Working is a core human activity that is essential to our being. Work provides opportunities for people to experience satisfaction and positive emotions, satisfy their psychological needs, engage in meaningful activities, learn and to be socially well. However, many people do not have access to the benefits of working. A significant percentage of the South African population struggle to survive - they need financial resources for life and caregiving, especially in conditions of poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, technological development, automation and artificial intelligence result in job losses and precarious work for others. It becomes increasingly difficult to do decent and dignified work.

High levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa have detrimental effects on people. Recent statistics in South Africa showed that the unemployment rate is 29 percent. Education is an issue: 57% of unemployed South Africans had an education level below Grade 12. Only 2.2 percent of the 6.7-million unemployed South Africans were graduates. Youth unemployment was 56.4 percent. Therefore, creating jobs is a crucial step to promote the functioning of people.

Furthermore, significant barriers exist for many people in being able to internalise work as an affirming aspect in their lives. Often they lack freedom of choice in selecting the work they want. Promoting decent work in the following ways is an important step to allow people to capitalise on the benefits of work:

- Create work contexts that are safe from abuse or dangerous conditions.
- Ensure a work life that provides people with rest and leisure.
- Establish organisational values that complement the values of employees.
- Ensure adequate remuneration.
- Ensure the availability of healthcare.

The abovementioned decent work agenda does not include flourishing dimensions such as meaningful work, job satisfaction, psychological need satisfaction and social well-being. But how does one promote functioning in terms of these dimensions?

- Enhance the level of respect and dignity that people experience at work.
- Provide individuals with a real sense of autonomy in their work.
- Ensure that individuals understand their organisation’s mission and have clarity about their roles.
- Help individuals to understand their interests, values, abilities and talents.
- Ensure fit between leaders, organisations and employees.
- Focus on promoting the greater good in organisations. This will create an environment for employees to experience meaning and purpose in their work.
Performance of Optentia: 2019

Concerning permanent staff, 22 primary and 13 secondary participants were affiliated to Optentia. A total of five support staff members, five postdoctoral fellows, and 40 extraordinary members participated in Optentia.

From 1 May 2019, a total of six Master’s and two PhD students have completed their studies. Two Master’s students and one PhD student submitted dissertations and a thesis respectively for examination during March 2019. Concerning peer-reviewed outputs for 2019, we have produced 156 peer-reviewed articles and 33 peer-reviewed chapters. A significant achievement is the large number of research proposals approved.

The Optentia Scorecard by Prof. Ian Rothmann

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Output</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed publications</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed articles*</td>
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<td>41.82</td>
<td>123</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed publications (Scopus and WS)*</td>
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<td>35.47(87%)</td>
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<td>Peer-reviewed chapters</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18(13.2)</td>
<td>33(23.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers: International conferences</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers: National conferences</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of NRF-rated researchers</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Master’s students</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46(31)</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Master’s students</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26(15)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating PhD students</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16(3)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed PhD students</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11(4)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-doctoral fellows</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of workshops presented</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of workshop participants</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Outputs as on 5 August 2019

* Expressed in terms of equivalents

“We produced 52.51 peer-reviewed articles and 23.94 peer-reviewed chapters so far this year.”

Thapelo Chaacha presented a poster at the EAWOP Congress in Italy
Development of Researchers by Prof. Ian Rothmann

During the last week of July 2019, Optentia staff presented the Short Learning Programme in Research Design to master’s and PhD students. Click here for information about the SLP. We had excellent students who participated in the training. This year we included RStudio. Prof. Leon de Beer (WorkWell Research Unit) facilitated the three-hour session. Thank you to all the presenters who are volunteering their time and effort to ensure competence development of master’s and PhD students. Various competence development initiatives are planned for the next five months:

- On 14 August 2019, Prof. Ian Rothmann and Anjonet Jordaan will present a workshop focussing on the development of young researchers.
- During the last week of August 2019, Prof. Ian Rothmann and Sibusiso Mnxuma will participate in a 5-day training session on Bayesian analyses at Utrecht University.
- From 18-19 October 2019, Optentia will host a workshop in sampling. Dr Ariane Neethling, a statistical consultant will present the workshop.

In his book “Range: How generalists triumph in a specialized world”, David Epstein (2019) claims the following: “everyone needs the habits of mind that allow them to dance across disciplines.” Unfortunately, education does not maximise the potential for applying conceptual thinking across domains.

Universities rush to develop students in a narrow speciality area but fail to sharpen thinking skills that can serve them in every area. Epstein (2019) posed the following challenge: “How do we maintain the benefits of breadth, diverse experience, interdisciplinary thinking, and delayed concentration in a world that increasingly incentivises, even demands hyper-specialisation?”

Students must be taught to think before being taught what to think about.

Professors at the University of Washington picked up the challenge to develop thinking skills of students. A class titled “Calling Bullshit” focuses on the broad principles fundamental to understanding the interdisciplinary world and critically evaluating overwhelming amounts of information. We need to do much more to develop interdisciplinary thinking. Click here to learn more about the curriculum of “Calling Bullshit”.

“Students must be taught to think before being taught what to think about.”

Participants in Optentia’s July 2019 Short Learning Programme in Research Design
Three Springer volumes on positive psychological interventions (PPIs) were published during 2019. Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl and Prof. Ian Rothmann edited these volumes.

Volume I provides theoretical perspectives on and approaches to the development or enhancement of positive psychological capacities within multi-cultural professional and organisational contexts. Specifically, it presents theoretical frameworks for the identification, development and optimisation of positive psychological capacities through a contemporary, multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary lens. In recent years, the applicability of PPI techniques has transposed the boundaries of clinical practice into a wide array of complementary domains such as law, education, business and even design sciences such as architecture. These interventions target the enhancement of positive psychological capacities (e.g. strength-identification and use; high-performance learning; appreciative design; job crafting) to not only improve individual functioning, well-being and the treatment of various forms of psychopathology but also to enhance team functioning and performance, organisational growth and community development. Despite its importance, very little research has been done on the design of PPIs for multi-cultural contexts.

Volume 2 presents innovative and contemporary methodologies and intervention protocols for the enhancement of positive psychological attributes in multi-cultural professional and organisational contexts. Most methods, models and approaches that underpin PPIs are confined to clinical samples, closed systems or monocultural contexts, which restrict their applicability to particular contexts. Extensive practical intervention protocols, designs and methods which usually accompany first draft intervention papers are condensed into brief paragraphs in final manuscripts or removed in their entirety. This, in turn, reduces their potential for replicability or adoption by consumers, practitioners, or industry. This volume develops guidelines for enhancing positive psychological attributes, such as positive moods, strengths, cognitions and behaviours within various multicultural contexts. Thereby, it shows how positive psychology interventions can be replicated to a wide range of contexts beyond those in which they were developed.

Volume 3 presents clearly defined and described evidence-based PPIs, which have been validated in multi-cultural contexts. From the late 1990s, there has been an upsurge in popular psychological “self-help” publications drawing from processes and principles of positive psychology. These publications are based on clinically validated PPI studies and translated in a “consumer friendly” manner. However, in these popular works, the intervention methods are significantly altered from the original forms, and the contexts of the consumers are meaningfully different from those of the original study populations, the impact on outcome variables are often misinterpreted or over-inflated, and incorrect outcome variables are targeted. Hence, the need for this volume which discusses in depth how validated PPIs in various multi-cultural contexts work in both clinical and real-world settings.
Stats Camp in South Africa: 23-26 April 2019

During the last week of April 2019, Optentia in association with Utrecht University in the Netherlands, and Prof. Todd Little of Texas Tech University in the United States of America presented the first Stats Camp in Africa at Mongena Lodge in the Dinokeng Game Reserve. The importance of interventions such as Stats Camp is evident from Prof. Todd Little’s writings. For example, in an article published in Research in Human Development, Little (2015, p. 269) motivated the importance of using advanced research methods: “If we don’t adopt advanced, sophisticated, and complex methods, our results will be inaccurate and, by implication, the results will reflect a miscarriage of social justice. Social justice and the pursuit of verisimilitude demands best practice.”

