

# Connecting the Dots: A Theoretical Review of Human Resource Practices, Employee Engagement, and Service Delivery in Local Municipalities of Mpumalanga, South Africa

LZ. Mkhabela<sup>1</sup>, AK. Isabirye<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*Local municipalities in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, face the challenge of meeting increasing service delivery demands while navigating a dynamic operational environment. This research reviews the critical connection between human resource (HR) practices, employee engagement, and effective service delivery within the local government sphere in the province. The research employs qualitative methods of a literature review genre. Scholarly literature was obtained from search engines like Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, from Statistics South Africa reports, the Auditor-General and Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA). The research used specific search terms including worker empowerment, employee engagement, recruiting, HR management and capacity building to find relevant scholarly and context-specific sources. Results show that HR practices in Mpumalanga municipalities are mainly fragmented and reactive, leading to erratic employee engagement and diminishing organizational efficiency. The research highlights the need for a strategic restructuring of HR processes, proposing a combination of employee engagement into the development of organizational goals. It recommends well-structured job descriptions harmonized with municipal requirements, multi-channel recruitment strategies, and systematized selection guidelines. Additionally, the study underscores the need for thorough engagement frameworks integrating fair compensation, performance management connected to strategic objectives, and employee wellness initiatives. The review deduces that proactive, strategically coordinated HR practices are necessary for enhancing continuous employee engagement and, eventually, augmenting the quality and consistency of public service delivery within Mpumalanga's local municipalities.*

**Keywords:** Human Resources, Employee Engagement, Service delivery, local Municipalities, Mpumalanga, South Africa.

## Introduction

Global organizations recognize that top HR practices combined with deep employee involvement create vital foundations which produce exceptional services that drive organizational success. Research evidence shows that employee engagement leads to increased productivity and creates essential service delivery channels for outstanding client and community service (Gargantini et al., 2022; Chiwawa, 2022; Jin & MacDonald, 2017; Isabirye & Moloi, 2025). Effective institutions depend on employee engagement as their main force which drives innovation while satisfying stakeholders and producing enduring socio-economic benefits in both public and private sectors (Schiuma et al., 2022). The African region together with developing nations recognize HR practices as essential drivers that enhance public sector operational efficiency and service delivery. Public service delivery by African municipalities becomes more complex because they must address unique socio-economic requirements of growing community needs and limited resources. Employee engagement generates beneficial performance results yet research has not resulted in substantial progress of complete HR methods for these particular situations (Alinda & Nakalema, 2021). The inability of local governments to adequately utilize their human resources leads to service delivery breakdowns which sustain poverty cycles and damage public trust. The Mpumalanga Province shows the most critical requirements and difficulties.

## Significance in Mpumalanga, South Africa, and Globally

The three districts and seventeen local municipalities of Mpumalanga which serve mostly rural areas reflect the public sector problems that exist at both national and international levels. The combination of structural problems related to unemployment and resource scarcity exists alongside organizational issues which

<sup>1</sup> Vaal University of Technology, Faculty of Management Sciences, Vanderbijlpark. Email: mkhabelazondi@gmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2941-6451>

<sup>2</sup> Vaal University of Technology, Faculty of Management Sciences, Vanderbijlpark. Email: isabiryeaki@gmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3601-2241>

include low employee morale, ineffective HR management and high staff turnover rates (Masiya, Davids & Mangai, 2021; Mashele et al., 2021). The municipalities, Bushbuckridge and Emalahleni, show these problems through their reports of food insecurity and unreliable water supply and social disturbances (Daily Maverick, 2025; Auditor General, 2023/24). The post-2005 basic infrastructure growth has not resolved the ongoing service delivery problems which continue to trigger protests and intensify public discontent (Shopala & Juta, 2024).

Public sector organizations across the world understand the need to build workforces which demonstrate both high performance and employee engagement. The African continent has shifted its attention toward professionalizing public workers and implementing HR strategies to deliver better citizen results because state capacity remains limited by historical challenges and resource constraints (Jha & Kumar, 2016; Hameduddin et al., 2022; Jain & Khurana, 2017). The municipalities of South Africa and Mpumalanga have not established enough HR practices that use employee engagement as their foundation to improve service delivery.

### **Problem Statement**

The interdependent connection between effective HRM, employee engagement, and service delivery is broadly recognized, nevertheless, there is a distinct gap in comprehending how distinct HR practices, when adapted to the circumstances of Mpumalanga's municipalities, can noticeably augment engagement and, by expansion, service delivery.

Current frameworks fail to consider the specific challenges of rural, resource-poor settings, which lead to poor or ineffective implementation. The ongoing gap between municipal capacity investments (financial and infrastructural) and service delivery outcomes indicates that HR-related issues such as the absence of professionalization, insufficient skills development, unresponsive performance management, and weak employee motivation have not been adequately explored or addressed (Bizana, Naude, & Ambe, 2015; Chen & Peng, 2019; Skosana, Maleka, & Ngonyama-Ndou, 2021).

### **Purpose and Objectives**

This investigation aims to deal with knowledge inadequacies in HR practices and employee engagement pertaining to service delivery across Mpumalanga local municipalities through a comprehensive review of theoretical research. The explicit aims are to: i). Conduct a thorough examination of studies on HR practices and employee engagement systems; ii). Establish the service delivery outcomes that result from employee engagement mechanisms in Mpumalanga local municipalities. iii). Develop recommendations based on research evidence which helps HR practices to enhance employee engagement for better organizational results.

### **Research Methodology**

The research took place in local government institutions throughout Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. The research applied qualitative methods to study how human resource practices affect employee engagement and municipal performance (Oranga & Matere, 2023). The research aimed to evaluate current human resource practices alongside developing recommendations to improve employee engagement and performance results for Mpumalanga municipalities.

We conducted an extensive literature search to obtain relevant information by examining government websites, peer-reviewed academic journals and specialized databases. Our research examined different fields that included recruitment and selection, performance management as well as employee engagement, training and development, and the wider research field. The extensive literature review aimed to discover effective employee engagement strategies which could be adapted for Mpumalanga municipal implementation. We sorted and evaluated relevant themes, strategies and practices during this analysis to produce significant findings from the literature. The research team collected literature from three main academic search engines which included JSTOR, EBSCOhost and Google Scholar. The research used

multiple general keywords such as "human resource practices", "employee engagement", "municipal performance", "Mpumalanga, municipal human resource context", "performance management system", and multiple qualitative research-related terms. Indeed, the outputs of this qualitative research reflect a rigorous examination of human resource practices as they pertain to municipal employees in Mpumalanga Province, incorporating insights from an array of academic contributors in the fields of employee engagement and municipal performance.

