

# The effects of employee turnover on the loss of organisational knowledge in South African municipalities: Balancing rhetoric with actual practice



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## ABSTRACT

Employee turnover presents a considerable difficulty for South African municipalities, especially in preserving tacit organisational knowledge. This study evaluated the effect of employee turnover on the retention of tacit knowledge within South African municipalities. The research employs secondary data analysis to investigate employee turnover in essential roles within many municipalities in South Africa, including senior management and occupations identified as scarce skills. The results of this study indicate that employee turnover adversely affects tacit organisational knowledge. The findings indicated that turnover exacerbates the retention of organisational knowledge gaps within municipalities, frequently resulting in worse service quality and heightened operational expenditures, including recruiting and the utilisation of service consultants. The study underscores the disparity between rhetoric (policies) and real practice (implementation) in tackling service quality and operational costs, indicating that current retention tactics and knowledge management methods frequently require revision. The article questions the efficacy of retention strategies, proposing that municipalities need more proactive and inventive methods to manage turnover and retain organisational tactical expertise, hence improving the continuity of public service delivery and organisational sustainability. Moreover, towns must to incorporate retention tactics, including succession planning, ongoing training, leadership development, and mentorship programs, into a comprehensive municipal governance framework.

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## Introduction

In the past decade, staff turnover in municipalities has garnered significant attention from researchers and professionals. Academic research has concentrated on understanding the diverse origins and patterns of employee turnover (Pietersen & Oni, 2014; Miller, 2017; Ogony & Majola, 2018). Simultaneously, other studies have sought to understand the factors that lead employees to resign (Mokhele, 2017; Alzayed & Murshid, 2017; Asriani & Riyanto, 2020; Pepple et al., 2021; Hur & Abner, 2024; Selesho, 2024). Naseema (2015) asserts that employee turnover primarily arises when an individual is dissatisfied with their work environment. Arokiasamy (2013) and Mokhele (2017) contend that inadequate workplace conditions alone do not compel an employee to resign or seek alternative employment, as individuals possessing unique competencies or in-demand skills may be lured by lucrative salary packages, particularly if the organisation provides tailored career and development opportunities. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the South African public sector faces challenges in retaining competent and skilled employees, who are lured by lucrative opportunities in the private sector and non-governmental organisations (Tariq et al., 2013; Ogony & Majola, 2018; Poon et

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al., 2022; Thusi & Chauke, 2023). Evaluating the effect of personnel turnover on the depletion of tacit organisational knowledge within local government is essential.

Employee turnover presents a considerable concern for South African municipalities, especially regarding the retention of organisational knowledge and operational effectiveness. Since 2019, South Africa's public sector, encompassing national, provincial, and municipal government levels, has experienced a turnover rise ranging from 16.6% to 19% (Department of Employment and Labour annual report, 2022). Notwithstanding the periodic churn of proficient and pivotal roles like senior management services (SMS), public sector professionals generally remain till retirement (AbouAssi, Johnson, & Holt., 2021; Leider et al., 2023). Certain public sector professionals transition from one department to another via promotion. Han, Håkansson, and Lundmark (2019) assert that employees opt to migrate and relocate their skills and expertise to different governmental regions, hence maintaining general stability in the public sector workforce. The South African Local Government Association's (2022-2023) annual report indicates municipal turnover rates for essential posts ranging from 7.2% to 8.1% during 2021-2023. The SALGA Performance Plan 2023-2024 indicates that the decrease in high employee turnover was facilitated by the shift from five-year contracts to permanent contracts for all personnel up to the managerial level in 2014/15, as well as the endorsement of particular senior management positions for permanent contracts in 2022/23. Nevertheless, the research lacks specificity concerning the towns in South Africa associated with these turnover rates, so undermining their credibility.

Moreover, the LGSETA report (2019) indicated that over 270,000 individuals are employed by municipalities in South Africa. The data exhibit considerable regional variation, with Central Karoo employing fewer than 1,000 full-time people, in contrast to metropolitan areas that employ over 25,000 full-time personnel (Dullar Omar Institute, 2019). These data exhibit considerable regional variation, with Central Karoo employing fewer than 1,000 full-time people, in contrast to metropolitan areas that employ over 25,000 full-time personnel (Dullar Omar Institute, 2019). The reduction in the workforce from 270,000 in 2019 to 220,641 post-COVID-19 in 2024 illustrates the difficulties municipalities face in attracting employees, resulting in a vacancy rate of 14.2% and 16% between 2018 and 2019, and 20% in 2022, in contrast to the national permissible vacancy rate range of 9.9% established by the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) (Bureau of Economic Research [BER], 2021; Houston & Kanyane, 2022; Auditor-General, 2022). Nevertheless, the local government workforce in rural or smaller towns continues to face challenges in attracting competent and skilled individuals due to turnover (Thusi & Chauke, 2023).

The workforce gap and implicit institutional knowledge loss underscore the necessity of this study to evaluate the effects of municipal employee turnover on these matters. This research requires acknowledging the limitations of standard measures and the distinct challenges posed by diverse mandates, organisational cultures, and contextual factors. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates both theory and practice is essential to mitigate employee turnover. Theoretical discourse attributes turnover to limited career advancement and inadequate work-life balance, whereas municipalities confront more profound challenges. Formulating turnover reduction initiatives for specific towns necessitates a balance between rhetoric and implementation. The report offers a comprehensive analysis of the challenges associated with the loss of tacit institutional knowledge and its effects on critical service delivery across multiple municipalities. This article examines the relationship between academic rhetoric and practical reality by analysing the impact of employee turnover in crucial roles, such as senior management and positions identified as scarce skills, on organisational knowledge loss and subsequent deterioration of service delivery in several South African municipalities.

## **Literature Review**

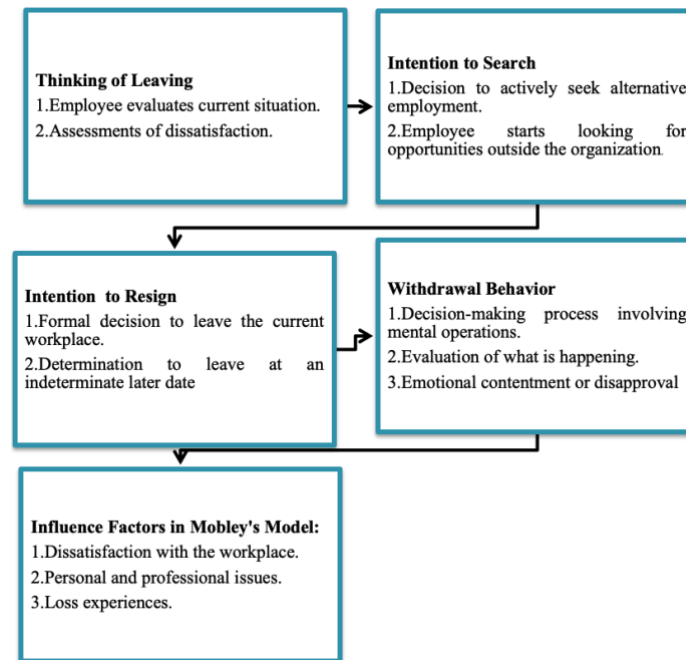
### **Mobley's theory as a lens to understand employee turnover on organisational knowledge**

Using Mobley's as a lens illuminates how employee turnover affects South African municipalities' organisational knowledge. Mobley's (1977) concept identifies three turnover cognitions as the main ways discontent leads to turnover. These include thinking of leaving (when an employee wants to leave the organisation) (Awan, 2021), the intention to search (when an employee starts looking for work outside the organisation) (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021), and the intention to leave. These stages provide a deep insight into employees' decision-making process before leaving the organisation and serve as a foundation for studying how employee turnover affects organisational knowledge in the South African public sector [municipalities] from the perspective of those occupying critical positions such as senior management.

