


Knowledge retention in a platinum mine in the North West Province of South Africa



Authors:

Salmon Makhubela¹
Mpho Ngoepe¹ 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Information Science, University of South Africa, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Salmon Makhubela,
makhuss@unisa.ac.za

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Background: Knowledge retention plays an important role in combating organisational knowledge loss. However, some organisations, including mining companies, still lose organisational knowledge because of employees' retiring, resigning, downsizing, attrition and so on. This leaves the organisations with a shortage of qualified senior experienced employees to meet production needs, which has a negative impact on the running of the operational functions on a day-to-day basis.

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to investigate knowledge retention strategies in a platinum mine in the North West Province of South Africa.

Method: The study used qualitative research approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

Results: The key findings of the study revealed that although the mine has a knowledge retention policy, some of the employees are not aware of its existence and there was not enough support of knowledge retention initiatives from the management.

Conclusion: The study concludes by arguing that having knowledge retention policy, strategies and initiatives on paper but failing to implement is as good as not having it. The organisation needs to implement knowledge retention policy in order to benefit from the knowledge retention initiative.

Introduction

Knowledge retention has become a critical challenge for many organisations around the world (Levy 2011). This is because organisations lose the knowledge of departing employees when they take early retirement, find another job or are lured by other organisations. Phaladi (2011) adds that many organisations are facing a crisis in their workforce demographics because of the increasing number of ageing experienced employees retiring from the workplace. The situation is compounded by the shortage of skilled, younger employees who can replace the experienced, old employees when they retire. Martins and Meyer (2012) agree that many organisations are faced with the challenge of losing organisational knowledge and competitive advantage because of employee layoffs, retirements, staff turnover, organisational mergers and acquisitions, and competitive recruitments.

DeLong (2004) argues that the changing workforce demographics are not the only problem that many organisations around the world face, but there is also a looming potential brain drain that is likely to affect the strategic and operational function of the organisation. The brain drain crisis is likely to affect organisations that depend on highly trained and experienced professionals and managers to create value for them (IBM Human Capital Management 2006). When employees leave the organisation, they take with them organisational knowledge about past research and development project failures and successes, resources and organisational procedures (Baguma, Ragsdell & Murray 2014; Dube & Ngulube 2012). Brown and Galli-Debicella (2009:11) argue that many organisations fail to realise the importance of such tacit knowledge until the employees leave. The loss of experienced employees affects not only the human resource (HR) management but also the functional operations and the capability of the organisation to engage in business activities effectively and without problems (Bairi, Manohar & Kundu 2011; Sutherland & Jordaan 2004:57).

According to Schultz and Grimm (2008), mining industries around the world have also been affected by a shortage of qualified talent to meet their production needs. The authors also explained that the number of employees leaving the mining industry to pursue other job and career opportunities is higher than employees entering the mining industry. Mills (2012:2) asserts

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that the crisis confronting the global mining sector arises because of the shortage 'of young people entering the sector [that] is beginning to have a real impact and is likely to affect mine production adversely in the foreseeable future'. Some of the reasons identified as attributes for this trend include 'the general image of the industry, declining numbers of graduates from mining programmes, and the draining of talent and knowledge as a result of mining industry turnover and retirement' (Schultz & Grimm 2008:54).

The mining industry in South Africa 'faces a skills shortage in many of the technical disciplines such as geology, mining engineering, metallurgical engineering, chemical engineering, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, analytical chemistry and mine surveying' (Musingwini, Cruise & Phillips 2013:235). Brown and Galli-Debicella (2009:11) declared that the new and young employees who are entering the field do not possess the skill sets needed to replace the retiring employees. The knowledge loss resulting from employee turnover exposes the mining industry to considerable risk because departing employees often leave with rare and difficult-to-imitate knowledge as well as critical knowledge about whom they know (Whelan & Carcary 2011:681).

