need for doctoral training has been identified in a study by Leijen, Lepp and Remmik (2016:130), who found that insufficient research methodological knowledge and experience restrain the ability of doctoral students to make informed research decisions, such as selecting a suitable research design.

Doctoral training is defined as a process where doctoral students are provided with “research experience, knowledge and skills ...” (Ismail & Meerah 2011:244). In fact doctoral training seems to include two important aspects, namely obtaining knowledge and obtaining experience. Knowledge is attained through core courses in, inter alia, research methodology to orientate students to the key concepts in a specific field. Neumann, Pallas and Petersen (2008:1484) contend that research training entails “creating a common core knowledge to be dispersed via a common curriculum to all doctoral students in a programme”. Lambie and Vaccaro (2011:244) argue that research training enhances the knowledge base because it lays a solid foundation and it provides direction as far as research is concerned.

The literature also reveals the importance of research experience as part of doctoral training (Eisenhart & DeHaan 2005:6). Blaj-Ward (2011:702) contends that research training affords students with an opportunity to form collaborative peer learning groups where they can dissect knowledge and engage in reflections. This training assists students to obtain intensive research experience through formal knowledge on research methods and practical knowledge. Research training takes place when doctoral candidates receive practical exposure in research methodology training where their ability

of identifying research problems and investigating them is enhanced (Page 2001; Eisenhart & DeHaan 2005:6).

Doctoral students have shown that they especially desire project specific research training (Okech et al. 2006:138; Weiland 2008) where their supervisors play a pivotal role. Heeralal (2015:93) suggests that supervisors involve their students in research activities that will enhance their methodological knowledge and skills. Not only will this involvement provide doctoral students with opportunities to learn and acquire research experience (Bard, Bieschke, Herbert & Eberz 2000:54), but it will expose them to the research communities of practice (Murakami-Ramalho et al. 2013:269).

There seems to be a general consensus that doctoral training includes both the theoretical and the practical component. The combination of these two dimensions is evidently a necessary condition for being methodologically prepared for a doctoral study.

#### **4.2.3.2 Mentoring**

Mentoring is identified by several scholars as a necessary condition for methodological preparedness. This is, *inter alia*, evident from a study by Lee (2008:275) of supervision practices in one research intensive university in the United Kingdom. The literature reveals a nuanced understanding of mentoring amongst scholars. Lambi and Vaccaro (2011:246), for example, regard mentoring as high-level research training. For Byrne and Kefee (2002:393) mentoring is “an intense personal and concentrated relationship with one or more experts with the aim of professional development”. Within this relationship, mentoring is guiding students through their first scientific investigations (Byrne & Kefee 2002:393). McAlpine and Norton (2006:8) regard mentoring as a process of introducing novice researchers to their academic context. Lambie and Vaccaro (2011) mentoring serves to familiarise doctoral students with the research process. Neumann et al. (2008:1484) take the value of mentoring to a more advanced level, by referring to mentoring as a process through which doctoral students develop expertise specifically related to their doctoral studies.

In addition to its contribution to the competence of a doctoral researcher, mentoring implies social, psychological and emotional support to the students. Wright (2005:9) emphasises the importance of psychological support by referring to the influence of students' "feelings of insecurity" in "their attitude towards research". Congruent to this, several studies confirm the necessity for social and emotional support to doctoral students (Heeralal 2015:93; Murakami-Ramalho et al. 2013:265; Sambrook, Steward & Roberts 2008:72).

Mentoring has shown to be a core antecedent for the methodological preparedness of doctoral students. Mentoring is a comprehensive process supporting a doctoral candidate intellectually, emotionally and psychologically to become competent, independent and comprehensive literate doctoral candidates. Related to the value of mentoring, is academic socialisation, as antecedent for methodological preparedness.

#### **4.2.3.3 Academic socialisation**

The reviewed literature shows that academic socialisation is a necessary condition for methodological preparedness (Bitzer 2011:434; Kiley 2009:301; Kiley 2015:54; Mullins & Kiley 2002:372). Hence, doctoral candidates need to be academically socialised into research communities or communities of practice (Ospina & Dodge 2005:149; Wade et al. 2010:101). Pallas (2001:8) argues that communities of practice provide the opportunities for intensive interaction amongst members, holding members accountable for their actions, peer-evaluation of actions, and negotiation of meaning. A study by Maritz and Visagie (2011:185) emphasise the value of a meaningful scholarly engagement for building a student's identity, ability to work within effective research units, and deal with interpersonal conflicts.

Academic socialisation through communities of practice thus provides doctoral candidates the opportunity to learn within a relatively secure environment through interaction with other members of that community (Maritz & Visagie 2011:178, 185; Rees, Baron, Boyask & Taylor 2007:767). This learning opportunity for doctoral candidates

includes a discussion on their research topics, as well as their eventual choice of methods for collecting and analysing data (Murakami-Ramvalho et al. 2013:268).

For doctoral candidates, academic socialisation includes introduction to the discipline's culture of science through their involvement in research with other scholars than their supervisors (Eisenhart & DeHaan 2005:7; Ismail & Meerah 2012:247). However, doctoral supervisors have shown more to be the conversant members in such communities of practice. Murakami-Ramvalho et al. (2013:268) refer to them as "activity-based collaborators". Through this interaction, supervisors can introduce and integrate their doctoral candidates in academic communities of practice, and assist them to develop their research competence (Murakami-Ramvalho et al. 2013:268). Academic socialisation may include participation in specialised training workshops on research methodology (Ismail & Meerah 2012:247). The process of academic socialisation, inevitably, evolves to a stage where doctoral candidates are provided with the opportunity to become part of a research project under the close supervision of an accomplished scholar (Eisenhart & DeHaan 2005:10). Such an involvement is thus a "process through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring advanced level of specialised knowledge and skills" (Weidman, Swale & Stein 2001:5). Through academic socialisation doctoral candidates can learn and experience what research constitutes (Franke & Arvidsson 2011:17).

Inadequate academic socialisation can yield negative results for the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates. If doctoral candidates experience inadequate socialisation they may be forced to drop out (Lovitts 2001; Gardener 2007; Phyhältö & Kesken 2012). Considering that Unisa is a distance education institution, a study by Murakami-Ramvalho et al. (2013:269) find that distance education students feel isolated from their research community. Academic socialisation in a distance education context can be enhanced through voluntary research seminars, conferences and ongoing engagements with academic staff members (Murakami-Ramvalho et al. 2013:266; Weiland 2008:1467). Castellö, Pardo, Sala-Bubaré and Sore (2010:5) affirm that

“socialisation of doctoral students is strongly related to the relationship with the supervisor”. This relationship is discussed in the next section.

#### **4.2.3.4 Student-supervisor relationship**

Supervisors play a critical role in the supervision process and their role is embedded in the student-supervisor relationship. The student-supervisor relationship has shown to be a key requirement for methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates (Murakami-Ramvalho et al. 2013; Boden, Borrego & Newswander 2011; Evans & Stevenson 2011; Barnes, Williams & Stassen 2012; Mainhard, van der Rijst, Tartwijk & Wubbels 2009; Liechty, Liao & Schull 2009; Gardner & Holley 2011; Deuchar 2008; Golde 2000). Various research studies have confirmed this relationship as a necessary condition for methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates. Similarly, Faghidi et al. (1999:13) found that the student-supervisor relations were the second most important factor that influences dissertation progress. A narrative by Mkhabela and Frick (2016:35) shows that the supervisor-student relationship can be strengthened in a complex society to build mutual kindness and trust. A study by Ali et al. (2016) find a direct correlation between the supervisor-student relationship and the satisfaction of students with the supervisory process. Murakami-Ramvalho et al. (2013:267) reveal that a physical distance between supervisor and student may be a factor influencing the quality of the relationship, as part-time students find their interactions with their supervisors unsatisfactory. Furthermore, research by Gardner (2009:107) shows that a poor quality of interaction between doctoral candidates and their supervisors, may influence doctoral candidates to discontinue their studies.

A mismatch of supervisors and doctoral students' expectations can cause a breakdown of the relationship. In this regard a study by Bui (2014) on student-supervisor expectations in the doctoral supervision process reveals that supervisors expect students to work independently from the first phases while doctoral candidates believe that independency can be developed as they progress with their doctoral studies (Bui 2014:20). Bui



(2014:23) consequently recommends that doctoral students should work independently and interdependently with their supervisors and other academics.

A similar study by Celik (2012:14) reveals that doctoral candidates expect direct and effective direction from their supervisors in the form of frequent communication within the context of a healthy student-supervisor relationship. I therefore argue that frequent communications can also include guidance in terms of the research methods and designs. Guidance seems to be necessary for enhancing doctoral candidates' research knowledge and skills. Pyhältö, Vekkaila and Keskien (2015) make a similar finding based on interviews of doctoral students and supervisors. They conclude that both doctoral candidates and supervisors deem the main task of the supervisor to be "giving guidance and tips related to becoming a researcher and the content of the research, including giving instructions, practical help and advice concerning the topic of the research, the methods and the reporting of it" (Pyhältö et al. 2015:9). A healthy and supervisor-dominated student-supervisor relationship is regarded as a main condition for the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates.

The literature furthermore reveal that supervisors' ability to contribute to their doctoral candidates' methodological preparedness, may be restricted by their limited areas of expertise. A supervisor is consequently challenged when appointed to supervise a student who is working outside the supervisor's area of expertise. Franke and Arvidsson (2011:15) conducted an empirical study amongst thirty supervisors of doctoral candidates in different faculties at a university in Sweden. They find that supervisors experience difficulties when they have to supervise a student whose thesis topic falls outside their area of interest and competence (Franke & Arvidsson 2011:15). This further reveals that methodological preparedness concerns both the supervisors and doctoral candidates.

#### **4.2.4 Consequences**

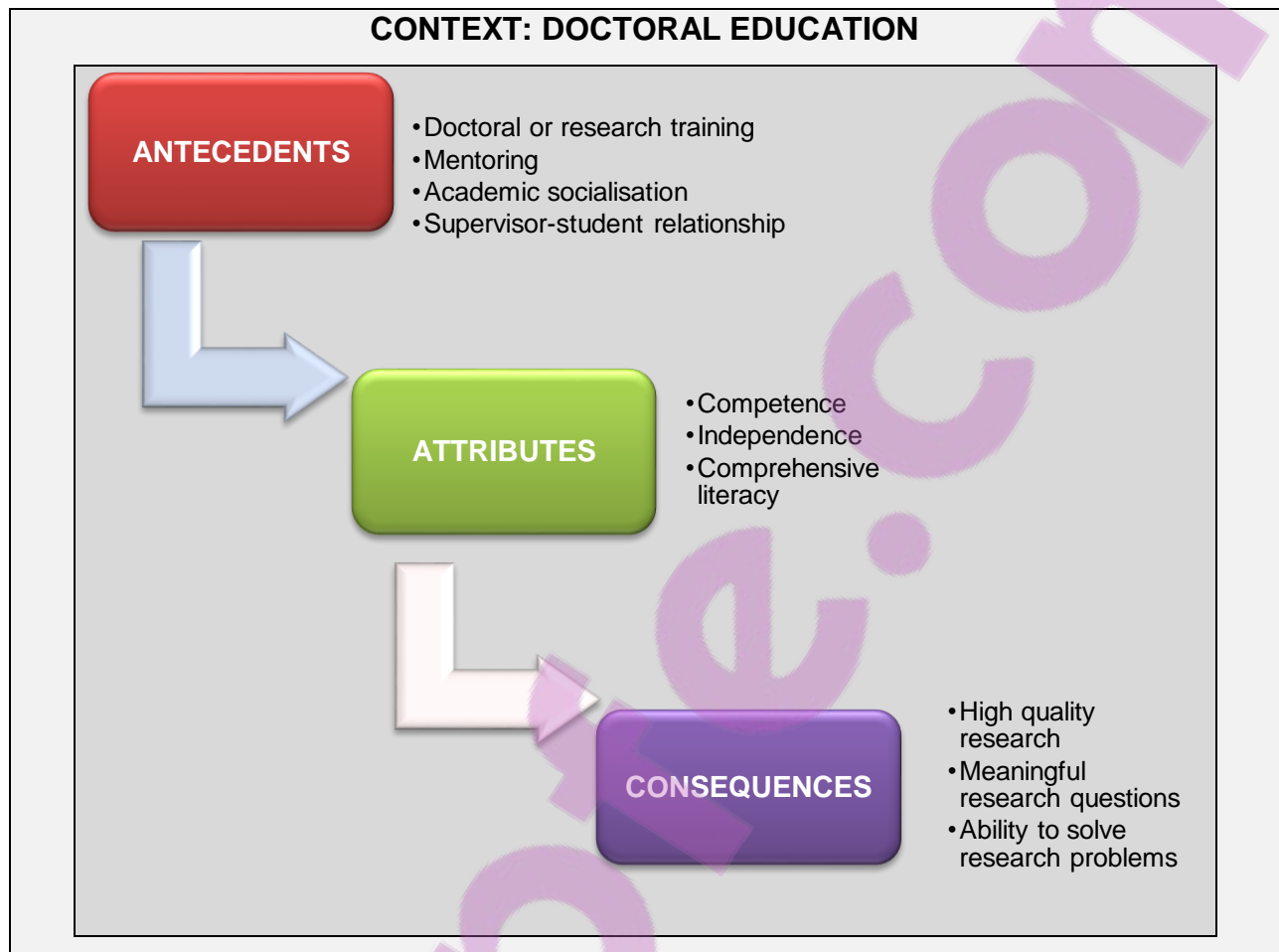
Within the context of concept analysis, the concept "consequences" refers to the events and incidents that occur as a result of the concept (Walker & Avant 2013:173). When I

derived the consequences I re-engaged with the scholarly literature and official documents used in Chapter 3 and this chapter. A concern about the quality of doctoral studies in Public Administration as indicated in Section 1.2 might be attributed to the lack of methodological preparedness. By revisiting Premise 2 (see Section 1.2) a number of consequences can be derived. A logic consequence of being methodologically unprepared could be that doctoral candidates terminate their studies before they graduate. In addition doctoral students can make methodologically flawed research designs and executions (Wessels 2010; Okech et al. 2006; Kuye 2005; Enders 2004; Cleary 1992) to demonstrate their being methodologically inadequately prepared.

There are positive consequences of methodological preparedness. Firstly, Wang et al. (2011:240) contend that doctoral students who are engaged in research preparation and training must be able to develop “meaningful research questions situated with a historical and theoretical context and develop strategies and collect and convert empirical data into text”. Apparently the ability of developing meaningful questions can be a consequence of being methodologically prepared. Okech et al. (2006:138) also allude to the importance of demonstrating an ability to pose researchable questions and selecting appropriate research designs. Aligned to this argument, Ismail and Meerah (2012:246) emphasise that doctoral candidates need to demonstrate the ability to identify and design “appropriate research procedure, understanding limitations and the scope of the research design”. Apart from developing meaningful or researchable questions, Enders (2004:423) argues that doctoral candidates need to identify research problems and solve them. Demonstrating the ability of solving research problems can also be regarded as a consequence of methodological preparedness. In addition, Leonard and Fennema (2008) contend that doctoral candidates need to be acquainted with research methods and be able to produce high quality research. Producing high quality research is a consequence of methodological preparedness because that will imply that the doctoral candidates have demonstrated the attributes as identified in the previous section.

Figure 4.1 shows that to understand the concept methodological preparedness within the context of doctoral education, it is necessary to understand the causal relationships

between the antecedents, attributes and consequences as already alluded to in the previous sections.



**Figure 4.1: A proposed conceptual framework for understanding what constitutes methodological preparedness as derived from the literature**

### 4.3 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a theoretical understanding of the point of focus of this thesis, which is *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates. Although the literature review revealed that the concept “methodological preparedness” is not used as such, it nevertheless shows that the concept refers to a doctoral candidate’s ability to conduct doctoral research and successfully completing doctoral studies. I have consequently conducted a concept analysis of “methodological preparedness” informed

by the scholarly literature and official documents on doctoral education. I further identified the defining attributes of the concept, namely competence, independence and comprehensive literacy (see Section 4.2.2). I also identified the antecedents (the conditions for being methodologically prepared), namely doctoral training, mentoring, academic socialisation, and the student-supervisor relationship (see Section 4.2.3). The consequences of “doctoral preparedness” relate directly to Premise 2 (see Section 1.2) of this thesis, namely that the low quality of Public Administration research is attributed to inadequate methodological preparedness of researchers. To this end, the literature review in chapter three and the concept analysis revealed that a methodologically prepared doctoral candidate departs on the doctoral journey with the necessary academic qualification. However, methodological preparedness that leads to successful completion is marked by the dynamic interplay between the candidate’s personal resources (competence, independence and comprehensive literacy) and the research-related contextual conditions necessary for success (doctoral training, mentoring, academic socialisation and the student-supervisor relationship). While this chapter provides a conceptual understanding of “doctoral preparedness” informed by the relevant scholarly literature, the unanswered question of this research is still: What constitutes methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa? The following chapters report on the empirical part (Phase 2) of this study

## **PHASE TWO**

**TURNING TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DOCTORAL  
CANDIDATES AND SUPERVISORS TO EXPLORE THE  
PHENOMENON OF METHODOLOGICAL  
PREPAREDNESS AT UNISA**

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CANDIDATES WHO TERMINATED THEIR STUDIES BEFORE COMPLETION

*“The task of interpreting is therefore to engage in the dynamic of conceal/reveal, making manifest what may lie hidden” (Shinebourne 2011:47)*

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I aimed to generate a **conceptual framework** to understand what constitutes *methodological preparedness* of South African Public Administration doctoral candidates from the period 2000–2015. As already alluded to in Chapter 2 a qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis approach was employed to understand the experiences of the doctoral candidates in terms of their own *methodological preparedness*. I departed from the assumption that the experiences are unique (Dowling 2007:133; Racher & Robinson 2002:471) and influenced by historical, social and cultural contexts (Livingston 2014:184).

The findings of this study are discussed in line with the research purpose and objectives identified and discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. It is worth mentioning that the findings chapters are divided into four parts:

- Candidates who terminated their studies before completion (Chapter 5)
- Candidates who are currently registered (Chapter 6)
- Candidates who have successfully completed their studies (Chapter 7)
- Supervisors (Chapter 8)

This chapter discusses the findings of the experiences of the doctoral candidates who terminated their studies before completion. I firstly introduce the participants by providing

a brief summary of each participant to orientate the reader of this thesis. Following the brief summary is the discussion of the findings where I firstly explain the *voyage by ocean* metaphor. Moreover, I identify and discuss the themes as supported by direct quotes from the information shared by the participants and from the naïve sketches. Following the direct quotes is an interpretation supported by “a theoretical perspective, previous research, prior interpretations offered by other scholars” (Livingston 2014:184) and my own experience as a currently registered doctoral candidate (Lopez & Willis 2004:729). A conclusion concludes this chapter.

## **5.2 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

Eight doctoral candidates who terminated their studies before completion were interviewed in 2015. The interviews were conducted at a preferred meeting point with the participants, for example their offices, restaurants and public parks. To protect their identity researcher-selected pseudonyms were used. The brief background of each participant’s profile reflects their occupation and the reasons for termination of their doctoral studies. Evidence for the reasons provided for the termination of their studies is provided in Section 5.3.3.1 by means of verbatim quotations.

- **Faith**

Faith worked in an academic environment for more than 20 years. She enrolled for her doctorate because she wanted to make a contribution in her field of study. In addition a doctorate was a requirement for promotion. After experiencing a painful loss she decided to terminate her doctoral studies and joined a government department.

- **Gift**

At the time of the interview, Gift worked in a government department where higher qualifications were not a requirement for promotion. Regardless of the fact that higher qualifications were not required for promotion, Gift decided to pursue the doctoral study for personal development. Gift said that the reason for the termination of his doctoral

study was that the academic department at the higher education institution where he was registered delayed to provide feedback on his research proposal.

- **Given**

Given worked as a journalist before he joined a government department where he occupied a senior position at the time of the interview. He enrolled because he was pressurised by his friends to obtain a doctoral degree. For him the enrolment meant to change his social status. After experiencing a sense of “*bad luck in supervision*” he terminated his studies.

- **Fortunate**

At the time of enrolment Fortunate was unemployed. She decided to enrol because she was still job hunting. After she submitted her proposal twice to the department and it was not approved she decided to terminate her doctoral studies.

- **Joe**

Joe occupied a senior management position in a government department at the time of the interview. After completing his master’s degree he decided to enrol for his doctoral degree for personal development. Due to work demands Joe decided to terminate his studies.

- **Mandla**

At the time of the interview, Mandla worked in a government department. He enrolled for the doctoral degree for his own personal development. After he was redeployed to a remote area he decided to terminate his studies. He terminated his studies before he submitted his research proposal.

- **Njabulo**

Njabulo worked in a government department at the time of the interview. A doctoral degree was not a requirement for promotion. He enrolled for his own personal development. It seems that he experienced feelings of discouragement that influenced



him to terminate his studies. According to Njabulo the supervisor expressed enthusiasm about the study and suggested major amendments to his proposal. However, he felt “*confused*” about the required demands of conducting a doctoral study. The confusion seemingly contributed to the sense of discouragement.

- **Cedric**

Cedric occupied a senior position in a private company at the time of the interview. He stated that he enrolled because he wanted to make a contribution in the field of public administration. Cedric stated that he was determined to complete his doctorate. However, he experienced a sense of being neglected by the supervisor and the academic department where he was registered for his doctoral degree, hence; he decided to terminate his studies.

### **5.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

This section starts with an explanation of the *voyage by ocean* metaphor that guides the discussion of the findings. The findings transpired from the analysis of the interviews by following Shinebourne’s (2011:56) four stage process. Through this process the four main themes were identified: (1) commencing the voyage, (2) being in the experience, (3) stormy waters and (4) reaching the destination. Each theme is presented by starting with a description of it, followed by verbatim quotes, in *italic font*, that support the description. Finally, a literature control is conducted to re-contextualise the findings to existing scholarly literature (Morse & Field 1995:130) to demonstrate the usefulness and implications of the findings.

#### **5.3.1 Metaphor: Doctoral journey as a voyage**

A metaphor is described by Semino (2008:1) as a “phenomenon whereby we talk about and potentially think about something in terms of something else”. This definition by Semino (2008) fits in this research because the phenomenon that is being explored, namely *methodological preparedness*, is likened to something else. The use of a

metaphor in this thesis originated from engaging with the experiences of the participants during the data analysis stage. The experiences of the participants were likened to a *voyage by ocean*. The *Collins English Dictionary* (2006:998) defines a voyage as a “long journey by sea or in space”.

As I was making sense of this voyage metaphor, the description by Lakoff and Turner (1989:60–61) of a journey shed some light: “our understanding of life as a journey uses our knowledge about journeys. All journeys involve travellers, paths travelled, places where we start, and places where we have been. Some journeys are purposeful and have destinations that we set out for, while others may involve wandering without any destination in mind, consciously or more likely unconsciously, a correspondence between a traveller and person living life, the road travelled and the ‘course’ of a lifetime”.

This description fits the *voyage by ocean* metaphor used in this thesis because the doctoral candidates embarked on a doctoral journey. At the time of embarking they seemingly knew where to start and where they were coming from; however, many aspects may metaphorically have been under the ocean and thus have not been revealed. Table 5.1 captures the various concepts that are used in this metaphor and their applied meaning.

**Table 5.1: Description of the key terms used in the voyage by ocean metaphor**

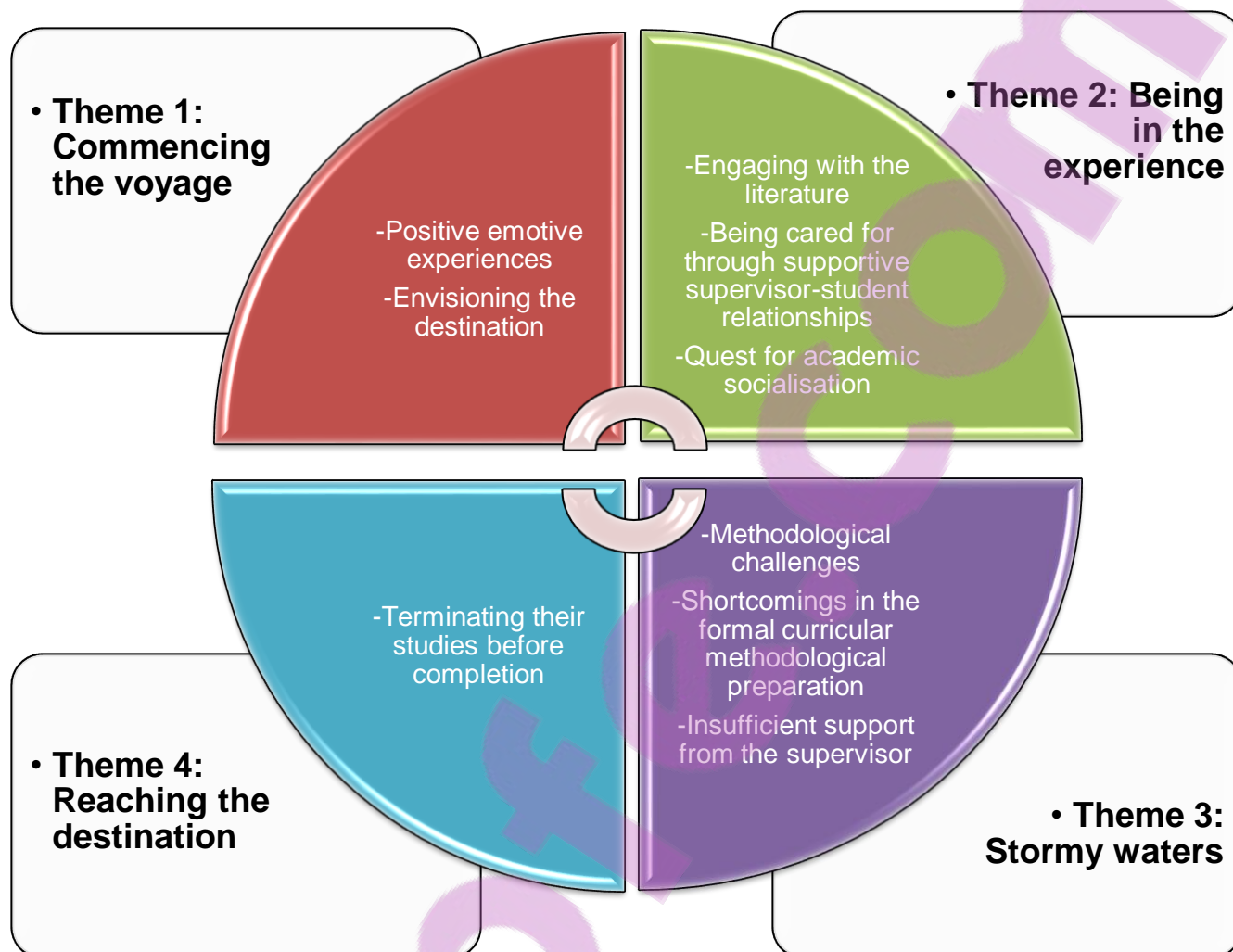
TERMINOLOGY	APPLIED MEANING
<b>Captain</b>	An individual doctoral candidate that participated in the research. The terms “captains” and “participants” will be used interchangeably throughout the findings chapters.
<b>Boat</b>	The research process from proposal writing to the completion of the thesis.
<b>Departing from the harbour</b>	The time of enrolment as a doctoral candidate.

TERMINOLOGY	APPLIED MEANING
<b>Being in the experience</b>	This entails the personal and research-related experiences and making critical decisions necessary for completing the journey. In the context of this research being in the experience refers to the experiences that unfolded from the time when the candidates started with the research activities which included writing the research proposal and in some instances working on the various chapters. It further included the occurrences that unfolded after the captains departed from the harbour.
<b>Ocean</b>	The dynamic interaction between the personal and the research-related contexts relevant to <i>methodological preparedness</i> . In Chapter 4 the personal emerged as the personal/internal resources such as competence, independence and comprehensive literacy while the research-related contexts included aspects such as training, mentoring, academic socialisation and the student-supervisor relationship. However, successful completion is marked by the dynamic interplay between the candidate's internal resources (competence, independence and comprehensive literacy) and the environmental conditions necessary for success (doctoral training, mentoring, academic socialisation and the student-supervisor relationship).
<b>License to steer the boat to a desired destination</b>	Methodological preparedness
<b>Survival kit</b>	The caring social dimension of research which includes knowledge, supervisory support and expected research interventions.
<b>Reaching the destination</b>	The graduation ceremony signifying that the doctoral studies have successfully been completed.

As travellers they occupied the role of a captain in their *voyage by ocean*. Just like a captain who bears important duties such as taking leadership in the boat and ensuring that the boat reaches its destination, the participants assumed similar duties when they departed from the harbour. They had to take the position of the captain when they enrolled for their doctoral studies. This implies that they had to take personal accountability for their doctoral journey. As captains they had to ensure that the boat complied with safety regulations (university policies and procedures). As captains they had to ensure that their licences were authorised for them to steer the boat (*methodological preparedness*). The licences were essential for persevering until the completion of the journey. As captains they embarked on the journey envisioning the destination. However, they could not fully comprehend what it meant to fully engage in a doctoral journey. The occurrences that are inherently part of a doctoral journey that could either support or discourage them from reaching the desired destination were not revealed as yet. In addition, they did not fully grasp the importance of the licence to steer the boat (*methodological preparedness*). These occurrences unfolded when the captains started steering the boat to the desired destination. As set out below in the findings in Section 5.3.3.1, these participants assumed a new position (captains), they seemingly had challenges in overcoming the stormy waters, the boat capsized and they lost hope and failed to reach the desired destination. This implies that they reached an undesired destination which was terminating their studies before completion.

### **5.3.2 Overview of the themes and subthemes**

Four main themes were identified as indicated in Figure 5.1 below: (1) commencing the voyage, (2) being in the experience, (3) stormy waters and (4) reaching the destination. Subthemes further emerged from the main themes as indicated in the figure:



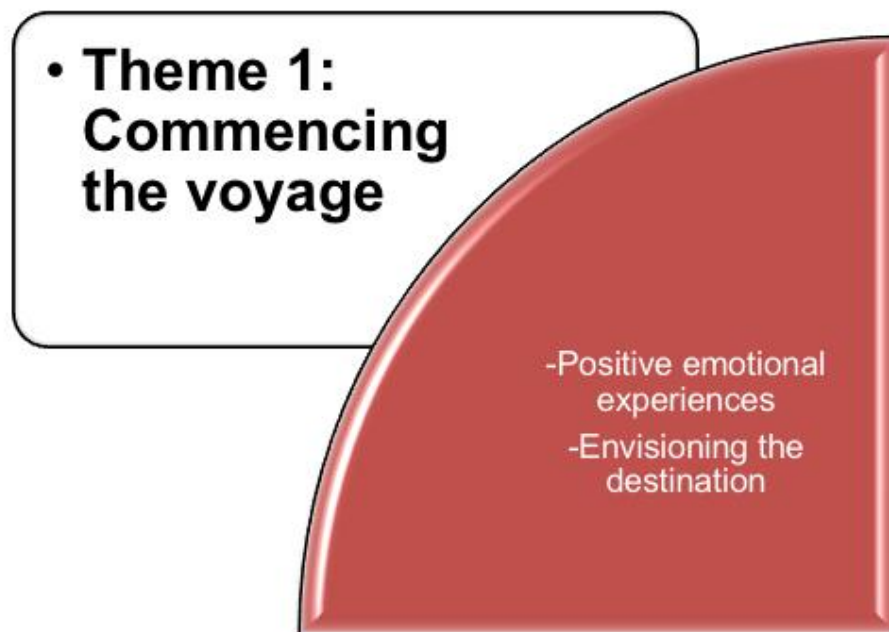
**Figure 5.1: Overview: experiences of participants who terminated their studies before completion**

### 5.3.3 Discussion of the main themes and supporting subthemes

The findings are presented as detailed descriptions according to the four themes identified in the previous section. Within each main theme, subthemes are identified. The subthemes are presented by providing a brief description, supported by evidence in the form of verbatim quotes and supported by other scholarly literature sources.

### 5.3.3.1 Theme 1: Commencing the voyage

Commencing the voyage uncovered the participant's experiences relevant to the time of enrolment. This main theme consists of two subthemes which are positive emotional expressions and envisioning the destination (see Figure 5.2). Departing from the harbour emerged as a positive emotive experience related to the “*excitement*” of commencing the journey and the expectations of the participants in reaching the destination. Subtheme 1.1 focuses on the initial feelings of the participants about commencing the voyage, while subtheme 1.2 focuses on the perceived benefits of obtaining a doctoral degree.



**Figure 5.2: Commencing the voyage**

#### **a) Subtheme 1.1: Positive emotional experiences**

Positive emotional experiences refer to the expressions of optimism, hope and confidence at the time of departing from the harbour. Several participants shared that they were “*looking forward*” to “*contributing to the body of knowledge*” and to navigate through the

ocean, while the others were more focused on the perceived benefits of obtaining the doctoral degree.

Expressions of “*looking forward*” to “*contributing to the body of knowledge*” are evident in the following quotes:

- “*I was excited and **looking forward to contributing towards the body of knowledge** for future generations to further expand on my chosen topic*”. (Faith, naïve sketch).
- “*It was exciting because I was **looking forward** to it and having been in academia for such a long time for over 20 years ... I was really **looking forward** to doing my studies and it was exciting and I was really **looking forward** to it*”. “*... I will **contribute in our specialised field** of Public Administration and in the country*”. (Faith, naïve sketch).
- “*... For me it meant that I was going to **make a contribution to the body of knowledge**. That feeling of knowing that I will **make a contribution to the body of knowledge**, it was exhilarating and very motivating*”. “*I was **looking forward, energetic and motivated** ...*” (Mandla, semi-structured interview).
- “*I wanted also to **contribute to the knowledge** and I was really excited and I wanted to do what I can to ensure that in this three or four years I complete my studies*”. (Cedric, semi-structured interview).
- “*I thought it had a place in Public Administration and **it will contribute to knowledge** and those were my thoughts, maybe they were wild, **I thought out of that something can come up and something can be created***”. (Cedric, semi-structured interview).

These initial feelings of the participants (henceforth referred to as captains) show that they were filled with hope and confidence that they would reach the desired destination. As it is evident in the above expressions by the captains, they (captains) believed that by departing from the harbour they will persevere to a point of “*making a contribution in the body of knowledge*” and “*contributing to their specialised field*”. These expectations are

in line with the official purpose of the doctoral degree as discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.2), namely to make a “significant and original academic contribution at the frontiers of a discipline or field” (Council of Higher Education 2013:38). This expectation is confirmed by various scholars, providing examples of the diverse nature of such contributions. Original contributions can include new knowledge, or the advancement of a scholarly discourse by providing evidence to substantiate an original conclusion (Petre & Rugg 2010:14), the development or testing of a theory or conceptual framework (Trafford & Leshem 2008:50), or the making of a methodological contribution (Finn 2005:14). These general expectations of a doctoral qualification is also embodied in the University of South Africa’s (2017 online) official expectations of a successful doctoral candidate in the field of Public Administration, namely to make “a significant and original academic contribution at the frontiers of the discipline or field”.

The above expectations from a doctoral qualification, confirms the view as discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3.1) that this qualification prepares candidates for a career as academics (Boud & Tennant 2006:293; Usher 2002:10). It is noteworthy that not one member of this group of participants whose studies were terminated, was an academic at the time of the interviews. However in spite of this, their expectations from this qualification were still of an academic nature. None of them mentioned making a contribution to their professional practice.