South African municipalities face significant challenges in addressing employee turnover's impact on the loss of organisational knowledge (Brito, 2021; Phathela, 2022). This is because both employed and unemployed people, especially graduates who may lack the skills and experience to meet specific jobs, often apply for entry-level jobs to gain the necessary skills and climb the corporate ladder (Mashashane, 2022). These entry-level employees may seek greater chances within or outside the organisation (Ployhart et al., 2021). Unfortunately, they may not fully assess the possible influence on their associated organisations' aims and objectives over time (Engel, 2019; Posner, 2020). Mobley's theoretical lens implies that skill acquisition may contribute to employee churn by encouraging alternative possibilities (Govindaraju, 2018). Thus, when these employees leave after gaining entry-level skills, they lose expertise and organisational memory, which hinders municipal operations like societal service delivery provisions (Thusi & Chauke, 2023).

From Mobley's lens, studying employee turnover impacts the loss of organisational tacit knowledge helps us understand what might occur before competent and experienced staff quit their job and the impact of such a process on organisational performance (Porter

et al., 2019). Recruitment and knowledge transfer may disrupt workflows, resulting in time constraints, loss of organisational knowledge, increased training and onboarding costs, team morale and productivity, communication issues, workflow interruptions, impacts on client and stakeholder relationships, temporary skill shortages, knowledge gaps, and challenges in continuing to provide co-ordination (Thusi & Chauke, 2023). Mobley's theoretical framework emphasises withdrawal's emotional and gratifying aspects (Awan, 2021). Inconducive working environments, a lack of recognition, and limited career growth prospects generally cause employee dissatisfaction in the South African public sector, with municipalities being the worst (Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA), 2019). Recent research shows that if the organisation does not meet the employees' abilities and work obligations, such as professional development and career progression or career aspirations not aligned with the organisational culture, it may cause them to quit (Moodley, 2022). These emotional components stress the human side of turnover and its potential influence on organisational knowledge, as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Adapted from the Mobley's model (1997)

## Employee turnover

Employee turnover is the number of municipal employees who leave during a specific period (Ali & Anwar, 2021). According to Ngcobo (2014), employee turnover is associated with the reduction in the number of employees in the organisation due to resignations, deaths, relocations, retirement or even retrenchment. The turnover rate is usually estimated yearly (Han et al., 2019; Ayodele, 2020). Much research shows that turnover is the rotation of employees changing organisations due to job satisfaction and career prospects (Pietersen & Oni, 2014; Ali & Anwar, 2021). In a dynamic organisation, some turnover is expected, but excessive turnover has financial implications and disrupts productivity (De Winne et al., 2019). This challenges organisations to retain highly skilled or senior management employees or top talent and simultaneously adapt to changing business needs. The available literature shows that "Employee turnover" and "staff turnover" are commonly used interchangeably, but they mean different things. Employee turnover is understood as those employees who leave or exit the organisation voluntarily via resignation or termination (Strouse & Reed, 2021). Involuntary departures such as retrenchments, incapacity or retirements, deaths, dismissals, and internal transfers are all considered staff turnover (Arokiasamy, 2013; Alony, 2015; Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017).

Staff turnover involves different types of workforce migration, but employee turnover focuses on departing workers. This research utilised "employee turnover" to ensure the consistency of this study. Understanding these disparities illuminates organisational dynamics. A high employee turnover rate may indicate structural issues, including non-conducive work environment, leadership, or engagement (Morrell, 2016). However, significant employee turnover may imply work-life balance, career growth, or difficulties with job satisfaction, as was the case during COVID-19 (Ntando & Ndamase, 2024). Knowing these disparities helps municipalities adopt turnover initiatives or retention strategies to eliminate these causes (Bearfield & Bowman, 2017).

Research conducted by Ntando and Ndamase (2024) on remote working shows that working remotely in municipalities tasked with basic service delivery mandates has negative and positive effects. These scholars showed that working remotely, even though it seems a promising approach in the digital era, has no positive impact as it does not give a sense of belonging, especially for new employees. During COVID-19, working remotely was introduced in South Africa not for work-life balance but for curbing the spread of the virus. Therefore, work-life balance through remote working was criticised by various studies (Asim, 2021; Mukherjee, 2021; Mousa & Abdelgaffar, 2022), which found that it creates disassociation between new and old staff in the sense that colleagues do

not know each other, contributing to an anti-social phenomenon. On the other hand, remote working indicated that another secondary challenge is unproductivity due to issues such as load-shedding at home, network challenges, domestic chores (cleaning and cooking), and noise (Ntando & Ndamase). Thus, the available research shows that adopting this approach in the struggling era of various municipalities in terms of high turnover rate requires agility, especially for new entrants and old staff, to adapt to a new norm, re-learning, and de-learning skills (Kokt & Chipunza, 2022; 2023).

Employee turnover is linked to dependency and chain reactions (Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017; Ahmad, 2018). Organisations with high employee turnover may have higher employee churn. A tumultuous workplace with frequent leadership or organisational changes may lead to employee unhappiness and job hunting (LGSETA, 2019). Addressing employee turnover issues, including insufficient capacity-building through training and development or recognition, improves work environments. Recognition and training programs may boost employee engagement and reduce attrition. To maintain and grow an organisational culture, worker and employee turnover should be managed (Strouse & Reed, 2021).

### **Organisational culture's impact on employee turnover**

According to Khan, Ismail, Hussain, and Alghazali (2020), organisational culture is the collection of values and beliefs that workers learn while working for the organisation. This helps them instill these values in new employees and influence their worldview or organisation outlook. Various scholars underscore the importance of organisational culture for employers and employees in influencing the work environment, employee happiness, and commitment (Reddy, 2017; Dzomonda & Fatoki, 2019; Reddy & Scheepers, 2019). These scholars deemed that a robust organisational culture gives employees purpose and a sense of belonging, increasing engagement and retention. Moreover, positive organisational cultures reduce attrition and boost productivity (Dzomonda & Fatoki, 2019).

Recent research shows organisational culture affects employee turnover in the South African public sector (Khan et al., 2020). According to Shin (2023) states that organisational culture influences turnover trends. Culturally and linguistically diverse South African municipal employees are organised by organisational culture. This trend can be that South Africa is also known as a rainbow nation due to its heterogeneous population and cultural togetherness (Bornman, 2021). However, this setup can influence employee turnover despite workplace culture, rate, unity-promoting, and code-guiding rules. This usually happens when remote workers leave their jobs because their duties conflict with their culture or religion. Sometimes, the organisational or workplace setup contradicts employees' cultural ideas, making some operations seem unjust. This mismatch between their cultural values and professional requirements might make individuals uncomfortable and influence them to seek transfer or work in other organisations that match their cultural ideals (Reddy, 2017).

