

**Special points of interest:**

- \* Internationalisation is essential for Optentia
- \* Six Optentia students were awarded PhDs in 2022
- \* Prof. Jess Auerbach obtained a P-rating from the NRF
- \* Optentia has appointed and reappointed various extraordinary professors and researchers
- \* Optentia is developing SLPs for mentors and mentees.
- \* NWU's first Socio-Gerontology professor explores ageing futures

**Inside this issue:**

Optentia's performance	2
Capability development	3
Optentia's PhD candidates achieve	4
Optentia researcher awarded an NRF P-rating	7
Statistical control: When, why and How?	9
Extraordinary professor: Prof. Christine Wekerle	10
The work of early childhood practitioners	11
SLPs for mentors and mentees	12
Writing a book	13
Gratitude and appreciation at work	20

**Embracing the Future: Towards Capabilities and Functionings**

A person's quality of life is greatly determined by the work they do. The work they do also helps them sustain their livelihoods. However, the nature of work is changing. The UNDP recently released a [report](#) about the changing nature of work which focuses on five themes to consider for sustainable work.

- COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact on the workforce and its future. The pandemic exposed weaknesses in how work is organised. The widespread use of modern technologies for surveillance, tracking, and remote work during the pandemic, ethical concerns, trust, and the blurring of work-life boundaries have been raised. As a result of disrupted work-life balance and uncertainty in economic prospects, mental health issues have become increasingly serious. Building resilience to external shocks is an opportunity and a requirement.
- Changes in demographics, new technologies, digital workplace platforms, and environmental challenges are disrupting job markets, business models, and social protection mechanisms. It is essential to prioritise human-



machine interactions protocols and ethics as jobs emerge that integrate machine and human skills. Demographic changes require job markets and economies to become more inclusive, boost productivity, and proactively support reskilling and upskilling.

- In response to new technological and social realities, new work models are emerging with a wide range of opportunities and challenges. Flexibility and accessibility are improving for most people, as well as new ways to connect consumers and workers, but social protection, long-term job security, and blurred lines between work and life are presenting challenges.
- New employee relationship practices will be required as

a result of technological change, demographics, economics, and cultural factors. Developing new work models will require narrowing the race and gender gaps and, in general, adopting more inclusive approaches.

- As work transforms, entrepreneurship will play a leading role. Start-ups and other forms of entrepreneurship will lead the adoption of new organisational structures and practices.

Sustainable employability requires that individuals and institutions develop a capability set which will lead to physical and mental health, productivity, retention and flourishing.

## Performance of Optentia: 2022

A total of 34 Master's students, 52 PhD students, and one post-doctoral fellow participate in Optentia. From 2 January to 31 August 2022, 28 (5 PhD and 23 Master's) students complete their studies. Researchers who participate in Optentia have produced 78.69 peer-reviewed article equivalents in 2021. Optentia produced 66.77 peer-reviewed articles from January to September 2022.

The following extraordinary professors were appointed or reappointed in Optentia over the last six months: Prof. J. Auerbach, Prof. A. Baart, Prof. A. Dhir, Prof. R. Heyman, Prof. JT Janse van Rensburg, Prof. P. Kaur, Prof. N. Keating, Prof. S. Koller, Prof. K. Lonka, Prof. H. Savolainen, Prof. L. Theron, Prof. B. Thyer, and Prof. C. Wekerle.



The following extraordinary researchers were reappointed: Dr M. Katjene, Dr A. Trusler, and Dr L. van Biljon.

We look forward to collaborating with our extraordinary professors and researchers.

**"We produced 66.77 peer-reviewed articles from January to September 2022."**

## The Optentia Scorecard *by* Prof. Ian Rothmann

Output	2020	2021	2022
Peer-reviewed article equivalents	68.37	78.69	66.77*
Papers: Conferences	1	26	9
Participating Master's students	96	22	34
Completed Master's students	11	22	23
Participating PhD students	35	46	52
Completed PhD students	3	2	6
Post-doctoral fellows	3	1	1
Number of workshops presented	9	13	8
Number of workshop participants	473	700	213

Note: Outputs as on 28 April 2022

\* Not audited

## Capability Development at Optentia

Optentia has presented various webinars and programmes to build the competencies of participants over the last five months:

- 9 May 2022: Optentia Community Day.
- 18 May 2022: Prestige lecture of Prof. D. Bohman.
- 27 May 2022: Inaugural lecture of Prof. J. Hoffman.
- 24 August 2022: Workshop on long-term futures of Africa by Prof. J. Cilliers.
- 30 August – 2 September 2022: AS Review (Utrecht University).
- 30 July – 30 November 2022: The SLP in Research Design



## Building Capabilities for International Collaboration

A delegation of the Faculty of Humanities and Optentia leaders will visit the United Kingdom and Europe during the first two weeks of October 2022. Prof. Dumi Moyo (Executive Dean), Prof. Mirna Nel (Deputy-dean: Research and Innovation), and Prof. Aaron Aaron Tshidzumba (Deputy-dean: Community Engagement and Stakeholder Relations) will repre-

sent the Faculty of Humanities. Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Leoni van der Vaart, Prof. Marita Heyns, Dr Japie Greeff, Prof. Jaco Hoffman and Mr Fred Goede will represent Optentia during the international visit. The international visit aims to:

- learn more about Open Science, as well as the application of Artificial Intelligence

(AI) and Machine learning in teaching and learning and research.

- build capabilities for research funding applications.
- learn about novel ways to address wicked problems faced by societies through teaching and learning and research.

---

**“The Online SLP in Research Design will be presented two times per year.”**

---

## News: Short Learning Programme in Research Design

Optentia has recently presented the certificates to master's and PhD students who completed the Short Learning Programme (SLP) in Research Design during 2021. A total of 151 master's and PhD students registered for the SLP in Feb 2021 and 54 participants completed the qualification. A total of 10 of the 11 students who registered in May 2021 and 48 of the 159 students who registered in August 2021 completed the qualification.



