

**Special points of interest:**

- \* Become knowledgeable of what languishing entails.
- \* Attend the qualitative research festival from 3-6 September 2024.
- \* The first half Of 2024 has been marked by significant academic achievements.
- \* Develop your capabilities: work with a good mentor.
- \* Optentia appointed top international experts as extraordinary professors.
- \* Optentia participants shine at conferences.

**Inside this issue:**

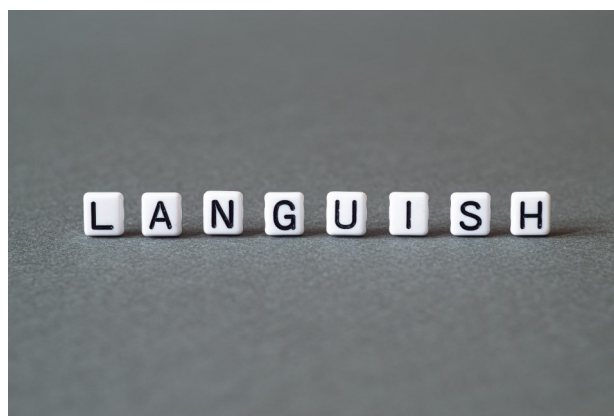
Optentia's performance	2
Capability development	3
Optentia highlights for 2024	4
News about academic mentor and mentee short courses	6
Lessons from the Optentia mentorship program	8
Extraordinary professors	9
AI, technology and the ethical compass	10
Optentia at the anti-ageism alliance	12
The impact of a community-	13
Optentia participants shine	14
Prof. Japie Greeff's work	20

## The Quiet Struggle of Languishing

The rising prevalence of precarity affects people's health and well-being: their lives are precarious because they are dependent on and vulnerable to others. If individuals' security needs are not fulfilled, individuals become pre-occupied with safety and security, defensive and protective, and neglect opportunities for growth. Consequently, in the midst of life's hustle and bustle, many people find themselves in a state of languishing - feeling stuck, joyless, and aimlessly adrift.

Languishing people often feel lonely and disconnected, and sense that they do not matter. There is perhaps no greater pain than the sense that we do not matter, and that we have nothing to give. When the world does not treat you as though you matter, when you suffered prolonged emotional neglect, or when you are part of a marginalised group, you are left vulnerable to the double jeopardy of feeling alone and unimportant.

Research showed that mental health and mental illness are not just opposites on a scale. Symptoms of mental illness are only modestly and negatively related to measures of subjective well-being. Psychological well-being measures have an average correlation of -0.51 with depression.



Languishing and depression, while both indicative of poor mental health, differ significantly in their severity and impact on functioning. Languishing is characterised by feelings of emptiness, stagnation, and lack of motivation that do not meet the clinical threshold for depression but still result in significant distress and reduced well-being. Individuals who are languishing often do not feel and function well, leading to fewer adaptive coping strategies and psychosocial impairment. Research by [Joshanloo \(2024\)](#) showed that good psychological functioning weakens the link between depressive symptoms and life satisfaction.

The workplace and its effects on social sustainability and mental health remain mostly under the radar. Individuals are struggling with motivation, and it is

leading to an overall feeling of stagnation and emptiness. They are not at peak capacity: they are missing motivation and meaning but are not depressed.

Human freedoms and capabilities are essential for human flourishing (which is the opposite of languishing). Questions should be asked about whether societies and institutions successfully support human flourishing. The core of the capability notion is to identify 'valued beings and doings' through reasoning and facilitate the enablement and achievement thereof. Importantly, feeling connected to others is essential to deal with languishing. It enhances belonging and self-worth, reduces loneliness and anxiety, and fosters purpose. True connection means supporting others during their moments of pain, failure, or loss.

## Performance of Optentia

A total of 41 permanent staff members, 77 Master's students, and 39 PhD students participate in Optentia. From January 2024 to July 2024, 10 PhD and 18 Master's students completed their studies. Optentia researchers have published 57.93 peer-reviewed articles, peer-reviewed chapters in books, and peer-reviewed conference papers from January to July 2024.

Concerning the training of academic mentors and mentees, Optentia trained 25 mentees and 39 mentors from various faculties and campuses of North-West University (January to July 2024). We are preparing to train more than 100 academic mentors and mentees from August to December 2024. Concerning research methodology training, 54 master's and PhD students



and staff members participated in Optentia's Short Learning Programme in Research Design. There is significant interest in

Optentia's PhD programmes for 2025.

**“Optentia researchers have published 57.93 peer-reviewed articles and peer-reviewed chapters in books from January to July 2024.”**

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

Output	2022	2023	2024
Peer-reviewed article equivalents	98.09*	67.40*	57.93*
Papers: Conferences	9	27	10
Participating Master's students	34	63	77
Completed Master's students	23	5	18
Participating PhD students	52	50	39
Completed PhD students	6	10	10
Post-doctoral fellows	1	2	0
Number of workshops presented	10	19	6
Number of workshop participants	250	619 (222)	351

Note: Statistics on 30 July 2024

\* Not audited

## Capability Development at Optentia

Optentia has presented various webinars and programs to build the competencies of participants from February to March 2024:

- Symposium on Education and Unemployment (February 2024 - Prof. Ian Rothmann and team)
- POP 2.0: Embracing the Technological Revolution (Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl).
- Positive Psychological Intervention Design (Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl).
- Artificial Intelligence, Technology and the Ethical Compass (Prof. Ian Rothmann and team).
- Research Community Day (Optentia).
- Performativity, Inclusion and Decolonial Praxis (Prof. Blessed Ngwenya).
- Short Learning Programme in Research Design (January-June 2024 and July-November 2024).



- Short Course for Academic Mentors (January-March 2024 and April-June 2024).
  - Short Course for Academic Mentees (January-March 2024 and April-June 2024).
  - Workshop: Diversity and Diversity Policies - 9 September 2024.
  - International Spring Week - Faculty of Humanities - 16 to 20 September 2024.
  - Exploring the Evolution of Cross-Cultural Psychology: The Primacy of Method over Theory - 21 October 2024.
- The following workshops will be presented from August to October 2024:
- A festival of diverse qualitative research perspectives - 3 to 6 September 2024.

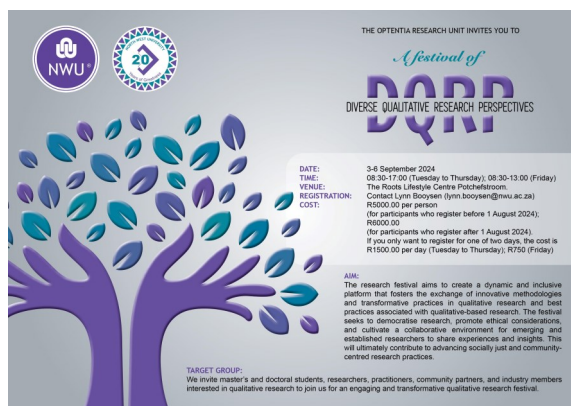
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**“Optentia organised various cutting-edge workshops and webinars.”**

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## Qualitative Research Festival: 3-6 September 2024

The Optentia Research Unit will present a qualitative research festival from 3-6 September 2024. The festival aims to create a dynamic and inclusive platform that fosters the exchange of innovative methodologies and transformative practices in qualitative research and best practices associated with qualitative-based research. The festival seeks to democratise research, promote ethical considerations, and cultivate a collaborative environment for emerging and established researchers to share experiences and insights. This will ultimately contribute to advanc-



ing socially just and community-centred research practices. We invite master's and doctoral students, researchers, practitioners, community partners, and industry members interested in qualitative research to join us for an engaging and transformative qualitative research festival. Contact [Lynn Booysen](#) for more information.

## Optentia Research Unit: Impact with Pioneering Achievements

The first half of 2024 has been marked by significant academic achievements, impactful publications, extensive training programs, and international collaborations.