### **Selection Criteria**

Our selection of materials focused on articles and reports and datasets which examined human resource practices and employee engagement, and performance metrics in municipal settings. Our selection criteria included municipal mandates together with service delivery, skills development, financial management, inter-community relations and communication, and performance management aspects. Our literature review selection process included a requirement that all sources must be from the last ten years to avoid using outdated data. Our research focused on empirical studies and theoretical documents, while prioritizing peer-reviewed articles and government reports, and policy statements that provided reliable information about human resource practices and their relationship to employee engagement in local governance systems.

Our research study used 66 articles from an initial 81 downloads which addressed human resource practices and employee engagement, training and development, municipal performance and financial management, and qualitative research methodologies. Articles that were either focused predominantly on the private sector or centered on contexts outside of Mpumalanga Province were excluded, as were those that exceeded our specified time threshold. This qualitative study employed thematic analysis to distill and interpret the data collected from peer-reviewed articles, municipal policies, and various academic and governmental reports, including the Auditor General's reports and Census data.

### **Limitations of Methodology and Search Criteria**

The research had a significant limitation because it did not include information about private sector practices and human resource frameworks used in other provinces. Our research concentrated on public sector entities in Mpumalanga but we did not consider successful private sector organizations or best practices from other municipalities outside the province which might have limited our research findings. The private sector's performance-driven culture which focuses on wealth generation offers important lessons that could benefit municipal operations particularly in terms of employee engagement, customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. Similarly, municipalities in other provinces, although operating under distinct circumstances, may possess transferable practices due to their collective constitutional mandates aimed at community development and service delivery. As municipalities strive for self-sufficiency—aiming to generate their revenue streams—incorporating proven private sector employee engagement strategies might enhance the operational effectiveness of human resource units in Mpumalanga.

### **Rigour and Trustworthiness**

Qualitative studies require both rigour and trustworthiness to validate research findings because they establish the credibility and reliability of research results. The academic community has developed different methods to maintain methodological integrity which include both structured checklists and flexible guideline-based approaches for peer reviewers (Ahmed, 2024; Johnson, Adkins & Chauvin, 2020). The research established credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as criteria to validate its trustworthiness. Our analysis relied heavily on peer-reviewed articles and empirical research recognized for their scholarly rigour. This included government reports, such as those from the Auditor General and Statistics South Africa, which were scrutinized for reliability according to the standards set forth in the South African Constitution. Every source received thorough evaluation for its relevance and credibility through a uniform assessment method that applied to all literature used in the study. The filtering process was explicit, ensuring clarity in the rationale for exclusion based on our defined parameters.

## **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review: Linking HR Practices, Engagement, and Service Delivery**

Local municipalities in Mpumalanga, South Africa, experience persistent challenges of delivering reliable and high-quality public services due to resource limitations, complex socio-political conditions, and mounting citizen expectations. The public sector has identified human resource (HR) practices and employee engagement as key levers to enhance service delivery performance. However, the mechanisms through which HR practices foster engagement and how this, in turn, translates to improved public service delivery are theoretically and empirically underexplored—especially within the South African municipal context. This review synthesizes extant literature and theoretical perspectives, proposing a cohesive understanding of the HR–Engagement–Service Delivery nexus, and positioning it within the South African local government context.

### **Conceptualising Employee Engagement: Definition and Dimensions**

The concept of employee engagement has transformed from its basic roots in satisfaction and organisational commitment into a broader concept which includes physical, emotional and cognitive investment in workers (Sumatra et al., 2023; Leijdekker, 2017; Malik, 2018). Three core dimensions typically define engagement: vigor (high energy and mental resilience), dedication (enthusiasm and sense of significance), and absorption (being fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work) (Lee et al., 2016). These attributes not only enhance individual performance but, collectively, create a more dynamic and responsive organisational culture capable of delivering superior service outcomes (Leijdekker, 2017; Malik, 2018). Contemporary research recognises that engagement is dynamic, fluctuating in response to contextual and organisational factors (Nor, 2025), thereby underscoring the importance of strategic HR practices tailored to foster engagement in the unique environment of local municipalities (Chen & Peng, 2019).

### **Human Resource Practices as Drivers of Engagement**

Effective HR practices act as building blocks for fostering employee engagement. Institutions implement Recruitment and Selection as key HR practices to match organizational values and goals with employee beliefs which create initial employee engagement (Chovarda et al., 2021). Training and development as an HR practice enables employees to develop new skills which leads to increased feelings of value and readiness (Nor, 2025). Thirdly, performance management provides regular, constructive feedback and recognition, aligning individual contributions with broader municipal objectives (Isabirye & Moloï, 2025). Regarding rewards and recognition, both financial and non-financial rewards signal value, increasing morale and reinforcing commitment (Hanaysha, 2016) among the employees. The two-way communication approach fosters open dialogue, inclusivity and a sense of belonging which are crucial for building trust and engagement (Gitonga et al., 2024). These HR practices when implemented with purpose create an environment that fosters employee engagement which is vital for delivering public services effectively.

Key HR practices include Recruitment and Selection which ensure alignment between organisational values/goals and individual employee beliefs, fostering engagement from the outset (Chovarda, 2021). Secondly, Training and Development as an HR practice support ongoing skill acquisition and personal growth, contributing to feelings of value and readiness (Mampuru et al., 2024) among employees. Thirdly, performance management provides regular, constructive feedback and recognition, aligning individual contributions with broader municipal objectives (Isabirye & Moloï, 2023). Regarding rewards and recognition, both financial and non-financial rewards signal value, increasing morale and reinforcing commitment (Kumar, 2022; Clack, 2021) among the employees. Finally, a two-way communication encourages open dialogue, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging, essential for engagement and trust (Cloete, 2021). When implemented purposefully, these HR practices create a fertile environment for employee engagement, which is integral to effective public service delivery.

## Theoretical Lenses: Illuminating the HR–Engagement–Service Delivery Nexus

The analysis of HR practices and their impact on employee engagement and service delivery in local municipalities requires strong theoretical foundations. Three prominent theories provide complementary lenses: i). Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) Theory, ii). Social Exchange Theory (SET), and iii). Public Service Motivation (PSM).

The AMO theory demonstrates that employees achieve effective performance through possessing Ability (skills and competencies) and Motivation (incentives and drive) and Opportunity (participatory avenues) to contribute (Cui & Yu, 2021). The combination of training as an ability-enhancing practice with rewards as motivational tools, and communication structures as opportunities for meaningful involvement, impacts positively on performance. The municipalities of Mpumalanga need AMO-aligned HR strategies to address skill shortages and disengagement because this approach leads to better engagement which is essential for delivering high-quality services. The theory provides a complete framework to assess HR practice design, and implementation effects on employee engagement which directly affects organizational effectiveness and service delivery results (Cui & Yu, 2021).