**Mrs Soraya Harding, Neil Barnard and Prof. Ian Rothmann**

## Optentia's PhD Candidates Achieve!

On 28 July 2022 Optentia celebrated the achievements of PhD candidates who completed their qualifications in July 2022. The following PhD candidates graduated in 2022: Dr Christiaan Bekker (Psychology), Dr Tessa de Wet (Industrial Psychology), Dr Eugeny Hennicks (Labour Relations Management), Dr Deon Kleynhans, and Dr Annelisa Murangi (Industrial Psychology). We have recently heard that Dr Amanda Erasmus (Industrial Psychology) will also receive her PhD in 2022. Thapelo Chachaa will also submit his thesis soon.

Several Optentia PhD candidates are currently working to submit their theses in November 2022 or March 2023. These PhDs include Neil Barnard, Praise Choeni, Lynelle Coxen, Mari Ford, Henry Lewis, Thera Lobi, Kalashni Narainsamy, Suzette Ragadu, Elette van den Berg (Horn), and Coen Welsh. Optentia is proud of the quality of its PhD candidates.



**Dr Christiaan Bekker, Dr Amanda Erasmus, Thera Lobi (PhD candidate), Dr Annelisa Murangi, Constand van Graan (PhD candidate), Kgomotso Malinga (PhD candidate), Sibusiso Mnxuma (PhD candidate), Dr Deon Kleynhans and Elette Horn (PhD candidate)**

**“Optentia is proud of the quality of its PhD candidates.”**

Optentia regards it as important that PhDs interact with their fellow students as well as with academic colleagues. Therefore, we create opportunities for discussion and recognition of students.



**Optentia staff, PhDs and PhD candidates attending the PhD function at Optentia**

## Optentia PhD and Master's Students Graduate

During June 2022 Dr Deon Kleynhans (Promoters: Prof. Marita Heyns and Prof. Marius Stander), Dr Eugeny Hennicks (Promoters: Prof. Marita Heyns and Prof. Ian Rothmann) and Dr Tessa de Wet (Promoter: Prof. Ian Rothmann) were awarded PhDs. At the end of July 2022, Dr Christiaan Bekker (Promoters: Prof. Ian Rothmann and DR Magda Kloppers) and Dr Annelisa Murangi (Promoters: Prof. Ian Rothmann and Prof. Mirna Nel) were awarded PhDs.



Prof. Marita Heyns, Dr Deon Kleynhans and Prof. Marius Stander



Prof. Ian Rothmann, Dr Annelisa Murangi, Dr Christiaan Bekker and Prof. Mirna Nel



Dr Eugeny Hennicks

---

"Five Optentia candidates received their PhDs in 2022."

---



Back row: Prof. Marita Heyns, Prof. Leoni van der Vaart, Dr Eugeny Hennicks, Anne-Marie De-Nysschen, Eddie Kok, Dr Tessa de Wet and Prof. Marius Stander. Front row: Dr Japie Greeff, Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Dumi Moyo (Executive Dean: Faculty of Humanities), Prof. Mirna Nel (Deputy-dean Research and Innovation: Faculty of Humanities) Prof. Elrie Botha, and Dr Deon Kleynhans

## The Academic Journey of Dr Annelisa Murangi by Prof. Ian Rothmann

“... she linked four job demands-resources profiles via work capabilities to special education teachers’ work engagement and retention ...”

We met Annelisa Murangi in March 2020 during a visit to Namibia. Prof. Mirna Nel and I were excited about her PhD study because it was about the capabilities and optimal functioning of special education teachers in Namibia. I became involved with Annelisa for various reasons: a) She had a very interesting topic. In our research, we have decided to focus on the pathways from precarity to capability to understand and promote the optimal functioning of people from a social justice perspective. b) When she applied for the PhD at the North-West University, she just completed her Master’s in Industrial Psychology at Stellenbosch University. I liked the guts of a Namibian who completed her graduate studies at the University of Namibia, her Master’s study at Stellenbosch University and then applied for a PhD qualification at the NWU. It suggested something of her openness, conscientiousness, and her flexibility. c) She (like me) was born and grew up in Namibia. We are both proud Namibians!

Annelisa prepared herself for her PhD journey by completing the Short Learning Programme in Research Design. Annelisa and her husband, Uti, will acknowledge that it was not easy to cope with all the work she had to do during the PhD. When we were almost finished with her thesis, we experienced a virus attack, which was stressful. But we managed to overcome challenges and she completed her thesis.

What contributions to science and practice did Annelisa make in her thesis? To understand her contribution, it is criti-



Prof. Ian Rothmann and Dr Annelisa Murangi

cal to understand that she was working within an emerging paradigm in Work and Organisational Psychology, namely the capability approach which takes a social justice perspective on people’s optimal functioning at work. While the focus in Occupational Health Psychology was on equality of resources, the focus is shifting to equity. Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome. So, the major contribution of her thesis came from the focus on the values, enablement and achievement of special education teachers. The contributions of her thesis can therefore be summarised as follows: Firstly, the study resulted in new knowledge regarding the effects of seven work capabilities (and capability set) that affected spe-

cial education teachers’ optimal functioning. Secondly, shifting the focus from resources to capabilities, she linked four job demands-resources profiles via work capabilities to special education teachers’ work engagement and retention, which represents a novel contribution. Thirdly, her findings regarding the effects of precarious employment on sustainable employability and the flourishing of teachers represented a significant contribution to knowledge. At the end of the PhD journey with Annelisa, I realised that there was a fourth reason why I connected well with Annelisa: her value system. She values applying her knowledge and skills, developing new knowledge and skills, making a difference, making her own decisions, setting her own goals, and developing and maintaining meaningful relationships. We are proud of the achievements of Annelisa.

## Optentia Extraordinary Professor Awarded an NRF P-rating

Prof. Jess Auerbach recently received the good news that she has been awarded a P-rating by the National Research Foundation. Jess' research discipline is anthropology, but as she explained, she did not specifically set out to become a researcher in anthropology.

She started out majoring in Xhosa and linguistics during her undergraduate studies at the University of Cape Town with the intention of becoming a writer. A chance encounter with an anthropology master's degree student who interviewed her for a project lead her to discover her interest in the field and change her major. She obtained her master's degree in Forced Migration at the University of Oxford and followed it with a PhD in Cultural Anthropology at Stanford University. A long-standing correspondence between Jess and James Ferguson, author of "The anti-politics machine" and many other texts on development and Africa lead to her pursuing doctoral studies there.

