

Importance of human resources management practices in enhancing knowledge retention in the cross-border mergers of the telecommunications industry in Lesotho

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Tahleho Tseole

National University of Lesotho Library Services &
Research fellow at the University of South Africa (UNISA)
te.tseole@nul.ls, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0422-5181>

Patrick Ngulube

University of South Africa (UNISA)
ngulup@unisa.ac.za, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7676-3931>

Abstract

Rationale of Study – The purpose of the current study is to investigate how human resources management practices may be used to improve knowledge retention in the cross-border mergers of the telecommunications industry in Lesotho.

Methodology – This was a single quantitative case study that used questionnaires for data collection. Data were gathered from 14 staff members who were available during the merger process as well as 14 other staff members who left the organisation because of the merger, thus making a total of 28 staff members from whom data were collected.

Findings – The study's findings show some inconsistencies regarding whether HRMPs are adopted and used at ETL. While the majority of participants thought certain HRMPs did exist, a sizeable number thought HRMPs were adopted. Furthermore, the study results also showed that employees are not compensated for sharing knowledge.

Implications – The proposed framework may be used as a yardstick for policy development on using HRMPs to improve knowledge retention for all organisations going through cross-border mergers and acquisitions (CBM&As) in all industries.

Originality – The study recommends a framework for retaining knowledge using HRMPs in CBM&A. However, the framework is not restricted to the telecommunications industry; it may be used by all organisations undergoing M&A in various industries.

Keywords

Mergers, acquisitions, knowledge retention, telecommunications industry

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1 Introduction

In a knowledge-based economy, organisations and their offerings survive based on managing their knowledge, and successful organisations are said to be those that make use of knowledge-based capital better and faster (Bontis, 1999; Ghlichlee & Goodarzi, 2022; Le & Le, 2023). One way in which organisations can harness their knowledge is through human resources management practices (HRMPs) (Alfes et al., 2013; Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Kehoe and Wright (2013; El-Farr & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019). Furthermore, Cao et al. (2021) also regarded HRMPs as the primary approaches for firms to evoke and reinforce organisational knowledge resources to meet their key goals. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2016) argued that “HRM practices including innovation-oriented selection, staffing and training initiatives can help new and existing knowledge and skills of employees to be expanded toward exploring new products and exploiting more market opportunities (p.134)”. For Evangelista et al. (2023), knowledge-based HRMPs are customised to improve knowledge creation, sharing and usage within an organisation.

Therefore, organisations need to focus on human resources because the implementation of HRMPs supports maximising employees’ capabilities in the organisation (Cherif, 2020). According to Gope et al. (2018), HRMPs epitomise all the firm’s activities that are intended to attract, develop, motivate and retain employees (Horwitz et al., 2003), as well as to ascertain that human resources are effectively used to achieve the organisational goals (Collins & Clark, 2003; Wright & Boswell, 2002). The relationship between knowledge management and HRMPs is premised on the fact that an organisation’s ability to generate knowledge is dependent on the employee’s ability to learn as well as on their motivation to share knowledge within an organisation (Gope et al., 2018; Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013; Tseole & Ngulube, 2022). Several studies unanimously contend that HRMs help organisations achieve goals such as employee well-being, productivity, reducing employee turnover and increasing commitment (Beer et al., 2015; Parayitam et al., 2021). The purpose of this study was to investigate how human resources management practices may be used to enhance knowledge retention in the context of cross-border mergers in the telecommunications industry in Lesotho.

2 Context of the study

This study is contextually set at Econet Telecom Lesotho (ETL). The organisation resulted from the merger between the former privately owned Econet Ezi-Cel Lesotho and former

state-owned enterprise (SOE) telecom Lesotho. Originally from Zimbabwe, Econet Ezi-Cel Lesotho was a diversified telecommunications group of companies that operated on different continents, including Africa, Europe, South America, North America, and the East Asia Pacific Rim. The merger between Telecom Lesotho and Econet Ezi-Cel Lesotho has subsequently given ETL an opportunity to provide both fixed and mobile services using a single license, unlike prior to the merger. The merger has also allowed ETL to enhance customer contentment by offering the newest services at affordable rates and to draw new clientele with ground-breaking product offerings.

3 Literature review

The current section discusses the literature review on the role of HRMPs in facilitating knowledge retention, critical factors in transferring and retaining knowledge in mergers, and the difficulties in retaining knowledge in the aftermath of a merger.

