

Effective strategies to mitigate staff turnover in universities through the establishment of knowledge management units in human resources departments in Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

The study explores effective strategies to mitigate staff turnover in Universities through the establishment of knowledge management units in human resources departments in Zimbabwe. The study tries to identify how knowledge management units can address the gap left by seasoned staff by leveraging knowledge sharing, employee engagement, and organisational learning. The total number of human resource personnel across these universities was 40, 18 at University A, 10 at University B, and 12 at University C. We selected a purposive sample of 13 participants, which included five from University A, four from University B, and four from University C. The study was guided by Knowledge Management Theory. The study indicated that there were no knowledge management units at these state universities. The study revealed that human resources personnel believed that KMUs can facilitate knowledge sharing among staff and address staff turnover challenges. The study established that by developing knowledge management units, universities can promote organisational learning and innovation, creating a healthy work environment. The study concluded that establishing KMUs in human resources departments can be an effective strategy to mitigate staff turnover in universities. The study recommended that university human resource departments should establish knowledge management units that facilitate

knowledge sharing among staff within different departments using technology to capture, share, transfer, retain, and preserve knowledge. The study further recommended that human resources departments should develop robust programmes that promote staff development to avoid losing critical knowledge from their employees. The study recommended that human resources departments should foster a culture that values knowledge sharing by utilising experienced employees to share their field experiences and pass knowledge to newer staff members.

Keywords: Human resources, Knowledge Management, Staff retention, Strategies, Universities

Introduction and Background

The increasing levels of turnover among staff in higher education, along with the potential of human capital, pose a serious threat to stability and sustainability for higher education institutions (Khalaf, Anter, & Abo Alnour, 2025). Institutions face the reality of having to advertise for new employees who may not understand the ways of the university system. Institutions need to be creative in order to retain talent as the academic system evolves and competition is intensified to find qualified professionals. Kossyva, Theriou, Aggelidis, and Sarigiannidis (2024) state that universities are emerging as important actors, and information retention is important. There are many creative HRM methods of HRM to retain relevant knowledge, including individual and organisational learning, motivation, the identification, management, and training of talent, etc. Human resource (HR) teams in various corporate organisations can aid knowledge retention significantly (Hadi & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019). According to Ntini and Dewah (2023), one promising possibility was the creation of knowledge management units within HR departments.

According to Majka (2024), knowledge management is a multidisciplinary concept that encompasses the strategies, processes, and tools used to identify, capture, distribute, and enable the effective use of knowledge within an organization. Knowledge Management seeks to harness the collective intelligence of an organization by systematically managing the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, thereby transforming raw data and information into actionable insights (Khalaf, Anter, & Abo Alnour, 2025). Through the methodical management of knowledge generation, diffusion, and application, knowledge management (KM) aims to transform raw data and information into actionable insights and harness the collective intellect of an organisation (Gates, 2024). Knowledge management

units are specialised teams or departments within an organisation that concentrate on the methodical management of information and knowledge, claim Gope, Elia, and Passiante (2018). According to Sivakumar & Kumar (2019), knowledge management departments can be extremely important in gathering, disseminating, and applying organisational knowledge.

Majka (2024) welcomes us to knowledge management, a cross-cutting field of study made up of processes, tactics, and tools for recognizing, capturing, sharing, and facilitating the appropriate use of knowledge in an organization. Essentially, knowledge management tries to take advantage of organizations' collective knowledge by managing how knowledge is created, shared, and utilized, while turning low-level raw data and information into actionable intelligence (Khalaf, Anter, & Abo Alnour, 2025). In essence, knowledge management (KM) looks to deliver actionable insights by managing knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, and knowledge utilization while capitalizing on organizations' collective intelligence (Gates, 2024). Knowledge management units are specialized teams or departments in organizations focused on organizing the systematic management of knowledge and information (Gope, Elia, and Passiante, 2018). For Sivakumar & Kumar (2019), a knowledge management department can be incredibly useful for gathering, sharing, and using organizational knowledge.

Also, gaps in the professional support and co-operation between staff and library directors (Hempel et al., 2013; 2019). Nyambok and Hongo (2022) concluded that supervisors of library employees should demonstrate good leadership qualities, support staff through professional development programs, mentoring, coaching, and supervise collaboratively, where staff are given a sense of professional space and ownership. This study highlighted the importance of library teams based on their feedback, as members lamented the void left by a member's departure. If libraries follow Nyambok and Hongo's (2022) suggestion of developing good professional development programmes, mentoring, and co-operative supervision, a new library team atmosphere or culture could emerge and succeed, considering the challenges associated with collaboration amongst staff and towards library users.

Despite the best efforts of Human Resource Departments to retain university employees. Saeed, Mohammad, Ahmed, Uddin, Mohammed, and Davi (2023) note that a permanent competitive benefit needs to be part of knowledge that should be part of knowledge. Managers should consider knowledge acquisition to reduce staff turnover. Knowledge

increases the increase in use of management system (KMS) information and communication technology. Santos, Carvalho, and Martins, (2024) posit that the establishment of KM units supports worldwide endeavours in higher education institutions to apply technology and innovation to their workforce management. The integration of KM into HR functions can streamline processes, improve communication, and foster a collaborative culture among staff. This is particularly relevant in Zimbabwe, where traditional approaches to HR may not adequately address the needs of a diverse and dynamic workforce.

The findings of Ntini and Dehwa (2023) at NUST found that the Registrar's Department operated without a knowledge management policy and knowledge strategies to retain critical knowledge that is lost when employees with critical knowledge leave, whether through resignations, death, or other circumstances; and with senior-level executives' support, funding to encourage knowledge retention is also very limited. The findings also assessed that coaching and mentoring, incentives, succession planning, and a lack of retention methods were all barriers to the transfer and retention of knowledge within the department.