Her PhD focused on the emergence of the Angolan middle class in part through short term migration to Brazil. From this work a book with the title "From Water to Wine: Becoming Middle Class in Angola" was published. . Since its publication, the book has been read by a lot of people who want to do business in Angola and need insight on how business is done in this country with a unique economic system. Most people in Angola have a day job and a number of side businesses or jobs too; the result is that the informal economy creates as important income as the formal economy.

Her post-PhD research has

focused on what she calls "knowledge mobilities". "We need new tools for how we deal with information" says Jess. "We must teach students the history of ideas, the reasons motivating certain ideas and systems in society. Academics are in a unique position to help curate knowledge in order sift through the overwhelming amount of it, to differentiate between fact and fiction, as well as what is important and what simply adds to the noise and distraction in answering a relevant question".

It is important to understand the history of ideas, where they are circulated and by whom? What is the status quo it maintains and why are only certain people's ideas are allowed in the conversation? If you have a system of knowledge that only validates certain types of knowing it devaluates other types of knowing. There are systems of power contained in knowledge and whose voices get heard, what kinds of information counts as legitimate and illegitimate, and who is able to inform the ways people experience their everyday lives. "In the South African context for example, decoloniality is about making sure that more voices get heard, proper representation of people across the spectrum in syllabi, and the realities of contemporary South Africa are captured. We must respond appropriately to needs of our local context while continuing to take part in the global debate.

In 2018 and 2019 Jess wrote extensively about decoloniality, in both the public and scholarly domain. Decoloniality offers alternative ways of entering, thinking and imagining the future, she



Prof. Jess Auerbach

explains. It is also about empowering students to feel that their own knowledge, thoughts and ideas have value, power and space in the room.

Jess is very passionate about researchers writing for the public. She views it as essential, since that is where a far greater number of people are likely to read about the new insights and solutions added through research and this turn it helps to change the discourse.

Jess would like to see the way Africa is imagined as a space changed, getting rid of the negative stereotypes; to engender more respect, more understanding, more curiosity about nuances of Africa not just the stereotypes. She feels it is important that people from this part of the world feel empowered to contribute to international discourse. Work around knowledge histories and mobilities actually says that we are equal players and not subservient citizens, addressing that imbalance is an important piece. Opening spaces for different kinds of listening, awareness of different sorts of storytelling, different types of knowledge is an important part of that.

---

**"It is important to understand the history of ideas, where they are circulated and by whom..."**

---

## My PhD Journey *by* Dr Eugeny Hennicks

It all started with a distant dream. As a child one of my earliest memories was scribbling on pieces of paper beside my dad whilst he was a student at Potchefstroom University. This tendency took a deeper hold over me and that's when I undertook my venture of intellectual curiosity.

Upon the completion of my B.Com degree, I remember sitting at the back of the auditorium at my first -ever graduation ceremony, towards the end of the proceedings it was time for the Doctoral student to receive their qualification. As they glided past me with their flamboyant red gowns I sat in awe & thought "wow" when & will I ever get there? I knew that my PhD would be a lonely endeavor filled with sweat & tears (1% inspiration, 99% perspiration); however my determination and incomprehensible motivation to complete this lifelong dream provided anaesthesia for the pain to come.



Dr Eugeny Hennicks



As I embarked on this daunting task, with never ending reading and writing, thoughts of quitting often lingered. As I immersed myself in my topic, the confinement of my study catapulted me into a kaleidoscope of research. Nonetheless as anticipated, hardships prevailed, and I faced tremendous obstacles and failures along the way. The worldwide Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measures presented yet another stumbling block.

All these challenges and setbacks drew me closer to not only my family but to also closer to God as I leveraged on Him immensely as an anchor and relied

on spiritual upliftment to continue my quest. This grounded my ability to stay focused and taught me the importance of celebrating mini triumphs.

My PhD took me on a journey of self-discovery with an unexplored topic. The intrigues and rigor of my research provided me with a great sense of fulfillment. It highlighted that with tenacity and perseverance one can indeed achieve anything. A value I'm hoping to share in my children. Contributing to the academic world via new research is indeed extraordinary as it means putting exploration back at the heart of the project.

“... we focus on the role of new technologies in teaching, learning and well-being.”

## News from Prof. Kirsti Lonka

Our Research Group for Educational Psychology in Helsinki (principal investigator: Prof. Kirsti Lonka) is very active. We got funding for a large research project called [DigiConsumers.fi](http://DigiConsumers.fi) from Finnish Strategic Research Council (2019-2025), which is a national multidisciplinary project for identifying solutions to improve the economic and consumer skills of young people especially in digital environments.

In the spirit of @Optentia, it combines areas such as sociology, economics, and educational psychology. The WP2 led by Prof.

K. Lonka addresses not only youth, but also, working life. With prof Rothmann, we published a study on job crafting and work engagement Well-being, socio-emotional learning (SEL) and engagement of both teachers and their students are of our interest. We edited a book about SEL in 2022. In general, we focus on the role of new technologies in teaching, learning and well-being. Our latest studies are large-scale investigations about mental health of immigrant youth in Finland.



Prof. Kirsti Lonka

## Statistical Control: When, Why, and How?

Many studies aim to determine whether a relationship exists between two or more variables (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016). They try to establish causality, that is, whether a change in the predictor variable(s) is associated with a change in the outcome variable(s) (Wysocki et al., 2022). In the process, researchers (should) control for other variables that may also impact the outcome variable. Researchers can do so by using different experimental designs in which relevant factors are held constant across the different groups. However, it is sometimes not feasible to design state-of-the-art true experimental studies, and we end up with observational or quasi-experimental studies. Our next best option to isolate the effect(s) of the predictor variable(s) is then to control statistically for other variable(s) by mathematically 'removing' its impact on the outcome variable. In this way, the effect of the predictor(s) on the outcome(s) can be isolated, and the regression coefficient is considered unbiased (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016).

Although statistical control offers a valuable alternative to correct design flaws, the selection of control variables is not without criticism. Wysocki et al. (2022) demonstrate eight different roles (e.g. confounder, confounder-blocker, collider, mediator, proxy) that a control variable can assume, depending on its causal association with the predictor and outcome. Whereas the control variable as confounder and confounder-blocker can remove bias when controlled for, the control variable as collider, mediator, and proxy may intro-

duce bias. Therefore, the selection of control variables should not be an arbitrary decision.