Sutherland and Jordaan (2004:56) argue that an organisation's ability to retain knowledgeable workers is a critical component in determining its present and future success. If the organisation does not retain employees' knowledge, remaining employees will not be able to learn from their experience and they will reinvent the wheel continuously (DeLong 2004; Martins & Meyer 2012:79). As retaining employees is not always feasible, it is important that organisations should retain or capture the knowledge possessed by experienced employees before they leave the organisation. Martins and Meyer (2012:79) suggest that knowledge retention could be regarded as a solution to combating knowledge loss by keeping possession of, continuing to have and practising and recognising knowledge that could have been lost by the organisation. Such knowledge retention can help the organisation maintain a competitive advantage (Bender & Fish 2000:130; Whelan & Carcary 2011:677), foster innovation and improve efficiency, effectiveness and productivity (Dube & Ngulube 2013:1).

It was reported that in 2009, the South African mining sector employed about 548 000 workers (MQA 2011:10). This number includes both permanent and contract workers. However, the mining industry still faces a skills shortage in many of the technical disciplines that are necessary to ensure its future health, despite it being a major source of employment (Musingwini et al. 2013:235). Jordaan and Barry (2009:174) argue that approximately 12 500 artisans are needed per year in South Africa to meet the demand, whereas the statistics show that approximately 3000 artisans pass trade tests every year (Van Rooyen et al. 2010:2). The authors further note that artisan retention is particularly important not only because the country is facing a critical shortage of artisans but also because the average age of artisans is 54 years and 70% of employees are therefore approaching

retirement age. This is a clear indication that retaining the employees is not the solution to the current situation faced by the mining industry; however, mines can try to retain the knowledge the employees possess.

There is also concern about the difficulties of fly-in fly-out (FIFO) as an ongoing lifestyle in the mining industry. This situation is prompted by a shortage of skilled employees and the high demand that comes with it. Artisans are employed for a year or a few years and then they move to other companies where they are promised large salaries and other incentives. Van Rooyen et al. (2010) observed that artisan retention in South Africa is crucial with regard to infrastructure development, economic growth and wealth creation. However, it seems highly unlikely that the South African mining industry will have sufficient artisans because of factors such as the immigration of skilled employees to Europe, an ageing workforce, layoffs and employee poaching by other companies (Van der Berg 2008). Stacey, Hadjigeriou and Potvin (2009:247) assert that 'large numbers of mining personnel, including many with key skills, have recently been attracted to other mining countries particularly Australia to satisfy the skills shortages in those countries'. This has left South African mining companies with a shortage of labour and experienced employees to carry on with their daily operations. South Africa has many mining companies across the country. However, our study focused on the North West Province of South Africa and utilised the knowledge retention model as a theoretical framework to investigate knowledge retention in a platinum mine in this province. The study provides recommendations to minimise the loss of organisational knowledge and devise strategies that will help the mine to maintain its competitive advantage. The research themes derived from the theoretical framework of the study are knowledge retention strategies, information and communication technology (ICT), knowledge retention initiatives support and learning culture.

Theoretical framework

This study is based on the knowledge retention model of Doan, Rosental-Sabroux and Grundstein (2011). The constructs used in this study that helped to frame the objectives of the study include ICT tools, HR practices, strategies for knowledge retention and learning culture.

Doan et al. (2011) argue that an adaptive and agile organisation will likely survive and have competitive advantage over its competitors. The knowledge retention and transfer techniques can be used to capture, share and possibly create knowledge before employees leave the organisation or when the organisation appoints new employees to promptly inform them of everything they need to know. Hence, knowledge retention is an area that holds great potential for organisations in terms of reducing the costs associated with staff turnover and sustaining business performance. The model outlines key elements that are critical for fostering and facilitating the knowledge retention process within the organisation.