Statement of the Problem

High turnover rates in Zimbabwean universities pose a major challenge to maintaining stability and quality in higher education. Retaining skilled faculty and administrative staff has become a widespread issue. This challenge disrupts academic programs, weakens institutional knowledge, and negatively affects student performance. According to Vakira et al. (2023), the turnover rate among university employees reached 18% between 2020 and 2021 in Zimbabwean state universities, indicating significant staff losses. A NewsDay Zimbabwe report (2022) further highlights this issue, stating that institutions like Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) have lost 50 lecturers, including five PhD holders, just since January of that year. The University of Zimbabwe (UZ), Midlands State University (MSU), and other state universities were facing similar problems. Current human resource practices have not been effective in reducing turnover or creating a workplace that promotes employee satisfaction and knowledge retention. As a result, these losses jeopardize the successful implementation of important educational initiatives like Education 5.0 and weaken the overall stability of Zimbabwe's higher education sector. This situation highlights the urgent need for research into new frameworks that can help reduce turnover through strategic methods. One

promising option is to create knowledge management units within university HR departments. These units would help systematically capture, share, and preserve institutional knowledge, ensuring continuity even when staff leave. Combining traditional retention strategies, such as improving career development pathways, fair pay, and working conditions, with strong knowledge management practices could improve employee engagement, cut turnover, and ultimately enhance the quality and stability of higher education in Zimbabwe.

Research objectives

- To identify the key factors contributing to staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities
- To assess the potential impact of knowledge management practices on employee retention rates
- To propose effective strategies to leverage knowledge management tools and practices

Theoretical Framework

The Knowledge Management Theory (Ikujiro Nonaka & Hirotaka Takeuchi, 1990) provides useful insight into the problem of turnover among employees in higher education (Patwary, Azam, Ashraf, Muhamed, Yusoff, Mehmood, & Rabiul, 2023), particularly if institutions have a use for a Knowledge Management unit to capture knowledge. According to Kim, Prempeh, Addai, and Wargo (2025), by providing a space in which people exchange ideas and experiences, colleges would cultivate happiness and employee engagement, reducing turnover since employees would feel valued and appreciate the university's mission. Differentiating between explicit (documented and easily transferable) and tacit (personal and context-specific) knowledge will help universities implement strategic approaches to capture both sorts of knowledge and identify robust training initiatives that will develop employees and/or support advanced employee training (Terhorst & Krumpholz, 2024). Moreover, knowledge management units can help create a culture of collaboration where staff support and share knowledge, strengthening relationships and community feeling (Chakraborty, Sharada & Anand, 2024). Furthermore, by addressing particular issues and enhancing general job satisfaction, knowledge management units can create focused retention strategies based on information obtained from employee input (Obeng, Arhinful, Mensah, & Owusu-Sarfo, 2024). Universities in Zimbabwe can therefore establish an organised method of information

exchange that not only improves organisational learning but also directly lowers employee turnover by implementing information Management Theory.

Literature Review

Factors contributing to staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities

The concept of retention of academic staff has piqued significant interest in a number of countries, and Zimbabwe is not immune. A study by Chivandire (2019) found that marital status, education level, training and development, workload, salaries, and opportunities for furthering one's career had significant influences on the retention of academic staff in Zimbabwean universities. They noted that education level and gender, though not married, did not significantly influence retention. In terms of conditions of high turnover, Paulos, Ndlovu, and Muriwo (2023) concluded that the causes of high turnover, according to employees' perceptions of their work environment, were reward structure, working conditions, inflexibility, poor work-life balance, inadequate resources, intrinsic motivations, and personal factors. They further established that the effects of employee turnover were typically associated with reduced productivity, reduced service quality, stress, work overload, damage to reputation, and low motivation. The research determined that the state universities in Zimbabwe are contending with high employee turnover, hampering their growth strategies, such that it is becoming increasingly uncertain towards the provision of expected services for national development. Another study by Vakira et al. (2023) found that the reasons for the exit of employees were inspired by many factors, such as poor career development, promotion, poor leadership practices, localization, and working conditions. Data also revealed that exit from the staff leads to work overload and high expenditure through recruitment and selection, and training of new employees, and training. However, data has shown that high staff turnover should first hire local people to combat top management, if they meet the requirements for the situation. Research is very important for academic researchers, human resource physicians, and management because it outlines strategies to reduce high employee turnover. In addition, there is limited research on employee turnover strategies in higher education institutions, especially in developing countries.

Potential impact of knowledge management practices on employee retention rates

According to Gates (2020), effective Knowledge Management (KM) practices significantly improved employee performance and employee satisfaction, which led to employee retention.

Effective KM practices increased linkages to have information and a better knowledge base, which improved employee productivity and efficiency. Because understanding KM practices involved developing a supportive climate - where employee job stress was lowered - and subsequently enhanced employee job satisfaction. In fact, Zayed et al. (2022) found that KM dimensions positively affected their measures of employee retention (Zayed et al., 2022). KM played an important role in the retention measures for KM as the knowledge acquisition, knowledge storage, and knowledge sharing - supervisor support, co-worker support and flexible tasks. In addition, the retention of major employees is important towards the long - term development of an organization (Mishra and Mishra, 2023). Organizational issues regarding successful employee retention involve training, time, and cost, and losing knowledge. Retention then revolves around the importance of linked factors (environment) as part of the holon of growth/individual's careers and compensatory policies (the biggest part to employee retention), and the level of interactivity of advisement/reward and support. Additionally, Saeed's (2017) study showed that there is significant evidence that knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge storage, and knowledge application have a positive effect that is statistically significant on employee performance, IT performance, and customer satisfaction. The results also showed that the knowledge management mechanism is a key factor for organisational performance and development.