How do we then select control variables? Several suggestions have been offered previously (see Becker, 2005; Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016; Breugh, 2006) but more recently, Wysocki et al. (2022) propose an alternative solution, one in which the researcher should consider the causal model (or structure) that connects the control, predictor, and outcome. Their proposed decision-making process starts with selecting predictor and outcome variables in which the predictor is hypothesised to cause the outcome. Next, choose potential controls, variables that may be associated with both the predictor and the outcome in their roles as confounders or confound-blockers. The reader is referred to Cinelli et al. (2020) for a list of 'good' and 'bad' controls. Following the selection of potential controls, the researcher should specify a causal model that includes the predictor, outcomes, controls and other important third variables. After outlining the model, each confounder or confound-blocker should be justified (i.e. assumptions and hypotheses must be developed). In addition, researchers should also justify why the controls will not bias the estimate by blocking a causal path or introducing a spurious path. Due to uncertainties regarding the causal structure, multiple competing models should be specified. With the plausible causal models in mind (i.e. after the justification process), the next step would be to select an appropriate set of controls which should block all confounding

paths without blocking any causal paths or inducing any spurious associations between the predictor and the outcome. Not every confounder needs to be contained in this set. After justification, the authors offer a couple of suggestions on how to control (from three different positions) (Wysocki et al., 2022).

For further reading, you are referred to:

[Becker, T. E.](#) (2005). Potential problems in the statistical control of variables in organizational research: A qualitative analysis with recommendations. *Organizational Research Methods*, 8(3), 274–289.

[Bernerth, J. B., & Aguinis, H.](#) (2016). A critical review and best-practice recommendations for control variable usage. *Personnel Psychology*, 69(1), 229–283.

[Breugh, J. A.](#) (2006). Rethinking the control of nuisance variables in theory testing. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 20(3), 429–443.

[Cinelli, C., Forney, A., & Pearl, J.](#) (2020). A crash course in good and bad controls.

[Wysocki, A. C., Lawson, K. M., & Rhemtulla, M.](#) (2022). Statistical control requires causal justification. *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*, 5(2). Advance online publication.

---

**“Although statistical control offers a valuable alternative to correct design flaws, the selection of control variables is not without criticism.”**

---

## New Extraordinary Professor: Prof. Christine Wekerle

Christine Wekerle, Ph.D. (Clinical Psychology) has been a research scientist in the fields of family violence, child maltreatment, adolescent dating violence, violence prevention, adolescent mental health, child welfare, child rights, and youth resilience for nearly three decades (see [youthresilience.net](http://youthresilience.net)).

Her prevention and curriculum work has extended recently to working with Six Nations of the Grand River and the intersections among climate, ecology, violence, mental health and resilience (see [Ohneganos.com](http://Ohneganos.com)). Open access knowledge mobilization videos are available at the Resilience In Youth Youtube Channel. Currently,

Christine is in her third term as Editor-in-Chief of Child Abuse & Neglect, and is guest editor of

an upcoming issue on technology innovations for mental health, trauma, and childhood adversity (with Drs. Shannon Self-Brown, Amanda Gilmore) in *Frontiers in Digital Health*. She developed a mobile application to enhance resilience, called JoyPop, based on positive psychology and trauma-informed care approaches. She supported the development of the Creating Safety for health and social service professionals, in the freely available [Violence-Education-Guidance-Action](#) or VEGA curriculum.

Her appointments include McMaster University (Pediatrics; Psychiatry and Neurosciences) in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada and Adler Graduate Professional Schools in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. She is a facilitator in McMaster's Michael G. DeGroot Medical



Prof. Chris Wekerle

School across their pre-clerkship medical foundations courses.

“Prof. Hans De Witte received a fellowship of the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology...”

## Fellowship for Prof. Hans De Witte

Prof. Hans De Witte received a fellowship of the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology at the 15th Conference of the EAOHP in Bordeaux, 7 July 2022 - “in recognition of an outstanding career contribution to occupational health psychology”. On their website they mention that “The Academy awards a lifetime fellowship to individuals, whom in the opinion of the Executive Committee, have made an exceptional contribution to the discipline of occupational health psychology.” Click here to see the Membership - The European Academy of Occupational Health ([eaohp.org](http://eaohp.org)) for the list of all Fellowships.



Prof. Hans De Witte

## The Work of Early Childhood Development Practitioners

Investment in early childhood development (ECD) is considered critical to a country's sustainable development and economic growth. ECD practitioners play a critical role in preparing children in early childhood to become capable citizens and to build the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities needed to create economic growth in countries. During the first eight years of a child's life, they develop in a way that shapes their adulthood, and, therefore, their entire lives thereafter.

There is a lack of adequate training for ECD practitioners, and they are often not respected. Their compensation and recruitment practices are also poor. Suzette Ragadu, PhD candidate in



Suzette Ragadu and Prof. Ian Rothmann

Optentia is investigating decent work in a large sample of ECD practitioners in the North-West Province and Gauteng. She is also studying the job demands and

resources, work capabilities and functioning of these ECD practitioners.

---

**“ECD practitioners play a critical role in preparing children in early childhood ...”**

---

## Short Learning Programmes for Mentors and Mentees

Optentia, supported by the Faculty of Humanities and the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) is currently developing two Short Learning Programmes (SLPs): a) An SLP for academic and research mentors and b) An SLP for academic/research (mentees). The target population is the academic and research staff of the Faculty of Humanities. However, the programme will also be available to other faculties at the NWU and other universities.

There are two main reasons for developing the SLPs. First, universities lack sufficient lecturers and researchers with doctoral degrees, which means insufficient capabilities to drive education. Second, the amount and intensity of work performed by staff have increased due to a rapidly growing student body, an increased demand for research funding, a greater focus on com-

mercialization, and an effort to do more with less. Academics and researchers self-manage and hide their well-being difficulties as they deal with their work's deliberations, strategies, and

obligations. Academic citizenship, work engagement, productivity, and staff retention are at risk because of insufficient capabilities of academics and researchers.