While South Africa prides itself on its multicultural identity and harmony, workplace realities often contradict its organisational setup and political or managerial leadership style. Municipal officials should establish policies and procedures that foster diversity and consider various cultural ideas to bridge the disparity between practice and theory. Organisations can empower, respect, and cherish employees by matching theory with actions. The employees will become more engaged and united as turnover rates decrease. Balancing rhetoric with practice promotes an organisational culture that supports diversity and maximises its potential for success. Municipalities empower the population and give them a voice in political choices that influence their daily lives, according to Tshiyoyo and Molekwa (2021).

### **Nature of work in the municipal settings**

Section 155 of the 1996 Constitution of South Africa divides municipalities into three categories: 44 districts (category C), 205 local municipalities (category B), and eight metropolitans (category A) (Republic South Africa, 1996; 1998). In South African municipalities, employee turnover procedures show the boundaries needed to retain the organisational knowledge of highly skilled employees. The nature of government work makes these imbalances evident, given the various reasons associated with the employee turnover rate in the South African local government, which typically ranges from 4% - 8% (LGSETA, 2021). Organisational culture promotes efficiency and employee happiness to foster organisational knowledge preservation and sharing. However, reality poses fundamental obstacles that prevent these ideals from being achieved.

In South Africa, legislative mandates in Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, as amended by Act 7 of 2007, allow municipalities to develop approaches and activities to ensure service delivery and governance (Subban & Theron, 2016), which all these require experience, high knowledge, skills, and abilities (Rajan, 2013; Poon et al., 2022). The literature shows that municipalities are still confronted with developmental challenges impacting employee turnover and other organisational dilemmas, such as administrative obligations, including financial management rules, procurement processes, service delivery standards, reporting, and paperwork, which lower employee engagement and increase turnover. Navigating bureaucratic red tape makes providing good services and sustaining organisational knowledge challenging (Skhosana, 2020; Eskanos, 2023). High turnover rates worsen this problem since employees depart and take their valuable expertise and ideas elsewhere. Thus, it is still challenging to match retention strategies (theory) with policy execution (practice), emphasising the need for flexible approaches to align organisational rhetoric with promoting good governance and effective service delivery to the whole citizenry. The research shows that a lack of professional capacity development affects municipalities' ability to function efficiently and meet evolving societal needs (Paroutis & Sillince, 2017).

## Professional growth challenges

Lack of professional growth opportunities relates to employee turnover and organisational knowledge retention in South African municipalities (Dzomonda & Fatoki, 2019). Lack of career growth and capacity development initiatives in municipalities in deep rural areas with poor infrastructure leads to employee dissatisfaction, lowering motivation and increasing turnover. This occurs when rural municipal employees confront career and skill development constraints. The loss of employees affects organisational stability and community service efficiency since these individuals are familiar with how municipalities operate and their proximity to their inhabitants (Laallam, Kassim, Engku Ali, & Saiti, 2020). However, such workers voluntarily go to major cities to advance their careers from a professional growth perspective.

This challenge informs the assumption that organisations suffer organisational knowledge loss when people voluntarily or involuntarily depart for greener pastures (Shin, 2023). This organisational knowledge loss affects the mission and vision of the organisation by affecting daily work and strategic decision-making (Johnson, 2018; Miller, 2018). Thus, the available literature emphasises that municipalities should create a supportive and development-oriented work environment that allows employees to thrive and make meaningful contributions. Such efforts feed into maintaining the balance between rhetorical ideals documented as strategic directions and actual practice based on how leadership implements policies.

## Research and Methodology

This qualitative study uses secondary data analysis to examine how employee turnover affects organisational knowledge loss in South African municipalities. This paper utilised secondary data to fulfil the aim of this study, using existing data when original data collection is impractical or unnecessary (Bryman, 2021). Employee turnover is complicated and affects organisational knowledge, requiring a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is best for examining social phenomena with multiple elements, interpretations, and contexts since it deepens understanding, according to Creswell & Creswell (2023). This study uses scholarly articles, government reports, organisational data, and other sources to examine employee turnover and organisational knowledge. This method enables an extensive review of theoretical frameworks and empirical data, supporting the study's purpose of integrating theoretical rhetoric and practice.

### Data sources and selection

This study collected data from Scopus due to its wide range of scientific literature. The search further led us to explore databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Open DOAR, ISI, and ResearchGate, with publication year restrictions from 2020-2024. To supplement the scientific literature, we searched the Department of Labour for employment equity reports from 2020-2024, SALGA reports from 2020-2024, LGSETA on skill gaps from 2019-2024, and municipal policies such as retention, wellness, career development, and skills training and development. Diaz (2023) and Leider et al. (2023) picked this timeframe to capture the latest employee turnover rates and their implications on organisational knowledge.

The study searched using the terms "employee turnover," "organisational knowledge," "South African municipalities/local government," and "public sector workforce", and Boolean operators identified 650 papers, which were narrowed down to 92 papers on South African municipalities only for our analysis. Webster and Watson (2022) provide a systematic search method for a complete literature review of all relevant research subjects. The study established inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure data quality and utility using the timeframe (2019-2024), terms specified above, and location and sphere of government (South Africa, local government/municipalities). The analysis excluded private sector turnover and non-South African publications. This constrained strategy concentrates on study goals and reduces unnecessary data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2022).

### The inclusion and exclusion criteria

This paper established its inclusion and exclusion by demarcating its study participants. This form of standard practice is required when following a qualitative research approach for designing high-quality research protocols. Theoretically, inclusion criteria are key features of the target population that the researcher intends to select from the overall population to answer the research question (Hulley et al., 2007). For this study, our inclusion criteria included demographics and geographical characteristics as provided below:

- i. Local: South African municipalities are an area of focus, irrespective of category.
- ii. Position/participants/unit of analysis: Only senior management officials such as municipal managers, chief executive officers, and senior managers were selected to inform our analysis.
- iii. Position/participants/unit of analysis: Critical/scarcely skills positions in each municipality. These scarce skills are derived from the LGSETA Guide 2019/2020.
- iv. Vacant critical positions in municipalities due to the following: (i) dismissals, (ii) end of contract, (iii) retirement, and (iv) resignations
- v. HR policies

## **Data screening and trustworthiness**

This study followed a meticulous screening of collected data, in which all 92 papers were reviewed against established inclusion criteria. This process informed this study on which paper to include and exclude in the analysis stage. Given that the literature search resulted in publications such as peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, books, book chapters, and theses, the inclusion criteria for this study were reinforced when screening this data. Thus, only papers within five years were included to reflect current trends and progress made on the impact of turnover on organisational knowledge in South African municipalities. From this, inclusion criteria primarily focus on specified terms with the addition of public sector employees to assess the relevance of this study; out of 92 papers, only 55 complied with the inclusion criteria, and those were retained for further analysis of this article. Moreover, the retained documents were primarily sourced from reputable journals and academic publishers such as Taylor and Francis, Wiley, Elsevier, and Springer for our data's credibility, validity, and trustworthiness. Furthermore, the following documents were included:

- i. 32 human resources policies from 8 municipalities,
- ii. 6 technical reports from LGSETA,
- iii. One Auditors-General report 2022/23,
- iv. 5 Commission for Employment Equity (CEE) reports (2019/20; 2020/21; 2021/22; 2022/23; 2023/24).