SET provides an interactional perspective, asserting that productive employment relationships are built upon reciprocity and mutual obligation (Thomas & Gupta, 2021). When employees perceive organisational support (through fair rules, transparent procedures, recognition, and developmental opportunities), they reciprocate with commitment and extra effort (Ahmad et al., 2023). HR practices that signal investment in employees (e.g., training, recognition) foster not only engagement but also retention, an important consideration amid high public sector turnover. South African municipalities face employees who need to manage multiple stakeholder demands while working with restricted resources, yet SET shows that employee support leads to performance beyond job duties which enhances local government service delivery.

The PSM theory investigates how public servants find meaning in their work through intrinsic motivation while HR practices need to match these values according to Ripoll & Ritz (2021) and Syamsir (2023). The sense of purpose and social value in their work activities serves as a source of engagement for municipal staff members. Public service ideals become more prominent when HR practices include participative management and values-based recruitment and opportunity for community impact which leads to higher engagement, better municipal service delivery quality, and responsiveness. The complex community dynamics and service focus of Mpumalanga's municipalities make PSM an appropriate framework for understanding how HR policies can be tailored to harness and sustain the intrinsic engagement of public employees.

The interplay of AMO, SET, and PSM presents a multi-dimensional theoretical scaffolding for connecting the dots between HR practices, engagement, and service. AMO shows how HR practices stimulate engagement, SET explains why engaged behaviours emerge through reciprocal exchanges, and PSM articulates what unique motivational factors drive public sector employees. As far as Mpumalanga is concerned, this integrative lens accounts for practical, relational, and moral foundations underlying effective service delivery.

## Human Resource Practices in Local Municipalities

High-performing local government institutions depend on effective Human Resource (HR) practices as their fundamental operational foundation. Local municipalities implement HR practices through coordinated activities, policies and processes which attract employees while developing them as motivation for organizational performance, and public service delivery excellence. The typical HR practices include recruitment and selection, employee training and development, performance management, rewards and recognition, employee wellness, two-way communication, and participative management systems. Local municipalities in Mpumalanga, South Africa face difficult socio-economic circumstances because they have restricted funding, unaddressed infrastructure needs, high joblessness and demanding community service requirements.



The literature indicates that strategic HR practices are increasingly recognized as key to overcoming these barriers (Houston & Kanyane, 2022; Cloete, 2021; Chiwawa, 2022) for they enhance employee engagement. Indeed studies underscore that municipal success hinges on employees' engagement, (the extent to which municipal employees are emotionally and cognitively invested in their tasks and organizational goals). Engaged employees demonstrate higher morale, improved productivity, and a proactive approach toward community-oriented service (Gargantini et al., 2022; Cloete, 2019; Isabirye & Moloi, 2025). But engagement in several municipalities in the province is not easily realized as many municipalities in Mpumalanga struggle with underdeveloped human resource departments and insufficient training programmes, which limit employees' ability to adapt to evolving service demands (Schiuma et al., 2022; Akpalu & Markom, 2022).

Furthermore, available literature indicates the role of management in enhancing employees' engagement. The impact of immediate supervisors on employee engagement is particularly pronounced in local government settings and cannot be overemphasized as they serve as the direct link between HR policies and everyday practice. Their commitment to communication, support, and empowerment is essential for fostering a positive work environment (Kisi, 2024; Jin & MacDonald, 2017). However, in many cases municipal management rarely communicates and supports the implementation of HR practices to ensure employees' engagement.

Municipalities also face high employee turnover rates, especially among skilled professionals attracted by better opportunities in the private sector or larger metros. HR strategies that offer meaningful recognition, career progression, and a sense of purpose effectively improve employee retention and service continuity (OECD, 2015; Nor, 2023). In addition, adverse factors like limited financial resources, inconsistent political leadership, and sometimes fragmented administrative processes do undercut even the best-designed HR strategies. However, where municipalities have successfully aligned HR practices with broader institutional reforms—such as through robust performance management, effective communication, and participative leadership—measurable improvements in workforce engagement and service outcomes have been observed (Houston & Kanyane, 2022; Ariusni et al., 2024).

### **The Significance of Effective Human Resource Practices**

Organizational success depends heavily on effective human resource (HR) practices particularly in local municipalities which handle complex service delivery needs (Karim et al., 2021; Malik, 2018; Bratton et al., 2021). The multiple HR functions including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, rewards and recognition, employee participation and employee relations, directly affect employee engagement which leads to better quality and consistent public services.

### **Recruitment and Selection**

The foundation for employee engagement emerges from strategic and merit-based recruitment and selection because these practices match organizational values with new hire competencies (Lokke et al., 2023; Karim et al., 2021; Asongwe, 2023). The process of identifying and recruiting candidates who possess technical qualifications and cultural compatibility leads to higher job satisfaction and employee engagement from the beginning. The use of well-defined job descriptions together with transparent selection criteria and standardized assessment methods helps clarify expectations which reduce performance and engagement problems (Torrington et al., 2020).

The effectiveness of recruitment and selection as HR practices determines the quality and sustainability of hiring decisions that municipalities make. Organizations that conduct thorough selection procedures will draw candidates who match the organization's values and possess necessary skills and experience which leads to better organizational performance (Lokke et al., 2023; Torrington et al., 2020). Staff members, who match their roles, achieve better performance results and produce higher productivity levels. Local governments achieve better employee engagement and job satisfaction through alignment of recruitment and selection practices with their organizational values and culture.

## Training and Development

Employee training and development through continuous investment strengthens engagement because it addresses both changing skill needs and individual development goals (Gargantini et al., 2022; Jin & MacDonald, 2017). Learning initiatives that are well-structured both improve performance capabilities and demonstrate organizational commitment to employee advancement which increases motivation, loyalty and discretionary effort (Jain & Khurana, 2017). Municipalities need to actively prepare their employees for the changing requirements of community service delivery. Indeed, Investment in employee training and development has emerged as a paramount priority (Gargantini et al., 2022; Chiwawa, 2022; Jin & MacDonald, 2017), especially within municipal settings searching for effective talent management strategies (Mvuyana, Biyela & Ndlovu, 2021). Growing concerns regarding a lack of skilled workers, which often results in subpar performance (Hanaysha, 2016), have underscored the importance of employee development (Govender, 2017; Mamokhere, 2020). Engaged employees are thus better equipped and more enthusiastic about contributing to high-quality service delivery and innovation in municipal operations.