Problem statement

Many organisations including those in the mining industry are faced with the challenges of workforce diversity, ageing workforce, generational differences, talent identification and retention in the era of skills shortage. The loss of employees as a result of resignations, layoffs, retirement and relocation has considerable cost implications for the organisation as it leads to knowledge loss. Nagadevara (2012) maintains that the loss of employees in the organisation results in increased costs such as the cost of having a position remaining vacant, hiring a new person, training the new person, loss of knowledge and productivity. Similarly, Aiman-Smith et al. (2006) stress that the situation can be worsened when there are not enough skilled and experienced employees left in the organisation to continue with the day-to-day functions of the organisation without any disruptions. The Deloitte report (2013) indicates that mines continue to face critical frontline and professional skills shortages that affect day-to-day operations.

Similarly, Schultz and Grimm (2008) also share the same sentiments highlighted in the Deloitte report (2013), namely, that globally the mining industry is affected by the shortage of qualified and experienced employees to meet its production needs. This is a challenge which many mining organisations have to address. Levy (2011) argues that knowledge retention has become the main challenge faced by many organisations around the world as a result of demographic change and attrition. Therefore, it is necessary to establish how the mining industry retains knowledge of employees who resign or retire from the industry in order to continue with day-to-day operations without disruptions.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate knowledge retention in a platinum mine in the North West Province of South Africa. The specific objectives were to:

- identify knowledge retention policies, strategies and procedures
- identify technologies used in knowledge retention
- determine the role players in knowledge retention
- assess the promotion of a learning culture.

Literature review

Literature for this study is reviewed based on the research objectives and aims at knowledge retention policy and strategies, the role players of knowledge retention, the role of ICT in knowledge retention and the learning and organisational culture.

Knowledge retention policy, strategies and processes

Liebowitz (2008:1) notes that strategic human capital management refers to the HR preparedness for workforce development and succession planning in terms of having the human talent available and educated in order to meet the

organisation's strategic mission and vision. According to Yamamoto (2011:3550), employee retention is regarded as one of the important HR management policies for retaining the current and expected high-performing employees within organisations for long periods of time, thereby enabling them to exercise or develop their capabilities. Knowledge retention is a multifaceted component of an organisation's HR strategies to retain expert, critical knowledge and to maintain a competitive advantage (Dube & Ngulube 2013:1).

The challenge currently faced by HR is addressing the issue of knowledge loss in organisations. Dube and Ngulube (2013:2) state that employees leave organisations for many reasons such as career improvement, retrenchment and retirement. Because of these factors, Liebowitz (2008) contends that knowledge retention strategies should be implemented or incorporated into the organisation from the beginning because you do not know when someone will leave or take early retirement. Martins and Meyer (2012) observe that some of the forward-thinking companies that are already experiencing skills shortages and knowledge loss are approaching the issue from an HR perspective by focusing on testing new and creative recruitment, retention, workforce career planning and retirement solutions to ensure that the talent and knowledge needed for continued productivity are in place.

Thomas (2009) expounds that for knowledge retention to occur, the organisation's workplace environment and culture that encourage and support knowledge transfer should be institutionalised. The authors further explain that all HR professionals should be aware of and understand demographic changes and how demographic issues such as an ageing workforce impact the development and implementation of effective HR policies and practices.

Knowledge can be retained in an organisation through various strategies that may involve education, training, a community of practice and professional networks, documenting the processes and the use of advanced software to capture the work processes (Wamundila & Ngulube 2011), best practices, case studies and job manuals (Kelleher 2006). According to Dewah (2012), most of the knowledge in organisations exists in the form of tacit knowledge gained and built up through years of experience. The author further argues that this knowledge has to be captured and stored in the organisations' repositories such as databases, documents, software and by embedding it in processes, products and services, thereby transmitting the existing knowledge throughout the organisation.

Doan et al. (2011) contend that knowledge retention strategies improve innovation, organisational growth, efficiency, employee development and competitive advantage. However, the organisations need to determine the technical, procedural and social aspects that will be employed in the debriefing process (Kelleher 2006). The strategy and technological devices will be based on how best to ensure

that other employees in the organisation can access the retained knowledge in meaningful ways.