## **Ethical considerations**

The ethical component of this research paper centred on accuracy and accountability. The study maintained academic integrity by reporting findings honestly and avoiding plagiarism. Flick (2022) notes that ethical considerations are just as crucial in secondary data analysis as in original research, especially for responsible data use and correct results. The study also avoided faking data to conclude. Hypothetical scenarios based on South African municipalities were employed to enhance the narrative and clarify the study subject. This method follows the American Psychological Association's (2020) qualitative research ethics guidelines for honesty, openness, and data source respect.

In terms of eliminating biases during data collection for ethical compliance purposes, such was informed by data saturation. Understanding that saturation is one of the key aspects to consider

in conducting qualitative studies, we demarcated our study into four provinces, municipalities, and senior management officials only, as well as critical/scarcely skills positions, papers to review from which journals, which technical reports to use in this study and their validity. Being guided by saturation during data collection, this paper concluded that the data is sufficient as it is peer-reviewed, mainly technical reports compiled by reputable scholars. Moreover, this paper understood that being guided by data saturation not only assures the validity and credibility of information for the study but also ensures that researchers do not end up collecting the same data over and over, leading to redundancy. Thus, inclusion criteria are introduced in this study.

## **Results**

### **Impact of employee turnover on organisational knowledge retention**

South African municipal employee turnover affects organisational knowledge retention. Operational continuity requires organisational knowledge—wisdom, processes, practices, and organisational memory—especially in the public sector, where stability and long-term goals are crucial to successful governance. Employees leaving impact the organisation negatively as they possess abilities, experience, and professional skills necessary for running the organisation and general productivity. South African municipalities struggle with service delivery, citizen involvement, and governance in a fast-changing context, making the organisational knowledge loss tragic to these institutions [municipalities]. Moreover, the findings show that among the critical positions in municipalities, senior management-level staff do not stay for long for various reasons, including political interference in administrative activities, appointment nature, which is five years with renewal based on performance, low rate of career progression, and non-competitive salaries compared to the private sector. The results further show that the high vacancy rates in municipalities are in managerial and leadership positions. Most of these people are employed on short-term contracts, especially senior management officials appointed for 5 years, creating a gap in performance management.

Moreover, the findings revealed that the critical positions requiring critical skills, such as engineering, waste, and water resources, are the most affected in various municipalities, given the nature of their appointment. The results show that most municipalities have high vacancy rates, tracing back to 2015; those positions are still vacant, as shown in the Auditor-General, 2022. Renosterberg Local Municipality in the Northern Cape Province has been difunctional for many years, with a 100% vacancy rate for senior management-level positions (Auditor-General, 2022). Even though it is argued in the literature that people leave the organisation due to lack of training, career progression, or being unsatisfied with the job environment, this study finding asserts that it is not always a lack of skill or job satisfaction informing employee intentions to quit the job because even if these employees are satisfied in their respective positions with good salaries, they will still leave for a better offer elsewhere as Mokhele (2017) mentioned. In most cases, employees move from one job or organisation to another primarily for better remuneration or for various reasons linked to service termination.

Furthermore, the results show that in most of the municipalities' exit interview reports, it is evident that most of the staff in critical positions leave their respective positions, creating a huge skill and professional gap due to the tenure and experience at the management level. This finding concurs with De Winne et al. (2019) that high turnover rates weaken organisational memory, which is essential for public service quality and efficiency. One good example is that in smaller municipalities in Karoo, the water resources management appointed to the contract was tasked to train the process controllers with the help of the district municipality due to the availability of resources. However, when a qualified water resource manager resigns to take up a permanent position in another municipality since he was appointed on a contract basis, that departure becomes a loss to the organisation due to such an individual's expertise and knowledge.

While the literature shows that municipal employees often have long tenures and deep organisational ties (LGSETA, 2019), there is a different case where contract workers occupy the most critical positions in smaller municipalities. These contractual and permanent workers who possess critical knowledge and skills for an organisation to lose them become detrimental, leading to service delivery backlogs. The departure of essential people who designed and implemented long-term plans and initiatives may destabilise organisational performance or productivity. Retaining highly skilled or senior management employees is crucial to ensure effective business continuity, even after the departure of the employee who occupies a key position or those with critical skills. Municipalities provide various services influencing people's daily lives and are the closest and most familiar with service delivery. Therefore, if such an employee with years of experience managing water supply services resigns, local water infrastructure, stakeholders, and service delivery specifics may be lost. The latter can delay the provision of essential services, increase costs in hiring temporary skilled employees or consultants, and increase public distrust, as stated by various scholars (Wadesango et al., 2018; Masiya, 2019; Moloto et al., 2020; Shongwe, 2023).

Employee turnover can reduce organisational knowledge, requiring municipalities to adapt rather than expand. The abilities of new employees sometimes require time to learn the municipality's ways of doing things and obligations, which means time and money are needed to train and assist new employees to perform like their predecessors (Thusi & Chauke, 2023). New employees may not comprehend community expectations, lowering service performance standards. Service delivery backlogs increase socioeconomic inequality in various South African municipalities. Therefore, such organisational knowledge loss can be disastrous. Losing experienced, skilled, or senior management employees in vital areas, such as water, sanitation, community services, and power, may delay and complicate operations and lead to societal vulnerabilities. This may destabilise the municipalities by inciting citizen unrest and protests.

The available data support the idea that employee turnover impacts organisational tacit knowledge negatively. One significant aspect that could be changed is senior management structures or political interference and instability, which the latter reported to have an impact on interrupting the delivery of essential services, as was the case in the Sarah Baartman District Municipality, according to Maholo (2021). Losing key individuals who know the municipality's strategic plans and operational procedures slowed project execution and efficiency. As the literature shows, municipal effectiveness requires organisational knowledge, potentially harming culture, morale, and operations. When experienced employees leave, the remaining workers may feel demotivated and overworked because they should take on additional work without enough assistance or an increase in salaries. Increased workloads and stress can weaken the organisation's productivity and increase turnover. South African municipalities should employ proactive knowledge management and succession planning to decrease employee turnover and organisational knowledge retention. Documenting essential procedures, creating thorough handover protocols, and investing in staff training and development and mentoring are crucial.

Formalising knowledge dissemination within the organisation helps municipalities save critical information once such employees leave. Municipalities should emphasise a good work environment that keeps its employees. Moreover, employees should be recognised and rewarded, promoted professionally, and encouraged to collaborate and share knowledge. By doing so, municipalities can reduce turnover and create a more resilient and adaptable organisation that can better address governance issues in the local sphere of government.

### **The role of organisational culture in turnover intention**

Organisational culture influences municipal employee turnover intentions in South Africa. Workplace culture—values, attitudes, and behaviours—affects employee happiness and retention. South African municipalities grapple with challenges creating a cohesive and sound corporate culture due to employee cultural variety and historical and socio-political issues. Employee engagement and retention necessitate a strong company culture, say Govender and Bussin (2020). Various municipalities in South Africa struggle to promote this culture, contributing to a lack of employee appreciation, communication, and professional growth. These factors devalue and disconnect workers, increasing turnover intentions. Thus, organisations that emphasise employee well-being, communicate openly, and offer growth opportunities have lower turnover and higher employee satisfaction.

The multicultural character of South Africa complicates municipal organisational culture. South Africa is known as the "rainbow nation," Bornman (2021) notes that organisations should be aware of their employees' cultural dynamics. Developing an inclusive and supportive organisational culture is difficult but necessary in municipalities where employees come from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Unresolved cultural dynamics can cause misunderstandings, disputes, and employee attrition. Various municipalities have culturally diverse staff with varying work, communication, and leadership requirements.

