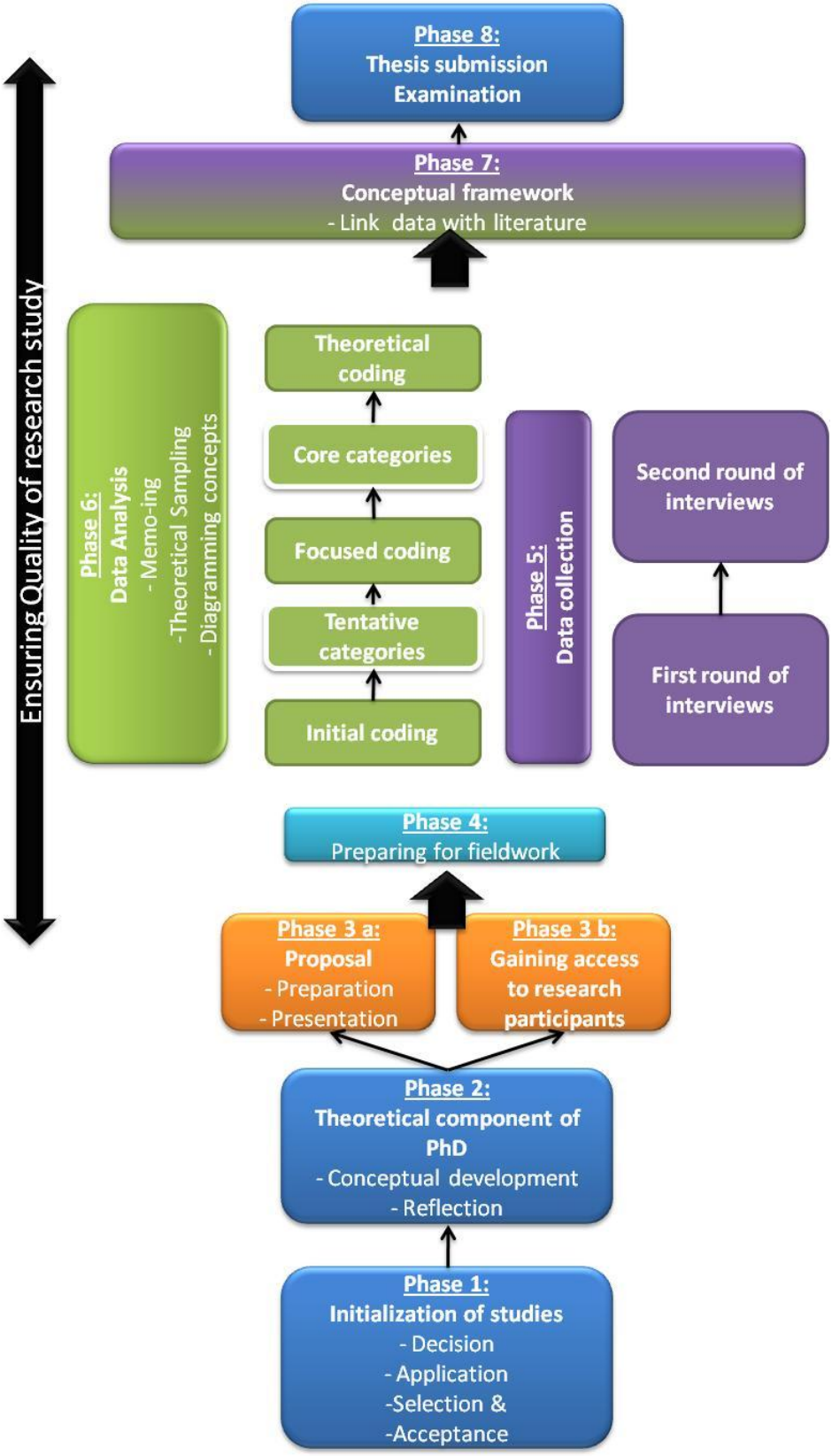
CHAPTER 3: MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, a theoretical account of my research design and methodology was provided. In Chapter 3, I include a more personal account of what I call my research journey, based in part on my research diary. I cannot describe every detail of my journey, but I attempt to point out all the major decisions made – all the major cities visited, so to speak. In addition, it is important to note that I reflect on my complete research journey, going beyond the research process to cover all aspects of my PhD quest. This extended process is illustrated in Figure 16 (overleaf), which I use as a guideline in my discussion in this chapter.

Figure 16: Process followed during the study



3.2 PHASE 1: INITIALIZATION OF STUDY

3.2.1 Decision leading to the PhD study

When I received the Dean's Medal for my Master's degree (a Master's degree in Business Administration at the University of the Free State) on stage during our graduation ceremony in March 2003 from Prof. M.J. (Tienie) Crous, Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, he asked me what the topic for my PhD was. I was 24 at the time, and was under some pressure from my faculty to proceed with my studies.

I have always known that I would do a PhD – it was just a matter of when and where, perhaps as a tribute to my father who did not complete his PhD, and due to circumstances, accepted a second master's degree. Directly after completing my MBA, I started thinking of possible research topics, without any success. My mentor, Prof. W.J.C. (Willie) van der Merwe (I worked as a lecturer at the University of the Free State at the time) advised me to be patient, to gain life and work experience. He said that I would know when I was mature enough to embark on this road.

In 2006, when I was working as a business consultant at an Information Technology organisation, I felt ready to once again pursue my goal of achieving a PhD. I researched various PhD programmes at several institutions, including the University of South Africa (UNISA), the University of the Free State and the University of Pretoria. After discussions with PhD graduates from both UNISA and the University of Pretoria, and drawing on my experience at the University of the Free State, I decided on the programme offered by the University of Pretoria, primarily because the University of Pretoria had a specialized programme in Organisational Behaviour. Organisational Behaviour has interested me since I explored it during my MBA, and my interest in this field of study has grown since I began working as a consultant for various prominent mining houses.

The Organisational Behaviour PhD programme consists of a theoretical and a research component (see Figure 17), of which the research component (a thesis and research article) contributes 100% to the requirements for the degree.