Role players and leadership support of knowledge retention initiatives

An organisation's knowledge strategy is 'the overall approach an organisation intends to take to align its knowledge resources and capabilities to the intellectual requirements of its strategy' (Nelson & McCann 2010:4). One of the factors that help with employees participating in knowledge retention initiatives in the organisation is when the leaders or top management support it. Doan et al. (2011) describe top management support as:

... the degree to which top managers act as role models when participating in knowledge-retention activities and establishing all the necessary conditions for the knowledge-retention process as well as will to provide additional resources if considered necessary. (p. 309)

The authors propose that the leadership and performance management systems should establish the importance of knowledge to its operations. Basford, Offermann and Wirtz (2012) argue that supportive leaders or supervisors can help with the reduction of the staff turnover by encouraging employees to stay in organisations for a long time because of the involvement with and assistance to the leaders. Whelan and Carcary (2011) stress that organisations need to support and provide a context for employees to share the knowledge freely with other employees. The authors further note that strategies for enhancing knowledge creation include practising relevant leadership behaviours such as providing the vision and support for innovation and cultivating an organisational learning culture.

The use of information and communication technology in knowledge retention

Information and communication technology is a broad subject concerned with technology and other aspects of managing and processing information and it deals with the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, process, transmit and retrieve information (Jamwal & Padha 2009). Dewah (2014) notes that ICTs impact heavily the way organisations function and play a vital role in the knowledge society. Hence, the ICT tools are incorporated in organisations in order to facilitate communication among individuals or employees.

According to Dewah (2014), knowledge is important for business survival and in this regard ICT plays a critical role in the success of any enterprise in the competitive world. The author further states that for most knowledge management systems, the use of appropriate and user-friendly information technology aids management and retention. Dalkir (2011) explains that technology is one of the key elements in knowledge management processes in today's information-intensive business world. Jamwal and Padha (2009) posit that in knowledge projects, technology mainly refers to specially designed software and hardware for capturing, storing and

sharing knowledge. The authors also argue that without an integrated strategic approach, it will be difficult both to receive the full benefits of ICT driving the socio-economic development cycle and to avoid the pitfalls. In turn, ICT tools refer to the extent to which ICT applications can be used to facilitate the process of knowledge retention (Jamwal & Padha 2009).

Therefore, appropriate strategies and approaches should be developed to capture employees' expertise and retain it in an organisation before they leave; it is imperative that the organisation uses relevant and current user-friendly technologies to capture knowledge that is compatible with other software and technologies.

Organisational culture and learning influences on knowledge retention

Dube and Ngulube (2012:72) describe an organisational culture as the shared assumptions that an organisation learns to create a unique culture that reflects the organisation's identity over time, both visibly and invisibly. An organisational culture entails the collective perceptions, practices, beliefs and values shared by employees with regard to appropriate behaviour in the workplace (Al-Alawi, Al-Marzooqi & Mohammed 2007; Zheng, Yang & McLean 2009:762). According to Schmitt, Borzillo and Probst (2012:64), an organisational culture denotes a shared common frame of reference that employees acquire socially and transmit and provide rules for organisational behaviour. Ajmal and Koskinen (2008:10) describe culture as holistic, historically determined and socially constructed knowledge, which exists at various levels in the organisation and is manifested in all aspects of organisational life.

According to Erwee, Skadiang and Roxas (2012:90–99), 'Organisational culture is [an] essential enabler for an effective knowledge culture with trust identified as the single most powerful culture dimension in the process'. The authors explain that the organisational culture is characterised by employees who are actively encouraged to use the organisation's knowledge, make contributions to its knowledge and form close working relationships between employees to improve performance. Al-Alawi et al. (2007) argue that each organisation has its unique culture, which develops over time to reflect the organisation's identity. The culture of an organisation may differ from one organisation to another, but there are factors that form the basis of organisational culture success. Without these factors, it is not easy for any organisation to succeed in its endeavour.