Without acknowledging and addressing these differences, employees may feel alienated and excluded. Employees who believe their cultural identity is not appreciated or cherished may leave the organisation more often. Cultural competency is crucial to managing a diverse workforce. Thus, municipalities must invest in cultural knowledge and sensitivity training for their employees and senior management employees.

The municipal structure and management techniques shape culture, turnover intentions, and cultural factors. Many South African municipalities are hierarchical and bureaucratic, inhibiting innovation and employee engagement in decision-making. Masiya, Davids, and Mangai (2019) say such organisational frameworks might make employees feel helpless and frustrated, especially those who want to innovate. Employees are more likely to leave if they are not listened to or powerless.

Lack of professional development in municipalities also contributes to high turnover intention. Employees who feel there is no potential for progress sometimes intend to leave for better opportunities and career advancement. This is especially true for younger and highly trained workers, who are more ambitious and want job advancement. A stagnating workforce with no career paths or professional development programs can lead to disengagement and turnover. Ahmad (2018) states that offering growth and development opportunities is crucial for keeping employees, especially in a skilled labour-intensive environment.

Additionally, employee-management relations affect turnover intention and organisational culture. Employees may feel detached from the organisation and its visions and missions if municipalities are unsupportive or aloof. Empathetic, open, and communicative leadership boosts employee engagement and reduces attrition. According to Laulié and Morgeson (2021), leaders who form close connections with their workers, recognise their achievements, and encourage their professional growth will likely maintain a devoted and motivated staff.

External constraints on municipalities complicate the influence of organisational culture on turnover intentions. South African municipal governments face fiscal limits, political interference, nepotism in recruitment processes, and public scrutiny. These demands can lead to burnout and high turnover if not managed well. Masiya, Davids, and Mangai (2019) state that municipalities must balance external demands with employee support and sustainability. Not doing so can lead to stress and burnout, negatively affecting employee retention.

Organisational culture drives South African municipal employee attrition. A healthy, inclusive workplace culture that promotes diversity, encourages professional growth, and engages employees is vital for keeping competent workers and lowering turnover. Municipalities should address cultural issues, provide professional development, and provide supportive and empowered management methods. Doing so may establish a workplace that attracts and keeps employees for good governance and service delivery.

### **Challenges of knowledge transfer amid high turnover rates**

Municipalities depend on organisational knowledge preservation and dissemination for service delivery and governance. High employee turnover makes knowledge transfer harder since experienced people depart and leave with valuable organisational information. South African municipalities are significantly affected since governance procedures are intricate, and localised competence is needed to maintain performance. Employee knowledge is tacit, making knowledge transfer challenging in high-turnover workplaces. Tacit knowledge of unformalised abilities, experiences, and insights is lost when highly skilled and experienced employees leave. Municipal employees may have spent years studying about communities, local dynamics, and governance procedures, so this information is beneficial. Phaladi (2021) opined that employee turnover may lower service quality because new employees may lack the background and knowledge to make informed decisions and implement effective solutions.

It is hard to capture explicit information and communicate and mentor tacit knowledge. Many municipalities underuse documentation and training initiatives for knowledge transfer. In smaller or resource-constrained municipalities, operational concerns sometimes precede knowledge management. Lack of formal knowledge transfer mechanisms means departing employees lose most of their essential expertise, resulting in inefficiency and recurrent mistakes. Transferring tacit knowledge is difficult, but high turnover intentions often undermine organisational mentorship relationships. Mentorship helps experienced workers teach new employees systematically. However, high turnover rates often end mentoring partnerships, resulting in knowledge transfer gaps and organisational continuity issues. Siewert and Louderback (2019) found that high mentor-mentee turnover interrupts learning and hinders knowledge transfer in organisations with high turnover rates.

South African municipalities are diverse, making knowledge transfer harder. The multicultural workforce requires knowledge transfer systems that account for employees' communication styles, learning preferences, and cultural backgrounds. Knowledge transfer is less subtle and adaptive in high turnover organisations. Govender and Bussin (2020) say that organisations that do not account for cultural differences in information transmission are more likely to miscommunicate and lose knowledge. Knowledge transmission is affected by high turnover, which impacts municipalities' operational efficiency and strategic goals. Effective information sharing is essential for organisational resilience and adaptability, especially under changing political, social, and economic conditions. High turnover rates might hinder knowledge transfer, making it challenging for municipalities to achieve long-term goals and adapt to new challenges. Tacit knowledge loss, mentoring disruption, and cultural diversity disregard in knowledge transmission reduce organisational performance. To address these issues, municipalities should codify critical processes and



practices, mentor, and transmit culturally relevant expertise. They may preserve and share organisational knowledge despite high turnover.

### **Effects of turnover on service delivery and community engagement**

South African municipal employee turnover impacts service delivery and community involvement, crucial to successful governance. Water, sanitation, electricity, and waste management are among municipal services. These services are essential to community well-being and municipal confidence. High turnover rates in municipalities might impair service delivery when experienced employees depart. Service delivery can suffer from turnover because it removes specialist knowledge and skills. Many municipal employees should understand technology, regulations, and community needs. When specialists retire, substitutes may be scarce. New employees may take time to learn, and such delays service delivery. Masiya, Davids, and Mangai (2019) say the knowledge loss of expert employees is challenging in smaller municipalities with few potential and competent employees.

High turnover rates undermine municipal employees' community relationships and cause them to lose specific skills. Community engagement ensures that citizens' needs are met in local governance. Employees with long tenure build trust and mutually understanding relationships with citizens. These partnerships are needed for communication, dispute resolution, and community projects. However, these links may dissolve when these employees leave, generating communication and community trust concerns.

South African municipal bureaucratic and regulatory limits exacerbate turnover's influence on service delivery. Losing experienced employees who know these restrictions can delay procurement, project approvals, and regulatory compliance. Delayed projects, underused funds, and unmet community needs can hamper service delivery. According to Maholo (2021), high municipal turnover rates contribute to the deterioration of community services. High turnover may impair community engagement and service delivery. If services are inadequately delivered or community needs are not satisfied, citizens may lose trust in the municipalities. This may make citizens feel unheard and make it challenging for municipalities to get appropriate community governance input. The decline in community engagement may make it difficult for municipalities to identify and satisfy community needs, say Govender and Bussin (2020).

To minimise turnover's influence on service delivery and community engagement, municipalities should retain experienced staff and invest in community relationships. Professional development and career progression reduce turnover and engage employees. Municipalities should document critical procedures and practices to create organisational memory so new employees may quickly understand the organisation and provide services. South African municipal service delivery and community participation are affected by employee turnover, which results in the loss of specialised expertise, community ties, and bureaucratic delays, lowering community service quality and efficiency. Municipalities should retain experienced staff, create organisational memory, and maintain strong community ties to continue providing services and sustain public trust.

### **Impact of high turnover on employee morale and organisational climate**

High turnover rates in municipalities affect service delivery, organisational knowledge, employee morale, and organisational climate. Employee morale is their view, attitude, contentment, and confidence at work. When turnover is high, surviving workers face more stress, workload, and uncertainty, which can lower morale. This impacts organisational climate or employee attitudes towards their workplace. Workload increases for surviving employees are one of the critical ways excessive turnover rates affect employee morale. When employees depart, the rest of the remaining team often shares their duties. This can overload employees, causing stress and burnout. Laulié and Morgeson (2021) found that high turnover rates impair work satisfaction because employees believe they are expected to perform more with less assistance and resources. Decreased work satisfaction can increase turnover, creating a vicious cycle that is hard to escape.