Figure 17: Excerpt from the University of Pretoria brochure outlining the PhD with specialization in Organisational Behaviour

↗ PhD with specialization in Organizational Behaviour (07267001)

(a) Minimum admission requirements

(i) A recognized masters degree.
(ii) A minimum mark of 65% average in master's degree..
(iii) All applications are subjected to a selection process.

(b) Course content

Theoretical component

The PhD programme in Organizational Behaviour comprises of a theoretical component and research component. For the theoretical component the candidate has to register for the ***Commerce Special Postgraduate Programme*** comprising of the following modules:

EBW 801 Research Methodology 801
IMN 883 International Management 883
ORG 884 Organizational Behaviour 884 (Overview)
ORG 910 Organizational Behaviour 910 (Individual and Organization)
ORG 911 Organizational Behaviour 911 (Group and Organization)
ORG 912 Organizational Behaviour 912 (The Evolving Organization)
ORG 913 Organizational Behaviour 913 (Managing Organizational Behaviour)
RES 986 Research Methods 986

After candidates have successfully passed the theoretical component, they can register for the PhD in Organizational Behaviour (Thesis & Research Article).

Research component (Thesis and Research Article)

ORG 990 Thesis: Organizational Behaviour 990

The research component comprises of a thesis and a research article for publication. A candidate will work under the guidance of a promoter to develop a detailed research proposal according to departmental guidelines and regulations. The proposal must be presented to the Departmental PhD committee and must be officially approved by all relevant committees before the candidate can commence with his/her research. The candidate will continue his/her research under the guidance of his/her promoter until the research is completed according to the rules and regulations of the University. A public defence of the final thesis is compulsory and forms part of the final examination. Furthermore, a research article based on the candidate's research must be submitted for publication to a recognized accredited journal. The article is a compulsory condition for the degree to be conferred on the candidate. The research component contributes 100% towards the total requirement for the degree

Admission to the programme enables students to register for the Commerce Special Postgraduate Programme and to participate in a two-year lectured programme, after which final acceptance and admission is granted for a PhD in Organisational Behaviour, after approval and acceptance of a research proposal as presented to the Departmental PhD Research Committee, Department of Human Resources Management.

3.2.2 Application

I applied online for a PhD in Organisational Behaviour in October 2006, but was unfortunately informed telephonically by Ms Juna Botha about a recent decision by the Dean that there would not be a 2007 intake for the PhD in Organisational Behaviour, due to the high number of students in the pipeline. I was very disappointed and contemplated registering at the University of the Free State or UNISA. However, when the Department of Human Resources Management at the University of Pretoria assured me that it would accept new students for 2008, I decided to wait for the next intake. In hindsight, this was a blessing in disguise, as I started a new job in 2007, which would have complicated the situation. By 2008, I was well established in my new organisation.

In October 2007, I once again applied online for the PhD in Organisational Behaviour at the University of Pretoria.

3.2.3 Selection

On 14 November 2007, I received an e-mail from Ms Juna Botha (see Figure 18) from the Department of Human Resources Management, informing me that I had passed the initial screening and that I was one of nine candidates on the shortlist for the formal full-day selection process that would take place on 20 November 2007 at the University's main campus, in Lynnwood Road. I was requested to bring the following to the selection session:

- a copy of my Master's dissertation; and
- a ten-page research proposal.

Figure 18: E-mail from Ms Juna Botha informing me that I was on the shortlist for the PhD (OB) programme

From: Juna Botha [Juna.Botha@up.ac.za] Sent: Wed 11/14/2007 8:16 AM
To: [redacted]
Cc:
Subject: PhD: Organizational Behaviour

Good morning everyone,

You are the nine applicants for abovementioned PhD degree that has been placed on our short list. You will need to be here at 07:30 in the morning till at least 16:00 in the afternoon on 20 November. You need to bring with you the following:

A copy of your Master's dissertation / thesis
Submit (8-10 pages) "mock research proposal" on "key success factors for PhD studies". We want you to tell us what is a research proposal and what is the key factors we are looking for in a research proposal.

Please let me know today or at the latest tomorrow if you are available or not.

Kind regards

Juna Botha
Department Human Resources Management
Administrative Assistant
Tel: +27 12 420 3108
Fax: +27 0866 352 664
Email: juna.botha@up.ac.za

I was the first to arrive on the Tuesday morning. As the other candidates arrived, we got to know each other a little and discussed a potential agenda for the day. I was uncertain about what to expect, but I was very relaxed. I realised the fact that I had not done a research-based master's degree placed me at a disadvantage. However, from my experience at the University of the Free State, I knew that the selection would be based on a combination of academic background, work experience and the personal characteristics of candidates.

The agenda for the day was as follows:

- Administration of psychometric tests.
- Write a five-page article review of a selection of articles from accredited journals.
- Attend a personal interview with the selection panel, during which the panel members will assess the candidate's research background, research vision and personal background.
- Participate in a group problem-solving exercise observed and assessed by the panel.

I enjoyed the excitement and pressure of the selection process, but I was reserved, as my lack of in-depth knowledge and experience of research methodology was very apparent during the individual interview session with the panel. I was, however, still positive, as I felt that I conveyed my ability and commitment to expand my knowledge in this regard sufficiently to the panel members.

3.2.4 Acceptance

I was informed telephonically on 15 January 2008 that I had been accepted for the PhD Programme in Organisational Behaviour at the University of Pretoria. I was very excited and relieved that I had been selected. I looked forward to starting this research journey.

3.3 PHASE 2: THEORETICAL COMPONENT - PROGRAMME IN ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

I registered on 2 February 2008 for the Commerce Special Postgraduate Programme; and arrived on 9 February 2008 for my first class. I met my four co-travellers on this journey that morning, during a very valuable orientation session of the Research Methodology course and the overview course on Organisational Behaviour that we

would take that semester. It was during this first class that Prof. Yvonne du Plessis[5] first referred to our studies as a journey. We found this to be such an appropriate metaphor that we presented Prof. Yvonne and Dr Mias de Klerk (our two main lecturers during the theoretical component of our studies) with flowers and a travel bag to signify our gratitude for their assistance during our journey.