#### **b) Subtheme 1.2: Envisioning reaching the destination**

Envisioning reaching the destination is concerned about the dreams the captains had about successfully completing their doctoral degrees and how it could benefit them. The captains used expressions such as “... *I would finish ...*” “... *I will meet my target*”, “... *it was for bragging ...*”, “... *it was a social status thing ...*”, “... *I was close to reaching my goal*”, “... *to give it the best shot*”. This envisioning of the destination is demonstrated in the following quotes:



- *“I had a time frame, I completed my junior degree in 1996 and I said to myself [in] less than 10 years’ time I must have my doctorate ... I was very excited because I thought I would finish ... I will meet my target. I was so excited and I was **close to reaching my goal**”.* (Gift, semi-structured interview).
- *“For me it wasn’t really a shock, I have done some international work working with some guys who were busy with their PhDs. So I was already in and out of the research fraternity. So even the pressure that I was getting there, it’s still a pressure that I am getting, for me **it was for bragging**, for me it was not necessarily a PhD for me, **it was a social status thing**”.* (Given, naïve sketch).
- *“... As a student I was **looking forward to complete the degree** in the years determined by the university”.* (Joe, semi-structured interview).
- *“Wow, it was **a dream come true**, look I wanted **to give it the best shot** ... And I think also the topic that I have chosen also I was very passionate about it”.* (Cedric, semi-structured interview).
- *“... what happened initially is you look at it and you want to **look forward** in achieving this doctoral degree”.* (Njabulo, semi-structured interview).
- In contrast to the other captains Fortunate’s envisioning was filled with doubts and uncertainty about her preparedness to reach the destiny. This is evident in this quote: *“Maybe I wasn’t **fully prepared psychologically, financially and mentally wise**... Maybe I wasn’t fully prepared because the doctorate was based on research on thesis, not somebody spoon feeding you, giving you a book, giving you a particular chapter or topic to go and read. **Maybe I wasn’t prepared. Maybe I wasn’t ready**, but now I know better”.* (Fortunate, semi-structured interview).

Most of the captains, with the exception of Faith did not express concerns about the challenges they might face in the ocean but their eyes were set on being on the other side – reaching the desired destination. This notion is in line with the findings by various researchers. For instance Park (2007:13) in his research found that the majority of the students in PRES University were optimistic about finishing their doctorate in time. Goodwin, O’Connor and Plugor (2012:7) also found similar perceptions in their research

where they explored the experiences of students at the University of Leicester. They found that the students were more optimistic about the chances of completing their degrees, as the majority believed they will finish on time.

The Assaf Report (Academy of Science of South Africa 2010:74) confirms Fortunate's experience as it reveals that some South African doctoral students enter higher education not well-prepared for university studies, as they are not being academically prepared for their doctoral studies. This is probably not a South African specific phenomenon, as a study by Leijen et al. (2016:130) at the University of Estonia also concludes that doctoral students are inadequately prepared for their studies.

### 5.3.3.2 Theme 2: Being in the experience

The captains realised that after departing from the harbour various occurrences started to unfold which included personal and research-related experiences. They assumed the responsibility of taking control and leadership as captains. As captains they realised they needed to take personal responsibility and make critical decisions necessary for completing the journey. Their successful completion of the journey was depending on their ability to use the survival kit that was on board. The participants at this point ensured that the survival kit was packaged with the necessary equipment such as food, lifeboats and radio transmitter. This is the stage where they had to consider their own *methodological preparedness*. As they took personal responsibility for their survival in the ocean, the ocean appeared to be clear and inviting. Amongst other, they needed a survival kit containing critical equipment to manage the dynamic interaction between their personal and research-related contexts. The data revealed that an adequate survival kit contained food (**“engaging with the literature”**), coastguards (**“being cared for through supportive supervisor-student relationships”**) and a radio transmitter (**“quest for academic socialisation”**) (see Figure 5.3).



**Figure 5.3: Being in the experience**

**a) Subtheme 2.1: Engaging with the literature**

Engaging with the literature refers to the captain's responsibility in terms of preparing for the journey. In this context, most of the captains indicated that they **"read"** in order to equip themselves and make critical decisions for completing the voyage. The captains realised that there was much needed food in the survival kit that would boost their strength during the voyage. The importance of engaging with the literature is evident in the following expressions:

- *"I went through **legislation and other directives** in our department and **I read other literature** that was available regarding my research ... **I read and that's how I got prepared**". (Gift, Naïve Sketch).*
- *"As I am saying I finished my master's in 2009, right in March, from July 2009 **I started reading on my topic itself and also on methodology**". (Given, Naïve Sketch).*

- “... **I took the whole year reading and writing** because what was annoying me was how you answer the topic whether a meeting was effective or not ...” (Given, Naïve Sketch).
- “When **I read through I read a couple of books and articles**, but the one I was more inclined or aggravated to was written by Mouton ... **I read material from other books**. I primarily used it as a base and used the others that **I read** on the side”. (Mandla, semi-structured interview).
- “... actually **from what I read, the plan was to read as much as I can** on background information regarding the understanding and explanation of those two angles qualitative and quantitative and try to see and come with a new perspective in terms of my topic ... So I needed to come with something that was entirely new **but informed by what was done before**”. (Mandla, semi-structured interview).
- “... **I was reading other research papers and looked at the methodology** that they followed. I thought [that] had I done that, my research was going to be very easy. **By reading other research papers, it actually helps you a lot and it guides you as well**”. (Njabulo, semi-structured interview).
- “I think **I did it in about three stages**; the first one was **general reading of research methodologies**, then I narrowed it down to research in Public Administration, what are the used methodologies in Public Administration. At the first stage was to look at the one that I have chosen; understanding and gaining knowledge about that methodology that I wanted to use”. (Cedric, semi-structured interview).
- “Like I said it was at a proposal level I didn’t really go anywhere. **It was based on what I was reading** and how I will go about it, it was purely **study reading from various books and through the internet and all that**”. (Fortunate, semi-structured interview).

These quotes reveal that the captains view engaging with the literature as one of the first and most prominent steps after departing from the harbour. They regard reading scholarly literature as a critical tool in assisting them with *methodological preparedness* because they assume that it “**guides**”, informs and assists them in understanding their preferred

research methods and designs. Their assumption is supported by Boote and Beile (2005:3) who argue that “a substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is a precondition for doing substantive, thorough and sophisticated research”. Boote and Beile (2005:3) further argue that “to advance a collective understanding, a researcher or scholar needs to understand what has been done before, the strengths and weaknesses of existing studies, and what they might mean”. Significant research is thus directly associated with a thorough understanding of the literature in the field (Boote & Beile 2005:3). Research by Jesson et al. (2011:10) confirms the value of a thorough literature review for postgraduate students, which assist in interpreting, identifying gaps and contradictions in existing knowledge. Seemingly these participants were also reading to understand what methodologies have been used before in their field of specialisation.

#### **b) Subtheme 2.2: Being cared for through supportive supervisor-student relationships**

During the process of getting familiar with the survival kit they realised that they had coastguards for their support. The coastguards refers to a sense of being cared for through supportive supervisor-student relationships. It appears that these captains perceived supportive supervisor-student relationships as the most critical coastguards that they needed to successfully complete the journey. They used concepts such as *knowledgeable, specialists, guides, helpers, directors, mentors, advisors, team players, counsellors, and supporters*. This realisation is supported by the following quotes:

- “When I joined the department I was still struggling with my proposal and **I had a meeting with Prof Y ... He said ‘I support your passion ...’**”. (Faith, Naïve Sketch).
- “They were **guiding me and they were quite useful**. Maybe because of their experience when **they give you direction** they know what you have to do and **they guide you accordingly**”. (Gift, semi-structured interview).
- “Coming to Unisa, there was **a lady who helped a lot (Dr X)**, to draw me far deeper in non-quantitative methods; she was able to say that there was phenomenology,

case study. She was also **able to say these are some of the strategies** that you can use in your research ...” (Given, semi-structured interview).

- “The fortunate part I had a **mentor** and ... **he encouraged me**. I didn’t struggle much because there was someone. Unfortunately he had to leave the institution and join the private sector so I was on my own”. (Joe, semi-structured interview).
- “In the past when I will write something **I used to send it to my mentor so that I may get an advice ... for me it’s difficult [as] I am not an academic**. I will write something and I think [it] is a point and he will say ‘no don’t pose a **hypothetical question**’ or not for the book. it was not easy having a mentor”. (Joe, semi-structured interview).
- “At the time **the person I would consult I was from XXX university** when I went to register at University A so **it was my supervisor from XXX university because I had informed her** that I wanted to do this through University A so I would from time to time as per her availability **I will consult and bounce some ideas**. So **she was there to provide support**”. (Mandla, semi-structured interview).
- “You must be very clear from the beginning **the supervisor must give you three years or four years and say 6 months: I expect that, in November, I expect that and next year June you must be there. He/she must give you timeline ... If you have a certain timeframe you will know that in six months I have to deliver that ...**” (Njabulo, semi-structured interview).
- “... you may think this particular one will really suit your angle of study but **as you discuss it with your supervisors** you come to realise that ... maybe this is not the particular one. You begin playing that kind of a game ... at least finally **through the guidance and assistance of the supervisors you are able to get to the methodology** that will really help you to get to where you really want to be”. (Cedric, semi-structured interview).
- “I think the trick is ...to come up with balanced methodologies ... **where you really need a very intense support from your supervisory team**, the people that have been there”. (Cedric, semi-structured interview).

- “... **that kind of guidance especially in the initial stages where you are crafting your methodology is a roadmap you really need** ...” (Cedric, semi-structured interview).
- “To some extent **I thought the supervisor will say if you have any problems with regards to your literature review and methodology, this is how you should go about doing it** ... I think **such assistance could help** and I got so discouraged and I left”. (Fortunate, semi-structured interview).

Most of the captains expected the supervisors to provide guidance in terms of the research methods and designs and how to operate the boat. These expectations of these participants are similar to Leijen et al. (2016:139) who found that the doctoral students highlighted important supervisor factors such as intent, commitment, regular meetings and feedback. In line with this, the ASSAf Report (Academy of Science of South Africa 2010:80) argues that the supervisor’s supportive role involves “demonstrating interest and understanding in research, offering encouragement, offering other structural support and cultivating a conducive research environment”. For these captains it appears that guidance in research, being cared for and encouragement was the most desired roles from the supervisors which they believed could enhance their *methodological preparedness*. Maasdorp and Holtzhausen (2015:46) further confirms that the main supervisor remains the sounding board for confidence and independence building. This is evident in Goodwin et al. (2012: 8) research where they found that “in order to finish successfully, students rely most on the supervisory support and guidance”. It seems that other scholars are in agreement that the student-supervisor relationship is important (Boden et al. 2011:11). This is confirmed by Evans and Stevenson (2011:6) who interviewed international nursing doctoral students and found that, “the supervision relationship revealed itself as by far the most significant element of the students’ learning experiences”. In a South African study, Albertyn, Kapp and Bitzer (2008:761) found that 80% of the PhD students regard mentoring to be important. These doctoral students shared that the main strengths of their supervisors was the ability to provide “guidance, support, expertise, professionalism, personal attributes and timeous feedback”.

### c) Subtheme 2.3: Quest for academic socialisation

Academic socialisation refers to the radio transmitter (on the boat) that was critical for engagement with the scientific community, as captains believed it could enhance their *methodological preparedness*. They used expressions such as “*to sit with staff members*”, “*an association of PhD class*”, “*... take me to conferences*”, “*seminars*”, “*induction*”, “*interact with others*”, “*... they should talk to the students*”, “*... a course of some sort ...*”, “*... come and present ... in front of the PA community*”. This is revealed in the following quotes:

- “... I should have gone **to sit with staff members in the Department**. And **sit down with the leader of the programme** of PhD students. And **sit down with them** and **tell them I am interested in doing the PhD**, this is the topic, this is how I view the world; just to have **one hour session or two hours with the Professor** or whoever is there who deals with PhD students, because I realised that even at that level for some of us you **need career guidance** before you could even pay your money”. (Faith, semi-structured interview).
- “I was thinking before senior students register for their master’s or doctoral degree, if it was in the limit of the university, **you must go sit down with maybe senior lecturers** and **tell them what you want to do ... they guide you** on what you have to do ...”. (Gift, semi-structured interview).
- “Choosing the methods is a problem: that is why I was saying **maybe having a meeting with senior lecturers** and say this is what I want to do and he will say with this research you are going to take this road and you won’t have problems”. (Gift, semi-structured interview).
- “**Take students to conferences**. If I was still in X University I could have completed my PhD because I could have had a mentor, **who will mentor me**. He will **take me to conferences**. You want someone to take you to that door .... I **needed a door to the other world** and he was not able to do that”. (Given, naïve sketch).



- “Like I say I also wanted **somebody to share with** because of an uncooperative supervisor. Maybe I was not a priority then. I just stepped aside and I left him/her. You don’t work in isolation; **you need one or two people**. Even scientists at labs have assistants and they always ask others. You don’t work in isolation; **you need one or two people**”. (Fortunate, semi-structured interview).
- “**Seminars** where you summarise what it entails briefly to do a doctorate like other universities. You find that some doctorates are based on coursework and research, so maybe they can also **give us a bit of course work**.” (Fortunate, semi-structured interview).
- “... you know this thing called **induction** eh, it must be similar to **induction**. I was of the opinion that as you know that in other universities, whether overseas or what, there is this period whereby **they take you for 6 months before you enrol** for the actual degree or whatever, just to check whether you prepared or you can succeed. Unfortunately with University A they accept you when you meet the requirement and they say start and submit, we want to see the proposal and they don’t check whether you are prepared. After they realised that I was struggling they organised a librarian”. (Joe, semi-structured interview).
- “You can **interact with other colleagues in the platform** and that can enrich the experience as well because **you need that interaction on a continuous basis**. If you start on your own you don’t know whether you [are] still on the right track **unless you bounce your ideas on others**”. (Mandla, semi-structured interview).
- “... You arrange an **introductory seminar**, you solve the problem”. (Njabulo, semi-structured interview).
- “Preparedness on the part of the department is to say can’t we have **a course of some sort** where **we sit down with our doctoral students** and we have this course that [for] everybody is a must and people must attend ... but **there must be a course** at that level that prepares, **that guides students** so to speak. I wish there was something like that. I wish I could have gone back ...”. (Cedric, semi-structured interview).

- “How often do we ask these guys **to come and present**. How often? Never and I was never asked to come and present **in front of the team and in front of the PA community, never**”. (Cedric, semi-structured interview).

The majority of the captains yearned for sufficient engagement and academic socialisation in the form of research interventions such as capacity development initiatives, contact sessions and conference attendance and joint presentation. This aspect of academic socialisation also fascinated them, hence they needed the senior academics to engage with them. The captains expressed the notion that by being academically socialised their *methodological preparedness* could be enhanced. This is consistent with the arguments raised in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.2.3.3) that academic socialisation is a necessary condition for methodological preparedness. Socialisation is defined by Golde (1998:56) as “a process where a newcomer becomes a member of the community”. Deducing from the information shared by the participants, it is evident that these participants felt isolated and not part of their scholarly community. This finding is consistent with findings of Pyhältö, Stubb and Lonka (2009:221) and Pyhältö and Keskién (2012:142) that doctoral students frequently feel isolated from their academic community and view themselves as outsiders. They further indicate that these doctoral students missed connection with the scholarly community and other researchers in the same field (Pyhältö & Keskién 2012:142). The participants that did not complete their studies felt isolated and not part of their scholarly community.

### 5.3.3.3 Theme 3: Stormy waters

While exploring the survival kit the captains were already navigating through the stormy waters. The stormy waters resemble the challenges that they faced in their *voyage*. They experienced a sense of disillusionment as they were shaken by their conceived idea of *methodological preparedness*. This is the phase where the captains had to demonstrate their abilities in using the survival kit. Seemingly the captains lost control and the boat capsized and they lost hope and confidence and reached an undesired destination. Three subthemes emerged from this theme: “**methodological challenges**”, “**insufficient**

support from the supervisor” and “shortcomings in the formal methodological curricular preparation” (see Figure 5.4).

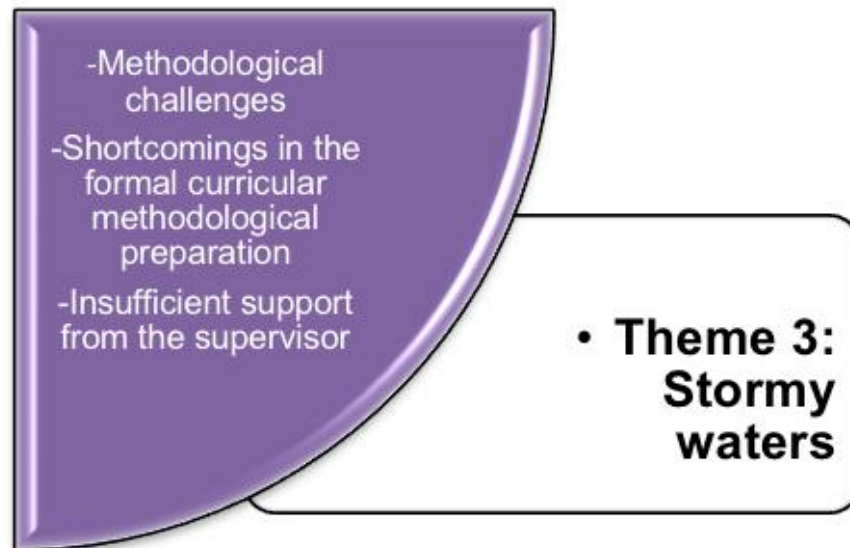


Figure 5.4: Stormy waters

a) Subtheme 3.1: Methodological challenges

This subtheme is about the research-related and personal challenges in terms of the captains' *methodological preparedness to voyage in the ocean*. This is the stage where they needed to go back to the survival kit and see if they are able to use the equipment in the survival kit. They realised they were not methodologically prepared and they experienced a sense of discomfort. This is vividly expressed in the following quotes:

- “Percentage-wise, you see you get excited, but when you sit down the reality hits, I am not 90% but I am 60%, my readiness with regards to research methodology. **It was kind of challenging with the proposed topic that I wanted to explore there wasn't much written academically**”. (Faith, naïve sketch).
- “**Some parts were a bit confusing because now when I was looking at the variables, I was trying to find out which one will be dependent on the other and the independent variable. I couldn't pinpoint which one will be my dependent**

**or independent variable. I really had problems in getting the methodology straight**". (Fortunate, semi-structured interview).

- **"Frankly speaking I don't think one was well prepared with regards to research methodology. The preparedness that goes into doctoral studies is different from when one prepares for [a] master's ..."**. (Joe, semi-structured interview).
- **"... this is not easy, I will tell you something, especially us who are not in [an] academia environment it's not easy ..."**. (Joe, semi-structured interview).
- **"... I wasn't that really prepared because I didn't know of the various types of designs and methods that I could employ. It was a lot of hard work, reading, trying to read research methodology books and trying to understand. Research methodology is such a difficult thing to understand, so it's very important that [for] anybody taking [up] a doctoral study there must be an introduction to research designs and research methods because that must fit in in your doctoral studies"**. (Njabulo, semi-structured interview).
- **"Because of my lack of knowledge in research methodology I went for qualitative because I thought it will be easier ... and we came to an agreement that I will do a qualitative study ..."**. (Njabulo, semi-structured interview).

These quotes demonstrate that when the captains had to make independent methodological decisions applicable to their research project, they realised that they were not adequately prepared to do that. Hanyane (2015:9) identifies methodological challenges as an "inability to reflect on understanding the basics of research methods in the discipline, lack of applying basic research techniques including statistical software and instruments and technologies to address pertinent research problems". This is similar to the findings of Leijen et al. (2016:137,141), namely that the doctoral students who terminated their studies had insufficient methodological knowledge and skills. This results either in difficulties in selecting suitable research designs or frequently changed designs. Furthermore, Edwards and Thatcher (2004:195) confirm that "students find courses in research methods to be difficult and challenging". Probably, this difficulty occurs because these courses focus on the transferring of knowledge about methodology, and not on

applying these methods. This confirms that students cannot be prepared by knowledge about research methodology only, but need to be guided to apply their knowledge under the supervision of experienced scholars (Wessels 2014:154). Methodological preparation predominantly consisting of knowledge transfer seems to make it difficult for students to conduct independent research, as confirmed by Lovitts (2005:137) and Gardner (2010:7). Preparation to become independent researchers thus includes both methodological knowledge and skills acquired under the supervision of an experienced scholar. The above thus implies possible shortcomings in the formal curricular methodological preparation for future doctoral students.

**b) Subtheme 3.2: Shortcomings in the formal curricular methodological preparation**

This subtheme is about the reflections regarding the formal curricular programme which failed to adequately prepare these captains for their doctoral journey. The captains experienced a sense of dissatisfaction in the way the research methodology modules were presented, as revealed in the following quotes:

- *“... it was such a challenging module and you had to do it. Believe me, as undergraduate, if I had a choice, I wouldn’t have done it. You had topics you had to go and research and **the methodology part of it was difficult to comprehend**. I will go to the lecturer and say “Mr Z, I don’t understand this research methodology module”. **It was very hard to understand it**, I don’t know whether it was the way the books were written or the way the lecturer tried to help us. **I don’t know, but it was very difficult**”. (Faith, naïve sketch).*
- *“**I didn’t do research methodology at undergraduate level, only at BTECH level when I was doing labour relations ... I studied alone, I tried to grasp and understand ... we didn’t have contact with the lecturers, so I was teaching myself. It didn’t prepare me for my master’s**”. (Gift, semi-structured interview).*

- “... you know at honours [level] they tell you about quantitative and qualitative, but then when you move to master’s you understand that **they are more complicated than they seem at face value.**” (Mandla, naïve sketch).
- “... looking at the nature of study at Unisa at times **it becomes a challenge to grasp some of the contents because of the distance learning environment. I will say in that regard there wasn’t thorough preparation looking at the nature how the studies are conducted**”. (Mandla, naïve sketch).

These quotes demonstrate that these captains grappled with understanding the knowledge about research methodology. It appears that the mode of tuition made it difficult for these participants to understand it. This finding is confirmed by previous research, Longmore, Dunn and Jarboe (1996:7) argue that when students “attend classroom lectures and engage only in reading material they do not thoroughly understand the various concepts until they apply it”. This explains why these students are less interested in such modules (Ball & Pelco 2006:147). The “weak foundations for conducting empirical research” as identified Aguado (2009:252), seem to refer to insufficient preparation of student’s competence in applying research methods.

The most appropriate approach for preparing students to apply research methods is evidently the learning by doing approach (Takata & Leiting 1987:145). Winn (1995:214) for example, through involving students in commissioned research projects, successfully prepared them methodologically. Aguado (2009:251–260) followed a different learning method by doing approach by including a practical component in the research methods module which was positively experienced by the students. Wessels and Thani (2014:62) strongly recommend that “the main content of the programme should thus be taught not as the conveying of facts but as the testing of facts and the solving of problems through the application of content specific methods”.

c) **Subtheme 3.3: Insufficient support from the supervisor**

Due to the evident insufficient formal methodological preparation, the captains tend to expect more support from the supervisors. However they seem to be disillusioned with this support. These captains used expressions such as “*we really missed each other*”, “*bad luck in supervising*”, “*the time I am ready he/she is not ready*”, “*communication gap*”, “*more like what the supervisor wants*” and “*the competence of the supervisory team*”. Their disillusionment is evident in the following quotes:

- “... When I got supervisors ... **I did get a sense that they understood me at a principal level and when it comes now to the nuts and bolts that’s where we really missed each other** ... I ended up quitting my studies and not necessarily on methodological grounds, **just bad luck with supervising**”. (Given, naïve sketch).
- “I can say the time constraints, **the time I am ready it will not be the time he/she is ready**. When I e-mail him/her he/she will **take some time to respond** ... I will see the supervisor once a month or after three weeks, **even when I get there to see him/her one on one he/she is always busy and in a hurry and doesn’t really look at it thoroughly and will just browse through and give me a summary and tell me to go redo it do**”. (Fortunate, semi-structured interview).
- “I got discouraged along the way with regard to my design and method. I prepared a proposal but **unfortunately I think there was a communication gap between me and the professor. I kept on receiving corrections. I will work through them and send them and he will come again with more corrections to do** ... I realised I am not sure whether I am relevant or the right person to continue with these studies”. (Joe, semi-structured interview).
- “What happens is that you know what you want to do in your research and **your supervisor is also telling you do this and do that and to change things and what happens is that what you want to do at the end of the day is completely changed**; more like what the supervisor wants and that is what happened in my case”. (Njabulo, semi-structured interview).

- “When departments allocate supervision to students especially at doctoral level this should be a carefully, carefully, carefully, crafted process because **if students don’t get the best advice, best supervisory direction from the supervisory team you will see people really dropping [out] and the competence as well [is] very important, the competence of the supervisory team ...**”. (Cedric, semi-structured interview).

The majority of the captains yearned for continued support from the supervisor. It seems that they believed that their lack of *methodological preparedness* could be compensated by their reliance on the supervisors. They were shaken by the reality that the supervisors were inaccessible, busy, providing confusing feedback and miscommunication. With this deduction in mind, Golde (2000) and Hoskins and Golberg (2005) arguments are true that the lack of connection between doctoral candidates and their advisors is the main reason for students to drop out. Other researchers agree that appropriate supervisor support is essential at doctoral level (Frischer & Larsson 2000; Gurr 2001; Platow 2012). The lack of it can have a direct impact on the doctoral candidate’s persistence with their programme (Gardner 2007:728). In a recent study by, Leijen et al. (2016:138) the doctoral students shared that they terminated their studies because they were dissatisfied or had negative relationships with their supervisors.

#### 5.3.3.4 Theme 4: Reaching the destination

When the captains departed from the harbour they envisioned the prospect of reaching a desired destination without consideration of their *methodological preparedness* (see Section 5.3.3.1). As they steered the boat in the stormy waters, they realised that the desired destination was out of reach. The boat capsized and they surrendered the journey without reaching the harbour (see Figure 5.5), thus terminating their studies before completion.



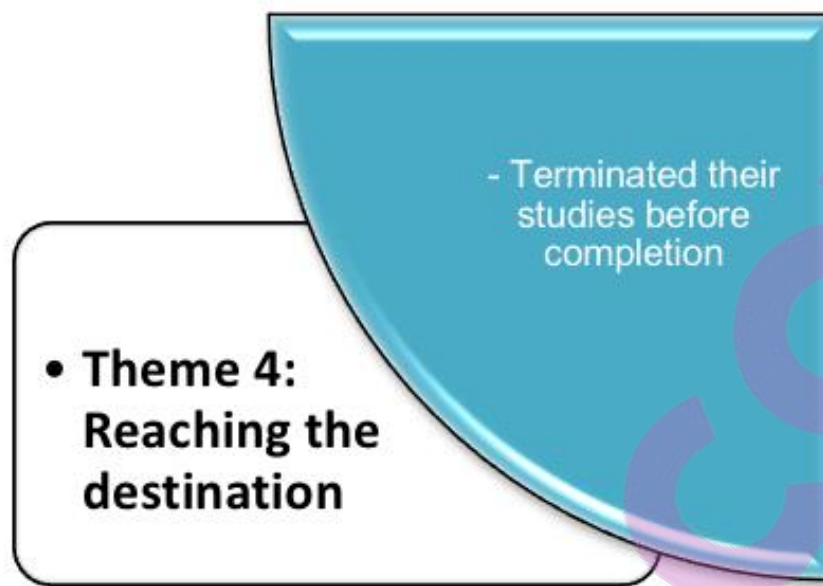


Figure 5.5: Reaching the destination

a) Subtheme 4.1: Terminating their studies before completion

The captains came to realise that they were not able to reach the desired destination. Seemingly some personal related challenges influenced them to terminate their studies. These captains used expressions such as “*life changing loss, bad luck in supervising, uncooperative supervisor and far removed from resources*”.

This realisation is evident in the following quotes:

- “*I had just experienced a **life changing loss** of my husband that resulted in me having to drop out of my studies*”. (Faith, naïve sketch).
- “*Well, in my case, I ended up quitting my studies and not necessarily on methodological grounds, just **bad luck with supervising***”. (Given, naïve sketch).
- “*Like I say I also wanted somebody to share with because of **[an] uncooperative supervisor**. Maybe I was not a priority then. I just stepped aside and I left him/her*”. (Fortunate, semi-structured interview).

- “I was redeployed ... and **I was far removed from the resources**. Where I was redeployed, it was rural areas, so it was difficult for me to continue accessing resources and materials and the signal in terms of coverage was a problem. I could not connect to the institution at the time”. (Mandla, semi-structured interview).
- “I sent my proposal and after a year **I could not get a reply** and I said no let me leave for a while”. (Gift, naïve sketch).
- “So again I said: ‘Look PhD is a journey. **You cannot work with somebody who is so and so and the person is on contract and that person doesn’t know whether that contract will be renewed or not**’. And it wasn’t really renewed and you have another person again and this person comes with ... . I was given a second supervisor ... it didn’t help”. (Cedric, semi-structured interview).
- “... I had to choose. **I had to go for the one set by the employer**, because that’s where it pays me my bread and this is my personal thing. I had to park doctoral studies and work on the financial management course ...”. (Joe, semi-structured interview).
- “... my son was in matric and the girl followed but after that **I had to make time for them** and ... I was very busy at work. I took a bit of a break but now that both of my kids are at university I will continue now”. (Njabulo, semi-structured interview).

The majority of the captains terminated their studies due to personal reasons which include emotional unpreparedness, work demands and family responsibilities – not necessarily *methodological preparedness*. Research-related contextual factors included the student-supervisor relationship challenges and delayed feedback on the research proposal. This finding is similar to Leijen et al. (2016:140) who find that the doctoral candidates terminated their studies due to non-academic factors such as work life, family life and personal factors including insufficient knowledge and skills, lack of interest, family demands, lack of finance and supervisory arrangements. This is further confirmed by other findings, for example, Maasdorp and Holtzhausen (2015:50) find that amongst other factors that contribute to high drop-out rates are frustration, student-supervisor relationship problems, limited experiences or facilities and challenges with scholarly

thinking and language problems. Related to these factors, Andrea (2002:42) conducted a study looking at obstacles that prevent doctoral students from completing their degrees, involving 215 professors from 42 states. Andrea (2002:42) finds that the main hindering factors are planning and writing, working independently, financial and personal-relationship pressures.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the findings of the lived experiences of the doctoral candidates who terminated their studies before completion, using a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach. The objective of this chapter was to make sense of the experiences of the doctoral candidates of the phenomenon *methodological preparedness*. As I engaged with the information shared by the participants I conceived the *voyage by ocean* metaphor which assisted me in making sense of the participant's experiences. The voyage by ocean metaphor depicts the doctoral journey of these participants as having different interactive stages: commencing the voyage, being in the experience, experiencing stormy waters and reaching a different destination than the one initially envisioned. According to the findings, methodological preparedness for these participants meant the ability to take independent decisions when confronted with the interplay between the candidates' personal resourcefulness and the research-related contextual conditions.

To this end, the literature review in Chapter 3 and the concept analysis revealed that a methodologically prepared doctoral candidate departs on the doctoral journey with the necessary academic qualification. However, methodological preparedness that leads to successful completion is marked by the dynamic interplay between the candidate's personal resources (competence, independence and comprehensive literacy) and the research-related contextual conditions necessary for success (doctoral training, mentoring, academic socialisation and the student-supervisor relationship).

These findings revealed that being enrolled does not imply being methodological prepared. These participants acknowledged the importance on engaging with the literature. This indicates that literature engagement, thus using your personal resources was not enough to keep them afloat, because they read, but they still did not complete their studies. It is evident that these participants needed to be independent and competent for them to engage with the literature. However, they did not mention the importance of comprehensive literacy. For this specific group of participants methodological preparedness did not result in reaching the destination due to situations that occurred that were inherently personal in nature, i.e. experiencing loss, being exposed to change but resulted to an undesired destination. It was difficult for the participants to successfully navigate the demands on their inner resource/abilities, while being confronted with a research-related context that lacked sufficient support. The participants viewed the student-supervisor relationship as one of the most important research-related factors for successful completion a doctoral study in Public Administration.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CANDIDATES WHO WERE CURRENTLY REGISTERED**

*“Interpretation is thus envisaged as a dynamic process, an interplay between the researcher and the object of interpretation” (Shinebourne 2011:47)*

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I continue with the discussion of the research findings and the literature control, started in the previous chapter. Unlike the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on the experiences of doctoral candidates who were currently registered at the time of the interviews. The same process of analysing the data was also used in this group of participants. Since these captains are engaged in the same doctoral journey as the previous group, the *voyage by ocean* metaphor has relevancy. It is worth mentioning that the themes remain the same starting from “commencing the journey”, “being in the experience”, “stormy waters” to “reaching the destination”. Some changes are observed in the subthemes. A similar pattern is followed in this chapter, by firstly providing the background information about the captains to orientate the reader. Moreover, I identify and discuss the themes as supported by direct quotes from the information shared by the captains and from the naïve sketches. A conclusion is provided to conclude this chapter.

#### **6.2 BRIEF BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

Nine doctoral candidates who were registered at the time of the interviews were interviewed in 2015. The interviews were conducted at a preferred meeting point chosen by the participants, for example their offices, cafeterias and Unisa premises. Similar to the first group, researcher-selected pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. The brief background information on each participant reflects their occupations and reasons for enrolment. Evidence for the reasons for their enrolment is provided in Sections 6.3.1.1 and 6.3.1.2 by means of verbatim quotes.

- **Junaid**

At the time of the interview, Junaid occupied a senior position in government. He enrolled for his doctoral degree for personal development because a doctoral degree is not a requirement for promotion in his work environment.

- **Kgomotso**

Kgomotso occupied a senior position in government at the time of the interview. While a doctoral degree is not a requirement for promotion in his work environment, he nevertheless enrolled for his doctoral degree for personal development.

- **S'phiwo**

S'phiwo worked in a government department at the time of the interview. She specifically worked in a research based section where she was involved in various research projects. She enrolled for her doctorate for personal development and to expand on her master's recommendations and find answers to those recommendations revealed in her master's dissertation.

- **Prudence**

At the time of the interview Prudence worked in the professional administration division at an academic institution. She said she enrolled for her doctorate for personal development and she is hoping to change from administration to academia in the future.

- **George**

George occupied a senior professional position in an academic institution at the time of the interview. He enrolled for a doctorate out of curiosity and for personal development.

- **Sibusiso**

At the time of the interview Sibusiso was an academic at an academic institution. A doctoral degree is a requirement for promotion in his work environment, hence he enrolled, thinking about career opportunities that he might attain after obtaining the doctoral degree.

- **Peter**

Peter was an academic at the time of the interview. He said he enrolled because he wanted to make a unique contribution in his field of study.

