

draft paper for the Africa Knows! Conference; panel 50

Jos Beelen, Cornelius Hagenmeier, Lynette Jacobs. Katherine Wimpenny

Ikudu; exploring how distance brought us closer

Abstract (200 words)

This paper draws on the Erasmus+ project iKudu, which is aimed at developing capacity for Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) at five South African universities. As part of the project, these universities were asked to assess how online collaboration contributes to achieving their aims for internationalised curricula, using Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). The European partners volunteered to do the same. Conceptualising the iKudu project enables us to define our focus on COIL. Extrapolating the role of COIL as a subtool for internationalisation of formal home curricula requires appreciation of the integration of existing curriculum transformation initiatives across the SA and European partners to discover the best of what exists. This includes awareness of strategies focused on curriculum decolonisation with focus on the roles of strategic leadership, COIL practitioners, and its impact on student/graduate experience - and to dream of what might be. The initial experiences with Appreciative Inquiry in a South-North project are shared here.

Keywords

COIL, Appreciative Inquiry, North-South collaboration

Biographical information

Jos Beelen is Professor of Global Learning at The Hague University of Applied Sciences.

Cornelius Hagenmeier is Director of the Office for International Affairs of the University of the Free State

Lynette Jacobs is Associate Professor the University of the Free State

Katherine Wimpenny is Professor of Research in Global Education at Coventry University

About the iKudu project

The EU-funded iKudu project is a South African - European capacity development project; which is co-funded by the European Union's Erasmus Plus programmeⁱ. It brings together ten universities of diverse size, shape and character from South Africa and the European Union, including universities of technology, universities of applied sciences, traditional research universities and comprehensive universitiesⁱⁱ. The project aims to develop a concept of Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC), which integrates Cooperative Online International Learning (COIL) virtual exchanges. It draws on classroom diversity and integrates indigenous knowledge and the contemporary local context. Besides, the iKudu partner universities are committed to developing a sustainable network of universities which will outlast the funding cycle.

The iKudu project is based on the fundamental belief that it is necessary to rethink internationalisation, particularly in a developing context. Already before the COVID-19 pandemic, student exchange programmes, especially at the undergraduate level, were limited in the Southern African region. In higher education landscape characterised by lack of

financial resources, only minimal numbers of students participate in physical mobility (Mpinganjira, 2011). Nevertheless, South African universities are under pressure to ensure that their students acquire global, international and intercultural competencies to succeed in the age of the fourth industrial revolution and to compete in the job market in an increasingly globalised world.

Another complexity in the Southern African region is that the region's colonial past shapes universities and their curricula (Le Grange, 2016). At times, a perception prevails that, before internationalising, local priorities should be considered. iKudu counters this by adopting a conceptual framework which considers curriculum decolonisation and Africanisation as complementary processes and central aspects of curriculum internationalisation. By stressing the conceptual complementarity, the project reconciles these higher education priorities.

iKudu aims to develop an inclusive model of internationalisation of teaching and learning, which integrates COIL virtual exchanges as a critical element of an inclusive, transformed and internationalised curriculum, which constitutes a central aspect of internationalisation at home at the partner institutions. Thus, the project works towards equity and democratisation of the higher education internationalisation process. Also, it develops capacity for governance, strategic planning and management of higher education institutions relevant to internationalisation.

iKudu works towards achieving its vision through two working groups (WGs). The project methodology is based on an adaptive management approach which provides structure to iterative decision-making processes in the Project Steering Committee (SC) and two Working Groups. One WG focuses on curriculum transformation. The original plan was for this working group to obtain, through in-person workshops at South African partner universities, an understanding of the current complexities, practices and policies regarding IoC Curriculum and curriculum transformation at the South African institutions. This would be followed by engagement visits to the European partners and the development strategies and guidelines for IoC and curriculum transformation. The second WG focuses on conceptualising COIL virtual exchanges for the South African context and practically implementing them.

The success of the iKudu project is rooted in the trust and long-standing relationships which connect its diverse core stakeholders. Members of the core team have been working together in earlier projects; they invited professionals trusted by them to join the project team. Through this process, a committed group of people united in their purpose was forged. Trust, frequent (monthly) steering committee meetings and other regular formal and informal project stakeholder interactions facilitate open and continuous communication between participants, which allow the project to overcome challenges which inevitably arise with a large-scale project like iKudu.