Effective strategies to leverage knowledge management tools and practices

Leveraging knowledge management (KM) tools and practices can significantly enhance organizational efficiency and innovation. Abiola's (2023) study found employee engagement, productivity, innovation, customer satisfaction, and financial results could all be realized by creating a culture of knowledge sharing, the support of leadership, encouraging employee involvement, and effectively leveraging technology infrastructure. In the same vein, Tucker (2024) suggests that HR leaders should think about the employee perspective when designing retention plans, building a strong leadership presence, and a strong communication network amongst the members of the organization. Additionally, Kuuyelleh, Alqahtani, and Akanpaadgi (2022) found that work-related, contact, and regular cushioning of staff promoted retention amongst academic staff of Ghanaian technical universities. Further, Bradley (2020) suggests that leaders to intentionally develop employee advancement programmes to retain and recruit the best talent, which would minimize costs, maximize

revenue, and enhance employee satisfaction. Also, Haughton (2021) found that organizations needed to provide a positive work environment that shaped employees to share and retain knowledge, which would grow an organization's knowledge bank. Moreso, Pascoe (2021) found that dealing with workforce turnover impact included reasonable and alternative training modalities, the use of champions or volunteers, increased program alignment with organizational goals, and creating diverse funding portfolios. One of the methods of retention strategy is a knowledge retention policy. According to Goswami (2020), knowledge management policy sets the benchmarks for every employee when managing and evaluating performance. Dewah and Sibanda (2022) found that, ICT infrastructure allows for the rapid and immediate capture, transfer, sharing, storage, and dissemination of knowledge between employees, helps with knowledge retention, and gets the right knowledge to the right employees at the right time and place.

Materials and methods

In this study, we used a qualitative research design to gather detailed insights from human resource personnel at Zimbabwean state universities. Although there are over twelve state universities in Zimbabwe, we focused on three institutions: University A, University B, and University C. These were chosen for their diverse profiles, geographic locations, and the importance of their human resource functions. The total number of human resource personnel across these universities was 40: 18 at University A, 10 at University B, and 12 at University C. We selected a purposive sample of 13 participants, which included five from University A, four from University B, and four from University C. The selection criteria focused on individuals with direct involvement and expertise in human resource management. This ensured that the participants were knowledgeable and could provide in-depth perspectives relevant to the study's goals. We collected data until we reached thematic saturation, meaning no new significant themes or information emerged. This occurred after we completed interviews with all 13 participants. This sampling approach covered about 32.5% of the total HR personnel population at the three universities, balancing detailed insights with practical feasibility. Overall, this strategy and sample size allowed us to thoroughly explore human resource management challenges, especially those related to staff turnover, across different institutional contexts within Zimbabwe's state university sector.

Findings & Discussions

This section presented results that were obtained from 13 participants (human resources personnel) that were interviewed.

Key factors contributing to staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities

Based on the interviewee responses, the key factors contributing to staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities can be synthesized into several overarching themes. These themes reflect the multifaceted challenges faced by university employees, which collectively impact their job satisfaction, commitment, and ultimately retention.

Inadequate Compensation and Financial Incentives

A recurring theme is the lack of competitive salary packages and benefits, which leads skilled staff to seek better-paying opportunities elsewhere. Respondents highlighted how salary disparities and external offers, both from local competitors and international institutions, present significant “pull” factors, causing staff to leave for improved financial security and career prospects. This creates difficulties for universities in sustaining an experienced and stable workforce. Some of the statements by respondents were:

R.1 *“Many skilled staff members leave for a better salary package. The institution has trouble building long-term expertise and continuity.”*

R.9 *“Competitors offer higher pay, better benefits, causing skilled employees to leave.”*

R.10 *“Overseas assignments are seen as more secure and better paid.”*

Workload Pressure and Burnout

Several interviewees pointed to the escalating workload without commensurate support or resources, generating burnout, stress, and emotional exhaustion among staff. The strain of high work demands, coupled with limited personnel or infrastructure, reduces morale and productivity, pushing employees toward turnover. This was exemplified by statements like:

R.3 *“The volume of work is exploding, but no extra resources and support have been made available.”*

R.12 *“Staff feels overwhelmed and unsupported. Burnout has negative effects on mental health and productivity.”*

Lack of Professional Development Opportunities

A prominent theme is the absence of clear promotion pathways and skill development mechanisms. Staff feel “stuck” in their roles, leading to dissatisfaction and a sense that their contributions are undervalued. The lack of continuous training further exacerbates feelings of stagnation and discontent, as was stated by some respondents:

R.4 *“Few avenues for promotion as a result, many staff feel trapped.”*

R.11 *“Absence of opportunities to refresh and upgrade skills leads to reduced productivity and discontentment.”*

Organisational Culture

A toxic organizational culture fueled by ineffective leadership, lack of transparency, and poor communication emerged as key contributors to low morale and disengagement. Factors such as unclear roles, favouritism or nepotism, and withholding of important information erode trust, collaboration, and job satisfaction. Respondents had this to say:

R.6 *“Poor management practice creates a toxic atmosphere.”*

R.7 *“Lack of transparency breeds mistrust and disengagement”*

R.13 *“Favouritism kills the spirit of fairness and equity.”*

R.5 *“Uncertainty about responsibilities and rules undermines trust in leadership.”*

Work Conditions and Work-Life Imbalance

Rigid working hours and a lack of flexibility make it difficult for staff to balance personal and professional lives, contributing to stress and decreased job satisfaction. This theme highlights the importance of flexible work arrangements to enhance morale, reduce absenteeism, and increase productivity. One interviewee had this to say:

R.8 *“Inflexible working hours make it challenging for employees. Also, rigid schedules contribute to stress, decreased job satisfaction, and health problems”.*