## Performance Management

Local municipalities need performance management systems as essential tools to achieve both individual and organizational success. Performance management systems function as active frameworks which both clarify expectations and motivate employees while linking their individual work to municipal strategic goals (Isabirye & Moloi, 2025). The combination of regular appraisals with ongoing constructive feedback and diverse recognition mechanisms through effective performance management practices create a foundation for employee engagement by building clarity, trust and promoting growth culture (Mahmud et al., 2019). A well-developed performance management system actively involves municipal staff members through clear performance expectations and immediate relevant feedback. Employees who receive recognition through formal awards or informal acknowledgments develop stronger feelings of organizational value and membership (Ripoli & Ritz, 2021). The recognition process simultaneously enhances employee morale while motivating staff members to dedicate their full energy toward municipal priorities. Furthermore, participatory performance management practices give employees a voice in setting goals and evaluating outcomes, which foster ownership and intrinsic motivation. Opportunities for professional development, tied to performance outcomes, create a continuous learning environment in which employees are encouraged to grow their skills and competencies (Adaobi et al. 2022).

Effective performance management enables local governments to achieve a high employee engagement level which directly improves both service delivery quality and responsiveness. Municipal employees who demonstrate engagement show higher levels of discretionary work effort, public value commitment and active community need response. The establishment of accountability through transparent fair appraisal processes enables employees to innovate while resolving local challenges efficiently (Akpalu et al., 2022). Performance management serves as a strategic tool which links personal employee motivation to municipal-wide outcomes beyond its role as a bureaucratic procedure. Local municipalities achieve better public service delivery through enhanced employee engagement which leads to reliable and responsive citizen-centered services.

## Rewards and Recognition

Reward systems that include financial and non-financial incentives serve to strengthen both desired behaviors and desired outcomes. Municipal organizations should recognize and compensate their public servants because such recognition demonstrates their work value and builds an appreciation culture. Organizations that celebrate achievements and provide fair rewards create intrinsic motivation which leads to higher employee morale and increased engagement (Jo & Shin, 2025).

## Employee Participation and Relations

Employee voice development through decision-making participation creates a sense of partnership which Malik (2018) identify as essential for engagement. Open communication practices combined with teamwork

and constructive labor relations build mutual trust which enables fast resolution of workplace issues thus supporting resilient and responsive municipal service delivery (Ennis et al., 2018).

### **Connecting HR Practices, Employee Engagement, and Service Delivery**

The effectiveness of each HR practice depends on its integration into a unified system which supports employee development throughout their lifecycle. The recruitment process selects people who match organizational values while training prepares them to handle changing challenges, performance management maintains accountability and rewards achievements, and participation enables collaboration. The combined effect of these practices leads to high employee engagement which characterizes employees who show enthusiasm, commitment and exceed basic performance expectations. Studies by Ennis et al. (2018); Gitonga et al. (2024) and Isabirye and Moloi (2025) demonstrate that employee engagement leads to better productivity and increased initiative, higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Local municipalities demonstrate this engagement through their efficient and ethical service delivery, their ability to respond to community needs and solve problems proactively. Municipal organizations which focus on connecting effective HR practices will develop engaged workforces that deliver sustainable high-quality services to their communities according to Govender (2017) and Mamokhere (2020).

### **The Mpumalanga Experience**

The local municipalities of Mpumalanga offer important insights into the current problems and future opportunities within the human resources management of public services. Municipal leaders in Mpumalanga have begun to understand that HR capacity investments through strategic recruitment, continuous training, and transparent performance management lead to a more motivated and aligned workforce (Mashele, Rachidi & Mokoena, 2021). Municipalities that foster two-way communication through community-focused engagement initiatives along with employee empowerment lead to higher staff morale alongside improved community trust and satisfaction with municipal services (Cloete, 2021).

Performance management serves as the primary tool for creating this beneficial cycle. According to Cloete (2021), Municipalities in Mpumalanga that adopt open and inclusive performance management practices generate better outcomes for their employees and their communities. Employees become more engaged in their roles and provide better service when performance management systems deliver clear development-oriented feedback that demonstrates fairness. The understanding of organizational purpose enables employees to move past basic compliance and start making meaningful contributions toward better service standards (Mashele, Rachidi & Mokoena, 2021).

Regular performance feedback along with professional growth opportunities and visible recognition enables municipal employees to become more committed and responsive, thus boosting the municipality's efficiency in service delivery. Mpumalanga municipalities that implement HR practices for employee engagement achieve higher productivity levels and gain improved public trust through their active communication and quick response to community needs (Cloete, 2021). This implies that employee engagement serves as an essential link that converts workplace motivation into enhanced external public value through better services.

There is however need to note that several major obstacles continue to block progress within Mpumalanga Province. A major problem exists between well-written human resource policies and their actual successful implementation. The human resources units of many Mpumalanga municipalities face resource constraints and limited capacity for data-based HR planning because of political work environments that disrupt stable leadership and talent distribution (Mahmud et al., 2019). The core role of employee engagement for municipal performance remains unaddressed by Mpumalanga municipalities since they face difficulties in achieving large-scale employee engagement (Mashele, Rachidi & Mokoena, 2021; Skosana et al., 2021).



The maintenance of high engagement remains difficult because strategic planning in recruitment and retention is insufficient; which leads to employee skills not meeting municipal goals. The intense competition between private sector companies and government agencies and local authorities creates recruitment difficulties that result in municipalities losing essential talent. This organizational misalignment creates two major problems: service delivery becomes ineffective, and employees lose both their engagement and sense of purpose during the early stages.

Additionally, Weak organizational systems further mar the training, retention, and the performance management landscape. In the absence of robust recruitment processes and development strategies, HR units in Mpumalanga have been unable to build an empowered, future-fit workforce that can rise to the needs of their communities. As a result, municipalities risk both stagnation in service delivery and falling internal morale. Furthermore, accessible pathways for career progression, which research identifies as drivers of job satisfaction and loyalty, have not been fully leveraged to retain top talent and promote commitment (Mashele, Rachidi & Mokoena, 2021).

These current deficits require HR managers in Mpumalanga to immediately work on improving both technical and relational capabilities of their units. The first step should empower supervisors to develop advanced communication and feedback abilities since these skills are necessary to motivate teams and help them develop and receive recognition (Isabirye & Moloi, 2025). The creation of work environments that promote psychological well-being and career mobility will be essential for sustaining employee commitment and enhancing job performance. The key to achieving higher employee engagement lies in implementing strong performance management systems that include ongoing training and professional development within a strategic HR framework. The improved service delivery and enhanced trust between municipalities and their communities result from this process (Cloete, 2021; Mashele, Rachidi & Mokoena, 2021). It can therefore be asserted that the connection between HR practices and public value, through employee engagement, enables Mpumalanga municipalities to establish sustainable citizen-centered local governance systems.