Along with increased effort, high turnover rates can promote organisational instability and uncertainty. Employees may distrust the organisation's ability to retain them and worry about their future, leading to employee turnover intentions. Instability may demotivate and disengage employees from the organisation and its goals. According to Awan et al. (2021), employees who sense a lack of stability in their organisation are more susceptible to worry and stress, which can impair morale and dramatically impact workplace climate. Employee perceptions of organisational policies, procedures, and processes create an organisational environment. Because of high turnover, employees may regard the organisation as unstable, poorly managed, or unsupportive. Demotivation and disengagement may lower employee engagement and productivity. Unsafe organisational environments can damage employee morale and performance, according to Selesho and Matjie (2024).

Employee camaraderie may suffer from significant turnover. Low turnover rates foster strong colleague relationships, producing a positive work environment and a sense of belonging. High turnover rates may weaken these bonds since employees may feel like co-workers are intending to leave. Since they cannot build lasting work ties, employees may feel isolated. High turnover rates may destroy an excellent organisational community culture, as Nowell et al. (2022) alluded to. On the other hand, leadership and management styles can aggravate the consequences of high turnover on morale and the workplace. Unsupportive senior management employees and differences in employee needs increase turnover.

During transition or uncertainty, good leadership is vital for workplace morale. Influential leaders who communicate, assist, and acknowledge their employees may minimise turnover and enhance the organisational culture. This statement concurs with Morse et

al. (2021) that empathy and support boost organisational culture and workforce morale. Thus, municipalities must provide a welcoming and stable work environment. The welcoming and stable work environment encourages employee growth, rewards initiatives, and builds community engagement. Municipalities should emphasise communication and personnel support in times of change to avoid frustrations, organisational uncertainty, and chaos. In other words, municipalities may keep people engaged and motivated despite high turnover by maintaining a healthy work environment. As mentioned above, high turnover negatively impacts South African municipalities' morale.

### **The cost of turnover: Financial and non-financial implications**

South African municipalities' turnover expenses go beyond hiring and training new staff. The financial and non-financial repercussions of turnover are as significant as these direct expenditures and affect municipal efficiency (Lee, 2018). It is of utmost importance for municipalities to understand these costs to decrease turnover and its repercussions. First, turnover costs money to acquire new employees, such as employment advertising, interviews, and background checks, which have profound financial implications. Onboarding and training new employees cost money. Han, Håkansson, and Lundmark (2019) report that these expenses can be significant, especially in municipal contexts requiring specialised expertise. Municipal new employees receive thorough training on regulatory obligations, community involvement strategies, operational processes, and basic orientation. In high-turnover situations where new employees must be trained often, these training expenditures may increase rapidly.

Besides direct financial expenses, turnover has enormous indirect costs. One of the biggest is lost productivity when experienced employees depart. As surviving employees adjust to the loss and new employees adjust, productivity frequently drops when a key employee leaves. This productivity loss might result in service delivery delays, missed deadlines, and inefficient operations. De Winne et al. (2019) and Thusi and Chauke (2023) discovered that the indirect costs of turnover, including lost productivity, can be larger than the direct costs of hiring and training in an organisation that relies heavily on their employees' skills and experience.

Turnover impacts municipalities' budgets and external relationships. Due to rapid employee turnover, these collaborations and networks with external stakeholders may be affected, and mistrust may creep in. This can reduce collaboration and external resources, including government or international funding or help. According to Laulié and Morgeson (2021), these disruptions can have a significant financial impact, especially for municipalities that rely on external cooperation for projects and programs. Municipalities might sometimes suffer long-term non-financial repercussions from turnover—organisational culture and morale matter. High turnover rates can promote organisational instability as those left behind worry about their employment and the organisations' future. Employees may feel less loyal to the organisation and less motivated to work. LGSETA (2019) states that turnover can "*hurt*" municipal culture, where a pleasant and stable workplace is essential for employee trust and participation.

Organisational knowledge and expertise are lost with turnover, which may impair strategic goals. Experienced employees leave with valuable knowledge of the organisation's history, procedures, and community connections. Organisational knowledge losses are hard to restore, especially in smaller municipalities or municipalities in rural areas where much is implicit and undocumented. Phaladi (2021) states that turnover might lower organisational knowledge and service quality since new employees may lack the context and skills to make informed decisions and implement effective solutions.

Non-financial turnover costs include community trust and engagement. Municipal turnover negatively impacts service delivery and community involvement, weakening public trust. Municipalities are expected to provide reliable essential services, yet the turnover rate might delay or reduce quality. Masiya, Davids, and Mangai (2019) state that turnover can reduce public trust and community engagement with municipalities and community-based programs. Therefore, municipalities require comprehensive knowledge management and employee retention strategies to reduce turnover. Maintaining organisational knowledge requires investing in staff development and well-being, creating a healthy organisational culture, and using effective knowledge transfer mechanisms. Municipalities should encourage good employee relations, recognise success, and provide career progression. The latter may reduce turnover and expenditures, ensuring long-term governance and service delivery.

### **Policies for mitigating the impact of employee turnover**

South African municipalities should limit the effects of employee turnover on organisational knowledge, service delivery, morale, and finances. Maintaining municipal operations involves turnover reduction and impact management strategic approaches, as shown in the table below, which shows that various municipalities have developed policies addressing issues associated with employee dissatisfaction.

**Table 1:** Human Resources policies development by municipalities per province

Province	Employee Wellness	Career Development Policy	Skill Training and Development Policy	Employee/staff Retention Policy
Eastern Cape	64%	20%	74%	72%
Free State	46%	42%	21%	58%
Gauteng,	48%	22%	80%	47%
KwaZulu-Natal	68%	52%	45%	65%
Limpopo	79%	62%	94%	68%
Mpumalanga	70%	24%	100%	72%
Northern Cape	69%	34%	98%	64%
Northwest	61%	85%	100%	58%
Western Cape	37%	32%	33%	90%
<b>Average</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>66%</b>

The above shows that since these policies or strategies were approved, their applicability was only feasible as per statistics shown in the above table. Compared to 2019 (see Table 2), statistics show improvements in some provinces while some provinces show some decline in implementing these policies. The two tables above show various policies, and the results further show that planning succession is another turnover mitigation strategy following knowledge management. Succession planning involves recruiting and training leaders and managers. This strategy ensures a steady supply of skilled leaders for leadership positions. Ahmad (2018) says adequate succession planning is needed to maintain leadership continuity and keep the organisation effective through change. Municipalities should identify high-potential employees early and train, advise, and lead them for future roles. Employee engagement and retention are needed to reduce turnover. Employee engagement is critical to retention since engaged workers are loyal and less likely to leave. Govender and Bussin (2020) recommend professional growth, recognition, and a healthy work environment to increase employee engagement. Municipal transparency may help employees feel informed and involved in decision-making. Participation and gratitude can help municipalities retain personnel and reduce turnover.