The interviews with human resources providers at Zimbabwe's universities provided a complex set of issues that affect staff turnover, as retention difficulties are never simple in the higher education context. A key theme was inadequate remuneration because R.1 noted that many salaries are modest from many institutions, which makes it difficult for retention to

happen in a situation where some of the institutional staff think they are being undervalued personally and can justify switching institutions simply for more money. Al-suraihi et al. (2024) noted that it is important for institutions to consider reviewing their remuneration packages in the context of their regional range to give employees a position of job satisfaction with the option to stay or go due to prospective offers elsewhere. The issue raised by R.2, that insufficient resources significantly hinder staff performance, is a critical factor affecting employee effectiveness and job satisfaction in Zimbabwean universities. When staff do not have the right tools, equipment, or support from their institutions, their ability to meet job responsibilities is compromised. This, in turn, negatively impacts productivity and the quality of work. Research shows that the availability of resources directly influences employees' ability to deliver quality outcomes and feel motivated. For example, a study by Dewah and Sibanda (2022) in Southern African universities points out that resource constraints are a major barrier to effective knowledge management and HR functions. This results in challenging working conditions and reduced staff efficiency. Similarly, Mavodza (2010) notes that poor institutional support, including a lack of necessary infrastructure, hinders university staff in Zimbabwe from performing at their best. This scarcity can increase stress and burnout. Interviewees, R.3 and R.12, in the broader staff turnover discussion highlight that a heavy workload combined with insufficient resources leads to emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction. From the perspective of organizational behavior, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory suggests that having adequate physical and environmental resources is essential for higher-level motivational factors like achievement and recognition (Maslow, 1943). When basic work resources are missing, staff spend their energy trying to overcome these shortcomings instead of excelling in their roles. This lowers morale and raises the likelihood of turnover. Furthermore, limited resource availability restricts the adoption of innovative or effective practices. Staff cannot experiment or improve without the necessary physical and administrative support (Hassan, 2014). This connects to the social lab concept discussed earlier, where spaces for experimentation and learning require sufficient resources to thrive. Their absence hinders systemic improvements in social work and education. The return on investment is investing in tools to do their job, as part of staff retention is tied to job retention. R.2 stated, "It adds another layer of complexity to working in higher education. Besides no pay and lack of resources, R.3 stated institutional workload has increased without appropriate support. R.3 dismissed it as a work-life crisis; it adds serious amounts of stress and burnout." Vakira et al. (2023) highlighted that staff

turnover is partly explained by poor career progression and workloads, and has a significant impact on employee exit; turnover-related costs can occur because of recruitment and training costs.

Limitations on career advancement also emerged as a prominent theme, with R.4 and R.11 talking about limited pathways for advancement, and limited professional development opportunities demotivating staff and prompting them to seek advancement elsewhere. This aligns with Chivandire's (2019) study, which noted that career advancement, training, remuneration, and workload significantly affect retention of academic staff in Zimbabwean universities. In addition, R.5 noted that rapid changes to policy result in job insecurity, highlighting the role of stability and explicit communication to foster trust and commitment amongst staff. The negative management and communication practices (R.6 and R.7) perpetuate a work environment that is discouraging, and subsequently lead staff to feel undervalued, uncertain, and disconnected. This is reflected in Abiola's (2023) research, which called for leadership that supports knowledge sharing, employee engagement, and participation to increase productivity and improve retention.

The issues raised by respondents regarding work-life balance, nepotism, and competitive recruitment environments in Zimbabwean universities are consistent with findings from both local and regional studies. Respondent R.8's concern about rigid working hours adding to stress and reducing job satisfaction echoes findings by Mubanga and Nyanhete (2013), who studied the responsiveness of a Zimbabwean university to workers balancing family and work responsibilities. They found that inflexible work schedules and unnecessary overtime negatively affected employees' family lives and led to coping behaviors such as increased absenteeism. The study also highlighted the need for flexible work arrangements, including formalizing part-time work and establishing childcare facilities, to support staff well-being and morale. Similarly, research by Maunganidze and Bonnin (2025) confirms that especially women in Zimbabwean universities struggle with balancing work and caregiving responsibilities due to rigid institutional policies and lack of flexibility, leading to career sacrifices and burnout. Respondents R.9 and R.10 noted that better pay and career opportunities elsewhere, including overseas, drain skilled staff from universities. This is supported by regional literature, which highlights how competitive salaries and better benefits offered by other institutions and countries act as strong "pull" factors for academic and non-academic university staff (Dewah & Sibanda, 2022; Muleya & Maqubela, 2025).

Furthermore, the allure of overseas employment is well documented, with staff perceiving it as offering greater financial security and career advancement prospects (Munyoro et al., 2023). R.13's point about nepotism damaging fairness, morale, and efficiency is a critical organizational issue that has been observed in studies of Zimbabwean public institutions. Nepotism and favoritism undermine merit-based recruitment, cause dissatisfaction among staff, and hinder organizational performance (Mutage & Dewah, 2022; Mubanga & Nyanhete, 2013). The call for meritocratic processes aligns with broader recommendations across Southern Africa, emphasizing transparency and equity in HR practices to build trust and foster a positive workplace culture (Ogola, 2020). Studies from Southern Africa corroborate these challenges, noting that inflexible work environments, non-transparent recruitment processes, and competitive brain drain are widespread issues affecting staff retention in the higher education sector (Muleya & Maqubela, 2025; Dewah & Sibanda, 2022). For instance, South African universities report similar concerns about rigid institutional policies impeding work-life balance, and uncompetitive pay packages contributing to turnover, especially among women and early-career academics (Betsie & Mohlala, 2024).