Dilemma's at the start of the project

From the outset, it was clear to project stakeholders that they had to overcome conceptual dilemmas to succeed in the endeavour to develop an inclusive South African concept of internationalisation at home. The model of capacity building, which underlies the Erasmus+ framework of the European Union (EU) (European Commission, 2020), is often associated with the notion of development assistance and an underlying donor-recipient relationship (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2014). The programme structure necessitated that the project had been structured to focus on interventions in which the South African partners are learning 'best practices' from the partners in Europe. Meanwhile, the consortium had from the outset the aspiration to develop a genuine, equal partnership, which would be sustainable beyond the funding cycle. One of the central aspirations of the project is not only to focus on

transformation, internationalisation and decolonisation of curricula but also to develop their partnership, avoiding the risk of perpetuating colonial structures. iKudu stakeholders consider it crucial to recognise and transform the power dynamics underlying international academic collaboration.

Consequently, the partners resolved to structure their activities within the ambit of the EU's Erasmus + rules to allow for genuine capacity development through a partnership based on mutuality, reciprocity and mutual respect. This practically manifests itself in the choice of the Appreciative Inquiry method (see below) to determine existing relevant positive practises at European and South African partner universities, the involvement of South African trainers and expertise in the partnering and training activities for new COIL virtual exchanges, a strong emphasis on a 'train the trainer' approach. In addition, the coordination by a South African university, the co-leadership of the two working groups by South Africans are examples of endeavours of the stakeholders to establish a truly equal partnership.

Another inherent dilemma the project faces is that the aspiration to strengthen internationalisation at home is partially motivated by the insight that future internationalisation will have to consider environmental sustainability. The present practice of internationalisation involving travel of international and study abroad students is emission-intensive (Davies & Dunk, 2015). The consortium is aware of the environmental impact of its planned travel. In the premises, the interventions were designed to undertake travel with the purpose of minimising the overall need to travel to achieve inclusive internationalisation. Consequently, the project has been designed to benefit at least 2500 students and to develop an inclusive, sustainable model for internationalisation at home which will avoid the need for undergraduate mobility in order to achieve the desired internationalisation outcomes.

Internationalisation, transformation and decolonisation of curricula in the South African context (600 words)

South African universities have been engaging with internationalisation for more than twenty years. Yet, this engagement is accompanied by critical voices. In their case study of the University of the Witwatersrand, Cross, Mhlanga and Ojo (2011, 76) note a "degree of scepticism regarding internationalisation". They point out the Europe centric nature of internationalisation, while simultaneously acknowledging that the university itself is a Europe centric institution. Others use stronger terms and describe internationalisation as an imposed, western concept (see e.g. Tefarra, 2019).

For a considerable time, internationalisation has been perceived as mobility, mainly of students. However, in the South African context, student mobility is "out of reach for most students due to financial constraints and cannot, therefore, serve as the main instrument to promote internationalisation policy" (Jooste, 2015, p. 260). This caused South African universities to look for other avenues for internationalisation.

Internationalisation at home and internationalisation of the curriculum.

Internationalisation at home (Beelen & Jones, 2015) and internationalisation of the curriculum (Leask, 2015) aim to engage all students in internationalisation. We use the terms here interchangeably as the two concepts overlap to a large extent.

Internationalisation of the home curriculum aims to address the formal, informal and hidden curriculum. The latter is where western (or northern) assumptions and values lurk, for example that western knowledge is more valuable than any other. Therefore, it can be argued that problematising the hidden curriculum is an act of decolonisation of the curriculum. Internationalisation of the home curriculum is not a set of actions that fit any context. Rather, it needs to be contextualised to the location, the type of university and to the discipline. The framework for internationalisation of the curriculum (Leask, 2015) therefore distinguishes not

only global, regional (in this case African), national but also local dimensions. This implies that local or indigenous knowledge as well as the national and regional contexts are an integral part of an internationalised home curriculum.

Internationalising curricula also leads to a shift within universities as organisations. While the international office remains the focus point for mobility, the internationalisation of teaching and learning is rooted in departments and ultimately rests with academics.