Furthermore, Prof. Little also regards transdisciplinary collaboration between researchers as crucial. This is evident from the distinction between mresearch and wesearch. Little (2015, p. 270) wrote: “When methods are tailored and questions are expanded, I am referring to the proverbial dance between theory and methods. When this scientific tango is done well, we see an elegant tandem whose coordinated interplay leads to unparalleled accomplishment. The partners form a wesearch team. When theory dances alone, it looks more like a statue than a dance (and methodology doesn’t dance well alone either). When theory or methods dance alone, the model is one of mresearch.” He pointed out that the model of mresearch is fundamentally flawed if researchers argue that they: a) use only the methods that everyone else is doing because they have to compete with them, and b) cannot collaborate to make their work better because they need sole-author publications to get promoted.

A total of 9 facilitators and 52 researchers and doctoral students representing seven universities in South Africa participated in the Stats Camp at Mongena Lodge. What did the participants learn during Stats Camp? The following themes were identified based on participants’ responses: a) Formulating good research questions. b) Deciding on and using appropriate analytical methods and software (e.g. Mplus and R). c) Competence in statistics (including confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses, measurement invariance, item parceling, using longitudinal data to test mediation and moderation effects, analysing latent growth, multilevel structural equation modelling and multi-group analysis, latent class analysis and cross-lagged models). Using statistical software to draw graphs. d) Using resources (e.g. advice from colleagues and google).

How did the participants experience Stats Camp South Africa? First, participants mentioned that the lectures by experts and the breakaways sessions focusing on different software available for statistical analyses were enjoyable and meaningful. Second, the practical nature of learning activities, as well as individual consultation sessions focusing on the learning needs of the participants, added much value to their experiences. Third, working in nature and meeting new people with similar struggles during breaks were very helpful. Fourth, working in nature and taking a break to go on game drives gave inspiration. Finally, socialising and networking activities with colleagues from different universities, both nationally and internationally were enjoyable and meaningful.

Click here to watch a video about Stats Camp South Africa – 2019.

Who will forget the magical moments at Mongena Lodge during StatsCamp South Africa 2019? Click on the image above to watch the beautiful video

“…working in nature and meeting new people with similar struggles during breaks were very helpful.”
Having Trust Savvy by Dr Marita Heyns

“Trust comes on foot but leaves on horseback” is a Dutch saying which makes me wonder: Do we have trust savvy?

The Edelman Trust Barometer is a global trust and credibility survey that has been conducted annually since 2001. It gives an indication of the level of trust respondents from participating countries have in government, non-governmental organisations, business and media. The survey results are released every year at the World Economic Forum. Since 2017, the trust index showed dramatic declines across the board in every facet tracked by the study in almost all of the 28 countries surveyed, with no significant signs of recovery since then. Although South Africa has seen a marginal improvement in business and consumer confidence in 2019, it still lists among countries in the general distrustful group as before.

According to Shiv Singh and Rohini Luthra (2019), we have now entered the post-trust era in which the lines between honesty and deception, truth and deliberate misrepresentations, factual and fake are becoming increasingly blurred. In the post-trust era, it is harder than ever to know who and what to believe and it creates a crisis of trust which impairs our ability to address and resolve pressing problems. We may contribute to the problem when we fail to examine innate biases that may distort our perceptions and cause us to make unwise trust decisions.

How should we deal with the trust crisis? An initial step would be to become more trust savvy. In their book “Savvy – Navigating Fake Companies, Fake Leaders and Fake News in the Post-Trust Era”, Singh and Luthra (2019) examine the psychology of trust. They alert us to a number of innate biases that we need to understand and overcome in order to navigate the trust landscape. Bridging the trust divide between parties is a challenge that we cannot afford to lose since trust still remains the irreplaceable, “essential binding agent of all good relationships, and of a well-functioning society” (2019, p. 28).

One of the prominent human tendencies that these authors highlight, concerns our preference to trust (only) information that supports our world view. Indeed, there are often serious value clashes between social groups which makes it even harder to recognise whatever mutual interests and values there might be. We need to be aware of our natural inclination to seek out information that supports our existing beliefs and to deem such information as more credible.

Closely associated with the above, is our tendency to regard the opinions of people who are closer and more familiar to us as more trustworthy, while closing our minds to insights coming from those we don’t feel comfortable with. There is nothing wrong with the need to belong, but it should not cause us to be so desperately loyal to the in-group that we keep silent when we should speak up, compromise our integrity by turning a blind eye to corruption, support injustices or lose our decision-making skills. In seeking to bridge the trust gap, we also need to be wary of overconfidence bias, which leads us to appraise ourselves as smarter, more knowledgeable and more capable than we actually are. While confidence in itself is desirable, over-confidence blinds us to accurate feedback from the environment and clouds our judgement. The list of possible biases is in no way complete. But hopefully, it serves to sensitise us to the possibility that we may unwittingly contribute to the trust crises because we may act in ways that serve the best interest of only ourselves or, at best, those whom we perceive to be more similar to us at the expense of serving a collective good. Failure to confront our innate biases amounts to short sightedness and a lack of wisdom. In the words of Singh and Luthra (2019, p. 115): “In the post-trust era we may not know what is true, but we know what we like to believe. We so deeply want to be right that it is more important to us to have evidence that we are right than it is for the evidence itself to be accurate. In this sense, it has become possible to be both more well-informed and more close-minded at once.” When we fail to consider the possible biases that may cloud our judgements and hinder trustworthy behaviour, a vicious cycle of distrust is set in motion. Let’s consider having more trust savvy.
Developing Young Researchers by Anjonet Jordaan

Academia can be a tough place to find your feet as a researcher and build a successful research career in your chosen field. Succeeding and thriving as a researcher is about a great deal more than getting your PhD and continuing with your postdoc activities thereafter, even though these are emphasised most.

Hard skills are skills you can gain through education, training programs, certifications, and on-the-job training. Soft skills are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, personality traits, attitudes, career attributes, as well as social and emotional intelligence that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals.

In the highly competitive research world, the so-called ‘soft skills’ are often the deciding factor between researchers making steady progress and those who continue to struggle to make headway. Ironically, these skills receive little consideration in researcher development.

Emerging researchers struggle with issues such as:

* Narrowing their research ideas and focusing their research.
* Getting clarity on their research questions.
* Constantly questioning their work and wondering whether it is good enough.
* Time constraints and work overload. Emerging researchers who have not completed their PhD studies often feel that their institutions do not allow time for them to work on their studies.

To better equip and enable academics to transition into confident researchers, Optentia hosted a workshop 14 August 2019. In the workshop, we addressed matters such as:

* Introduction to knowledge work – the demands and requirements of you as a researcher.
* Getting clear about why you entered the academic world and what you need to enable you as a researcher.
* Solving problems/challenges – what competencies do you need to develop to succeed as a researcher?
* The way forward.

Emerging researchers who want to participate in development opportunities could contact Ms Anjonet Jordaan or Prof. Ian Rothmann.

"... soft skills’ are often the deciding factor between researchers making steady progress and those who continue to struggle to make headway..."
Two PhDs Awarded to Optentia Participants

Rachele Paver received her joint PhD in Industrial Psychology from the North-West University in South Africa and KU Leuven in Belgium. The thesis focused on vocational interventions for the unemployed. Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Hans De Witte and Prof. Anja van den Broeck were promoters of the study. Rachele investigated interventions to equip unemployed individuals to deal with unemployment. Her thesis contributed to knowledge regarding programmes and services offered to the unemployed in South Africa, by highlighting the need for psychosocial intervention programmes, proper documentation of employment programmes, collaboration between role players, distribution of the information, and the monitoring and evaluation of existing employment programmes. She developed a framework comprising best practices to adapt, implement, and evaluate a job-search intervention, called the JOBS programme, which aims to develop personal resources and skills that promote re-employment. As a means of fulfilling the absence of psychosocial intervention programmes for unemployed people in South Africa, she adapted and evaluated the Qhubekela Phambili career-enhancement programme (a South African version of the JOBS programme) among unemployed people from two low-income communities in South Africa. Click here to read more about the doctoral study of Rachele Paver.