The cumulative impact of the above factors is a serious problem for Zimbabwean universities, because high turnover disrupts continuity, increases attrition and training costs, and undermines institutional capacity to deliver quality education and research. Studies such as Vakira et al. (2023) and Chivandire (2019) reaffirm these results and specifically identify poor career progression and leadership to improve working conditions as important antecedents of turnover. Research by Manyeruke (2025) has shown that high teacher turnover negatively affects learners in a very impactful way through disruption to teaching and elements of quality. Therefore, in order to address these interconnected problems, a systemic approach is required, which includes competitive remuneration, adequate resources, job responsibilities, transparency, opportunities for career development, supportive leadership, flexible working arrangements, and hiring practices that promote equity. All of these factors buffer the impact of personal factors (such as turnover) by rebuilding trust and improving job satisfaction, ultimately stabilizing the academic workforce, developing and supporting Zimbabwean higher education institutions, and recognizing that stability through a quality workforce is important to sustainable growth and development.

Potential impact of knowledge management practices on employee retention rates

On the potential impact of knowledge management practices on employee retention rates, the following themes emerged:-

Feeling Valued

One interviewee indicated that:

R.13: "When knowledge is shared freely, employees will feel a stronger connection to the company and feel more valued as an employee, which results in staff retention".

Access to Information

Another respondent opined that:-

R.12: "Access to information and resources is crucial for staff to perform their jobs better and to remain less frustrated in the process of completing their work."

Continuous Training

One of the interviewees shared this:-

R.11: "Regular training sessions not only enhance skills but also show employees that the organization is invested in their growth."

Mentorship and Support Systems

One of the respondents had this to say:-

R.10: "Mentorship fosters strong relationships and provides guidance, making employees more likely to remain with the organization."

Collaboration Tools

Another responded and commented that:-

R.9: "Effective collaboration tools facilitate teamwork and communication, creating a sense of belonging that enhances retention."

Feedback Systems

One of the interviewees opined that: -

R.8: "Having systems in place for feedback allows employees to voice their concerns and feel heard, which improves job satisfaction."

Knowledge Sharing Culture

A respondent had this to say:

R.7: "A culture that promotes knowledge sharing and learning instills loyalty and commitment among employees. Such a culture motivates employees to contribute actively and remain dedicated to the organization."

Ideas and Innovation

Another respondent adds that: -

R.6: "When staff see their creativity recognized and implemented, it boosts their confidence and engagement. This sense of ownership drives loyalty and reduces turnover."

Recognition of Expertise

One interviewee indicated that:

R.5: "Recognizing employees' knowledge and expertise boosts their morale and encourages them to stay longer."

Employee Engagement

An interviewee had this to say:

R.4: "When staff believe their skills and insights contribute meaningfully, they develop a stronger attachment to the organization. This engagement leads to greater job satisfaction and loyalty."

Knowledge Management Units

Another respondent opined that: -

R.3 "When there is a knowledge management unit in the university HR department, it will identify training needs for newly employed staff, leading to a smooth transition of workflows."

Skills Development

As stated by one of the respondents: -

R.2. "Supporting staff with skills development helps employees contribute to the objectives of the organization, ensuring efficiency across different departments."

Knowledge Sharing

One of the interviewees opined that:-

R.1. "Knowledge management allows different sections, units, and departments to work as a team; this teamwork fosters a cohesive environment where everyone works towards common goals."

The interview responses regarding the impact of knowledge management (KM) practices on employee retention strongly emphasize the vital role that effective knowledge sharing, organizational learning, and supportive work environments play in retaining staff. This qualitative data is consistent with existing scholarly literature, like Saeed (2017), storage, and application improve employee performance, IT performance, and ultimate customer satisfaction, and support the overall development of the organization. Through Interview 13, free knowledge sharing meant employees felt more connected and valued, and this led to belongingness, a primary driver of retention. Here again, Interview 12 showed employees can rely on easy access to information and resources to perform well, and are saved from frustration, which increases job satisfaction and loyalty. Interview 11 confirmed that training on a consistent basis not only increases employee skill, but it demonstrated the organization is interested in staff development. This all contributes to employee morale and retention, while also supporting Mishra and Mishra (2023), who acknowledged as important happen that keeping key employees is a must for organizational long-term success. Mentorship, highlighted in Interview 10, develops interpersonal relationships while providing encouragement and guidance, which vastly improves job satisfaction and loyalty. Interview 9 highlighted that a good collaborative tool can improve an employee team with the collaborative team and enable better communication, which creates a sense of belonging and engagement. Tucker (2024) framed an employee-focused retention strategy with a requirement to develop a strong communication and leadership network.

Interview 8 helped to impress upon a number of the practical recommendations presented in the study. Participants spoke about feedback mechanisms that prompt employees to speak up about concerns and feel validated in their opinions, which ultimately enhanced employee satisfaction and loyalty. Interview 7 highlighted the need to create a culture of knowledge sharing and continual learning. This is consistent with Zayed et al. (2022), who state that knowledge management dimensions play a significant role in improving employee retention. Encouraging innovation and recognizing expertise, as reported by Interview 6 and Interview 5, both contributed to employees feeling seen and valued, which are vital to retention. Engagement discussed in Interview 4 is positively correlated with retention and is supported by Abiola's (2023) suggestion that employee engagement relates to knowledge sharing, leadership support for KM initiatives, and organization-related infrastructure & technology. As discussed in Interview 3, a dedicated knowledge management unit in HR can help the organization understand training gaps for each employee to help them adapt to pre-existing processes and encourage HR to identify ways to promote a seamless experience for new employees and sustain the workflow. Interview 2 emphasized that when employees have the skills they need, they have a better understanding of how the work connects to HR organizational goals, and to goals and a shared purpose with the organization. Interview 1 stated that KM supports collaborative work across departments, which minimizes duplication and develops a collaborative culture that supports retention.

Extensive literature supports the idea that knowledge management (KM) is a key resource for gaining and maintaining competitive advantage in organizations. For example, Ahumada Tello and Perusquia Velasco (2023) argue that effective KM depends on properly combining human capital, communication, technology, and innovation. Together, these factors drive ongoing improvement and competitive growth. They state that organizations that utilize KM create lasting value by capturing and sharing crucial knowledge, allowing them to maintain performance even as employees leave.