- Ten PhD candidates were awarded degrees in May 2024. Notable graduates include Dr. Constant van Graan in Relational Dynamics and Development, and Dr. Andrew Banda in Ageing and Development. Other topics included self-compassion and compassion of managers (Dr. Mari Ford), employability of students (Dr. Elette Horn), and food addiction (Dr. Mart-Marie Joubert).
- Four research professors significantly impacted academic discourse by submitting and/or publishing 42 peer-reviewed manuscripts in Quartile 1 and 2 journals, collaborating with national and international experts
- Optentia researchers contributed to multiple books, including "Job Insecurity in Higher Education" and "Community Psychology," with upcoming works on capability and well-being.
- Prof. Roos, Prof. Rothmann, Prof. Greeff, Dr Bunt, and Prof. De Witte contributed chapters to prominent publications on ageing, well-being in the digital age, job insecurity, and thriving.
- Four international experts were appointed as extraordinary professors to elevate our researchers' capabilities. Additionally, several esteemed experts were reappointed as extraordinary professors in 2024.
- Prof. Ian Rothmann, Dr. Neil Barnard, Ms. Anjonet Jordaan, and Ms. Kelebogile Ramagaga trained 60 academics in successful mentorship, with over 100 partici-

pants joining. Additionally, 30 participants enrolled in the Research Design SLP from August to December 2024.

- Optentia's community engagement in 2024 included attending a symposium on unemployment and education in Hermanus, the Yabelana project's WSIS+20 nomination, and Prof. Heyns' post-graduate workshops.
- Profs. Greeff, Hoffman, Roos, and Rothmann gave keynotes at national and international events. Several funding applications were also developed.
- Optentia members attended major conferences and internationalized their research by visiting institutions in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Italy, France, and Egypt.

These outcomes are proud achievements of the whole Optentia team and our leaders!

**"These outcomes are proud achievements of the whole Optentia team and our leaders!"**



The leadership team of Optentia - Back: Mrs. M. Malan, Prof. J. Hoffman, Prof. B. Ngwenya, Dr N. Barnard, Ms. E. Kriel, Prof. H. Zaaiman, Prof. J. Greeff, Ms. L. Booysen, Front: Prof. V. Roos, Mrs. S. Harding, Ms K. Ramagaga, Prof. I. Rothmann, Ms. A. Jordaan, Prof. M. Heyns, Dr L. Bunt

## Academic Success: Navigating to High-Impact Research

On 3 May 2024, Prof. Ian Rothmann delivered a keynote paper at the Research Career Development Symposium for Academics, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. He started his presentation by focussing on three challenges for academics:

- Moving from languishing to flourishing
- Moving away from a toxic work culture
- Learning how to use artificial intelligence.

Prof. Rothmann focused on the following challenges regarding the identification and refinement of a focused and impactful research niche::

- Develop your capabilities: work with a good academic mentor
- Conduct a literature review: Look for recurring themes and questions that have not been fully addressed.
- Obtain insights from experts (academics and practitioners).
- Consider relevance and application, i.e. for policies, practices, or organisational outcomes.
- Consider how your research can advance knowledge, solve practical problems, or influence other disciplines.
- Feasibility and resources: Ensure that you have access to the resources (data, tools, funding).
- Identify unique angles within well-established areas: new methodologies, frameworks, or cross-disciplinary research.

Prof. Rothmann also mentioned the following strategies re-



Prof. Ian Rothmann presenting a keynote at the University of the Free State

searchers can use for increasing visibility and citation impact:

- Regularly present your findings at major conferences and seminars: To increase your work's visibility and network with other researchers and practitioners in your field.
- Aim to publish your research in high-impact journals within your field. Articles in well-regarded journals are more likely to be read and cited by your peers.
- Engage on social media and professional networks.
- Collaborate with researchers from other disciplines or institutions. Interdisciplinary research often reaches wider audiences and can lead to innovative findings that influence multiple fields.
- Contribute to special issues and edited volumes: These are often thematic and attract readers interested in specific topics.

- Utilise multimedia: Consider creating video abstracts, podcasts, or blogs about your research. Multimedia content can help reach a broader audience, including those outside the traditional academic circles.
- Implement open science practices: Transparency can increase the trustworthiness and reproducibility of your work, leading to more citations and follow-up studies.

Prof. Rothmann summarised his presentation by mentioning the following points:

- 20% of the improvement you will experience comes from your mentor; 80% comes from your hard work
- Focus on values and your why
- Meaning that one assigns to events is critical
- Develop a tolerance for negative emotions
- Set small, manageable objectives for improvement.

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**“Develop your capabilities: work with a good academic mentor.”**

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## Academic Mentor and Mentee Short Courses Launched

Are you passionate about shaping the future of academia? Join our transformative short courses designed specifically for academic mentors and mentees. As a mentor, you will have the opportunity to guide and inspire the next generation of scholars, sharing your knowledge and experience. As a mentee, you'll receive invaluable support and insights to help you navigate your academic journey. These courses will equip you with essential skills for effective mentorship and a sustainable academic career, fostering a thriving and collaborative academic community. Don't miss this chance to be part of a program that emphasizes growth, support, and excellence. Register now to embark on this rewarding path of mutual learning and development. Your future in academia begins here!

Click [here](#) to register for the academic mentoring short course. Click [here](#) to register for the academic mentee short course. Please contact Kelebogile Ramagaga, the course administrator for the short courses for mentors and mentees.

To access the Short Courses for Mentors and Mentees

- Go to [www.optentia.co.za](http://www.optentia.co.za)
- Click on Education
- Select Registered Short Courses
- Find the Short Courses for Mentors and Mentees
- Access the Short Courses via the Optentia Glide homepage (<https://optentia.glide.page>). You will need a password to access the Short Courses.

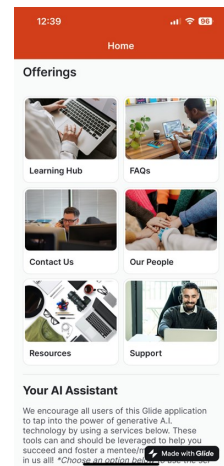
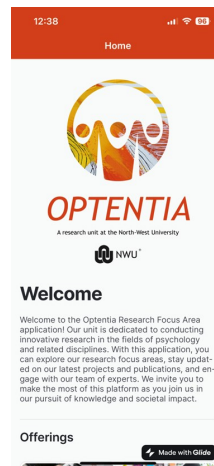


Ms Kelebogile Ramagaga

Click [here](#) to watch a short video about the development of the short courses for academic mentors and mentees.

Click [here](#) to watch a video that focuses on the what, how and why of academic mentoring.

**“These courses will equip you with essential skills for effective mentorship and a sustainable academic career.”**



# NAVIGATING WITHOUT A ROAD MAP

## Addressing the challenges of Academic Mentorship

## Empowering Academics: Mentee and Mentor Training

In January 2024, Optentia introduced two impactful short courses: one for academic mentors and the other for academic mentees. The progress has been outstanding, with participants highly valuing the programs. Our primary goal of developing mentors to guide the next generation of academics and tackle the mentor shortage within the institution is showing exciting and promising results. From January to July 2024, we successfully trained 25 mentees and 39 mentors from various faculties and campuses of North-West University. Our collective efforts and dedication are reflected in the overwhelming response we've received, with over 100 applications for mentor and mentee training from August to December 2024. This incredible interest highlights our commitment and the positive impact of our program!

We are dedicated to enhancing our support by providing personalised guidance for each participant, implementing a more adaptable support structure, refining the program, and boosting its effectiveness. Our primary goal is to meet the program's objectives and address the university's needs. This commitment goes beyond the training period, as we strive to support participants in their entire academic journey.

Our priority is to ensure that academics in the Faculty of Humanities enrol in the mentorship and mentee short learning programme. This initiative aims to foster the development of young academics through mentor-mentee relationships and to assist faculty staff members in optimising their responsibilities in

research, teaching, learning, and community engagement. We believe that this programme is a valuable opportunity for all faculty members to enhance their academic and professional growth.