### **Employee Engagement in the Public Sector**

Employee engagement in local government and public sector organizations describes the emotional, cognitive and behavioral commitment that workers show toward their work responsibilities and their organization. According to Jha and Kumar (2016) engagement represents the process of organization members directing their personal selves toward their roles through physical, cognitive and emotional self-expression during work activities. As noted earlier, in local municipalities, engagement further encompasses employees' willingness to invest discretionary effort, align with municipal objectives, and contribute innovatively toward public service excellence (Chovarda & Theriou, 2021; Isabirye & Moloi, 2025). Commonly recognized dimensions of employee engagement in the public sector include: i) Vigour Energy, (persistence, and effort in daily work); ii) Dedication (A sense of significance, pride, and enthusiasm for one's role and objectives); and Absorption-Being fully concentrated and engrossed in work activities (Malik & Khan, 2023; Shellow, 2022). These dimensions are critical, as they contribute not just to individual satisfaction and well-being, but also to collective organizational performance; and especially pressing concern in resource-constrained municipal environments.

### **Factors Influencing Engagement: The Role of HR Practices**

Human resource practices serve as the fundamental factors which determine employee engagement according to widespread theoretical perspectives. Local municipalities use HR functions including fair recruitment, comprehensive induction, ongoing training, transparent performance management and recognition programmes to transmit organizational values; and develop employee sense of belonging (Bratton et al., 2021; Isabirye & Moloi, 2025). According to Malik (2018) supportive HR policies together with open communication and professional development opportunities lead directly to higher employee engagement levels.

Performance management plays a crucial role in municipal settings. Regular constructive performance feedback combined with achievement recognition leads employees to experience meaningful work while gaining creative contribution power (Sumatra et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2016). The availability of career advancement opportunities and internal job movements functions as a vital employee retention tool which strengthens workplace engagement (Obuobisa-Darko, 2023).

### Research findings from South African and Developing World Perspectives

Research has demonstrated that employee engagement produces superior organizational results. Organizations with high employee engagement levels achieve better performance results while showing enhanced resistance to organizational challenges (Karim et al., 2021; Chovarda & Theriou, 2021). In the South African municipal context, particularly in provinces like Mpumalanga, studies confirm that engaged employees are instrumental for successfully advancing municipal goals and improving service delivery (Mashele, Rachidi & Mokoena, 2021; Cloete, 2021). However, South African municipalities—like many counterparts in the developing world, face challenges including resource constraints, skills shortages, and political complexity (Cloete, 2019). Research conducted in Mpumalanga shows that municipalities with poor HR planning face challenges in hiring and keeping staff members; which leads to employee demotivation and reduced service delivery quality (Mashele, Rachidi & Mokoena, 2021). The research by Cloete (2021) and Mashele et al. (2021) demonstrates that HR practices which create positive work environments through two-way communication and empowerment lead to better internal employee morale and external community trust. Research conducted in developing countries confirms this pattern. In their research in Philippines for example, Sumatra et al. (2023) discovered that work engagement dimensions create positive relationships with better performance in local government units. In line with Sumatra et al. (2023), Shellow (2022) demonstrates that employee performance in public sector organizations depends on engagement which acts as a critical intervening factor between job satisfaction and employee performance.

Globally, Malik & Khan (2023) and Obuobisa-Darko (2023) stress the importance of positive emotions, strong leadership, and continuous feedback for sustaining engagement and, by extension, organizational effectiveness in public services. In sum, employee engagement in local municipalities is a multidimensional construct rooted in psychological investment and shaped by organizational context. Effective HR practices, especially those focused on inclusive performance management, ongoing learning, and staff recognition are theorized and empirically validated to drive engagement, which in turn is crucial for improved organizational and service delivery outcomes, particularly in South African and developing world municipalities.

### Connecting Employee Engagement to Service Delivery

Human resource and public administration scholarship demonstrates that employee engagement directly affects service delivery performance. Research defines engagement as a three-part construct which includes emotional commitment, cognitive dedication and behavioral involvement of employees toward their work roles and organizational goals (Chen & Peng, 2021; Karim et al., 2021). Local government employees who demonstrate engagement show three key characteristics: they provide extra effort and maintain their resilience through difficult times while actively working to serve the public. Multiple theoretical frameworks explain this relationship. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, organizations that provide adequate resources such as autonomy, supportive supervision, and development opportunities lead employees to become more engaged, resulting in better performance and service quality (Chen & Peng, 2021; Malik & Khan, 2023). On the other hand, the Social Exchange Theory demonstrates that municipal employees who feel that their municipality invests in them will respond with loyalty, effort and innovative behavior (Obuobisa-Darko, 2023). Municipal employees who demonstrate engagement tend to: i). Perform activities that exceed basic requirements when addressing community needs. ii). Respond constructively to challenges, iii). Exhibit greater ownership of service outcomes, and iv). Act as ambassadors for their organization (Sumatra et al., 2023; Isabirye & Moloi, 2025). There is need to note that the emotional connection and psychological investment fostered by engagement have a multiplier effect on individual and collective results; directly influencing the quality, reliability, and responsiveness of municipal services.

## Empirical Evidence: Connecting Engagement to Service Delivery Outcomes

The essential role of employee engagement in service delivery improvement receives continuous validation from empirical studies particularly within local government settings. Research conducted in developing areas shows that the performance of municipalities directly depends on the extent to which their employees are engaged in their work. The research conducted by Sumatra et al. (2023) demonstrated that improved employee engagement within Philippine local government units resulted in better service performance and enhanced community issue response and public satisfaction rates. The research by Alinda and Nakalema (2021) showed that Ugandan health sector frontline staff who was engaged produced better patient results and more efficient service delivery. In Mpumalanga, South Africa, research demonstrates both difficulties and opportunities that employee engagement presents. For instance, in their research, Mashele et al., (2021) showed that poor HR planning together with inadequate training and performance management created engagement problems which limited service delivery capabilities.

Public service delivery shows better consistency and improvement when municipalities prioritize employee motivation and provide development chances along with clear advancement paths to maintain essential staff members who demonstrate higher commitment levels (Isabirye & Moloï, 2025; Cloete, 2021). These observed patterns exist throughout broader African research findings. For instance research by Chatiza, Mubvundu, and Chisango (2021) in Zimbabwean tertiary institutions revealed that employee engagement boosted internal employee morale, leading to improved performance. Globally, Shellow (2022) demonstrated in U.S federal government contexts that employee engagement was a statistically significant predictor of both job satisfaction and service-related outcomes.

## Integrating the “Dots”: Synthesis and Gaps

The reviewed literature articulates a complex web of relationships between Human Resource (HR) practices, employee engagement, and service delivery within the unique environment of local municipalities. Different theoretical frameworks including Resource-Based View (RBV), Social Exchange Theory and Public Service Motivation (PSM) paradigm show that HR practices lead to employee engagement which then enhances municipal service delivery outcomes. The literature shows that strategic HR practices including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management and recognition systems serve as basic tools that directly affect employee attitudes and behaviours (Bratton et al, 2021; Thomas et al., 2021). Municipal employees who are engaged show higher levels of commitment, innovation and responsiveness which are critical for addressing the complex service delivery issues that local governments encounter.