Viné Petzer received her PhD in Learning and Teaching. Her thesis focused on a model for creating positive Accounting classroom conditions that support successful learning at schools. Prof. Mirna Nel and Prof. Mary Grosser were the promoters of the study. She employed a mixed-method design to investigate Accounting classroom conditions in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. The findings of her research informed the development of a model for teachers in Accounting, supporting them to use more effective teaching methods and creating positive learning conditions to learn successfully in Accounting classrooms. Click here to read more about the doctoral study of Viné Petzer.
Research on Ageing Pioneer Honoured

The Ageing and Generational Dynamics in Africa (AGenDA) programme at Optentia was instrumental in the recent NWU programme to honour Professor Monica Ferreira with a PhD (Honoris Causa).

It all kicked off on 19 May with a function at Prof Jaco Hoffman’s house where Prof. Kavita Sivaramakrishnan (Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, USA), Prof. Sinfree Makoni (Penn State, USA), Prof. Sebastian Kalula (IAA, UCT), Prof. Johnny Strijdom (Senior Policy Advisor: AU) and Mr Rayne Stroe bel (Stirling, UK) joined colleagues from NWU and WITS to welcome her.

The next day (20 May 2019) entailed a round table discussion attended by three generations of international and African scholars. We discussed Ageing Research in (South) Africa - where are we and what prospects? This session updated both students and established scholars on the state of ageing studies and a possible future research agenda on ageing in (South) Africa. Prof. Kavita Sivaramakrishnan also introduced her book “As the World Ages: Rethinking a Demographic Crisis” during this session. Later that afternoon, Prof. Sinfree Makoni presented a prestige lecture: “Applied Linguistics, the Global South, Southern Epistemologies and Ageing.”

On 21 May 2019 Dr Conroy Cupido at the Department of Music put together a beautiful programme in honour of Prof. Ferreira on Later Lives - Late Style. To enjoy a long successful singing career relies on a solid singing technique employing the fundamental key aspects of “bel canto” singing. Joan Sutherland and Edita Gruberova are examples of opera divas who have sung with much skill, beauty and finesse well into their 60’s and 70’s. Ella Fitzgerald is also a singer who rendered well-produced vocal tones in the Jazz genre into her later years. This concert and presentation described the ways in which these singers made this possible and the musical offerings by students of the Conservatory were examples of what Joan, Edita and Ella have sung during their heyday.

The programme of festivities culminated the next day in the graduation ceremony where Prof. Ferreira was awarded a honorary degree. Part of Prof. Ferreira’s commendation reads as follows: “As one of the founding scholars and most significant figures in the field of ageing in Africa the exceptional achievements of Prof. Ferreira deserves to be honoured. Her focus on nurturing not only relevant, but also excellent African research to enhance the well-being and inclusion of vulnerable older populations resonates fully with the dream of North-West University: engaged scholarship with a commitment to social justice on the African continent and beyond. North-West University is greatly honoured to confer the degree Philosophiae Doctor Honoris Causa on Prof. Monica Ferreira in recognising her attributes:

- As being a most prominent first-generation exponent of research and development of policy on ageing in Africa;
- As a skilful negotiator and connector of local and global worlds, driving a recognition of African ageing issues on the international stage;
- For pioneering scholarship on ageing in Africa and contributing internationally to the expansion of research on population ageing as one of the major challenges that will face the globe in the 21st century;
- As an activist for the everyday (often unrecognised) contributions made by millions of older persons for country, community and significant others;
- As a nuanced translator of research into policy and practice;
- As a wise Nkuku and mentor to numerous second and third generation scholars of ageing research across the continent and the world.

See here to see a video of the ceremony. Click here to watch a video about Prof. Monica Ferreira.
Prof. Sinfree Makoni: Extraordinary Professor in Optentia

Prof. Sinfree Makoni presented a prestige lecture as Extraordinary Professor at the Optentia Research Focus Area on the Vanderbijlpark Campus of the North-West University (NWU) on Monday, 20 May 2019.

Prof. Sinfree teaches in die Department of Applied Linguistics and Program in African Studies at Penn State University in Pennsylvania, USA. His main research interests are colonial linguistics, language policy and planning and ontologies and epistemologies of language and ageing.

His lecture looked at applied linguistics and ageing from the Global South and southern perspectives. Prof Sinfree explains that Southern perspectives are not simply a case of adding some perspectives from the Global South, or including various southern people who are often forgotten, or incorporating geographical areas, or topics occluded from analysis in Global Northern Applied Linguistics.

“What we are addressing here, by contrast, is a much more far reaching set of challenges to what applied linguistics means; what it encompasses, what its central concerns are, what it regards as it’s antecedents and historical pedigree and what ideas and traditions it therefore draws on,” he says.

He adds that the innovations and challenges that needs to be brought to applied linguistics have far reaching implications for ageing that extend beyond an agenda that seeks to redress various exclusions. Rather, these are deep seated challenges to some of the core tenets of applied linguistics as well as new directions for theories and practices in the field.

Acknowledging the complications of applied linguistics with a history of colonialism and capitalism and a range of contemporary inequalities, Prof Sinfree argues that we need to remake applied linguistics at a global level in open-ended ways if it is to be relevant to ageing. The presentation concluded by making a case for alternative understandings of language and ageing and the importance and contribution of the Global South to the Global North scholarship.

Prof. Sinfree Makoni holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Edinburgh University. He has published extensively; his most recent publication with Alastair Pennycook entitled, Innovations and Challenges to Applied Linguistics from the Global South, will be in print in August 2019 published by Routledge Press.
Research Entities Day in Mahikeng

On 7 August 2019, a total of 10 Optentia researchers participated in a Research Entities Day of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences in Mahikeng. Optentia members used the opportunity to build the team, to form networks with researchers in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences and to learn about the context at the Mahikeng Campus of the North-West University (NWU). We hope that the information that we got and the networks we formed will benefit research at the NWU.

Optentia Exhibition at the Launch of SADiLaR

On 7 August 2019, research entities in the Faculty of Humanities at the North-West University showcased their research at the launch of the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR), a national centre supported by the Department of Science and Technology (DST). SADiLaR has an enabling function, with a focus on all official languages of South Africa, supporting research and development in the domains of language technologies and language-related studies in the humanities and social sciences. SADiLaR clients include academic scholars and professionals in all domains of Humanities and Social Sciences, Language Technologies, Natural Language Processing, Computer Science, as well as potential end-users in education, business and industry.

“SADiLaR has an enabling function, with a focus on all official languages of South Africa...”
Internationalisation at Optentia

Optentia researchers has collaborated actively with our national and international networks over the past five months. The following events stand out:

- **StatsCamp 2019.** Nine international experts participated in the StatsCamp. Three extraordinary professors in Optentia, namely Prof. Sufen Chen, Prof. Todd Little and Prof. Rens van de Schoot participated in the event.

- **Oxford University.** Prof. Jaco Hoffman attended a workshop at the University of Oxford to discuss future partnerships and to strengthen the Memorandum of Understanding that the NWU (Optentia) have with the University of Oxford. Prof. Ansie Fouche visited Dr Franziska Meinck, Department of Social Policy and Intervention Oxford University, UK. They compiled research proposal and ethics application for a UK government funded research project to take place in Mpumalanga.

- **Prestige lectures of international experts.** The prestige lectures of Prof. Marise Born and Prof Sinfree Makoni took place at the Vanderbijlpark Campus.

- **Conferences and workshops in Austria, Italy, Germany and Australia.** Various Optentia researchers presented papers at international conferences from April to June 2019.

- **Frankfurt.** Prof. Jaco Hoffman participated in the exhibition "Grey is the new Pink" at the Weltkulturen Museum.
“...we should teach people “how” to think about statistics/methods, not “what” to think. We should tailor the methods to the question and embrace the complexity. Research questions can thereby become more sophisticated and more nuanced because the methodological machinery can be adapted, through principled and thoughtful justification, to provide minimally equivocal answers.”
Spotlight on Autism Spectrum Disorder

Chantel Snyman is a young researcher at Optentia. She successfully completed the Train the Trainers Scheme in the Management of Challenging Behaviour in December 2010 in the United Kingdom. She is recognised as the first qualified Studio III trainer in South Africa. Over the past eight years she has been involved in the development and delivery of the management of challenging behaviour courses in South Africa. Chantel is currently enrolled for her Master’s Degree in Positive Psychology at the North-West University.