Similarly, Delong (2004) and McCann & Buckner (2004) point out that companies that focus on developing and keeping knowledge workers and promoting leadership-driven learning cultures integrate KM into HR practices. This approach improves organizational performance and resilience. Iyiola (2024) adds that KM strategies that foster trust, openness, and collaboration help employees feel valued, which supports knowledge retention and loyalty to the organization.

Empirical work by Abiwu and Martins (2023) directly connects talent management with KM, showing that integrated KM practices like encouraging knowledge sharing, improving resource access, enhancing training, providing mentoring, implementing feedback systems, and recognizing contributions positively impact work-life balance and employee retention, particularly in higher education.

These findings also match broader research showing that KM boosts innovation, productivity, and job satisfaction. Together, these lead to lower turnover rates and promote organizational growth (Echeverri et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2014). In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) context, Dewah and Sibanda (2022) discovered that universities' adoption of KM was positively linked with staff collaboration, learning culture, and retention, even though they faced resource challenges. Studies in Zimbabwe support these observations: Mutage and Dewah (2022) found that universities actively implementing KM policies supporting training and knowledge sharing saw improvements in staff morale and loyalty, resulting in fewer employees leaving. In contrast, when KM culture is weak and infrastructure is lacking, staff disengagement and turnover increase (Ncube & Mbawuya, 2022).

Moreover, HR departments in Zimbabwe that promote mentoring, ongoing professional development, and open feedback improve employee integration and satisfaction. This aligns with global evidence about KM's role in fostering positive employee experiences (Brightwheel, 2025; Abiwu & Martins, 2023). Thus, applying KM within HR creates supportive workplaces, enhancing performance and loyalty through consistent knowledge sharing and social connections. This overview highlights that incorporating KM into HR strengthens individual careers while also building resilience and a lasting competitive edge in Zimbabwean universities and similar environments.

Reasons for the low adoption of knowledge management by human resources departments in Zimbabwean universities

The low adoption of knowledge management (KM) by human resources (HR) departments in Zimbabwean universities can be grouped into several key themes supported by quotes and findings from research:

Lack of Integration and Coordination among Departments

HR departments often work in silos, with limited awareness or collaboration with other departments like ICT, Research Boards, and Libraries, which inhibits effective KM practices, as was stated by an interviewee who had this to say:

R 16 *"The two departments act as autonomous entities, with each department not aware of what the other department is doing. On the other hand, HR departments do not make use of the ICT department to promote knowledge socialisation, combination, or internalisation."*

Weak Knowledge-Sharing Culture

There is no conducive organizational culture for promoting knowledge sharing, leading to knowledge hoarding and reluctance by staff to share expertise. This was opined by one of the interviewees:-

R.13 *"The HR department is not doing enough in shaping the organisational culture to be amenable to knowledge sharing"*

Inadequate Training and Use of External Resources

HR training policies focus primarily on external trainers, limiting internal knowledge transfer; many employees have not participated in relevant KM training. Another interviewee adds that:-

R.9 *"Training strategy does not consider locally-based training experts as resource persons."*

Lack of Strategic Policies and Incentives

There is an absence of clear policies and rewards to encourage knowledge sharing and management, weakening the KM initiatives. One of the respondents gave the following comment: - R.7. *"All universities surveyed did not have a rewards management policy, and knowledge sharing culture does not exist."*

Limited Access to Knowledge Resources and Infrastructure

Challenges exist in library services, ICT infrastructure, and access to materials, hindering knowledge combination and internalization. A respondent stated that: - R.17. *"The library is failing to deliver, and the cost of acquiring local research publications is hindered by bureaucratic red tape."*

The low adoption of knowledge management (KM) by human resources (HR) departments in Zimbabwean universities relates closely to a mix of organizational, cultural, infrastructural, and policy challenges. These issues have similarities found worldwide, in Southern Africa (SADC), and specifically in Zimbabwe. A key factor is the lack of integration and coordination between departments, especially between HR and ICT. They mostly function as separate entities that do not support one another in sharing or internalizing knowledge. One respondent pointed out, “The two departments act as autonomous entities, with each department not aware of what the other department is doing. HR departments do not make use of the ICT department to promote knowledge socialization, combination, or internalization” (Nyamubarwa, 2013). This disconnect aligns with global research that shows effective KM depends on cooperation across different units to build knowledge-sharing communities (Borghoff, 2008; Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2005).

Another major barrier is a weak organizational culture that discourages knowledge sharing, leading to knowledge hoarding and reluctance among staff to share their expertise. A respondent stated, “The HR department is not doing enough in shaping the organizational culture to be amenable to knowledge sharing,” highlighting this local cultural issue (Mutage & Dewah, 2022). Similar problems with traditional hierarchies and cultural barriers limiting knowledge exchange have been well documented in African universities (Ogola, 2020).

Additionally, inadequate training practices persist, where HR policies depend heavily on external trainers instead of utilizing local knowledge workers. This approach limits internal capacity building. One respondent noted, “Training strategy does not consider locally-based training experts as resource persons” (Nyamubarwa, 2013). This reflects findings that about 68% of staff have never taken part in KM training, which is crucial for the processes of knowledge socialization and internalization described in Nonaka’s SECI model (Nonaka et al., 2000). The lack of ongoing, context-specific training hampers KM adoption across African institutions (Mavodza, 2010).

Strategic policy gaps are also apparent, as universities lack formal incentives or rewards to promote knowledge sharing. This weakens motivation for KM. The claim that “All universities surveyed did not have a rewards management policy, and knowledge sharing culture does not exist” underscores this point (Nyamubarwa, 2013). Globally, Alavi and Leidner (2001) stress that established policies and rewards are critical for maintaining KM engagement.