Throughout 2008, we had roughly one contact session per month, consisting of discussion colloquia for each of the two courses per semester. We usually had to prepare a paper and a presentation on a specific topic. One of our fellow students only attended the first orientation session and another did not return for the second semester. We, the three remaining ladies, all aged 30, completed the first year, the theoretical component.

At the end of 2008, the amended guidelines from the University of Pretoria dictated a change in our curriculum. This meant that we would not have a class in the first semester of 2009, which suited me for three reasons. Firstly, I accepted a new position in my company as a principal consultant, managing about 30 consultants across South Africa at the end of 2008. I was under pressure to expand the consulting practice during the economic downturn. Secondly, I could focus on my research proposal. Thirdly, I could get married on 2 May 2009 without having to worry about missing any formal contact sessions. I clearly remembered Prof. Yvonne telling us during our first class in 2008 to keep our lives stable during the course of our studies: do not change jobs, do not get married or divorce your partner, and do not get pregnant. This was one time where I did not take her always sound advice, but it worked out well enough!

[5] I will hereafter take the liberty to refer to Prof. Du Plessis as 'Prof Yvonne', signifying our relationship throughout the course and my research. She is more than a promoter: I regard her as a critical friend. A critical friend, according to Costa and Kallick (1993), refers to 'a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens and offers critique of a person's work as a friend'.

Figure 19: My husband Corné and I on our honeymoon in Namibia

The class of 2008 and two students from the 2009 intake met during the second semester of 2009 for two contact sessions, on 25 July 2009 and 12 September 2009, as well as a learning conference on 31 October 2009. This conference was planned and executed by the team (with much-appreciated help from Ms Christa Smit and Prof. Yvonne). The five students were also the presenters for this colloquium conference.

Figure 20: Prof Yvonne (far left), myself and fellow students and lecturers during the learning conference

The time around the learning conference was probably the most stressful time during my research journey. I had to prepare for the conference while simultaneously preparing for fieldwork and continuously working on my initial draft chapters. In addition, my sister emigrated to Germany during this time; and I had to see off her and her family and support my parents during this process. However, I also made an important mental shift: I had thoroughly enjoyed the theoretical component of the programme, but at that stage I was completely ready to move on and focus solely on my research.

Although the theoretical component did not contribute to the requirements for the degree, it did contribute greatly towards

- raising my level of conceptual, critical and lateral thinking skills;
- assisting me to write academically about a subject;
- building my knowledge and confidence in different research methodologies;
- keeping me focused and driven towards the completion of my studies through peer support and constant involvement in the academic milieu; and
- increasing my self-reflection, which I found useful not only in my personal development, but also in doing a qualitative research study using the constructivist-interpretivism paradigm.

3.4 PHASE 3A: PROPOSAL

As we did not have any contact sessions for the first semester of 2009, I took the opportunity to prepare my proposal based on the knowledge gained in Research Methodology EBW 801. I met with Prof. Yvonne on 17 February 2009 to discuss my proposal concept and submitted a ten-page summary of my intended proposal outlining

- the proposed title;
- the problem statement, rationale for the study and an explanation of how it fits into the domain of Organisational Behaviour;
- the intended scope; and

- the proposed methodology in order to answer the research questions and/or reach the research objectives.

At that stage, my proposed topic was *Positive psychological capital as critical component of employee commitment in South African mining organisations*, as initially submitted informally during 2008 in order to be assigned a promoter. However, during this session, I took the opportunity to discuss my interest in the impact of the downturn on the leaders in the mining industry, which by then was already severely affected, with Prof. Yvonne. She was, like me, excited about my suggested change in topic and proposed research questions and scope, and gave me valuable guidance on how to proceed with my proposal. Due to the risks associated with a study tied so closely to an external event (the South African and global economy) she urged me to adhere to a strict timeline in order to complete my research within this particular context successfully.

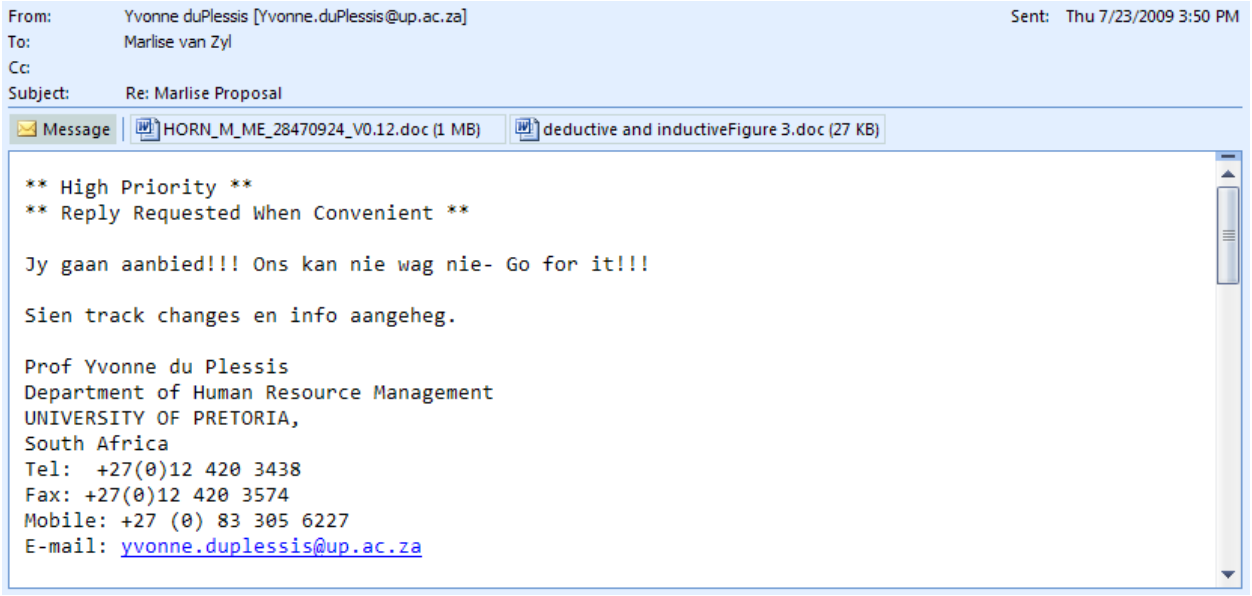
I went to work writing my research proposal, spending a significant amount of time researching research methodologies. I discussed some research design and methodology suggestions with Prof. Yvonne, based on my draft research questions and research objectives, particularly in view of the methodological issues that I found relating to coping research in general (see Section 1.4.1). We agreed that a qualitative research approach would be an appropriate choice.