Research methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach to solicit information from the participants through semi-structured interviews and content analysis in order to understand how the platinum mine in the North West Province of South Africa retains the knowledge of the leaving employees. As a result, the study was inductive rather than deductive as it was concerned with exploring an emerging area of knowledge

retention in a mining sector. Neuman (2014) argues that the inductive approach is concerned with understanding the worldview of a person being studied and accurately represents how that person sees the world, feels about it and acts within it. The participants were chosen purposively in order to get relevant answers to the questions posed to them. The target population for the current study was the experienced employees of a platinum mine in the North West Province of South Africa. Ten employees agreed to participate in the interviews, which included both senior experienced employees and managers from different departments (HR, talent management, engineering and IT) in the organisation. In order to ensure trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility of data, this study triangulated different data sources to build a coherent justification for the themes. It was assumed that the process added to the validity of the study, based on the convergence of sources of data and perspectives of participants. The accuracy was further determined through taking the final analysed data to the participants for checking. Neuman (2014) argues that authenticity refers to giving a fair, honest and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of someone who lives it. Furthermore, the interviews took place at the organisation and were recorded on voice recorder and transcribed manually on Word document for analysis. The data analysis was performed according to the themes or objectives of the study. The organisation is referred to as *the mining company* throughout this study because the company requested to remain anonymous.

Findings and discussion

This section discusses the research findings that were obtained via interviews and document analysis. The results will be discussed based on the objectives of the study.

Knowledge retention policies, strategies and procedures

Ngulube (2003) states that written policies serve as binding contracts between individuals, the organisation and stakeholders. The author further stresses that the written policies can help organisations set standards and can be used as tools for staff motivation to create, share and retain knowledge. A review of the organisational documents suggests that the organisation has a knowledge retention policy. The organisation also has a talent management framework in place that helps in predicting talent supply and the interventions necessary to ensure talent availability when it is required; it also continues to monitor skilled employee turnover as a measure of retention. Although there existed a knowledge retention policy, some participants were not aware of its existence. This might have impacted the way employees participate in and commit to knowledge retention programmes because, if there is no awareness about a particular programme or initiatives, employees might assume that it is not important and, hence, it is not necessary to participate in it. The policy should also state the method that must be used when employees conduct knowledge retention from the leaving employee/s (resignation or

retirement). The participants were asked about the strategies and processes that the organisation uses to capture the knowledge of the leaving employees back into the organisation. Some of the responses were as follows:

‘Exit interview. For the purpose of documentation. Nothing has happened in relation to information captured on the exit interviews that I am aware of.’ [P1]

‘The organisation uses the exit interviews to capture the knowledge of the leaving employees, as well as mentoring of junior employees by senior employees.’ [P2]

‘Interviews and it depends on how long you have been with the organisation.’ [P3]

‘I’m not aware of the organisational methods. But I have been informed by other leaving employees that they have attended an exit interview. Within our unit it is the mentoring/meetings mentioned.’ [P4]

The participants indicated that the organisation predominately uses exit interviews to capture the knowledge of the leaving employees. However, some of the participants stated that they are not aware of processes to follow or use when capturing the knowledge of the leaving employees from the organisation. Based on these different viewpoints, it seems as if the organisation needs to workshop employees about the processes when capturing knowledge of the leaving employees. Liebowitz (2008) contends that knowledge retention strategies should be implemented or incorporated into the organisation from the beginning because no one knows when an employee will leave the organisation or take early retirement. This was also supported by Levy (2011) who proposed that knowledge retention should start immediately when an employee has been recruited and must continue during employment until he or she retires or resigns. Baguma et al. (2014) argued that if the organisation adopts suggestions made by Liebowitz (2008) and Levy (2011), it would improve the management of the knowledge possessed by employees by capturing it and converting that knowledge into organisational knowledge on a day-to-day basis, depending on the organisation’s need.

Role players and support of knowledge retention initiatives

The research aimed to identify the role players of knowledge retention in the organisation. The following section presents the findings from organisational document analysis and participant interviews about the role players and knowledge retention initiatives the organisation has in place.

