

Implementing Knowledge Management Strategies in Mpumalanga's Local Government: From Silos to Synergy

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Abstract

This study examines the detrimental effects of silo mentality on knowledge management practices within Mpumalanga's local government. It seeks to propose strategies for enhancing synergy among municipal departments. The primary aim is to explore how fragmented operations hinder effective service delivery and to recommend mechanisms for fostering collaboration and integration across governmental entities. Utilising a qualitative literature review methodology, relevant data were sourced from authoritative publications, including those from South African Local Government Association (SALGA), the Local Government Sector Education Training Authority (LGSETA), and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), emphasising works published in the last ten years. Key findings indicate that current government operations suffer from significant duplication and inefficiency due to a lack of coordinated knowledge sharing, resulting in weak accountability and poor service outcomes for communities. The study recommends consolidating governmental mandates and budgets into a unified plan aligned with the District Development Model (DDM) and emphasises the necessity of sharing knowledge across departments to optimise performance. Additionally, it highlights the need for an empirical study to validate these findings and further explore practical implementations of knowledge management strategies in local government settings. This research advocates for a transformative approach to municipal governance that prioritises collaboration and data-driven decision-making for enhanced public service delivery.

Keywords: *Knowledge management, Strategy, Organisational learning, Human resource, Local Government, Mpumalanga Province.*

Introduction

The focus of this study is on knowledge management (KM) for sustained organisational performance and effective service delivery at Mpumalanga's local government in South Africa. Gonzalez and Martins (2017) assert that knowledge is an asset cultivated by the organisation over time through the coordinated efforts of its personnel within a framework that permeates the organisation. Lengrick and Lengrick (2002) characterise knowledge management as the field that advocates a cohesive strategy for finding, capturing, retrieving, sharing, and assessing an organisation's assets. These information assets may comprise databases, documents, policies and procedures, as well as uncaptured, implicit skills and experiences resident in individual workers. Valamis LXP (2002) states that knowledge management is the purposeful act of defining, structuring, maintaining, and sharing the knowledge and experience of employees within an organisation. According to Guru (2022), knowledge management encompasses a collection of strategies relating to the development, distribution, use, and management of the organisation's knowledge and information. It refers to a multidisciplinary strategy for achieving corporate objectives by optimally utilising information. KM often pertains to training and learning within a business or for its consumers. It consists of a cycle of creating, sharing, structuring, and auditing knowledge to maximise the efficacy of an organisation's collective knowledge (Knowledge Blocks for HR Knowledge Management, 2021). It leads to enhanced situational awareness and fosters avenues for learning about best practices, lessons learnt, and overall organisational progress. The primary objective of knowledge management is to enhance an organisation's performance and preserve information within the institution (Koenig, 2018). Thus, KM is an enabler of organisational learning (Guru, 2022). Three primary aspects of knowledge management are identified by Valamis (2022) as: (i) gathering information, (ii) storing knowledge, and (iii) disseminating knowledge. The purpose is to facilitate organisational learning and cultivate a learning culture where the

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exchange of information is encouraged. Knowledge management enables the organisation to provide staff with a searchable knowledge base containing policies, procedures, and other relevant content (Guru, 2022).

According to Alipour and Karimi (2018), organisational learning is not a location or an objective, but rather an atmosphere in which employees enhance their ability to achieve their desired outcomes. Consequently, learning and development involve three key activities: education, training, and development. Schepeers (2012) asserts that purpose coaching is essential for leveraging knowledge, as it aligns individuals with their paramount personal goals and aspirations while concurrently connecting them to the organisation's demands. Koenig (2018) as well as Panagiotopoulos, Zogopoulos and Karanikola (2018) purport that to foster organisational learning, the organisation needs to create a context whereby knowledge can be replicated and be conducive to successful research and development (R&D) which encapsulates rich, deep, and open communication and information access and to deploy it broadly across the organisation. Furthermore, Senge (2006) believes that conditions and enabling variables are necessary to build a knowledge development context, which spurs and ignites knowledge-based assets as growth engines to produce and unlock company value. Thus, the focus of KM process is on connecting people, causing them to think and act together (Gonzalez & Martins, 2017:252; Qutoshi & Rajbhandari 2016:13). According to Ungerer, Herholdt and Uys (2006) the core organisational capabilities and the growth engine of knowledge based assets are: (i) core capabilities as interrelated concepts to resources, core competence and dynamic capabilities; (ii) capability-based strategy; (iii) organisational core capability architecture; (iv) operationalisation framework for leveraging core capabilities from an intellectual capital perspective; (v) knowledge development as a key organisational capacity for a knowledge-centric institution; innovation capacity stimulation as a key organisational capacity for a knowledge-centric institution; and organisational enabling conditions for innovation. In such an atmosphere suggests Senge (1990:6), new and critical patterns of thought are nourished, and individuals continually learn how to learn together to acquire new skills, innovative knowledge, social, and ethical behaviours.