Ms Snyman has been working as an Occupational therapist at Quest School for learners with Autism since 2007. She has delivered structured assessments and treatment plans for children between the ages of 5 and 18 years old, diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and co-morbid features, for the last eleven years. She is also part of the outreach team, delivering support to teachers, parents and other professionals in the community. She conducted training with staff members in managing challenging behaviour and gave regular support in classes with various behaviour difficulties. She serves on Autism Eastern Cape’s committee; supporting the Education and Adult subcommittees.

As a Studio III Trainer she stands for the principle that low arousal approaches can make a significant contribution in health care settings with regards to special needs and challenging behaviour. She delivers various trainings and also started with the first Train-the-Trainers programme in South Africa in 2018.

Further details may be found here.

She opened a private practice for Occupational therapy services in 2009. Her main area of expertise is Autism and paediatrics, children with injuries, learning difficulties or developmental disabilities and emotional problems. She has been working as therapist for ten years and delivered one-on-one specialised services to individuals with various diagnosis.

Mrs de Vries, principal of Quest School for learners with Autism, joined in the fun day during April where learners celebrated their uniqueness.
Spotlight on Autism Spectrum Disorder

Like many different rays of light, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can look different in every individual. April is World Autism Awareness month and the goal is to raise as much awareness worldwide about individuals with ASD. Multicoloured puzzle pieces and the colour blue is mostly associated with ASD. The puzzle pieces suggest the intricacy of the autism spectrum and the various colours portray the diversity of families and individuals living with ASD.

ASD is a lifelong neuro-developmental disorder with traits of impairments in verbal and non-verbal communication, socialising and stereotyped, restricted and repetitive behaviours. Lately a fourth component was added, namely sensory integration difficulties. Often comorbid conditions are noted, like epilepsy, sleeping disorders and anxiety and depression, to name a few. The overall prevalence of ASD is currently one in 59 and boys are four times more likely than girls to be diagnosed. ASD can be diagnosed as early as 18 months.

Diagnosis is best made through observation of behaviour and recording the developmental history of an individual. The Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS), Childhood Autism Rating Scale and the DSM-5 are used to support diagnosis. Early diagnosis means early intervention, planning and provision for family support and education. The DSM-5 made important modifications to the autism diagnosis and changed the subcategories so that it is now a wider spectrum of disorders. This suggests that ASD is one spectrum of linked disorders, but fluctuating in severity from highly skilled to severely challenged. Pervasive developmental delay, autistic disorder and Asperger syndrome are now combined into a single classification of ASD.

The prevalence of ASD has been growing for years, but researchers cannot come to an agreement on what the reason are for this increase. The cause is still unknown at this point in time, but it is considered to stem from a genetic and environmental predisposition. Early intervention improves the prognosis and lead to more positive outcomes. Early intervention can change lives. Due to the increase in ASD it is believed that it is the most common disability in schools. Individuals with ASD present with various degrees of signs of the diagnosis and their extensive heterogeneity are acknowledged. They have their own specific and unique skills, strengths, needs and interests. Outcomes of treatment are different for each person and individualised interventions may be more encouraging and effective. An approach that is holistic and in collaboration with a trans-professional team, is recommended.

Temple Grandin (an advocate for autistic communities) said: “There needs to be a lot more emphasis on what a child can do instead of what he cannot do.” Let’s celebrate uniqueness and open our hearts to such incredible individuals, because if you only see Autism, you will miss out on so much more.
It was Saturday, 1 June 2019. I attended the 19th EAWOP Congress in Turin, Italy. The congress was almost over and I was waiting for time to pass so that I can fly back to South Africa. My mobile phone rang, and I saw that it was my colleague, Prof. Deon Meiring (Pretoria University) calling. I thought: “Deon knows that I am in Italy. Why on earth does he call me? International calls are expensive.” I ignored the call. A few seconds later, he sent me a message: “Ian please phone me urgently! Fons (van de Vijver) has died.” I could not believe it. Fons will not die now … he and Lona just started a new life in Australia after he retired from Tilburg University. I called Deon and could hear he was shocked and felt very sad — Fons was not only the promotor of his PhD study, he was a close friend who visited South Africa many times. I called Lona, Fons’ partner; she confirmed that he has died …

Who was Fons? He was an emeritus professor in cross-cultural psychology at Tilburg University, the Netherlands, and had an extraordinary chair at North-West University and the University of Queensland, Australia. He has (co-)authored about 600 publications, mainly in the domain of cross-cultural psychology. He is one of the most frequently cited authors in this field. He was the editor of the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology and a former president of Division 2 (Assessment and Evaluation) of the International Association of Applied Psychology, the European Association of Psychological Assessment, and the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology. He has received Dutch and international prizes for his work.

Fons was a co-author of at least three of my publications in international journals. We met at least once per year, either in South Africa or the Netherlands. We planned student exchange between Tilburg University and the North-West University. Moreover, together with a South African research team we planned and implemented one of the largest projects on personality measurement that was ever undertaken in South Africa. Fons would have visited me on 19 July 2019 and present a workshop at Optentia. I promised to take him to Mongena Lodge for one day and night during his visit. He was also invited to present a keynote lecture at the SIOPSA Conference in Pretoria. In honour of Fons, Prof. Deon Meiring organised presenters, including himself, Celeste Combrinck, Ian Rothmann, Tessa de Wet, and Leon de Beer to present a keynote lecture on 21st century capabilities and skills (the topic of Fons’ planned lecture at SIOPSA).

So Fons has died … But, his footprints will be visible on the South African soil for many years … He was a brilliant scholar. Much of what I know about cross-cultural psychology, I learnt from him, and his mentor, Prof. Ype Poortinga.

Optentia produced a video of an interview with Prof. Fons van de Vijver. The topic was: “Enhancing the cross-cultural comparability of Likert-scale measures.” Click here to watch the video.
I have been to many conferences, on four different continents. But in all honesty, the SDT (self-determination theory) conference was the best conference I’ve been to so far.

Firstly, it was really well organized. There were enough breaks and social events (including a party with great live music) to socialize with others. I met old friends and made new ones from South America, England, the US, Australia, Scotland, Finland, Poland and many other countries. It was a paperless conference, but by having access to an excellently designed conference app, it was still easy to navigate through the program.

Secondly, the location was charming and unique: a modern and comfortable conference centre (with excellent food) in the quaint old fishing town Egmond aan Zee in the Netherlands. As the name already implies, we could take a stroll at the beach in our free time and enjoy the sea.

But what really stood out was the quality of the presented research. I have never seen so much excellent research in one place. All the presentations (and not just the keynotes) I have listened to were not only well presented, but have shown studies with sophisticated designs, large sample sizes and advanced statistical methods.

There was also practitioner’s day included, making sure the research results will also find their way to practical applications. This also included Brain Storm Sessions, where I participated in a session on SDT interventions and the way forward.

My own presentation was fittingly scheduled into a session on ‘Educational Contexts in Africa’. It was great to see that our continent was also represented well at the conference. We had a very interested audience with lively discussions and came out of the session with new ideas for collaborations. I talked about the research I conducted together with Dr Marita Heyns and Prof. Werner Nell on ‘The postgraduate journey: A qualitative study on well-being and need-fulfilment amongst postgraduate students in South Africa’. A woman walked up to me afterwards and told me she also works at a university in South Africa. She said she was taking photos of my sheets and were sending them to a colleague, saying: “Look, this is a 100% us!”

Maybe the conference organizers had the three needs that SDT studies in mind: they gave us many opportunities to connect (relatedness), we had the free choice where to go to out of all the many different programme lines (autonomy) and the presentations and posters clearly enhanced our knowledge (competence). In any case, I would always want to go back to SDT conferences, which are organised every three years.
News: Human Flourishing in Institutions by Prof. Ian Rothmann

The news in the programme over the last five months can be summarized as follows:

- Dr Rachele Paver was appointed as a postdoctoral fellow in Optentia. She will continue with her research on unemployment interventions. We aim to broaden the research to include employer perspectives on unemployment.