On 23 June 2009, I submitted my request to present my proposal to the Department of Human Resource Management. My request was granted, and Iwas awarded the 12:00 to 13:00 timeslot on 31 July 2009 to see the Departmental PhD committee, pending approval.

On the same day, Prof. Yvonne declared me ready to present on 31 July, after which I submitted the required eight duplicate paper copies and an electronic copy to Ms Smit on 27 July 2009. See below e-mail that I received on 23 July 2009 from Prof. Yvonne. I

worked quite hard on my proposal and it was a relief that the final product was accepted for presentation.

Figure 21: E-mail from Prof Yvonne indicating that my proposal was ready for presentation



From: Yvonne duPlessis [Yvonne.duPlessis@up.ac.za] Sent: Thu 7/23/2009 3:50 PM
To: Marlise van Zyl
Cc:
Subject: Re: Marlise Proposal
Message | HORN_M_ME_28470924_V0.12.doc (1 MB) | deductive and inductiveFigure 3.doc (27 KB)

** High Priority **
** Reply Requested When Convenient **

Jy gaan aanbied!!! Ons kan nie wag nie- Go for it!!!

Sien track changes en info aangeheg.

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You are going to present!! We cannot wait – go for it!
See track changes and information attached.

I experienced the proposal presentation on 31 July 2009 to the Department of Human Resource Management PhD committee as extremely positive. The panel members were constructive in their feedback and suggested some changes to the proposal, which I found helpful. I did not experience the session as an evaluation, but rather as valuable input into my research process. I felt that I was well prepared for the presentation. We discussed my research choices with input from the panel in such a way that it felt like more like an intellectual discussion than an evaluation. After the session on 31 July 2009, I received preliminary approval for my research proposal, pending some minor changes based on the panel members' suggestions, which I subsequently made and submitted.

3.5 PHASE 3B: GAINING ACCESS TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

As part of demonstrating the feasibility of my study during the presentation of my research proposal to the Departmental PhD committee, I was required to demonstrate access to research participants, especially as the proposed research participants were executives in mining houses. The nature of the research participants posed three potential problems regarding access:

- gaining initial access to the individuals could be problematic, due to their position and various gatekeepers' screening their contacts;
- their diaries are typically full and to get a timeslot might prove difficult; and
- organisations of this nature typically have strict rules governing individual participation in, for example, research studies.

I contacted six mining houses based on purposive sampling during April 2009 to negotiate organisational consent that would allow individuals from a particular organisation to participate in the research study if they were prepared to give their individual consent. Although I had various contacts within the mining industry, this process took about four months. It mostly involved contacting a series of individuals within a particular mining house, starting from my initial contact and eventually ending with an executive member. Gaining access to my sample usually meant getting organisational consent from the mine's executive committee (in one case, consent had to be granted by the mine's communication vice-president, but mostly the matter was tabled at an executive committee meeting).

I was able to demonstrate access to my sample for my proposal presentation purposes by initially getting preliminary consent only, pending the final approval of my proposal and subsequent approval of my topic. Figure 22 shows an example of a communication sent to an executive member to gain preliminary approval (the person's name has been hidden to protect the person's identity). I then proceeded to get formal organisational consent from four of the six mining organisations that I had initially contacted in April in the form of organisational consent forms signed by the appropriate authorities (see Appendix A). At this point, one of the original mining organisations that I had

approached declined to be part of the study and the executive contact from another mine that I had built up over a period of months resigned after negotiating initial consent.

Figure 22: E-mail sent to a mine to gain preliminary organisational consent

From: Marlise van Zyl
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2009 2:09 PM
To: [redacted]
Subject: PhD Studies

Good day [redacted]

With reference to our discussion regarding access to respondents in [redacted] South Africa for my PhD Studies.

I am currently enrolled for my PhD in Organisational Behaviour at the University of Pretoria, focusing on Organisational Behaviour of Executive Members in the mining industry, specifically during the current economic climate. Please can you, as discussed, facilitate a request if [redacted] will be willing to grant access to 3-4 Exco members for individual interviews of +/- 2 hours as part of a qualitative study? The interviews are envisioned to take place during September/October 2009. This e-mail serves to gain preliminary approval from your company and I will provide a formal informed consent form to you after approval of my topic by the Faculty Committee (31 July 2009).

Responses in this study will be treated as strictly confidential, and no individual or their company will be identified based on their responses. The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. I will provide respondents or [redacted] with a summary of my findings on request.

Please contact my supervisor, Prof Yvonne du Plessis at Yvonne.duPlessis@up.ac.za or 083 305 6227 if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

Your assistance and feedback in this regard is highly appreciated.

Regards,
Marlise

Marlise van Zyl
082 928 3022

Principal: Mining Business Consulting

3.6 PHASE 4: PREPARING FOR FIELDWORK

As part of the preparation for fieldwork I had to adhere to a number of university research requirements, the most important of which was getting ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria. I received a letter dated 11 September 2009 from the University's Postgraduate Committee to confirm the registration of my title, *Coping strategies for leaders during an economic downturn*. However, getting the formal informed organisational consent documentation took longer than I anticipated. I was

very grateful that I had already gained preliminary consent from most of the mines before I presented my proposal and registered my title, because at this stage I was becoming anxious to start my fieldwork while the economic downturn was still a reality. I must admit that I was probably the only person working in the mining industry that secretly hoped for the downturn to last just a little bit longer! However, I had to adhere to the University's guidelines and committee meeting schedules; and I managed to submit my application for ethical clearance on 16 October 2009 with all the necessary documentation and signed informed consent forms. The Committee for Research Ethics formally approved my study on 28 October 2009, which meant that I could go ahead with my fieldwork.