Mpumalanga is one of the nine provinces in South Africa. The municipal administration in Mpumalanga is structured into departments, units and sub-units. The municipality has departments such as community service, corporate services, finance, technical services, local economic development, environment and planning (Municipal Systems Act No. 32, 2000; Municipal Structures Act No. 117, 1998). Deriving from the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP) of the municipality, municipal departments develop their implementation plans. The practice is that each department extracts its Key Performance Areas (KAPs) from the SDBIP to develop independent individual implementation plans. At this stage of the process, there is no communication or coordination across departments. Within departments, different units plan and implement programmes independently from other units. These exclusively independent activities in departments and units lead to duplicated efforts and conflicting priorities (COGTA, 2020). There is no integrated implementation planning within and between departments. The IDP serves as a blueprint that guides municipal service delivery priorities and requires coordinated efforts in planning for the implementation of programmes and projects. Planning and implementation in silos result in conflicting actions and inefficiencies during the actualisation of service delivery priority.

Research indicates that all organisational activities aimed at improving the productivity and performance of groups and individuals can be classified as HRM's learning and development function elements in the municipality (Guru 2022; Koenig 2018; Gonzalez & Martins, 2017; Schepeers 2012; Ungerer, Herholdt and Uys, 2006; Lengrick & Lengrick, 2002). By sharing knowledge with employees, HR may reduce the time spent answering basic queries and help employees to locate answers that are relevant to them (Knowledge Blocks for HR Knowledge Management, 2021:1). It is up to the organisation to identify the two forms of knowledge (tacit and explicit) and design a procedure to manage this asset, that is, the KM process (Gonzalez & Martins, 2017). Drawing on extensive literature the purpose of this paper is to interrogate how the application of knowledge management strategies in Mpumalanga's local government may transform the institution from working in silos to synergy.

Problem Statement

Mpumalanga province is one of the nine provinces in South Africa, comprising 17 local municipalities. In the Mpumalanga local government, there are increasing apprehensions regarding the ongoing dependence on isolated entities that do not prioritise information transfer (Imhanzenobe et al., 2021; Bento et al., 2020). The disorganised character of local government operations adversely affects the quality and efficacy of services provided to communities. Silo planning obstructs service delivery by promoting fragmented planning, diminished coherence, and inadequate monitoring and assessment of municipal performance. Fragmented planning results in poor performance and a lack of capacity to deliver services in a municipal environment, leading to protests by dissatisfied communities (Parebes; Shongwe & Meyer, 2023; Municipal IQ, 2017 & Breakfast, Bradshaw & Bradshaw, 2019). Municipalities in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, exhibit analogous planning trends that, if not addressed through knowledge management techniques and coordinated planning and execution strategies, may result in a deterioration of municipal services. Moreover, the absence of coordinated planning and implementation of programmes results in delays in service delivery initiatives, inefficiencies, and insufficient responsiveness to community demands.

Siloed operations develop when separate departments and units undertake programmes independently, with no alignment of plans and objectives. This results in conflicting policies and inconsistent methods, adversely affecting the efficiency of service delivery (COGTA, 2020). In municipalities within Mpumalanga Province, the failure to disseminate organisational information both internally and externally is a primary factor hindering the provision of effective services to communities. The absence of coordination, information and knowledge sharing has led to bureaucratic inefficiencies, missed opportunities for integrated planning, and ultimately, an unacceptable level of services supplied to communities. The researchers argue that avoiding silos in governmental operations and functions leads to improved performance outcomes (Imhanzenobe et al., 2021; Bento et al., 2020).

Research Questions

- What is knowledge management, and how can HR change management strategies enhance a municipality's effectiveness?
- What knowledge management strategies can be used to improve delivery service in the local government?

Aims of the Study

The aims of the study are to:

- Describe knowledge management and HR change management strategies to enhance municipality effectiveness.
- Suggest knowledge management strategies that can be used to improve delivery service in the local government.

Theoretical Framework

The current study draws heavily from Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI Model of knowledge management. In 1995, two business school professors, Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, published *The Knowledge-Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*, which provides insight into how Japanese companies work and, most importantly, what enables Japanese businesses to *create* new knowledge (Kaur, 2020). SECI Model of knowledge management theory proposes that the ability to create, share, and apply new knowledge throughout a company is key to continuous innovation. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), organisations such as the local government can be transformed by embracing tacit knowledge from experience over explicit knowledge from manuals. The

authors also propose a 'middle-up-down' management model to create and share knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). The SECI stands for Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization, and it describes four distinct ways knowledge can be converted and shared within organisations to create coherence in processes and performance, involving the interplay of tacit and explicit knowledge (Hendersen & Callahan, 2023; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Tacit knowledge is acquired with little or no direct instruction, is practically useful, and cannot be fully articulated (Hendersen & Callahan, 2023; Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009, p. 641). By contrast, explicit knowledge can be expressed in terms of words or formulas and easily communicated. SECI includes four knowledge creation processes that can occur at the individual, group, or organisational level (Hendersen & Callahan, 2023). The Nonaka and Takeuchi model is one of the knowledge management models that can be applied in knowledge creation and conversion (Anggraini, 2018). The SECI Model is a framework that provides guidelines on how knowledge is created, managed, and shared to enhance performance for organisational outcomes (Farnese et al., 2019).