The team of developers of the SLPs” Dr Adi Barnard, Anjonet Jordaan, Prof. Ian Rothmann, Dr Jeniboy Kimpah, Lynn Booysen, Neil Barnard and Thera Lobi

## NWU's First Socio-Gerontology Professor Explores Ageing Futures

Africa is and will population-wise be the youngest continent globally for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, increasingly, many more people in Africa are living longer. This is, according to Professor Jaco Hoffman (DPhil, Oxford), a professor of Socio-Gerontology in the Optentia Research Unit based on demographic trends on the continent. Social gerontology is the interdisciplinary study of the social aspects of ageing. Prof Hoffman is the first professor of social gerontology at NWU. He was recently conferred a full professorship.

His inaugural lecture titled "Africa ageing futures: Challenges, prospects, and ambiguities" explored the complex issues faced in understanding the biological, psychological, social, and public policy aspects of ageing and its implications for the future on the levels of research, policy development and practice. He drew in his lecture on the innovative work of Osborne Macharia, a self-taught Kenyan commercial photographer and digital artist. Osborne's work focuses on themes of Afrofuturism through which he challenges stereotypes and (re)imagines Africa's futures through image, storytelling and social inclusion. Prof. Hoffman explored our ageing futures on the continent and anticipated possible emergence on conceptual and policy levels.

Prof. Hoffman pointed out that around 75 million people are currently aged 60 and above in Africa. By 2050, this absolute number will have almost quadrupled to around 235 million. The rise in the number of older people in Africa, specifically sub-



Prof. Jaco Hoffman after his inaugural lecture

Saharan Africa, will be sharper than for any other region and age group.

"These transitions occur largely against the backdrop of poverty and inequalities, migration and the quadruple disease burden and are crosscut by changing family dynamics. Despite this, Africa will remain population-wise the youngest continent in the world," he said. The implication being that it makes developmental sense that equitable, intergenerational and life-course approaches should be points of departure: by treasuring linked lives through investments in both the young and the old; by aiding the youth through supporting older generations.

In terms of our long-term care and development futures, Prof. Hoffman proposed concurrent investments in older and younger generations: The overlap in the rise in non-communicable diseases and increasing longevity will have an enormous socio-economic impact on Africa. Already there is a clear and increasingly acknowledged need for a range of Africa-appropriate long-term care options as the older population increases. Sim-

ultaneously, the high burden of youth unemployment throughout Africa calls for the long-term social and health care needs of older people to be linked with broader development agendas.

Emergent intergenerational futures could then address the growing demand of the expansion of formal service provision needs and contribute to the widening of employment opportunities for Africa's youth. It could also embrace gender equality, decent work and the empowerment of women by investing in training to reach the under-served. In this way the formal care economy – with older people as part of the equation – could contribute to strengthening African efforts to establish the conditions needed to achieve development towards a society for all ages.

Imagining the future is now and it could emerge right here at NWU through Africa-relevant research on ageing through the first multi-disciplinary [PhD on Ageing and Development](#) on the continent. Watch: Prof Hoffman discusses [Africa Ageing Futures: Challenges, Prospects and Ambiguities](#):

---

“... enablement and achievement were lacking for some teacher values...”

---

## Writing a Book: Reflections *by* Vera Roos and Jaco Hoffman

The aim of the we-DELIVER community-based project was to develop an information and communication technology (ICT) artefact (Yabelana) to capture service and resource information to improve service delivery of people aged 60 years and older. The Yabelana artefact functioned as an ecosystem; a website, an app, and an unstructured supplementary service data (USSD) code. Yabelana serves as an eDirectory to provide information about local services or events for (but not exclusive to) older individuals; it also offers them the opportunity to give feedback to service providers. Researchers and student fieldworkers from different disciplines, across the three North-West University's campuses (Mahikeng, Potchefstroom and Vanderbijlpark) were invited to participate in the we-DELIVER project to collect data from older participants and to introduce the ICT artefact to the older recipients.

We captured data during the planning and implementation of the project which we presented as different chapters in a book publication. We herewith, share a few lessons learned in the process:

- Adopt a both-and-approach. Community-based work often yields different types of data—visual, textual, and observational. The capturing of rich and adequate quality data offers the opportunity not only to address the goals set out in the project, but also for future publication purposes.
- Be mindful of context. Context in this instance refers to the unique setting of the community as well as other contexts

(in this instance tertiary education context across three settings), and it informs the appropriate ways to enter, engage and exist (read: ethical considerations). Context also refers to the interpersonal.

- Contextualise the setting, the interpersonal, and the process of data collection and dissemination of the ICT artefact contributes to a clear understanding and the development of new knowledge.
- Surround yourself with people who demand a lot from you. Irreplaceable in writing a book for publication is people who are asking critical questions during the different phases. They support the writing process by identifying gaps, giving feedback to ensure a logical flow, and offering critique on assumed knowledge.

- You are not done, until you are done. Writing a book is a tedious, iterative process; it requires consistent engagement to ensure the logical synthesis of information across the different book chapters. You must be prepared to write and re-write multiple versions.

As editors, Jaco and Vera are proud to present the [book](#).




---

**“Writing a book is a tedious, iterative process; it requires consistent engagement to ensure the logical synthesis of information ...”**

---



**Dzunisani Baloyi introduces the Yabelana artefact to three older women in Ikageng**

## Character Strengths Use in the Autism Classroom

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is one of the most common disabilities in schools, with up to 50% of children displaying challenging behaviours, bringing about demanding teaching circumstances. The teachers and teaching assistants of such learners often experience a negative impact on their own quality of life. Research globally and in South Africa about the teachers of ASD learners and teaching interventions, especially positive psychology approaches aimed at supporting learners with ASD, is sparse.

When Chantel Snyman enrolled for the master's degree in Applied Positive Psychology at Optentia in 2018, she chose to make a positive difference in this respect by developing a strengths-based intervention to implement over a period of six weeks, targeting the behaviour of learners with ASD and the well-being and self-efficacy of teachers and assistants.

Covid-19 regulations, amongst others, presented daunting challenges during the practical applications phase, but with the guidance and support of

Prof. Heyns and Prof. Van Eeden as her study leaders, Chantel persevered and graduated earlier this year (cum laude).

Being able to graduate is, however, not the destination – the best part follows when the results are transformed to practice for those community members who might benefit most from its findings. Chantel was able to do just that on 14 August when she empowered teachers in the Sedibeng School district with practical skills to apply a strengths-based intervention to support children who display challenging behaviours in their classrooms.