- Molandri Moller completed her master’s study in Industrial Psychology. Her study focused on the use of latent profile analysis to classify well-being according to the Mental Health Continuum (Short Form).

- From 9-11 September 2019, Prof. Ian Rothmann will attend a workshop on decent work and the informal sector in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

- Dr Laura Weiss and Dr Kleinjan Redelinghuys recently presented papers at the World Congress on Positive Psychology in Australia.

Job Insecurity in Higher Education Institutions

Every two years, EAWOP is like a class reunion: The perfect time to catch up with fellow researchers. Of course, this was also the ideal opportunity to organize a meeting with our Job Insecurity in Higher Education Project team. Despite a series of bad luck preventing several of our fellow members to attend, we still gathered as a jolly group in the University of Torino to discuss our status and plan the road ahead. Specifically, we are excited about the following upcoming projects:

- Academy of Management Annual Meeting in Boston (9-13 August 2019): Dr Lara C. Roll in collaboration with Prof. Ian Rothmann and Prof. Hans De Witte will present a study titled “Job Crafting as a Buffer of Job Insecurity in Higher Education: Comparison between South Africa and Belgium” as part of the symposium “Expanding the Conceptualization of Job Insecurity: Evidence from Four Continents”, chaired by Prof. Lixin Jiang.

- Book Publication: Across the 10 countries included in this project, each of our country teams will explore a topic in depths. Topics will include what external causes higher education staff perceives as the root of job insecurity and differences in what it means to be an academic in the various countries.

- Journal articles, symposia at SIOP and EAOHP 2020, and more. After this intense discussion, the authentic Italian coffees that followed were well deserved!
The EAWOP Congress in Turin, Italy

The European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) recently hosted its 19th congress in Turin, Italy. The theme for the congress “Working for the greater good: Inspiring people, designing jobs and leading organisations for a more inclusive society” ties in with Optentia’s philosophical roots (precariousness and the capability approach).

Researchers from Optentia and the School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resource Management attended the congress and presented posters and papers showcasing various avenues through which we can create more inclusive organisations:

- Dr Elsabé Diedericks and Vuyani Sibamba: The role of trust in job satisfaction and work engagement among South African bank employees.
- Dr Elsabé Diedericks and Eugeny Hennicks: The role of monetary rewards in the turnover intention of employees in the utility industry in South Africa.
- Geraldine Ehlers and Prof. Elrie Botha: Exploring wellness among sales and marketing staff within a global automotive company.
- Prof. Marius Stander and Prof. Ederick Stander: A talent development centre as a hybrid succession planning and leadership development methodology.
- Elizma Stander, Prof. Ederick Stander and Prof. Elrie Botha: Fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction of South African football fans: The role of social interaction motive.
- Thapelo Chaacha and Prof. Elrie Botha: Factors influencing intention to leave of younger employees in an academic institution.
- Prof. Marius Stander, Lynelle Coxen and Natasha Maximo: Authentic leadership and work engagement: The indirect effects of psychological safety and trust in supervisors.
- Dr Leoni van der Vaart and Prof. Elrie Botha and Geraldine Ehlers: Job crafting.
- Prof. Ian Rothmann and Dr Fathima Mahomed: Thriving of academics in higher education institutions in South Africa.
- Prof. Chantal Olickers, Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl, and Corné Booysen: Positive psychological interventions aimed at managing territorial behaviours.
- Dr Lara C. Roll, Prof. Ian Rothmann, and Prof. Hans De Witte: Job insecurity in higher education: The role of job crafting.
- Prof. Chantal Olickers, Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl, and Corné Booysen: Positive psychological interventions aimed at managing territorial behaviours.

Keep an eye out for the publications some of which are already available!
From Surviving to Thriving in Academia by Prof. Ian Rothmann

In an article (“Reinvigorating South Africa’s Academic Staff”), Herwitz (2018) observed the following in higher education institutions:

- Research funding is drying up, or harder to find.
- Government has imposed on universities (and academic staff) increased bureaucratic surveillance.
- Academic staff is put in the position of corporate employees without any of the fringe benefits of the corporate world.
- Demanding jobs: challenges to teach inadequately prepared students because of poor investment in primary education.

Studies showed that job demands and a lack of resources associated with constant change result in psychological unwell-being, physical ill health and disengagement. The result is a workforce that fails to fulfil its potential and has a propensity to quit.

A recent study, published in the book “Theory, Research and Dynamics of Career Wellbeing”, Dr Fathima Mahomed and Prof. Ian Rothmann studied the surviving versus thriving of academics. Individuals seek self-determination and a sense of meaning, and desire a job situation that allows them to thrive, rather than merely survive. Thriving refers to a desirable subjective experience characterised by a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work.

The study showed that enabling academic staff members in higher education institutions to use their strengths and providing sufficient training and development opportunities contributed to thriving and reduced intentions to leave their institutions. Strength use impacted the thriving of academic staff members indirectly by enhancing the satisfaction of their autonomy needs. In addition to promoting strength use of academics, autonomy satisfaction seems key to thrive and to remain in the institution.

Motivation at Work by Dr Leoni van der Vaart

Reducing poverty and inequality is one of the key objectives of the National Development Plan. To achieve this objective, jobs should be created to boost household income. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play an increasingly important role in job creation and, hence, their effectiveness in key. Organisational effectiveness, in turn, relies heavily on optimally performing employees who are psychologically well.

To generate knowledge to support the development of evidence-based interventions for SME effectiveness, Dr Leoni van der Vaart (together with Prof. Anja Van den Broeck and Prof. Ian Rothmann) recently embarked on a new research project. The project, titled “Motivation@Work: A Dynamic Approach to Performance and Well-Being”, is grounded in the self-determination theory and aims to understand the motivational processes underlying SME employees’ performance and well-being. The project builds on the knowledge gained from the “Experiences of Unemployment” project which was completed in 2018.

One PhD student (Miss Lynelle Coxen) and two master’s students (Simeau van Nieuwenhuizen and Nadia Jordaan) will collaborate with the principal investigators on this project. Currently, Simeau and Nadia are in the process of validating measures in preparation for the PhD study. Lynelle’s proposed PhD study will consist of a meta-analysis and two diary studies. As part of capacity building initiatives, Dr Van der Vaart will spend two months in Leuven* to (a) meet with experts on meta-analyses and diary studies and (b) plan and prepare for the implementation of the next phases of the project under the guidance of Prof. Anja.

*The visit is funded by VLIRUos
Research on Capability and Functioning Gets Momentum

Education plays a critical role in achieving both national and global progress in countries. The value educators bring to society cannot be underestimated, for it is directed towards the preservation and improvement of quality of life. However, education in South Africa faces various challenges, including a shortage of educators, underqualified educators, and poor educator performance. Poor educator performance results in poor learner standards and a lack of classroom discipline, which are exacerbated by insufficient resources and inadequate infrastructure. Rothmann (2015) showed that occupational stress of secondary school teachers was significantly higher than primary school teachers and higher education educators. To better understand educational problems and challenges, it is vital to understand the capabilities and functioning of teachers and learners.

Research shows that work has become trivial and unattractive for many people in modern societies, resulting in experiences of precariousness, characterised by uncertainty and insecurity. The precariousness experienced by educators may imply a lack of secure professional-based identity, thus leading to teachers lacking control over their working environment. Precariousness (arising because of a lack of support, stress, poor remuneration, working in geographically isolated environments) results in less capable teachers (Ivancheva, 2015). According to Rogers (1989), the concept of precarious work goes beyond the form of work to include the range of factors that play a role to how a particular form of employment exposes the worker to employment instability, social and economic vulnerability.

With the Fourth Industrial Revolution, characterised by the fusion of technologies that appear to blur the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres, there seems to be enthusiasm regarding the prospects of quality education resulting from this revolution. This may result in added pressure on educators because it poses the challenge of elevating the use of technology in education, which disrupts teaching approaches. Whether teachers have the necessary capabilities to fulfil such expectations remains a significant question.