- **Phumi**

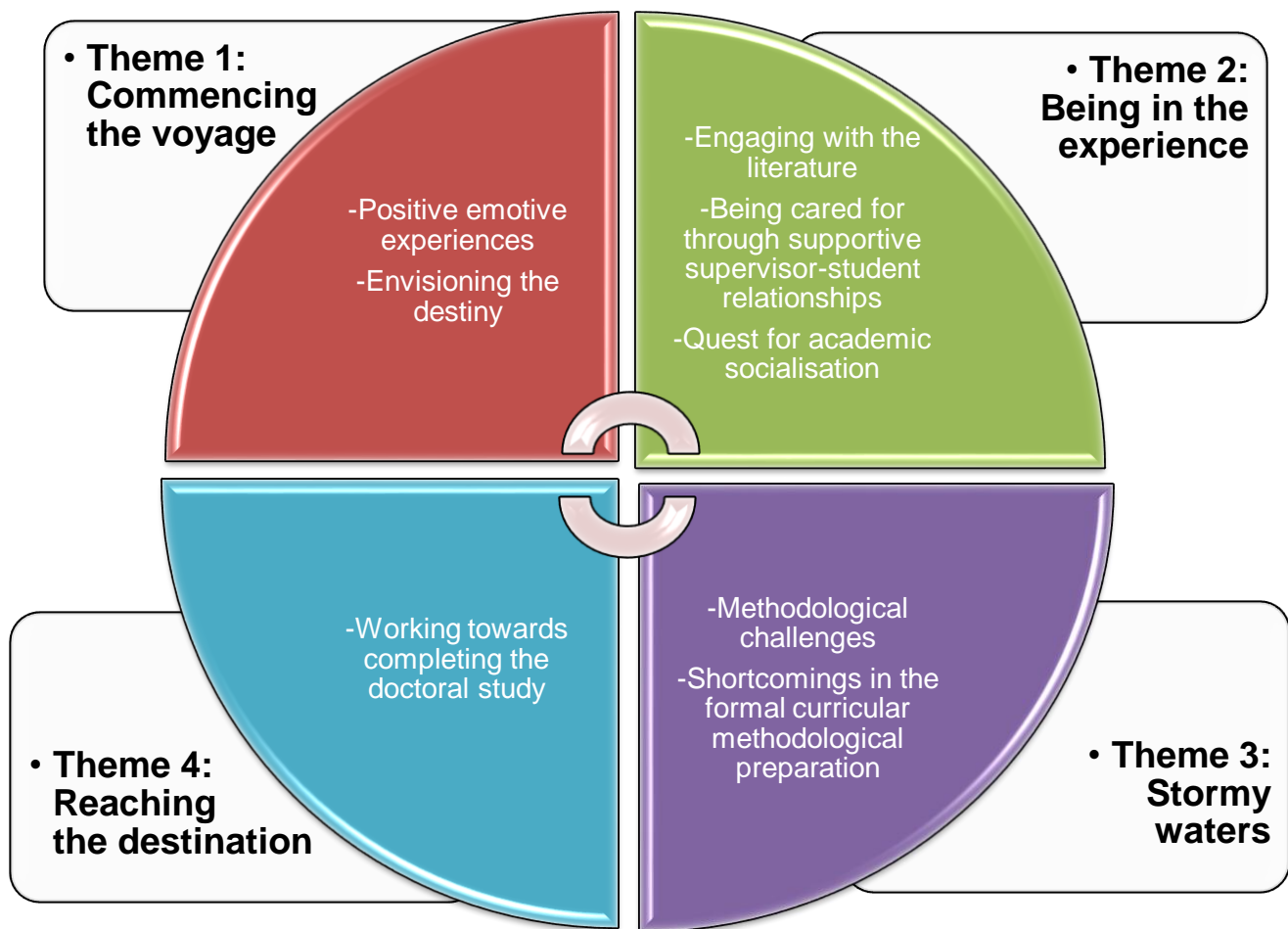
At the time of the interview Phumi had recently joined academia. She decided to enrol because she wanted to further her academic qualifications. She said she always felt that she wanted to complete her qualifications with a doctorate.

- **Jonathan**

Jonathan was an academic at the time of the interview. He enrolled because he wanted to advance his academic career. A doctoral degree is a requirement for promotion in academia.

### **6.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

The purpose of this section is to narrate, analyse and reflect on the lived experiences of doctoral candidates who have been registered for their studies at the time of the interviews. As already alluded to in the previous chapter, the findings transpired from the analysis of the interviews by following Shinebourne's (2011:56) four stage process. Through this process the four main themes were identified: (1) commencing the voyage, (2) being in the experience, (3) stormy waters and (4) reaching the destination (see Figure 6.1). Each theme is presented by starting with a description of it, followed by verbatim quotes, in *italic font*, that support the description. Finally, a literature control is conducted to re-contextualise the findings to existing scholarly literature (Morse & Field 1995:130) to demonstrate the usefulness and implications of the findings.

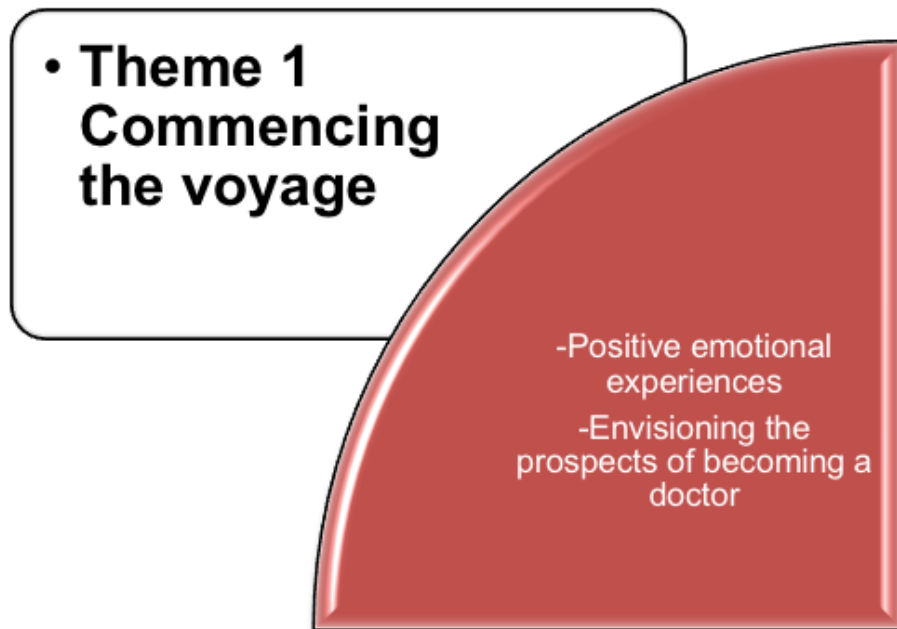


**Figure 6.1: Overview: Experiences of participants who were registered**

### **6.3.1 Theme 1: Commencing the voyage**

Commencing the voyage is about the initial feelings of the captains concerning the reality that they were departing from the harbour. At this stage the captains were reflecting on the prospects of reaching a desired destination by obtaining the doctoral degree. Two subthemes emerged from this theme: positive emotive experiences and envisioning the prospects of obtaining the doctoral degree (see Figure 6.2).





**Figure 6.2: Commencing the voyage**

#### **6.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Positive emotional experiences**

Positive emotional experiences refer to the feelings of confidence, enthusiasm and trust that, since the captains departed from the harbour, they would reach the desired destination. It appears that these captains were more excited about the career opportunities they would achieve after reaching the destination. This is evident in the following quotes:

- *“The degree will also be beneficial to me because it will provide **more career opportunities**”. (S’phiwo, naïve sketch).*
- *“I was happy that at least **I was afforded an opportunity to further my studies**”.  
“**I always wanted to further my studies** but I do not have time, my work load is too much. But I got pressure from my previous employer but who knows **maybe in future I will want to change from administration to academic environment**”. (Prudence, naïve sketch).*

- *“If I can manage to complete my doctorate even after my pension I will continue working outside the university. **This is a career and as a doctor I will be able to go further even in my later age.** I can also work in government and do whatever I want to do with my doctorate”.* (Sibusiso, semi-structured interview).
- *“But overall excited, yah excited, for me to have that opportunity **to enrol for the doctorate. For me that’s an achievement**”.* (Jonathan, semi-structured interview).
- *“The reason for pursuing my PhD is curiosity, I think at master’s level you develop an interest and for me **that interest is like something is boiling in me. I wanted to learn more and I wanted to know more.** And I pursued it **for fun just to change the title.** I think that’s the two things that motivated me”.* (Kgomotso, semi-structured interview).

It is evident from these quotes that the captains believed that by departing from the harbour they would reach the desired destination. The information shared by these captains reveal that they were already thinking about career opportunities that they would pursue after reaching the destination. Seemingly, they realised that their dreams of becoming doctors were going to be achieved. This is in line with the finding by Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012:209) that most of the doctoral candidates that they interviewed shared that their enrolment meant that they would benefit personally and professionally. For the majority of these captains, earning a doctorate meant exposure to many career opportunities. In addition to this, Backhouse (2011:33) found that the majority of the doctoral students enrolled for personal development. In a recent study conducted in one university in the USA, Friedrich-Nel and MacKinnon (2014:6) found that the doctoral candidates shared that their enrolment meant that they would have better professional and career opportunities.

#### **6.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Envisioning the prospects of obtaining a doctoral degree**

This subtheme is about the captains’ reflections about what is required to persist in the voyage. Seemingly the captains realised that by departing from the harbour they were placing a huge responsibility on themselves and they realised that they will face some

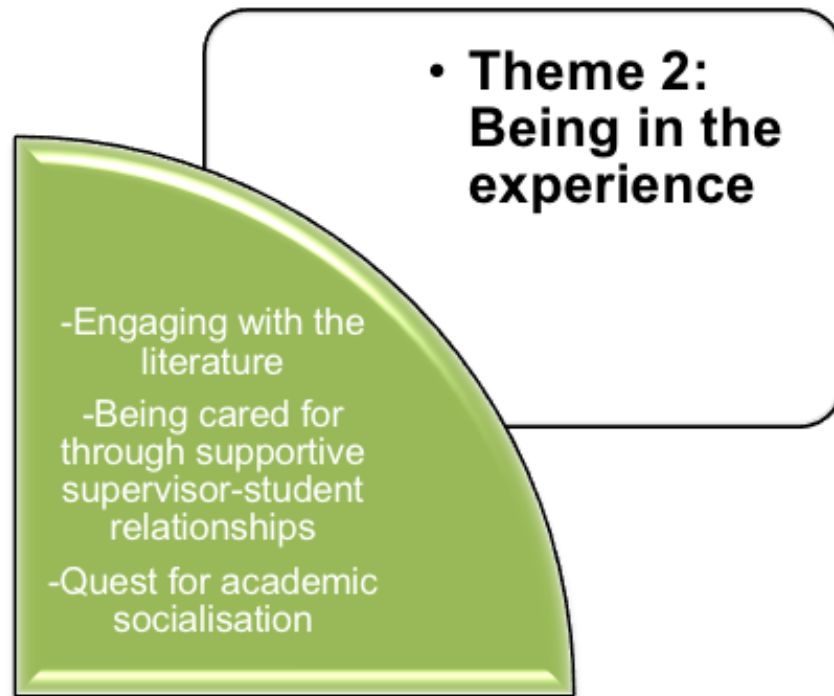
difficulties along the way. They further realised that there are some qualities that they needed to possess such as “*commitment*”, “*dedication*” and “*endurance*”. This envisioning is demonstrated in the following quotes:

- “... I can say a mixture of feelings; the one dominating is that I am taking myself a **step higher in my life**. Doing a PhD is not easy, not an easy life. You know studying is a **commitment, you compromise** on a lot of things, but **on the other side opposite of that excitement there is a feeling that I don’t know what I want to do**. You see I am venturing into a new field ... I studied the first one and I realised this is too limited and not working. **Then I changed**. You [are] not sure when you get in, then I told myself I am in and I wanted to get in and I will do it. Although I had a plan that this specific year I have to finish, but it is **difficult**”. (Junaid, semi-structured interview).
- “... sadness in the sense that a doctoral study is a massive project. **Time, dedication, know what you want to do, know where to find sources, you need to know who to contact for help, but for help we usually rely on supervisors**”. (S’phiwo, naïve sketch).
- “... but I was also filled with some tribulation, feelings of tribulation because this is not a master’s degree, **this is a marathon, and will I really have time to complete this marathon?**” (Sibusiso, semi-structured interview).
- “Again, I search for various doctoral research in the field of public administration and studied them in order **to establish what each researcher considers to be a new contribution**. At times, I would ask myself, what is a new contribution? I **initially thought maybe a contribution would mean writing a very thick document**”. (Peter, semi-structured interview).
- “At the same time I was very anxious of what I considered high expectations for a doctoral study. **Questions that bogged me were whether I have the ability to endure the pressure that comes with being a doctoral student**”. (Jonathan, semi-structured interview).

These quotes demonstrate that the captains were aware that engaging in this voyage required their full devotion and perseverance. The captains were also aware that steering the boat to the desired direction was difficult; it required time, dedication and endurance. It further appears that they were aware that this was a marathon which required one's fitness and energy. This is similar to a finding made by Gardner (2007:731) that first and second year doctoral students experience feelings of ambiguity in terms of "programme requirements, expectations and what comes next. Many new graduate students are unsure of the path on which they are about to embark and these feelings leave them with unanswered questions that may later impede their progress". In addition to this, Mendoza (2007:85) interviewed two groups of doctoral candidates (beginning group and advanced group) to understand student's cultural knowledge acquired through socialisation patterns. Mendoza (2007:85) finds that the beginning group is more concerned about developing academic competencies.

### **6.3.2 Theme 2: Being in the experience**

The theme "being in the experience" is in essence about the personal and research-related experiences and making critical decisions for completing the voyage. It seems that at this phase the captains were confronted with positive currents which were necessary for completing the voyage. As these experiences unfolded the captains realised that they had a well packaged survival kit that was necessary for an emergency as they *voyage by ocean*. They came to a realisation that it is their responsibility to familiarise themselves with the survival kit and be able to use it. As they perused through the survival kit they found the food "**engaging with the literature**", coastguards "**being cared for through supportive supervisor-student relationships**" and the radio transmitter "**quest for academic socialisation**", discussed as different subthemes below (see Figure 6.3).



**Figure 6.3: Being in the experience**

#### **6.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Engaging with the literature**

Engaging with the literature resembles the food for thought necessary for the voyage. Obtaining this food for thought is a personal responsibility of the captain of the boat. This implies that doctoral candidates need to read in order to enhance their *methodological preparedness*. It appears that engaging with the literature was experienced by the captains as the most important equipment in the survival kit. They opened their respective survival kits and they realised there is a variety of food for thought embedded in the scholarly literature. This is evident in the following quotes:

- *"I had to read ... In terms of research methodology, **what it means it might use the same theory but one had to first remind himself. I did a lot of studies before I registered so that I could convince myself that I know what I am doing and I will be fitting [in]very well when it comes to producing a thesis ... I did a lot of reminding myself and I studied, To me that reading was all about research***

methodology, ***I read a lot of books and I even bought some for example Mouton, it had information that I needed at that time ...***". (Junaid, semi-structured interview).

- ***"The only solution was reading, what one did was looking at your existing articles. I read your master's articles, doctoral articles and research books ... I read and tried to make sense of what I have read and put the methods section in order for now because I might not know what the supervisors will say"***. (Kgomotso, semi-structured interview).
- ***"I never thought of it, I never thought of the methodology that I will use, I was led by the literature"***. (Sphiwo, naïve sketch).
- ***"I found research methodology books very interesting and I use them as a guide and I read research methodology books and what other students have worked on and then I compare with my own research as to what should be done or changed. I also read books on academic writing and they help me a lot" ... "I also read other theses and looked at topics that are similar to my topic and I looked [at] theses from Public Administration just for the style..."***. (Prudence, semi-structured interview).
- ***"Now I know it after having various discussions with my supervisors and I read almost all articles on research methodology in the library before I could grasp it"***. (George, semi-structured interview).
- ***"I have read a lot of articles that were published by people in Public Administration"***. (George, semi-structured interview).
- ***"If you really go to the library read! Read! Read! You can actually gain that independency and most students ... don't have that because the library is there and it's quiet and there are a lot of books in the library but a lot of students don't do that, that is why they rely so much on the supervisors and they are not independent because they don't read ... I read articles that will help me in my study"***. (Sibusiso, semi-structured interview).
- ***"When I perused different scholarly published articles I realised there are several strands of mixed research methods which I did not know. I had to delve deep into these various strands in order to understand the type of mixed***

*methods research which was applicable to my research ... when I studied doctoral dissertations written by other scholars I could see that I still had to learn several things. For instance, I had to also try to understand philosophical positioning of the research I intended to undertake, which is also informed by the choice of methodology*". (Peter, semi-structured interview).

- ***"I went back to well-known authors like Mouton and Creswell [and] I studied them when I drafted my proposal. The start was authors that I knew from my previous studies ... To be honest I also looked at other completed dissertations and I looked at their research methodology chapters and I read it and compared to what I wanted to do. Previous studies also guided me on what I wanted to do ..."*** (Phumi, naïve sketch).
- ***"As part of my studies I read generally about research methods and when I think about my studies as to what methodology I am going to use"***. (Jonathan, semi-structured interview).

The majority of the captains dedicated time to read various books, articles, master's dissertations, doctoral theses and other research that was relevant to their chosen topics to enhance their *methodological preparedness*. It appears that the reading was conducted to *remind oneself* about the various research methods and designs, to determine whether they are on the *right track*, to understand *the parameters*, to *convince themselves*, to *make sense* and be *guided* by previous studies, to *develop confidence* and *independency*. Engaging with the literature that was undertaken by the participants reveals that they needed to take personal responsibility for their own *methodological preparedness*. Their engaging with the literature is in line with Mouton's (2001:87) argument that when master's and doctoral candidates embark on their studies they must first find out what has been done in their field of study. Mouton (2001:87) further argues that "you want to learn from other scholars, how they have theorised and conceptualised on issues, what they have found empirically, what instrumentation they have used and to what effect". Petre and Rugg (2010:68) also confirm that doctoral candidates need to conduct extensive reading in their own and other disciplines to have a "thorough grasp of what it is all about". It seems that the participants read extensively in at least their own

discipline in order to determine which research instruments were used by previous researchers. In that sense they have taken the responsibility to obtain the food for thought necessary for their individual voyages. This is in line with the arguments raised in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.2.2.3) that doctoral students need to possess comprehensive literacy. This implies that as they read they make sense and invent meaning (De Beer 2016:25).

### **6.3.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Being cared for through supportive supervisor-student relationships**

In addition to the food for thought in the survival kit, the captains discovered directions for communicating with their dedicated coastguard for their voyage. The coastguard in this metaphor refers to the supervisors of the candidate's doctoral study. The coastguards provide guidance to the captain throughout the voyage. Seemingly the captains needed to clarify the float plan with the coastguard. It further appears that the coastguards were familiar with the ocean and they were in a position to advise the captains about the feasibility of their float plan as demonstrated in the following quotes:

- *"It is very important to have a good relationship and **the supervisor should be a subject specialist so that he can understand your arguments, you must also be able to convince that person and that person must listen and understand and be open and be able to express your own views.** It is frustrating when you spend so much time on your research proposal and your supervisor keeps on shaping the proposals but **at the end it helps with the structure**". (Junaid, semi-structured interview).*
- *"**Their role should be more of advisory because they are there to guide me where I might be derailing at times as a researcher you get to a point where you feel like you are off track without seeing unless somebody tells you that you are off the trail now come back to the trail so that you head to the directions that you said you are heading to, so that you don't miss a destination so I think that's how I view them as advisors in this process**". (Peter, semi-structured interview).*



- ***“I had discussions with the supervisors on what exactly I wanted to do. We also discussed what could be the appropriate method we can use to achieve what we wanted to achieve. Use supervisors for guidance”.*** (Jonathan, semi-structured interview).
- ***“In my view supervisors can assist students to be methodologically prepared. Remember research is another field ... Surely you need to be introduced by a person who has been part of the group. You can prepare it (research proposal) and get material but if you don’t know in my view you need the supervisors ... my experience with Unisa is that you do most of the things on your own but you keep on knocking [on] your supervisors [door] to say I have read, can we put it together ...”.*** (Kgomotso, semi-structured interview).
- ***“being an administrator we not involved in writing articles compared to academics ... we forget other things like how to do a problem statement ... I feel like during the research proposal module we should be allocated a mentor whether a one on one base or face to face or they can appoint whoever that we can communicate with through e-mail or stuff like that to guide us to say whether we are on the right track or not”.*** (Prudence, semi-structured interview).
- ***“It’s not an easy relationship because your supervisor might have information and deliberately hides it from you and if you can interpret that incorrectly, you can feel like the supervisor is not willing to assist you but in the meantime the supervisor wants you to find it yourself. It’s a delicate relationship between you and the supervisor”.*** (Phumi, naïve sketch).
- ***“I wish my supervisor could have narrowed it and say this is what you need to focus on. I don’t want to know everything about research approaches; you can read books and thousands about different approaches; it’s good if you are an academic to have that background knowledge. You find various books that refer to one at the same thing, so you can focus on so many things or you can narrow it down to qualitative”.*** (George, semi-structured interview).
- ***“I had to take the bull by the horns; really my supervisor helped quite a lot in my master’s level. Now when I registered for my doctoral studies I think I was a little bit at ease with research methodology because of the help that I***

***got from my supervisor at master's level and the module that I did at BTECH level and the reading that I had to do on my own, I think it prepared me really. I would not say I am an expert, I am still struggling even now but on average I can manage".*** (Sibusiso, semi-structured interview).

These quotes demonstrate that the captains expected the supervisors to be subject specialists, experts in research, guides, mentors, advisors and good listeners. It seems that for the supervisors to play such a critical role to safeguard the voyage, a supportive supervisor-student relationship was deemed necessary. It further appears that in this relationship meaningful discussions were required. These attributes identified by these participants are aligned to Clegg and Gall (1998:329-331) argument that the role of the supervisor involves being a navigator, guide, route planner and knowledge experts. In addition to this, Mouton (2001:17) puts it that a supervisor needs to be an advisor and quality controller. A study by Lee (2009:646) in one institution showed that doctoral students wanted help and support from their supervisors. Lessing (2011:922) agrees that supervisors need to advice and support doctoral students when deciding about different aspects of their research. Lee (2009:646) found that doctoral candidates considered subject knowledge and understanding of doctoral requirements to be important. Schulze (2011:790) interviewed 52 students in one college at Unisa and found that the majority of the respondents agreed that their supervisors were knowledgeable in their fields of specialisation, supported them to set clear goals for their research, evaluated their work thoroughly and gave them clear guidelines on how to proceed with their projects.

In contrast to the other captains, Sibusiso has shown that he worked independently in making methodological decisions. The preparation that he received at his master's level assisted him in being more independent at doctoral level. Sibusiso regarded himself as adequately prepared for his doctoral studies. This is in line with Petre and Rugg (2010:2) argument that doctoral candidates need to demonstrate research competences such as the capability of doing independent research. That independency can be achieved when the doctoral candidates engage in the doctoral process (Finn 2005:8). This finding is consistent with the research by Friedrich-Nel and MacKinnon (2015:6) confirming that the

process of preparing the thesis assisted the doctoral candidates to be independent. This is consistent with the deductions made in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.5.3) that being independent is an indication that doctoral candidates are methodologically prepared.

### 6.3.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Quest for academic socialisation

This theme is about the plea from the captains to be given dedicated frequencies when using the radio transmitter. Interventions such as PhD class, forums, mentors or e-mentors, research workshops, platforms for engagement, sessions for conversations and colloquiums were more desired. It seems that the participants even though they were engaged in the voyage they yearned for academic socialisation in the department as evident in the following quotes:

- “... However it could have been easier for me if there was **a way of joining a class to prepare us for the next level ...**”. (Junaid, semi-structured interview).
- “... I wish I could have received a lecture to say **this is research methodology ...**, this is how you do it ..., **just refreshing so that you get there fully geared, it’s a struggle to do it**”. (Junaid, semi-structured interview).
- “You need to mentor students rather than to come with strategies to reduce numbers. **Student’s waste time doing things what they are not supposed to do, so in that case you need a mentor to guide you**”. (Kgomotso, naïve sketch).
- “**Conducting a workshop** like what they do ... we attend a lot of research workshops qualitative and quantitative and all those ... **taking the students through to tell them what you mean by research design, what you mean by research methodology before they start with their study**”. (Sphiwo, naïve sketch).
- “... being an administrator we [are] not involved in writing articles ... **I feel like during the research proposal module we should be allocated a mentor whether a one-on-one base or face-to-face or they can appoint whoever that we can communicate through e-mail or stuff like that to guide us to say whether we are on the right track or not**”. (Prudence, semi-structured interview).

- ***“I think most of us when we register we were not prepared methodologically. I think immediately after we register we need a workshop that will help us to recap on what we have already done and what we know”.*** (Prudence, semi-structured interview).
- ***“They must have a conversation, sit with you and ask what is that you want to investigate and why and what is your intention. I think students at doctoral level ... need those in-depth conversations ...”.*** (George, semi-structured interview).
- ***“But now you see it’s very much important to create the platforms like orientation week and the sessions that we have. In a year bring them again maybe in June or August”.*** (Sibusiso, semi-structured interview).
- ***“... to have colloquiums particularly on research methodology because I have not heard and I haven’t seen research colloquiums where they will say there is one on research, various research methods and techniques so such workshops can help”.*** (Peter, semi-structured interview).
- ***“... they can attend a session that is prepared so that doctoral students can come forward to present ... what they want to research ... and not only that, but also the methods which they want to utilise so that they can establish whether they are methodologically prepared...”.*** (Peter, semi-structured interview).
- ***“... during that orientation week we had topics on research methods and design ... those presentations were helpful”.*** (Phumi, naïve sketch).
- ***“... maybe in the beginning, once they enrol for the proposal module, we invite them and assist them with how to go about and provide guidelines before they start writing their research proposals. It helps a lot ...”.*** (Jonathan, semi-structured interview).

As is evident from the above quotes the captains yearned for academic socialisation in the form of research interventions such as workshops, colloquiums and seminars. It appears that the captains believed that their *methodological preparedness* could be enhanced through academic socialisation. This finding is supported by Andrea’s

(2002:53) recommendation that doctoral programmes should be more structured, supportive and guiding to doctoral students. For example, Schulze (2011:799) found that students at one college at Unisa yearned for research workshops that will assist them with the research design and analysis. Similarly Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012:210) found that the doctoral candidates that they interviewed appreciated the course that was offered prior to the dissertation because it assisted them in completing their degrees. The course included “programmes with rigorous research and writing courses which prepared them for the challenges associated with the dissertation” (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw 2012:210). It seems that this could be achieved through academic socialisation. In instances where socialisation is encouraged, doctoral students feel valued and they gain a better understanding of their role in the department and manage to develop stronger relationships with their advisors (Mendoza 2007:85).

In contrast to this, Stubb, Pyhältö and Lonka (2011:33) explored doctoral students’ experiences of their scholarly communities. They found that the majority of the doctoral candidates experienced the scholarly community to be a burden. They perceived the scholarly community did not consider them to be valuable, even though they were doing all the hard work alone. They also experienced a sense of insufficient support in learning and doing research (Stubb et al. 2011:40).

### **6.3.3 Theme 3: Stormy waters**

This theme is about the challenges that the captains experienced as they voyage *by the ocean*. It seems that the captains were shaken by the reality that they were not methodologically prepared. Seemingly they were determined to persevere despite the stormy waters. Two subthemes emerged from this theme: methodological challenges and shortcomings in the formal methodological preparation (see Figure 6.4).



Figure 6.4: Stormy waters

#### 6.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Methodological challenges

The captains experienced research-related and personal challenges in terms of their own *methodological preparedness*. This is the point where they admitted that they had their own methodological challenges, hence they yearned for academic socialisation. These methodological challenges that they experienced are evident in the following quotes:

- “... **even when I went to register I still had questions.** You can have a concept on research but **how are you going to do it and when you read alone it does not give you confidence that you understand it.** There is no one to relate your questions and clarify them. You go there with all the confusion”. (Junaid, semi-structured interview).
- “**To be honest I was not prepared ... I must say the supervisor and the joint supervisor somehow paved a way in terms of preparing you [regarding] the methods ... even now I am still not prepared. I still ask myself: how do I unpack the whole thing?**” (Kgomotso, semi-structured interview).

- ***“Honestly I was not prepared, I never thought of the research methodology; I just focused on the problem and I dwell on the literature on the problem. I thought of the research methodology at the proposal stage when I reached the section for research methodology, I decided to read the literature. I started on the literature on research methodology and research design”. (Sphiwo, naïve sketch).***
- ***“I would say I was not that much prepared since I am currently busy with my research proposal. Another thing is that I expected that after my registration I will be allocated somebody from the department to guide me. Unfortunately I was on my own. I was not sure whether what I am doing is the right thing and when I enquired from the department they said they don’t have much capacity”. (Prudence, semi-structured interview).***
- ***“... in your PhD everything is based on your research design and research methods, that’s why, when I started with ethical clearance, they bombarded me with so many concepts, I was completely lost, I didn’t understand it ... To answer your question; because I am not an academic I don’t understand research designs and research methods, I struggled in the first year to try and figure out what is the difference research designs, methodologies, validity, questionnaires based on quantitative [research] I was stuck there. I didn’t know how to put all that into this and run with it”. (George, semi-structured interview).***
- ***“When I thought of the methodology, I will always think of the questionnaires as [a] data collection technique for quantitative and interviews for qualitative methodology but it wasn’t much that I knew; in fact I could always say that I was ill-prepared in a way for my doctoral studies, I didn’t know much but I needed to learn more in order to understand which actually [a] philosophical paradigm underlie the mixed methods because at the same time when I was doing literature review, I also noticed that there are these paradigms or philosophical positions like the positivists, post-positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism”. (Peter, semi-structured interview).***
- ***“The whole process to get from where it starts to an academic or scientific document that process is very difficult ... I knew what I had to do and I knew***

*what is required even though it was very limited ... even within that limitation it was not easy to do it ... How to write that section, and to state the reasons why you selected it, in a way academic writing was not easy.”* (Phumi, naïve sketch).

- ***“It’s a bit of struggle because now I need to understand my main research question to be able to find the appropriate method. At the time I was struggling to conceptualise so it was difficult to link it to an appropriate method”.*** (Jonathan, semi-structured interview).

These quotes demonstrate that the captains had limited knowledge and lacked an understanding of research methods. Most of the captains shared that they were not prepared methodologically. Consequently they were uncertain, confused, completely lost, stuck and found it difficult for them to unpack their research projects. This is consistent with the findings by Olehnovica, Bolgzda and Kravale-Paulina (2015:3563) that doctoral students’ poor understanding of research methodology resulted in them having a lack of confidence to make appropriate methodological decisions uncertain about the choice of research methods. This is similar to the finding by Andrea (2002:51) that doctoral candidates found it difficult to make methodological decisions due to inadequate preparation. Their inadequate preparation has shown to be related to their limited experience in conducting research. This is confirmed by Meerah’s (2010:184) finding that the majority of the doctoral candidates had no experience in doing research prior to their enrolment and had already forgotten what they learned at master’s level.

#### **6.3.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Shortcomings in the formal curricular methodological preparation**

This subtheme is about the reflections of the captains about the methodological preparation that they received in the previous qualifications. The captains recalled that the previous formal curricular methodological preparation failed to adequately prepare them as demonstrated in the following quotes:



- “You have relaxed in your BTECH research methodology module. **That module needs to be revisited. When I did my BTECH research, for me it was like communication, that is why people scored distinctions but it means nothing.** Students just memorise a statement, come and do the real stuff they can’t”. (Kgomotso, semi-structured interview).
- “... the **BTECH research methodology was a monster, I don’t want to lie, it was like a monster, I don’t know how I passed it.**” (S’phiwo, naïve sketch).
- “... in my honours level research methodology module **did not adequately prepare me.** I have done a research paper at honours level, it helps you to tell you what is qualitative and quantitative, but they struggled with the last few pages on the mixed modes and they just added general things. **But it’s far from being adequate**”. (George, semi-structured interview).
- “Well I never did a research methodology module at undergraduate level and I just educated myself about the research methods through reading in order to understand. **Even at honours level I didn’t do any research methodology module whatsoever. I just put it upon myself to read more ... to understand these research methods**”. (Peter, semi-structured interview).
- “But if I were to go back to my masters and undergraduate experiences **I can say that I was never adequately methodologically prepared. It has been a struggle because I was only introduced to research methodology at honours level.** For my master’s study I was only exposed to case study method and quantitative design. I strongly feel that exposure to research methodology on undergraduate level would have made a major difference to my preparedness as a doctoral candidate”. (Jonathan, semi-structured interview).
- “... this is something I don’t know how to put it but we as students are very afraid of methodology! Research methodology! Methodology! **We think this is something that is very difficult you know, if I studied it at second year of university it could have been better but you know, ... I started it at BTECH level.** It was quite late but the module itself was simple enough to understand that is why I passed quite comfortably and it prepared me to really do my master’s”. (Sibusiso, semi-structured interview).

- “Yes unfortunately I did the course work and course work is different from pure research ... the lecturer there used a different style when we were doing the research methodology. We were doing the practical part and theory. When we were at that part of theory we would do it practically in our research proposal. **Like when we were doing a problem statement, we were doing it parallel to our research proposal. Maybe that is why it was so easy for us and we managed to do it**”. (Prudence, semi-structured interview).

With the exception of Sibusiso and Prudence, the majority of the captains experienced a sense of discomfort about the formal curricular methodological preparation. Their experiences were multi-faceted because the majority of them felt it failed to prepare them, while a minority group felt it adequately prepared them. This finding is in line with the arguments provided in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.3.3.2). It further supports the finding by Keenan and Fontaine (2012:229) that students at the Geography department got frustrated when they had to write the parts of their research design based on reading study material and from lectures without a practical component.

In contrast to the other captains, Sibusiso and Prudence shared that the research methodology module prepared them. Sibusiso in particular seemed to be more methodologically prepared and ready to persevere until the completion of the journey. This finding is echoed by Spronken-Smith (2005:218) where they implemented the problem-based learning approach in the third year geography research methods module. The students appreciated this approach because it prepared them in research methods and other transferrable skills. Ball and Pelco (2006:147–154) implemented an active learning approach in the third year research methods psychology module. At the end of the semester they found that the majority of those students felt that they were adequately prepared for future research. In a later study, Shaw, Holbrook and Bourke (2013:725) investigated the experience of honours students in a variety of honours programmes in Australia; they came to a conclusion that the students felt more research prepared and ready to continue into higher degrees.

#### 6.3.4 Theme 4: Reaching the destination

As the subtheme “reaching the destination” resembles the graduation, these captains have not reached the desired destination. It appears that they were in different stages of the voyage. One subtheme emerged from this theme: working towards completing the doctoral study (see Figure 6.5).

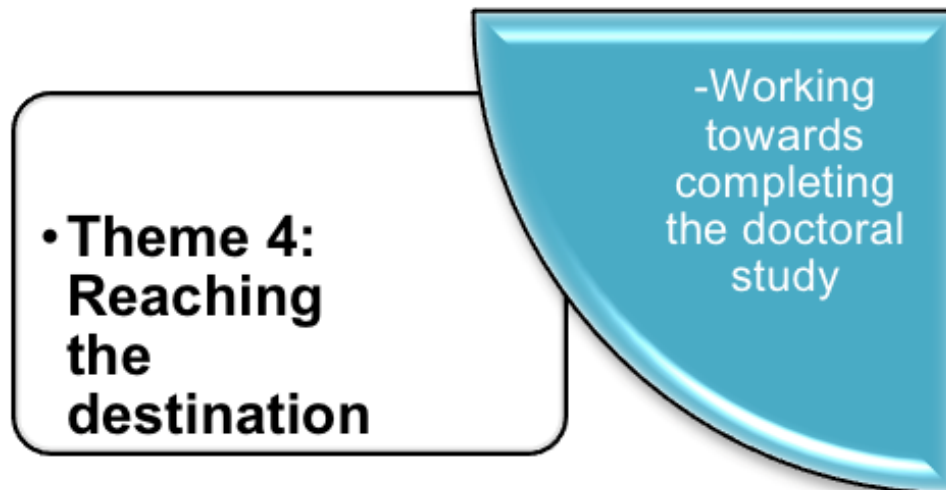


Figure 6.5: Reaching the destination

##### 6.3.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Working towards completing the doctoral study

It appears that the captains are determined to reach the destination because they are still working towards completing the doctoral study. Seemingly they are self-motivated. This is evident because they used expressions such as “to push the doctorate”, still learning, I had to do this research proposal, I want to complete, I have to finish and I want to do it”. This motivation is evident in the following quotes:

- “Currently here I am in sabbatical leave **to push the doctorate**; I work at XXX under monitoring and evaluation”. (Sphiwo, semi-structured interview).

- *“Moving to doctorate was quite a big leap but **I am still learning** and I think as I progress with my studies I will learn more”.* (Sibusiso, semi-structured interview).
- *“**I am on my own and I have to do this research proposal module** on my own and I hope the department will allocate someone ... to check the correctness but now there is light”.* (Prudence, semi-structured interviews).
- *“... **I want to complete my studies** with a doctoral degree”.* (Phumi, semi-structured interviews).
- *“**For my doctoral** what I have come to adopt from other fields like law and labour relations which happens to be in the HR department or the field of law...”.* (Peter, semi-structured interview).
- *“... Although **I had a plan that this specific year I have to finish** but it’s difficult”.* (Kgomotso, semi-structured interviews).
- *“... **I want to do it from the bottom of my heart** and I am prepared to do it...”.* (Jonathan, semi-structured interviews).
- *“Just a bit curious because **I myself as a doctoral student** have challenges or questions...”.* (George, semi-structured interviews).