While waiting for ethical clearance, I researched qualitative interview techniques in detail in order to prepare myself. This was very important to me because I had never done qualitative interviewing and, although I could gain only theoretical knowledge in this way, it gave me confidence during the interview process.

In consultation with Prof. Yvonne, I also decided to do a pilot interview with a member of my own organisation's executive committee on 13 November 2009. Although I do not work for a mine, my organisation operates in the mining industry, focusing on mine technical systems and mining consulting (geology, surveying, mine planning) and the organisation had been affected by the downturn in a similar way as the mines themselves. We decided that I would also use this information as part of my study and I gained the necessary organisational and individual informed consent. The purpose of the pilot interview was, firstly, to practise my theoretical interview skills; secondly, to verify that my interview schedule was sufficient; and, thirdly, to give me confidence in subsequent interviews.

In addition, I did a mock interview on 6 November with a friend and colleague, Dr Adri Grové, who had completed her PhD using qualitative research in 2008. Not only did the mock interview help me tremendously, but having Adri as a critical friend assisted me

throughout my research journey. As a final confirmation, I met with Prof. Yvonne on 12 November 2009 to go though the final preparation for my interviews the next day.

3.6.1 Selecting individual respondents

Table 5 provides a summary of the interview schedule. I was surprised and humbled by the rapid response from the respondents and their willingness to assist me in this regard. It later became evident that my timing was good on various levels, from a data collection timing perspective, but also from a practical perspective, as the respondents indicated that their diaries were less full towards the end of the year.

Table 5: Summary of the interview schedule

Interviewee number	Mining organisation	Position	Interview date	Interview duration
0	**PILOT**	Chief Operating Officer	13 November 2009	42:09
1	**A**	Managing Director	16 November 2009	1:10:16
2	**B**	Executive Vice-President	17 November 2009	40:03
3	**B**	Executive Vice-President	17 November 2009	44:56
4	**C**	Managing Director	17 November 2009	1:26:09
5	**C**	Executive Director	17 November 2009	34:40
6	**D**	Chief Executive Officer	4 December 2009	39:34
7	**D**	Executive Director	4 December 2009	35:17

All respondents in this study were white males.

3.7 PHASE 5: DATA COLLECTION

3.7.1 Interviews

Before the start of each interview I explained the individual informed consent form that I had included in the electronic meeting invitation to the interviewees, emphasising that

- respondents' identities and their mine affiliation would be treated as confidential to ensure that neither the particular individual nor his or her specific organisation can be identified based on the responses;
- no confidential mine-related information that might emerge during the interview would be used in this study; and
- their participation in this study was very important to me, but they could choose not to participate and could also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.

They then signed the individual informed consent forms before the interview commenced.

I also asked their permission to record the interview. All the respondents agreed.

Doing the interviews was perhaps the most exciting part of my research journey. After my pilot interview, I felt confident about my ability to do the interviews, but I was still quite nervous to do the actual interviews. Firstly, I was worried that I might not be able to get my respondents to talk to me, a virtual stranger, about their personal behaviour, feelings and coping strategies during the economic downturn. Secondly, engaging with high profile individuals meant that I was probably not going to get an opportunity to do follow-up interviews, so this might be my only chance to get rich information.

However, despite my fears, in my opinion, the interviews went well for a number of reasons:

- **Responsiveness of interviewees:**

  Although it took some time for respondents to start talking about their own experiences during the economic downturn and how they coped, I felt deeply honoured by how much they indeed opened up to me. My strategy was to first let them talk about the downturn and their role in it in general and then move on to their more personal experiences and coping during that time. This worked well in most cases, although some respondents (notably Interviewee 4) elaborated on some non-

relevant details and I had to bring them back to the focus of the research. Apart from the fact that my questioning strategy worked well, I got the distinct impression that the respondents were relieved to talk to someone about their experiences during the downturn. One respondent indicated that he had not spoken to anyone about his feelings and experiences during the downturn before the interview. I built up quite a strong rapport with most of the interviewees during the relatively short period that I spent with them. I received extremely valuable input from respondents when I asked them at the end of the interview whether there was anything else that they would like to mention. Interestingly, both the respondents who mentioned their faith as an important element of their coping during the downturn mentioned it in response to this final question.

- **Being aware of my potential biases:**

  I was very careful not to ask leading questions and I evaluated myself after each interview to ensure that I had not led interviewees in a particular direction. In line with the emerging nature of grounded theory, my interview guide was very general and I wanted data to emerge from respondents. For example, after the third interview, I began to notice that the interviewees spoke about the fact that they regarded the economic downturn as an opportunity and also about the fact that they were optimistic and saw the downturn as a challenge. I was worried that I had led respondents to talk about this, given my interest in Positive Organisational Behaviour. I remember thinking about this, driving to the next interview, and I tried to recall whether I had asked any leading questions. I took particular note of this and made a point of not asking any leading questions in the remaining two interviews on that day. In retrospect, upon strict evaluation of my interview questions on 18 November 2009 using the recordings that I had made during the interviews, I am comfortable in stating that this was a theme emerging from the data and that I did not force the data to emerge through leading questions. I made an important discovery through this process: data collection and data analysis are both parts of a truly integrated process. Although I had not formally started with data analysis, I was already analysing what I had heard during the interviews. I then also became fully aware of my potential bias towards, for example, the positive in analysing the data.

3.7.2 Field notes

My field notes were an important part of my research process and later proved invaluable during the data analysis. After Interview 0 (the pilot interview) and Interview 1, I spent roughly two to three hours writing field notes on the interviews. I made both descriptive and reflective notes, with sections on the research setting, the responses of the interviewee, and my reflections on the interview. I was amazed at how much insight I gained while writing my field notes and I used this insight and questions or gaps identified during the interviews in subsequent interviews and data analysis.

As I had scheduled four interviews (Interviews 2 to 5) on one day, I had to ensure that I did not lose any important field note information in the process. After each interview I would sit in my car and note my most important observations, reflections and questions. I then used the two days that it took for my transcriptions to be completed to write complete field notes on the interviews based on my rough notes made in the car while my memory of the interviews was still fresh.