The HR practices work together as interdependent elements. Performance management systems create feedback which together with recognition and career progression opportunities leads to employee belonging and motivation to excel (Nor, 2025). Training and up-skilling enable municipal staff to handle changing policy requirements and varied community needs. The literature shows that employee engagement functions as the key variable which connects HR practices to service delivery improvement (Torrington et al., 2020). The improved skills and motivation of engaged employees result in concrete public value outcomes which include superior service quality and higher citizen satisfaction and local government trust.

Having noted the above, it is important to indicate that several research gaps still exist regarding local South African contexts including Mpumalanga. The HR–engagement–service chain receives strong support from international literature yet there is a scarcity of empirical research on South African local municipalities. The socio-political dynamics together with resource constraints and historical decentralization legacies of Mpumalanga province remain underrepresented in research. Furthermore, there is limited exploration of how factors such as cultural diversity, union dynamics, and political interference affect HR effectiveness and employee engagement in municipal settings.

Additionally, studies often lack standardized measures of both employee engagement and service delivery outcomes, hindering cross-case comparability and synthesis. Apart from that, much of the research remains correlational, with insufficient longitudinal or case-study evidence to unravel causal mechanisms between

HR practices and municipal performance. Finally the literature frequently prescribes “best practice” HR models from private or Western public sectors, giving scant attention to practical challenges (e.g., skills deficits, funding shortfalls, policy ambiguity) unique to South African municipalities.

Key uncertainties persist regarding which bundles of HR practices are most impactful for engagement and service delivery in the realities of South African municipalities. There is also a paucity of research examining municipal employees’ own perspectives on the engagement–service link or analyzing differential impacts across urban and rural municipalities within Mpumalanga. Theoretical and international research indicates a direct link between strategic HR practices and service delivery improvement through employee engagement yet the South African municipal context shows substantial gaps in empirical evidence. Future research needs to adapt these relationships for local testing while focusing on specific factors that influence places such as Mpumalanga. Research of this kind is crucial for developing HR interventions which can drive service delivery transformation in South African municipalities.

## **Recommendations**

### **i). Strategic Human Resource Planning, Recruitment, and Selection**

A municipality achieves effective service delivery through its workforce when it effectively utilizes and directs the skills and competencies of its employees. Strategic HR planning needs to become the top organizational priority. The HR units of municipalities need to link their workforce planning directly to both organizational targets and projected community requirements (Lokke et al., 2023; Torrington et al., 2020). The achievement of alignment requires HR strategies that use data-based approaches while looking ahead to service demands which continue to evolve. The recruitment process needs to undergo redesign through the implementation of: a). Detailed job descriptions that present information about responsibilities, qualifications and performance targets to achieve clear roles and effective talent recruitment. b). The use of social media platforms together with professional networks and local outreach programs to expand candidate pools while supporting equity goals. c). Standardized selection instruments such as competency-based assessments and structured interviews, which promote fairness, transparency, and objectivity in hiring should be used (Karim et al., 2021). The professionalization of recruitment processes will enable municipalities to obtain the required talent needed for delivering high-quality services.

### **ii). Rewards and Benefits for Talent Retention**

Municipalities need to establish themselves as preferred employers in a competitive labour market by developing attractive value propositions for their current workforce and job candidates. The retention strategies need to be complete by including salary and benefits alongside recognition programs, career development and work-life balance initiatives (Gitonga et al., 2024). The rewards system should have the following characteristics: a). The system should provide equal opportunities with specific programs for different employee groups to address their individual requirements. b). The system should connect employee performance with service delivery results. c). It should also provide non-monetary benefits through professional growth opportunities and adaptable work schedules and employee appreciation initiatives (Jo, & Shin, 2025).. The organization needs specific skills development programs to fill existing gaps because they will help employees stay motivated while advancing in their careers (Mashele et al., 2021; Skosana et al., 2021).

### **iii). Leveraging Performance Management to Optimize Talent**

Performance management needs to evolve from basic compliance practices into an active system which supports ongoing improvement and individual development. Modern systems: a). The municipal strategic imperatives should guide both annual and developmental objectives (Mahmud et al., 2019; Syamsir, 2023). b). Performance outcomes should guide individual career planning, training needs and succession planning (Mahmud et al., 2019). Such a proactive approach not only drives productivity but also enhances employee engagement, loyalty, and upward mobility within municipal structures.

#### **iv). Employee Engagement Strategy**

A complete employee engagement framework should be established throughout the entire organization. Every departmental and operational practice should incorporate engagement principles to maintain continuous employee voice, aspiration and well-being assessment in municipal planning (Kisi, 2024; Lee et al., 2016). The following effective engagement practices should be implemented: a). The organization should conduct frequent employee surveys and establish multiple feedback channels. b). The organization should include staff members in both decision-making and transformational processes. c). The organization should establish pathways for employee recognition and self-determination. d). The alignment of engagement initiatives with municipal targets and budget limitations should be achieved through monetary and non-monetary incentives which include additional leave time and flexible work schedules and public recognition (Chovarda & Theriou, 2021). The core implementation of engagement as an organizational value leads to better service delivery, innovation and establishes an excellent organizational culture.

#### **v). Health and Safety Plans**

A workplace that is safe and healthy is essential for compliance as well as for the morale and trust of the workforce. Given the often high-risk, public-facing nature of municipal functions, HR units must champion holistic health, safety, and wellness programs that address both physical and psychological risks (Skosana et al., 2021). Effective practice should include: a). Policies on health and safety that are developed in collaboration with employees, b). Risk assessments and safety training should be done on a regular basis; and c). Employee wellness programs that are robust and address stress management, mental health and chronic disease prevention. A visibly safe work environment promotes higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational attachment and ultimately, improved public service delivery.

#### **Conclusion and Call for Future Research**

This theoretical review analyzed and evaluated human resource practices and employee engagement across local government settings which included municipalities in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. The research demonstrated how employee engagement functions as a key factor which links human resource approaches to service delivery results. The research combined South African and international studies to determine major challenges which impede effective employee engagement practices such as poor strategic HR planning and fragmented policy implementation and leadership capacity deficits, limited resources and the absence of relevant best practice models for South African municipalities.

Research shows that effective municipalities at home and abroad establish employee engagement fundamentals within their core strategic and operational planning structures. The integration of employee engagement objectives leads to employee empowerment and performance enhancement which enables municipalities to better achieve their public service mandate. The study demonstrates that once-off HR interventions will not lead to success because Mpumalanga needs end-to-end HR value chain reform for lasting performance enhancement. The adoption of data-driven workforce planning together with rigorous recruitment and selection, protocols competitive retention strategies, transparent performance management, mandatory engagement policies, and employee wellness culture stand as essential elements for HR success.