Responsibilities of knowledge retention

Thilmany (2008) posits that in order to prevent valuable information accumulated on the job from getting lost in the transition, HR professionals at many companies adopt different mechanisms to retain employees’ know-how and best practices so that the information can be passed on to future employees. Liebowitz (2008:1) states that strategic human capital management has been an important area in recent years within government, industry and academia to

find ways to retain employees and knowledge of the experienced employees. When the participants were asked about who is responsible for knowledge retention in the organisation, they mentioned that HR management or practitioners are responsible, with the exception of one participant who identified the department of talent management as the one responsible for knowledge retention. Based on these different views, it seems as if the employees are not certain about who is actually responsible for knowledge retention in the organisation. Calo (2008) argues that the policies and practices that are necessary for knowledge transfer to occur reside within the HR function; so the involvement of leadership and HR management is essential. The author further states that HR should receive significant incentives to develop and implement the necessary policies and practices that will encourage and facilitate the transfer of critical knowledge within the organisation before knowledge is lost and becomes unrecoverable.

Support of the knowledge retention initiatives

The knowledge retention initiatives need to be supported in order to achieve intended objectives. Whelan and Carcary (2011) contend that organisations need to support and provide a context for employees to share the knowledge freely with other employees. The authors further note that strategies for enhancing knowledge creation include practising relevant leadership behaviours such as providing the vision and support for innovation and cultivating an organisational learning culture. The interview results showed that there are differing opinions concerning the leadership support of knowledge retention initiatives. Although some of the participants stated that the leadership or management supports knowledge retention initiatives, others disagreed. Those who disagreed highlighted that management does not prioritise or fully support knowledge retention initiatives. It is important for the role players to be involved in, and committed to, the knowledge retention initiatives. This will influence the employees to take the initiatives seriously and commit to the fulfilment of their objectives.

The role of information and communication technology in knowledge retention

The purpose of this theme was to identify the impact of ICT on capture, storage and retrieval of the knowledge. In order to determine how ICT is used in knowledge retention, the researcher reviewed the organisational documents and interviewed the participants. The findings are presented and discussed in the following section according to sub-themes.

Usage and accessibility

Bairi et al. (2011) posit that knowledge retention consists of three activities: knowledge acquisition, storage and retrieval. These activities are explained as follows:

Knowledge acquisition describes the practices, processes and tools used to move knowledge into a state where it is kept available for future use (for example to mentor junior employees, capturing instructions on database and so on); storage represents

the processes and facilities used to keep knowledge and information until it is needed. Storage entities include individuals, groups, cultures, work processes, tools and systems such as a database; and retrieval includes behaviours, routines and processes used to access and reuse information and knowledge in new situations. (p. 46)

Dewah (2014) states that ICT tools such as intranets, email, groupware and data warehousing provide a collaborative framework and help capture, store, disseminate and share knowledge. This was echoed by Hortovanyi and Ferincz (2015), who stated that the organisational ICT acts as a socio-technical system that enables individuals to interact through a wide range of devices, including voice mail, email, video conferencing, groupware, corporate intranet and wikis. The platinum mine's annual report (2015) revealed that the organisation uses ICT to provide the right data to the right people at the right time, enable innovation, adapt to a changing business environment, support the achievement of cost efficiencies and contribute to a safe workplace. The findings indicated that there was consensus among most of the participants who have access to the intranet, email, Internet and radios for knowledge sharing in the organisation. Furthermore, the organisation uses computers and document files to store or preserve the knowledge retained from the departed experienced employees. From these findings, it seems that the organisation is successful in allowing its employees to use a variety of technologies to share knowledge.