In addition to the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, South Africa faces the challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment. People in societies with bigger income gaps between rich and poor are more likely to suffer from a wide range of health and social problems compared to those living in more equal societies. Poverty levels in South Africa are unsustainably high, and unemployment is a real challenge.

Four PhD candidates in Optentia (Tessa de Wet, Christiaan Bekker, Thembelihle Lobi and Elette van den Berg) focus on the capability and functioning of educators and learners to ensure sustainable employability. Sustainable employability means that, throughout their working lives, workers can realize tangible opportunities in the form of a set of capabilities.

“Sustainable employability means that, throughout their working lives, workers can realize tangible opportunities in the form of a set of capabilities.”
René van Rooyen Obtains MEd-degree with Distinction

In her study entitled, Perceptions of self-regulating skills among Grade 10 mathematics learners, René, argues for the importance of developing self-regulating skills during teaching. Self-regulating skills to plan, monitor and evaluate work, are crucial skills to enhance academic performance in mathematics. During the planning phase, the self-regulated learner sets clear goals and selects strategies to achieve the goals. Monitoring follows the planning stage, and now the self-regulated learner makes sure that he is making progress towards attaining the goals he set. Finally, the self-regulated learner evaluates how successful he was in attaining his goals during the evaluation phase. This research firstly aimed to establish how Grade 10 mathematics learners perceive the development of their self-regulating skills, in relation to the planning, monitoring and evaluation of their own learning, as well as in relation to the skills to secure a suitable study environment. In addition, the research explored possible reasons for self-regulating skills perceived to be well-developed or not-well-developed.

In sum, the findings of the research revealed a number of limitations in the context of teaching mathematics in South African classrooms. The learners who took part in the study appear to be novices in the application of the self-regulating skills to plan, monitor and evaluate their mathematics learning tasks, and apparently also lack self-regulating skills to secure suitable study environments. The main reasons mentioned that possibly influence the development of self-regulating skills are, a lack of understanding of what the planning, monitoring, and evaluation phases of the learning process entail, a limited variety of available strategies to engage in the independent planning, monitoring, and evaluation of learning, and to remove obstacles from the study environment. Limited opportunities to develop self-regulating skills at school also appear to be a reality. The study concluded with recommendations to teachers that could enhance the development of self-regulating skills more effectively.

How Do People Learn? Mariette Fourie Joins Optentia

As an emerging researcher, Mariette anticipates to advance her research potential into a vivacious career in the academic repertoire. Her research interest embraces the field of neuroeducation. She wants to mindfully discover, unravel complexities, and publish about trends in Mind, Brain and Education (MBE) Sciences that could ardently inform teaching and learning practices. From a pedagogical stance, MBE informs teacher training programmes to include and apply the principles of Learning Sciences, which could enable teachers to respond to the diversity of learning needs of students. Her research is inspired by efficacious teachers, and the creation of opulent learning environments, accommodating the diverse needs of learners with a focus on learning, and the transfer of learning across real-world contexts. My previous studies focused on the role of various learning theories in how learners learn best. My research interest enables me to further contribute to the interrelated and interdisciplinary fields of educational neuroscience, educational psychology, and neuropsychology.
Conference on Inclusive Education: “Giving Students a Voice”

On 2 May 2019 a conference on “Inclusive education: Giving students a voice” took place at the University of Vienna, Austria. Combined with this international conference, Prof. Susanne Schwab, who started working as a full professor for the University of Vienna in October 2018, gave her inaugural lecture. In addition to this inaugural lecture there were presentations by international discipline experts, such as Prof. Mirna Nel, Prof. Hannu Savolainen (University of Jyväskylä in Finland), Prof. Dr. Elias Avramidis (University of Thessaly in Greece) and Prof. Dr. Frank Hellmich (University of Paderborn, Germany). Following these lectures, there was a poster presentation with more than 20 scientific posters by international researchers. The conference ended with a panel discussion between the experts and participants of the conference.

Inclusive Education has become the focus of research as the number of students with special needs educated in mainstreaming classes is rising globally. However, inclusive education not only focuses on ‘special’ learners but emphasises that all students should be included in quality education. Within this context, it is important to examine how students themselves feel about inclusive education. Do they have a positive attitude towards inclusive education? Do students feel socially included? Which level of wellbeing do they experience in school?

In her inaugural lecture, Prof. Schwab presented results of some of her previous research projects. For example, in one of her studies, Prof. Schwab dealt with the efficiency of inclusive school systems. Results showed that the efficiency of these school systems depends on the one hand on how many resources are available and how they are used and on the other hand a factor that reduces efficiency is the fact that in many so-called “inclusive classes” are not only students with SEN, but also other at-risk students. Other at-risk students are, for example, pupils with learning problems, migration background or low socio-economic status.

Another major research focus highlighted in the inaugural lecture is the social participation of students with SEN in inclusive education. In one of her research projects with Sebastian Wahl and Niklas Hamel, Prof. Dr. Schwab identified four key dimensions of social participation: friendships, social interactions, perceived social integration and peer-acceptance. In the course of this study it could be reported that across all four key dimensions students with SEN have an impaired social participation in inclusive classrooms because of their special needs. Additionally, also migrant background and being male can result in a lower social participation in school. The “take home” messages of Prof. Schwab’s inaugural lecture were:

- Including students’ perspectives is meaningful
- Being different means being less liked
- Being born disabled vs. becoming disabled by one’s environment
- Unequal distribution of students respective dimensions of heterogeneity in integrated and mainstream classes prevent inclusion and equal opportunities

Topics of the lectures of the international researchers were:

- Mirna Nel: Inclusion and being humane
- Hannu Savolainen: Class behavior climate from students’ perspectives
- Elias Avramidis: Trajectories of social functioning among students with and without learning disabilities in inclusive educational settings
- Frank Hellmich: Under which conditions does the social participation of students with special educational needs succeed?
On the third of June 2019, Prof. Hayley Walker-Williams and I started the International workshop on Narrative Inquiry (NI) at the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule (PTHV), Vallendar, Germany, presented by Prof. Dr. D. Jean Clandinin and Prof. Dr. Vera Caine from the University of Alberta, Canada. Little did we know that we were being positioned as participants who would experience first-hand what it means to participate in a NI study! A thought-provoking, educational and meaningful experience is the only way we can describe this 5-day training retreat. Not only were we privileged to learn about this method, we were also fortunate to enjoy the safe and green surroundings, and interesting meals and exchanges with colleagues from around the globe, including China, America, Ghana, Canada and Norway!

NI is much more than storytelling and subsequent analysis: something we grasped early on during the training, and which became even more evident at the conclusion of the workshop. To use this method of qualitative data collection and analysis, one should be well trained and supervised. What stood out is the different terms used in NI, such as a ‘research puzzle’, as oppose to a research question. We learned that having a research question assumes that one would find the answer, which is not the stance of NI researchers, instead they explore research puzzles to improve their understanding of these. Another term which is different to standard qualitative research methods is ‘research texts’ as oppose to data. Among other aspects, one crucial element of doing a NI study is to explicate your different justifications for doing this work: personal, practical and social/theoretical justifications. Becoming more involved with your participant, listening to their story and ‘walking alongside’ your participant for a lengthy period of time, optimizes the collection of rich data, or ‘research texts’. A time consuming, ethically demanding and exposing research journey for both the researcher and the participant which yields rich and meaningful research texts, to help unfold a variety of research puzzles. We could go on and on about what we have learned, but the best would be to read the book by Jean Clandinin, titled “Engaging in Narrative Inquiry” (2013).
S2T Researchers Attend International Workshop by Dr Elmien Truter

From Vallendar to Koblenz, Prof. Hayley Walker-Williams and I enjoyed Spargel soup, Salami und Käse and Wurst, walks, and a cruise on the Rhine River, plus seeing the spitting boy as he periodically spits water.