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), there are two types of knowledge, namely explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is often found in manuals and procedures. It is formal and systematic and easily communicated (Kaur, 2020:1-2; Nonaka, 2007). On the other hand, tacit knowledge is highly personal as it is learnt through experience only (Nonaka, 2007). This makes tacit knowledge difficult to formalise as one often cannot find the words to express the technical principles behind what they know (Nonaka, 2007). Thus, tacit knowledge can only be communicated to others indirectly, such as through metaphors and analogy (Kaur, 2020: 4). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), suggest that the creation of new knowledge is a spiralling process of interactions between explicit and tacit knowledge. However, many US companies have shown to be heavily reliant on explicit knowledge, such as “benchmarking” and “best practices” to help further their businesses (Kaur, 2020; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In contrast, Japanese firms often focus more on tacit knowledge and on the real-life application of creating knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nevertheless, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue that that the secret behind Japanese firms’ success is that they have mastered how to utilise tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge to create innovation in any organisation, whether it is from tacit to tacit, from explicit to explicit, from tacit to explicit, or from explicit to tacit. This led to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) proposing the Knowledge Spiral Model (Kaur, 2020).

Firstly, socialisation is the process of creating knowledge from tacit to explicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) describe socialisation as the process of sharing experiences and thereby creating tacit knowledge such as shared mental models and technical skills. Tacit knowledge can be shared in social interactions through observation, imitation, practice and participation in formal and informal communities (Yeh, Yeh, & Chen, 2012). Secondly, externalisation refers to the “process of articulating tacit knowledge into explicit concepts and metaphors” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). It is only when one can articulate their tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge that it can be shared throughout an organisation (Nonaka, 2007). Thirdly, combination is the transference of tacit to explicit knowledge, integrating and systemising concepts into a knowledge system with the help of different media, such as review reports and trend analysis (Siu, 2006; Yeh *et al.*, 2011). This allows the facilitation of passing on explicit knowledge (Siu, 2006). Lastly, internalisation refers to the “process of embodying explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge”, which promotes the concept of “learning by doing” (Siu, 2006:497). If one can internalise their explicit knowledge, then they will be able to convert it into tacit knowledge (Siu, 2006). Therefore, the Knowledge Spiral Model shows that explicit and tacit knowledge are not separate entities as the four processes continuously interact with one another (Kaur, 2020).

The four distinct ways of creating knowledge can be applied as follows in the local government. Socialisation (tacit knowledge) encompasses sharing knowledge through direct interactions among employees and municipal stakeholders, mentoring among employees and their supervisors. It is about relationship building, team effort, and fostering communication and common understanding, enabling individuals to benefit from each other’s knowledge, experiences, and insights. Socialisation is effective in building trust among municipal role-players and stakeholders. Externalisation (tacit knowledge) focuses on converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, often using models, theories, and other forms of representation. It is about making knowledge available and accessible to others for use to enhance

collaboration, communication, and to increase performance, allowing knowledge to be organised and shared more widely within the organisation and with important stakeholders. Combination (explicit knowledge) is putting together explicit knowledge into new knowledge that enhances cooperation and teamwork and propels productivity and improved performance. Internalisation (explicit knowledge), which is the last one, converts new knowledge back to tacit knowledge through practice, where employees apply it and it becomes part of their knowledge and experiences to be further shared with others and be organised and kept as an organisational asset. In various organisational settings, such as local government, this model illustrates how tacit knowledge (Kaur, 2020) (unspoken, intuitive knowledge) can be converted into explicit knowledge (documented information) that can be used to improve performance, facilitate innovation and continuous learning (Kaur, 2020).

The four processes above emphasise the dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge. Over time, knowledge is created, shared, and transformed within a spiral, enhancing organisational knowledge depth. For instance, in a municipal environment, evolving service delivery challenges if brought to the attention of the municipality (explicit knowledge), can lead to engagement, brainstorming and information sharing sessions between municipal leaders, employees and community members (tacit knowledge), encouraging further innovations and insights into how the emerging service delivery needs can be resolved (Hossain, 2016). A Community of Practice (CoP) suggests that knowledge is often shared through informal social networks and communities. These groups share a common interest and collaborate to deepen their understanding of a specific domain. Municipalities in Mpumalanga Province can be empowered through platforms such as departmental and Unit WhatsApp platforms where employees share activities, daily experiences, and solutions involving their work content, including interaction with communities and external stakeholders. This practice can foster collaboration among employees across different departments and units within municipalities. Leading to faster and effective sharing of information and knowledge that enhances organisational performance (Hill, 2025; Hossain, 2016).

Literature Review

In the knowledge economy, conversations inside and outside the organisation drive transformation and renewal in the generative learning culture. Knowledge management can be implemented via change management to choose a knowledge base, create success measures, and drive high adoption (Guru, 2022:2). According to Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) Knowledge Spiral Model, organisational development strategies that increase knowledge storage and reuse can help the HR department implement the KM process (Gonzalez & Martins, 2014: 249). KM will help organisations develop methods, tools, techniques, and values that promote knowledge flow between individuals and the retrieval, processing, and use of this knowledge to improve and innovate (Gonzalez & Martins, 2014: 249). Through process-based flow, Information Technology (IT) stimulates individual creativity to create new organisational values (Gonzalez & Martins, 2017:249). Thus, the HR department must prepare internally to share knowledge and apply it to improve organisational performance (Gonzalez & Martins, 2014). Team Leverage Edu (2022:1) states that human resource management involves effectively managing the staff in an organisation to gain a competitive edge.

Guru (2022:1) lists three knowledge management practices to boost corporate productivity:

(i) Encourage knowledge sharing - Foster a culture where employees freely exchange knowledge rather than hoarding it. Implementing knowledge management technologies makes knowledge easily accessible and usable.