The review discovered multiple understudied issues which affect South African HR management. Research about local HR model, adaptations from international standards, as well as employee engagement measurement and socio-political influences on HR effectiveness remain limited in South African studies. The implementation of HR reform continues to face major challenges because of budget restrictions together with persistent skill deficits and restricted leadership potential.

Future research needs to address the existing knowledge gaps as a matter of urgency. The development of context-specific HR frameworks for South African local municipalities needs empirical research with a focus on the Mpumalanga region. Research that combines long-term observation with multiple research methods will produce detailed information about how HR practices affect employee engagement and



service delivery outcomes. The investigation needs to examine leadership factors together with organizational culture elements as well as system-level enablers and barriers. Research needs to assess both the practicality and effectiveness of requiring municipal policies to implement employee engagement strategies while establishing concrete resource allocations and performance monitoring systems.

Municipalities in Mpumalanga need to establish human resource management and employee engagement as strategic priorities in order to function as sustainable development drivers throughout South Africa. Local governments must establish best practices in engagement through rigorous context-aware research to develop high-performance workforces which address community needs through future HR interventions.

## References

- Adaobi, C.C., & Snr, C.O.K. (2022). Employees training and development on organisational performance. *Scholars Journal of Science and Technology*, 3(4), 749-764. <https://doi.org/10.53075/ijmsirq/56653356>
- Ahmad, R., Nawaz, M. R., Ishaq, M. I., Khan, M. M., & Ashraf, H. A. (2023). Social exchange theory: Systematic review and future directions. *Frontiers in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1015921>
- Ahmed, S.K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100051>
- Akpalu, V. L., & Markom, M.N.B. (2022). The impact of training and development on the performance of academic staff in Technical Universities in Ghana. A Conceptual Paper. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(1), 1793-1806. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i1/12115>
- Alinda, F., & Nakalema, I. (2021). Employee engagement in health care service delivery. *Ugandan Journal of Management and Public Policy Studies*, 21(1), 1-11. <https://ojs.umi.ac.ug>
- Ariusni, E., Bachtiar, N., & Andrianus, F. (2024). An empirical study on training and decent work for nonwage workers in Indonesia. *Contingent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2408063. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2408063>
- Arunmozhi, T. (2015). A study on employee engagement and involvement practices in ICICI Bank Ltd., Chennai. <https://hdl.handle.net/10603/40684>
- Arwab, M., Ansari, J., Azhar, M., & Ali, M. (2022). Exploring the influence of training and development on employees' performance: Empirical evidence from the Indian tourism industry. *Management Science Letters*, 12(2), 89-100. <https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2021.10.004>
- Asongwe, J. K. (2023). The significance of employee recruitment and selection process on organizational performance: A systematic literature review and meta-analysis. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Aston University.
- Auditor General. (2023/24). Consolidated general report on local government audit outcomes. MFMA 2023-2024. Pretoria: Auditor-General South Africa
- Bizana, N., Naude, M.J., & Ambe, I.M. (2015). Supply chain management as a contributing factor to local government service delivery in South Africa. *Journal of Contemporary management*, 12(1), 664-683. On-line version ISSN 1815-7440
- Bratton, J., Gold, J., Bratton, A. & Steele, L. (2021). Human resource management. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Chatiza, K., Mubvundu, M., & Chisango, S. (2021). Employee engagement and service delivery in tertiary institutions: case of a Public University in Zimbabwe. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(11), 79-102. <https://cedred.org/jais/index.php/issues>
- Chen, S. W., & Peng, J. C. (2019). Determinants of frontline employee engagement and their influence on service performance. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(5), 1062-1085. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2018.1505764>
- Chiwawa, N. (2022). Determinants of employee engagement in public sector organisations: Case of Zimbabwe', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 35(7) 749-764. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-03-2021-0073>
- Chovarda, M., & Theriou, G. (2021). The impact of training and development on work engagement: A Study in the banking sector. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 11(1): 374. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v11i1.18343>
- Chukwuemeka, O., & Endurance, G.W. (2022). Impact of training and development on employees' performance in Epenal Group Ltd. *International Journal on Integrated Education*, 5(5), 281-293. <https://doi.org/10.17605/ijie.v5i5.3095>
- Cloete, H.C.A. (2019). Guide to effectively manage human resource development in South African Local Government, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch
- Cloete, H.C.A. (2021). Ethical, accountable leadership needed to fix dysfunctional municipalities. Accessed from <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/Lists/news/DisForm.aspx?ID=8422>
- Cui, Y., & Yu, G. (2021). A cross-level examination of team-directed empowering leadership and subordinates' innovative performance: an AMO theory perspective. *International Journal of Manpower*, 42(7), 1257-1278. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijm-3-2020-0099>
- Deloitte. (2015). Becoming irresistible: A new model for employee engagement. Retrieved from <http://dupress.deloitte.com/dup-us-en/deloitte-review/issue-16/employee-engagement-strategies.html>
- Ennis, M.C., Gong, T., & Okpozo, A.Z. (2016). Examining the mediating role of effective and normative commitment in the relationship between transformational leadership practices and turnover intention of government employees. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 41(3): 203-215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2016.1256894>