These captain’s experiences reveal that they are self-motivated regardless of stage of the doctoral study. The quotes further reveal that these captains are at different phases because others are still busy with the research proposal. This finding is supported by Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012:201) who argue that doctoral candidates who are motivated persist in their doctoral studies. In addition, Lovitts (2005:148) also attest that self-motivated doctoral are enthusiastic about their studies.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the findings of the lived experiences of the doctoral candidates who were registered at the time of the interviews using a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach. The objective of this chapter was to make sense of the experiences of the doctoral candidates as they experienced the phenomenon *methodological preparedness*.

Methodological preparedness for these participants meant being able to make independent methodological decisions while engaged in the doctoral study. These participants were filled with positive emotional experiences when they commenced the voyage. These findings revealed that these group of participants were conscious that they needed to engage with the literature. Similar to the previous group they did not mention the importance of comprehensive literacy. Moreover they also did not mention the importance of their own personal resourcefulness such as being competent and independent. They however mentioned the importance of the supervisor-student relationship. Similar to the previous group it seem that the relationship is seen as one of the critical success factors in the doctoral journey. The research-related contextual conditions are regarded as important because the participants also highlighted the importance of academic socialisation. For this specific group, methodological preparedness implies thriving until they reach the desired destination. Unlike the previous group, I have also learnt that this specific group is able to manage the research-related contextual conditions while persevering to reaching the destination.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES WHO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THEIR DOCTORAL DEGREES**

*“Interpretation is thus envisaged as a dynamic process, an interplay between the researcher and the object of interpretation” (Shinebourne 2011:47)*

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Similar to Chapters 5 and 6, this chapter continues with the discussion of the research findings and literature control. Unlike the other two chapters, this chapter focuses on the experiences of doctoral candidates who successfully completed their doctoral degrees. The same process of analysis as for the others is used in this group of participants. The *voyage by ocean* metaphor also applies to this group of participants, although their central storyline might differ from the others. However the themes remain the same from “commencing the voyage”, “being in the experience”, “stormy waters” and “reaching the destination”. In comparison to Chapters 5 and 6, the same pattern is used to present the chapter, by firstly providing the background information about the captains. Secondly, the themes are identified and discussed as supported by direct verbatim quotes from the information shared by the participants and from the naïve sketches. A conclusion is provided to conclude this chapter.

#### **7.2 BRIEF BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

Eight doctoral candidates who successfully completed their doctoral degrees were interviewed in 2015. As already alluded to in the two previous chapters, interviews were conducted at a preferred meeting point chosen by the participants. Similar to the other two groups, research-selected pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. The brief background information of the participants reflects their occupation, reasons for enrolment and their status of *methodological preparedness* at the time of enrolment.

Evidence of the reasons for their enrolment and their status of *methodological preparedness* at the time of enrolment are provided in Sections 7.3.1.1 and 7.3.1.2 by means of verbatim quotes.

- **Rejoice**

At the time of the interview, Rejoice worked as senior academic in an academic institution. She said she enrolled because she always wanted to do a doctoral degree. In addition, a doctoral degree is a requirement for promotion in academia.

- **Bongani**

Bongani was a senior academic at the time of the interview. His reason for enrolment was that he wanted to create knowledge and add to the number of people who possess doctoral degrees. Similar to Rejoice, a doctorate is a requirement for promotion at Bongane's academic institution.

- **Sifiso**

At the time of the interview, Sifiso was also a senior academic in an academic institution. He enrolled for his doctoral degree because he wanted to attain this highest qualification. Moreover, this qualification was a requirement for promotion.

- **Charles**

Charles occupied a senior position in a government department at the time of the interview. He said he enrolled for his doctorate because he wanted to be an academic in the future. At the government department where he worked, a doctoral degree was not a requirement for promotion.

- **Isaac**

Isaac was a senior academic at the time of the interview. He said he enrolled because it was an institutional requirement to further his studies up to doctoral level. Isaac further shared that the doctoral degree was necessary for his career development.

- **Lethabo**

At the time of the interview, Lethabo was a senior academic in an academic environment. He said he enrolled for his doctoral degree because he was passionate about being a doctoral student and he wanted to finish it. Furthermore, a doctoral degree was a requirement for promotion at his academic institution.

- **Pretty**

Pretty occupied a senior academic position in an academic environment at the time of the interview. She enrolled because she thought it was going to be easy; seemingly she was shaken by the university system where she was enrolled. In addition, a doctoral degree was a requirement for promotion at her institution.

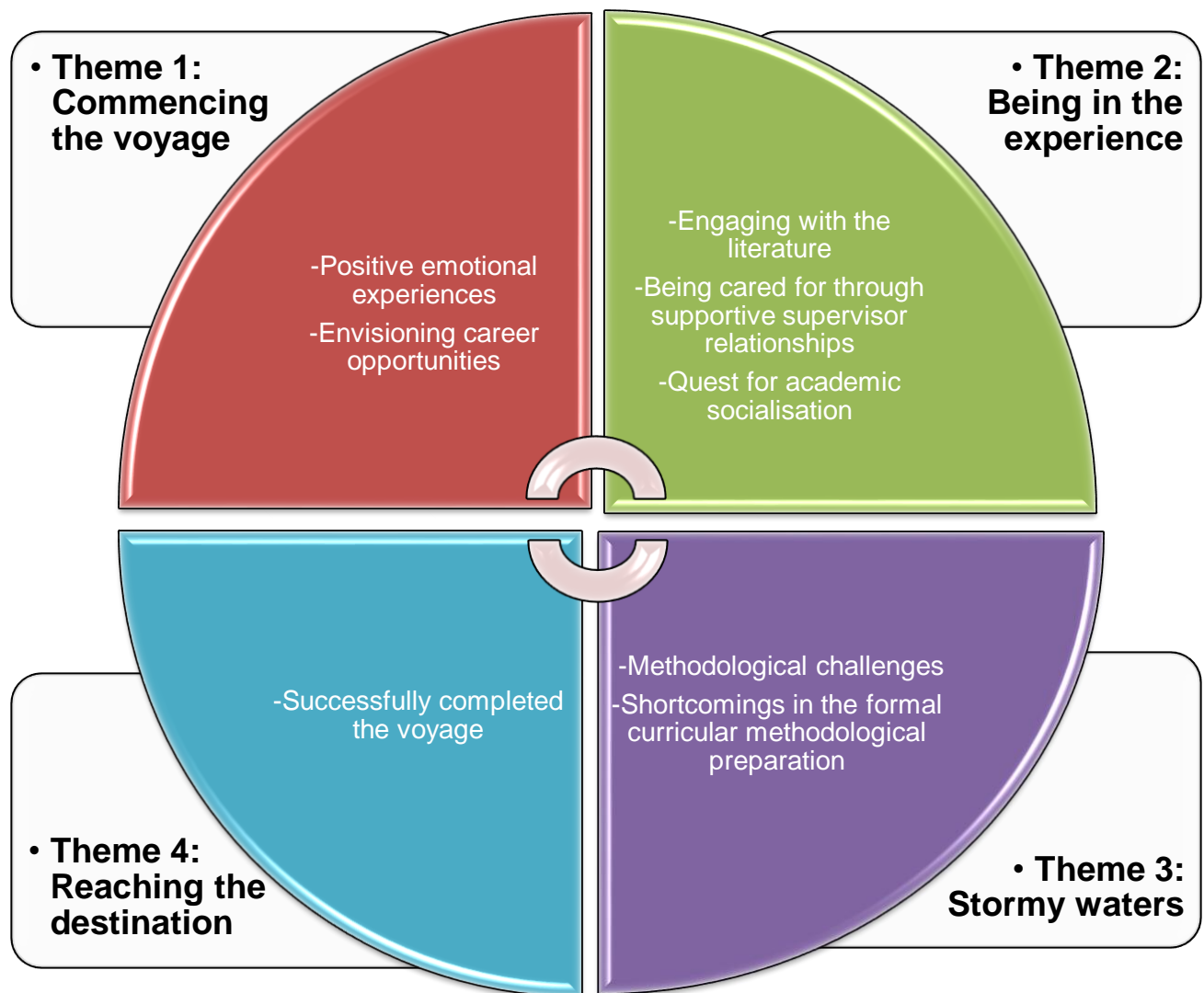
- **Justice**

At the time of the interview, Justice occupied a senior position in a government department. His reason enrolment was that the doctoral degree linked to his master's degree.

### **7.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

A similar pattern used in Chapters 5 and 6 is also used in this chapter. Each theme is presented by starting with a description of it, followed by verbatim quotes, in *italic font*, that support the description. Finally, a literature control is conducted to re-contextualise the findings to existing scholarly literature (Morse & Field 1995:130) to demonstrate the usefulness and implications of the findings. Similar to the other chapters, four themes were identified as captured in Figure 7.1.





**Figure 7:1: Overview: Experiences of participants who successfully completed**

### 7.3.1 Theme 1: Commencing the voyage

This theme is about the initial feelings of the captains at the time of departing from the harbour. As they moved away from the shoreline they experienced positive emotions and envisioned the anticipated career opportunities. From this theme two subthemes emerged positive emotive experiences and envisioning career opportunities (see Figure 7.2).

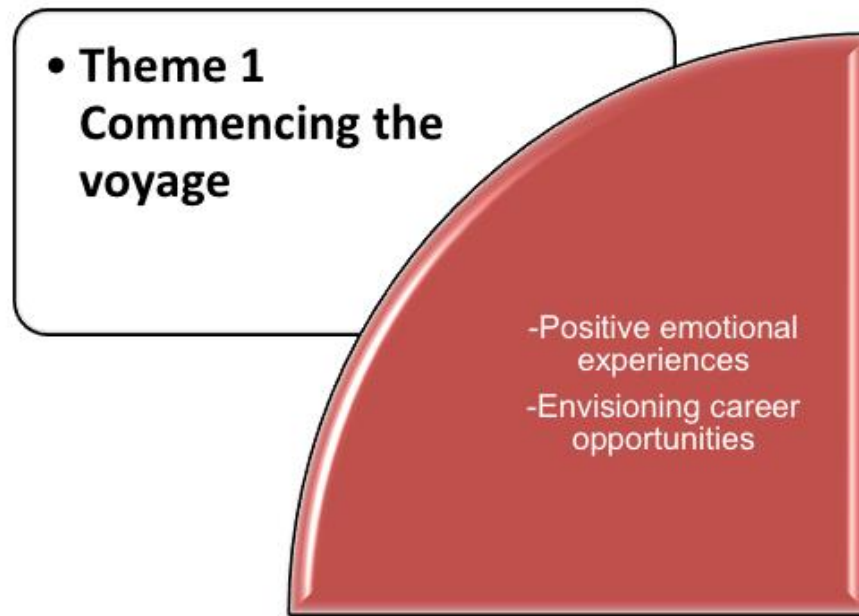


Figure 7.2: Commencing the voyage

#### 7.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Positive emotional experiences

Positive emotional experiences are in essence about the feelings of excitement regarding the captains' enrolment. Seemingly their enrolment meant an achievement. This is evident in the following quotes:

- *"I was **excited** because I always knew this is what I wanted to do. Even when I started my university at first year I **always knew this is what I wanted to do in the end**. I was **excited** to actually get to that point".* (Rejoice, semi-structured interview).
- *"For me **it was very exciting** because very few black people in the field on Public Administration and Management want to pursue a PhD. I **wanted to add to the scholarship** and the number of people who possess a PhD".* (Bongani, semi-structured interview).
- *"It is **both exciting and nice**, you are **excited that you are admitted** to a doctoral programme but on the other side you ask yourself do you really have what it takes. On the other hand with your peers and community you feel if I can finish this*

*qualification I will be there. [It] is an achievement that I can record at a personal level". (Sifiso, semi-structured interview).*

- *"When I enrolled for my doctorate I was **prepared for the challenge of being committed to work hard and earn the academic qualification**. I had consulted beforehand with the academic department and had sorted out my questions and plans for the topic I had in mind ...". (Justice, semi-structured interview).*
- *"... I thought it will be easier. I think I had a lot of assumptions, because with my master's, I didn't struggle at all. It was with my master's I knew exactly where I was going, what I wanted to achieve ...". (Pretty, semi-structured interview).*

With the exception of Pretty, the majority of the captains were optimistic about their enrolment as they believed they will reach a desired destination. This is consistent with the finding by Anderson and Swazey (1998:10) that doctoral candidates are more optimistic about completing their degrees. Related to this finding, Harmann (2002:484) found that a majority of the doctoral students were optimistic about their career prospects. Similarly González (2006:356) finds that the doctoral candidates reported positive experiences which assisted them in developing early confidence in their abilities.

#### **7.3.1.2 Subtheme 2.2: Envisioning career opportunities**

This theme is about the captains' reflections about their anticipated careers. It seems that reaching the destination was an institutional requirement for the majority of these captains since they were academics at the time of the interview. Their reflections are evident in the following quotes:

- *"When I enrolled I was **an academic and it is required from me to have a PhD**. If you want to create new knowledge, there is no way that you can create new knowledge ... You need to pursue your studies and learn more tricks and learn more aspects of research. The only way ... to go through the journey of the PhD". (Bongani, naïve sketch).*

- *“It is **an excitement you really look forward to a new phase in your career**, in your studies you really want to take the world and bull by its horn. You are both excited as well as thinking what am I really doing here because there are many people that have been involved in their studies at doctoral level and they have not completed”. (Sifiso, naïve sketch).*
- *“... eventually **one wants to be an academic so I had that and I still have it**”. (Charles, semi-structured interview).*
- *“I was at the university at the time, I was at X university. I have been a lecturer for about 15 years. I was about 31/32 years old ... to get to the next level **I needed to do the doctorate**. The university at the time was very strict and the next logical step was a doctorate ... **It was a necessary step in my career ...**”. (Isaac, semi-structured interview).*
- *“I think it was scary; at the same time quite interesting. You venture into the highest level. One was curious to have a sense of what it takes. Anxious and a sense of anxiety, one was scared, and looking forward to have an experience of what is it like to be at that level ... At the same time what was critically important for me was the passion of being a doctoral student and **ensure that you finish your journey and you know it is the highest level in terms of academic levels and one always aspires** and you are genuine as a doctoral student”. (Lethabo, semi-structured interview).*

These quotes reveal that the majority of the captains were determined to complete their doctoral journey as it was an institutional requirement. By completing the journey they were going to enjoy the anticipated career opportunities in academia. This finding is similar to Baker and Lattuca (2010:807) argument that a doctoral degree is a requirement for most academic posts. When identifying some purposes of a traditional doctoral degree, Green and Powell (2005:49) agree that it trains individuals for academic careers. In addition, Aslanbeigui and Montecinos (1998:175) see a doctoral degree as a stepping stone to a future career and getting a job in academia. This finding is also in line with the outcomes of a traditional doctorate as discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3.1), namely to train individuals for academic careers (Council of Higher Education 2013:36).

### 7.3.2 Theme 2: Being in the experience

Being in the experience is concerned about the personal and research-related experiences. The captains were confronted by positive currents which enhanced their *methodological preparedness*. They ensured that they had a well packaged survival kit with the food for thought “**engaging with the literature**”, coastguards “**supportive supervisor-student relationships**” and radio transmitter “**the quest for academic socialisation**” (see Figure 7.3).



**Figure 7.3: Being in the experience**

#### 7.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Engaging with the literature review

This theme is concerned about the food for thought that the captains found in the survival kit. The food for thought was necessary to sustain them and strengthen them in their respective voyages. Seemingly the food for thought was taken by reading relevant scholarly literature as indicated in the following quotes:

- *“I took a year in between the master’s and when I enrolled for the PhD, I took a year to read and in that year I had already started working on my research proposal. I took research books from Prof Mouton, on how to succeed on your masters and from Prof X on research ... during that year when I registered I had already worked on my research proposal. I got it fine-tuned and decided on what I wanted to do ...”.* (Rejoice, semi-structured interview).
- *“The thing is reading a lot of research methodology textbooks and asking questions to those who have already completed their PhD because if one looks at the success rate of people who have enrolled for the PhD, most of the people or candidates do drop out along the way... I relied more on my reading and self-study. I read a lot of research methodology books before I could put a pen to paper and I consulted the library...”.* (Bongani, semi-structured interview).
- *“... this takes a lot of reading; you need to spend so many hours in the library searching through what other people have done investigating a similar research problem. A doctoral study is intimidating, not for wrong reasons but for good ones, because at the end of the day you must become an authority in your field of study”.* (Sifiso, semi-structured interview).
- *“... I read methodology books. I read a book by Mouton which shows how to successfully complete your master’s and doctoral studies ... also one by Newman on research methods”.* (Charles, semi-structured interview).
- *“... perhaps [in] 2005 I spent time reading in the area, the literature review ... I only started thinking about research designs two or three years in my study, so I had a lot of reading ... I decided on quantitative design. I read like all do Mouton and other ... research and for me it made sense to go through the route of a survey, collecting data, analysing and interpreting the data, for some reason it drew my interest and I started to be interested ...”.* (Isaac, semi-structured interview).
- *“... It took a lot of reading, reading theoretical and philosophical stuff, trying to read as much as I can research methodology books ... I had to prepare myself when I was a doctoral candidate ... Reading, reading, reading and*

*reading ... I had to make sure that I read as much literature as I can, specifically on research methodology. Particularly a discourse on research methodology as it relates to the discipline, **there is no short cut, you read and interrogate what people are saying and what I picked up also is that other disciplines are more advanced ...***. (Lethabo, semi-structured interview).

- ***“I started reading research methodology books especially Mouton ... So ironically in most of the literature that I read they have used other methodologies, but I think it was more suitable due to the lack of available literature ... I still say Johann Mouton because I would read and remember ... For the second year research methodology module I did read a lot of research methodology books. I think I knew a bit more research of designs but ... I think I only truly started to grasp it with Mouton’s way of doing it because it is simple”.*** (Pretty, semi-structured interview).
- ***“In fact I was advised by my supervisors to check what the literature says and if there is any shortcoming in the literature, my doctorate was aimed at practice ... The literature played an important role. I spent about 6 months busy with literature review, obtaining information as to what the literature says ... I got literature from both sides. I played ... a middle path to combine these thoughts and statements made by these authors. Literature played a cardinal role, it laid a foundation”.*** (Justice, semi-structured interview).

The majority of the captains devoted time to read research methodology books in order to fine tune their research, see how others have done it, prepare for the doctoral journey and understand the various research methods and designs. This finding lends support to the argument by Aveyard (2014:4–6) that the literature review provides “insights, summarises available literature on a topic and keeps one up to date with recent development and research”. In addition to this, Garrard (2013:4) argues that a literature review focuses on hypotheses, scientific methods, results, strengths and weaknesses of the study, authors’ interpretations and conclusions. Machi and McEvoy (2016:4) argue that advanced master’s and doctoral students need to conduct a complex literature review in order to explain and argue about knowledge which leads to original research.

### 7.3.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Being cared for through supportive supervisor-student relationships

In addition to the literature review that was found in the survival kit, it appears that the supervisor-student relationship played a major role in preparing the captains methodologically. These participants viewed the supervisors as knowledge experts as evident in the following quotes:

- *“I think **the supervisors did prepare me**, because for example in my research initially I did not intend to do follow-up interviews. That was what **they suggested I needed to do to complement the questionnaire**”. (Charles, semi-structured interview).*
- *“Another thing was that **we had regular meetings, we had regular meetings where we were not necessarily looking at what was written there but we had discussions**, from the discussions that we had I received mentorship from the two guys. **Another advantage I had was that we were at the same corridors with my supervisors. Anytime** I was struggling or felt like asking a question, ... able to ask questions. That is why I was mentored”. (Bongani, semi-structured interview).*
- *“**I presented my draft proposal to my supervisors** and discussed the kind of approach that I think it will be the most appropriate. Fortunately one of my supervisors come from a very strong background of ... **so one came from qualitative and it was easy to gel the topic and that is the beauty of having two supervisors who come from different worlds**”. (Bongani, semi-structured interview).*
- *“My supervisors played **a role in pinpointing things that I needed to do and if they spoke about the research design I had to go back and read**. Two/three years into my study I was prompted by my supervisors to go and read about the various research designs which I think is a good sequence because you know some students who have done the research design before the literature review. **In my case I spent two to three years reading, which helped a lot. I got to know**”*



... a lot on international searches which gave me so much insight in ... specifically in research design ... as to how do you investigate and collect data on ... is difficult, its illicit and illegal also ... **My supervisors provided me with some guidance**". (Isaac, semi-structured interview).

- "I think of her and I had a male and female and **she is the strongest methodologically so we will literally sit, because she realised I was not**. Apart from understanding the concepts **we will spend nights working on the concepts in terms of what it means to me and my studies. She will take nights as well to teach me methodology** and she will say: No no no listen!!!! And I think she really assisted me in terms of that but not the department. I don't think all students got that unless they were with her". (Pretty, semi-structured interview).
- "Those two supervisors were senior ... **I had sessions with them to sort out this methodology and I explained to them what I wanted to get out and they assisted me in panel-beating and editing**. The pre-discussion to get everything so focused ... that is what I sort with my supervisors. **I must say my supervisors assisted me to get that clear**". (Justice, semi-structured interview).
- "If you have a good relationship ... my supervisor was really **patient and very nice. If I had a problem he can always be there**. That helps because you do not feel embarrassed to ask **and say I do not know**". (Rejoice, semi-structured interview).

These quotes reveal that the captains perceived the supervisors as knowledge experts who were capable of guiding them in terms of their research designs and methods. It further appears that methodological discussions were prevalent amongst the doctoral candidates and the supervisors. This is in line with De Valero's (2001:356) finding that the majority of the doctoral candidates agreed that supervisor-student relationships enhanced time to degree completion. Moreover these findings seem to support the argument of Gardner and Holley (2011:86) that the support from faculty, peers and mentors enhance student persistence. Similarly, Liechty et al. (2009:487) agree that the relationship with the supervisor is a strong predictor of completing the doctoral study. Felder (2010:469) interviewed doctoral candidates who successfully completed their

studies and found that these candidates responded positively to the mentorship that supported their research focus. This is further consistent with the arguments provided in Chapters 5 and 6 on the importance of the supervisor-student relationship (see Sections 5.3.3.2 & 6.3.2.2).

### 7.3.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Quest for academic socialisation

The quest for academic socialisation is about the reflections of the captains about what can be done to enhance *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates. Seemingly the captains recommended some research interventions as evident in the following quotes:

- “... **if students know that they have to stand in front of people and defend what they want to do they will be prepared.** If I know that I have to send you for example 10 pages, I know paper is patient, it is an easier option, but **if I have to stand there presenting my topic, my methodology, my literature review, my questions, my aims and my objectives, then I will have to be prepared.** You will know you will be prepared because you know there will be five professors sitting there and they are going to tell me I am not prepared, that will be beneficial ...”. (Rejoice, semi-structured interview).
- “... after having conducted the first workshop let’s give students an opportunity to write their drafts before they even complete; **step by step let us invite them again to the workshop where they are going to present to all the supervisors who are there ... a holistic feedback,** that will also give them confidence that now I am not alone in there. **The step-by-step process will help a lot ...**”. (Bongani, semi-structured interview).
- “... once students meet the admission criteria and they apply to study for a doctoral degree, **a workshop on methodology and research proposal could serve to support their most basic needs ...**”. (Sifiso, semi-structured interview).

- *“Presentations can work also because in the University of X they present their research proposal and the panel will show you the weaknesses ...”. (Charles, semi-structured interview).*
- *“I would think when they register the first year they do the research proposal, perhaps after it has been accepted, there must be given a year to read, second year the literature review and **after that they make it obligatory to present ... They can come present their design; it must be open and critical ...**”. (Isaac, semi-structured interview).*
- *“... I attended so many conferences as part of choosing ... I started focusing on that, the conferences that I attended were on that topic ... I remember I spent some time drawing up a question and I took that question to one conference in Europe and I presented it in a workshop”. (Isaac, semi-structured interview).*
- *“... A candidate must be able to face a panel of professors, to defend your thesis and adequately answer questions about your thesis and you must convince them that this is new and it adds to [the] existing body of knowledge to this extent. That panel can also have a sense that this person is adequate and therefore he/she has been conferred with a doctoral status ...”. (Lethabo, semi-structured interview).*
- *“I would have liked courses, so obviously way back the discussion classes that could have helped or Saturday morning sessions and I know that will be terrible because that will mean that the lecturers have to come in ... to accommodate students all over the world, like satellite or video broadcasting. I think things are in place to reach distant students ... So now everyone in the department knows the topics that the students are working on so people are sharing more something like...”. (Pretty, semi-structured interview).*
- *“That type of consultation is before they are registered; the department should have or allow for short interviews with students in that time of planning. If the department deems it necessary, at proposal stage there should be discussion and consultation so that their methodology can be clear. You can still improve, but at proposal stage it should be very clear”. (Justice, semi-structured interview).*

The majority of the captains deemed academic socialisation as necessary for methodological preparation. The information shared by the captains further reveal that research interventions such as research workshops, research methods courses and affording candidates an opportunity to present their research appeared to be important. The *Business Dictionary* (2017: online) define “socialisation” as a by which individuals acquire the knowledge, language, and to conform to the norms and for into a group or community. It is a combination of both self-imposed (because the wants to conform) and externally-imposed rules, and the expectations of the others”. This finding is in line with Leonard and Becker’s (2009) argument that creating peer support groups and developing academic networks ensure success and support beyond the supervisor. Similarly, De Valero (2001:356) found that providing an orientation programme enhances student’s success. In contrast, Austin (2002:104) views lack of systematic professional development opportunities, minimal feedback and lack of mentoring as obstacles towards student’s success. Where socialisation is promoted students are more motivated to persist in their doctoral journey. In relation to this, Anderson and Swazey (1998:7) find that the doctoral candidates felt they were cared for and were treated with respect and faculty were accessible and collaborated with them on publications. In addition, Hunter, Laursen and Seymour (2005:36) find that doctoral students in one university in the USA felt that through socialisation they benefitted more in becoming scientists.

It seems that being part of a scholarly community was deemed important. For example, Isaac used scholarly communities for engagement in order to understand various aspects in their research projects. Pyhältö, Nummenmaa, Soini, Stubb and Lonka (2012:339) define a scholarly community as “a community of university based scholars sharing academic traditions and conventions”. It appears that a minority of the participants engaged the members of a scholarly community while the majority of the participants yearned for such engagements. This finding is consistent with the finding by Pyhältö et al. (2009:227) that the majority of doctoral students majoring in medicine, arts and psychology perceived themselves as members of scholarly community while the doctoral students majoring in Education felt that they were outsiders. This finding is further similar to Baker and Lattuca’s (2010:809) argument that for doctoral students to build knowledge

and acquire skills for scholarship they need to participate in the intellectual community in their respective fields. The interactions with the scholarly community result in learning (Baker & Lattuca 2010:810).

#### 7.3.2.4 Subtheme 2.4: Methodological readiness

This subtheme is about how the captains perceived their *methodological preparedness* at the time of enrolment. Some of the captains were confident that they were better prepared to commence the voyage as aptly put in the following quotes:

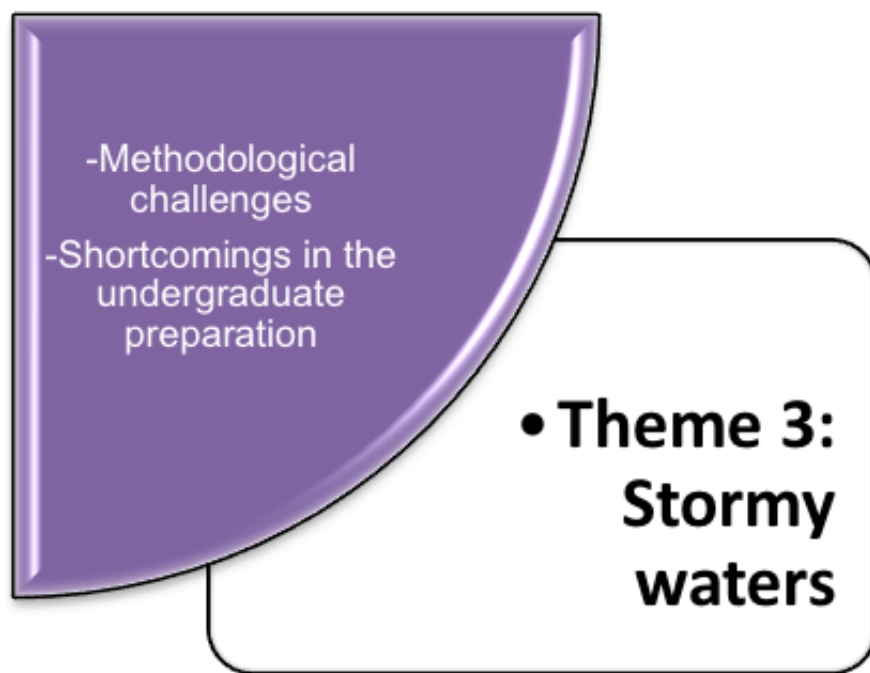
- *“I think **I was prepared pretty good**, I would say if I will rate it from 1 to 10, 1 being less prepared and 10 more prepared, I would say 8 more or less”. “When I got to the doctorate ... I had already a picture that this is the methodology that I wanted to use, this is what I am going to do, this is the design. I already knew the topic that I wanted to choose. Everything was already there. But it was not like that for the master’s”. (Rejoice, semi-structured interview).*
- *“I was a bit advantaged in the sense that **one of my teaching modules was research methodology as well as experience in research methodology from my mother university and as well as other research institutions** that I have worked for before coming back to academia. For me it was an advantage in that sense”. (Bongani, semi-structured interview).*
- *“In the case of methodology **I was quite well prepared**, there were few hiccups and I also tested the questionnaire with about five participants. I received good feedback and made necessary changes. With the data that I obtained I realised that I was well focused with my methodology. The pre-planning stage is important, especially with the questions”. (Justice, semi-structured interview).*

Some of the captains shared that they were prepared because of the experience that they had already accumulated at their respective work environment. Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard (2015:109) agree that doctoral candidates need to be reasonably prepared to

perform various tasks in their doctoral studies, including developing research proposals and in choosing their thesis topic.

### 7.3.3 Theme 3: Stormy waters

Stormy waters resemble the challenges that were faced by the captains as they voyage through the ocean. Two subthemes emerged from this theme, namely methodological challenges and shortcomings in the formal methodological curricular preparation (see Figure 7.4).



**Figure 7.4: Stormy waters**

#### 7.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Methodological challenges

Methodological challenges are about the disillusionment of the captains when they realised they were not methodologically prepared. This disillusionment is evident in the following quotes:

- *“In the beginning of my research proposal stages, **I had thought that I was prepared ... when I commenced with my writing, it was clear that this section of research methodology is highly demanding and requires a lot of support from a supervisor to have an acceptable research proposal.** Partly, the main problem I was experiencing, was not just on methodology, but on several other areas such as topic formulation and study objectives, among others. **This clearly indicated the level of preparedness for enrolling for a doctoral degree as poor in my case**”.* (Sifiso, semi-structured interview).
- *“... I do not think very well. I had published perhaps one or two articles before I could register for my doctorate. I think reflecting on it now, **I do not think I was prepared in terms of that ... I think my master’s study was not too great thinking of I did my master’s and I finished it 1999 and it wasn’t a great study and I wasn’t satisfied. I think in terms of your question I think **I had a lot to do and I had a lot to learn** when I registered in 2004**”.* (Isaac, semi-structured interview).
- *“When one gets to doctoral level, you get to know the importance of research methods. I would not say I was fully prepared methodologically. **I sensed that what was required from me was that I needed to go back and make sure I adequately read as much as I can as far methodological aspects are concerned when one wants to undertake a research project.** This part I did extensively”.* (Lethabo, semi-structured interview).
- *“I think as a student **I was not well prepared.** At that time I used to lecture research methodology to second years, so I do suspect that having to compile my research module I might have been slightly better prepared than others, but in the end I used a grounded theory approach which **I knew nothing of, but my one promotor; it was her little pet project at that point ...**”.* (Pretty, semi-structured interview).

These quotes demonstrate that these captains admitted that they were not methodologically prepared. The information shared by the captains further reveal that they experienced methodological problems, they had to learn a lot, they needed to go back and one of them knew nothing about the research design she/he chose. This finding lends support in De Valero’s (2001:344) argument that lack of training for conducting

independent research is a hindrance in doctoral research. Liechty et al. (2009) also argue that doctoral candidates may experience difficulties in the beginning in developing and defining a problem. This can be associated with lack of knowledge in planning, implementing and writing up an independent project (Liechty et al. 2009). In their research King and Williams (2014:277) find that doctoral students reported barriers in their doctoral persistence to be associated with identifying a research problem. This is also in line with the arguments discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 (see Sections 5.3.3.3 & 6.3.3.1).

### **7.3.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Shortcomings in the formal curricular methodological preparation**

This subtheme is about the reflections of the captains about the formal curricular methodological preparation. Apparently they recalled that the previous qualifications did not adequately prepare them. This realisation is aptly put in the following quotes:

- *“When I did my honours it was only the modules; human resources, finance, public policy, theory and science. **It was just those, not like the current master’s where you do research methodology as a module and where you do the proposal and the research report. I think that is why the master’s was so difficult, because that was the big learning curve**”.* (Rejoice, semi-structured interview).
- *“... **It also questions the kind of undergraduate qualification that we have received**, so it shows a lot of gaps in the undergraduate up to the postgraduate stream of the qualification ...”.* (Sifiso, semi-structured interview).
- *“... **I don’t think the honours preparation was adequate for the master’s, because when I got to master’s I struggled. The people who taught the modules were very good, but I do not think I was adequately prepared**”.* (Isaac, semi-structured interview).
- *“**I think also the manner in which we are prepared to undertake research in the discipline must be looked into again, particularly given the fact that we have not yet settled fundamental questions of the discipline, for example if***



*you teach research methodology module at honours level, this is where we should start introducing our students to the debates concerning methodological questions of Public Administration*". (Lethabo, semi-structured interview).

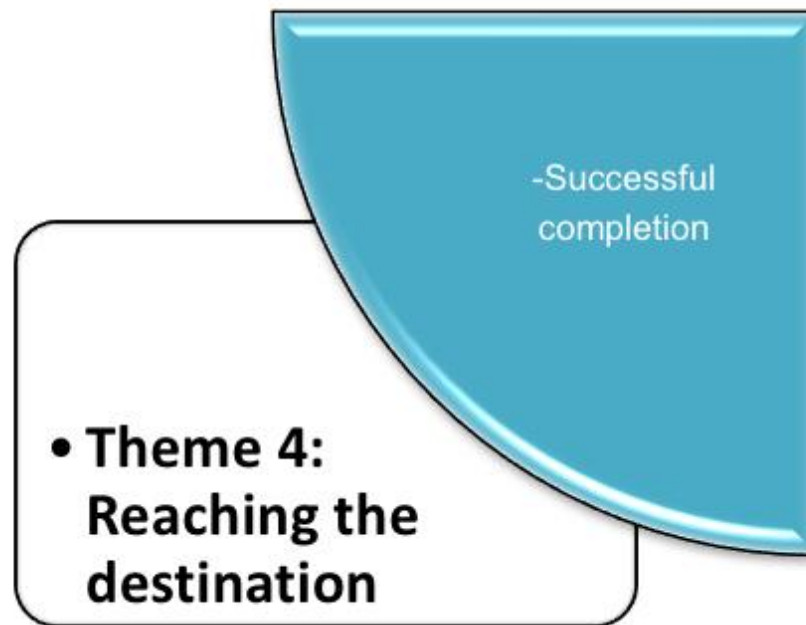
- ***"I do not think it really prepared me as well as I think it could have ... once again you know the Public Administration students do not take Sociology and they do not have that and I think I was slightly better prepared than them. But you know what we did was more quantitative. We used to draw samples and it had formulas. That is the only thing I can recall from the module. But it was marks for mahhala, if you work out the sample and you get it right you will get your marks ... I know I was not fully prepared methodologically"***. (Pretty, semi-structured interview).
- ***"Honours research methodology module was a nightmare, terrible nightmare because [for] my honours I had to change study direction. I was enrolled for LLB, so I had to change to management, methodology changed completely and no one advised me, I was bouncing from pillar to post trying to find information. It was just one big nightmare. I just learnt to ask questions and find out what I wanted to do. Don't carry on, on your own. Don't waste time"***. (Justice, semi-structured interview).
- ***"The preparation at master's level was very good in a sense that we were guided every step, we were not expected to write a full research proposal, but we were invited to attend sessions where they conducted a research methodology course at a very high level ... for example they dwell on issues such as how to construct a problem statement, then we were given an opportunity to go and construct our own problem statements and come back and each one was expected to present his/her own problem statement and feedback was also given and having to listen to your classmates presenting their own problem statements and the kind of feedback that was given to them from so many supervisors, that was a learning curve and that was the best opportunity we could ever have"***. (Bongani, semi-structured interview).