Matching mentees with potential mentors is a crucial task for us, and we are currently defining that process. Our goal is to create productive pairings that benefit both parties by adhering to ethical considerations and best practices in mentorship relationships. This ensures interactions are respectful, professional, and mutually beneficial. We strive to foster long-term relationships between mentors and mentees that extend beyond the program's duration, promoting ongoing support and mentorship while highlighting the pivotal role each participant plays in the program's success.

We aim to continue supporting participants even after they receive their certificates. We are developing a network for mentors and mentees to share experiences and challenges. This network will provide reading materials and a communication platform for ongoing support, enhancing the learning experience and offering practical guidance.

For more information about mentor and mentee training, contact: [Kele Ramagaga](#).



**Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Sufen Chen, Ms Anjonet Jordaan and Ms Kelebogile Ramagaga**

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**“We are dedicated to enhancing our support by providing personalised guidance for each participant...”**

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## Lessons from the Optentia Mentorship Program *by* Dr A Murangi

I was part of the first cohort for the mentorship course for mentors presented by the Optentia Research Unit. The course opened my eyes to the purpose and value of academic mentorship. One key foundational element of the mentorship course was the integration of research, teaching, and community engagement, as the three pillars of academic work.

Most academics at universities focus on research because it is tied to promotional opportunities. In most times, research is initiated because there is a problem or a gap that exists. Optentia uses a multi-disciplinary approach to effectively respond to social issues that confront individuals, organisations, and communities. The problem or gap does not simply exist in isolation. It exists in settings often occupied by human beings.

While doing the mentorship program, I got intrigued by this question: What happens to all the research findings? The recommendations? What is the value of research? What becomes of the communities where we conduct research? At what stage can academics say that the problem that necessitated a study got solved?

The questions above speak to the need for academics to pause and reflect on the value of research. Post-research interventions requires us to identify the key stakeholders that will effectively roll out evidence-based interventions for individuals, organisations and communities. One key stakeholder is the students themselves, who are always eager to learn and contribute to the societies they come from.



**Dr Annelisa Murangi**

I attempted to integrate the three pillars using my 3rd and 4th year Industrial Psychology students: Students were taught on employee and organisational well-being as part of their curriculum. Students were further required to look for context specific research on well-being in various occupations

Where Namibian context-specific research findings were not available, students were required to go to several organisations and employees and investigate factors affecting well-being. Using context specific factors, students had to use their research findings to develop individual and organisational level interventions, that spoke to the factors specific to each occupation. This they had to present in class for constructive feedback. Lastly, students were required to contact the wellness offices of various organisations and go back to give what they found and outline how they proposed for it to be rolled out.

The three pillars of academic work should be integrated and be

able to speak to one another. With careful planning, collegial conversations and collaborative job crafting strategies, smart ways of working can surface. Academia can become an environment where lecturers and students thrive.

I had the opportunity to extend the lessons learned in the Mentorship Program to the entire UNAM community, in retrospect, an extension of Optentia. Thank you Optentia!

Dr Annelise Murangi is a senior lecturer at the University of Namibia and an extraordinary researcher at the Optentia Research Unit.

**“One key foundational element of the mentorship course was the integration of research, teaching, and community engagement.”**



## Four Extraordinary Professors Appointed in Optentia

Optentia recently appointed four outstanding extraordinary professors: Prof. Olya Kudina, Prof. Linda Liebenberg, Prof. Alex Morin, and Prof. Jasper van Assche.

Prof. Olya Kudina, an Assistant Professor in Ethics/Philosophy of Technology, examines the interaction between values and technologies through a phenomenological and pragmatist lens. Her expertise in empirical philosophy connects ethics with design, focusing on responsible human-artificial collaborations. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Twente and has a background in diplomacy, (inter) governmental work, data protection, and privacy. Her Google Scholar h-index is 13. She is internationally recognised for her work in technology, artificial intelligence, and ethics.

Linda Liebenberg specializes in youth resilience and community development, focusing on children and youth with complex needs. She emphasizes participatory image-based methods, longitudinal quantitative designs, and creating measurement instruments to engage youth meaningfully. With a Ph.D. in Social Science Methods from Stellenbosch University and a Master's in Counselling Psychology from Yorkville University, she excels in visual research methods and multivariate data analysis. Her projects, such as Spaces and Places and Networks for Change, address community needs and sexual violence. Her Google Scholar h-index is 46, and she holds a B2 NRF rating.

Alexandre Morin, a Full Professor at Concordia University, excels in Organizational Psychol-



Prof. Olya Kudina



Prof. Linda Liebenberg



Prof. Alex Morin



Prof. Jasper van Assche

ogy, Psychometrics, and Latent Variable Modeling. With a B.Sc. in Psychology and a Ph.D. in Industrial-Organizational Psychology from the University of Montreal, he has held academic positions in Canada and Australia. He leads the Substantive-Methodological Synergy Research Laboratory, integrating methodological innovations with psychological research. Renowned for his expertise in Mplus software and advanced statistical methods, he has published 250 peer-reviewed articles and holds an h-index of 81.

Prof. Jasper van Assche, a prolific social psychology researcher, focuses on intergroup relations, prejudice, and political attitudes. His work examines

shifts in outgroup attitudes post-terror attacks, prosocial behavior during crises like COVID-19, and cross-cultural prejudice comparisons. He studies asylum seeker perceptions, religion-prejudice dynamics, and trust-repairing apologies. His insights aid in understanding intergroup contact and societal cohesion. His Google h-index is 21.

Optentia also reappointed various extraordinary professors, including Prof. Kristin Betts, Prof. Roland Blom, Prof. Sufen Chen, Prof. Danie du Toit, Prof. Ederick Stander, Prof. Michael Steger, and Prof. Duco Veen,

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**“Optentia recently appointed four outstanding extraordinary professors.”**

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## Artificial Intelligence, Technology and the Ethical Compass

The Optentia Research Unit recently hosted a symposium on technology, humanity and ethics, emphasising the importance of balancing technological progress with ethical considerations and human rights to ensure advancements support sustainability and individual well-being. The event aimed to bring together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from various fields to collaborate towards a more equitable and humane technological future. The hybrid event at the Potchefstroom Campus featured distinguished speakers:



Click on the image 'Watch Now' or click [here](#) to watch the video *AI, Humanity, and the Ethical Compass*.

Click [here](#) to read more about the symposium

Prof. Olya Kudina, assistant professor in ethics and philosophy of technology from TU Delft in the Netherlands, Prof. Shirley Chen, professor of digital learning and education and Vice-dean for academic affairs at the National Taiwan University of Sci-

ence and Technology, Prof. Sang Min Lee, professor in psychological counselling at Korea University, and Prof. Amandeep Dhir, professor in research methods at the University of Agder, Norway. They were joined by NWU experts Dr Lance Bunt and Prof. Japie Greeff.

“The event aimed to bring together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from various fields to collaborate towards a more equitable and humane technological future.”



SF van der Westhuizen (MSM Productions) Prof. Japie Greeff, Dr Lance Bunt, Prof. Shirley Chen, Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Sufen Chen, Prof. Aman Dhir, Lynn Booysen, Christina den Heijer, Elizna Leibbrandt (Feisty Communications), GP van Rheede van Oudtshoorn (Coppertop Consulting) and Anjonet Jordaan

Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Japie Greeff, and Dr Lance Bunt recently completed a peer-reviewed book chapter: Rothmann, S., Greeff, J. & Bunt, L. (2024). Technology and well-being: Perspectives from the capability approach. In A. Van Niekerk, N. Harry & M. Coetzee (Eds.), *Unlocking sustainable wellbeing in the digital age: Theory, research, strategies and practices*. Springer Nature.



Dr Lance Bunt, Prof. Japie Greeff and Prof. Ian Rothmann, co-authors of a chapter on technology and well-being from the perspective of the capability approach

## AI, Technology and the Ethical Compass

During April 2024, Optentia hosted a workshop at Mongena Lodge. Prof. Mirna Nel, Prof. Aman Dhir, Prof. Shirley Chen, Prof. Sufen Chen, Prof. Japie Greeff, Dr Lance Bunt, and Prof. Puneet Kaur attended the workshop which aimed to promote research collaboration in research on technology and well-being. At the end of the workshop, the participants were spoiled with a game drive by Mongena Lodge, a wonderful opportunity to connect with nature while dealing with complex issues regarding technology and capability.