3.8 PHASE 6: DATA ANALYSIS

3.8.1 Transcripts

In consultation with Prof. Yvonne, I decided to use a professional company specialising in transcribing research interviews to do my transcripts. During October 2009, I contacted them several times prior to my interviews to arrange when and how I would send them the recordings and to confirm their turnaround time. On 12 October 2009, I also contacted Liz Archer from the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment at the University of Pretoria, an expert in qualitative research, for advice on which digital recorder to purchase. I used a digital recorder during my interviews so that I was able to download my interview recordings, which I sent to the organisation that was to do the

transcripts the day after each interview using a website specialising in uploading and downloading large files. Their turnaround time was two working days and I promptly received my transcribed interviews from them via e-mail.

After receiving my transcripts, I listened to the interview recordings carefully myself and compared the recordings with the transcripts, firstly, to correct any mistakes made during transcription and, secondly, to supplement my field notes with additional information.

I also prepared my transcripts for coding, by firstly sanitising the interviews (taking out all identifying names and references to organisations), and secondly preparing the format of the documents in line with guidelines provided by Liz Archer during our ATLAS.ti course (see Section 3.8.2 below).

3.8.2 Coding

On 26 June 2009, I attended a workshop on the use of ATLAS.ti presented by Liz Archer. After I had purchased the software, I practised on the course activities in order to familiarise myself with the software again. This assisted me greatly, as I was able to start using ATLAS.ti in my coding immediately.

On 9 November 2009, I bought a student license of ATLAS.ti online by verifying that I was a registered student at the University of Pretoria in anticipation of my data analysis, which was to start after my first interview.

Figure 23: ***From left to right:*** **Prof Yvonne, Liz Archer, myself and fellow students at an ATLAS.ti workshop**

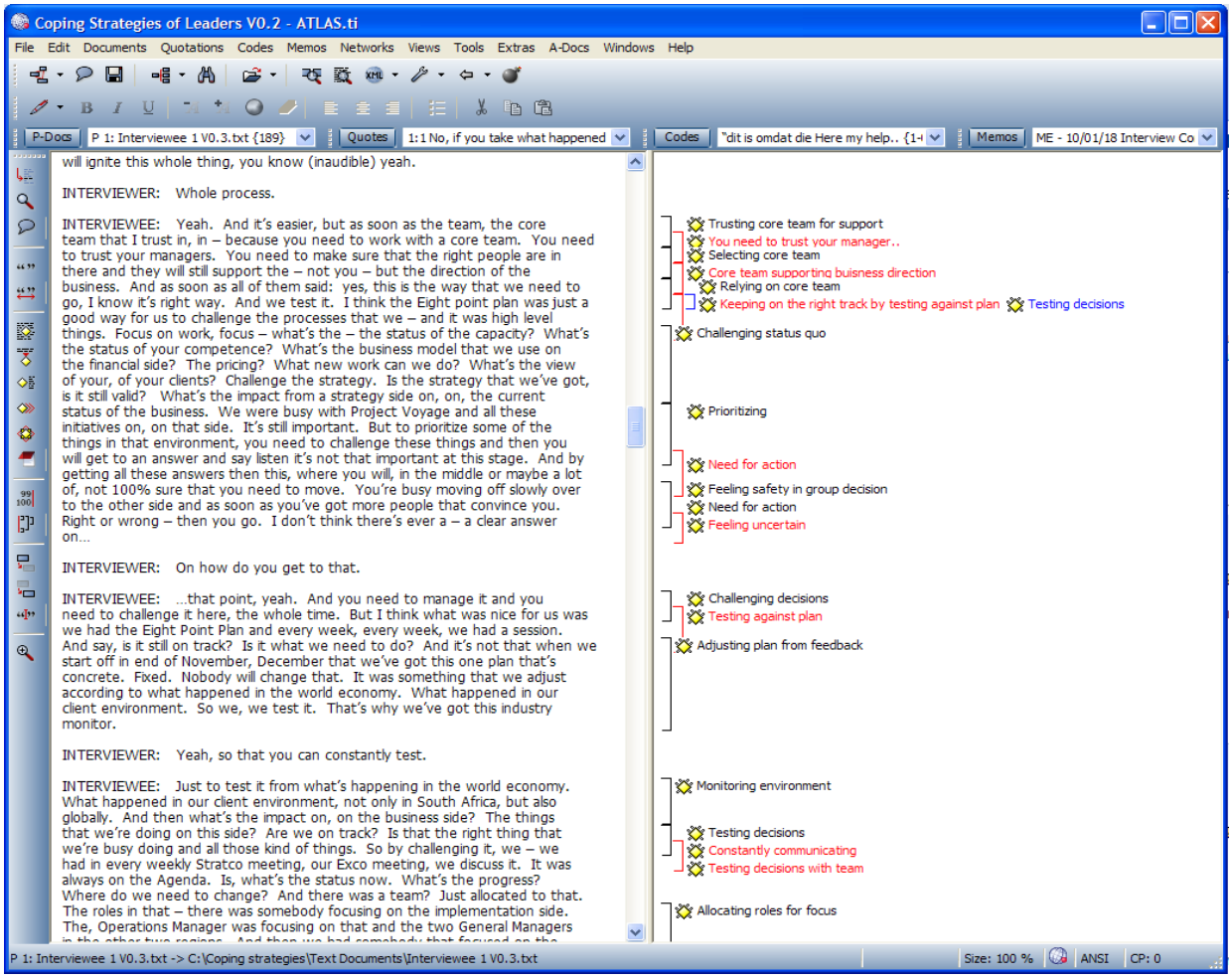
3.8.2.1. Open coding

I did open coding using ATLAS.ti, starting after I received the transcripts of my first round of interviews on 20 November and for the whole of December. I started with line-by-line (and often word-by-word) coding, which I found extremely difficult. I was constantly afraid, as the excerpt below from my research diary dating 14 December 2009 reflects:

> *It feels like I am constantly afraid: afraid that I am not coding correctly, afraid that I did not get enough data from my interviews, afraid that I will not be able to develop categories from my data…*

By January 2009, I was quite disheartened by the coding process. At that stage, I had done a total of 773 codes, working line-by-line (see the example in ATLAS.ti below).