(ii) Reward knowledge contributors to encourage knowledge generation. Implementing knowledge management technologies that enable easier identification can encourage additional knowledge contributions.

(iii) Create subtle reminders to check the knowledge base before asking queries to encourage high utilisation. This saves time and boosts efficiency.

If the organisation includes organisational learning, the knowledge management strategies above will enhance productivity and performance. Numerous studies show that leadership inspires people at all levels, influencing organisational learning. Research has shown that transformational leadership promotes organisational learning and change management (Khanal & Park, 2016). Continuous debate, discussion, communication, reflection, and reflexivity foster a learning culture among all members (Houck, 2018; Terblanche, 2017). According to Polston-Murdoch (2015), a culture of learning is based on shared values and ideas that shape how individuals and teams see, think, and act. Thus, Argyris and Schon's (1978) model of single-loop and double-loop learning can help the HR department understand how organisational learning sustains performance. Senge (2006) suggests five learning disciplines to spark organisational learning and generative thinking. These disciplines are shared vision, personal mastery, mental models, team learning, and systems thinking. To configure organisational learning, these disciplines must be implemented as a system that builds on each other (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Valamis LXP, 2022).

KM generally relates to customer and organisational training. Maximising an organisation's collective knowledge and sustained performance involves developing, sharing, structuring, and auditing knowledge (Valamis LXP, 2022). Argyris and Schon (1978) define organisational learning as the creation, retention, and transfer of knowledge inside an organisation, which improves with experience. The organisation can develop HR expertise in all areas to improve the institution. Examples include improving production efficiency or learning skills for efficient services and outputs. Individual, team, organisational, and interorganisational knowledge is developed (Senge, 2006). Guru (2022) proposes that knowledge management can improve organisational learning by building a knowledge-driven culture that values curiosity and receptivity to new ideas. Everyone must maintain the knowledge base and promote its use (Guru, 2022).

Knowledge Management Practices in the Local Municipality

The levels of service delivery in most municipalities in South Africa require that municipalities harness and integrate processes to increase efficiency and performance. Utilising KM practices to synergise operations in municipalities can build the culture of collaboration, communication, teamwork and consolidation of efforts towards better and effective services to communities. KM is a game changer everywhere it is embraced as it has the benefits of empowering municipalities with their own knowledge and experiences important in enhancing organisational response to community needs for services (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015; & Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022). Previous research on KM in South Africa reveals that public service municipalities, are yet to embrace KM practices. Currently, there are no elaborate empirical studies that point to the effective implementation of KM practices at local government settings (LGSETA, 2019). Despite the benefits of performance increase that comes with embracing KM practices, municipalities in South Africa have not made much progress in incorporating KM practices in human resources strategies. The initiatives to introduce measures to enforce comprehensive KM practices in municipalities are yet to be accepted and implemented (SALGA, 2018). The resistance that confronts attempts at introducing KM practices in most municipalities demands that more robust measures be put in place to encourage mandatory use of knowledge sharing to foster more collaboration and cooperation across departments and units in municipalities. In the City of Ekurhuleni, KM practices have been outsourced to external consultants instead of the internal HR unit (Mahlaule, 2022). The route of consultants complicated the implementation of KM, where they failed to navigate the contextual complexities of socio-cultural diversity, and the large number of stakeholders in the city, making it difficult to assess the available wealth of knowledge in the organisation (Mange, 2019).

The lack of interest in KM practices by municipal leadership means that employees are not motivated to commit to sharing their knowledge for the sustainability of municipalities. In the case of the City of Johannesburg (Mange, 2019) it was found that KM is integrated in the administrative structure of the city where a stand-alone department responsible for managing organisational knowledge in the metropolitan council is in place. Despite the efforts, there are challenges of a lack of support by the city's leadership, leading to a lack of resources to enable the implementation of KM practices. In addition to KM structures and resources, there must be a monitoring and evaluation system to track the effective implementation of KM practices in organisations (Mange, 2019). The lack of leadership support for initiatives aimed at

enhancing the utilisation of organisational knowledge has been widely reported in most municipalities in South Africa as one of the reasons for the weak delivery of services to communities. In the Eastern Cape, the study that was conducted in the Buffalo City Metropolitan revealed trends like the City of Johannesburg, and in the City of Ekurhuleni, where KM practices are not supported. Transparency and openness are embraced by KM practices. The discomfort with KM practices in most municipalities is caused by embracing principles of transparency and openness, to which politicians are uncomfortable, fearing that internal secrets might be exposed in the process. The hierarchical and bureaucratic leadership in most municipalities must be convinced to support KM practices for their municipalities and communities to benefit (Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020).

A study of seven local municipalities in Limpopo Province revealed that despite the proven benefits of KM practices, it does not embrace and encourage HR practitioners and is not supported at leadership levels as well. The study also found that in most municipalities, there is no adequate infrastructure to support KM practices (Dikotla, 2019). In the same way as in the metros above, in municipalities where attempts are made to embrace KM, there is resistance from executive authorities who do not provide the required support. The hostility against KM practices in municipalities makes it difficult for committed HR practitioners to introduce measures for embracing and integrating KM practices. Consequently, for KM practices to be integrated and their implementation to succeed in municipalities, it requires competent and experienced leadership across the organisation, the leadership that appreciates the value of knowledge as a competitive advantage for organisations (Hajric, 2018). The national strategy and framework that was initiated by the national government in 2020 to enforce KM in all government institutions remains a tool that, if enforced, leads to a broader acknowledgement of the contribution that KM practices can make towards improved performance of the public service and municipalities (Dayal, 2023).