Finally, limited access to current knowledge resources and ICT infrastructure, along with bureaucratic obstacles, severely impairs KM efforts. Respondents mentioned, “The library is failing to deliver, and the cost of acquiring local research publications is hindered by bureaucratic red tape” (Nyamubarwa, 2013). Similar issues with bibliographic and ICT resources are noted in Zimbabwean academic libraries (Mavodza, 2010) and affect many African universities (Ogola, 2020). These limitations hinder the combination and internalization of knowledge essential for knowledge-based HR functions.

These challenges in Zimbabwe reflect broader issues in the Southern African region, where fragmented departmental coordination, poor KM cultures, lack of local training capacity, absence of policy incentives, and limited infrastructure are common barriers to KM adoption in universities (Dewah & Sibanda, 2022). Addressing these interconnected challenges requires Zimbabwean universities to implement comprehensive solutions: fostering collaboration between departments, promoting a culture of knowledge sharing, investing in ongoing local training, establishing clear KM policies with rewards, and enhancing knowledge infrastructure to boost HR effectiveness and overall institutional performance.

Effective strategies to leverage knowledge management tools and practices

When interviewed on the effective strategies to leverage knowledge management tools and practices, the following themes emerged:-

Organized and Accessible Knowledge Systems Improve Productivity

One of the interviewees had this to say:

R.1: "Such a system reduces duplication of effort and promotes consistency in the work performed across the organization. When knowledge is organized and accessible, employees can make informed decisions and collaborate more effectively, ultimately improving overall productivity."

Regular and Ongoing Training to Maximize Usage

Another interviewee shared this: -

R.2: "Conducting regular training sessions are vital to help employees understand how to effectively use knowledge management tools"

Fostering a Knowledge-Sharing Organizational Culture

A respondent posits that: -

R.3: "Fostering an organizational culture that values knowledge sharing motivates employees to contribute their insights openly."

Implementing Collaboration Tools for Communication and Teamwork

One of the respondents revealed that: -

R.4: "Implementing collaboration tools is crucial as they facilitate seamless communication and teamwork among employees. When employees can easily share ideas and information, it leads to more effective problem solving and a stronger sense of community."

Establishing Feedback Loops

A respondent said this: -

R.5: "Establishing feedback loops allows the organization to refine its knowledge management practices based on real employee experiences and needs. This iterative process helps create a more user- friendly system that truly supports employees in their daily work."

Providing Incentives

One of the respondents adds that: -

R.6: "Providing incentives for employees who actively share knowledge can significantly boost engagement and participation. Recognition and rewards create motivation for staff to contribute valuable information and best practices. Mentorship builds strong relationships and helps new staff acclimate quickly, gaining the skills and insights needed to perform well. This approach strengthens the organization's capacity to sustain expertise over time."

Keeping the Knowledge Base Current and Reliable

As stated by a respondent: -

R.8: "It is crucial to keep the knowledge base current by regularly reviewing and updating content to reflect the latest information. This not only enriches the knowledge base but also fosters a culture where knowledge sharing is seen as a valued and rewarded behaviour."

Mentorship Initiatives to Ensure Knowledge Continuity

A participant disclosed that: -

R.7: "Setting up mentorship initiatives is an effective way to transfer knowledge from experienced employees to newer ones, ensuring continuity and reducing knowledge loss"

Integration of KM Practices into Daily Workflows

A respondent communicated the following: -

R.9: "Integrating knowledge management practices into daily workflows ensures that employees use these tools as part of their routine tasks."

R.12: "Departments should actively integrate knowledge management practices into their daily workflows to encourage employees to use these tools regularly".

Strong Leadership Support and Commitment

Respondents expressed the view that:

R.10: "Strong support from leadership is essential to promote knowledge management initiatives and encourage their adoption across the organization. Their visible commitment inspires employees to embrace knowledge management practices enthusiastically."

R.13: "There is a pressing need to secure strong support from leadership to promote knowledge management initiatives, encouraging widespread adoption and engagement across the organization. With committed leaders, knowledge management becomes a strategic priority that drives continuous improvement."

Leveraging the Expertise of Seasoned Staff for Onboarding

A participant stated that:

R.11: "The involvement of experts or seasoned staff members to guide newly recruited employees is critical for helping them fit into their roles with adequate skills. Experienced staff can provide practical insights and hands-on training that accelerates the learning curve. This guidance ensures that new employees become productive more quickly and feel supported during their transition."

The interviewees' insights on effective strategies to leverage knowledge management (KM) tools and practices align well with findings from contemporary KM literature across global, regional (SADC), and Zimbabwean contexts, emphasizing a holistic, integrated approach to KM implementation. The establishment of organized and accessible knowledge systems that minimize duplication and foster consistent practices, as highlighted by R.1, resonates with Ahumada Tello and Perusquia Velasco (2023), who emphasize the critical role of centralized knowledge repositories in enabling informed decision-making and collaboration. When knowledge is easily accessible, organizational productivity improves, as supported by Alavi and Leidner (2001), who advise integrating robust knowledge storage systems to enhance operational consistency.

The necessity of regular and ongoing training (R.2) to maximize staff competence with KM tools is well documented. Ahmad et al. (2022) argue that continuous capacity building ensures staff can effectively use KM platforms and stay current with evolving technology, preventing underutilization. This is echoed regionally by Dewah and Sibanda (2022), who found that Zimbabwean universities investing in continuous KM training observed higher adoption rates. Similarly, fostering a knowledge-sharing organizational culture (R.3) is a recurrent theme; Mutage and Dewah (2022) note that creating environments where employees feel valued for their contributions stimulates engagement, collaboration, and innovation, a finding consistent with Yang et al. (2014) on how culture drives KM performance.