A big thank you to the special school resource centre in Vereeniging as well as Dr Vasti Marais-Opperman (a former PhD student of Optentia) and her husband Herman for their role in helping the research team to narrow the gap between research and practice. Hopefully, this intervention will have a positive influence in the lives of the teachers and help the children in their classrooms to also make their dreams come true.



“... this intervention will have a positive influence in the lives of the teachers and help the children in their classrooms ...”



Workshop presenters and the participants

## Visit to the Centre for Sustainable Transitions

Prof. Mirna Nel, Prof. Ian Rothmann and Prof. Jaco Hoffman visited the Centre for Sustainable Transitions at Stellenbosch University on 8 September 2022. The aim of the visit was to learn about funding applications and management from a centre which is successful in securing research funding. Click [here](#) to read more about the Centre.

During the visit to the Western Cape, the delegation also met Prof. Reno Morar, the Chief Executive Officer of the University of Cape Town, and Prof. Maylene Shung Ping who works in the Public Health Policy and Systems Division at UCT.



Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Jaco Hoffman, Prof. Mirna Nel and Cornelia Jacobs

## Research Funding is Back Again! *by* Anjonet Jordaan

Research funding and postgraduate scholarships are making a huge comeback right now. For two years the Covid-19 crises gave rise to a near total freeze of any and all research funding not related to investigations into pandemic-related themes.

The opportunities that are

available now range from career development opportunities, crossborder collaboration, to long-term research endeavours that will help you and your research to boldly go where you've yet to go.

So, if you've been holding off or been laser focused on teaching

and learning duties these past two years, now is the time to get all your ducks in a row to make the most of the opportunities that are out there. To see the latest funding opportunities visit the Optentia website.

---

**"if you've been holding off or been laser focused on teaching and learning duties these past two years, now is the time to get all your ducks in a row."**

---



## Learning Networks to Enhance Knowledge Development

Recently we received good news from ZonMW, one of the largest intermediary in the Netherlands in funding research on Care, Health and the social domain in general: Our proposal to set up a Community of Practice with seven municipalities aimed to better understand how this learning network can enhance knowledge development and implementation concerning by guiding long term unemployed was granted. The cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, Tilburg, Arnhem Amersfoort and executive organisations, Werkzaak Rivierenland and Senzer participate in this network for the next four year together with branche organisations Divosa and SAM and knowledge institutions Tilburg University, TNO and two universities of applied sciences. In addition each of the partners participate in funded research on specific topics such that each project contributes to the whole of knowledge development and implementation. For



Prof. Roland Blank

“Our proposal to set up a Community of Practice with seven municipalities aimed to better understand how this learning network can enhance knowledge development ...”

example the city Tilburg participates in a large three year project on enhancing economic resilience of mothers on welfare benefits starting on the first of September and just a few days ago our four year EU Horizon proposal in cooperation with the

city of Amersfoort and partners from all over Europe aimed at creating upward mobility at the lower side of the labour market was granted as well. The CoP and the several projects have started or will start in the next few months.

## FRIEND-SHIP by Prof. Susanne Schwab

The [FRIEND-SHIP project](#) has travelled a long way since its departure in September 2019. From its debut with a comparative desk research on programs aimed at improving students' social participation, we acknowledged key success factors (see our report) to inform our FRIEND-SHIP intervention program, a school-based intervention to improve 8 to 11 year-old students' social participation. To evaluate the main outcomes of the program, an open access digital tool was also developed to allow teachers an insight into their

students' relationships and a glance at the classroom's social networks. The FRIEND-SHIP program was implemented in Austria, Germany, Portugal and Greece during two academic years with the participation of more than 900 students and their teachers from 48 classes from 13 elementary and secondary schools. A teachers' Handbook followed.

The Handbook is divided into three parts. In the first part, information on social participation and inclusion is provided, as well as a description of the tar-

get audience of the Handbook and a brief explanation of the digital tool. The second part is devoted to the FRIEND-SHIP intervention program with an indication of guiding principles, aims, materials and detailed descriptions of the 12 sessions. The third part describes the implementation of the program in the four partner countries. In particular, this last part contains testimonies from participant teachers concerning the program's relevance, usability and effects, as well as teachers' suggestions to its implementation.

## Need Satisfaction in Small to Medium Enterprises

To generate knowledge in support of the development of evidence-based interventions for small to medium enterprise effectiveness, Prof Leoni van der Vaart (together with Profs Anja Van den Broeck and Ian Rothmann) embarked on a Thuthuka-funded research project in 2020. The project, titled "Motivation@Work: A Dynamic Approach to Performance and Well-Being", is in its final stages, and we would like to share some interesting findings from the project.

A master's student, Naniki Mokgata (with Prof Leoni and Prof Leon de Beer), recently published a paper "Autonomy-supportive agents: whose support matters most, and how does it unfold in the workplace?" in *Current Psychology*. In a sample of 278 small to medium enterprise (SME) employees, she found that three 'people' can support these employees' autonomy in the organisation: their manager or colleagues (by providing them with choices or including employees in decision-making) and themselves (by deliberating choosing what they wanted to do). Her results also showed that the manager played the most important role in supporting employees' autonomy. Employees and their colleagues played a lesser role (than the manager) (Mokgata et al., 2022). In the study, autonomy support mattered because it helped them to perform. That is when they felt that their decisions and behaviours aligned with their wishes, they could perform their tasks better. They were also able to adapt to changes and proactively prepare for changes in their job, team, and/or organisation. They could do this because they were



Prof. Leoni van der Vaart

more energetic, absorbed in, and dedicated to their tasks when their autonomy was supported (Mokgata et al., 2022).

In another publication, prepared by Ms Lynelle Coxen (together with Profs Leoni, Anja, Ian, and Bert Schreurs), preliminary results indicate that daily need satisfaction also matters for well-being on a daily level. The final sample consisted of 68 SME employees who completed daily surveys, resulting in 557 responses across ten days. These employees indicated that on days when they experienced more need satisfaction, they were more motivated to perform tasks and resultantly were more engaged in their work and less ex-

hausted. On the flip side, on days that they experienced more need frustration, they were less motivated to perform tasks for the inherent satisfaction derived from it and resultantly were less engaged in their work and more exhausted.