The Role of Human Resource Management in Knowledge Management

KM is an important HR management technique used across organisations to maximise knowledge use. KM transforms rural South African municipalities into successful drivers for performance, transformation, and development (SALGA, 2018). Using ICT, local government can adopt KM approaches that recognise employees as creators and distributors of essential knowledge across companies. KM practises can help organisations solve problems and make decisions by making greater sense of their knowledge than traditional skills, data, and information (Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022). Local government KM comprises strategic organisation and use of intellectual assets like knowledge and expertise to improve service delivery and efficiency when shared and implemented organisationally. It involves recording, curating, and disseminating municipality data to improve performance and meet strategic goals (Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022). Municipalities may streamline operations, reduce redundancy, and cut administration expenses with KM. KM helps towns make good decisions by using freely available knowledge (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015; & Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022).

In towns that embrace KM, employees create and carry knowledge that improves performance when managed. Easy use tracking aids policy and program execution. Continuous performance monitoring and easy sharing of performance data are done. KM helps towns identify and meet community needs and include individuals in life-changing decisions, enhancing service quality and reliability. Municipalities boost productivity and creativity by promoting cooperation, collaboration, and information sharing. Implementing KM approaches in all organisational processes provides public servants with more learning opportunities as their work grows and they must be well-prepared. Municipal staff are better prepared to serve communities when they have organisational expertise. Employees adopt innovative collaborative learning methods in their organisation (Booi, 2023 & SALGA, 2018). Thus, KM practises are contextual and environmental depending on how ready institutions are to contribute and gain from improved outcomes (SALGA, 2018). KM practices can help businesses maximise performance by allowing employees to share critical knowledge across the institution. KM approaches in local government capture, organise, share, and use employee, community, stakeholder, and partner knowledge and expertise to improve performance.

KM is unique in that it values people as the most valuable workplace resource. Employee expertise helps municipalities deliver services, as it does other organisations (SALGA, 2018). KM systems provide fast, reliable decision-making and reuse institutional and employee knowledge and experiences to solve service delivery and organisational performance issues (Maramba & Smuts, 2022). KM uses workforce knowledge as the organisation's aggregate knowledge to achieve results. All municipal employees are potential contributors to the total body of knowledge and must be valued and encouraged to participate, contribute, and share their critical insights and experiences to optimise performance that benefits communities (SALGA, 2018). They can improve their skills and performance through best practices and teamwork, leading to employee job satisfaction. Despite the claimed beneficial results, KM contributes to performance; however, some researchers believe that most municipalities do not integrate KM methods (Booi, 2023). SALGA (2018) suggests that municipalities must implement KM practices. However, many municipalities have not adopted the knowledge management strategies and templates established and offered. All HR professionals who optimise employee performance to accomplish municipality goals are required to prioritise the municipality's KM commitment and practices.

According to Lengrick and Lengrick (2002:1), HRM can assist the municipality as follows:

- (i) HR should help the organisation articulate the purpose of the knowledge management system. Effectively framing the knowledge management issue, before deciding on a course of action is a crucial prerequisite for success.
- (ii) As a knowledge facilitator, HRM must ensure alignment among an organisation's mission, statement of ethics, and policies.
- (iii) HRM should also create the ultimate employee experience. That is, by transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through education, organisations must build employee skills, competencies, and careers, creating 'bench strength'.
- (iv) HRM must integrate effective knowledge sharing and usage into daily life. That is, knowledge sharing must be expected, recognised, and rewarded.
- (v) HRM must relax controls and allow (even encourage) behaviours that, in the clockwork world of industrial efficiency, never would have been tolerated.
- (vi) HRM must take a strategic approach to helping the organisation manage email, instant messenger, internet surfing, and similar uses of technology.
- (vii) HRM must champion the low-tech solutions to knowledge management. Although it should not ignore the high-tech knowledge management tools, HRM contains the expertise to develop low-tech knowledge-management strategies.

KM practices encompass activities and procedures followed to obtain and utilise existing knowledge and experiences of employees within an organisation (SALGA, 2018). These practices facilitate measures that embrace collaboration in municipalities, enhancing responsiveness to the service delivery expectations of local communities (Hill, 2025). Implementing and benefiting from effective KM practices in a municipal context takes various forms, consisting of Knowledge Sharing Platforms: ICT facilitates in organising (sharing, collaboration, categorising, and dissemination) and storing of knowledge, which is retrieved and utilised when needed as usable knowledge for organisational use. The creation of intranets or collaboration tools such as WhatsApp groups, Microsoft Teams or Slack, facilitates the sharing of knowledge across municipal departments, units and communities. Although most municipalities are currently using the tools, ICT constraints limit the benefits from KM practices, which include accessibility of knowledge among employees for problem-solving and organisational performance (Hill, 2025).

To enhance KM, the municipality could also implement knowledge management systems to catalogue, store, and retrieve valuable documents efficiently (Barbier & Tengeh, 2023). Document management

systems are developed to organise tender documents, employee information files, and community engagement correspondence, allowing quick access to crucial knowledge in the process. Investing in training and development would help the municipality leverage existing knowledge while up-skilling employees in new knowledge needed for organisational performance. Continuous learning initiatives are needed in the local government environment in Mpumalanga Province, where challenges of weak service delivery feature prominently and require urgent attention amidst growing pressure from communities that demand acceptable service delivery (Hossain, 2016).