**Table 2:** Human Resources policies development by municipalities per province

	Staff Retention/Attraction*	Employee Wellness	Career Development Policy	Skills Training and Development Policy
Gauteng	45%	45%	18%	73%
Western Cape	22%	33%	30%	85%
Mpumalanga	67%	89%	22%	100%
Limpopo	65%	75%	60%	90%
North West	57%	79%	29%	100%
Northern Cape	65%	74%	39%	96%
Eastern Cape	69%	62%	19%	73%
Free State	55%	40%	20%	60%
<b>Average</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>85%</b>

Source: LGSETA (2019: 54)

The available research shows that career advancement might also minimise turnover. At the same time, it is not guaranteed that those who receive career advancement when great opportunities appear will not leave (Mokhele, 2017). The theoretical assumption remains that employees stay where their professional development needs are considered. Professional development growth keeps employees longer, according to Laulié and Morgeson (2021). Career training, mentorship, and clear pathways from municipalities may assist employees in building their professions. Municipalities may encourage employees to gain new skills and solve new issues by promoting continuous learning.

Effective leadership is needed for workplace wellness, employee engagement, succession planning, and knowledge management. Solid and supportive leadership helps the organisation manage turnover and maintain stability, according to Morse et al. (2021). Municipalities should finance leadership programs that teach current and future leaders how to manage teams of employees, improve employee well-being, and drive change management. Organisational culture in the workplace, such as attitudes, beliefs, and actions, should be favourable to decrease turnover.

An organisational culture that promotes diversity, well-being, cooperation, and innovation helps retain and reduce turnover. Positive cultures attract and retain top talent because employees feel valued, encouraged, and motivated to help the organisation succeed. Promotion of diversity, appreciation of employee contributions, work-life balance, and employee well-being may assist municipalities in building an excellent organisational culture. South African municipalities must decrease employee turnover through knowledge management, succession planning, employee engagement and retention measures, career development, leadership development, and a good culture. These approaches can assist municipalities in retaining skilled employees and those with a rich organisational culture, reducing turnover and sustaining operations. These strategies provide stability, organisational knowledge, and excellent community services.

## **Discussions**

The study found that employee turnover significantly impacts organisational knowledge retention in South African municipalities. Loss of knowledge severely undermines public service efficiency and effectiveness. The findings reflect prior studies showing that turnover impairs organisational memory and operations (Phaladi & Ngulube, 2024; Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Phaladi and Ngulube (2024) propose that experienced employees leave with their skills and tacit knowledge, which is hard to replace. This loss hits municipalities most because contextual knowledge of local problems and processes is crucial for efficient governance.

The analysis confirms Morrell's (2016) complex relationship between employee turnover and knowledge loss, stating that high turnover rates hinder knowledge transmission and cause organisational memory gaps. The lack of organisational knowledge management systems in many municipalities and informal, person-to-person information interchange exacerbates this disruption (Nelufule, 2021). Highly skilled and experienced employees leave a knowledge gap that can be difficult to replace, especially in governance. This finding concurs with Massingham (2017), who researched knowledge loss created by organisational turnover. His finding revealed that knowledge loss has a negative impact on institutional productivity in the context of morale, creating institutional strategic misalignment of the remaining workforce (capacity gaps). Moreover, institutional loss negatively impacts resource cuts (decline in employee performance), the decline in quality and quantity from those who are new or inexperienced employees, mistrust, as well as slow task completion as regarded as an increased search cycle time.

The study also found that turnover produces varying knowledge loss levels. When employees leave for better opportunities, volunteering is worse for knowledge retention than layoffs or retirements. Other research suggests that involuntary turnover is disruptive (Ahmad, 2018; Porter et al., 2019). Voluntary turnover includes highly skilled, hard-to-replace professionals, but involuntary turnover may be easier to handle, especially when it involves rapidly available employees. This complete grasp of turnover's impact on knowledge retention highlights tailored retention strategies. The study opined that municipalities retain key professionals, particularly those whose abilities and managerial skills can negatively affect organisational performance or productivity. According to Al Mamun and Hasan (2017), organisations should keep covertly knowledgeable employees. Mentoring and detailed recordkeeping decrease turnover and maintain critical information.

This study found that organisational culture influences South African municipal employee turnover. A healthy organisational culture boosts employee loyalty and reduces turnover. According to Reddy (2017) and Khan et al. (2020), a supportive culture that values employees reduce turnover. This study's finding underscores that cultural mismatch between employees and the organisation causes turnover. In South African municipalities, where cultural diversity is widespread, employees who felt their cultural or religious convictions were not respected were likely to leave. This finding concurs with Bornman (2021), who agrees that diverse workplaces require cultural inclusiveness to retain employees. Organisations that do not appreciate cultural diversity risk employee alienation and turnover. The finding in this paper concurs more with Ringson and Matshabaphala (2022) that despite other elements identified in this paper that contribute to loss of institutional knowledge due to employee turnover are directed to the institutional set-up of the South African public sector where we have two wings such as political and administrative legs. Their findings, which are linked with the results of the current study, show organisational culture deficiencies in various local governments. Further, the article acknowledges that some of the deficiencies in local government organisational cultures are attributable to shortcomings in leadership, organisational agility, and responsiveness to the fast-changing environment, globalisation, market pressures, and technological changes. On that note, this study argues that organisational culture is significant but insufficient to reduce turnover, primarily if the political and administrative legs of the public sector operate in silos. Culturally strong organisations may lose employees due to lack political and leadership support, professional progress, and work-life balance. This supports employee turnover complexity studies conducted by scholars such as Govender and Bussin (2020) and Al-Suraihi et al. (2021). Though a positive culture helps minimise turnover, Govender and Bussin (2020) still underscore professional development and flexible work arrangements as fundamental to employee retention. Thus, municipalities should promote inclusive, varied organisational cultures. Diversity training, inclusive policies, and employee-centred cultural and religious practices may achieve this. Khan et al. (2020) believe diverse workplaces should emphasise inclusivity. Respect and inclusion may help municipalities reduce turnover and retain a diverse and engaged workforce.

Lack of professional advancement causes employees to leave for better opportunities, erasing organisational knowledge. Research shows that career development helps retain employees (Brito, 2021; Masuku & Jili, 2019). According to Brito (2021), organisations without career paths risk losing qualified employees to competitors of the public sector, such as the private sector and non-governmental organisations. The findings also reveal that rural and impoverished municipalities struggle with professional growth. Lack of training and growth keeps these employees stagnant and unhappy. This confirms Dzomonda and Fatoki (2019), who showed

that rural employees stagnate due to infrastructural and resource shortages. The study found that employees in these places were more likely to leave for urban municipalities, which provided better career advancement.

Moreover, the study found that a lack of mentorship and leadership development initiatives promotes turnover. Without mentors and role models, employees lack career direction, increasing turnover. The literature shows that mentoring helps retain employees by guiding workers through their career journey discoveries (Jones et al., 2018; Conroy, 2022). Furthermore, municipalities should subsidise professional development for all employees, regardless of position or seniority. Career paths, mentorship, and online training are examples of such progress in the workplace. Professional development can help municipalities maintain organisational knowledge by increasing employee satisfaction and turnover. This finding concurs with Masuku and Jili (2019) that professional development retains employees and maintains organisational stability.

According to the available literature, south African municipalities generally fail to adopt staff retention initiatives. This study indicated that various municipalities emphasise keeping their employees and conserving organisational knowledge but do not always follow through for various reasons, such as political interference in research processes. This concurs with other studies revealing that various municipalities have retention strategies but lack the resources and willingness to apply them (Phaladi, 2021; Mamokhere, 2022). The study showed this gap notably in staff retention resource allocation. Despite the significance of retention, many municipalities underfund training, development, and other retention measures. According to Mamokhere (2022), financial limitations and competing objectives generally underfund retention initiatives. Thus, actions do not follow retention rhetoric, resulting in significant turnover and organisational knowledge loss.