Figure 24: Example of open coding in ATLAS.ti



I realised that I could not work with the amount of coding that I had at that stage and I was still afraid that I was not doing the coding correctly. Although I had already spent months researching grounded theory for the purposes of my proposal and methodology chapter, and in preparation for data analysis, I decided to stop coding early in January and to go back to the literature on grounded theory, particularly analysis in grounded theory.

At the time, I thought I was taking a step backwards; and I had to sternly motivate myself; but in hindsight this was actually a great leap forward in several ways. Firstly, the literature on grounded theory became practical, because I was applying it; and therefore I started to understand what I was supposed to do. Secondly, re-examining

the literature helped me to realise that I was actually on the right track and that I was busy with micro analysis, the 'very careful and often minute examination and interpretation of data' as Strauss and Corbin (1998:58) describe it. Although doing micro analysis as a method of open coding took a long time and was difficult and daunting to do, it assisted me greatly during my future analysis process: I started to look at my data differently and in a more conceptual way. It forced me to listen to what the interviewees were saying, and how they were saying it. An example of this was looking at the use of the term 'survival' by several interviewees (refer to Section 4.3.19).

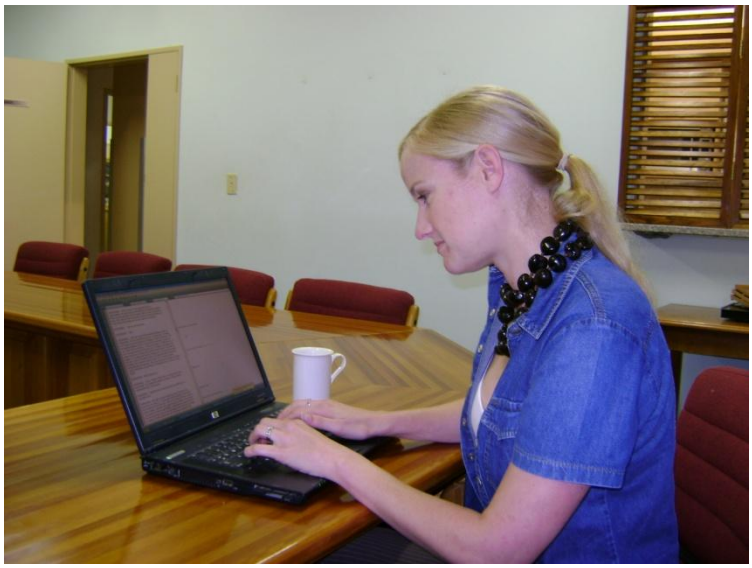
The following entry in my research diary (dated 20 January 2010) dealing with my reflection on the re-examination of the literature shows that I then decided to relax, enjoy the research process and adopt a more flexible approach to the research.

> *I was still unsure about how to 'do' grounded theory* [GT]. *I went to the library, got (again!!!) a great deal of books and articles about GT and started studying the methodology again – reading and re-reading the ideas behind and basis of GT.*
>
> *I am taking comfort in the fact that many novice researchers (PhD = novice!), and even experienced researchers struggle with the same questions and issues that I've been struggling with. I realise now that having confidence in one's ability and own creativity is one of the difficult aspects in the unstructured, often confusing nature of qualitative research in general and GT in particular.*
>
> *I did not so much learn 'how' to do GT from this, but rather understood that my feelings and fears are natural and common and as such, I WANT to and feel ready to overcome them.*

On 27 January 2010, I met with Prof. Yvonne at her office (see Figure 25) to show her my progress on my open coding and also to discuss some of my fears with her and how

I proposed to overcome them. As always after a session with her, I felt motivated, ready for the challenge and even more comfortable with the coding process.

Figure 25: Discussing my coding progress in ATLAS.ti with Prof. Yvonne



During February 2010, I then proceeded to go through a second round of open coding in ATLAS.ti, based on my micro analysis. It was during this time that I discovered the wonder of constant comparison and also became totally absorbed in my research. Although I had to constantly balance my job and my research, I started to eat, sleep and live my data. It was as if I could not stop thinking about it and I slept with my laptop next to my bed, because I would get 'revelations' during the night, wake up and start working. Many of my revelations (I started to think about them as receiving a 'Christmas present') came to me while in the bath and driving long distances for work, perhaps because I could then focus only on my thoughts. One such 'Christmas present' was understanding constant comparison: I was intrigued by the question of why two respondents reacted so differently to the threat to their own job security as a result of the economic downturn and, through constant comparison of different responses and different incidents, I came to the conclusion that the organisational level is an influencing factor (see Section 4.3.10). I was then able to really apply constant comparison throughout my analysis. I got to a point where I was starting to think that I

might be moving to a different level of coding. I prepared a preliminary list of open codes to ensure that all my codes were on the same conceptual level and I then naturally moved on to axial coding[6], the first section of focused coding.

3.8.2.1.1. Computer crash

Unfortunately, my computer's hard drive crashed on Sunday, 21 February 2010. Luckily, I had been making back-ups meticulously, and I was also able to recover some data, but it took more than a week to rebuild my hard-drive. My biggest concerns were, firstly, that I could not recover my ATLAS.ti program, although I had the data backed up and, secondly, that I had to download the latest version of Zotero, a referencing facility where all my resources had been stored since the start of my study, and the latest version was not compatible with my back-ups. I was fortunate that both problems were resolved early in March 2010.

The computer crash slowed me down, but it re-emphasised the importance of making regular back-ups and I became even more fanatical about this practice.

3.8.2.2.Axial coding

When my computer and ATLAS.ti were up and running again, I continued with axial coding during March 2010. At this stage, I embraced the data analysis phase fully, enjoying it thoroughly. I loved the memo-writing process, sorting memos and creating and developing categories. However, I was becoming worried that I would not be able to demonstrate my conceptual thinking to readers of my thesis sufficiently. I asked Prof. Yvonne to provide me with some examples of qualitative studies that were successful in showing the different levels of codes and analysis. With the inputs from Prof. Stanz (the Head of Department: Department of Human Resource Management), she provided me with the thesis of Frans Johannes Burden (2006). After consultation with Prof. Yvonne,

[6] Axial coding is defined by Strauss and Corbin (2007:96, cited in Boeije, 2010:108) as 'a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories'

I arranged with Dr Burden to meet with him. He was kind enough to see me on Saturday, 13 March 2010, on his farm outside Johannesburg. The purpose of this peer debriefing meeting was for me to gain insight into the display of the results of an analysis in a meaningful way, and also to evaluate my coding so far with a peer.