Together, these studies illustrate the valuable role of need satisfaction for SME employees as it enhances their well-being and performance.

"The financial assistance of the NRF towards this research is hereby acknowledged (TTK190307422577). Opinions and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily attributed to the NRF."

---

**"... these studies illustrate the valuable role of need satisfaction for SME employees ..."**

---



## International Health Expert Appointed as an Extraordinary Professor

Prof. Doris Bohman RN, RNT, Associated professor at the Department of Health, Blekinge Institute of Technology, in Sweden, was recently appointed as an extraordinary professor at the the Optentia Research Unit. Prof. Bohman holds a PhD in Medical Science and has extensive experience working with ethnographic methods focusing on Gerontological care.

Her studies had an ethnographic approach focusing on caring aspects of older individuals in a South African context, including daily life experiences and being old, intergenerational relations, and beliefs about health illnesses.

As part of the appointment, she delivered a prestige lecture where she offered insights from her current research that focuses on different aspects of cultural competency within health care and education and technology in health care and education.

Drawing from her experience working with South Africans and Swedish aged people, Prof. Bohman, who started as a nurse, gave a professional and personal account of her experiences. Sharing her current research findings, she explained how ICT changed the context within which aged people lived and how their social and health care needs were provided for in the age of ICT.

"There is an increase in the number of aged people globally, and there is a need for a contextual approach to gerontological care. We gathered Swedish and South African researchers to get broad and enhanced ageing knowledge. The study was in Majenang, Hammaskraal. I spent



Prof. Jaco Hoffman, Prof. Doris Bohman and Prof. Vera Roos

an extensive period doing field-work doing a lot of focus interviews. The biggest challenge was having to speak through an interpreter. We also worked with Sangomas in wanting to understand their approaches to health issues. Many articles came out of the studies,' she explained.

Prof. Ian Rothmann, Director at the Optentia Research Unit, said Optentia had relationships with extraordinary professors like Prof Bohman to build relations with national and international experts. "We want to create a space where experiences could be shared and build on individual relationships and collaborate in solving societal challenges, advancing science, and empowering our researchers and our students to build their capabilities to conduct research.

"Our extraordinary professors are important contributors within our research entity," said Prof Rothmann. "Optentia is honoured to be associated with Prof. Bohman, an outstanding scholar. It has been an honour to get to know her and work with her on many important initiatives. She has been a long-standing associ-

ated of the institute and has been a very valuable resource to us.

During the summer she finalised a manuscript with colleagues on self-reported eHealth Literacy among nursing students in Sweden and Poland and coming article will focus on techPH (techAnxiety and techEnthusiasm). Also been working on a manuscript on health education and decolonisation.

Prof. Bohman looks forward to the collaboration between SNAC -Sweden and Optentia.

**"Her studies had an ethnographic approach focusing on caring aspects of older individuals in a South African context."**

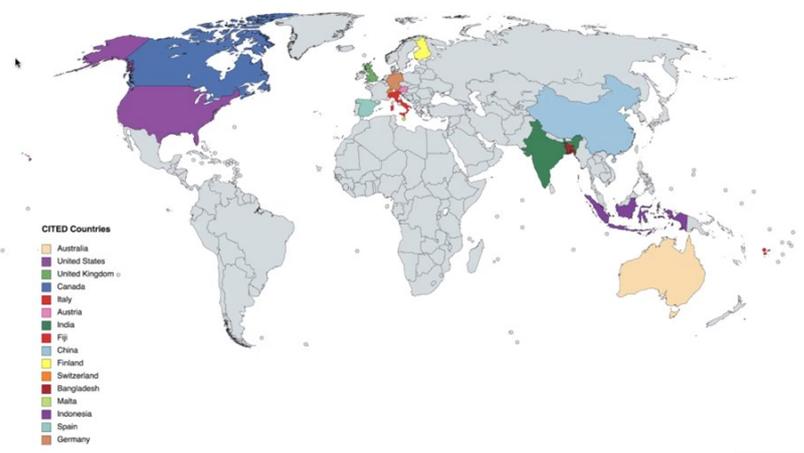
## Third World Conference: Inclusive Teacher Education and Development

In early July 2022, inclusive education scholars from around the world gathered to share their latest findings and reflections on inclusive education. The conference was hosted by the Consortium for Inclusive Teacher Education and Development (CITED), and its focus was Co-creating an Inclusive Future. Over two days, the conference was held at varying time periods to ensure that CITED members and their graduate students would be able to attend within their daytime hours. CITED is one of the influential groups that can take the

lead of intercontinental collaboration for one step further accessible inclusion of all. The group continues to identify barriers that learners, their carers and educators face in terms of providing high quality education to disadvantaged youth and adults. They are conducting several multi-national projects to identify and test innovative solutions co-designed with the end-users. The work of the members could be accessed at <https://www.monash.edu/cited> The issues that resonated throughout the two-day conference are

relevant to the members of Inclusive Education Canada and to stakeholders in inclusive education around the world. Hannu Savolainen and Susanne Schwab explored self-efficacy as a predictor of attitudes toward inclusion, expanding the focus to the order of effects of internal factors that affect inclusive teaching behaviour.

Prof. Savolainen and Prof. Schwab attended the Third World Conference of the Consortium for Inclusive Teacher Education and Development.



“The group continues to identify barriers that learners, their carers and educators face in terms of providing high quality education to disadvantaged youth and adults.”



Prof. Susanne Schwab presented at the Conference

## Gratitude and Appreciation at Work *by* Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl

“... work-related gratitude involves (a) grateful appraisals of work...”

Luuk Harper is a 40-year-old senior lecturer at a prestigious university in the United Kingdom. For most of his career, he has been the most productive researcher in his department, he received excellent student evaluation ratings and was highly active in his valorization initiatives. Luuk used to spend around 70-80 hours a week either at work or in work-related activities. He is extremely performance-driven and requested regular meetings with his line manager to set targets for the next period. These meetings seemed to be a “bit of a waste of time” for his line manager as Luuk was clearly a high performer that needed little guidance. Luuk enjoyed his work but has systematically been withdrawing from his department. Although he is still performing, Luuk has started to slowly lose his enthusiasm for his work, he has become cynical and resentful towards others and started to become completely detached from his professional community. He feels that his contribution to work doesn't matter and that nothing he does will ever be good enough. Who once was a shining star with a lot of potential, is now a burned-out husk who avoids taking on extra responsibilities. But how did Luuk go from a high-potential employee to a cynical, resentful and withdrawn husk?