Engagement with internationalisation at home in South Africa took place in a phase that “witnessed the transformation of a once racially defined system into a multi-racial system fully integrated into the global higher education structure, with a strong focus on its European origins” as Jooste (2015, p. 254) characterises the period from 1994 to 2014. Several universities started to engage with internationalisation of the curriculum (see e.g. Jooste & Neale-Shutte, 2007). The International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) has been instrumental in driving internationalisation of the home curriculum forward. IEASA concluded a MOU with the Expert Community Internationalisation at Home of the European Association for International Education (EAIE) (see Jooste, 2015, p. 259). This has resulted in joint sessions at EAIE conferences as well a joint publication (Leask, Beelen & Kaunda, 2013). Internationalisation at home in South Africa has been termed a slow process by Quinlan (2015) and in that sense the South African situation may not be all that different from Europe, where universities are still struggling with internationalisation of learning outcomes and assessment.

Misconceptions. One of the main obstacles to internationalisation as well as internationalisation of home curricula is that it is still poorly understood. One of those misconceptions is that it is an alternative to studying abroad. We have known for the last twenty years that, across the world, study abroad is only an option for a small minority of students and that we should give priority to internationalisation for all students ‘at home’. In this sense there is little difference between the present COVID-19 situation and the era before it.

Internationalisation of the curriculum is quite different from traditional concepts of internationalisation, that tend to focus on international student recruitment, revenue generation, rankings and other quantitative indicators. It rather focuses on teaching and learning and qualitative indicators that are set by individual departments in their own contexts. Since the concept also includes regional dimensions, it touches upon the connection between internationalisation and Africanisation. This has been a debated issue for a while (see e.g. Moja, T. (2007).

Internationalisation of home curricula can only be successful in their local contextualisation. Critical voices of internationalisation at home (e.g. Tefarra, 2019) may not fully realise this. A case study of how to contextualise internationalisation in South Africa has been conducted by Hagenmeier (2017). This case demonstrates how an innovatively structured internationalisation process can transform a university into a locally relevant and at the same time globally active university. Contextualisation is also what makes Appreciative Inquiry (explored in the next section) a powerful tool for this project.

Decolonisation has now entered as a topic of the discussion on education in general and in international education in South Africa in particular (Heleta. 2018). The project offers opportunities to discuss and find ways forward, In particular how COIL can contribute to creating an meaningful learning environment for internationalisation of curricula.

Ways forward. The *Policy framework for internationalisation of higher education in South Africa* (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2017) includes the definition of

both internationalisation at home and internationalisation of the curriculum and suggests combining transformation and internationalisation.

Yet the Framework states that: “Internationalisation at Home can partly be achieved through emphasis or increased and/or intensified academic staff international mobility and emphasis on informal curriculum.” Considering the nature of internationalisation at home these instruments will not suffice and we need therefore to inquire deeper to find out how COIL can be a catalyst for internationalisation for all students.

Appreciative Inquiry

Similar to action research designs, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a cyclical process, and it consist of at least five stages. During the initial *Define* stage clarity is sought in an inclusive manner about the purpose of the initiative and the research, and to jointly demarcate the focus (Ogunde, Meyer, Mwambakana, & M thethwa, 2019). This is followed by the *Discover* stage during which participants focus on the best of what exists - the capabilities and strengths within themselves and their organisation (Jacobs, 2015; Miles, Mensinga, & Zuchowski, 2018). During this stage, storytelling on what worked, is most valuable. Sankarasubramanyan and Joshi (2019, p. 51) points out that the assumption that is applied here is “what we want already exist ... and is waiting to be discovered”.

The third stage is the *Dream* stage where participants imagine what can be, and dream about the organisation that they would prefer, and life as they would want it. The question that the participants ask themselves at this stage is “what might be?” as they dream a shared vision (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Miles, Mensinga, & Zuchowski, 2018). Fourthly the participants actively plan and build concrete proposals toward the desired change, in the stage that is appropriately labelled *Design*. They are guided by the question “how can it be” (Jacobs, 2015, p. 413), “what actions are needed to make the preferred future happen” and “who needs to be involved” (Miles, Mensinga, & Zuchowski, 2018, p. 713). Concrete proposals are jointly built during this stage toward the desired change.