Information and communication technology can help organisations to be more efficient and innovative by making knowledge visible and accessible among employees (Hortovanyi & Ferincz 2015:4). Participants were asked whether the retained knowledge from the departed senior experienced employees is made accessible to the current or remaining employees within the organisation. If the answer to the previous question was 'no', then the participants were requested to give reasons. The following answers were given:

'No, the company keeps the retained knowledge for unknown purposes. It does not benefit the remaining employees or help to solve recurring challenges.' [P1]

'The organisation makes the retained knowledge accessible to all employees.' [P2]

'No, I don't recall of any knowledge being retained and shared with other employees.' [P3]

'The information or knowledge is only made available to the people or employees that are at higher levels of management in the company.' [P4]

There were different perceptions with regard to the accessibility of the retained knowledge. Most of the participants stated that the organisation makes the retained knowledge available to the employees, while some of the participants mentioned that the retained knowledge is not accessible to all the employees. This can have a negative impact on the employees who need the retained knowledge

of the retired or departed experienced employees to make an informed decision. Hortovanyi and Ferncz (2015) stress that technology is important for facilitating knowledge sharing between employees, but does not replace the need for continual collaboration between employees.

The organisational culture and learning influence on knowledge retention

The research aimed to determine which organisational culture promotes learning and knowledge retention. The findings from the organisational documents review and participants' responses with regard to organisational culture are presented below.

Learning culture

Learning culture is described as an organisational culture that is oriented towards the promotion and facilitation of workers' learning, its share and dissemination in order to contribute to organisational development and performance (Rebelo & Gomes 2011). The authors also argue that learning culture through a sharing process turns into group learning or organisational learning, thereby contributing to organisational success. The platinum mine's annual report (2015) revealed that the organisation aims to employ and retain high-calibre, high-performing individuals who subscribe to organisations who share values and culture. The annual report further stated that the organisation acknowledges that in order to attract, retain and keep employees motivated, the reward for executing a business strategy needs to be market related. The interview results showed that there was consensus among the majority of the participants that the organisation has an employee development plan in place and is always willing to allocate funds for employees to attend courses to acquire new knowledge, which confirms what was established in the platinum mine's annual report. However, one of the participants acknowledged that the organisation has employee development plans and funds allocated for training, but some of the departments just pay lip service. From the document analysis and interview results, where it was established that the organisation has a learning culture, it seems that some of the departments do not implement the learning culture. This might have a negative impact on the way employees commit themselves to and get involved in knowledge retention initiatives and the sharing of knowledge.

There were different views with regard to the rewards or incentives that employees receive when they participate in knowledge retention initiatives. Some of the participants mentioned that employees get promoted and are given incentives like vouchers, t-shirts and jackets, while other participants were not aware of any incentives that the organisation gives to employees who participate in knowledge retention initiatives. It seems as if the communication and implementation of the incentives are not fully adhered to by all the departments in the organisation. Calo (2008) argues that factors such as management support and performance-

related rewards are prerequisites for knowledge sharing to occur on a voluntary and ongoing basis.

Conclusion and recommendations

It is clear from the study that although the platinum mine in the North West Province of South Africa has a knowledge retention policy, the policy is not fully implemented by all the departments in the organisation. This study recommends that the knowledge retention policy should be institutionalised and enforced across all the departments in the organisation in order for the policy to achieve its objectives. The study revealed that there is ambiguity about who is responsible for knowledge retention in the organisation. Along the same lines, the findings show that the involvement of the leaders and their support of knowledge retention initiatives are inadequate. The study recommends that in order for the knowledge retention initiatives to be fully implemented by all the departments in the organisation, role players and management need to be involved and must support the initiatives from the onset.

Support for the initiative will in turn encourage the employees to be involved and to realise the importance of knowledge retention in the organisation. Furthermore, the study recommends that the retained knowledge should be made available and accessible to the current employees so that they can use it to make informed decisions. Lastly, the study established that the organisation has a learning and organisational culture in place, although not all the departments follow this culture. The study further recommends that the organisational culture should be fully implemented and practiced by all the departments at all times in order to make knowledge retention possible. Finally, a further inclusive study that covers knowledge retention in the platinum mines of the North West province as a whole is recommended.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

S.M. conceptualised and collected the data, and M.N. supervised the project. Their respective contribution was 60% and 40%.

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