In the researchers' schema, there is a need for the municipality to conduct regular audits of the available knowledge and current performance. Conducting regular audits is essential for identifying gaps in the knowledge and understanding of mechanisms to be employed to resolve community services challenges. In addition to addressing the skills needs of employees, municipalities need to utilise knowledge audits to ensure that critical information is available and accessible to all relevant stakeholders to avoid the risk of inadequate engagement with employees and communities (Barbier & Tengeh, 2023). The researchers argue that in addition to the benefits of embracing KM practices, municipalities can enhance performance through integrating good governance principles into their service delivery processes, as KM practices are compatible with good governance. Good governance endorses principles such as accountability, transparency, and community participation, which are emphasised in KM practices. While KM focuses on effectively managing organisational knowledge to improve service delivery and decision-making (Hossain, 2016), good governance and KM are intertwined as good governance relies on informed decision-making, transparency and efficient resource utilisation, which require effective knowledge management practices to be achieved (Dayal, 2023).

Key good governance principles in the municipal context include i) Accountability: being responsible for municipal service delivery actions and decisions the optimal performance of all available resources in the organisation. KM practices are important tools that enable the municipality to account for the decisions and actions taken in response to community needs, and redress where services delivered are not of acceptable standards. ii) Transparency: Openness about the municipal business, and access to information about municipal activities that impact the available resources and communities. Fostering community trust and participation in the processes of the municipality builds confidence in municipalities, leading communities to take ownership of the decisions and processes of their municipalities (Barbier & Tengeh, 2023). iii) Public participation: involving citizens and stakeholders in decision-making processes on the services that are prioritised for delivery through the municipal Integrated Development Plan creates stability and trust in municipal processes. Inviting community comments on decisions and processes that affect them inspires confidence among community members as they participate in the planning and implementation stages of service delivery decisions of the municipality. In the foreword of the annual performance plan for 2025/26 for municipalities in Mpumalanga, the MEC for Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (2026/26) states that municipalities the 7th provincial administration is committing to good governance, social justice, and economic progress, all centered around empowering municipalities through community participation (Hossain, 2016). Consequently, there is acknowledgement of the critical role communities play in creating high levels of engagement, accountability and organizational outcomes. Through public participation communities are empowered to contribute towards the governance of their municipalities. iv) Rule of law: Municipalities as a sphere of government is governed by a number of pieces of legislation including Municipal Systems Act, Municipal Finance management Act, Municipal Structures Act among others.

There has been growing concern over allegations of corruption in municipalities. Therefore, Government processes at municipal level must embrace the rule of law to inspire confidence and trust by communities. There needs to be adherence to legal frameworks and fair enforcement of laws that govern local government in order to promote stability and predictability of municipal processes. v) Effectiveness and efficiency: Effectiveness and efficiency is built were good governance principles are holistically integrated across service delivery strategies. Considerate optimal utilization of available municipal resources built the necessary ability to facilitate effective delivery of social services to communities. The resources include physical, financial, human capital, including employee knowledge and experiences. vi) Equity and

inclusiveness: Municipalities need to ensure that all citizens are treated fairly and have access to equal quality services regardless of their social status and background. Embracing social justice as proposed in the municipal performance plan seems to resonate with good governance principles that facilitate the creation of municipal settings that are responsive to community needs. vii) Responsiveness: The current instabilities in municipalities call for responsiveness to the service delivery needs of communities.

Evidence shows that most municipalities in South Africa continue to fail in responding to the basic services needs of communities, resulting in community protests (SALGA, 2018; & Hislop et al., 2018). Local government settings must be sensitive, accountable and responsive to the service delivery needs and concerns of the citizens. viii) Consensus Orientation: functional municipalities strive for consensus with all stakeholders and communities. Working collaboratively with communities and stakeholders creates certainty and predictability, resulting in community endorsement of municipal policy and decision-making processes' stability. Stable municipalities are those that value the role and contribution of communities and stakeholders in all important processes (Nciweni, 2024 & Hossain, 2016).

Addressing the Silos Obstacles and Creating Synergy

We contend that KM practices in municipalities can remove barriers to collaboration, cooperation, communication, teamwork, and consultation, and foster integration of government programmes and projects across the organisation. The practices can also facilitate the culture of knowledge sharing and improve the efficiency of services that are delivered to communities. Through effective KM practices, municipalities can improve levels of engagement across organisations, enhance decision-making, encourage innovation, and ultimately strengthen and transform communities through public participation. Parebes (2022) and Hill (2025) assert that KM is about harnessing organisational knowledge to create an effective, efficient, and integrated effort towards the attainment of the mandate to deliver sustainable and affordable social services to communities.