- Gargantini, T., Daly, M., & Sherlock, J. (2022). Providing safe space for honest mistakes in the public sector is the most important predictor for work engagement after strategic clarity, Sustainability, 14(12), pp.1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14127051>
- Gitonga, C.K., Egessa, R.W., & Tibbs, C. (2024). Effect of career development on talent engagement in selected private technical and vocational education training institutions in Kenya. *African Journal of Empirical Research* 5(4): 1252-1265. <https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.5.4.103>.
- Govender, K. (2017). Empowering leadership and municipal service delivery in South Africa. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 40(5), 427-433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2015.1127964>
- Hameduddin, T., & Engbers, T. (2022). Leadership and public service motivation: a systematic synthesis. *International Public Management Journal*, 25(1), 86-119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2021.1884150>
- Hanaysha, J. (2016). Testing the effects of employee empowerment, teamwork, and employee training on employee productivity in higher education sector. *International Journal of Learning and Development*, 6(1), 164. <https://doi.org/10.101/j.sbspro.2016.07.139>
- Houston, G. & Kanyane, M. (2022). Municipal skills and capacity assessment study. Human Science Research Council.
- Isabirye, A.K. & Moloi, K.C. (2025). Unleashing employee engagement: Exploring the influence of human resource practices in a local government in South Africa. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 4(4), 436. <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v4i4.6747>
- Jain, S., & Khurana, N. (2017). Enhancing employee engagement through training and development. *Asian Journal of Management*, 8(1):1 <https://doi.org/10.5958/2321-5763.2017.00001.4>
- Jha, B., & Kumar, A. (2016). Employee engagement: A strategic tool to enhance performance. *DAWN: Journal for Contemporary Research in Management*, 3(2), 21-29. <https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net>
- Jin, M., & McDonald, B.D. (2017). Understanding employee engagement in public sector: The role of the immediate supervisor, perceived organizational support, and learning outcomes. *The American Review of Public Administration* 47(8), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016643817>
- Jo, H. & Shin, D. (2025). The impact of recognition, fairness, and leadership on employee outcomes: A large-scale multi-group analysis. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0312951>
- Johnson, J.L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). A Review of the Quality Indicators of Rigor in Qualitative Research. *Am J Pharm Educ*. 2020 Jan; 84(1):7120. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7120>
- Lokke, A., Villadsen, A.R. & Bach, S. (2023). Recruitment and selection in the public sector: Do rules shape managers' practices? 52(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00910260221146145>
- Karim, M.M., Bhuiyan, M.Y.A., Nath, S.K.D. & Latif, W.B. (2021). Conceptual framework of recruitment and selection process. *International Journal of Business and Social Research*. 11(02), 18-25.
- Kisi, N. (2024). 'Exploring employee engagement in the public sector: Antecedents, consequences and strategies', *Public Administration Issues*, 5pp. 111-129. (In English). <https://doi.org/10.1.17323/1999-5431-2024-0-5-111-129>.
- Lee, L., Kwon, K., Kim, W., & Cho, D. (2016). Work engagement and career: Proposing research agenda through a review of literature. *Human Resource Development Review*, 15, 29-54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484316628356>
- Leijdekkers, R. D. (2017). The Employee as active consumer of HRM: Explaining consumer behaviour using the AMO theory. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Twente.
- Mahmud, K.T., Saira Wahid, I., & Arf, I. (2019). Impact of training needs assessment on the performance of employees: Evidence from Bangladesh. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5(1), 17056627. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1705627>
- Makhaye, A., & Subban, M. (2024). Leading local economic development in the 'new' normal: Urban and rural challenges in the case of a district municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 13(1). [https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-ajgd\\_v13\\_n1\\_a7](https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-ajgd_v13_n1_a7)
- Malik, A. (2018). Strategic human resource management and employment relations. An International Perspective. Springer, 10, 978-981. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0399-9>
- Mamokhere, J. (2020). An assessment of reasons behind service delivery protests: A case of Greater Tzaneen Municipality. *Journal of Public Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15254228>
- Mashele, A.M., Rachidi, M.F., & Mokoena, S.K. (2021). An investigation of rewards and benefits preferences on the retention of talent in a public sector organisation in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. Published Online 1 September 2012. [https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-jpad\\_v56-n3-1-a6](https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-jpad_v56-n3-1-a6)
- Masiya, T., Davids, Y. D., & Mangai, M.S. (2021). Factors affecting the performance of South African municipal official: stakeholders' perspectives. *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance*. <https://doi.org/10.5130/cjlg.vi25.7701>.
- Mvuyana, Y.C., Biyela, A.C. & Ndlovu, I.B. (2021). Examining talent management as a strategy by the Zululand district municipality in improving service delivery. Published Online: 1 September 2021. *Journal of Public Administration*. [https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-jpad\\_v56\\_n3\\_1\\_a10](https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-jpad_v56_n3_1_a10)
- Nor, A.I. (2025). The effect of training on public service delivery effectiveness in public sector organizations: the mediating role of civil servants' performance. *Cogent Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2025.2466788>
- Obuobisa-Darko, T. (2023). Leader's role in employee performance and engagement. In *global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance*, 7319-7329. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66252-3\\_4245](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66252-3_4245)
- OECD. (2015). Lead, engage, perform: Public sector leadership for improved employee engagement and organisational success. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/pem/discussion-paper-pdf>
- Oranga, J. & Matere, A. (2023). Qualitative research: Essence, types and advantages. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1111001>
- Pongweni, T. (24 March 2025). Daily maverick: Malnutrition analysis in Bushbuckridge. [DailyMaverick.co.za](http://DailyMaverick.co.za)
- Ripoll, G., & Ritz, A. (2021). Public service motivation and human resource management. In *Research handbook on HRM in the public sector*, 245-259. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- SABC News. (2025, March 28). SABC News. <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/1033995-2/>.

- Saul, T.F., Shopala, M., & Mlambo, V.H. (2023). Human resource management system as enabling tool for good governance in South Africa's local government sector. *International Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 2023, 11(4), 514–520. <https://iahrw.org/our-services/journals/iahrw-international-journal-of-social-sciences-review/>
- Schiuma, G., Schettini, E., Santarsiero, F et al. (2022). The transformative leadership compass: six competencies for digital transformation entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 28(5): 1273–1291. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-01-2021-0087>
- Shabane, Z.W., Schultz, C.M., & van Hoek, C.E. (2017). Transformational leadership as a mediator in the relationship between satisfaction with remuneration and retention of artisans in the military. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(2) <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v15i0.923>.
- Shellow, A. (2022). The relationship between employee engagement, job satisfaction, and employee performance in the federal government. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Walden University.
- Shopala, M., & Juta, L. (2024). Political patronage in South Africa local government: Is the local government: Municipal Systems Amendment Act helping matters? *Journal of Public Administration*, 59. <https://doi.org/10.53973/jopa.2024.59.1.a9>
- Skosana, T.B., Maleka, M.J., & Ngonyama-Ndou, T.L. (2021). Predictors of effective commitment at municipalities in the Nkangala district, Mpumalanga. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19, 11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v19i0.1567>
- South Africa. (1996). The constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996. Section 152. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Statistics South Africa. (2024). [Census and survey reports]. [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)
- Statistics South Africa. (2025). The non-financial census for municipalities. [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)
- Sumatra, V. B., Deferia, E. S. N., Degoma, J. D., Santos, H. A. D., Ibañez, L. H. C., Jumawan, M. A. C., & Decena III, J. T. (2023). Employee engagement and performance of Barangay local government unit of Poblacion, Tacurong City. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8240340>, ISSN2822-4353
- Syamsir, S. (2023). The influence of public service motivation on service quality of civil servants in west sumatra Indonesia. *European Journal of Economics and Business Studies*, 9(1), 118–132. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejes.v5i1.p33-41>
- Thomas, A., & Gupta, V. (2021). Social capital theory, social exchange theory, social cognitive theory, financial literacy, and the role of knowledge sharing as a moderator in enhancing financial well-being: From bibliometric analysis to a conceptual framework model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 664638. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.664638>
- Torrington, D., Hall, L., Atkinson, C. & Taylor, S. (2020). Human resource management. Pearson UK.