I also visited Mainz, a beautiful university and cosmopolitan city, where I met Prof. Haupert from TU Kaiserslautern to discuss social work issues experienced in Germany. The abuse of drugs, detrimental impact of divorce on children and unemployment are some of the key problems social workers deal with in Germany. Escalating numbers of emigrant families exacerbate some of the problems in Germany, and it is said that many migrant families struggle to integrate in the German culture and way of life. What is different about social work in Germany is that these social workers, especially those in child protection, have about 30-40 cases per social worker, whereas here in South Africa, our child protection social workers have anything between 90-300 cases per social worker. Interestingly, one of the risk factors in child protection social work South Africa, is that social workers in this sector are frequently exposed to violent clients, whereas this is apparently not a problem in Germany. From my conversations with Prof. Haupert, high stress levels and burnout are also not a common phenomenon among child protecting social workers in Germany, which is not the case in South Africa. It was good to hear that the police in Germany are a force to be reckoned with and very supportive in collaborating with child protection social workers in executing their work.

Hot social work research topics in Germany at the moment include case analyses, effects of unemployment on families, the effect of social media on socialization, effects of divorce on children, the loss of Christian values in society and the shortage of male social workers in the profession. We would like to thank Prof. Ian Rothmann from Optentia and the North-West University without whom this experience in Germany would not have happened.

Prestige Lecture: Prof. Tess Patterson

Prof. Tess Patterson, extraordinary professor in Optentia will present her prestige lecture on 26 August 2019. The topic of the lecture is: “Sexual Harm: The Child Witness, the Perpetrator and the Victim-Survivor”. Worldwide prevalence rates of sexual violence vary greatly from country to country. Whilst adult males commit the majority of sexual violence against female victims, there is increasing recognition that sexual harm is also committed by females and by male adolescents, and that victims of sexual abuse include male victims. The lecture will present research examining three key areas related to sexual harm. First, it examines the child as a witness in cases of childhood sexual abuse and the need for gold standard forensic interviewing practices. Second, it examines atypical perpetrators of sexual harm, that is female sexual offenders and adolescents who engage in harmful sexual behaviour. Third, it explores the long-term outcomes and lived experience of those who have survived childhood sexual abuse.

“... high stress levels and burnout are also not a common phenomenon among child protecting social workers in Germany.”
As the World Ages ... New Book on Ageing

People are living longer, creating an unexpected boom in the elderly population. Longevity is increasing not only in wealthy countries but in developing nations as well. In response, many policy makers and scholars are preparing for a global crisis of aging. But for too long, Western experts have conceived of ageing as a universal predicament—one that supposedly provokes the same welfare concerns in every context. In the twenty-first century, Prof. Kavita Sivaramakrishnan writes, we must embrace a new approach to the problem, one that prioritizes local agendas and values. As the World Ages is a history of how gerontologists, doctors, social scientists, and activists came to define the issue of global ageing.

Sivaramakrishnan shows that transnational organisations like the United Nations, private non-government organisations, and philanthropic foundations embraced programs that reflected prevailing Western ideas about development and modernization. The dominant paradigm often assumed that, because large-scale growth of an ageing population happened first in the West, developing societies will experience the issues of ageing in the same ways and on the same terms as their Western counterparts. But regional experts are beginning to question this one-size-fits-all model and have chosen instead to recast Western expertise in response to provincial conditions. Focusing on South Asia and Africa, Sivaramakrishnan shows how regional voices have argued for an approach that responds to local needs and concerns. The research presented in As the World Ages will help scholars, policy makers, and advocates appreciate the challenges of this recent shift in global demographics and find solutions sensitive to real life in diverse communities.

Kavita Sivaramakrishnan is Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia University.

Prestige Lecture of Prof. Anne Margriet Pot: 14 November 2019

Prof. Anne Margriet Pot will present her prestige lecture on 14 November 2019. The topic is: “Care and support for people with dementia and their carers: Critical Insights from the Global North; Prospects for (South) Africa”. She will present some relevant insights on establishing long-term care systems for people with dementia and their carers. In 2016, the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on ageing and health, stating that every country need to have a long-term care system. A long-term care system is needed to enable people with a decline in physical and/or mental capacities to continue to live their lives with meaning and dignity. However, the challenges to establish such systems in a sustainable and equitable way are immense, both in the Global South and the Global North. Policy-makers, care professionals, and academics from different disciplines, like theologians, psychologists and social workers, may want to learn from the experiences of the establishment of long-term care systems in other countries: the successes and the pitfalls. Challenges in the long-term care for people with dementia will be discussed, such as stigma and unawareness; the lack of diagnosis, training and support; fragmentation in care; medicalization; and hospitalization. The Healthy Ageing model of the World Health Organization will be drawn upon to reflect on these challenges and to evaluate the approaches through which it has been operationalized in the Global North over the past decades, with The Netherlands as a case in point.
Focus on Older Carers

Older adults across the globe are living longer and at the same time facing an increasing burden of providing care to others. This is especially the case in (South) Africa due to the lack of formal long-term care (LTC) systems amidst the effects of HIV/Aids as well as the increase in non-communicable diseases. In her dissertation Estelle Louw (Junior Lecturer, Department of Sociology) analysed the South African Time Use data to determine the scope and nature of the care contribution/burden of older people, specifically the way in which older adults spend their days on unpaid care work/unpaid work.

This study was quantitative in nature and encompassed a cross-sectional research design. The sample used consisted of 4,387 participants aged ≥60 years and living in South Africa. The specific objective of this study was to analyse secondary data obtained from the South African Time Use Survey to compare older adults’ time spent on unpaid care work in urban and in rural areas of the country.

Data were analysed by using non-parametric methods. The main findings of this study confirmed that differences exist in older adults’ time spent on unpaid care work activities in urban compared to rural areas, but that the calculated effect sizes of these differences are small. This can be ascribed to the general lack of LTC systems across rural and urban settings in South Africa. As expected, younger older adults (60-65 years) spent more time on unpaid care work activities than their older counterparts. Lastly, older women spent more time on unpaid care work (activities regarded as feminine) and older men spent more time on unpaid general work activities associated with masculine roles. These findings were discussed from a role/gendered perspective and while feminists are advocating equal participation for men and women in unpaid care work, fresh thought should be given as to how men actually care and to explore whether general unpaid work might perhaps be their way of caring...

With her excellent dissertation Estelle challenges researchers, policy makers and practitioners alike that it is high time that the unpaid ‘care work’ by older adults and their contributions to family and society in general be acknowledged.

Congratulations Estelle!

Estelle Louw

University Management Members with two honorary doctorates (Prof. Monica Ferreira and Dr Imtiaz Sooliman)

Prof. Daryl Balia (PC: Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Prof. Nancy Refilwe Phaswana-Mafuya (Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation), Prof. Pamela Maseko (Executive Dean: Faculty of Humanities), Prof. Sonia Swanepoel (Executive Dean: Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences), Prof. Monica Ferreira, Prof Dan Kgwadi (Vice-Chancellor) and Dr Imtiaz Sooliman
The International Imago Conference by Prof. Vera Roos

On 16 May 2019, a day before the International Imago Conference 2019 with the theme Inspiration and Tradition commenced, Maya Kollman presented a workshop on the theoretical underpinnings of Imago. Two questions posed by Maya captured my attention because of their applicability to every relationship: What do I do that contributes to the nightmare in my relationship? What can I contribute to the dream?

Harville Hendrix and Helen Lakelly Hunt (developers of Imago Couples Therapy) introduced the notion of “zero negativity”, referring to a negative emotional impact as a consequence of what we say and how we communicate; a daily practice with an accumulative effect; a relational prerequisite to promote a sense of safety; and a mechanism to open-up the relational space and to start a process of becoming curious about the other person.

I appreciated the authentic presentations with personal accounts of the struggles and successes to re-connect after raptured connections. One noteworthy example was the presentation of Drs IN Claudia Luciak-Donsberger and Mikael Luciak on The power of forgiveness.