Although the question can be approached from various perspectives, it is clear that Luuk's professional identity was primarily built around his work. Luuk derived meaning from work and work-related activities and felt motivated to perform because he believed that his work was contributing to the lives of others. But Luuk did not seem to get any

recognition or appreciation for his contribution to his department or his line manager. In an attempt to correct for such, Luuk initiated quarterly performance meetings with his line manager to not only set goals for the next period, but also to show off what he has done during the previous period... all in an attempt to receive a bit of recognition for his contribution. When no recognition or appreciation was shown, Luuk would work harder, longer hours and invest more time and energy to outperform his peers but would still not feel as though his work is being appreciated. This perceived lack of appreciation from his line manager sent Luuk into a spiral of perpetual negativity. Appreciation is all that Luuk strived for, but the lack thereof led to his inevitable withdrawal from work. Therefore, appreciation is an essential tool that managers could use to reward and recognize people's performance and an integral element to their wellbeing and sustained performance.

Appreciation can take many forms, but according to Youssef-Morgan, Van Zyl and Ahrens (2022), work-related gratitude plays an important role. Work-related gratitude refers to “the intentional choice to engage in positive appraisals and feelings of thankfulness and appreciation toward the characteristics, situations, and people currently present in one's work context.” In effect, work-related gratitude involves (a) grateful appraisals of work (i.e., positive, cognitive appraisals of work characteristics and situations), (b) gratitude toward others at work (i.e., social appreciation toward the contributions of others at one's work),



Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl

and (c) an intentional attitude of gratitude (i.e., purposefully enumerating, enjoying, and being mindful of positive aspects of work). Gratitude involves noticing the good things people/employees do at work and showing appreciation for these contributions. It facilitates feelings of community and highlights the importance of people's contribution at work. In effect, showing gratitude communicates the importance of the person, the value of the role/task, and highlights the significance of people's contribution to work. Managers should view gratitude as a type of currency that not only “pays” for current performance but “buys” extra-role behaviours, commitment and motivation from their employees.

To read more about gratitude at work, please refer to the following article:

Youssef-Morgan, C. M., van Zyl, L. E., & Ahrens, B. L. (2022). The work gratitude scale: development and evaluation of a multidimensional measure. [Frontiers in Psychology](#), 12, 795328.

## Gratitude and Appreciation at Work *by* Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl

So what could Luuk and his manager have done differently? Research suggests the following tips and tricks:

- Clarifying expectations. Both Luuk and his manager could clarify their expectations not just about the nature of the task, but also about the nature of their relationship.
- Articulating how gratitude is shown and experienced. Gratitude and appreciation are shown, shared and perceived differently by different people. Gratitude can be expressed through (a) words of affirmation (i.e. telling a person he/she is appreciated; praise), (b) spending quality time (i.e. providing undivided attention in conversations/personal meetings), (c) acts of service (i.e. providing support and assistance when and where needed; helping to get resources), and (d) tangible rewards (i.e. rewarding people with physical artefacts). Its important for both

Luuk and his manager to know how they show appreciation and to ensure that that appreciation is shown in a way that matches the employee's needs.

- Provide balanced feedback. Managers should provide balanced feedback in performance meetings where the focus should be on "what went well" and "what can be done differently". Balanced feedback shows appreciation for what was done well, acknowledges past performance, and creates a positive climate to discuss performance improvement targets.
- Show appreciation authentically. Although showing appreciation and gratitude does not come naturally to most of us, it is important to express appreciation authentically. Just saying "thank you, great job!" with no meaning behind it, does more damage to morale than good. Managers should therefore attempt to

express gratitude more authentically through ways and means that feel natural to them.

- Show appreciation regularly and in a timely fashion. Appreciation is also not a "once off" deal. To establish feelings of appreciation, gratitude should be expressed regularly. Further, gratitude should be shown in a timely fashion. If something extraordinary happens, appreciation should be shown immediately and not 6 months down the line. This not only communicates genuine appreciation but also reinforces the positive effects of gratitude.
- Circles of appreciation. Once every quartile, hold circles of appreciation. Here people have the opportunity to show appreciation and gratitude to each other for their contribution to our personal working lives.

---

**"... it is important to express appreciation authentically."**

---



Postal Address  
Optentia Research Focus Area  
Faculty of Humanities  
North-West University  
Vanderbijlpark, 1900  
  
Phone: +27(16)9103433  
Fax: +27(0)867307905  
E-mail: [ian@ianrothmann.com](mailto:ian@ianrothmann.com)  
Web: [www.optentia.co.za](http://www.optentia.co.za)



## Books

Alvesson, M. (2022). *The triumph of emptiness: Consumption, higher education, and work organization*. Oxford University Press.

Boyd, G., & Reardon, J. (2020). *Rebuild: The economy, leadership and you—a toolkit for builders of a better world*. Evolutesix Books..

Hanson, J. (2022). *Philosophies of work in the Platonic tradition: A history of labor and human flourishing*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Lussier, R.N., & Hendon, J.R. (2022). *Human resource management: Functions, applications, and skill development (4th ed.)*. SAGE..

Martela, F. (2020). *A wonderful life: Insights on finding a meaningful existence*. HarperCollins.

McNulling, I. (2019). *Existential flourishing: A phenomenology of the virtues*. Cambridge University Press.

Upcoming Events (Click [here](#) to go to the Optentia Research Calendar)

## Useful Websites

- <https://goodorganisations.com>
- <https://youtube.com/c/GoodOrganisations> is an informative YouTube channel
- [www.refseek.com](http://www.refseek.com) is a search engine for academic resources.
- [www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org) - search the content of 20,000 global libraries.
- <https://link.springer.com> - access to more than 10 million scientific documents: books, articles,
- <http://repec.org> - Volunteers from 102 countries collected nearly 4 million publications
- [www.science.gov](http://www.science.gov) is a U.S. government search engine.
- [www.pdfdrive.com](http://www.pdfdrive.com) is the largest website for free download of PDF books.
- [www.base-search.net](http://www.base-search.net) is one of the most powerful search engines for academic research texts.