Elimination of silos in municipalities can be addressed by fostering collaboration, communication, and shared responsibility across departments and units. Using technology can optimise free access to organisational knowledge across departments and units and eliminate barriers to collaboration and teamwork. Cross-departmental knowledge sharing facilitates workflow and adequate access to organisational information (Hossain, 2016 & Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015; Igbinovia & Ikenwe, 2017; Koenig, 2018). Municipalities need to adopt a multifaceted approach to synergise service delivery planning and delivery processes. The approach involves strengthening interdepartmental communication, information and knowledge sharing, and collaboration, promoting a more integrated approach to planning, and fostering interdepartmental and unit cooperation (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015; Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022). Continuous training and development, if prioritised, can help break down barriers and promote a more collaborative culture within local government settings (COGTA, 2020). Continuous learning and knowledge sharing can address critical risks such as administrative inefficiencies and resistance to innovation, which are deeply rooted in bureaucratic structures in municipalities (Shava & Muringa, 2024). The obstacles discussed above, including inadequate knowledge and information sharing, are responsible for the current municipal service delivery inefficiencies and inadequacies.

While KM, re-organisation, partnership, teamwork, collaboration, performance management and strong regulation each play an important role in public service performance, the current practices in municipalities sustain individuality, parallel planning and execution of processes, and decisions to the detriment of effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery. Adequate knowledge sharing practices will only be achieved through effective integration of strategies, collaboration and communication across departments and units. High-quality municipal leadership, which demands and rewards a culture of knowledge sharing, is critical for effective integration of government programmes. KM is a catalyst to foster collaboration and synergy of purpose, increase and sustain performance in the service delivery environment. Employee knowledge, experience and skills are important ingredients for effective execution of municipal roles and responsibilities, which must be facilitated through collaboration and increased communication. By identifying critical knowledge, skills, and sharing best practices, lessons learned, and expertise across all departments and levels, municipalities can enhance their organisational outcomes (Sadat, 2021). Through

KM, knowledge and best practices are made readily available across organisations as resources to provide solutions to daily service delivery challenges (Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022). Collaboration and knowledge sharing across an organization rationalizes processes, removes repetitions and duplication of work activities and save resources, and promotes general efficiency and adequacy in municipal settings (Sadat, 2021), facilitates knowledge sharing and collaboration, community engagement in municipal processes, and promotes stakeholder participation (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015; Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022). Research shows that sustainable organisations look for effective ways to embrace KM practices and integration into their HR systems and processes to strengthen collaboration and communication (Hossain, 2016 & Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015; Igbinovia & Ikenwe, 2017; Koenig, 2018).

Embracing knowledge sharing as a valuable commodity integrates efforts in municipalities by increasing their responsiveness, competitiveness, and efficiency in responding to service delivery needs of communities (SALGA, 2018; Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022). Collaboration across departments benefits municipalities with effective and accurate decision-making during service delivery planning and implementation processes (Hajric, 2018). The current disregard for collaboration leaves municipalities with planning and delivery barriers that negatively impact performance. There is an urgent need to foster more collaboration, teamwork and knowledge sharing to enhance municipal performance. KM in local government contexts includes the systemic process of acquiring, creating, sharing, and using institutional knowledge and experiences to foster cooperation and integration, leading to enhanced delivery of social services, improving productivity, and organisational results (Sadat, 2021). The practices in municipalities leverage existing organisational knowledge and experience, implicit and overt, to encourage collaborative work across the institution. KM practice can be described as systematically using the knowledge, skills and experiences of employees, current and retired, to harmonise service delivery activities (Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022). Girard and Girard (2015) maintain that KM is vital for creating integrated processes and technology to enable knowledge sharing. In the context of fostering synergy in municipalities, collaboration, communication and information sharing must be emphasised and promoted. As De Bem Machado et al. (2022) point out, effective KM practices enable knowledge sharing, which underpins successful organisational strategies and performance. In this instance, KM becomes a mechanism to foster team-building efforts towards organisational goals (Hislop et al. 2018; Hossain, 2016).

The key benefits of KM in a municipal context include (a) assisting municipalities to increase service delivery by identifying and sharing plans, best practices and expertise across departments within the organisation (Sadat, 2021); (b) creating knowledge that is ready for use and available to drive performance. (c) Rationalising processes, limits replications of work, and improve the general effectiveness within the municipal settings (Sadat, 2021), (d) KM facilitates development of new ideas and solutions by encouraging knowledge sharing and collaboration among different structures of the municipality, communities and important stakeholders (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015; & Pepple, Makama & Okeke, 2022), (e) it involves residents and stakeholders in knowledge creation and sharing process, leading to a more participatory, transparent and responsive local government environment (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015). Municipalities can leverage KM practices to integrate and share best practices in policymaking and community engagement and enhance societal interest in municipal processes. (f) KM inspires a constant learning and development mindset within the municipal environment, promoting a culture where knowledge is valued and actively pursued, and shared to enhance organisational outcomes (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015).