Participants appreciating nature after a workshop at Mongena Lodge



Students of the North-West University were sponsored by the Optentia Research Unit to attend the symposium on AI, Humanity, and the Ethical Compass.

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“... students left with a renewed sense of purpose and direction for their research projects.”

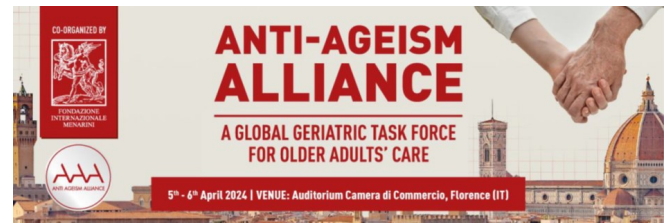
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## Optentia at the Anti-Ageism Alliance in Italy

The United Nations (UN) Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021– 2030) has identified ageism as a global obstacle that curtails older persons’ opportunities to contribute to society, realize their full potential, and lead a fulfilling life. The World Health Organization (WHO) established the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism (<http://bit.ly/combatageism>) to build a world for all ages by changing the way we think, feel, and act about age and aging. To provide evidence-based support for such Campaign, the WHO, in collaboration with other UN agencies, released the landmark [“Global Report on Ageism”](#) in 2021.

Prompted by these strong actions Prof. Jaco Hoffman and Femada Shamam were invited by the Fondazione Internazionale Menarini to a meeting (5 – 6 April) in Florence to contribute to an Anti-Ageism Alliance Task Force. The focus of the meeting was to emphasise how ageism adversely impacts the goals of care, the care itself and the health outcomes of older adults. The meeting underscored the many ways through which cultural stereotypes and social behaviours affect the care and well-being of older persons including their involvement in critical decisions concerning their life and their ability to maintain a positive role in the society. More important, the Task Force identified what remedial actions can be prioritized in education and legislation that eliminate ageism in health care and in the society.

One of these being the establishment of the Anti-Ageism Alliance as a working group: the scientific board agreed that the



Prof. Jaco Hoffman, Femada Shamam and Prof. Mario Barbagallo

Anti-Ageism Alliance conference offers the opportunity to create an operative working group aiming to increase awareness of ageism; expand research and knowledge on age-related discrimination in healthcare and other fields; implement intervention strategies to counteract ageism and its manifestations.

Policies and laws, educational activities and intergenerational interventions have all been proven to work to reduce ageism. To create a world for all ages, stakeholders across countries, sectors and disciplines must invest in these three strategies and join the global movement to change negative narratives around age and ageing.

As the Carta of Florence Against Ageism concludes: “Ageism is pervasive and involves most aspects of our life. We learn early that being ‘young’ as opposite to being ‘old’ is a positive value and this ageist cultural view persists over the whole lifespan. The ‘fear’ of becoming old and the ‘surprise’ of reaching old age are only a few examples

of the ageist imprinting that we carry with us. Such negative cultural stereotypes of aging have severe consequences on the lives of older persons, who tend to be marginalized and left out of many opportunities just because of ‘old age.’” (Ungar et al., 5)

Ungar A, Cherubini A, Fratiglioni L, de la Fuente-Núñez V, Fried LP, Krasovitsky MS, Tinetti ME, Officer A, Vellas B, Ferrucci L. Carta of Florence Against Ageism: No Place for Ageism in Healthcare. *J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci*. 2024 Mar 1;79(3):264. doi: 10.1093/gerona/glad264. PMID: 38419345; PMCID: PMC10902610.

“The World Health Organization (WHO) established the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism.”

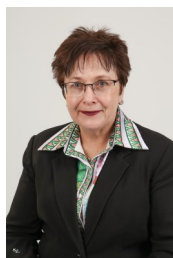
## Reflections on the Impact of a Community-based Project

A recent call by Universities South Africa (USAf) to highlight an Impact Case, which demonstrates NWU's commitment to addressing and solving societal challenges, compelled us to revisit a project in which a number of NWU staff across all three campuses were involved. It is indeed an insightful exercise to look back on a project and its impact.

"Yabelana" (referring to "sharing") is a first-of-its-kind self-sustaining technology artefact with context-specific service delivery information, accommodating both older (push button) and smartphone technology. Three interrelated trends informed this innovative development:

- Older persons in sub-Saharan Africa are the fastest-growing population group on a very young continent;
- Concurrently technology is leapfrogging throughout Africa – across socio-economic groupings, across generations, and
- Deficits in service delivery, affecting older persons disproportionately.

Older South Africans' proper inclusion in technology to access information and services frequently lags for various reasons, but mostly because a basic understanding of how they use cell phone technology is underreported and often misrepresented because of ageism. This project explored ICT not only beyond youth but also as an Intergenerational Contact Zone (ICZ). With in mind older generations as end-users, the Yabelana ICT ecosystem consists of a website, app



Prof. Vera Roos



Prof. Jaco Hoffman

and USSD code and promotes access to a service delivery repository for all generations towards well-being across the life-course.

The Yabelana technology artefact is the result of dedicated research and community engagement conducted by the Optentia Research Unit. We collected quantitative and qualitative data about older South Africans' cell phone use to understand the situatedness of a cohort of older participants, their needs and preferences in relation to cell phone technology and the social systems (intergenerational relations and service delivery needs) determining and facilitating their ICT use.

We adopted two main approaches to drive the development of the Yabelana ecosystem: (1) That older individuals should participate in the design of the

artefact despite their low competence in cell phone use and low literacy levels.

(2). To involve trained younger people, drawing on the following social engagement strategies:

The process of developing and implementing the Yabelana artefact has been published as an open source book by Springer: [Age-inclusive ICT innovation for service delivery in South Africa: A developing country perspective](#). Springer's website reported 16k X accesses and Altmetric has measured six posts from six users, with an upper bound of 9,523 followers according to Springer's webpage. In 2024, the Yabelana project was nominated as a finalist of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +20 Forum High-Level Event, the International Telecommunication Union and the Global Coalition on Ageing, Geneva, Switzerland.

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**"Yabelana (referring to 'sharing') is a first-of-its-kind self-sustaining technology artefact with context-specific service delivery information."**

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## Optentia Scholars Shine at ECPP 2024 in Austria!

A total of nine Optentia researchers participated in the July 2024 European Conference of Positive Psychology (ECPP) in Austria. Five full-time North-West University staff (Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Marita Heyns, Dr Neil Barnard, Dr Lynelle Coxen and Dr Thapelo Chachaa) and four extraordinary professors (Prof. Leoni van der Vaart, Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl, Prof. Michael Steger, and Prof. Laura Weiss) made presentations at the ECPP. Researchers from the North-West University, and specifically Optentia are influential in terms of both number of Positive Psychology publications and citations as was shown in a recent study in [Frontiers in Positive Psychology](#).

“... it is easier to learn to surf if you have a surfboard, a coach, and a lifeguard...”

We had the opportunity to attend two exceptional keynote presentations by Prof. Corey Keyes and Prof. Michael Ungar. The presentation on languishing by Prof. Corey Keyes concerned the “blah” feeling of inner emptiness that aggravates mental illness, and how flourishing and good mental health are more closely related to functioning well rather than feeling good. The following words of Prof. Michael Ungar’s keynote on resilience in stressed environments stood out: “You can’t stop the waves but you can learn to surf ... yes, but it is easier to learn to surf if you have a surfboard, a coach, and a lifeguard!” Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl and colleagues presented an interesting symposium on life crafting.

In addition to learning and sharing research findings at the ECPP 2024, an important aim was to provide opportunities for emerging researchers. Emerging researchers in Optentia benefited from the opportunities for



Dr Lynelle Coxen, Dr Neil Barnard, Dr Thapelo Chachaa, Prof. Marita Heyns, Prof. Leoni van der Vaart and Prof. Ian Rothmann at the ECPP



Dr Neil Barnard, Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Shiri Lavy, Dr Lynelle Coxen and Dr Thapelo Chachaa

professional development, visibility and recognition, collaboration, understanding the global research landscape, building confidence, and career advancement.