With the exception of Bongani, the captains expressed feelings of dissatisfaction in the formal methodological curricular preparation. This finding is similar to De Valero's

(2001:359) finding that three of the faculties reported that the courses on research did not prepare students to do research, but gave them theoretical background. This is also in line with the arguments on the formal methodological curricular preparation provided in Chapter 5 and 6.

### **7.3.4 Theme 4: Reaching the destination**

This theme is about the captains reaching the desired destination by completing their doctoral degrees (see Figure 7.5). Seemingly it took the captains more than four years to complete their degrees . Regardless of the fact that the majority of the captains were academics, it is evident that they experienced some methodological challenges as indicated in Section 7.3.3.1 which might have delayed their completion.



**Figure 7.5: Reaching the destination**

#### **7.3.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Successful completion**

The captains managed to successfully complete their doctoral studies. The data has revealed that in average it took the captains more than four years to reach the desired

destination (see Table 7.1). This information shows that these captains indeed were confronted with stormy waters which might prolonged their journey.

**Table 7.1: Background information on years of enrolment**

STUDENT NUMBER	DATE OF ENROLMENT	YEAR OF COMPLETION	YEARS OF ENROLMENT	ACTIVITIES
A	2004	2010	6	Thesis
B	2007	2011	4	Thesis
C	2004	2011	7	Thesis
D	1995	2001	6	Thesis
E	2003	2007	4	Thesis
F	2005	2010	5	Thesis
G	2007	2014	7	Thesis
H	2001	2010	9	Thesis
I	2002	2014	12	Thesis

(Compiled by author)

## 7.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the findings of the lived experiences of the doctoral candidates who successfully completed their doctoral degrees using a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach. The objective of this chapter was to make sense of the experiences of the doctoral candidates as they experienced the phenomenon *methodological preparedness*.

Similar to the other two groups of participants, these participants were also filled with positive emotional experiences when they commenced the journey. These participants were also aware that their personal resourcefulness such being competent, independent and comprehensive literacy was necessary. These participants were able to manage the interplay between their own personal resourcefulness and research-related contextual factors. I further realised that the supervisors as knowledge experts played a major in guiding these participants when they were confronted with stormy waters. Methodological preparedness for them meant making independent methodological decisions until they reach the desired destination. Since the majority of the participants were academics it seems that they were able to engage with the supervisors and the academic community. Comparing this group with the first group, it seems that the academics are able to persevere even when experiencing personal challenges. Considering the experiences of these participants it is evident that methodological preparedness is a continuous process.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE SUPERVISORS ON THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF THE DOCTORAL CANDIDATES**

*“Interpretation is thus envisaged as a dynamic process, an interplay between the researcher and the object of interpretation” (Shinebourne 2011:47)*

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

Corresponding to Chapters 5, 6 and 7, this chapter discusses the research findings and literature control focusing on the experiences of the supervisors (henceforth referred as coastguards) of doctoral candidates. The same process of analysis was used and four main themes were also identified starting from “commencing the journey”, “being in the experience”, “stormy waters” and “reaching the destination”. The voyage by ocean metaphor was also used to make sense of the participants’ experiences. The same pattern used in the previous chapters is also adopted to present this chapter, by firstly providing the brief background information about the participants. Moreover, the themes are identified and discussed as supported by direct quotes from the information shared by the participants and from the naïve sketches. A conclusion concludes this chapter.

#### **8.2 BRIEF BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

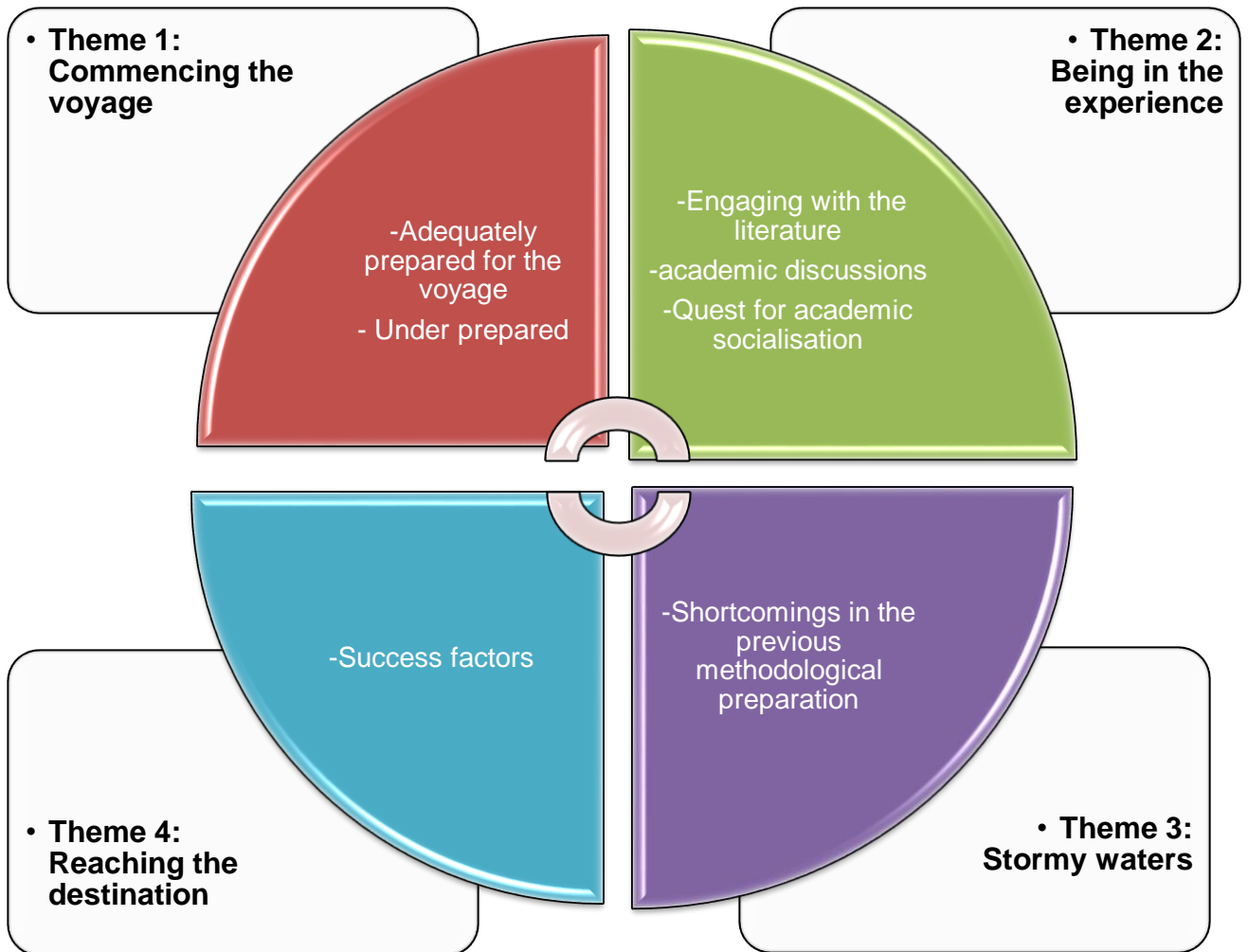
Ten supervisors who supervise doctoral candidates were interviewed in 2015. The interviews were conducted in the supervisors’ offices and in cafeterias. Similar to the other three groups of participants research-selected pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. The brief background information of the participants reflects their positions and years of experience in supervision. This information was obtained from the official departmental page (Unisa 2016 online).

**Table 8.1: Background information of the supervisors**

Name	Gender	Academic position	Years of supervision
Supervisor 1	Male	Associate Professor	4 years
Supervisor 2	Male	Senior Lecturer	18 years
Supervisor 3	Male	Associate Professor	10 years
Supervisor 4	Female	Associate Professor	35 years
Supervisor 5	Male	Professor	23 years
Supervisor 6	Male	Professor	34 years
Supervisor 7	Male	Professor	8 years
Supervisor 8	Male	Professor	25 years
Supervisor 9	Male	Professor	27 years
Supervisor 10	Male	Professor	25 years

### **8.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

A similar pattern used in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 is also used in this chapter. Each theme is presented by starting with a description of it, followed by verbatim quotes, in *italic font*, that support the description. Finally, a literature control is conducted to re-contextualise the findings to existing scholarly literature (Morse & Field 1995:130) to demonstrate the usefulness and implications of the findings. Similar to the other chapters, four themes were identified as captured in Figure 8.1.



**Figure 8.1: Overview: Experiences of coastguards**

### **8.3.1 Theme 1: Commencing the voyage**

Commencing the voyage is about the coastguards experiences related to the *methodological preparedness* of the captains at the time of enrolment. Seemingly at the time of enrolment the captains were either adequately prepared or under prepared for the voyage (see Figure 8.2). Two subthemes emerged from this theme: adequately prepared for the voyage and under prepared for the voyage.

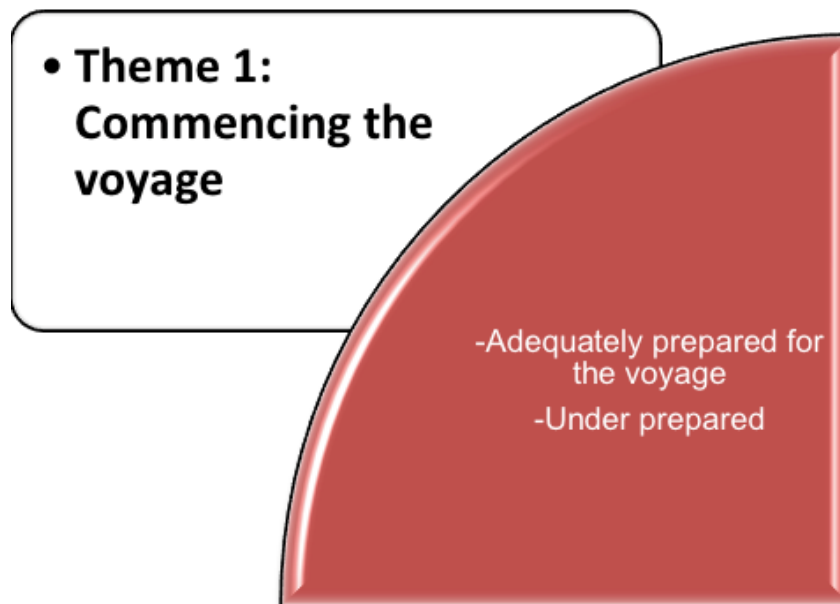


Figure 8.2: Commencing the voyage

#### 8.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Adequately prepared for the voyage

This subtheme is about how the coastguards viewed the preparedness of the captains at the time of enrolment. They shared that some of the captains were adequately prepared as evident in the following quotes:

- “... in my experience we have **a number of students who understand research methodology** who need minimal assistance ... **most of them actually were able to discuss the approach clearly in terms of qualitative and quantitative or case study and so on**”. (Supervisor 1, semi-structured interview).
- “There are differences. There was candidate 1 who did not have any Public Administration background but because he/she was an **academic** before, **he was more methodologically prepared**”. (Supervisor 5, semi-structured interview).
- “Some of them are more prepared especially if they are lecturers ... You do find that you have master’s students and **they complete their master’s degree under your supervision and they enrol for doctoral studies and yet again they are**



*under your supervision then it's easier for them. They are prepared and they are ready in a sense they just pick up from where they left. Unfortunately that does not happen more often".* (Supervisor 6, semi-structured interview).

- *"So at the same time **there are students who are working very, very hard and who have demonstrated that they actually read as expected and you are able see when they submit their research proposals that this person has worked really hard before** and they also have experience that they have gathered from their honours degrees while they were doing their assignments. They are actually able to use the type [of] knowledge that they have gathered from the compilation of assignments in order to write their proposals and write chapters of their dissertations ...".* (Supervisor 7, semi-structured interview).
- *"**Depending on where they did their master's the quality of their master's dissertation, the mini-dissertation and the full master's, if they did it at a very good university and have some good research methodology foundation then they knew exactly what they were in for their PhD**".* (Supervisor 8, semi-structured interview).
- *"50% of my doctoral students **were lecturers in the Department**, while a further 25% of them **were involved in academic activities at a university**. This in particular contributed significantly to their methodological preparedness for doctoral studies. The other 25% either **had educational experience** in the sense that **they did master's studies in the field of education and/or did extensive reading on research methodology** before the commencement of their doctoral studies – a requirement that I set ... all my doctoral students who completed their studies **were methodologically well prepared**".* (Supervisor 9, semi-structured interview).

The information shared by the coastguards revealed that those adequately prepared captains were mainly academics, studied at what is regarded as a good university or non-academics with experience in research. The adequacy of the preparation relates to the basic methodological skills acquired at master's level as confirmed by Backhouse (2011:35). Two separate studies (Kiguwa & Langa 2009:52; Jansen, Herman & Pillay

2004:85) have shown that these factors resulted in the candidates knowing what they wanted to do at the time of enrolment. This implies that these candidates commenced their voyage with a certain level of methodological independency, an attribute which supervisors, according to a study by Smit (2010:102) expect from doctoral candidates. Adequately preparedness is thus demonstrated in doctoral candidates' independency and freedom while initiating and sustaining their research projects (Lessing & Schulze 2003:181).

### 8.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Under prepared

The other side of the coin of preparedness is under preparedness. The coastguards have shown a deep sense of discouragement about what they experienced as the overwhelming under preparedness of most of their captains. The following quotes capture the essence of their experiences:

- “... the preparedness of these doctoral candidates I would say **was very chaotic**, even when the research proposals were approved ... **when students come in they are vague in terms of the methods**”. (Supervisor 2, semi-structured interview).
- “... we take for granted that students are aware of the methodology they want to follow. **It is a myth in this instance** ... my understanding is that they come here and **they have an idea, but they have not thought methodologically**. I think this is caused by a lack of reading on the methodologies”. (Supervisor 3, semi-structured interview).
- “... I have to assist the students with the first frustrations because **some of them do not know what they really want to do even though they are doctoral candidates** ... you expect the students to be at a specific level, but [when] **they come they do not really know** and you have to refer them back to some completed stuff to just get a broad idea of what is expected from them ... **I have not worked with one student that was actually prepared and knowledgeable about the methods to use**”. (Supervisor 4, semi-structured interview).

- *“The other candidate I can think of is candidate V from X **was not prepared at first** but as that candidate went on, in the course of the study the student developed some **methodological sophistication** because the candidate attended a course offered by Johann Mouton”.* (Supervisor 5, semi-structured interview).
- *“... **most of the ones outside the university struggle with the going** and is usually a process that takes so many years, because even if you give them some reading to do and study what needs to be done, **they struggle with that aspect and as we know that our students struggle with writing** ... usually **they are not really prepared depending on where they come from** ... the MPA students from X and mostly from other universities really struggle with that particular aspect, because you know the MPA students they do their papers and the dissertation of limited scope. Now at some universities you find that the dissertation is even more limited and **they have very little practical experience in methodology so they struggle a lot and they are quite unprepared**”.* (Supervisor 6, semi-structured interview).
- *“... **sometimes students do not do their part** ... They just basically are chasing a date because they want to graduate. This compromises quite a lot of things ... at the end **because of chasing the date the result will be that they are poorly prepared** ... **They do not know research methodology** ... they are not methodologically prepared ... you find that they know the content but **they are unable to match the different types of research methodologies that can be used to conduct research on those topics**”.* (Supervisor 7, semi-structured interview).
- *“**In the majority of cases master’s and doctoral degree candidates struggle to compile an acceptable research proposal.** If they struggle to get over the first hurdle (in some instances even two years and longer just to get the research proposal accepted), they will soon lose confidence in their own ability to successfully deal with the other hurdles – and such students are not always bad students”.* (Supervisor 9, semi-structured interview).

- *“When you do research you work with a population of students. [They] use the word ‘population’ I will give some explanation; it is clear that **they do not know what it is and if you do not identify your population properly how are you going to draw the sample and then when doing your sample compare apples to apples not apples to peaches** that’s another problem I have come across”.* (Supervisor 10, semi-structured interview).
- *“... there are some **who really need gross assistance in supervision**”.* (Supervisor 1, semi-structured interview).

The majority of the coastguards shared that the captains were under prepared at the time of enrolment. This was evident from them as they needed supervisory assistance, experienced difficulties in conceptualising their research proposals and their methodologically dependence. This experience of the captains is similar to the findings by Lovitts (2005:137) that the majority of doctoral students find it difficult in transitioning to independent research. The review of the literature has revealed various effects of under preparedness namely: confusion and anxiousness (West & Gokalp 2011:17; Rosenblatt & Christensen 1993:502); vagueness in the conceptualisation of the possible research (Jansen et al. 2004:85; Herman 2011:17); and an inability in developing intellectual work (Mowbray & Halse 2010:660). In a South African perspective Teffera (2015:13) argued that under preparedness of doctoral candidates is a serious concern and candidates just enrol with the expectation that they will have access to academic, professional and remedial support. In a similar stance, Backhouse (2011:31) found that supervisors expected doctoral candidates to be independent and self-directed and these supervisors believed that research training was done at master’s level. Unfortunately this is not always the case, because some captains as evident in this research, are under prepared for their doctoral studies.

### **8.3.2 Theme 2: Being in the experience**

Being in the experience is about how the coastguards perceived the personal and research-related experiences of captains. The participants realised that the captains

needed some assistance from their supervisors. Their suggested assistance emerged from the subthemes “*engaging with the literature*”, “*supervisor-candidate relationship*” and “*academic socialisation*” (see Figure 8.3).



**Figure 8.3: Being in the experience**

#### **8.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Engaging with the literature**

This subtheme is about the scholarly literature that the coastguards considered being important for the captains in understanding the various research methods and designs in their field of study. This is aptly put in the following quotes:

- “... what I do is that I also give them those guidelines on how to write a research proposal ... I give them some information from research books and I highlight some information to them, depending on their need. I am sure that has been helpful ... I expose my students to different designs. I give them past theses that have been completed and that can be said they are good,

*it's up to them to choose. One thing that I do with my students; I allow them to choose whatever design they are comfortable with". (Supervisor 1, semi-structured interview).*

- *"The students somehow **need to read and they need to be ready and they need to understand research methodology literally, especially at ground level ... I just request them to find literature on research methodology, not one but maybe up to five, read them, scan them and also try to understand ...**". (Supervisor 2, semi-structured interview).*
- *"... it was a **lot of working in terms of reading first on the methodology before they can even engage in research ... Other than that it is very difficult because if I do not know the journey in terms of the means of transport to get there, my journey will be very difficult**". (Supervisor 3, semi-structured interview).*
- *"I normally refer the student **to an example more or less if it [is] a case study. I sent them to go and look at that case study to see whether it is usable and applicable to their studies and read; you have to read a lot ... I actually prefer that they do their own searches on research methodology, especially at doctoral level ... I provide them with an example ... but I do not want them to follow that route as a recipe**". (Supervisor 4, semi-structured interview).*
- *"I did not refer the students to methodology and books **except for Johann Mouton: How to succeed in your master's and doctoral studies. I refer to Johann Mouton not about the methods of gathering evidence, but to see what kind of study they want to work on ... they have to read** work of other researchers. They have **to read** famous articles very well-known research and well discussed research ... there are other famous articles like the "muddling through" and **they must be assisted to read these things with methodological lenses so that they can explain what method was used**". (Supervisor 5, semi-structured interview).*
- *"I usually **give them some names of the books that I think are books that can be used and I also give them names of books they should avoid ... I always try to put them on the right road and make it open and choose the books they have to read ... But I find that the books that are very understandable help***

**them a lot.** They can in actual fact see the correlation between our guideline and what they read in the books and the books might explain it even more”. (Supervisor 6, semi-structured interview).

- **“Reading is very important ... you must be able to talk about generic things that hangs around the area or topic that you have chosen or focused on/in your studies ... Normally I advise them to go to the library after discussing ... the research methodology and I will advise them to look at a topic of their own interest from among the theses that have been stored in the library** to say that: look at this particular chapter and look at how that particular individual has written the research design and research methodology”. (Supervisor 7, semi-structured interview).
- **“The first thing I tell my students is you take a week, you go to the library, take four or five recent theses or dissertations, work through chapters 1 and see how they actually went about it, because they are all the same, it is like writing a letter. The moment you see how you can approach it, you do not copy word for word but you copy the same process, the same layout, the same template. Once you’re familiar with, that you can easily write a research proposal”.** (Supervisor 8, semi-structured interview).
- **“Students should be encouraged by supervisors to spend extensive time (six months as a guideline) on the planning of their research ... extensive reading ... more reading will be required ... Extensive reading ... will give them ideas ... of how they can approach or structure their own research”.** (Supervisor 9, semi-structured interview).
- **“... once again students try to take a short cut by taking a thesis and documents as a basis and following that instead of working with books on how to do research. You see they leave something out because it was not necessary for the previous student to mention it, for instance there are many doctoral degrees where the population and sample was not necessary and that student did research on what was critical to have it”.** (Supervisor 10, semi-structured interview).

The majority of the coastguards shared that reading is the first and critical step in engaging in the research process. They shared that captains need to spend extensive

time in extensive reading in order to understand the various research methods and designs. The literature that the coastguards believed the captains needed to read included past theses, books, case studies and scholarly articles. This finding lends support in Erwee, Albion, Van Rensburg and Malan's (2011:89) argument that supervisors expect doctoral students to read literature and understand the meaning of what is read. In addition, Smit (2010:104) found that supervisors in one department referred doctoral candidates to relevant literature in the beginning phases. In this research, some supervisors indicated that they recommended scholarly books to the doctoral candidates. Similarly, Lessing and Schulze (2003:174) found that experienced supervisors assist doctoral candidates in initiating their studies by referring them to completed theses and outline the material for the first chapter.

### 8.3.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Supervisor-candidate relationship

Supervisor-candidate relationship is in essence about the care and the willingness of the coastguards to devote time to engage the captains about methodological issues. These coastguards believed that the care can be expressed by having direct or personal interactions with the candidates as demonstrated in the following quotes:

- “... **also the discussions we have ... are quite beneficial, to sit down with them and they tell you what they want to do. I will tell you that all of my students know what they want to do and they have got an idea of what they want to do. The challenge is always to do with how they go about with it and fine-tuning some things in the process**”. (Supervisor 1, semi-structured interview).
- “One must understand that there is a great difference between methods and methodology and one must decide, ... does the student understand the difference between method and methodology and **one must continue engaging the students until the students can bleed out unconsciously and be able to see that now the student is talking about method not methodology**”. (Supervisor 2, semi-structured interview).



- *“What I do is, I make an appointment with the student to come and see me and spend about three to five hours in the office where we run through the entire research proposal, specifically in terms of methodology and of course research objectives [and] research questions that follow after that”. (Supervisor 3, semi-structured interview).*
- *“... the student who communicates more with me are the students who normally are better students and the relationship is much more relaxed, because the more you communicate, the more you can gather those gaps and the information that you need to fill those gaps... an open communication and communication regularly with your doctoral candidates ... is an indication of a better student and the chances are the student will complete if you have better communication or a good relationship with your student”. (Supervisor 4, semi-structured interview).*
- *I had a guy who is completing now from XXX. I took him/her from a colleague who left here and [he] was not given full attention. **This student improved very, very much when we gave him feedback** ... Their methodological preparedness ... **improves through your guidance, the guidance of the supervisor** and it also improves depending on the amount of time they put in, in order to read and understand”. (Supervisor 7, semi-structured interview).*
- *“I will strongly recommend that after that student’s research proposal has been accepted he/she will have to save and **make plans to come and visit his/her supervisor for a week** so that the supervisor can introduce to him/her the biggest library in the world”. (Supervisor 8, semi-structured interview).*
- *“... the creation of a relation of trust and cooperation between supervisor and his/her student is important ... a proper working relationship between supervisor and student”. (Supervisor 9, semi-structured interview).*
- *“... if he does not phone you ... **phone him and say: What is the problem?** It might be a tiny thing that is blocking his progress, but you cannot be able to find that if you do not communicate, if you do not talk to him, if you do not ask him what the problem is ... I was one of those (I do not want to use the word ‘idiot’) but I often travelled in my own vehicle to go to Johannesburg and see a*

***postgraduate student which could not come here ...***". (Supervisor 10, semi-structured interview).

These quotes reveal that the coastguards believed in having a good supervisor-student relationship. This relationship was sustained by continuous interactions with the captains to guide them. Seemingly the majority of the participants deemed these interactions as beneficial for enhancing the *methodological preparedness* of their doctoral candidates. This finding lends support to the research of Wikeley and Muschamp (2004:134) that face-to-face discussions can assist doctoral candidates and supervisors to achieve a shared understanding. Similarly Erwee et al. (2011:892) confirm that direct interaction supplement written material. Such interactions are to occur in the early phases of the doctoral journey (Taylor 2012:128). The purpose for such interactions is to encourage, build and sustain a research project (Wisker 2010:238). Such interactions are further enhanced by open communication and access to the supervisor (Herman 2011a:49). If there can be a communication breakdown it could have an impact on the persistence of the candidates (Wisker & Robinson 2013:300). In addition to this, the literature has shown that these interactions need to be consistent and continuous coupled with honesty (Di Pierro 2012:32; Erwee et al. 2011:89). Seemingly these interactions can occur if there is a supervisor-student relationship. The literature has confirmed the importance of this supervisor-student relationship (see Sections 5.3.3.2, 6.3.3.2 & 7.3.2.2). If there is such a relationship it would be possible to help the candidates with the formulation of the scope, objectives and methodological consideration of the research projects (Hockey 1997:46) which would ultimately result in better research training, as this is required by many candidates (Jansen et al. 2004:93).

### **8.3.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Academic socialisation**

The coastguards regarded academic socialisation of captains as crucial for the enhancement of their *methodological preparedness*. Various instances of academic socialisation were suggested by them, as evident from the following quotes:

- “It will be good for us as a department if **we create the platform where we do some formal training and introduce them to their peers ... we need a process whereby we can ask the student what is it that you want to do ...**”. (Supervisor 1, semi-structured interview).
- “... there should be **a six months engagement with the supervisor to prepare the person ... we sit and discuss that particular research ... I want to engage them in workshops and training possibilities and practical** aspects of their research ...”. (Supervisor 2, semi-structured interview).
- “... we should **have a workshop in terms of methodology [to train] the members them in** and see how we can help them in their studies. Otherwise you will be sitting with a situation especially, from my perspective, proposals are sent back and forth ... because of a lack of understanding on research methodology ... we need to have more **interactive workshops ... Having two sessions before they start** can bridge the gap and **sitting them in class and exposing them to the various research methodologies ...**”. (Supervisor 3, semi-structured interview).
- “You have to **talk to the student in person to get to their level of understanding ... We must first have a general workshop with the students** and then take them through that process of the research proposal and there can be a second workshop just to give them the spaces and later we can start with **specialised workshops** and give them the opportunity to participate because we cannot force them”. (Supervisor 4, semi-structured interview).
- “... in some departments students **present their proposals**. This whole thing of mentoring/Who are my mentors/are the people [if] I read their work ... died 2000 years ago, but I went with them and **I walked with them through dialogues and conversations in my head**. They say you are out of line or now you are clever”. (Supervisor 5, semi-structured interview).
- “I realised over the years that **the only way to get the students to understand something is to get them to your office ... I sit with them ...** if we can develop a system where **we [could] encourage students to come and have a colloquium with all the lecturers**”. (Supervisor 6, semi-structured interview).

- “... *In order to solve the problem we need to change the way we do things. We must actually meet with students or do road shows or we do video conferencing, but that basically we will need to have discussions with our students to help them ...*”. (Supervisor 7, semi-structured interview).

The above quotes have shown that academic socialisation can occur in various forms such as one-on-one engagement with the supervisor, training interventions, conference attendance, participation in seminars and the presenting of research proposals at dedicated colloquiums. This is in line with the research by Di Pierro (2012:32) that support programmes such as peer support, workshops on proposal writing are essential as they academically socialise the candidates into the scholarly community. In a similar stance Backhouse (2011:35) strongly recommends some instances of socialisation such as seminars, conferences, skills training and exposure to academic life. Seemingly seminars and luncheons to discuss research matters are desired by doctoral candidates as found by Jairam and Kahl's (2012:325) research. Moreover Smit (2010:105) also found that doctoral candidates appreciate networking opportunities, while supervisors regard conferences and journal publications to be critical for the academic development of the candidates. Candidates who were exposed to various socialisation instances were able to learn from their peers as confirmed by De Lange, Pillay and Chikoko (2011:23). This finding shows that since the candidates are transitioning to a new professional role as put by Baker and Pifer (2015:6), they need to be exposed to the socialisation instances to enhance their *methodological preparedness*.

### 8.3.3 Theme 3: Stormy waters

The stormy waters resemble the methodological challenges experienced by captains after commencing with their doctoral studies. In order to meet these challenges, captains need to be adequately prepared. This section reports on the coastguards' reflections on their lived experiences of captains' methodological unpreparedness to meet these challenges, shortcomings in the previous methodological preparation (see Figure 8.4).

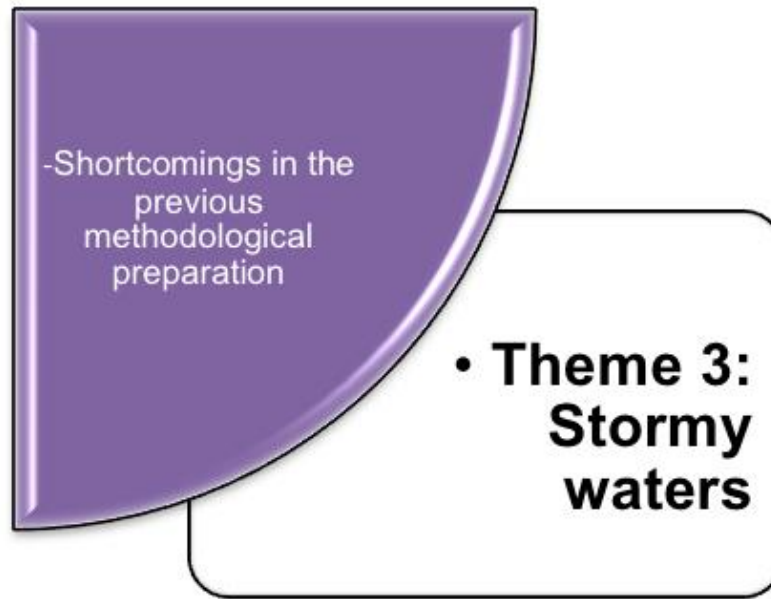


Figure 8.4: Stormy waters

#### 8.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Shortcomings in the previous methodological preparation

The coastguards expressed their concerns about the captains' seemingly inadequate formal methodological preparation. The following quotes capture the essence of their concerns:

- *"My experience is that at master's level **they really struggle and this poses a question if our courses are really helping them** and you will realise that some of these students have done course work and no research aspect ...". (Supervisor 1, semi-structured interview).*
- *"If we say this is done (preparation) **students must be able to answer for themselves, not us as academics ...**". (Supervisor 2, semi-structured interview).*
- *"... remember that **most of our students are enrolled for MPA [Master Public Administration] which is a limited scope and then the next step is doctoral level and for them it is even more difficult and they do not have a good***

*understanding of what they want to do and in terms of methodologies they are going follow*". (Supervisor 3, semi-structured interview).

- "... the research that you did that our research is more hermeneutical so when you take what we really do as a point of departure, that is where we start, how do we read and understand, how you for instance use Marxist analysis. **That kind of thing we do not start with. We think it is still fine to present the traditional empirical social science methods** to our students, which are useful, but not all the studies that our students do are of that nature". (Supervisor 5, semi-structured interview).
- "Many of them come from elsewhere and often there are two categories the one are **from the MPA students from X and mostly from other universities. They really struggle with that aspect because ... they do their papers and the dissertation of limited scope**". (Supervisor 6, semi-structured interview).
- "**Depending on where they did their master's, the quality of their master's dissertation, the mini-dissertation and the full master's**, if they did it at a very good university and have some good research methodology foundation, then they knew exactly what they were in for their PhD ...". (Supervisor 8, semi-structured interview).
- "... some of them knew how to do it ... what we must appreciate is that **not all MA degrees are bestowed on candidates on the basis of a dissertation**. So that part is missing from that student's development, which we should also take [into account]. Other for the research that he had done probably for his honours degree, **but how far did he do that, what methodology did he use, even at that level and that brings me to the question: is that enough? Is there enough that has been done at honours level to prepare students to do proper research?**". (Supervisor 10, semi-structured interview).
- "... **I am sure that at honours level what they are doing at this moment will produce more prepared students** for master's and doctoral studies if they want to further their studies". (Supervisor 4, semi-structured interview).

With the exception of Supervisor 4, the majority of the captains shared that the previous methodological preparation was not sufficient, because some of the captains' completed mini dissertations at master's level and the honours degree gave them limited exposure to methodological sophistication. This experience of the coastguards confirms Mouton's (2007:1090) argument that the research preparation of doctoral candidates is insufficient. Hanyane (2015:31) proposes a "proper undergraduate tuition in research methods in the discipline". Lessing and Schulze (2003:177) conducted some research and found that some supervisors blamed the honours degree in their department that it failed to adequately prepare the students for either the master's or the doctoral degree. Supervisors felt that the candidates lacked knowledge on research methodology. The lack of knowledge about research methodology is evident when the candidates struggle to even identify appropriate research questions as argued by Jansen et al. (2004:92). Wisker (2010:235) made a similar finding where supervisors admitted that students experience challenges in identifying research questions. This finding is further in line with the arguments levelled in the previous chapters (see Sections 5.3.3.3, 6.3.3.2 & 7.3.3.2).

#### **8.3.4 Theme 4: Reaching the destination**

The theme "reaching the destination" resembles the graduation ceremony signifying the completion of the doctoral journey. This section reports on the coastguards' expectations based on their lived experiences about what is necessary for captains to successfully complete the journey. The data revealed that reaching the destination entails that there are "success factors" that can facilitate the process of reaching the destination.