Tools and Technologies to Facilitate Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Contemporary organisations seek effective tools and the infrastructure to embrace more collaboration, communication, teamwork and knowledge sharing. Municipalities should foster a culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing. Available tools and technologies such as digital platforms like Knowledge Bases, Intranet Systems, wikis, Groupware Systems, Project Management Software, and Communication Platforms can assist municipalities in integrating systems and optimising more collaboration and knowledge sharing organisational outcomes (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024; SALGA, 2018). Knowledge bases: Digital platforms such as Shelf or Bloomfire help organise and store knowledge for easy access. It can help municipalities distribute information about priorities and plans across departments and units, enabling integrated planning and execution. Intranet systems: A single centralized internal website serving as a hub

for resources, information announcements, and documents facilitate effective knowledge sharing across a municipality. Wikis: Integrated platforms like Wikis enable internal sharing of knowledge and information guides, FAQs, and shared documentation, facilitating team efforts and the culture of knowledge creation. Groupware Systems: This is part of the larger knowledge management system (KMS) and it facilitates collaboration, information and knowledge management across departments and units in municipalities. Collaborative work can be enhanced through this system. Project Management Software: Communication across departments and units can be streamlined using tools like Asana, Jira, or Microsoft Teams, which assist in tracking service delivery projects, sharing information and documents, and facilitating effective communication across departments (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024; Lawton, 2023). Communication Platforms: Platforms like Asana, Jira, or Microsoft Teams can be used as convenient tools to facilitate instant messaging, file sharing, and visual meetings, all of which can enhance communication and collaboration (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024; SALGA, 2018).

Recommendations to Foster a Culture of Synergy

To cultivate a culture of synergy, municipalities in South Africa must prioritise relationship building, effective communication, and collaboration across departments. By establishing clear, attainable goals and actively encouraging stakeholder participation, including community members, municipalities can evolve into more synergised, effective, and developmental institutions (Fourie & van der Waldt, 2021; COGTA, 2018; LGSETA, 2019). To achieve this, the following critical steps are recommended:

- i). **Clearly Define Municipal Objectives and Expectations:** Municipalities should articulate their objectives to ensure all departments, units, and teams understand their roles and contributions towards shared goals. Clear communication of organizational objectives aligns efforts across the municipality, promoting a unified vision (COGTA, 2018; LGSETA, 2019).
- ii). **Foster Inclusive Communication:** Establishing transparent communication channels, providing regular updates on municipal program performance, and creating platforms for discussion can cultivate accountability and trust. These practices encourage a culture where problem-solving is collaborative and proactive (COGTA, 2018).
- iii). **Encourage Community Involvement:** Active community participation in processes such as Integrated Development Planning (IDP) and budget discussions is essential. Engaging communities not only fosters a sense of ownership but also ensures that municipal decisions reflect the needs and aspirations of citizens (Fourie & van der Waldt, 2021).
- iv). **Build Trust and Relationships:** Human Resources (HR) departments should promote interdepartmental relationships through team-building initiatives, cross-departmental projects, and mentoring programs. These efforts can create a culture of learning and collaboration that transcends departmental boundaries (LGSETA, 2019).
- v). **Embrace Accountability:** Creating clear lines of delegation and responsibility is crucial for all stakeholders, including employees, councilors, and community representatives. Establishing accountability ensures that individuals take ownership of their actions and decisions (Fourie & van der Waldt, 2021).
- vi). **Foster a Culture of Continuous Learning and Development:** Municipalities should implement ongoing training and development programs for employees, enabling them to stay current with technological advancements, knowledge, and best practices (LGSETA, 2019).
- vii). **Promote Ethical Conduct:** Adhering to strong ethical standards and managing conflicts of interest fosters a culture of trust, transparency, and accountability within the municipality (COGTA, 2018).
- viii). **Leverage Technology:** Utilizing technology effectively can facilitate communication and knowledge sharing across departments, thereby streamlining municipal processes and enhancing collaboration (LGSETA, 2019).

ix). Value Local Economic Development: Section 152 of the South African Constitution mandates municipalities to promote local economic development. Recognizing and fulfilling this role can attract local investment and create job opportunities for residents, thereby fostering community prosperity (RSA, 1996).

X). Mitigate Risks through Collaboration: Municipalities should work within the intergovernmental framework to collaborate with other government levels, building resilience against challenges that are too complex to tackle independently (Joulal & Messaoudi, 2024; COGTA, 2018).

By implementing these recommendations, municipalities can effectively transition from siloed operations to a more synergized organizational culture, ultimately enhancing their capacity to serve communities effectively.

Conclusion

This study revealed that in municipal settings, fostering synergy in knowledge management (KM) practices is essential for enhancing collaboration, improving problem-solving abilities, and optimizing public service delivery. The unified efforts of various departments and units within a municipality are critical in developing effective KM practices that lead to sustainable decision-making and improved service delivery processes. By leveraging collective knowledge, municipalities can address challenges more creatively and accurately, ultimately enriching the solutions available to local government. Synergy not only optimizes organizational performance but also facilitates knowledge retention and transfer. Documenting and sharing experiences can mitigate the risks associated with employee turnover, ensuring that valuable insights remain accessible to new entrants and contributing to the continuity of the municipal culture. Cultivating a robust culture of knowledge sharing and continuous learning can inspire municipalities to identify and replicate best practices, thereby enhancing overall innovation and performance.

Moreover, a collaborative culture grounded in knowledge sharing encourages employee engagement and job satisfaction, as individuals feel their expertise is valued. By implementing synergized KM practices, municipalities can achieve evidence-based decision-making, fostering accountability and transparency in municipal processes. In environments that prioritize continuous learning and knowledge sharing, employees are more likely to align with organizational goals, enhancing overall performance. Future research should focus on empirical investigations that provide insights into creating synergy within municipal organizations. Specific areas of interest include enhancing collaboration, communication, teamwork, and community engagement, as well as optimizing decision-making processes to improve service delivery and sustainable development outcomes. Such studies would contribute valuable knowledge to the field and guide local governments in leveraging their organizational assets for improved performance and community impact.

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