Optentia is proud of the quality of work that was produced and presented at the ECPP 2024!

## A Journey of Learning and Connection *by* Dr Neil Barnard

I recently had the privilege of attending the European Conference on Positive Psychology in Innsbruck, Austria. Under the theme “It’s you, It’s me, It’s us,” the conference offered a dynamic platform for sharing insights and fostering advancements in positive psychology.

The event was filled with a series of inspirational talks and groundbreaking research. I had the privilege to connect with respected researchers like Shiri Lavy, whose work on social-emotional skills in education is truly inspiring; Prof. Corey Keyes, renowned for his pioneering research on flourishing; and Laura Weiss, an Extraordinary Professor at Optentia, involved in a significant 10-year study on mental health (the data being collected is open-source which I am considering for potential future studies). I also resonated with the presentation by Ernst Bohlmeijer on a model of sustainable well-being (one I am exploring for integration into my research on sustainable employability) and Michael Steger’s workshop on meaning, who is also an Extraordinary Professor at Optentia. Their work has broadened my thinking and increased my enthusiasm for future collaborations.

I presented a poster titled “Emergency Nurses’ Job Demands-Resources Profiles and Work Capabilities: Effects on Mental Health” and had the opportunity to attend the presentations of other North-West University staff. Dr Lynelle Coxen presented on the impact of daily leader and colleague behaviours on work effort, Prof. Karel Botha on the exploration of positive psychology of negative affect, and



**Dr Neil Barnard, Prof. Corey Keyes, and Prof. Ian Rothmann**

Dr Thapelo Chaacha and Prof. Marita Heyns presented posters on functionings, capabilities, and competencies of academics and social well-being in the workplace, respectively.

The conference not only enriched my understanding but also strengthened crucial relationships with colleagues like Dr Thapelo Chachaa, Dr Lynelle Coxen, Prof. Leoni van der Vaart, and Prof. Ian Rothmann, fostering future collaborative research efforts within the School of Industrial and Organisational Psychology and Human Resource Management and collaboration with the Optentia Research Unit.

Set against the stunning backdrop of Innsbruck, the conference underscored the importance of human connections alongside scientific inquiry. The conference was pivotal in my research, exposing me to diverse perspectives on well-being and psychology research, sustainability as a research focus, and building and strengthening national and international networks.

Reflecting on ECPP 2024, I am reminded of the power of

community and collaboration in enhancing our understanding of human well-being. This conference was an invaluable journey of learning, connecting, and envisioning the future of research, particularly in my focus on sustainable employability.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Prof. Ian Rothmann for his invaluable talks, advice, and mentorship during this trip. His guidance has been instrumental in my development as both an academic and an individual. I also thank Optentia, the School of Industrial and Organisational Psychology and Human Resource Management, and the Faculty of Economic Management Sciences for their support, which made my participation in this conference possible.

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**“I am reminded of the power of community and collaboration in enhancing our understanding of human well-being.”**

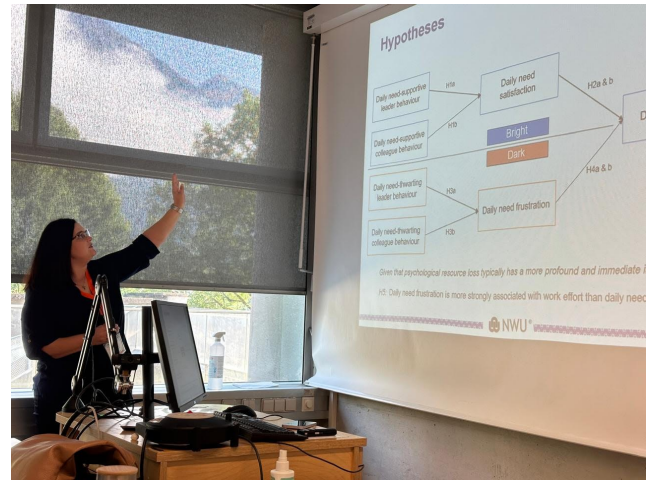
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## My Experiences at ECPP 2024 in Austria *by* Dr Lynelle Coxen

I recently had the incredible opportunity to attend the European Conference on Positive Psychology (ECPP) in Innsbruck, Austria. For those who haven't had the chance to visit, Innsbruck is a stunning town nestled in the heart of the Alps. The breathtaking scenery of snow-capped mountains and picturesque landscapes provided an ideal backdrop for an intellectually stimulating event, making the entire experience memorable.

But let's get to the important part - the conference itself. I had the opportunity to present a paper at such a prestigious event, and I must admit, it was both exhilarating and somewhat stressful. The title of my paper was "Do daily leader and colleague behaviours matter for work effort? The role of daily basic psychological need satisfaction and frustration", and preparing for this presentation was a journey in itself. I was anxious about how my peers and other experts in the field would receive my work. However, my paper was well received, and the feedback I garnered was constructive and encouraging. It was a significant validation of my efforts and a moment of immense pride.

Attending the ECPP provided me with a deep sense of confidence in the way we conduct our research. Seeing our work align with international norms and standards was reassuring. It affirmed that our methodologies and findings are on par with global benchmarks, which is a testament to the hard work and dedication we put into our research. This realisation has emboldened me to continue pursuing excellence in my future projects.



Dr Lynelle Coxen doing her presentation at the ECPP

“... the ECPP provided me with a deep sense of confidence in the way we conduct our research.”

One of the most valuable aspects of the conference was the opportunity to build international networks. Meeting and interacting with professionals and researchers from around the world was incredibly enriching. These connections are not just about expanding my professional network but also about fostering collaborations that could lead to groundbreaking research and innovative solutions.

Additionally, I had the privilege of spending some quality time with my PhD promoter, Prof. Leoni van der Vaart, who now resides in Norway. This was an enlightening experience as it allowed us to discuss various academic and research practices. I learned a great deal about how academia and research operate in her country, which gave me a broader perspective on international academic practices. Understanding these different approaches and methodologies has given me new insights that I can incorporate into my own work.

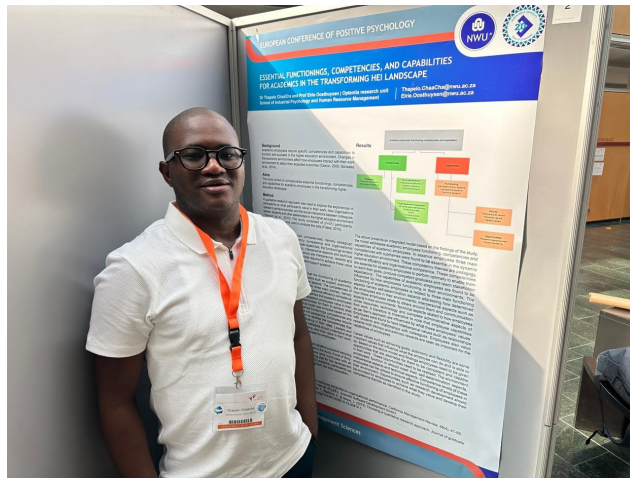
The exposure and experiences I gained at the conference have significantly bolstered my

confidence in my future research endeavours. The various presentations, workshops, and discussions I participated in have sparked new ideas and inspired me to think more deeply about my own research passions. I am now more motivated than ever to explore these passions and contribute meaningfully to my field. In summary, attending the ECPP conference in Innsbruck was a significant milestone in my career. It enriched my professional knowledge, expanded my global connections, and inspired me to pursue my research passions with renewed vigour. The beautiful setting of Innsbruck, combined with the stimulating academic environment, made this an unforgettable experience. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity and look forward to applying the insights and inspiration gained from this conference to my future work.