##### **8.3.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Success factors**

The coastguards believed that there are success factors that facilitate the voyage of the captains to reach the desired destination. As they recalled their experiences they shared various success factors that were necessary as expressed in the following quotes:

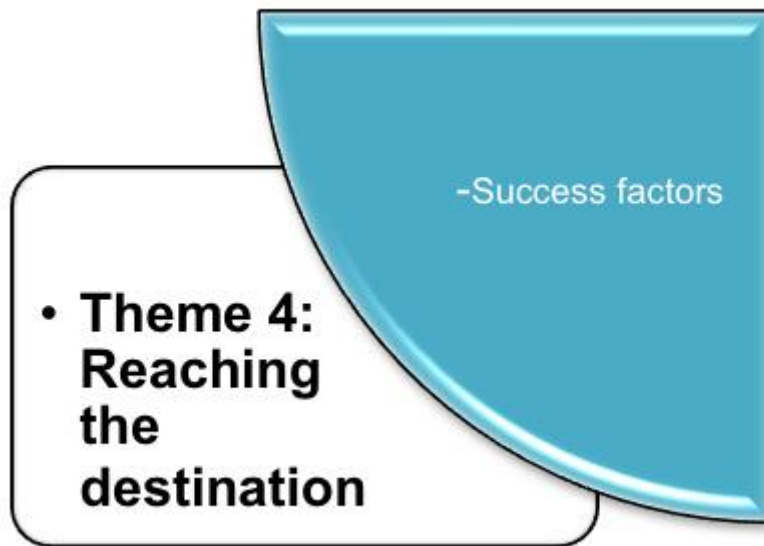


Figure 8.5: Reaching the destination

- “The **close connection and cooperation between supervisor and student is important**, coupled with **constant interaction and feedback and encouraging words**, ‘the end is in sight, excitement about the new discovery and contribution’. **The commitment of both the supervisor and student lead to success and making a difference to academic space**”. (Supervisor 3, semi-structured interview).
- “I have no doubt that **hard work** is the most important factor leading to successful completion”. (Supervisor 5, semi-structured interview).
- “I feel so strong about an **excellent and open relationship between supervisor and student**, a relationship that has trust and mutual respect as foundation, that I would like to emphasise it as my only guiding principle to you. It worked well for me over the years as a supervisor. Perhaps I can mention **proper planning of the entire project**, especially in the beginning when the framework is set, as my second priority”. (Supervisor 9, semi-structured interview).
- “There are so many factors. Some of them are **perseverance, continued research and hard work, focus on the topic, being structured in your approach and read, read and more reading**. Realisation that the doctoral



*journey is a long term effort to which there is no quick fixes. Nothing worthwhile in life comes easy". (Supervisor 6, semi-structured interview).*

- *"For me there are three important factors: **endurance, knowledge of the supervisor and willingness from the student to learn.** Endurance will carry the student up to completion. The knowledge of the supervisor is critical because they need to guide the student and the student must show that willingness to learn from the supervisor". (Supervisor 8, semi-structured interview).*

The above quotes revealed that the important success factors necessary for the completing of the doctoral journey included a good relationship with the supervisor coupled with trust, respect and commitment from both parties. It was further revealed that qualities such as hard work, proper planning, perseverance and endurance were also critical. This finding lends support to Mainhard et al.'s (2009:359) research that the relationship between the supervisor and the doctoral candidate is important. The importance of the supervisor-candidate relationship is evident in the previous sections (see Sections 5.3.3.2, 6.3.3.2 & 7.3.2.2) where it was argued that the successful completion of the doctoral studies is dependent on the relationship with the supervisor (Pitchforth, Beames, Thomas, Falk, Farr, Gasson, Thamrin & Mengersen 2012, Goodwin et al. 2012; Boden et al. 2011; Evans & Stevenson 2011; Bell-Ellison & Dedrick 2008, Gardner & Holley 2011, De Valero 2001). Other than the relationship, doctoral candidates needed to possess qualities such as hard work to be able to persevere until completion. Pitchforth et al. (2012:133) argue that doctoral candidates are able to write their thesis if they are determined, demonstrate endurance, have set goals and believe in their writing abilities. These qualities can relate to self-motivation and personal responsibility as indicated by Ivankova and Stick (2006:127). Motivation is defined by Grover (2007:9) as a requirement "to be willing and enthusiastic about engaging in the unstructured and often frustrating process of knowledge creation". This indicates that other than being methodologically prepared, doctoral candidates need to be self-motivated so that they can withstand any pressures that come with their enrolment.

## 8.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the experiences of the supervisors of the doctoral candidates using a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach. The objective of this chapter was to make sense of the experiences of the doctoral supervisors as they supervised the doctoral candidates experiencing the phenomenon *methodological preparedness*.

The essence of these participants' experiences as they supervised the doctoral candidates reflected that most of the doctoral candidates were under prepared due to various reasons at the time of enrolment and with a small number of adequately prepared candidates. Considering that the majority of the doctoral candidates were under prepared, the participants (supervisors) believed that their *methodological preparedness* could be enhanced by encouraging the candidates to first read extensively before commencing with their research proposals. The literature has confirmed that engaging with the literature is the first and paramount step in the research process and supervisors play a role in encouraging the candidates to engage in such an endeavour. In addition to this, the participants acknowledged the importance of academically socialising the candidates in the department. The literature has confirmed the importance of academic socialisation. Moreover the participants acknowledged the meaningful role that the supervisor-candidate relationship played in assisting the doctoral candidates in enhancing their *methodological preparedness*. The participants further acknowledged the challenges related to the previous methodological preparation of the doctoral candidates and admitted that the doctoral candidates were not adequately prepared to undertake the doctoral study. They subsequently recommended research methodology training for the doctoral candidates.

## **PHASE THREE**

### **A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DOCTORAL CANDIDATES' AT UNISA**

## **CHAPTER 9**

# **THE MAIN FINDINGS AND A PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AT UNISA**

*“Researchers in general and dissertation researchers in particular often describe the process as a journey where one sets out along an unknown path, has experiences along the way, comes to conclusions and is changed by the whole voyage. The person who sets out is no longer the person who returns” (Badenhorst 2015)*

### **9.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the study was to obtain a deepened understanding of what constitutes the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa. This interpretive phenomenological study was done in three interrelated phases (see Section 1.5), to obtain a theoretical perspective on the concept *methodological preparedness* (Phase 1), to explore how Public Administration doctoral candidates and supervisors make sense of the phenomenon *methodological preparedness* at Unisa (Phase 2), and to generate a conceptual framework for enhancing an understanding of the concept and phenomenon within the context of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa, and it's possible transferability to related contexts (Phase 3). This chapter, being part of Phase 3, subsequently provides a consolidated discussion of the findings as reported in Chapters 5 to 8 (Phase 2) of this thesis, followed by the integration of these findings in a conceptual framework.

### **9.2 CONSOLIDATED FINDINGS**

The findings of Phase 2 of this study have been reported separately for the distinct categories of participants, namely for candidates who terminated their studies before

completion (Chapter 5), candidates who were still registered at the time of the study (Chapter 6), candidates who have successfully completed their studies (Chapter 7) and supervisors of doctoral candidates (Chapter 8).

In this section of Chapter 9, these findings on the sense-making of the respective categories of doctoral candidates and supervisors are consolidated by using the *voyage by ocean* metaphor. Through this metaphor, their experiences have unfolded in four main themes, presented as different stages of this voyage by ocean, namely “commencing the voyage”, “being in the experience”, “stormy waters” and “reaching the destination”. The next section provides a discussion of the consolidated findings on how the participants of this study made sense of *methodological preparedness* in the first stage of the voyage, namely “commencing the voyage”.

### **9.2.1 Stage 1: Commencing the voyage**

As any voyage by ocean, a doctoral journey also needs to start somewhere. This section integrates the lived experiences of the various categories of participants associated with the commencing of Public Administrative doctoral candidates voyage at Unisa. The categories of doctoral candidates that participated in the study were distinct from each other regarding the status of their studies (terminated, ongoing and completed) but also their occupations. Not one of those who have terminated their studies was an academic (see Section 5.2). The composition of the category of candidates who were registered at the time of the interviews, were relatively equally balanced between academics, government officials and professionals in academic institutions (see Section 6.2). With the exception of one senior government official, all the candidates who have completed their studies were academics (see Section 7.2). I will utilise this information in the next paragraph to interpret the distinct experiences of the three categories of captains within the context of the voyage metaphor.

A consolidated analysis of the doctoral candidates’ lived experiences of the commencing of their voyage, revealed some nuanced differences amongst the three participants

groups. At the time of their enrolment (see Sections 5.3.3.1; 6.3.1 & 7.3.1 in the previous chapters), they all had positive emotive experiences irrespective of whether they have reached their envisioned destination. They were focused on the future, thinking about completing the journey without due consideration of what it takes to complete it. However, the reasons for their positive emotive experiences slightly differ according to their categories. While those who eventually have terminated their studies were positive about the prospect to contribute to knowledge (see Section 5.3.3.1 (a)), their envisaged destination was one of completing the degree to fulfil a dream and subsequent social status (see Section 5.3.3.1 (b)). On the contrary, those candidates who have completed their studies were, as academics, positive about the envisioned prospects a doctorate enabling them to progress to the next step in their academic career (see Section 7.3.1.1).

**Finding 1: While doctoral candidates have positive emotive experiences when they envisaged completing their respective doctoral voyages, these distinct experiences have shown to be career informed. They have nevertheless shown to be unconsciously unaware of their *methodological preparedness* status at the time of enrolment.**

This finding aligned to the scholarly literature on this topic, which indicates that doctoral candidates are optimistic about completing their degrees and subsequently achieving their anticipated future career development goals (Friedrich-Nel & MacKinnon 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw 2012; González 2006; Harmann 2002; Anderson & Swazey 1998). This study, however, has shown that this optimism may have different reasons for candidates who are academics and those who are not academics. The candidates who are academics could have been more optimistic because achieving a doctorate can be regarded as part of their career path. This distinct positive emotive experience may serve as an additional antecedent for understanding methodological preparedness (see Figure 9.1).

When reflecting on the *methodological preparedness* of their doctoral candidates at the time of their enrolment, doctoral supervisors have shown to experience doctoral

candidates at the time of enrolment as either adequately prepared (8.3.1.1) or under prepared (8.3.1.2). This categorising has shown to be directly informed by whether their candidates were academics or not.

**Finding 2: Doctoral supervisors as coast guards had mixed experiences of the boat captains (doctoral candidates) commencing their voyage: those who are academics were experienced as adequately prepared (see Section 8.3.1.1), while those who are not academics predominantly as methodologically under-prepared (see Section 8.3.1.2 in the previous chapter).**

The lived experiences of supervisors are consistent with the findings in the Assaf Report (Academy of Science of South Africa 2010:68) revealing that South African doctoral candidates entering higher education are “increasingly less prepared for doctoral studies”.

### **9.2.2 Stage 2: Being in the experience**

The second phase of a voyage, being in the experience, refers to the experiences and decisions of the boat’s captain in order to ensure that the boat reached its destiny. Within the context of doctoral studies, this phase refers to the doctoral candidates’ personal and research-related experiences relating to critical decisions they had to make for completing the qualification. Their lived experiences in this stage of their voyage also need to be interpreted within their immediate occupational context (being an academic or not) in mind. My consolidated analysis revealed relatively similar experiences regarding specific conditions (antecedents) for methodological preparedness, namely engaging with the literature (see finding 3 below), a caring supervisor-student relationship (see finding 4 below), academic socialisation (see finding 5 below). Those candidates who have already completed their studies, have shown to experience engagement with the scholarly community (see Section 7.3.2.3 and finding 6 below) as well as a confidence in their own state of methodological readiness (see Section 7.3.2.4 and finding 7 below) as additional conditions (antecedents) for methodological preparedness in this stage of their voyage.

Several consolidated findings have been deduced on the lived experiences of both the boat captains (doctoral candidates) and the coast guards (supervisors) on the stage “being in the experience” of this voyage by sea (see findings 5 to 7 below).

When reflecting on their experiences in this second stage of their voyage, doctoral candidates admitted that they were not methodologically prepared at the commencement of their respective voyages. However they believed that by engaging with the literature they might improve their *methodological preparedness* (see Sections 5.3.3.2 (a), 6.3.2.1 & 7.3.2.1 in the previous chapters). The doctoral supervisors have shown to also expect from their candidates to read extensively. They consequently see their role to guide their candidates in selecting appropriate literature (see Section 8.3.2.1 in the previous chapter). This shows that both the doctoral candidates and the supervisors were aware that commencing the doctoral voyage required the doctoral candidates to engage with the literature in order to enhance their *methodological preparedness*. The consolidated finding on the lived experiences by both the boat captains and the coast guards of the second stage of this voyage by sea, is subsequently captured as finding 3:

**Finding 3: An ongoing engagement with the scholarly literature has been experienced by all participants as a condition (antecedent) for methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates.**

The literature has confirmed finding 3 as various scholars emphasise the critical importance of engaging with scholarly literature during the doctoral journey for being adequately prepared for their journey (Machi & McEvoy 2016:4; Aveyard 2014:4–6; Garrard 2013:4; Jesson et al.. 2011:10; Petre & Rugg 2010; Boote & Beile 2005; Mouton 2001; see Section 4.2.2.3).

Another condition for methodological preparedness derived from the lived experiences of both doctoral candidates and doctoral supervisors in this stage of the doctoral voyage (being in the experience) is that of a caring supervisor-student relationship (see finding 4 below).



Doctoral candidates have shown to yearn for a sense of being cared for through supportive supervisor-student relationships (see Sections 4.2.3.4; 5.3.3.2 (b); 6.3.2.2 & 7.3.2.2 in the previous chapters). It appeared that the doctoral candidates expected some attributes from the supervisors such as commitment, intent, expertise, offering encouragement, ability to guide, advise and support. These expectations of the supervisors were confirmed by other studies (Leijen et al. 2016; Lee 2008; Academy of Science of South Africa 2010; Albertyn et al. 2008; Mouton 2001; Clegg & Gall 1998). In addition, these expectations of the doctoral candidates are also aligned to the expected role of supervisors as stipulated by the Unisa Procedures for master's and doctoral degrees. These procedures stipulate that the supervisors need to provide appropriate guidance to the doctoral candidates by showing them relevant scholarly sources, guiding them in terms of the methodology and connecting them with experts that will assist with developing research instruments (Unisa 2015:10). The literature has confirmed that the supervisor-student relationship is important for methodological preparedness (Boden et al. 2011; Evans & Stevenson 2011; Liechty et al. 2009; Gardner & Holley 2009; see Section 4.2.3.4). These three groups of participants needed to confer with the supervisors regarding any methodological decisions that they were making as already articulated that the supervisors guide doctoral candidates in terms of the methodology. Doctoral supervisors also reflected on the supervisor-student relationship (see Section 8.3.2.2 in the previous chapter) and deemed it as a necessary condition for the *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates.

This condition (antecedent) for methodological preparedness is structurally confirmed within Unisa as the Procedures for master's and doctoral degrees shows that the doctoral candidates also have the responsibility to "treat the supervisor with courtesy and fairness and must communicate with the supervisor about any specific need or circumstances likely to affect the postgraduate study" (Unisa 2015:11). This condition is clearly embedded in the supervisor-student relationship.

Even though Unisa is an ODeL (Open Distance e-Learning) institution, the interview data revealed that the supervisors preferred to meet with the candidates face to face to engage in academic discussions. This is also consistent with the Procedures for master's and doctoral degrees because it stipulates that the supervisors are responsible for initiating discussions with the doctoral candidates and also to provide timeous feedback (Unisa 2015:11). For academic discussions to take place it seems that the supervisor-student relationship is necessary. The findings further revealed that the supervisor-student relationship was based on regular scholarly discussions in order to have a shared understanding, interaction, informative dialogues, engagement and training in research methods. This is consistent with the literature (Wisker & Robinson 2013; Taylor 2012; Erwee et al. 2011; Herman 2011; Wisker 2010; Hockey 1997). The student-supervisor relationship is thus a necessary condition for *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates within the context of Unisa. Subsequently, I have deduced finding 4 as follows:

**Finding 4: A sense of being cared for through a supportive supervisor-student relationships is a necessary condition for the methodological preparedness of Public Administration Doctoral candidates at Unisa.**

In addition to the need for a supportive supervisor-student relationship, participants in my study also confirmed academic socialisation as a condition for methodological preparedness. The need for academic socialisation with other students and scholars, was raised by both doctoral candidates and doctoral supervisors (see Sections 5.3.3.2 (c); 6.3.2.3; 7.3.2.3 (c) & 8.3.2.3 in the previous chapters). They specifically referred to the value of attending workshops for this purpose. This condition is also confirmed institutionally as the Unisa procedures for master's and doctoral studies provides for such opportunities by requiring doctoral candidates to attend "relevant Unisa workshops such as AtlasTi, Mendeley, networks, SPSS and SAS for which Unisa has site licences" (Unisa 2015:11). To this effect, all Public Administration master's and doctoral candidates at Unisa are invited to various instances of academic socialisation such as capacity development initiatives, contact sessions, conference attendance and joint presentation (Unisa 2015:11). This condition is a confirmation of the literature in this regard (see Bitzer

2011:434; Kiley 2009:301; Kiley 2015:54; Mullins & Kiley 2002:372) as discussed in Section 4.3.2.2 of this thesis.

In addition to the empirical findings of this study, scholarly literature also confirms the relation between the lack of academic socialisation of doctoral candidates, their sense of isolation and consequent decision to terminate their studies (Pyhältö et al. 2009:221; Pyhältö & Keskien 2012:142). Other studies have shown that academic socialisation can be obtained through structured programmes that provide for doctoral training (Di Pierro 2012; Backhouse 2011; West & Gokalp 2011; Schulze 2011; Mendoza 2007; Andrea 2002; Anderson & Swazey 1998). Considering the strong scholarly confirmation of my empirical findings regarding this condition, I have deduced finding 5 as follows:

**Finding 5: Academic socialisation of doctoral candidates in the form of capacity development interventions has shown to be regarded as a condition for the methodological preparedness for Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa.**

While the previous three conditions (findings 3, 4 and 5) were shared by all three categories of doctoral candidates and doctoral supervisors, the following two were identified exclusively by those doctoral candidates who have successfully completed their voyage. These conditions are ‘an engagement with the scholarly community’ (see Section 7.3.2.3 and finding 6 below) and ‘confidence in their own state of methodological readiness’ (see Section 7.3.2.4 and finding 7 below).

While an engagement with the scholarly community may also be regarded as academic socialisation as in finding 5, this engagement has shown to be experienced by these successful boat captains differently, namely to participate in the activities of the scholarly community as a scholar and not as a trainee. This condition is explicated by the scholarly literature as intensive interaction as part of communities of practice (Ospina & Dodge 2005:149; Wadee et al. 2010:101). A study by Maritz and Visagie (2011:185) emphasise the value of a meaningful scholarly engagement for building a student’s identity, ability to

work within effective research units, and deal with interpersonal conflicts. Considering that this condition has been identified by those boat captains who have successfully completed their voyage, and that it has been widely confirmed by the scholarly literature, I have deduced finding 6 as follows:

**Finding 6: Meaningful research engagement with a scholarly community of practice is a necessary condition for building a doctoral candidate's identity of methodological preparedness.**

The last subtheme identified by successful doctoral candidates as a possible condition for methodological preparedness, is that of methodological readiness (Section 7.3.2.4). Methodological readiness refers to the ability to use basic research methodology tools. While this subtheme is about how the participants perceived their own *methodological preparedness*, it relates directly to finding 5 above. I am arguing thus that a doctoral candidate's own identity of being methodologically prepared, results from meaningful engagement with a scholarly community of practice, and not merely knowledge of research methodology obtained through reading. This is confirmed by boat captains referring to their previous teaching experience, thus scholarly engagement, as reason for their confidence (see Section 7.3.2.4). Cloete et al. (2015:109) agree that doctoral candidates need to be reasonably prepared to perform various tasks in their doctoral studies, including developing research proposals and in choosing their thesis topic. The presentation of their research to scholarly communities and their subsequent engagement with scholarly experts enhanced their understanding of the research methods and designs of their choice. 'Being in the experience' thus opposes an isolated voyage in which doctoral candidates are required to steer their boats in the right direction without input from a scholarly network or community, including supervisors, other scholars, the university and the academic department. Deduced from the above, I have formulated finding 7 as follows:

**Finding 7: A candidate's own identity of being methodological prepared, has shown to be a necessary condition for methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa.**

While stage 2 of this voyage by sea focuses on the personal and research-related experiences of doctoral candidates, stage 3 of the voyage focuses on the challenges they are facing that will test their methodological preparedness. The consolidated findings pertaining the stormy waters of the voyage by sea, are discussed in the next section.

### **9.2.3 Stage 3: Stormy waters**

The third stage of this metaphoric voyage by ocean, is the stormy waters. This stage refers to the unfolding of challenges experienced by the captains when steering their boats to the desired destination. This stage resembles the methodological challenges experienced by doctoral candidates during their doctoral journey, which they attribute to shortcomings in their formal curricular methodological preparation, and insufficient support from their supervisor

The three groups of candidates have shown to experience difficulties to make independent methodological decisions (see Sections 4.2.2.2) related to their respective studies (see Sections 5.3.3.3 (a); 6.3.3.1 & 7.3.3.1). This inability has been confirmed by the doctoral supervisors' experiences of candidates' inability to even formulate research questions (see Section 8.3.3). However, although the doctoral candidates in the third group were exposed to the same challenges within the stormy waters, they have nevertheless completed their voyage. They evidently succeeded in making independent methodological decisions regarding their respective research projects.

The lived experiences of both doctoral candidates and doctoral supervisors are confirmed by previous studies in this regard (Hanyane 2015:31; Mouton 2007:1090; Lessing & Schulze 2003:177). This inability to understand research methodology is referred to by Aguado (2009:252) as weak research foundations. One can thus argue that the

foundations of the candidates in the third category, were strong enough for them to succeed.

Incapacity to meet the defining attributes associated with methodological preparedness are attributed by doctoral candidates and doctoral supervisors to the inadequate formal methodological curricular preparation that they received in their previous qualifications (see Sections 5.3.3.3 (b); 6.3.3.1; 6.3.3.2; 7.3.3.1; 7.3.3.2 & 8.3.3.1 in the previous chapters). However, although the doctoral candidates in the third category were exposed to the same shortcomings in their formal methodological curricular preparation as the other candidates, they have completed their studies. It seems thus this should be explained by the presence of another condition (antecedent) than the formal methodological curricular preparation.

Participants' experiences of inadequate formal methodological curricular preparation, serve as additional confirmation of the results of an earlier study by Wessels and Thani (2014:154). This study attributed the inadequacy of curricular preparation to the fact that these modules are primarily designed to transfer knowledge about methodology, and not to apply them (Wessels & Thani 2014:154). The opportunity for applying these methods, was shown to be limited. Other studies contributed inability of doctoral candidates to make independent methodological decisions to a variety of other reasons (antecedents), such as insufficient previous methodological preparation, quality of formal curricular preparation (e.g. on Master' and Honours level), and even the lack of "undergraduate tuition in research methods in the discipline" Hanyane (2015:31). Considering the above experiences, I deduced finding 8 as follows:

**Finding 8: The main challenge experienced by doctoral candidates in the stormy waters of their voyage has shown to be an inability to make independent methodological decisions related to their research.**

The literature has also shown that lack of knowledge and experience poses the risk of uncertainty and confusion amongst doctoral candidates (Olehnovica et al. 2015; Wheeler

& Elliott 2008). Within the stormy waters of doctoral studies, this risk may directly influence doctoral candidates' ability to persist through independently making competent and innovative methodological decisions in order to complete their doctoral journey (Leijen et al. 2016).

#### **9.2.4 Stage 4: Reaching the destination**

Although there is only one envisaged destination for any candidate embarking on a doctoral journey, the three categories of participants imply different destinations reached for each category, namely the termination of the journey before completion, the successful completion of the journey, or working towards completing the journey (see Sections 5.3.3.4; 6.3.4.1 & 7.3.4.1 in the previous chapters). While the third category of doctoral candidates successfully completed their voyage and the second category of candidates were still in on their way during my interviews with them, the first category of candidates have terminated their voyage without reaching their envisaged destination. They have attributed their decision to a variety of academic and non-academic reasons. While this study has identified several academic factors (antecedents) that may attribute to a candidate's methodological preparedness (see the antecedents in Figures 9.1 & 4.1), a decision to terminate a doctoral voyage cannot be attributed to methodological preparedness alone. The non-academic reasons have shown to include emotional unpreparedness. Those candidates who terminated their voyage, attributed their decision to, *inter alia*, work demands and family responsibilities (see Section 5.3.3.4 (a)). Non-academic reasons for terminating doctoral studies such as frustration, limited experiences, limited facilities, challenges with scholarly thinking, and language problems, have been well-documented (see the studies by Andrea 2002:42; Leijen et al. 2016:140; Maasdorp & Holtzhausen 2015:50). Andrea (2002:42) finds that the main hindering factors are planning and writing, working independently, financial and personal-relationship pressures. However, this study has shown those candidates who have terminated their studies before completion ascribed their decisions to, (a) the fact that their envisaged destination have been perceived as being out of reach, and (b) inadequate student-supervisor relationship with subsequent delayed feedback (see

Section 5.3.3.4). These, mostly non-academic reasons, have evidently changed their initial positive emotive experience and vision of contributing to knowledge and reaching a desired social status by obtaining a doctoral degree. However, this study has confirmed that methodological preparedness is not necessary for preventing a candidate from termination the voyage before reaching the destination, but for enabling the candidate to be competent for making independent methodological decisions relevant to that study.

However, methodological preparedness has shown not to be a sufficient condition for the successful completion of this voyage. Various other factors, mostly of a non-academic nature, have shown to influence the eventual destiny of the doctoral journey, such as a good relationship with the supervisor; self-motivation, proper planning, perseverance and endurance (see Section 8.3.4.1 in the previous chapter). Self-motivation is regarded as a student responsibility by the Unisa Procedures for master's and doctoral degrees, prescribing that the doctoral candidate takes "primary responsibility for all aspects of his/her research own research from application to graduation" (Unisa 2015:11). Consequently, finding 9 is formulated as follows:

**Finding 9: The methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa, being the capability of candidates to make independent methodological decisions relevant to their respective doctoral study, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a high quality doctoral thesis and for reaching the ultimate destination of the doctoral voyage.**

### **9.3 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AT UNISA**

Following the consolidated findings of this study (see Section 9.2), I designed a conceptual framework for understanding the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa (see Figure 9.1). This framework (see



Section 2.3.3 in Chapter 2 for a discussion of the method used) consists of the following components: the definition and aims of the concept, the aims of the concept analysis, the uses of the concept, determining the defining attributes, identifying the antecedents and the consequences.

### **9.3.1 Definition and uses of the concept within its specific context of application**

This study departs from a definition of methodological preparedness as referring to a doctoral candidate that is ready, and competent, to make independent methodological choices during a specific doctoral journey (see Section 1.7.4). This definition was used as a point of departure for the concept analysis of the concept informed by the extensive review of the scholarly literature (see Chapter 4). Without providing the participants in this study this definition, I have required both the doctoral candidates and the supervisors to reflect independently on how they have experienced Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa's state of being methodological prepared (see Chapters 5 to 8).

Deducing from the participants' understanding and experiences of their own or their students' methodological preparedness (see Chapters 5, 6, 7 & 8) *methodological preparedness* within the context of this specific study can be defined as a doctoral candidate's competence to make independent methodological decisions relevant to his or her doctoral study whenever required during the course of the doctoral voyage. The defining attributes of the concept, derived from the information shared by the participants in this study, are analysed in Section 9.3.2.

### **9.3.2 Defining attributes of methodological preparedness**

Through a re-engagement with the integrated findings (see Section 9.2), the interpretation chapters (see Chapters 5, 6, 7 & 8) and the definition of *methodological preparedness* (see Section 9.3.1), the defining attributes of methodological preparedness has shown to be methodological competence, independent methodological decisions, and its relevance to the doctoral study.

### **9.3.2.1 Methodological competence**

Methodological competence has shown to be generally regarded as a defining attribute of methodological preparedness (see finding 9). This is evident from the review of the scholarly literature (see Section 4.2.2.1) as well as the lived experiences of the research participants. Methodological competence has shown to be demonstrated when doctoral candidates are able to appropriately utilise various research methods and designs when needed.

Methodological competence, as a defining attribute of methodological preparedness, thus refers to, *inter alia*, the doctoral candidate's ability to:

- develop a “sound appropriate research design” (Wisker 2010:225).
- “design and conduct rigorous research” informed by “knowledge, skills, critical thinking and initiative” (Petre & Rugg 2010:33).
- “develop, adapt and implement research methodologies to extend or redefine existing knowledge or professional practice” (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013:63).
- refine and reformulate research questions in order to select appropriate research designs (Jansen et al. 2004:86).
- engage with the scholarly community on his or her research (see finding 6).

The attribute closely related to methodological competence, is the one of methodological independence.

### **9.3.2.2 Methodological independence**

The second defining attribute of methodological preparedness is the ability to make independent methodological decisions, when required, during the doctoral voyage (see also finding 9). In Chapter 3 an independent researcher was described as a person who can take the initiative in the design and execution of a research project (Petre & Rugg

2010:33). Independency is also associated with leading critical reflection, the development of methodologies and the generation of original contributions (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013:63). It also entails producing knowledge from uncertain processes (Lovitts 2005:138). Independency is closely associated with high research capability and the subsequent making of independent research contributions (Council of Higher Education 2013:36). This can also mean identifying a gap and claiming it (Jansen 2011:141). When the doctoral candidates commenced their individual voyages, they believed that they were going to successfully complete their doctoral studies (see Sections 5.3.3.1; 6.3.1.1 & 7.3.1.1). Although this study has shown that they were unconsciously unaware of their state of methodological preparedness, their ability to successfully complete their studies implies that they have indeed made independent methodological decisions relevant to their study.

#### **9.3.2.3 Relevancy to doctoral study**

As methodological preparedness refers to a state of being of doctoral candidates within a specific context (eg a specific doctoral research project in the field of Public Administration), their competence to make independent methodological decisions refers thus to a specific doctoral research project (see also finding 9). Hence, the third defining attribute, is relevance to the chosen doctoral project. Relevance, thus, refers to the appropriateness of the methodological preparedness for “the topic and purpose of the research and the unit of observation” (Thani & Wessels 2011:75). If a doctoral candidate makes methodologically flawed decisions which do not deal with the research problem, that would mean that the candidate’s methodological decisions are not relevant to and appropriate for the doctoral study. Methodological preparedness is thus characterised by its direct relevance to a specific doctoral research project.

#### **9.3.3 Antecedents of methodological preparedness**

Based on the re-engagement with the integrated findings (see Sections 9.2.1; 9.2.2; 9.2.3 & 9.2.4) the following antecedents (see Figure 9.1) were regarded as necessary for the

methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates, namely vision and commitment, self-motivation, engaging with the literature, academic socialisation, supervisor-student relationship, and a formal curricular methodological preparation.

#### **9.3.3.1 Vision and commitment**

Vision and commitment have shown to be a decisive factor determining the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates. The experiences of the doctoral candidates (see Sections 9.2.1; 5.3.3.1 (a); 6.3.1.2 & 7.3.1.2) showed that they envisioned the destination. This implies that the candidates had a vision and commitment to that vision (see finding 1). This was evident when the doctoral candidates were unconscious of their methodological preparedness status at the time of enrolment. However they were committed to the task to complete their journey and reach their envisaged destination as already alluded to in the previous chapters.

Their commitment meant that they would be able to overcome any methodological challenges related to their chosen research topics. Commitment also involves taking personal responsibility for their learning (Mowbray & Halse 2010:660). Taking responsibility is also embedded in the Procedure for masters and doctoral studies which argues that it is the responsibility of the doctoral candidate to conduct independent research (Unisa 2015:10). It was evident that these candidates took personal responsibility for their voyages, regardless of the destination they reached. This further shows that undertaking a doctoral study is an individual choice. Ironically the literature only focuses on a scholarly perspective of methodological preparedness such as having doctoral or research training and a formal programme at the time of enrolment but the doctoral candidates firstly focused on themselves and their vision as they pursued the doctoral journey. This brings a deepened understanding that methodological preparedness does not only entail having a formal programme at the time of enrolment rather it is essential to focus on individual doctoral candidates who are enrolling for the qualification.

### 9.3.3.2 Self-motivation

The experiences of the doctoral candidates revealed that at the time of enrolment they were self-motivated through positive emotive experiences (see finding 1). This was evident when they shared their experiences when they commenced the voyage (see Sections 9.2.1; 5.3.3.1; 6.3.1.1 & 7.3.1.1). The second logical antecedent is thus self-motivation. Being self-motivated implies a willingness to be methodologically prepared for the methodological challenges posed by the study. The literature defines self-motivation (Mowbray & Halse 2010) without relating it to methodological preparedness. The *Business Dictionary* (2017 online), for example, defines “self-motivation” as “an ability to do what needs to be done without influence from other people or situations. People with self-motivation can find a reason and strength to complete a task without giving up or needing another to encourage them”. This study has shown that self-motivation is a necessity for doctoral candidates to meet the competence and independence attributes of methodological preparedness. Self-motivation in the context of *methodological preparedness* thus refers to the ability of the doctoral candidate to persevere even if they are confronted with challenging methodological decisions culminating in a successful completion of the doctoral study.

Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012:201) attest that motivation assists candidates’ to persist in their doctoral study. Self-motivation is a personal characteristic that a doctoral candidate must possess prior to experiencing the concept. If the doctoral candidates are self-motivated they will be able to remain enthusiastic about their research problems (Lovitts 2005:148) and withstand any methodological challenges. Self-motivated doctoral candidates have personal resourcefulness. Mowbray and Halse (2010:657) define personal resourcefulness as the “acquisition of skills that enable students to become more assertive, confident, resilient, persistent and resolute in determining how to progress their PhD while balancing their commitments”. In addition to this, self-motivated doctoral candidates can be independent thinkers and possess cognitive skills (Gilbert, Balatti, Turner & Whitehouse 2004:377). The cognitive skills can assist the doctoral candidates when critically engaging with the literature.

### 9.3.3.3 Engagement with the literature

Finding 3 of this study revealed that doctoral candidates needed an engagement with the literature to be methodologically prepared for their journey (see Sections 5.3.3.2 (a); 6.3.2.1 & 7.3.2.1). It appears that the engagement with the literature occurs only after enrolment. The literature has shown that doctoral candidates need to be comprehensively literate during the engagement with the literature (see Figure 9.1). In Section 4.2.2.3 it was argued that comprehensive literacy entails thought, being, making sense and inventing meaning (De Beer 2016:25), all necessary conditions for meeting the attributes of competence, independence and relevance. As they engage with the literature, comprehensive literacy could facilitate their “ability to scrutinise and synthesise ideas and information, recognise different viewpoints, appropriate theory and use more sophisticated insights to interpret data and support analyses and conclusions” (Mowbray & Halse 2010:660). In addition, Jansen (2011:140) argues that doctoral candidates need to have cutting-edge knowledge in their respective fields and on their specific chosen research topics. For these candidates to have cutting-edge knowledge, they needed to engage with the literature in a comprehensive literate way. This study could not find any evidence that doctoral candidates were consciously aware of the concept “comprehensive literacy”, or themselves being comprehensive literate, or not. This shows the interrelatedness of the antecedents, because as they engage with the literature the doctoral candidates are exposed to mentoring. In this instance, during the engagement with the literature they are mentored by authoritative scholars in the field other than their supervisors. Mentoring is not only limited to the supervisor and the candidates, other mentors outside their relationship can play a major role. Moreover, during the engagement with the literature the doctoral students were exposed to the research culture of the department and indirectly being academically socialised in the department (see Figure 9.1).

#### 9.3.3.4 Academic socialisation

Academic socialisation is regarded as a necessity for doctoral candidates' methodological preparedness (see finding 5). Academic socialisation refers to "a process where a newcomer becomes a member of a community" (Golde 2007:56). Doctoral education also entails being inducted into a scholarly community (De Lange et al. 2011:21). The doctoral candidates participating in this study in general yearned for academic socialisation (see Sections 5.3.3.2; 6.3.2.3; 7.3.2.3 & 8.3.2.3 in the previous chapters). The supervisors also deemed academic socialisation a necessary condition to be methodologically prepared. It appears that academic socialisation enhanced their methodological preparedness (see Sections 5.3.3.2 (b); 6.3.2.3 & 7.3.2.3). It also seems apparent that the current opportunities for academic socialisation that the doctoral candidates were experiencing in the department were insufficient. It appears that academic socialisation initiatives are needed to be enhanced in order for the doctoral students to be better prepared when they experience the phenomenon. The scholarly communities assist doctoral candidates to share knowledge and skills and develop new ways of learning (De Lange et al. 2011:26). Access to these scholarly communities can be gained through conference participation and paper publications (Smit 2010:96). The key role players in academic socialisation are the department, doctoral candidates, peers, supervisors and the institution. Each role player needs to fulfil their task, for example the supervisors play a major role in introducing these candidates in these scholarly communities. Aligned to this Pearson and Brew (2002:142) argue that the supervisor needs to assist the doctoral candidates in accessing learning opportunities.

West and Gokalp (2011:11) argue that a supportive environment is necessary for proper integration in scholarly communities. If doctoral candidates are integrated in the scholarly communities they will develop their research skills, presentation skills and experiment ways of thinking and arguments (Mowbray & Halse 2010:658). Academic socialisation is evidently a necessary requirement for the *methodological preparedness* of the doctoral candidates.