The study concluded that accountability and monitoring procedures are lacking, which causes rhetoric and practice to diverge. Without accountability, retention techniques are generally uneven or non-existent. Strouse and Reed (2021) agree that comprehensive monitoring and evaluations are necessary for retention tactics. No matter how good their policies are, organisations will not meet retention targets without these measures. The study suggests municipalities should provide financial support to implement retention efforts to bridge the gap between theory and practice since they go hand in hand. Better budgeting, accountability, and retention efforts can achieve this. Municipalities may limit turnover and retain organisational expertise by matching theory with their practice, improving public service delivery. The study revealed that high employee turnover affects organisational knowledge management and retention in South African municipalities. Public sector knowledge management focuses on retaining experienced employees with vital tacit knowledge, which is difficult to record or convey. This conclusion supports the research that shows municipalities struggle to maintain knowledge loss when skilled employees depart (Phaladi & Ngulube, 2024). The study shows that losing the organisational knowledge of those with expertise or senior management levels might create a knowledge gap, lowering public service efficiency and quality (Phaladi & Ngulube, 2024). This study has significant consequences for municipalities, which depend on service continuity and organisational memory. The study indicates that municipalities should improve knowledge management through various techniques to reduce employee turnover. These techniques may involve creating complete information transfer procedures, investing in knowledge management systems, and encouraging employee knowledge exchange. By retaining vital information and skills, municipalities can prevent knowledge loss when employees leave. This study supports the knowledge-based view of the organisation, which holds that information is essential to organisational performance (Grant, 2019). Lost information due to employee turnover impairs operational efficiency, creativity, and challenge response. Therefore, the section below provides some implications associated with employee turnover and organisational knowledge loss.

The findings of this study show that inadequate human resource management (HRM) practices in employee engagement, motivation, and career development increase the municipal turnover rate. Municipalities need improved HRM strategies for employee retention, job satisfaction, and career progression. Municipalities must recognise that HRM is about developing and retaining talent, not just hiring. The study suggests that municipal governments use HRM practices that foster a welcoming workplace, competitive remuneration, and professional advancement to prevent turnover. These methods increase job satisfaction and retention. The research also recommends that municipal HRM be more aggressive in tackling work dissatisfaction, lack of recognition, and career progression opportunities as contributing to turnover intentions. By retaining key employees, municipalities may boost performance and productivity. According to Awan et al. (2021), job embeddedness decreases turnover intentions. Thus, municipal HRM should use job satisfaction and engagement initiatives to integrate employees.

The study found that organisational cultures in South African municipalities encourage employee turnover, especially when they lack support, recognition, and advancement. Disengagement, discontent, and attrition can come from workplace hostility (Govender & Bussin, 2020; Masuku & Jili, 2019). This finding has enormous implications for municipalities, especially if these institutions ignore turnover rates and maintain organisational competence, which requires municipalities to encourage and value employees. This may involve creating a more welcoming workplace, recognising employees, and fostering learning and progress. Municipalities may reduce attrition and costs by creating a workplace where employees feel valued and motivated. The paper suggests integrating corporate culture with municipal strategic goals, including knowledge retention and service delivery. Innovative, collaborative, and information-sharing cultures preserve organisational knowledge and boost organisational success. Organisational culture impacts employee retention and turnover, according to Morrell (2016). Thus, municipalities should promote strategic goals and staff retention.

The study found that employee turnover diminishes organisational knowledge and public service delivery effectiveness in South African municipalities. Expert employees leave, interrupting service delivery and reducing public service quality. Research suggests

that turnover damages organisational performance and service delivery (Ndebele & Lavhelani, 2017; Masuku & Jili, 2019). To improve public service, municipalities must retain organisational competence and limit turnover. Succession planning, knowledge transfer enhancements, critical knowledge recording and accessibility may be needed. Municipalities can preserve public services by minimising turnover disruptions. Research suggests municipalities should invest in capacity building and training to boost employees' capabilities. This can lessen dependency on a few key employees and offer a more extensive network of public service providers. This technique complements Davids et al.'s (2022) capacity-building approach, which states that municipalities should focus on capacity building to improve service delivery and reduce turnover.

## Conclusion

The elevated personnel turnover in South African municipal governments impacts knowledge retention, human resource management, organisational culture, and public service delivery. The findings corroborate the majority of turnover and organisational performance studies indicating that the departure of key people impacts tacit knowledge inside the company. This study demonstrated that, notwithstanding many human resource strategies, their execution is notably sluggish, particularly regarding retention policy. These findings impact organisational performance and generate service delivery delays, as these individuals have essential roles within the municipality. Consequently, the article asserts that municipalities necessitate more aggressive and inventive strategies to address turnover and the retention of organisational tacit knowledge. Future study may enhance this academic work by investigating primary data collecting via diverse case studies or interviews with municipal employees to yield deeper insights.

### *Recommendations*

- i. Municipalities should formalise knowledge transfer mechanisms such as comprehensive documentation (archive) and mentoring to prevent knowledge loss when employees exit public service.
- ii. Policymakers should develop a knowledge management policy aligned with the National Knowledge Framework. This policy will ensure that the municipality values the intellectual resources entrenched in its employees' minds.
- iii. Municipalities should invest in continuous professional development and career growth opportunities to enhance employee retention.
- iv. Conducting skills auditing and skills needs to ensure that the skills available in the organisation are competitive and align with the mentorship competencies and skill gaps to avoid skills mismatch.
- v. Policymakers must ensure retention policies or strategies are reviewed, updated, funded, and integrated into the municipality's broader governance framework.
- vi. Municipalities should invest in mentorship programmes, improving succession planning, capacity building and continuous training to boost employees' capabilities.
- vii. Succession planning should be prioritised, focusing on identifying and developing future leaders.
- viii. Leadership development programmes should emphasise creating an inclusive and supportive organisational culture to minimise turnover intentions.

### *Limitations of the study*

The secondary data utilised in this study will not be generalised. They will offer a comprehensive overview of the issue of institutional knowledge loss in South African municipalities resulting from employee turnover. Secondary data offers insights and facilitates a comprehensive literature search; nevertheless, it restricts the acquisition of primary data necessary for more specific and current information. The approach mitigated this constraint by utilising fresh and pertinent secondary data delineated from 2019 to 2024. This work addressed selection bias in document analysis while reading articles from reputable journals. Notwithstanding the comprehensive search conducted in the study, the availability of documents or the researcher's viewpoint may have influenced the selection process. The conclusions are constrained by the interpretations of qualitative researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2021). A transparent and systematic strategy with well defined inclusion and exclusion criteria mitigates bias and ensures the credibility of the study. This study acknowledged the following limitations while reporting on employee turnover and its implications for organisational knowledge across South African municipalities, notwithstanding these constraints. (i) The reports obtained from DPSA, the Department of Labour, and certain municipal websites do not specify which municipal department experiences the highest turnover rate; and (ii) a limited number of municipalities documented the reasons for employee departures, including dismissals, contract completions, retirements, and resignations, among others. Consequently, the study offers a comprehensive and sophisticated theoretical and practical analysis to inform future research and policy.

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