## Capitalising on Learning Experiences *by* Dr Thapelo Chachaa

I recently had the opportunity to attend the 11th European Conference on Positive Psychology (ECP 2024) held in Innsbruck, Austria. The conference was mainly focused on positive psychology topics reflecting well-being, flourishing and meaning in different domains. The opportunity provided lots of learning. The key topics that were of interest to me were how leaders can cultivate their psychological well-being through identity-based learning and development. Various presentations focused on the utilisation of the PERMA model. I enjoyed how the model can be utilised for positive leadership behaviours. It was worthwhile to learn about sustainable mental health approaches during the conference. My key takeaways from the conference were on job and life crafting, which I think is important for everyone to gain an understanding of how they can continuously craft in their work and life. It is important for everyone to gain meaning in the activities they are involved in. The



Dr Thapelo Chachaa at the ECP 2024

conference has definitely contributed to research ideas and how to be more effective with current research plans.

I also had the opportunity to do a poster presentation focusing on "Essential functionings, competencies, and capabilities for academics in the transforming HEI landscape. I received positive feedback from colleagues attending the conference. Resulting in some new networks being made with national and international

colleagues. I also had the opportunity to witness some of my colleagues (Dr Lynelle Coxen and Dr Neil Barnard) conduct their presentations, well done. Thank you to the School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resource Management, VC and Optentia for the support. Kea leboha!

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**"My key takeaways from the conference were on job and life crafting."**

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## Workshop on Diversity and Diversity Policies

On 9 September 2024, Prof. Jasper van Assche, an extraordinary professor in Optentia will present a workshop on diversity and diversity policies. Diversity, i.e., the presence of other social groups in society, can have divergent effects depending on the individual. After discussing these implications, we will examine how diversity is handled, specifically focusing on diversity ideals, practices, and commitment to social change. Together, we will aim to understand the complexities of

diversity ideologies, such as multiculturalism, interculturalism, and colourblindness, and how their endorsement may be associated with either solidarity with disadvantaged groups or a reinforcement of the existing social hierarchy. The workshop will end by proposing ambitions for future theorising and practice.

Please contact [Lynn Booysen](#) if you want to participate in the workshop.



Prof. Jasper van Assche

## Optentia Contributes to the SIOPSA Conference

The Optentia Research Unit attended the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology Annual Conference of South Africa (SIOPSA) in Johannesburg from 16-19 July 2024. The theme of the conference was “Mindful organisations, productive people: Cultivating a culture of mental health and wellness.”

Various Optentia-affiliated researchers presented papers at the Conference. During the event, Prof. Ian Rothmann was part of a roundtable discussion titled Flourishing Lives: New Approaches to Cultivating Wellbeing at Work and Enabling Social Justice. Dr Ingra Du Buisson-Narsai (Director at NeuroCapital), Navika Ratangee (Managing Director, Lyra Southern Africa), Prof. Karin Millner (Associate Professor, University of the Witwatersrand), Prof. Ian Rothmann and Lungile Langa (HR Group Executive at ACSA).

In his presentation, Prof. Rothmann highlighted the growing issue of precarious employment and its detrimental impact on employee health and well-being. He emphasized that the workplace's role in social sustainability and mental health often goes unnoticed. Prof. Rothmann stressed that human freedoms and capabilities are crucial for flourishing, raising essential questions about whether our societies and institutions effectively support this goal. He underscored the importance of developing employees' capabilities and ensuring equal opportunities, advocating for a strong commitment to social justice as a means to promote health and well-being for all.

“... he advocated for a strong commitment to social justice as a means to promote health and well-being for all.”



Dr Neil Barnard, Sibusiso Mnxuma, Prof. Marius Stander, Dr Jacqueline Bosman and Prof. Ian Rothmann. Dr Suzette Ragadu, Kele Ramagaga, Anjonet Jordaan, Prof. Elrie Botha, Dr Elette Horn and Lynn Booyen



Lungile Langa, Karin Millner, Ian Rothmann, Navika Ratangee and Ingra Du Buisson-Narsai



Prof. Ian Rothmann doing a presentation at the SIOPSA Conference

## NWU Exhibition Stand at the SIOPSA Conference

The North-West University exhibition stand at the Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology in South Africa, from 16-19 July 2024, proudly united the School for Industrial Psychology and Human Resource Management, the Optentia Research Unit, and the WorkWell Research Unit, showcasing our collaborative excellence and innovative research.

The exhibition stand offered an opportunity for our research unit to showcase its innovative research, methodologies, and significant contributions to the field. It served as a dynamic platform to engage with scientists, practitioners, and potential collaborators, fostering valuable networking and partnership opportunities. By displaying our latest findings and ongoing projects, we attracted interest from diverse stakeholders. This visibility not only enhanced our reputation but also stimulated discussions that can lead to new research directions and collaborative ventures, ultimately advancing our mission and societal impact.

Lynn Booysen and Anjonet Jordaan from Optentia, Zoe Labuschagne from the WorkWell Research Unit, along with Jason Beukes from postgraduate student recruitment at NWU, planned the stand. They were also present at the conference to handle questions and enquiries.



Anjonet Jordan, Lynn Booysen and Zoë Labuschagne represented the NWU at the SIOPSA Stand



The NWU's exhibition stand at the SIOPSA Conference

“By displaying our latest findings and ongoing projects, we attracted interest from diverse stakeholders.”

## Prof. Japie Greeff on a Productive International Visit

In April 2024, Prof. Japie Greeff did a number of visits to universities in Europe, specifically meeting people from Vives University of Applied Science in Belgium, Inholland University of Applied Science, Delft University, Utrecht University and The University of Twente in the Netherlands, and the University of Paris in France. Additionally, in July 2024 he visited the National Academy of Information Technology for Persons with Disabilities, and the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, both institutions in Cairo, Egypt. While in Cairo, he made a presentation was at the 2024 Innovative Clean Energy Summit focussing on capacity building and economic growth.

At the end of July 2024, Prof. Greeff attended the Head of Department Meeting for the Southern African Computer Lecturers Association at the SACLA 2024 conference where heads of departments from universities in the region come together to discuss their strategies on how to approach the teaching and learning of students in the various computing fields, as well as to discuss the general trends in the field that are going to impact future curriculums and industry needs.

Prof. Japie Greeff has had a productive year, beginning with a week-long workshop in Belgium and a series of four public lectures on parallel programming with Prof. Martin Bucher through NiTheCS. He delivered keynotes at the opening ceremonies for BRICS skills standards working groups. For the remainder of the year, he is scheduled to travel to Stellenbosch in August, Kenya for



Prof. Duco Veen, Prof. Olya Kudina (both extraordinary professors in Optentia) and Prof. Japie Greeff



Prof. Japie Greeff and Prof. Saskia Kelders (an extraordinary professor in Optentia)



Prof. Laura Weiss (an extraordinary professor in Optentia) and Prof. Japie Greeff



Prof. Japie Greeff, Helen Greeff, Prof. Martin Bucher and Doris Bucher

the TICONA conference in September, Morocco for the OPCW conference in October, and China for the skills competition and the annual Big Data and Artificial

Intelligence Professional Committee meeting in November.

“... he made a presentation was at the 2024 Innovative Clean Energy Summit focussing on capacity building and economic growth.”

## Prof. Japie Greeff: Involvement with BRICS

A team being led by Prof. Japie Greeff is developing BRICS curriculums and skills standards has grown steadily to now include experts from 10 South African universities, as well as members from the Department for Higher Education and Training, as well as the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations. Strong connections were forged this year with new collaborators, and existing partners were engaged in every visited country, expanding the Optentia network even further!



**Prof. Japie Greeff addresses participants at the Innovative Clean Energy Summit 2024**

## NRF Rating for Prof. Marita Heyns

Prof. Marita Heyns, a research professor in the Optentia Research Unit of the NWU recently received her National Research Foundation (NRF) rating as an established researcher. Optentia is proud of yet another participant who received an NRF rating. Marita has a PhD in Psychology and a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) as her academic background. Her interests generally reflect Positive

Psychology and Positive Organizational Scholarship related topics. She is particularly interested in developing models for interpersonal- and organisational trust within workplace contexts characterised by transition and uncertainty. Through her research, she strives to promote pathways for individuals and organisations to flourish.