The Appreciative Inquiry culminates into the final stage, called *Destiny*, also sometimes referred to as *Delivery*, where the design is enacted through improvisation and innovation. While this stage is an opportunity to celebrate, it is also, in line with the nature of action research, a time to reflect, and identify what still needs to be done to better the future (Miles, Mensinga, & Zuchowski, 2018).

Sankarasubramanyan and Joshi (2019) however emphasise that a sixth stage, between *Dream* and *Design*, is essential, namely the *Drench* stage. They argue that during this stage, the realisation needs to dawn on participants that the change in the organisation will happen through the change that will happen within themselves. It requires consciousness in terms of “letting go” (Sankarasubramanyan & Joshi, 2019, p. 53) and welcoming the possible future as emerging. This stage, the authors argue, is a time for inaction, where those involved need to “soak in the dream” (Sankarasubramanyan & Joshi, 2019, p. 51).

Based on the above, the process of AI can thus be summarized as follows:

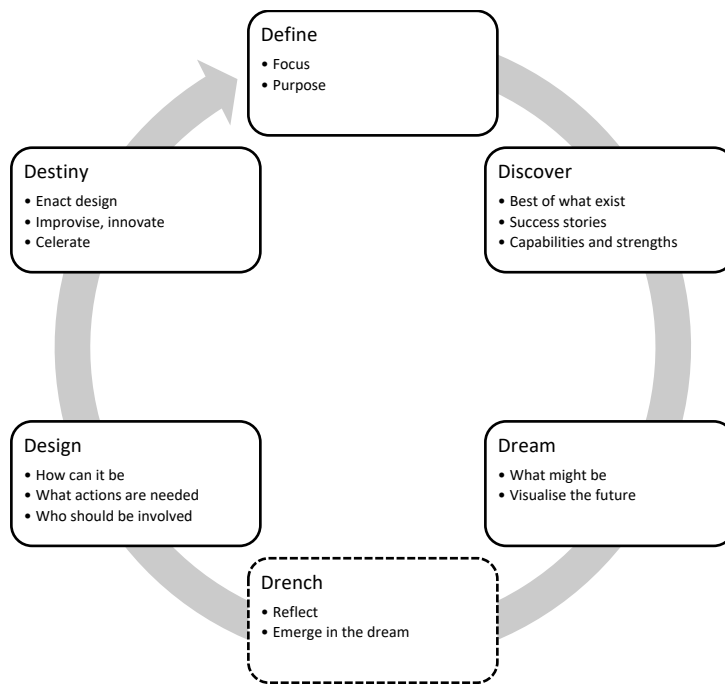


Figure 1: AI process

It should be clear to the reader that this whole process needs to be facilitated by an individual or a core group who can lead the participants through the process. Elliot et al. (2020, p. 52) explain that the role of the facilitator in the process of AI is to sift through what is discussed and what happens, and to “celebrate what begins to emerge”.

How COVID 19 has impacted on our project: issues and opportunities

The impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic has required us to re-focus our project activities and to adapt in ways that would enable our project to progress. From 29 March 2020 to 1 April 2020, for example, we had planned for the first wave of partnered academics to attend the first iKudu COIL virtual exchange training workshops to be held at Durban University of Technology. However, as all international travel was suspended, this training moved online. Whilst an appropriate shift in our project practice, what was recognised was a necessary change of pace as priorities changed in many ways as all our university campuses had to review teaching and learning practices, moving content from across all programmes into the online space. Shifting modes of delivery and pedagogical practices in this way, and for universities who have not already delivered online-only programmes, has been a significant undertaking. As such, whilst the online training still aims to progress the roll-out of our COIL exchanges, there has needed to be greater space for open dialogue wherein colleagues can share the realities of their current situation, and how the objectives of the partnering, trainings and ultimately COIL exchanges has needed to be suitably reviewed and re-tailored.

Additionally, at the end of May 2020, representatives from across the 10 university partners in WG1, planned to visit the five South African universities to appreciate existing internationalisation and decolonisation of the curriculum initiatives, policies and practices, to discover the best of what exists. This task is also now taking place online through completion of university self-narrative reports completed by consortium members and with support from wider institutional stakeholders, including leadership, academic colleagues and technical support staff. Additionally, it has been agreed that this self-narrative would benefit all the

partners in their internationalisation and curriculum transformation efforts as part of the iKudu project. As such, the 10 university partners are each completing this task, framed within our Appreciative Inquiry lens.