This meeting had mixed results:

- Dr Burden was of the opinion that my open interview style with only an interview guide was not sufficient. He had employed a very structured approach to interviewing, using grounded theory in the modernist paradigm. I was, however, convinced that data should emerge during the interview, which, in my opinion, requires an open, unstructured or at most a semi-structured interview, especially when using grounded theory within the constructivist-interpretive paradigm. I also confirmed this with Prof. Yvonne.
- However, I gained much valuable information during the session, especially on the methodology Dr Burden had employed regarding the display of codes. He explained how he developed this method and how it could be improved. In the end, I employed his method in Chapters 4 and 5 to display open, axial and selective codes in a tabular format before displaying it in a conceptual framework. I would like to express my thanks to him for so generously sharing the information with me.
- Most importantly, Dr Burden advised me to do my conceptual model manually. Up to that point, I was primarily making use of ATLAS.ti for coding and the visual mapping of codes. I started to manually display my categories, with links and areas of comparison (see Figure 26 - overleaf).

Figure 26: Manual category and conceptual framework development

It seems that I was not yet ready to embrace the digital age fully; and this valuable piece of advice opened my thoughts and deepened my analysis even further. From then on, I continued to develop the various versions of my categories and ultimately my conceptual framework manually.

3.8.2.3.Selective coding

At this stage, especially through visually displaying my codes, categories and their relationships based on earlier coding and memos, my core categories became apparent, which I then attempted to display in the form of an early version conceptual framework. I e-mailed my draft conceptual framework to Prof. Yvonne on Monday, 12 April 2010. She advised me to finalise my chapters dealing with the results of data analysis in order for her to view my codes, categories and conceptual framework in context. I continued with this process for the remainder of April 2010, constantly refining earlier codes and categories.

3.8.2.4.Reflection on data analysis

It is evident from the above sections that data analysis was a long and winding gravel road on my journey. For me, this was both the most difficult and most rewarding part of my study. I am not used to doubting myself and my abilities, and it was therefore a humbling experience for me to deal with my constant self-doubt and my uncertainty about how to do data analysis, and whether or not I was doing it correctly. I have learnt that one should not stop when the road gets bumpy, but that one has to continue. I was amazed at how, given time and constant effort, the data eventually just 'came together' and things started to make sense to me.

On many 'roads less travelled', one often goes around a bend in the road, just to be surprised with the most amazing view or a little gem of a town. Similarly, I made great discoveries during data analysis, both regarding the data analysis method itself and regarding the data, which left me excited and inspired.

Figure 27 (overleaf) shows my two research companions checking up on my progress during data analysis. Although this was a long process through which I needed a lot of support, it was also (although only in hindsight!) the most rewarding part of my study journey.

Figure 27: My two research companions, Toffies and Max, checking on my progress

3.8.3 Conceptual framework

Building the conceptual framework based on my data analysis enabled me to consolidate my thinking. I was relieved that my earlier fear that I would not be able to convey my increasing level of conceptual thinking in an understandable way was banished.

The development of my conceptual framework already started while I was still busy with axial and especially selective coding, but it really took off after I took to heart Dr Burden's advice to go about the process manually. I had various versions of my conceptual framework, starting with very early versions where the concepts were viewed in isolation (an example was shown earlier, in Figure 26), progressing to later versions, where relationships between various concepts were illustrated, as shown in Figure 28 (overleaf).

Figure 28: An early version of my conceptual framework

On 16 April I had the opportunity to present my conceptual framework to the executive committee of the organisation where had I initially interviewed Interviewee 1. The executive committee consisted of seven members, one of whom had participated in the interviews. This assisted me with ensuring the credibility of my research; and it also gave me confidence that I was on the right track. It was gratifying to note that the participants identified with the conceptual framework with comments such as the following:

- *'I remember sitting in the room where we decided who will be retrenched thinking that we should just stick to the plan and everything will be OK'* (Organisational rationalisation strategy 'Believing in the plan').

- *'It is true that one felt sorry for the other people, often I thought more about them than about myself. I wish I could have resigned to save a few'* (Derived organisational stressor 'Feeling responsible and to blame')

3.8 PHASE 7: MATCHING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK WITH THE THEORY

Linking the conceptual framework with the existing theory in the literature was a very time-consuming, but delightfully rewarding, process which continued until May and June 2010, although I had already started gathering the literature during the analysis phase, as themes and core categories became apparent. Since the beginning of my studies had starting with the theoretical course work component of the programme, I loved finding and reading relevant literature. I therefore thoroughly enjoyed this part of my research journey and read and sorted through hundreds of articles and book sections to finally build a picture of the relevant literature to link with my conceptual framework. At this stage I only did a preliminary literature review as an orienting process to become aware of current thinking in the field of coping and identifying a niche that my research would occupy. I avoided a more thorough literature review up to this point to ensure that the themes and categories would emerge from the data itself and would not be influenced by existing thoughts and ideas. I was amazed at how well my core categories related to existing theory, but also at how different some of my categories were, making a unique contribution.

3.9 PHASE 8: FINALISING THE THESIS FOR SUBMISSION

On Monday 5 July 2010, I delivered my final draft thesis (still missing some minor elements) to Idette Noomé for language editing and also sent it to Prof. Yvonne for comment. On 12 July 2010, Prof. Yvonne and I went over some final suggestions regarding the content and layout, as shown in Figure 29.

Figure 29: Prof Yvonne and I, going over the final details of my thesis

3.9.1 Finalising the thesis after examination

To be completed after examination (completion of my story and reflection)

3.9.2 Binding and final submission

To be completed after examination

3.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have attempted to provide some insight into my research journey through a more personal account of the most prominent moments of this study: how and why I initially embarked on this journey, lessons learnt along the way, how data was gathered, analysed and interpreted and how it eventually all came together in the form of this document.