**Prof. Marita Heyns**

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**“Strong connections were forged this year with new collaborators, and existing partners were engaged in every visited country, expanding the Optentia network even further!”**

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## Online Launch of Free Web Resource

On the 23rd of July 2024, The Dulwich Foundation, based in Australia, launched African-centred narrative practice resource, featuring videos, articles, audio clips and songs from a wide range of narrative practitioners from Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Zanzibar/Tanzania as well as from Africans in the diaspora, bringing the African voice to collective narrative therapy.

The work includes many African contributions to the field of narrative therapy and community work and especially those of Dr Ncazelo Ncube-Mlilo, a Zimbabwean psychologist living in South Africa, who used the “Tree Of Life” project to assist traumatised children and women in Africa.

The launch was attended by 213 individuals from countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Greece, USA, Australia,

Tasmania, UK, Israel, France, Belgium, Burundi, Uganda, etc. For more information on the resources, click [here](#).

## Celebrating Success: Optentia's PhD Graduates Triumph in May 2024

In May 2024, doctoral degrees were awarded to seven Optentia-affiliated PhD candidates: Andrew Banda, Mari Ford, Elette Horn, Khumbudzo Leburu, Vhumani Magezi, Mart-Marie Joubert, Kalashni Narainsamy, Mamello Ramothamo, Constant van Graan, and Elne Visagie .

To celebrate the achievements of PhD candidates, Optentia hosted a Research Community day themed "Discovery Delight: Socialising the Scientific Way." This event was a vibrant celebration aimed at generating an inclusive and engaging environment. The event offered opportunities to forge new connections, support and learn from one another, and foster curiosity and appreciation for research, aligning perfectly with the scientific aspects of our fields.

Optentia commend the outstanding achievement of the 10 PhD candidates who completed their PhD studies within the last seven months. This remarkable milestone reflects our commitment to academic excellence and the dedication of our students and faculty.

We want to give the following message to our new doctors: Congratulations on completing your PhD! Your dedication, perseverance, and hard work have led you to this remarkable achievement. Remember, this is just the beginning of your journey. Your expertise and passion will undoubtedly make a significant impact in your field and beyond. Keep pushing boundaries, stay curious, and continue to strive for excellence. The world is ready for your contributions, and we are incredibly proud of you!

**"Optentia commend the outstanding achievement of the 10 PhD candidates who completed their PhD studies."**



**Prof. Vera Roos, Dr Tamlynn Jefferis, Khumbudzo Lebu, Dr Andrew Banda, Mamello Ramothamo, Dr Elette Horn, Dr Mari Ford and Prof. Ian Rothmann**



**Prof. Andrew Banda was the first student in Africa who obtained the PhD in Social Sciences with Ageing and Development**



**Three PhD candidates in Industrial Psychology graduated in May 2024: Dr Elette Horn, Dr Mari Ford and Dr Kalashni Narainsamy**

## Stephanie Nowack Obtained a PhD at Cambridge University

Stephanie Nowack, previously an Interna Research Psychologist at Optentia, recently passed her PhD defence at the University of Cambridge. Her doctoral work explored a contextually-grounded South African pedagogy of play for autistic learners. the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero Pedagogy of Play South Africa project, which was led by Prof. Ben Mardell and Prof. Jen Ryan – experts introduced to her by Prof. Ian Rothmann when she worked at Optentia.

Stephanie has recently written a blog post: "Play in South African autism schools: why are formalised ethical processes important?" Click [here](#) to read about her valuable and relevant work.



Dr Stephanie Nowack

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**"Her doctoral work explored a contextually-grounded South African pedagogy of play for autistic learners."**

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**Stephanie Nowack with her supervisors (Prof. Nidhi Singal and Prof. Jenny Gibson) and her examiners (Prof. Sara Baker and Prof. Shruti Taneja-Johansson).**

## The Value of Extraordinary Professors: The Case of Prof. L. Weiss

The appointment as Extraordinary Professor of Laura Weiss from the University of Utrecht speaks to the international nature of the North-West University.

Laura Weiss, a German student who completed a PhD at Twente University in the Netherlands, joined the NWU's Optentia Research Unit in 2016 and completed her postdoctoral fellowship in 2019. Her involvement at NWU focused on postgraduate student capabilities and well-being, which impacts their sustainable employability, perceptions of social justice, and academic achievements. In 2022, Prof. Weiss was appointed as an Extraordinary Professor within Optentia's Strengths-based Studies and Interventions Programme. This programme explores strengths that Individuals, families, communities, and institutions can utilise to promote positive outcomes.

Prof. Weiss' appointment contributes to the international nature of the NWU through a) the knowledge, skills, and global perspective she brought from a different context; b) the opportu-



Prof. Laura Weiss, and extraordinary professor in Optentia recently presented her research at a conference in Austria

nities for collaboration and partnerships with other international institutions, such as Twente University and Utrecht University, c) facilitating cultural exchange and understanding of Western and non-Western cultures among students and faculty, which builds a more diverse and inclusive academic community, and d) contributing to capacity building by training local faculty and students in cutting-edge research

techniques and methodologies. Overall, the relationship with Prof. Weiss as a postdoctoral fellow and extraordinary professor resulted in numerous and continuous benefits in knowledge transfer, research collaboration, global perspective, reputation enhancement, cultural exchange, and capacity building.

**“Prof. Weiss’ appointment contributes to the international nature of the North-West University.”**

## Renowned Cross-Cultural Psychologist to Visit Optentia

On 21 October 2024, Prof. Ype Poortinga, an expert in cross-cultural psychology will present a lecture with the title “Exploring the Evolution of Cross-Cultural Psychology: The Primacy of Method over Theory” at Optentia.

Prof. Poortinga is an emeritus professor at Tilburg University in the Netherlands and at the University of Leuven in Belgium. His most consistent interest has been in the conditions under

which data obtained from different cultural populations can be meaningfully compared. He has also written on theoretical issues in cross-cultural psychology. His empirical research has dealt with various topics in culture-comparative research, including information transmission, basic personality variables, emotions, and social psychological variables.



Prof. Ype Poortinga





## School Education and Happiness *by Prof. Ruut Veenhoven*

It is generally assumed that doing well in school will add to your happiness in later life. There is much indirect evidence for that belief, such as that higher educated people earn more income, have better marriage changes, are healthier and live longer. Yet, in my reviews of empirical happiness research I saw mostly low correlations between level of school education and happiness. Together with colleagues from Portugal, I checked that impression in a synthesis of 86 research findings available in the World Database of Happiness. We found a small average zero-order correlation ( $r = +0.09$ ) and much variation ( $SD = 0.13$ ). This small correlation was wiped away in multi-variate analyses that control for possible indirect effects of school-education, such as income. So, school-education as such does not seem to add to happiness.

This non-effect fits the result of my earlier synthesis of research on the relation between happiness and IQ, where smart people appeared to be no happier than dummies. Note that IQ is a main outcome of school education.

In that study on happiness and IQ I distinguished between the micro level of individuals and the macro level of nations and found a strong relation at the latter level: "Smartness of all pays more (happiness) than being smarter than others". We applied the same analysis on school-education, comparing average education and average happiness across 147 nations. We found a strong positive relationship:  $r = +0.59$ .



A plausible explanation for the positive effect of education on average happiness in nations is that an educated population of required for the functioning of modern societies, with their high division of labor, and that people live happier in modern societies. It is less easy to understand why education hardly adds to the happiness of higher educated personally. Since there are evident positive effects, such as the higher income mentioned above, there must be negative effects which balance the out. It is a task for further research to identify these negative effects.

Leite, Â., Costa, A., Dias, P.C., Veenhoven, R. (2024). Education and happiness: lower at the micro level of individuals than at the macro level of nations. In: Magalhães, L., Ferreira Lopes, M.J., Nobre, B., Onofre Pinto, J.C. (eds) [Humanistic Perspectives in Happiness Research](#). Happiness Studies Book Series. Springer, Cham.