What has remained central at this stage of our project is the continued efforts across all the partners to strengthen and build working relationships, and with care and compassion for one another. Here we are mindful again about inclusive practices relating importantly to having all partners views heard and validated, and how this can easily feel disrupted due to limited internet connectivity (especially in rural areas) and load shedding, which prevents having one's voice heard.

The consortium have several ways in which communication and interaction takes place, synchronously and asynchronously through email and MT, zoom and WhatsApp. Further, along with the current structure of our online Steering and Working Group meetings, we have built in "Friday Cuppa's," a more informal online meeting space to keep ourselves connected and with wider project team members across our universities not involved in the more formal Project Management meetings. In these weekly gatherings, we not only share the impact of Covid-19 on our living and home-working lives, but use the space to spark creativity, and to have particular themes presented. These lively discussions offer space to enable us all to be global citizens together. Indeed, with acknowledgement of the (expected) increase in global pandemics, iKudu enables us to engage in positive action-orientated change to share how collaboration in international online teaching and learning pedagogies and practices can (re)focus attention to the benefits of remote teaching and learning mindsets for addressing global challenges, and the key role of universities in this regard, in embracing their role as societal leaders.

(Preliminary) findings

Operationalising the AI process. In the original project plan, only the South African partners would write a self-evaluation report, but the European partners suggested that they do the same. As a first step in the AI process, all partners developed a model with the stakeholders in internationalisation of the curriculum and COIL. This served to identify the respondents for the different phases of the AI.

The process of composing stakeholder models demonstrated three key factors. The first is the realisation that there are many stakeholders in an internationalised home curriculum, from leadership at different levels, to managers, teaching and learning centres and -most important of all- academics.

The second factor is that while universities may largely be organised along similar lines, the way they organise, stimulate and support internationalisation can be quite different. This becomes visible when new initiatives such as COIL are deployed.

The third factor is a case of serendipity. The project partners found that the engagement with stakeholders in an internationalised curriculum and COIL provided them with an opportunity to knock on a range of doors and monitor internationalisation more broadly in their institutions.

The AI-process has also sparked lively discussions among researchers on methodological issues, particularly about the relation between action research and AI and the roles of interviewer/facilitator/researcher in those settings.

Discussion

While an Erasmus+ project is not a research project, the AI process constitutes a research component. Beyond that, the project partners have identified a range of possibilities to

strengthen the project by drawing up a research agenda. This will unfold over the years to come, but a paper has already been published at the IVEC conference 2020.

The research focuses on the relationship between transformation of teaching and learning, internationalisation of curricula and the role of COIL within those. We will look particularly how COIL can effectively be aligned with other international and intercultural components of a curriculum and how regional and local factors can be integrated in teaching and learning.

Conclusions and what to do next

The AI process has enabled us to collaborate in a more intensive way and our awareness that physical meetings will be impossible for a while has strengthened our resolve. In that sense, distance has indeed brought us closer together.

The collaborative aspect of COIL will remain a core focus, within the project but also between lecturers and between students. This will require attention for the design of COIL practices, in which collaborative learning is not always a given.

References

- Beelen, J., & Jones, E. (2015). Redefining internationalization at home. In A. Curai, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi & P. Scott (Eds.), *The European higher education area: Between critical reflections and future policies* (pp. 67-80). Dordrecht: Springer. Retrieved from <http://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0>
- Boyd, N. M., & Bright, D. S. (2007). Appreciative Enquiry as a mode of action research for community psychology. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(8), 1019-1036.
- Bruhn, E. (2020). *Virtual internationalization in higher education*. Bielefeld: wbv Publikation.
- Bushe, G. R. (2011). Appreciative inquiry: Theory and critique. In D. Boje, B. Burnes, & J. Hassard (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion To Organizational Change* (pp. 87-103). Oxford, UK: Routledge.
- Carbonnier, G., & Kontinen, T. (2014). North-South Research Partnerships – Academia Meets Development? European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes Policy Paper.
- Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. (2008). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: For leaders of change* (Second Edition). San Francisco (CA): Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Cross, M., Mhlanga, E., & Ojo, E. (2011). Emerging concept of internationalisation in South African higher education: Conversations on Local and Global Exposure at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 15(1), 75-92.
- Davies, J. C., & Dunk, R. M. (2015). Flying along the supply chain: accounting for emissions from student air travel in the higher education sector. *Carbon Management*, 6(5-6), 233-246.