Collaboration tools (R.4) supporting seamless communication underscore the technological enablers discussed by Borghoff (2008), who notes that technology must facilitate interaction to unlock collective intelligence. Additionally, the role of feedback loops (R.5) in refining KM practices aligns with Nonaka et al.'s (2000) SECI model, emphasizing the iterative knowledge conversion processes critical for adaptive KM systems. Providing incentives and recognition (R.6), including mentorship programs (R.7, R.11), links directly to Abiwu and Martins (2023), who found that such practices strengthen employee motivation, reduce knowledge loss, and improve retention, a correlation echoed in Zimbabwean higher education, where mentoring assists staff integration (Mutage & Dewah, 2022).

The importance of keeping the knowledge base current and reliable (R.8) is essential, as outdated knowledge diminishes trust in KM platforms (Echeverri et al., 2018). Embedding KM into daily workflows (R.9, R.12) transforms knowledge sharing from a supplemental

task to a core activity, boosting efficiency; this is affirmed by Dewah and Sibanda's (2022) regional study, highlighting that routine KM practice fosters collaboration and improves organizational outcomes. Vital to all is strong leadership support and commitment (R.10, R.13), which Koufopoulos et al. (2010) and Alavi and Leidner (2001) identify as critical for legitimizing KM efforts, securing resources, and overcoming resistance, observations corroborated in Zimbabwe (Nyamubarwa, 2013). Lastly, leveraging the expertise of seasoned staff for onboarding (R.11) is consistent with global best practices promoting knowledge continuity and rapid acclimation of new employees (Wang & Noe, 2010). Together, these themes reflect a multidimensional KM strategy advocated in the literature, where technology, culture, leadership, continuous learning, and process integration interlock to optimize knowledge assets and workforce performance. In Zimbabwe and the wider SADC region, studies by Dewah and Sibanda (2022) and Mutage and Dewah (2022) confirm that universities adopting these integrated KM strategies, including ongoing training, leadership buy-in, collaborative platforms, and mentorship experience better KM uptake and employee retention. This parallels global findings (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Nonaka et al., 2000), affirming that KM deployment is not merely technological but socio-technical, requiring aligned human and organizational systems.

Conclusions

The study concludes that to address the challenge of high staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities, it is important for these institutions to establish KM units within human resources. By fostering a knowledge-sharing culture, ensuring access to knowledge, and offering regular training and mentoring, they can boost employee motivation, institutional commitment, and retention. The researchers highlight that the lack of formal institutional KM procedures such as mentoring, organized training, succession planning, and incentives like monetary or non-monetary rewards may be the biggest obstacle to retaining skilled professionals. These gaps particularly hinder the transfer of organizational tacit and explicit knowledge, which is fundamental to KM theory and crucial for organizational learning and adaptability. Additional factors that support learning and performance include robust feedback mechanisms and leadership practices that foster a positive environment, making employees feel valued, heard, and connected to the organization. Consequently, universities can reduce turnover by implementing more comprehensive KM activities aligned with these dimensions, which motivate, retain, and enhance the performance of an academically skilled

workforce. This approach aligns with general organizational development principles, which view knowledge creation, sharing, and application as dynamic processes that, when effectively managed, contribute significantly to the strength and competitiveness of the organization.

The implication of the study

The study shows how important it is for human resources departments in Zimbabwean universities to have specific knowledge management (KM) units. These units play a key role in lowering employee turnover. In practice, KM units help universities keep skilled workers by seeing their contributions as essential to the institution's success. They also support career growth and offer a positive work environment that increases job satisfaction and loyalty. This is especially important in Zimbabwean higher education, where high staff turnover is causing the loss of important knowledge. Without proper KM structures like mentoring, structured training, succession planning, and reward-based retention programs, universities face big challenges (Ntini & Dewah, 2023). On a theoretical note, this study is based on Knowledge Management Theory, as KM incorporates dynamic processes focusing on capturing, sharing, and applying tacit and explicit knowledge to improve organizational learning, flexibility, and performance (Du Plessis, 2005). Through strategically employing KM, universities can gain a competitive advantage through enhanced employee engagement and institutional reputation, while achieving strategic objectives in a timely way. With the burgeoning political, social, and economic challenges of the 21st century, institutions can assume leadership in KM by leveraging the related and significant advantages accompanying an integrated ICT infrastructure that has the potential to disseminate and store knowledge as rapidly as possible, thereby ensuring the right information reaches the right people at the right time (Dewah & Sibanda, 2022).

Additionally, establishing a culture of continuous learning and the sharing of knowledge is consistent with Haughton (2021) and Zayed et al. (2022), who related culture building to the enhancement of retention and innovation. It also reinforces the significance of leadership commitment, effective feedback loops, and tracking mechanisms, as they are important for sustaining KM initiatives as well as building an environment where employees feel they are a part of the ongoing learning process and valued factors regardless of their role (Abiola, 2023; Tucker, 2024). Adopting a holistic KM framework that includes formal mentoring, training, succession planning, incentives, and support from the institution is critical if universities in

Zimbabwe are to eliminate turnover or attrition while retaining expertise and enhancing greater employee engagement, scalability, and flexibility that ultimately leads to better decision making in a complex, changing educational environment.

Recommendations

The study recommends that: -

- University human resource departments should integrate KM activities such as knowledge sharing, training, mentoring, and documentation into routine HR practices to facilitate knowledge sharing among staff within different departments using technology to capture, share, transfer, retain, and preserve knowledge
- Human resources departments should identify and address training needs through workshops, seminars, and on-the-job training to improve professional knowledge, working practices, and career development prospects
- Human resources departments should capture recorded seminars, talks, and workshops in a centralized digital repository so that knowledge sharing is accessible to all staff anytime, supporting asynchronous learning and future onboarding.
- Human resources departments should lobby for financial support that will see the promotion of knowledge management through stand-alone budgets towards mitigating staff turnover.

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