“... school-education as such does not seem to add to happiness.”



## Unlocking the Magic of Qualitative Meta-Studies (QMS)

Ever wish you could wave a magic wand and get a comprehensive, all-in-one understanding of a complex subject? Well, a qualitative meta-study (QMS) is pretty close to that magic wand. According to Habersang and Riehlen (2024), a QMS combines primary qualitative accounts to refine, expand, and create new theories while keeping the original insights intact. Here's why QMS is the hero we need:

- **Comprehensive understanding:** Imagine having the superpower to integrate findings from multiple primary studies, giving you a broader and more complete picture of the subject. That's QMS for you.
- **Theory development:** By drawing on a wider range of data and perspectives, QMS helps us refine, extend, and build new theories, making them more robust and generalisable. Think of it as upgrading from a flip phone to a smartphone.
- **Rich insights:** QMS preserves the detailed and nuanced insights from primary studies, blending them into a cohesive whole. It's like making a delicious smoothie with all your favourite fruits.
- **Identifying patterns:** Ever felt like you're missing the forest for the trees? QMS helps spot patterns and themes that might be invisible in individual studies, leading to new insights and discoveries.
- **Resource efficiency:** Let's be honest, who doesn't like saving time and resources? By combining existing studies instead of conducting new ones, QMS is a cost-effective

### Think – methods – Again



way to advance knowledge.

Out of all these superhero traits, the last one is my personal favourite. Nothing beats the joy of finding a well-done review/synthesis when diving into a new topic or sharing materials with students or colleagues. It's like someone else did the hard work of assembling a complicated IKEA puzzle for you!

But there comes a time when you've got to roll up your sleeves and pay it forward by conducting your own review/synthesis. Whether you're doing it out of academic duty/interest or to critically evaluate someone else's work, Habersang and Riehlen's (2024) latest publication is a must-read. They've developed a framework (check out Figure 2) that covers the core decisions and methodological choices in QMS. Plus, they introduced three reflective meta-practices – translation, abstraction, and iterative interrogation – that are essential for any QMS. And for those of us who love a good guideline, Table 5 is a treasure trove of advice on aligning methodological choices with the QMS's purpose, be it to test and refine

established theory (confirmatory QMS) or build new theory (exploratory QMS).

Oh, and a special shout-out to the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) for updating their manual for evidence synthesis. It's packed with resources for researchers or practitioners conducting various types of reviews. So next time you embark on a qualitative meta-study, remember, you're not alone—there's a whole toolkit waiting for you!

Reference:  
Habersang, S., & Riehlen, M. (2024). Advancing qualitative meta-studies (QMS): Current practices and reflective guidelines for synthesizing qualitative research. *Organizational Research Methods*. Click [here](#) to access the article.



Prof. Leoni van der Vaart

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**“... there comes a time when you've got to roll up your sleeves and pay it forward by conducting your own review...”**

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## Journal of Community Psychosocial Research *by* Prof. C. Hermann

The Journal of Community Psychosocial Research (JCPR) at the North-West University in South Africa is inviting submissions to the special edition topic, "Technology and Innovation in Community Psychosocial Well-Being". The JCPR is an open-access online publication platform for researchers concerned with research, policy, and practice in improving psychosocial health and well-being. Our journal provides a platform for cutting-edge research in Community Psychosocial Research, and we welcome contributions from researchers, scholars, and scientists worldwide.

The special issue guest editors are Prof. Caroll Hermann and Prof. Eugene Davids. We encourage submissions that offer empirical research, theoretical perspectives, case studies, and practical insights into harnessing technology for positive psychosocial outcomes at the community level. Join us in shaping the discourse on technology-driven solutions for enhancing community well-being. Submissions may include empirical research, comprehensive review studies, commentaries, or book reviews. We are particularly interested the following perspectives, and we hope you can provide insights that will enhance the scholarly dialogue::

- efficacy of digital mental health interventions,
- the role of social media in community support networks,
- the impact of virtual communities on psychosocial resilience,
- innovative uses of technology in promoting mental health.



Prof. Caroll Hermann

- access to services,
- online support forums,
- digi-health,
- online support groups,
- access to online support,
- narrowing the digital divide in access to e-health

The JCPR invites interested authors to submit a 200-250 word abstract with relevant keywords via [email](#). Upon approval of the submitted abstract and keywords by the Special Issue Editors, the authors are provided with the final submission date for full manuscripts. The submitted manuscript will be submitted for peer review by at least two independ-

ent reviewers. Reviewed manuscripts will be evaluated by the Special Issue Editors. Recommendations and/or possible revisions will be sent to the authors (The editorial board and Special Issue Editors hold the right to the final decision for publication in the JCPR, based on recommendations from the independent reviewers). Upon final acceptance authors will approve the final galley proof, provide proof of payment, and sign a copy of the Creative Commons License 4.0. Click [here](#) for more information.

**"Our journal provides a platform for cutting-edge research in Community Psychosocial Research."**



JCPR

## New Book: The Work Capability Model

Prof. Jac van der Klink and Prof. Ian Rothmann are currently editing a book with the title “The added value of the capability model for well-being at work.”. A total of 31 authors are involved in the book.

The rationale for a new book on work capabilities, grounded in the capability approach of Amartya Sen, is multifaceted and compelling. This book would provide a normative framework that addresses the profound implications of work in contemporary society, highlighting its pivotal role in fostering human development, social justice, and individual flourishing.

The capability approach offers a normative perspective beyond traditional economic metrics like income or gross domestic product. This approach emphasises the significance of focusing on what individuals are able to do and be rather than merely what they have. By centering on capabilities, it acknowledges the intrinsic value of every person's potential and the importance of providing equal opportunities for individuals to flourish. In this book, we will apply this to work.

The book consists of the following chapters:

1. The capability approach for work: An introduction.
2. The capability approach from a contributive justice perspective.
3. Advancing work capabilities: Update of the scientific model
4. The paradox of capability assessment. Investigational requirements associated with adopting capability as informational focus of a theory of justice.



Van der Klink, J..J.L. & Rothmann, S. (2025). *The added value of the capability model for well-being at work.*  
 Publisher: Cambridge University Press.



Prof. Jac van der Klink



Prof. Ian Rothmann

5. The integrative aspects of the capability approach.
6. Integrating the capability approach with other models in social justice and work theories.
7. Introducing justice into the governance of corporations.
8. The application of the capability approach in human resource management.
9. The capability approach applied to working individuals: Decent and flourishing work.
10. Practical examples of applying the capability approach at different levels in the organization.
11. Cross-cultural perspectives on the capability approach.
12. The capability approach and the decolonial ‘parrhesia’: theorising from the Global South.
13. Work capabilities in different occupations and countries.
14. The capability approach: a guiding framework for work capabilities and leadership.
15. Future work and the capability approach: Digitilization, globalization and climate change..

The following Optentia-affiliated staff are involved as authors and co-authors of chapters in the book: Prof. Jac van der Klink, Dr Tessa de Wet, Dr Annelisa Murrangi, Prof. Jasper van Assche, Prof. Leoni van der Vaart (extraordinary professors and researchers); Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Marius Stander, Prof. Mirna Nel., Prof. Blessed Ngwenya, Dr Neil Barnard, Dr Thapelo Chachaa; two former PhD candidates (Dr Henry Lewis and Dr Suzette Ragadu), and current PhD candidate (Bianca Arendse).

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“This book would provide a normative framework that addresses the profound implications of work in society, highlighting its pivotal role in fostering human development, social justice, and individual flourishing.”

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## Books

- Field, A. (2025). *Discovering statistics: Using IBM SPSS statistics* (6th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Haidt, J. (2024). *The anxious generation*. Penguin Books.
- Makhalima, M. (2024). *Coaching methods in Africa*. Centurion: The Africa Board for Coaching, Consulting and Coaching Psychology.
- Mutanga, D., & Marovah, T. (2024). *Southern theories: Contemporary and future challenges*. New York: Routledge.

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,
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