- Department of Higher Education and Training (2017). *Policy framework for internationalisation of higher education in South Africa*. Pretoria: Author.
- Elliott, C., Braithwaite, C., Lavis, V., & Richardson, I. (2020). Testing Appreciative Inquiry to Destruction: Releasing the Energy for Change in Britain's Prisons. *AI Practitioner*, 22(1), 51-57. doi:10.12781/978-1-907549-42-7-8
- European Commission (2020). *Erasmus+ Programme Guide*. Version 3 (2020).
- Hagenmeier, C. (2017). Innovative approaches to internationalization in rural South Africa. In H. de Wit, J. Gacel-Avila, E. Jones & N. Jooste (Eds.). *The globalization of internationalization* (pp. 169-181). London: Routledge
- Heleta, S. (2018). Decolonizing knowledge in South Africa: Dismantling the 'pedagogy of big lies'. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 40(2), 47-64.
- Jacobs, L. (2015). Developing research capacity through professional training. In N. Popov, C. Wolhuter, K. Ermenc, G. Hilton, K. Ogunleye, & E. Niemczyk, *Social Justice and Accountability in Education Worldwide. BCES Conference Books* (Vol. 13, pp. 410-416). Sofia, Bulgaria: BCES.
- Jooste, N. (2015). South Africa. In: H. De Wit, F. Hunter, L. Howard & E. Egron-Polak, (Eds.), *Internationalisation of Higher Education* (pp. 253-266). Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies.
- Jooste, N., & Neale-Shutte, M. (Eds.) (2007). *Internationalising the curriculum*. Port Elizabeth: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalizing the curriculum*. London: Routledge.
- Leask, B., Beelen, J., & Kaunda, L. (2013). Internationalisation of the curriculum: International approaches and perspectives. In H. de Wit, F. Hunter, L. Johnson & H.G van Liempd (Eds), *Possible futures; The next 25 years of the internationalisation of higher education* (pp. 188-204). Amsterdam: EAIE.
- Le Grange, L. (2016). Decolonising the university curriculum: Leading article. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(2), 1-12.
- Miles, D., Mensinga, J., & Zuchowski, I. (2018). Harnessing opportunities to enhance the distance learning experience of MSW students: an appreciative inquiry process. *Social Work Education*, 37(6), 705–717. doi:10.1080/02615479.2018.1447557
- Moja, T. (2007). Africanisation vs. internationalisation: Tension or challenge to South African higher education? In N. Jooste & M. Neale-Shutte (Eds.), *Internationalising the curriculum*. Port Elizabeth: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- Mpinganjira, M. (2011). The state of academic mobility in the SADC region. *Building Regional Higher Education Capacity through Academic Mobility*, 23-38. SARUA Leadership Dialogue Series 3 (1). ISBN: 978-0-9869903-2-8

- Ogunde, N. A., Meyer, I. J., Mwambakana, J., & Mthethwa, N. E. (2019). Can extended curriculum programmes be improved through engagement with students using appreciative Inquiry? *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 33(4), 219-236. doi:10.20853/33-4-2835
- Quinlan, O. (2015). South Africa: Small steps in the right direction. *Forum*, winter 2015, 17-19.
- Teferra, D. (2019, 23 August), Defining internationalisation – Intention versus coercion. *University World News*. Retrieved from <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190821145329703>
- Sankarasubramanyan, R., & Joshi, W. (2019). Drench—Living the Dream Before Action. *Organization Development Review*, 51(3), 50-55.

Endnotes

ⁱ Project number 610322-EPP-1-2019-1-ZA-EPPKA@-CBHE-JP (2019-2050/001-001). Comprehensive information on the project is available on the project website <https://www.ufs.ac.za/ikudu> (link accessed on 6 October 2020).

ⁱⁱ University of the Free State (coordinating university, South Africa), University of Antwerp (co-coordinating university, Belgium), Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands), Central University of Technology (South Africa), Coventry University (United Kingdom) Durban University of Technology (South Africa), The Hague University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands), University of Limpopo (South Africa), University of Siena (Italy), University of Venda (South Africa)