### **9.3.3.5 Supervisor-student relationship**

This study revealed that the doctoral candidates and the supervisors deemed this relationship to be necessary for sustained methodological preparedness (see finding 4 as well as Sections 5.3.3.2 (b); 6.3.2.2 & 7.3.2.3). Smit (2010:98) defines this relationship as a “boundary activity in the community of research practise, facilitating the entry of the doctoral candidate into that community”. Literature has confirmed the importance of supervisor-student relationship (Evans & Stevenson 2011; Kiguwa & Langa 2009, Dowling 2000: see also Chapters 5 to 8). This relationship needs to start in the early phases of the doctoral study (Kiguwa & Langa 2009; Smit 2010). This implies that supervisors need to be appointed immediately after doctoral candidates’ enrolment to assist the candidates in developing the necessary methodological skills. In this context a supervisor-student relationship refers to the individualised methodological guidance that the doctoral candidate receives from a dedicated supervisor at the time of enrolment. This relationship demands time, dedication, commitment and frequent methodological dialogues from both parties.

The student-supervisor relationship is embedded in the supervision process. Kiguwa and Langa (2009:51) define supervision as a “process in which both the student and the supervisor bring previous learning experience into the supervision process, which becomes part of a continuous negotiation related to the nature and content of the relationship”. This supervision process entails that a supervisor-student relationship is necessary for methodological preparedness because the doctoral candidate is guided and mentored.

### **9.3.3.6 Formal curricular methodological preparation**

This study shows that participants are concerned about the methodological preparation doctoral candidates has received in their previous qualifications (see Sections 5.3.3.3; 6.3.3.1; 6.3.3.2; 7.3.2 (b); 7.3.3.2 & 8.3.3.1 in the previous chapters). It appears that they were dissatisfied with the preparation; hence they faced stormy waters during their



doctoral studies. This shows the necessity of the formal methodological curricular preparation. This preparation refers to the methodological curriculum presented to doctoral candidates prior to their enrolment for doctoral studies. This curriculum can include official study material, online tuition and contact classes based on research methodology. Seemingly there is a concern about the current formal methodological curricular. Having a similar stance, Wessels and Thani (2014:60) conclude that the teaching of methods selected Public Administration departments was presented in a reflective way and not in an applied way. This shows that an appropriate formal methodological preparation is necessary for enhancing the *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates.

#### **9.3.4 Consequences of methodological preparedness**

The significance of a study of the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates, is evident from the consequences of the methodological preparedness (or the lack thereof) of doctoral candidates. The following consequences were identified from the interviews conducted with doctoral candidates and doctoral supervisors.

##### **9.3.4.1 Improved methodological skills: doctorateness**

Improved methodological skills, although not a specific finding of this study, is thus by implication one of the consequences of methodological preparedness. This consequence is evident when doctoral candidates employ appropriate research skills, capabilities and experiences of being a good researcher (Wisker 2010:225). Being a good researcher at doctoral level can be shown when doctoral candidates write well-crafted conclusion chapters in their thesis. When describing the purpose of conclusion chapters, Trafford et al. (2014:52) state that these chapters “include factual, conceptual and secondary conclusions, agendas for future research, critiques of the research and if appropriate, recommendations for action”. This description by Trafford et al. (2014) shows the importance of possessing methodological skills that would assist the doctoral students in demonstrating doctorateness (Trafford & Leshem 2008). In addition, this consequence is

evident when the doctoral candidates are able to supervise and evaluate other doctoral candidates' work in their field of study (Council of Higher Education 2013:36). This implies that improved methodological skills are further demonstrated beyond reaching the desired destination. Improved methodological skills are thus a consequence of being methodologically prepared.

#### **9.3.4.2 Successful completion**

The second consequence of the state of methodological preparedness is the destination of the specific candidate (see finding 9). Successful completion refers to meeting the requirements of the doctoral study, that is, making an original contribution to knowledge and submitting a completed thesis (Baptista, Frick, Holley, Remmik, Tesch & Akerlind 2015:55; Bitzer 2012:1188; Wisker 2010:225). This destination has shown to be experienced as a consequence of the state of methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates. Not only is the successful completion of a doctoral voyage the consequence of methodological preparedness, but the source of motivation for doctoral candidates' positive emotions when commencing the voyage (see finding 1 & Sections 5.3.3.1, 6.3.1.1 & 7.3.1.1 in the previous chapters). However, those candidates who have not successfully completed their journeys may also ascribe their non-completion to, amongst other reasons, their state of methodological preparedness.

#### **9.3.4.3 Quality doctorate**

The third consequence of methodological preparedness is the quality of the doctoral journey and the thesis (see also finding 9). A quality doctorate refers to an acceptable doctoral thesis in Public Administration, demonstrating that the doctoral candidate has undertaken "research at the most advanced academic levels culminating in the submission, assessment and acceptance of the thesis" (Council of Higher Education 2013:36). The Council of Higher Education (2013:36) indicates that the quality of a thesis is determined by a peer review process and the thesis meriting publication. A quality doctorate is thus an ultimate consequence of methodological preparedness.

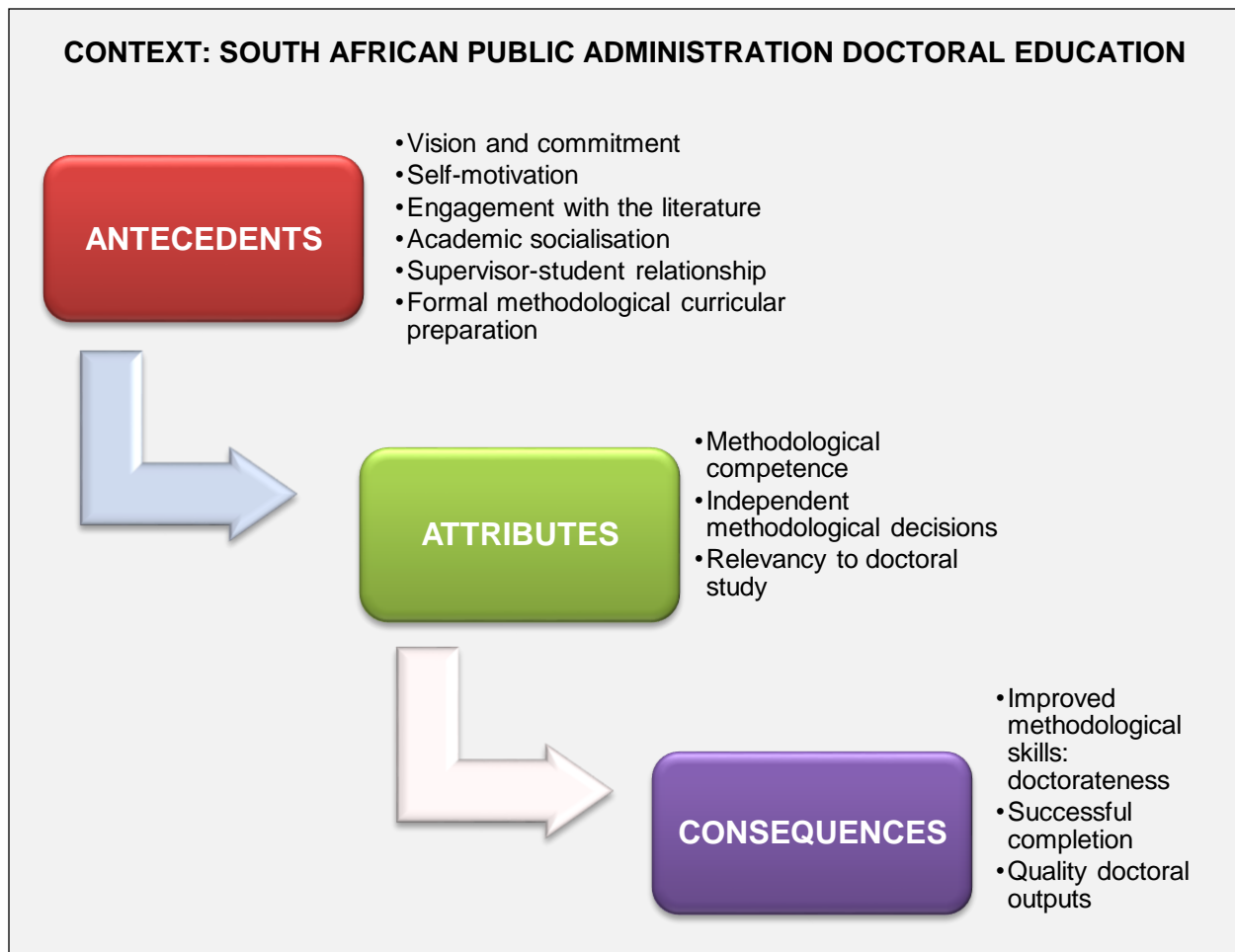
To fully understand the implications of these findings, a conceptual framework (see Figure 9.1) has been derived from the findings in Chapters 5 to 8, the consolidated findings in Section 9.2, as well as the literature review (Chapters 3 & 4). This framework presents the concept “methodological preparedness” within the context of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa, South Africa. The framework consists of three categories of concepts, namely the defining attributes of “methodological preparedness”, the antecedents or conditions for this concept and its phenomenon to exist, and the consequences of the concept and its phenomenon. This framework is presented for understanding the consequences of the methodological preparedness of the Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa, through the interrelationship between the various antecedents and the defining attributes of methodological preparedness.

The conceptual framework (see Figure 9.1) serves thus as a vehicle for a deepened understanding of methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa within the context of South African doctoral education. It shows that the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates within this context can be best understood through its causal relationship with the identified antecedents, as well as its consequences for a candidate’s doctoral capability and scholarship.

#### **9.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides a consolidated summary of the findings as reported in Chapters 5 to 8 (Phase 2) of this thesis. Derived from these findings, a conceptual framework for understanding the methodological preparedness of Public Administration Doctoral candidates at Unisa has been designed for understanding the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa (see Figure 9.1).

Nine consolidated findings were deduced from the lived experiences of the selected group of doctoral candidates and doctoral supervisors of the phenomenon methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa. The findings were presented in the four stages of the metaphoric voyage by ocean.



**Figure 9.1: A proposed conceptual framework for understanding what constitutes methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates as derived from the participants' experiences**

These findings revealed that while doctoral candidates were seemingly unconsciously unaware of their own status of methodological preparedness when commencing their voyage, the doctoral supervisors experienced the vast majority of their doctoral candidates as methodologically unprepared at that stage of the voyage. However, the findings on the participants' lived experiences of the second stage of their voyage (being in the experience), revealed that doctoral candidates not only became aware of their methodological unpreparedness, but that they also became aware of the various antecedents for methodological preparedness. The third stage of the voyage, stormy waters, has unveiled methodological preparedness as readiness for independently

making competent methodological decisions related to a specific research project. The findings on the fourth stage of the voyage confirm that the consequence of a doctoral candidate's methodological preparedness, is the destination of the specific doctoral candidate.

## CHAPTER 10

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“Even carefully planned research can discover something that was not expected”*

(Trafford & Leshem 2008:145)

#### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

This study was motivated by my prolonged engagement as a member of the Higher Degrees Committee of the Department of Public Administration at Unisa with doctoral candidates. I observed the challenges they experienced to select an appropriate research methodology and to apply their knowledge of the chosen methodology to present a well justified methodology section in research proposals. During the early stages of my involvement with these candidates, I wondered “How methodologically prepared were they when they embarked on their doctoral journeys?” My curiosity was informed by scholarly literature, when I realised that *methodological preparedness* as a concept and as a phenomenon is under-researched in Public Administration. I argue in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.3) that the lack of scholarly contributions on the *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates indicates a knowledge gap that hinders scholarly understanding of *methodological preparedness*, both as a concept and a phenomenon. As a lecturer, and later as a postgraduate supervisor in the Department of Public Administration and Management at Unisa, I was also acutely aware of the importance of understanding the experiences of doctoral candidates and supervisors of the phenomenon under study (methodological preparedness). I argued that a deepened understanding of methodological preparedness is a critical step that will make it possible to develop strategies to facilitate successful throughput rates of Public Administration doctoral candidates. Subsequently I decided to conduct this study to generate a conceptual framework to understand what constitutes *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa from the period 2000-2015.

A review of the Public Administration scholarly literature revealed a general concern regarding the quality of the Public Administration research (hence, Premise 1 in Section 1.2). The perceived poor quality has been attributed by some scholars to the inadequate preparedness of doctoral candidates (hence, Premise 2 in Section 1.2). I consequently crafted a research problem (see Section 1.3) which showed the necessity for undertaking this study. In dealing with the research problem, research questions and objectives were explicitly discussed in Chapter 1 (see Sections 1.4 & 1.5). Chapter 2 provided the research design, approach and methods that were followed in answering the research questions and objectives as discussed in Chapter 1. Chapter 3 reported on an analysis of the doctorate as an immediate context for methodological preparedness. Chapter 4 explored the concept *methodological preparedness through an engagement with scholarly literature*. Chapters 5 to 8 discussed the findings of the lived experiences of the various groups of doctoral candidates and the supervisors of the doctoral candidates of the research phenomenon. Chapter 9 provided a consolidated summary of the findings as reported in Phase 2 of this thesis, followed by the integration of these findings in a conceptual framework for understanding what constitutes *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa. The proposed conceptual framework (see Chapter 9) encapsulates the original contribution of this study.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of this thesis, a reflection on the limitations of this study, the conceptual conclusions of the study, a reflection on the significance and originality of the study's contributions and recommendations for future research.

## 10.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

The thesis consists of 10 chapters. In **Chapter 1** I provided a justification for this study, informed by a preliminary background discussion consisting of international and South African perspectives on the identified problem. In order to deal with the identified knowledge gap and research problem, that compromises scholarly understanding of *methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates*, I also provided the research

questions, research purpose and objectives aligned to the three-phased design, the context for this study, a clarification of the key concepts, and a brief overview of the methodological design.

I utilised **Chapter 2** to offer an extensive justification of and report on the qualitative theory generating research design that was actualised in three interrelated phases and was used to achieve the aim and objectives for this study. To this end, I presented a graphical representation of the research design, approach and methods in Figure 2.1, followed by a description of each phase throughout the rest of the chapter. I discussed the three methodological lenses that could inform a phenomenological approach. I justified my choice of the interpretive approach complemented by IPA as the most suitable approach for this study, and my decision to follow the Heideggerian philosophical reasoning. I furthermore provided a justification for using a purposive sampling method and for conducting semi-structured interviews, thus, enabling the participants to share their rich and lived experiences during the second phase of the study. I also reported on how I attended to the measures of trustworthiness and the ethical issues in terms of respect for persons, beneficence and justice.

I subsequently reported in **Chapters 3 to 10** on the three interrelated phases in which the study was organised. My overview of these chapters is consequently structured according to these phases, and is presented as follows:

**Phase 1:** In this phase I turned to scholarly literature and official documents for obtaining a theoretical perspective for this study. This theoretical perspective served as a scholarly context for obtaining a deepened understanding of the concept *methodological preparedness* relevant to Public Administration doctoral candidates. Two objectives were explored in this phase:

- *Objective 1:* Provide an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration as an immediate context for methodological preparedness [**Chapter 3**].



- *Objective 2:* Do concept analysis to identify and describe the meaning of the concept *methodological preparedness* with reference to a doctoral candidate [**Chapter 4**].

**Phase 2:** I turned to Public Administration doctoral candidates and supervisors to explore the phenomenon of *methodological preparedness* at Unisa. Two objectives were also explored in this phase:

- *Objective 3:* Explore how Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa make sense of *methodological preparedness* [**Chapters 5 to 7**].
- *Objective 4:* Explore how Public Administration supervisors at Unisa make sense of *methodological preparedness* [**Chapter 8**].

**Phase 3:** I generated a conceptual framework for understanding the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa [**Chapter 9**].

- *Objective 5:* To generate a conceptual framework that describes what constitutes the *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates, as a concept and a phenomenon at Unisa [**Chapter 9**].

### **10.3 MAIN FINDINGS IN RESPONSE TO EACH OF THE FIVE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study aimed at answering five research questions through the operationalisation of the three interrelated phases. The findings in response to these questions, are subsequently provided within the context of these interrelated phases.

**Research question 1: What are the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration offered by South African Universities? [Chapter 3]**

In response to this question, my objective was to provide an overview of the characteristics of the doctorate in Public Administration as an immediate context for

methodological preparedness (research objective 1). I subsequently turned to scholarly literature and official documents for providing a contextual overview of the doctorate as an immediate context for understanding the *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates in the South African Public Administration fraternity. The literature I consulted has confirmed that the doctorate is a distinct degree qualification offered by Unisa and other universities (see Section 3.2). Its distinctness from other degree qualifications such as the master's degree lies in the high-level research competencies needed by doctoral candidates for making significant and original contributions to their fields of study.

The literature further revealed that apart from the traditional doctorate offered by Unisa and other South African universities, various other categories of doctorates exist, such as the doctorate by publication, the professional doctorate and the higher doctorate (see Section 3.3). The main outcome of the doctorate and specifically the traditional doctorate has shown to make a contribution to knowledge (see Section 3.3.1). In making the contribution, doctoral students need to demonstrate various competencies, such as sound appropriate research design, critical thinking, independency and theoretical knowledge. All these competencies required by doctoral programmes, imply a specific level of methodological preparedness, hence the reason for this study.

My study has shown that doctoral programmes in Public Administration offered by South African universities are offered in various generic fields (see Section 3.4). Although the Public Administration doctorate are offered by various South African universities, in a variety of generic fields with different qualifiers, the outcomes of the qualification as well as the expected competencies of candidates, have shown to be the same. These outcomes are the making an original contribution to knowledge, conducting independent research and producing theses that merit publication. This implies that one can expect the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa to be similar to that of doctoral candidates at other South African universities.

**Research question 2: What constitutes the concept *methodological preparedness* of a doctoral candidate? [Chapter 4]**

In response to this question, I set out to meet research objective 2 by conducting a concept analysis to identify and describe the meaning of the concept *methodological preparedness* with reference to a doctoral candidate. This concept analysis, informed by the relevant scholarly literature, revealed that the concept *methodological preparedness* within this specific context is characterised by the attributes competence, independence and comprehensive literacy (see Section 4.2.2). These attributes have shown to be directly aligned to the generic characteristics and outcomes of a doctorate offered by Unisa and other South African universities (see research question 1 above). *Methodological preparedness* refers thus to an ability necessary for a doctoral candidate to conduct independent research and successfully complete the study. Furthermore, the concept analysis assisted me to identify the interrelated antecedents necessary for being methodologically prepared, namely, doctoral or research training, mentoring, academic socialisation and student-supervisor relationship (see Section 4.2.3). Lastly, the concept analysis assisted me to identify the consequences of a state of the *methodological preparedness* of a doctoral candidate, namely the solving of research problems, producing high quality research output, and obtaining a doctoral qualification.

**Research question 3: How do the Public Administration doctoral candidates enrolled at Unisa from 2000 to 2015 make sense of *methodological preparedness*? [Chapters 5 to 7]**

In response to this question, I set out to explore how three distinct groups of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa made sense of *methodological preparedness*. This exploration was done through a qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis approach to understand the doctoral candidates' lived experiences of their own *methodological preparedness*. The results of this approach have been documented in Chapters 5 to 7, each chapter for a different category of doctoral candidates who voluntarily participated in this study.

**Chapter 5** documented the lived experiences of the doctoral candidates who terminated their studies before completion. These participants' experiences revealed that they were mostly ill-prepared for their respective voyages. They were oblivious of the necessity of *methodological preparedness* at the enrolment stage. They viewed engagement with literature, as well as a supportive student-supervisor relationship as critical aspects to facilitate *methodological preparedness*. While they considered academic socialisation as a necessity, they did not experience it (see Section 5.3.3.2). Their experiences revealed that the research methodology preparation in their previous qualifications, failed to adequately prepare them for the doctoral journey, hence, a need for more support from the supervisor (see Section 5.3.3.2). However, non-academic factors have shown to also have influenced their decision to terminate their studies before completion (see Section 5.3.3.4).

**Chapter 6** documented the lived experiences of the doctoral candidates who were still registered at the time of the interviews. These participants have shown to have positive emotional expressions when commencing their doctoral voyage (see Section 6.3.1.1). During the initial stage of their voyage they envisioned reaching the desired destination which could ultimately improve their career opportunities (see Section 6.3.1.2). They reflected on the personal attributes which could enhance their perseverance, without conscious consideration of their current *methodological preparedness* (see Section 6.3.1.2). Although they emphasised the need for taking personal accountability for their *methodological preparedness*, they also expressed the need for being cared for through a supportive supervisor-student relationship and academic socialisation (see Sections 6.3.2.2 & 6.3.2.3). The need for care and support has been raised within the context of the metaphorical "stormy waters" of the research process, when they experienced methodological challenges due to shortcomings in their formal curricular methodological preparation (see Sections 6.3.3; 6.3.3.1 & 6.3.3.2).

**Chapter 7** documented the lived experiences of the doctoral candidates who successfully completed their doctoral degrees. The essence of these participants' experiences emerged as a sense of not being prepared at the time of enrolment. However, they have

shown a conscious awareness of typical antecedents of methodological preparedness, such as engaging with the literature, academic socialisation and supervisor-student relationship (see Sections 7.3.2.1 & 7.3.2.2). Consequently they have utilised these typical antecedents to enhance their methodological preparedness in order to successfully complete their voyage. This chapter also confirmed that the caring support from the supervisor motivated them to complete their studies (see Sections 7.3.2.2 & 7.3.2.3).

**Research question 4: How do the Public Administration doctoral supervisors at Unisa make sense of *methodological preparedness*? [Chapter 8]**

**Chapter 8** documented the lived experiences of doctoral supervisors at Unisa and their making sense of *methodological preparedness*. They experienced that most doctoral candidates were under-prepared at the time of enrolment (see Sections 8.3.1.2). The supervisors acknowledged the challenges related to inadequate previous methodological preparation of the doctoral candidates (see Section 8.3.3.1). They believed that the *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates could be enhanced by encouraging the candidates to first read extensively before commencing with their research proposals (see Section 8.3.2.1). They confirmed their role in encouraging the candidates to engage in such an endeavour (see Section 8.3.2.1) and acknowledged the importance of academically socialising with the candidates in the department. Moreover the supervisors acknowledged the meaningful role that the supervisor-candidate relationship played in assisting the doctoral candidates in enhancing their *methodological preparedness* (see Section 8.3.2.2). The doctoral supervisors subsequently recommended that research methodology training for the doctoral candidates should be provided during the journey. Their views regarding the enhancing of capacity-building initiatives to facilitate the methodological preparedness of the doctoral students, are similar to the views held by doctoral candidates.

**Research question 5: What constitutes *methodological preparedness* of Public Administration doctoral candidates, as a concept and phenomenon, at Unisa? [chapter 9]**

In response to research question 5, **Chapter 9** provided the consolidated findings on what constitutes *methodological preparedness* of doctoral candidates to the respective categories of doctoral candidates and supervisors reported on in Chapters 5 to 8.

This study has shown that the understanding of the *methodological preparedness* of a doctoral candidate (the phenomenon) occurs within the immediate context of the specific characteristics of the doctorate, namely independent research leading to original contribution to knowledge culminating in a theses which merit publication (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, this study found that the lived experiences of the participants in this study have shown that the respondents have different perspectives on methodological preparedness. These perspectives are directly related to their lived experiences of the phenomenon in the distinct stages of the doctoral journey, metaphorically referred to as the voyage by sea.

**Stage 1:** Doctoral candidates have shown to commence their doctoral voyage being unconsciously unaware of their status of *methodological preparedness* at the time of enrolment (see finding 1; subsection 9.2.1). On the contrary, doctoral supervisors experienced the vast majority of doctoral candidates as being under-prepared at the time of enrolment (see finding 2; subsection 9.2.1). However, their state of methodological preparedness has evidently not disqualified these doctoral candidates for commencing their doctoral journey.

**Stage 2:** The unawareness of their state of methodological preparedness has shown to rapidly change for the doctoral candidates in the second stage of their voyage (being in the experience) to a conscious awareness of their methodological unpreparedness (see finding 3; subsection 9.2.2). Being in the experience of either methodologically prepared or methodologically unprepared, resulted in both the candidates and supervisor

participants to identify antecedents for methodological preparedness, namely engagement with scholarly literature (finding 3; subsection 9.2.2), a supportive student-supervisor relationship (finding 4 and 5; subsection 9.2.2), academic socialisation (findings 6, 7 and 8; subsection 9.2.2), and formal curricular methodological preparation (finding 7; subsection 9.2.2) both as antecedent of methodological preparedness (see findings 3 and 4; subsection 9.2.2). Although the participants did not provide a clear articulation of the concept *methodological preparedness* in the second stage of this doctoral voyage, they were consciously aware of the antecedents necessary of a state of being methodologically prepared.

**Stage 3:** This study has shown that the candidates' understanding of the concept *methodological preparedness*, became more articulated during their experiences of methodological challenges in metaphoric stage of stormy waters (see subsection 9.2.3). Their understanding of *methodological preparedness* subsequently refers to include the defining attributes of independence, competence and project relevance (see finding 9; subsection 9.2.3).

**Stage 4:** The study has shown that the participants' understanding of *methodological preparedness* has been completed in the final stage of the metaphorical voyage by sea, namely the reaching of the destination (see finding 10; subsection 9.2.4). *Methodological preparedness* has shown to be fully understood through its consequence, namely the completion of the doctoral journey.

In order to integrate the various perspectives on methodological preparedness, I have re-engaged with the conceptual analysis in Chapter 4, the interpretation chapters (see Chapters 5, 6, 7 & 8) and the integrated findings (see Sections 9.2.1; 9.2.2; 9.2.3 & 9.2.4), to generate a conceptual framework (see Figure 9.1) for understanding the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa. This conceptual framework serves to illustrate the originality of the contribution of this study which is discussed in Section 10.5 of this chapter.

The study has shown that within this specific context, *methodological preparedness* as a state of being is characterised by a doctoral candidate's competence to make independent methodological decisions relevant to his or her doctoral study. The ultimate consequence of this state of being is the successful completion of the doctoral study. Furthermore, the study has identified several antecedents which may enhance doctoral candidates' methodologically preparedness. Some of these antecedents are of a non-academic nature, such as vision, commitment and self-motivation. Others are of an academic nature, such as a comprehensive engagement with scholarly literature, academic socialisation, a supportive student-supervisor relationship, and formal curricular methodological preparation. In addition, this study has shown that methodological preparedness is not a once-off gate-keeping phenomenon, but an ongoing decision-making process. This study has shown that a candidate's methodological preparedness (the state of being competent to independently make a methodological decision relevant to his or her doctoral research project), is not a once-off gate-keeping phenomenon, but an ongoing and fluent state of being.

#### **10.4 A REFLECTION ON THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Two limitations could have influenced the interpretation of the findings of this study. The first limitation relates to my relationship with the participants including the doctoral candidates. I had interacted with some of the doctoral candidates during the research indabas organised by the department. This might have influenced the manner in which they shared their experiences. To counter for this limitation, when I entered the field, I introduced myself as a doctoral candidate and not as an academic (see Section 2.3.2.4). I intentionally introduced myself in this manner to assure the participants that we were equals in the research process. In addition I provided a detailed informed consent forms (see Annexure 3 & 4) to ensure that the participants make an informed decisions in terms of their voluntary participation. I further ensured that there is structural coherence and I created a chain of evidence as explained in detail in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.1.5).



The second limitation was my own methodological preparedness regarding the use of phenomenology during the course of the study. I could not locate a study in Public Administration that has used phenomenology or IPA. This implied that I had to rely heavily on other disciplines to enhance my own methodological competence. This limitation was also dealt with by having two supervisors, one in my discipline and the other from another discipline (nursing) where phenomenology is used. In order to explore what I did not know about the chosen design, I participated in a workshop on phenomenology focusing on IPA and had regular supervision sessions with my supervisors to groom my understanding and competence. I had to rely mostly on completed research projects and research methodology books to enhance my own methodological preparedness. After I transcribed the interviews, I realised I had an enormous amount of data. I had to revisit the literature to be able to handle the data and ensure that my interpretations were relevant.

## **10.5 THE SIGNIFICANT AND ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

With this study, I set out to contribute to an ongoing discourse on the perceived low quality of Public Administration research (see Premise 1 in Section 1.2), as well as the discourse related to the inadequate methodological preparedness of Public Administration researchers (see Premise 2 in Section 1.2). While only a few studies have focused on the methodological preparation of scholars in Public Administration (see Section 1.3), these studies have not focused on Public Administration scholars' or doctoral candidates' state of being methodologically prepared. The lack of scholarly contributions on the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates indicates a knowledge gap that compromises scholarly understanding of methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates in Public Administration. Failure to deal with this knowledge gap will continue to influence the quality of Public Administration research and the consequent ability of Public Administration scholarship to inform public policy on the improvement of the well-being of society.

This study, firstly, makes an original contribution to the scholarship on methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates in general, by generating a conceptual framework for understanding the concept *methodological preparedness* and its related phenomenon (see Chapter 4) through a review of the relevant scholarly literature. This framework departs from a preliminary definition of the concept, as “a certain ability for conducting research and successfully completion of doctoral studies” (see Section 4.2.1). It identifies the concept’s defining attributes, antecedents and consequences in an original manner (see Chapters 3 & 4). Three defining attributes were identified, namely competence, independence and comprehensive literacy. Four antecedents were identified as factors enhancing the understanding of the concept, namely doctoral or research training, mentoring, academic socialisation, and student-supervisor relationship. Four consequences were identified, namely high quality research, meaningful research questions, the ability to pose suitable research questions and the acceptance of a doctoral thesis. The framework (see Figure 4.1) contributes to the understanding of the under-researched concept *methodological preparedness* within the context of doctoral education.

The second contribution of this study is an original conceptual framework for a scholarly understanding of the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa. This original contribution is three-fold, namely scholarly, pragmatic and methodological. Firstly, this framework (see Figure 9.1) contributes to the Public Administration scholarship on doctoral education. Secondly, I envisage that the conceptual framework would inform supervision practices and improve the throughput and success rate of Public Administration doctorates at Unisa. Thirdly, the study makes a methodological contribution by employing the IPA approach for the first time in the South African Public Administration fraternity. This contribution is important because it serves as a guideline to other Public Administration researchers who could consider employing IPA in their respective projects.

## 10.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research was based only in the Department of Public Administration and Management at Unisa and the findings were based on the experiences of the doctoral candidates and supervisors in this department. Emanating from the re-engagement with the interpretation of the findings the following recommendations for further research were identified.

As the conceptual framework has identified several antecedents for the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates, future research is necessary to optimise the value of this framework. Informed by this study, I consequently recommend future research on the following themes:

- The role of doctoral supervisors in enhancing the independency of doctoral candidates during the doctoral journey.
- Overestimation of the methodological curricular on the competence of doctoral candidates.
- The role of comprehensive engagement with the literature to enhance relevancy of independent methodological decisions.
- The role of research training in doctoral programmes to prepare doctoral candidates in making an original contribution.
- The methodological preparedness of doctoral supervisors (the supervisors were not asked about their own methodological preparedness).
- Appropriate capacity-building initiatives to facilitate the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates (it appears that the doctoral candidates yearned for more academic socialisation).
- The influence of non-academic factors in the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates.
- Supporting self-motivation in doctoral candidates.
- The use of IPA in Public Administration.

## 10.7 REFLECTION

Upon commencing this journey I was under the impression that doctoral candidates are/were methodologically prepared. I believed that their methodological preparedness was enhanced at master's level. As I commenced with the semi-structured interviews, I came to realise that my assumption was not valid. My sample consisted of academics and students (some of the students were practitioners). Regardless of their occupation, the majority of the participants alluded to the fact that they were not methodologically prepared at the time of enrolment. This was also confirmed by the supervisors. Seemingly, methodological preparedness is enhanced during the voyage. I realised that at the time of enrolment, doctoral candidates need support to enhance their methodological preparedness. I further realised that doctoral students who are less methodologically prepared can complete their studies if they have supportive supervisors. Candidates who are methodologically prepared can discontinue their studies if they feel isolated. This research made me realise the importance of instilling methodological competence in students prior to their enrolment for doctoral studies. The conceptual framework in Chapter 9 (see Figure 9.1) can be useful to supervisors to understand the methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates within Unisa.

During the research process, I came to realise that my own understanding of methodological preparedness was limited. As I listened to the experiences of the participants, I had to suppress my feelings, assumptions and viewpoints to allow them to draw me into their being. As I was drawn into their being, I came to a deepened understanding of what *methodological preparedness* as a phenomenon means. I came to the realisation that at the time of enrolment the doctoral candidates are unconscious of their methodological preparedness status. Unconsciously, the supervisors realised that they were unprepared. Another discerning realisation for me was that methodological preparedness is not the only condition for successful completion of the doctoral study. Reflecting on the conceptual framework (see Figure 9.1), a number of factors are involved for one to be methodologically prepared and successfully complete the doctoral study. The interrelatedness of the antecedents, defining attributes and consequences of

methodological preparedness enhanced my understanding of what it is like to *voyage by the ocean*. I am inspired and motivated to continue delving in this under-researched area to further extend deeper understanding of this concept and phenomenon.

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**ANNEXURE 1**  
**ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

# DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT



REF: PAM/2013/002

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT:  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

This is to certify that the application for ethics clearance submitted by  
Ms XC Thani (staff no 90124960)

for the doctoral study

**The Methodological Competence of Doctoral Candidates in Public Administration: An  
Interpretive Phenomenological Approach**

has received ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Public  
Administration and Management, CEMS. This approval will be sent to the CEMS Research  
Ethics Committee for notification.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Webb", is written over a large, light grey, stylized graphic of three wavy lines in orange, red, and blue.

Prof Werner Webb  
Chair: PAM Research Ethics Committee  
webbwn@unisa.ac.za

February 28, 2013



University of South Africa  
Pretorius Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa  
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150  
www.unisa.ac.za

**ANNEXURE 2**  
**PERMISSION LETTER FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH**  
**USING UNISA STUDENTS AND STAFF**

PROF L LABUSCHAGNE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH DEPARTMENT  
Tel: +27 12 429 0308 / 2440  
Email: [labus@unisa.ac.za](mailto:labus@unisa.ac.za)  
Address: Theo van Wijk Building, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Office no. 50 (TVW 10-50)

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10 December 2014

Mrs. Xolile Thani  
Department of Public Administration and Management  
College of Economic and Management Sciences  
Unisa

Dear Mrs. Xolile Thani

**PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH INVOLVING UNISA STAFF, STUDENTS AND  
DATA**

**A study into: "The methodological preparation of doctoral candidates in  
Public Administration: an interpretive phenomenological approach."**

Your application regarding permission to conduct research involving Unisa staff, students and data in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee of the Unisa Senate Research and Innovation and Higher Degrees Committee (SRIHDC) on 05 December 2014.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for this study as per your application, for the period between 1 January 2015 and 30 November 2015.

The Department: Legal Services considers requests for access to records of the University of South Africa in accordance with the Promotion of Access to Information Act, Act No. 2 of 2000 and the Protection of Personal Information Act, Act No. 4 of 2013. Access to the details (personal information) of staff and students cannot be granted without the written consent of the mentioned individuals.

We would like to wish you well in your research undertaking.

Kind regards



PROF L LABUSCHAGNE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH



**ANNEXURE 3**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORMS: DOCTORAL CANDIDATES**

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM**

**PROJECT TITLE: THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPARATION OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

**PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR: Mrs XC Thani**

**ADDRESS: AJH van der Walt Building 4-102**

**P O Box 392, Unisa, 0003, South Africa**

**E-mail: [thanixc@unisa.ac.za](mailto:thanixc@unisa.ac.za)**

**STUDY LEADER: Prof JS Wessels**

**Department of Public Administration and Management**

**University of South Africa**

**E-mail: [wessejs@unisa.ac.za](mailto:wessejs@unisa.ac.za)**

**JOINT STUDY LEADER: Dr Retha Visagie**

**Research Management Directorate**

**University of South Africa**

**E-mail: [Visagrq@unisa.ac.za](mailto:Visagrq@unisa.ac.za)**

**Dear prospective research participant**

My name is Xolile Carol Thani, currently enrolled for a doctoral degree in Public Administration (DLitt et Phil) at the University of South Africa. I am investigating a study entitled: **The methodological preparation of doctoral candidates in Public Administration: an interpretive phenomenological approach.** I am conducting this research under the supervision of Prof JS Wessels and Dr Retha Visagie who are both affiliated with the University of South Africa. You are invited to participate in my research study that forms part of my formal doctoral studies. Please read this information and make sure that you fully understand what is involved. You are welcome to ask me or my

supervisors if there is information that you do not understand. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline to participate. If you decide not to participate, this will not affect you negatively in any way. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you have initially agreed to take part. This study has been approved by the Department of Public Administration Higher Degrees Committee and the Research Ethics Review Committee. Permission to conduct this study using Unisa students was granted by the Research Permission Subcommittee of the University of South Africa Senate Research and Innovation and Higher Degrees Committee (SRIHDC). This study will comply with the ethical guidelines and policies of Unisa.