A highlight of the conference was the introduction to communologues by Orli Wahrman (imagorli@gmail.com). This innovative approach to facilitate dialogical processes for safe communication in groups without judgement or interpretation, inspired the South African contingent to consider its potential impact in conflict-ridden communities, strained intergenerational relations and as an intervention to counter the seemingly growing racial divide between fellow South Africans.
The IAGG by Prof. Vera Roos

The IAGG-ER programme included a variety of performances and entertainment demonstrating some applications of the capability approach to ageing. During one of the lunch breaks this intergenerational choir entertained attendees with traditional Swedish folk songs.

"... the intergenerational choir entertained attendees with traditional Swedish folk songs..."
News from AGenDA by Prof. Vera Roos

The month of May 2019 was a once in a lifetime academic opportunity when Vera Roos attended three and presented at two international conferences. The International Institute for Qualitative (IIQM) presented the 17th Qualitative Methods (QM) Conference from 1-3 May 2019 in Brisbane, Australia with opportunities to attend workshops on 29 and 30 April 2019. The International Imago Conference organised by the board members of Imago Austria, took place in Vienna from 17-19 May 2019, and the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics European Region (IAGG-ER) Conference was presented in Gothenburg, Sweden from 23-25 May 2019.

IIQM usually combines qualitative methodology conferences with interactive workshops. The 2019 QM conference was no exception and attendees were spoilt for choice. I selected the workshops of: David Morgan, Introduction to focus groups; Alex Clark and Bailey Sousa: Effective academic: key approaches, tools and resources; and John Creswell and Mariko Hirose’s workshop on Conducting a rigorous qualitative study using systematic design procedures.

David reiterated that researchers who are using focus groups are not observing a natural group but a group they called together for a specific purpose.

- Participants: who are the most appropriate people to discuss the topic?
- Questions: what should researchers ask to create an effective conversation?
- Moderating: what is the best style for conducting the group discussion?
- Analysis: how will researchers make sense of the data and report the results?

Alex and Bailey’s co-authored book How to be a happy academic, provided the basis for this interactive workshop. The book and the workshop are invaluable resources for every academic, managers of knowledge workers and new graduates. The workshop facilitated a process whereby attendees could develop concrete actions plans to reach their career goals, mindful of using the 1440 seconds of every day optimally and strategically. It is good to know that their expertise will be available in future on-request workshop presentations. Alex Clark and Bailey Sousa, Click here for more information.

"Researchers who are using focus groups are not observing a natural group but a group they called together for a specific purpose."
International Networking: Prof. Vera Roos

The husband-and-wife team, John Creswell (senior research scientist, mixed methods program, University of Michigan, USA) and Mariko Hirose (research and project director, KwanseiGakuin University, Japan) presented a systematically and logically-organised workshop with clear guidelines on how to embark on the qualitative research journey and to conduct rigorous qualitative research. John generously shared resources and his in-depth knowledge as a methodologists contributed to an enjoyable and useful learning experience.

I am particularly intrigued by Mariko’s introduction of the Trajectory Equifinality Approach and keen to read the book of Tasuya Sato (Ed).


During the 2019 QM conference, Linda Jackson and Avie Cherrington (Nelson Mandela University, South Africa), Lizanlé van Biljon (extraordinary researcher, Optentia) and Prof. Vera Roos presented four papers as part of a symposium on Showcasing the Mmogo-method: A visual tool for generating subjective, relational and contextual data in a group setting.

... the article on reporting standards for qualitative and mixed methods research in psychology is a useful reference...”
AGENDA Researchers Active at Conferences

The IAGG-ER 2019 Conference, themed “Towards capability in ageing: From cell to society”, covered a variety of themes ranging from genetics to demography with oral presentations mainly organised in symposia.

The symposium Ageing and Gentrification, convened by Lucie Vidovicova from Czech Republic, included presentations of Tine Buffel and Chris Phillipson (Manchester, UK), An-Sofie Smetcoren (Brussels, Belgium), Josefine Heusinger (Germany), Norah Keating (Swansea, UK, Optentia) and Vera.

Vera and Norah presented the paper, Dislocation, place and loneliness of older adults in rural South Africa. Tine and Chris’ paper Elected or excluded? Experiences of gentrification in later life, was presented with commentary from Norah.

In conjunction with the Conference, Norah directed a master class on Ageism for PhD students and postdoctoral scholars from all parts of the world.
The Fifth World Congress on Risk

Five Optentia colleagues attended the Fifth World Congress on Risk, with a focus on Development and Resilience from 6-8 May 2019. Emmanuel Mulambya, Fred Goede and Hermien Zaaiman presented their work on programme risk management, a socio-technical approach to risk management and public sector accountability for risk.

According to Prof. Hermien Zaaiman, members of the Society for Risk Analysis tend to focus on quantitative analytical aspects of risk. However, speakers stressed that quantifying risk is not enough for making sound risk-related decisions. The need for greater involvement of social scientists in risk research and decision making was mentioned in most of the talks that she attended. The research programme she leads in Optentia takes a behavioural approach to risk management, which is relevant and topical to the risk field. Furthermore, Prof. Andrew Robinson, a biosecurity expert from the University of Melbourne in Australia, said that risk managers must remember that they do risk management because they have something valuable to protect. This was an unexpected positive insight in a conference that focused on negative human impact on our fragile environment. Prof. Zaaiman said that we are privileged to have something to protect, and we must continue to do our best to protect what we value. Fred Goede pointed out that resilience assessment in the field of workplace safety remains mainly engineering-focused with less understanding of the behavioural aspects that affect safe risk-taking. He also observed that the audience was very interested in the next phase of his research which is about modelling human behaviour when taking safety risks. Specific feedback in the days following his presentation recommended distinguishing between individual “rogue” behaviour as well as group behaviour - thus not neglecting the outliers of human behaviour - which often cause incidents.
Prof. Marise Born, extraordinary professor in Optentia, recently presented a risk management lecture. Born is a full professor of Industrial Psychology at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Her research interests are in the domains of personnel selection, cross-cultural psychology, test development and assessment, big data and algorithms in psychological assessment and personality and individual differences.

The audience at her prestige lecture was treated to a look at risk issues or culture and relevant aspects impacting on it related to the individual differences between people. “If we talk about organisational risk issues or risk culture, there is relevant aspects related to differences between individual people that must be taken into account,” she said. Her lecture gave examples that aimed to inspire the audience and ultimately lead to new research.

Prof. Marise elucidated that concepts that are relevant on the level of individual differences, such as different styles of coping with life events, is certainly also relevant when looking at organisational cultures, where different coping styles exist within the organisational setting. She believes that apart from the organisational culture itself, it is also important to focus on research regarding the differences between individuals who play important roles within the organisation. “Individual differences in terms of personality and values could influence how they go along with roles in terms of risk accountability, for instance,” she added.

Prof. Marise describes herself as interdisciplinary oriented and believes in economic viewpoints as a big driver of her research. “We know UARM is doing a lot of research in the South African context. From the standpoint of research in Industrial Psychology, this is immensely important,” she said. According to her the datasets used in international books and journal articles are skewed due to the information collected originating in western countries in Europe and North America. “Individual differences when it comes to risk management is also very relevant in the South African context. Some research must be done in risk taking propensity and how this may effect risk behaviour in the South African context. A lot of research has been done in other parts of the world, which may be generalised to some parts of society in South Africa, but certainly not on all,” said Prof. Marise.
Two Optentia Highlights: Photos

"Thank you to our staff and management for supporting our research!

We had a close encounter with six elephants at Mongena Lodge during StatsCamp 2019
We’re on the web!
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Books


Thank you to Optentia Support Staff who have worked long hours to help us to reach our goals for 2019!

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

- 17-31 August 2019 – Visit to Optentia: Prof. T. Patterson
- 14 August 2019 - Workshop: Emerging researchers
- 19 August 2019 - Public lecture: Prof. P. Westoby
- 21 August 2019 - Optentia Scientific Committee
- 26 August 2019 - Prestige lecture: Prof. T. Patterson
- 26-30 August 2019 - Training in Bayesian analysis
- 18 September 2019 - Optentia Scientific Committee
- 18 October 2019 - Workshop: Sampling
- 23 October 2019 - Optentia Scientific Committee
- 23 October 2019 - Prestige lecture: Prof. T. Kocken