### **What is this study all about?**

The aim of this study is *to generate a conceptual framework to understand what constitutes methodological preparedness of South African Public Administration doctoral candidates from the period 2000 to 2015*. In order to make sense of the topic under study, you are requested to complete a written essay on your experience of your methodological preparedness at the commencement of your doctoral studies. In addition you will be requested to participate in one or more individual interviews which will allow you to share your experiences voluntarily. You will be invited via e-mail, telephonically and through social networks to participate in an individual interview ranging from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. Either Prof JS Wessels or Dr RG Visagie may act as an observer during some of the interviews. You will however be requested to provide explicit permission for this to happen. The interviews will be conducted at a venue that will be convenient for you as a prospective research participant. The interviews will be audio-recorded. If you feel that you are uncomfortable with the audio-recording kindly inform me.

### **Why have you been selected?**

You have been invited because of your invaluable experience of the phenomenon “methodological preparedness” as either a currently registered doctoral candidate, one that has successfully completed the degree or had ended your study. Your participation

in this study will result to developing a framework that will be used to instil methodological preparedness in Public Administration doctoral candidates.

**Will you benefit from taking part in this research?**

I trust that you may directly benefit from this research as a doctoral candidate or alumnus. This reflective process will allow you to make sense of your own methodological preparedness at the commencement of your doctoral studies. If you agree to participate you will contribute to the improvement of methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates and the future development of Public Administration researchers.

**Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research?**

There are no long terms risks in participating in this research. However you will be required to spend some time reflecting and completing the required essay and to be available for the interviews. As already mentioned earlier you may be requested to participate in more than one interview. This will require time from your schedule. During the reflection process something might trigger your memory as you reflect on your “methodological preparedness” at the commencement of your doctoral studies. Please note that this information will be handled with sensitivity and care. Remember that your participation is voluntary. If at that point you don’t feel mentally prepared, the interview can be rescheduled to a time convenient for you as research participant.

**If you decide not to take part, what alternatives do you have?**

You are free to withdraw from this research at any stage without any negative consequences. Your withdrawal will be a confidential matter between you and me and you will not be penalised in any way if you decide to withdraw.



### **Who will have access to the information generated through the research?**

Any information resulting from this research, will be treated with confidentiality. Your identity will be protected by not recording your names or titles of your own research. I also urge you not to mention the names of your supervisors to protect their identity too. Since I will use individual interviews I will make sure that I keep the audio-recordings in a secured place. Once they are transferred to my laptop they will be password-protected and deleted from the audio-recorder.

The written essays and audio-recordings will also be made available to the people involved in this research such as the supervisors, transcriber (only to translate audio to written text and this person is not affiliated to Unisa) and the Unisa Research Permission Subcommittee (for reporting purposes only). The transcriber will be requested to sign a confidentiality agreement to protect the information that you will share with me related to the topic under study. I will also request the transcriber not to capture any identifying information that you may share during the interviews during the capturing process.

It is also important to note that I will store the aforementioned information for a period of five years in a password-protected computer and it will be used only for research purposes.

### **Will you be paid to take part in this research and are there any costs involved?**

You will not be compensated to participate in this research. There won't be any cost for you in this research. I will provide water during the interviews, considering the time that we will spend in each interview.

### **Is the researcher qualified to conduct this research?**

The researcher is a student who is conducting this research in partial fulfilment towards the doctoral degree in Public Administration and Management under the supervision of

qualified researchers.

**Is there anything else that you should know or do?**

In case you want to know more information about this research please contact the Chair of the Department of Public Administration Ethics Review Committee at 012 429 6909. This person can only provide information on the ethical aspects of the research. You will also receive a copy of this information and informed consent form.

## Declaration by participant

By signing below, I ..... agree to take part in a research study entitled ***The methodological preparation of doctoral candidates in Public Administration: an interpretive phenomenological approach***

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form or it has been read to me. In addition, it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I understand that interviews will be audio-recorded to improve the credibility of the findings of the research.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I am aware and agree to the storage of the original data as set out in the application form for a minimum period of five years from the completion of the doctoral thesis including the required essay and audio-recordings of the interviews.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I agree that one of the supervisors of this study could be present during one or more of the interviews as set out in the information leaflet.

YES	NO
-----	----

Signed at (*place*) ..... on (*date*) ..... 2015.

.....  
**Signature of participant**

## Declaration by investigator

I Xolile Carol Thani declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to .....
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.

Signed at (*place*) ..... on (*date*) ..... 2015.

.....  
**Signature of investigator**

**ANNEXURE 4**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORMS: SUPERVISORS**

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM**

**PROJECT TITLE: THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPARATION OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

**PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR: Mrs XC Thani**

**ADDRESS: AJH van der Walt Building 4-102**

**P O Box 392, Unisa, 0003, South Africa**

**E-mail: [thanixc@unisa.ac.za](mailto:thanixc@unisa.ac.za)**

**STUDY LEADER: Prof JS Wessels**

**Department of Public Administration and Management**

**University of South Africa**

**E-mail: [wessejs@unisa.ac.za](mailto:wessejs@unisa.ac.za)**

**JOINT STUDY LEADER: Dr Retha Visagie**

**Research Management Directorate**

**University of South Africa**

**E-mail: [Visagrq@unisa.ac.za](mailto:Visagrq@unisa.ac.za)**

**Dear prospective research participant**

My name is Xolile Carol Thani, currently enrolled for a doctoral degree in Public Administration (DLitt et Phil) at the University of South Africa. I am investigating a study entitled: **The methodological preparation of doctoral candidates in Public Administration: an interpretive phenomenological approach.** I am conducting this research under the supervision of Prof JS Wessels and Dr Retha Visagie who are both affiliated with the University of South Africa. You are invited to participate in my research study that forms part of my formal doctoral studies. Please read this information and make sure that you fully understand what is involved. You are welcome to ask me or my

supervisors if there is information that you do not understand. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline to participate. If you decide not to participate, this will not affect you negatively in any way. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you have initially agreed to take part. This study has been approved by the Department of Public Administration Higher Degrees Committee and the Research Ethics Review Committee. Permission to conduct this study using Unisa students was granted by the Research Permission Subcommittee of the University of South Africa SRIHDC. This study will comply with the ethical guidelines and policies of Unisa.

### **What is this study all about?**

The aim of this study is *to generate a conceptual framework to understand what constitutes methodological preparedness of South African Public Administration doctoral candidates from the period 2000 to 2015*. In order to make sense of the topic under study, you are requested to complete a written essay on your experience of your doctoral candidate's methodological preparedness at the commencement of their doctoral studies. In addition you will be requested to participate in one or more individual interviews which will allow you to share your experiences voluntarily. You will be invited via e-mail, telephonically and through social networks to participate in an individual interview ranging from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. Either Prof JS Wessels or Dr RG Visagie may act as an observer during some of the interviews. You will however be requested to provide explicit permission for this to happen. The interviews will be conducted at a venue that will be convenient for you as a prospective research participant. The interviews will be audio-recorded. If you feel that you are uncomfortable with the audio-recording kindly inform me.

### **Why have you been selected?**

You have been invited because of your invaluable experience of the phenomenon "methodological preparedness" as a current or previous supervisor of doctoral candidates in the Department of Public Administration and Management. Your participation in this



study will result to developing a framework that will be used to instil methodological preparedness in Public Administration doctoral candidates.

### **Will you benefit from taking part in this research?**

I trust that you may directly benefit from this research as a doctoral supervisor. This reflective process will allow you as a supervisor to make sense of the methodological preparedness of your doctoral candidates. It will further assist you in thinking about some mechanisms that you can put in place to improve the methodological preparedness of your doctoral candidates. If you agree to participate you will contribute to the improvement of methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates and the future development of Public Administration researchers. Moreover you will benefit from the conceptual framework that will be generated because it will contain some guidelines.

### **Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research?**

There are no long terms risks in participating in this research. However you will be required to spend some time reflecting and completing the required essay and to be available for the interviews. As already mentioned earlier you may be requested to participate in more than one interview. This will require time from your schedule. During the reflection process you might trigger your memory as you make sense of your doctoral candidate's 'methodological preparedness' at the commencement of their doctoral studies. Please note that this information will be handled with sensitivity and care. Remember that your participation is voluntary. If at that point you don't feel mentally prepared, the interview can be rescheduled to a time convenient for you as research participant.

**If you decide not to take part, what alternatives do you have?**

You are free to withdraw from this research at any stage without any negative consequences. Your withdrawal will be a confidential matter between you and me and you will not be penalised in any way if you decide to withdraw.

**Who will have access to the information generated through the research?**

Any information resulting from this research, will be treated with confidentiality. Your identity will be protected by not recording your names or titles of your doctoral candidate's research. I also urge you not to mention the names of your students to protect their identity too. Since I will use individual interviews I will make sure that I keep the audio-recordings in a secured place. Once they are transferred to my laptop they will be password-protected and deleted from the audio-recorder.

The written essays and audio-recordings will also be made available to the people involved in this research such as the supervisors, transcriber (only to translate audio to written text and this person is not affiliated to Unisa) and the Unisa Research Permission Subcommittee (for reporting purposes only). The transcriber will be requested to sign a confidentiality agreement to protect the information that you will share with me related to the topic under study. I will also request the transcriber not to capture any identifying information that you may share during the interviews during the capturing process.

It is also important to note that I will store the aforementioned information for a period of five years in a password-protected computer and it will be used only for research purposes.

**Will you be paid to take part in this research and are there any costs involved?**

You will not be compensated to participate in this research. There won't be any cost for you in this research. I will provide water during the interviews, considering the time that we will spend in each interview.

**Is the researcher qualified to conduct this research?**

The researcher is a student who is conducting this research in partial fulfilment towards the doctoral degree in Public Administration and Management under the supervision of qualified researchers.

**Is there anything else that you should know or do?**

In case you want to know more information about this research please contact the Chair of the Department of Public Administration Ethics Review Committee at 012 429 6909. This person can only provide information on the ethical aspects of the research. You will also receive a copy of this information and informed consent form. You will also receive the conceptual framework that will be generated from this research study. You are kindly requested to evaluate the framework and see if it is useful for instilling methodological preparedness to doctoral candidates.

## Declaration by participant

By signing below, I ..... agree to take part in a research study entitled ***The methodological preparation of doctoral candidates in Public Administration: an interpretive phenomenological approach***

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form or it has been read to me. In addition, it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I understand that interviews will be audio-recorded to improve the credibility of the findings of the research.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I am aware and agree to the storage of the original data as set out in the application form for a minimum period of five years from the completion of the doctoral thesis including the required essay and audio-recordings of the interviews.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I agree that one of the supervisors of this study could be present during one or more of the interviews as set out in the information leaflet.

YES	NO
-----	----

- I agree that I will read and evaluate the conceptual framework to determine if it is useful for instilling methodological preparedness to doctoral candidates.

YES	NO
-----	----

Signed at (*place*) ..... on (*date*) ..... 2015.

.....  
**Signature of participant**

## Declaration by investigator

I Xolile Carol Thani declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to .....
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.

Signed at (*place*) ..... on (*date*) ..... 2015.

.....  
**Signature of investigator**

**ANNEXURE 5**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: DOCTORAL CANDIDATES**

## **DOCTORAL CANDIDATES**

1. What was it like when you enrolled for your doctoral degree?
  
2. Reflecting on your experience of your doctoral study, tell me how prepared you were with regard to the research methodology (design and methods) when you enrolled?
  
3. Reflecting on your experience, what would have facilitated your methodological preparedness at the time of enrolment?



**ANNEXURE 6**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SUPERVISORS**

## **SUPERVISORS**

1. Please tell me about your supervision experience at this department?
2. Reflecting on your supervision experience, tell me how methodologically prepared your doctoral candidates were when they enrolled for their doctoral studies?
3. Reflecting on your own supervision experience, what do you believe is needed to facilitate the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates in the Department of Public Administration and Management?

**ANNEXURE 7**  
**EXAMPLES OF FACEBOOK REFLECTIONS**

Xolile Thani is 😊 feeling thankful.

#### Reflection day 11

I had an interview with one of my research participants just 3 hours ago. The participant started sharing the experience. I was actually puzzled when the participant indicated that he/she did not do any research methodology module at undergraduate level or either honours level. It was not part of the curriculum. The masters degree was just a nightmare and that led to being unprepared at doctoral level. What interests me the most about this participant is that he/she managed to somehow bridge the gap by conducting an extensive literature review and reading completed theses from other disciplines. This participant believed that at doctoral level you have to work independently, a promotor serves as a mentor but the reading and understanding is your responsibility. Thank you to my participants for their willingness to share their experiences.

On a lighter note: Today I remembered to bring water for my participant as promised in the informed consent form. Yesterday I went to stock bottled water.

Themes that I derived today: Literature review, research methodology curricular, research colloquiums and multidisciplinary.

Xolile Thani is 😊 feeling determined.

#### Reflection day 10

I had an interview this morning with one of my participants. Before I could ask the first question the participant started sharing the experience. I didn't want to destruct the participant, I decided to listen. After 10 minutes then I managed to ask the first question and the moment the participant started sharing I realised that emotions kicked in. I quickly assured the participant it is safe to share the experience because anonymity is maintained. We finished the interview and there I drove off. On my way back as I was reflecting I got so emotional, I realised that expectations sometimes can be so higher that they lead to disappointment. You can write so many chapters thinking you will impress your supervisor and only to find you still have to rework them so many times.

I started transcribing when I got home and these were the themes I derived today: Academic background, literature review, critical thinking, research methodology grounding, research mentor and research methodology workshops.

**ANNEXURE 8**  
**EXAMPLE OF A NAÏVE SKETCH**

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1. What was it like when you enrolled for your doctoral degree?

Mixed feelings, considering the fact that a doctoral study is a massive research project while on the other hand I want a doctoral degree. But because the topic emanates from the research study I conducted for my master's degree, I felt obliged to enrol for a doctoral degree in order to address the problems revealed by the findings. I believe that my research study will assist in alleviating service delivery protests and demonstrations. The degree will also be beneficial to me because it will provide more career opportunities.

2. Reflecting on your experience of your doctoral study, tell me how prepared you were with regard to the research methodology (design and methods) when you enrolled?

I was not prepared because I did not focus much on the research methodology when I enrolled for my doctoral study but on the identified problems. Through literature review, I just decided to use mixed methodologies with the belief that my supervisors will be of assistance. I also discovered through literature that my study is wide, so I opted for a case study design to narrow it (doctoral study). In addition, case studies are used to address broad issues in society, social institutions and social relationships. Furthermore, they (case studies) are also conducted in real-life setting and contribute to finding concrete solutions to social problems. I chose mixed methodologies in order to collect both qualitative and quantitative data with the aim of having rich data that will yield excellent results. My doctoral study involves beneficiaries of a housing project, so I

finding concrete solutions to social problems. I chose mixed methodologies in order to collect both qualitative and quantitative data with the aim of having rich data that will yield excellent results. My doctoral study involves beneficiaries of a housing project, so I just concluded that the beneficiaries of this project will be the target population and a sample will be drawn from this population to determine the adequacy of the provided houses. Semi-structured interviews using semi-structured questionnaires will be used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data due to the fact that mixed methodologies were chosen. I will conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews.

3. Reflecting on your experience, what would have facilitated your methodological preparedness at the time of enrolment?

I should have thought of the methodology first and conducted extensive literature review instead of dwelling much on the identified/revealed problems and reading more on them. This should have facilitated the ability to choose a methodology that will yield rich data independently without expecting the supervisors to assist. I'm of the opinion that after identifying a research problem, I should have identified participants of my study first. This should have assisted me in choosing an excellent research design and methodology and determining data collection tools and sample size. In addition, I should have requested permission to conduct my study from relevant institutions in advance.

**ANNEXURE 9**  
**EXAMPLES OF OBSERVATIONAL NOTES**



## **Students who terminated their studies before completion**

### **Faith**

**Date:** 22 September 2015

**Time:** 12:08 – 13:08

**Place:** Government office

The participant was alone in her office. We closed her office for privacy promises. The researcher and the participant were the only people during the interview.

The researcher contacted the participant to recruit the participant and send the informed consent form. The participant agreed and the date was set for an interview.

### **The interview**

The participant was excited and shared her rich story. She kept an eye contact. Her face was inviting. I realised a sudden change on her facial expression when she shared the experience about the loss of her husband.

She started sharing that at the time of enrolment she felt prepared. She realised her unpreparedness when she had to compile the research proposal. It appeared that she found the methodology modules to be challenging at undergraduate level. She looked like she was still passionate about academia.

Her naïve sketch was very brief hence I probed during the interview to draw her inner thoughts.

### **Gift**

**Date:** 9 October 2015

**Time:** 10:56- 12:10

**Place:** Boksburg Park

I met the participant at a restaurant that was selected by him. The participant came alone to meet me. It was too noisy in the restaurant and we both agreed that the venue was not conducive. He proposed that there was a park in the centre of the town. We went to the park and it was a quiet and conducive environment. The researcher and the participant were the only people during the interview.

The researcher contacted the participant to recruit the participant and send the informed consent form. The participant agreed and the date was set for an interview.

**Interview:**

It was difficult to ascertain his feelings because he is more reserved. I assured him that I am also a doctoral student like him. He started to relax. He shared that at the time of enrolment he was looking forward to achieve his dream. He was very serious when sharing his experience. I noticed that he frowned when he shared that the department delayed to provide feedback on his research proposal and he decided to terminate his studies before completion. He also took some long pauses during the interview. It looked like he wanted to think deep before he could share his experience.

**Given**

**Date:** 25 September 2015

**Time:** 09:39- 10:39

**Place:** Boksburg Park

I met the participant in one restaurant that he selected. It was the two of us. We asked for a secluded table to avoid interruptions. He is free spirited and vocal.

**Interview**

His facial expression showed that during his journey he was frustrated, angry and demotivated. He strongly believed that he experienced “bad luck in supervision”. He believed he was methodological prepared. I noticed how confident he was when he reflected on his methodological preparedness. After the interview he still shared her personal experience because I realised I triggered his emotions I had to sit and listen.

**Students who are registered**

**S’phiwo**

**Date:** 3 September 2015

**Time:** 15:28- 16:20

**Place:** Supervisor’s office

I met the participant at one of my supervisor’s office. The participant came alone to meet myself and one of the supervisors. Consent was sort from the participant and she agreed

that one of my supervisors can sit in as an observer. We were interrupted by a colleague who knocked in the office. We kept the door closed to avoid more interruptions.

### **Interview**

The participant looked relaxed and confident. Her confidence was seen when she started sharing her experience. She maintained an eye contact and she kept on smiling as she shared her experience. She acknowledged that she was not methodologically prepared but she read extensively. She also indicated that she was making good progress with her studies. Her naïve sketch was specific.

### **Prudence**

**Date:** 22 October 2015

**Time:** 09:03- 10:55

**Place:** Her office

I met Prudence in her office. It was the two of us during the interview. She is energetic and vocal. Since we work at the same institution I assured her that the interview was confidential. She seemed to be relaxed. That was an indication that she trusted that I was going to maintain confidentiality.

### **Interview:**

Prudence had a pen and paper in front of her. She kept on illustrating what she meant. Even though she showed some level of dissatisfaction with the process of evaluating proposals, it seemed that she already had meetings with a potential supervisor. You could see her facial expressions when she shared that she was not prepared. She insisted that it is not easy especially if you are a professional administration staff to be methodologically prepared.

### **Jonathan**

**Date:** 14 September 2015

**Time:** 09:59- 10:45

**Place:** Supervisors' office

I met Jonathan in one of my supervisor's office. It was the three of us during the interview. He is a reserved participant, who believed he will respond to the questions asked.

**Interview**

He kept an eye contact. He was not intimidated by the fact that we work in the same department. It appears that he understood the purpose of the study and he was willing to share his experience. He seemed to be concerned with his methodological preparedness status. Jonathan further shared that he wrote a research project at honours level but it did not prepare him.

**Successfully completed****Rejoice**

**Date:** 21 October 2015

**Time:** 09:50- 10:50

**Place:** In the participant's office

I met Rejoice in her office. It was the two of us during the interview. She looked excited, energetic and eager to participate.

**Interview:**

This participant could not stop smiling and giggling as she shared her experience. It seemed that it was relaxed sail for her during the doctoral journey. She smiled even more when shared that she selected a topic that she was passionate about. She giggled so loud when she said that she had very supportive supervisors who were always there to support her.

**Bongani**

**Date:** 15 October 2015

**Time:** 12:13- 13:00

**Place:** Cafeteria

I met Bongani at a cafeteria. He was confident and excited about the interview. He was dressed in a relaxed manner.

**Interview**

This participant was using gestures to demonstrate his confidence. He was not interested in a drink or anything because he wanted to share his experience. He is more vocal and

he believed that it was important to make a contribution in the field of Public Administration and Management. It appeared as if Bongani was methodological prepared, he did not show that he had challenges during his doctoral journey.

### **Pretty**

**Date:** 23 October 2015

**Time:** 11:56- 13:00

**Place:** In her house

I travelled to Pretty's house. At some point I got lost on the way and this participant was patient and kept on directing me. Since she leave in a secured place I had to wait just a little while at the security gate. The security staff called her to confirm whether they should open for me and she agreed.

### **Interview**

She was smiling and relaxed. She invited me in her office and we went upstairs to her staff. She offered me water and we sat in the couch. It was the two of us during the interview. As she shared her experience you can see on her facial expression that she was trying to recall some past events. She acknowledged that they used sit for long hours with her supervisor. She had an opportunity to be taught about the research methods and design that she selected. It seems that Pretty worked hard because she chose a design that she was not familiar with. She also pointed to the support that received from family members.

## **Supervisors of doctoral students**

### **Supervisor 1**

**Date:** 12 November 2015

**Time:** 13:40- 14:35

**Place:** In his office

The participant preferred that we conduct the interview in his office. It was the two of us during the interview. We were interrupted by one staff member and we decided to close the door.

### **Interview**

He was relaxed and he kept eye contact. He used body gestures to demonstrate his confidence. Supervisor 1 also indicated that he inherited most of his doctoral students from a supervisor who resigned at the institution. He also indicated that there are two groups of students. The first group consists of those who are methodological prepared and the second group consists of those who less prepared.

### **Supervisor 2**

**Date:** 12 November 2015

**Time:** 09:47- 10:40

**Place:** In his office

We met at his office. It was the only two of us during the interview.

#### **Interview**

He was energetic, enthusiastic and vocal. He used body gestures to emphasise some points. He seemed to enjoy supervision more than teaching and learning. He seemed to be flexible because he shared that he needed to have different types of students those who are frustrated and those who are not. He shared that most students are methodological prepared but some are prepared. He facial expression indicated that he was concerned about the student who are less prepared.

### **Supervisor 3**

**Date:** 12 November 2015

**Time:** 13:35 -14:30

**Place:** In her office

This participant invited me to her office. It was the two of us during the interview.

#### **Interview**

This participant was more relaxed and she kept an eye contact. Her involvement in various committees in the department has helped her to adopt a student-centred approach. She shared that doctoral students are also confused at the beginning phases and they do not know what to do.

**ANNEXURE 10**  
**EXAMPLE OF METHODOLOGIC NOTES**

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### **Students who terminated their studies before completion**

Date: 10 October 2015

Venue: Campus library

#### **Notes**

This group of doctoral candidates consists of students who terminated their studies with the Department of Public Administration and enrolled with other Higher Education Institutions. I observed that the students who experience a lack of support from the supervisors were discouraged from pursuing their doctoral studies. I further realised that the interviews presented them with an opportunity to express their feelings hoping that remedial actions can be taken to address their concerns. Some of the students indicated that the institution did not follow up to ask about the reasons for terminating the doctoral studies. I needed to tactfully re-direct the participants to the objectives of the study. I always asked myself, 'what do I want to achieve with this interview'. I then decided to afford the participants with an opportunity to discuss any other issues prior to the interviews. This helped in ensuring that we did not deviate from the purpose of the study.

### **Students who successfully completed**

Date: 30 October 2015

Venue: Campus library

#### **Notes**

This group of participants consisted of seniors academics and senior government officials. Considering their academic experiences and work experiences it was easy for them to deviate from the topic. I needed to reflect on the various data collection methods. I read the naïve sketches prior to the interview to assess whether I am obtaining the necessary information. During the interviews I emphasised that I was interested in their own experiences. I realised that some of the participants were more inclined to include their students as they shared their experiences. The main highlights about this group of participants was that they were vocal and shared their experiences as if they understood the approach and design that I adopted.



## **Registered students**

Date: 25 October 2015

Venue: Campus library

### **Notes**

This group of participants consisted of doctoral students from diverse backgrounds. Some were academics, government employees and recently joined academia. When they shared their experiences you could sense the excitement coupled with uncertainty in other cases. They were more inclined to reflect about their experiences during the masters journey. I had to re-direct them by probing to ensure that they share relevant experiences.

## **Supervisors of doctoral students**

Date: 25 October 2015

Venue: Campus library

### **Notes**

This group consisted of senior academics such as associate professors and professors. I realised they had vast experience to share. The main highlight was that they were aware that they needed to share relevant experiences. Hence most of them were asking if they have adequately answered the questions. When I sent them a follow up e-mail to ask them about the reasons why students terminate their studies, they were write accounts not listing points.

**ANNEXURE 11**  
**EXAMPLE OF PERSONAL NOTES**

**Personal notes**

Date 23 October 2015

Time: 13:30

I arrived at the venue and had to wait for few minutes at the security gate. I eventually gained access and Pretty was waiting for me. I was welcomed to her house. We went upstairs and settled in her study area. The atmosphere was conducive and there were no distractions. She offered me a glass of water and we started with the interview. She has a cheerful personality and she kept on smiling when she shared her experience. I was comfortable and felt safe during the interview. The fact that Pretty is currently supervising master's and doctoral students assisted her to share rich experiences.

Seemingly the questions were not challenging to her because she was able to recall what she experienced during her voyage. Her facial expressions confirmed that at some time during her journey she was excited. It seems that she reached her stormy waters because she chose a research design that she was unfamiliar with.

**ANNEXURE 12**  
**A LETTER FROM THE LANGUAGE EDITOR**

I, MARTHA MARIA GERBER

ID: 5010210086082

Declare hereby:

Declare hereby: I have edited the PhD thesis

**METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES IN PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH by  
XOLILE CAROL THANI.**

MMJ Gerber

Freelance Language Practitioner

206 Russel Street

Rietondale

Pretoria

**Qualifications: BA (Languages), THOD**

**Work experience: 12 years teaching experience in English and Afrikaans**

**28 years as Language Practitioner at Unisa, Pretoria, working  
with academic texts**

I also had training in various aspects of editing by John Linnegar of PEG and at other workshops at UJ and in Pretoria:

- Plain English for writers and editors
- Editing and proofreading maths and science
- Advanced copy editing and proofreading
- Grammar for editors
- Power use of MSWord for editors

Membership of professional bodies: PEG (Professional Editors' Group)

SATI (South African Translators' Institute)

MMJ Gerber

Freelance Language Practitioner

206 Russel Street

Rietondale

Pretoria

**ANNEXURE 13**  
**A LETTER FROM THE TECHNICAL EDITOR**

# Between lines editing

Leatitia Romero  
Professional Copy-Editor, Translator and Proofreader  
(BA HONS)

Cell: 083 236 4536  
leatitiaromero@gmail.com

17 May 2018

To whom it may concern:

I hereby confirm that I have technically edited the thesis of XOLILE CAROL THANI, entitled: "METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH". Any amendments introduced by the author or supervisor hereafter, is not covered by this confirmation. The author ultimately decided whether to accept or decline any recommendations made by the editor, and it remains the author's responsibility at all times to confirm the accuracy and originality of the completed work.

Leatitia Romero

(Electronically sent – no signature)

## Affiliations

PEG: Professional Editors Group  
English Academy of South Africa  
SATI: South African Translators' Institute



**ANNEXURE 14**  
**CONSISTENCY TABLE**

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<b>Participant group</b>	<b>Stage 1: Commencing the voyage</b> (participant's experiences relevant to the time of enrolment)	<b>Stage 2: Being in the experience</b> (personal and research-related experiences)	<b>Stage 3: Stormy waters</b> (challenges that they faced in their <i>voyage in the ocean</i> )	<b>Stage 4: Reaching the destination</b> (desired destination)
<b>1. Candidates who terminated their studies before completion</b> 5 Government; 1 Academics; 1 Unemployed; 1 private company (5.2)	Positive emotional Experience (5.3.3.1 (a)): contribute to knowledge (5.3.3.2 (b)):	Engaging the literature (5.3.3.2(b)): To understand methodologies	Methodological challenges (5.3.3.3 (a)): ...when they have to make independent decisions	Terminating studies before completion (5.3.3.4): Desired destination out of reach; Non-academic reasons; student-supervisor relationship & delayed feedback
	Envisioning the destination (5.3.3.1(a)): Dream; social status; complete degree	Cared for: Supportive supervisor-student relationship (5.3.3.2.(b)): Expect guidance from supervisors	Shortcomings in formal curricular methodological preparation (5.3.3.3 (b)): Mode of tuition – lack of application	
		Academic socialisation (5.3.3.2 (c)): Capacity development; contact; conference	Insufficient support from supervisor (5.3.3.3 (c)): Lack of continued support; negative relationships	

<b>Participant group</b>	<b>Stage 1: Commencing the voyage</b> (initial feelings of the captains concerning the reality that they were departing from)	<b>Stage 2: Being in the experience</b> (personal and research-related experiences and making critical decisions for completing the voyage)	<b>Stage 3: Stormy waters</b> (methodological challenges that the captains experienced)	<b>Stage 4: Reaching the destination</b> (desired destination)
2. <b>Candidates who were currently registered</b> 4 academic; 3 in government; 2 professionals in academic institutions (6.2)	Positive emotional Experience (6.3.1 (a)): Career opportunities	Engaging the literature (6.3.2 (a)): Becoming methodologically knowledgeable	Methodological challenges (6.3.3 (a)): Not adequately prepared when challenged to make independent methodological decisions	Working towards completing the journey (6.3.4):
	Envisioning prospects of obtaining doctorate (6.3.1 (b)): Step further in life; contribution; pressure	Being cared for through supervisor-student relationship (6.3.2 (b)): Expected methodological guidance; subject specialists, mentors; good listeners	Shortcomings in formal curricular methodological preparation (6.3.3 (b)): Difficult; complicated	
		Academic socialisation (6.3.2 (c)): need for workshop, conversation; platforms; seminars		

Participant group	Stage 1: Commencing the voyage  (initial feelings of the captains at the time of departing from the harbour)	Stage 2: Being in the experience  (interplay between personal and research-related experiences; making critical decisions to complete journey)	Stage 3: Stormy waters  (challenges that were faced by the participants as they voyage through the ocean)	Stage 4: Reaching the destination  (reaching the harbour by completing their doctoral degrees)
3. <b>Candidates who successfully completed their doctoral degrees</b>  Nearly all of them were <b>academics.</b> (7.2)	Positive emotive experiences (7.3.1 (a)): Excited; achievement	Engaging the literature (7.3.2 (a)): devoted time to read about research methodology	Methodological challenges (7.3.3 (a)): experienced methodological problems	Reaching the destination (7.3.4): no quotes to support this finding
	Envisioning career opportunities (7.3.1 (b)): Envisaged new phase/necessary step in academic career	Cared for through supportive supervisor-student relationships (7.3.2 (b)): Regular meetings; guidance; from different worlds	Shortcomings in formal curricular preparations (7.3.3 (b)): Previous qualifications inadequate prep	
		Academic socialisation (7.3.2 (c)): research workshops, research methods courses, presenting research		

		Methodological readiness (7.3.2 (d)): Perceived themselves as well prepared		
<b>Participant group</b>	<b>Stage 1: Commencing the voyage</b> (participants' experiences of <i>methodological preparedness</i> of the doctoral candidates at the time of enrolment)	<b>Stage 2: Being in the experience</b> (interplay between personal and research-related experiences; making critical decisions to complete journey)	<b>Stage 3: Stormy waters</b> (challenges that were faced by the participants as they voyage through the ocean)	<b>Stage 4: Reaching the destination</b> (reaching the harbour by completing their doctoral degrees)
<b>4. Supervisors</b>	Adequately prepared for voyage (8.3.1 (a)): mainly academics, studied at good universities; or non-academics with experience in research; demonstrated in independency and freedom while initiating and sustaining their research projects	Engaging with the literature (8.3.2 (a)): first and critical step in engaging in the research process  Supervisor-candidate relationship (8.3.2 (b)): continuous interactions; beneficial for enhancing the <i>methodological preparedness</i> of their doctoral candidates	Shortcomings in previous methodological preparedness (8.3.3 (a))	Success factors (8.3.4(a)): good relationship with the supervisor coupled with trust, respect and commitment from both parties

	Under prepared (8.3.1 (b)): Needed supervisory assistance; struggle to conceptualise; lack of independence	Academic socialisation (8.3.2 (c)): occur in various forms; crucial for the enhancement of their methodological preparedness		
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Participant group	<b>Stage 1: Commencing the voyage</b> (participants' experiences of <i>methodological preparedness</i> of the doctoral candidates at the time of enrolment)	<b>Stage 2: Being in the experience</b> (interplay between personal and research-related experiences; making critical decisions to complete journey)	<b>Stage 3: Stormy waters</b> (challenges that were faced by the participants as they voyage through the ocean)	<b>Stage 4: Reaching the destination</b> (reaching the harbour by completing their doctoral degrees)
<b>Consolidated finding for each stage</b>	<p><b>Finding 1:</b> While doctoral candidates have positive emotive experiences when they envisaged completing their respective doctoral voyages, these distinct experiences have shown to be career informed. They have nevertheless shown to be unconsciously unaware of their <i>methodological preparedness</i> status at the time of enrolment.</p> <p><b>Finding 2:</b> Doctoral supervisors as coast guards had mixed experiences of the captains (doctoral candidates) commencing their</p>	<p><b>Finding 3:</b> An ongoing engagement with the scholarly literature has been experienced by all participants as a condition (antecedent) for methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates.</p> <p><b>Finding 4:</b> A sense of being cared for through a supportive supervisor-student relationships is a necessary condition for the methodological preparedness of Public Administration</p>	<p><b>Finding 8:</b> The main challenge experienced by doctoral candidates in the stormy waters of their voyage has shown to be an inability to make independent methodological decisions related to their research project.</p>	<p><b>Finding 9:</b> The methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa, being the capability of candidates to make independent methodological decisions relevant to their respective doctoral study, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a high quality doctoral thesis and for reaching the ultimate destination of the doctoral voyage.</p>

	<p>voyage: those who are academics were experienced as adequately prepared (see paragraph 8.3.1 (a)), while those who are not academics, as methodologically under-prepared (see Section 8.3.1 (b) in the previous chapter)</p>	<p>Doctoral candidates at Unisa.</p> <p><b>Finding 5:</b> Academic socialisation of doctoral candidates in the form of capacity development interventions has shown to be regarded as a condition for the methodological preparedness for Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa.</p> <p><b>Finding 6:</b> Meaningful research engagement with a scholarly community of practice is a necessary condition for building a doctoral candidate's identity of methodological preparedness.</p> <p><b>Finding 7:</b> A candidate's own identity as being methodological prepared, has</p>		
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		<p>shown to be a necessary condition for methodological preparedness of Public Administration doctoral candidates at Unisa.</p>		
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**ANNEXURE 15**  
**TURNITIN DIGITAL RECEIPT**



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ADMINISTRATION: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

by

XOLILE CAROL THANI

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

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