3.1 The role of human resources management practices in knowledge retention in mergers

The organisational context is shifting and has become more competitive in recent times. In line with the latest developments in technology, Gope et al. (2018) argue that human resource professionals have been facing a “talent crunch” to attract skilful and talented employees who will add value to the organisation. According to Thite (2004) and Gope et al. (2018), human resources management and knowledge management are two human-centred constructs that focus on creating, using, and sharing knowledge. Similarly, (Garavan et al., 2022) argued that even though they take different formats in terms of implementation, knowledge management and human resources management are concerned with managing employees in an organisation. The two concepts are dependent on each other as knowledge, for instance, cannot be managed in a void without people and vice-versa. Furthermore, Ghlichlee and Goodarzi (2022), as well as Subramanian and van de Vrande (2019), opined that intellectual capital plays a vital role in the innovative capabilities of organisations, such as new product development projects, as a critical portion of the knowledge and skills required for innovation resides with and is used by individuals.

Human resource practices (HRPs) are about the policies, practices and systems that an organisation can use to sway employees’ behaviour, attitudes and performance (Wang & Noe, 2010; Le & Le, 2023). For Turulja and Bajgoric (2018), HRMPs are defined as all decisions made in an organisation and are aimed at attracting and retaining personnel. The connection between HRMPs and knowledge management is based on the conjecture that

the firm's ability to create new knowledge resides in their employees' abilities to learn and in their motivation to share their knowledge with their colleagues (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013; Gope et al., 2018). Furthermore, Sammarra et al. (2017) remark that HR systems should focus not only on the provision of lifelong learning education but also towards ensuring that all organisational HRM policies and practices work to improve employees' knowledge retention behaviours.

Jimenez-Jimenez and Sanz-Valle (2013), Saleem and Khurshid (2014), as well as Cherif (2020) underscore that HRM practices can augment knowledge management, specifically knowledge retention (KR), via two different directions. Firstly, organisations may use HRM practices to obtain and inspire a workforce with learning capabilities. Secondly, HRM practices can cultivate an organisational culture that inspires the acquisition of knowledge and its sharing amongst organisational members. The adoption of HRM practices promotes a positive work environment where employees are willing, have the opportunities and are skilled to make a more significant individual contribution to the organisation, which in turn increases organisational performance (Kellner et al., 2016; El-Farr & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019). Additionally, HRM practices facilitate the shaping of employees' skills, abilities, values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours through hiring, socialising and developing a firm's pool of human resources. For instance, providing training and development to employees through different knowledge retention strategies, including on-the-job training, job rotation, coaching, and others, can help improve the knowledge, skills, experience, abilities and motivation of employees.

The extant literature lists several HRM practices, and for this study, the three knowledge-based HRM practices identified by Gope et al. (2018), Parayitam et al. (2021) and Kianto et al. (2017) were used, including knowledge-based recruitment and selection, knowledge-based compensation and rewards management, knowledge-based training and development. The above-selected HRM practices are now discussed below:

3.2 Knowledge-based recruitment and selection

According to Kianto et al. (2017), recruitment 'includes those practices and activities carried out by the organisation with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees' (p.12). Selection, on the one hand, is defined as 'the task of predicting which applicant will be the most successful in meeting the demands of the job, and/or be the best fit with the workgroup and culture of the organisation' (Torrington et al., 2008, p. 12). From the KM perspective, El-Farr and Hosseingholizadeh (2019) and Garavan et al.

(2022) suggested that an organisation must have the ability to recruit and retain the required human capital pool with knowledge and skills that are valuable and rare. Furthermore, Kianto et al. posited that both recruitment and selection impact organisational knowledge creation because of their ability to determine the type of knowledge brought into the organisation.

Compensation and rewards management is an effective mechanism to motivate employees to acquire, use, share, transfer and create knowledge (El-Farr & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019; Evangelista et al., 2023). Top management, for instance, can use both tangible (bonuses and one-off rewards) and intangible incentives (status and recognition) to motivate employees to share, create and apply knowledge (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; El-Farr & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019; Kianto et al., 2017).

According to El-Farr and Hosseingholizadeh (2019), training and development allow the employees of an organisation to acquire and develop critical skills that improve personal and organisational performance. Many scholars view the process itself as being an effective HRM practice that is intended to facilitate the implementation of the KM strategy, activities and outcomes. Lwanga and Ngulube (2019) suggested that an active reward system is vital in motivating employees to share knowledge because, in the absence of such a system, some employees may hoard their knowledge for fear of losing it. Depending on the task interdependence, compensation and reward can be tailored towards either individuals or teams (Ahmad et al., 2019; Evangelista et al., 2023).

3.3 Key factors in transferring and retaining knowledge in mergers

Tang (2016) notes that among the various steps in mergers and acquisitions, the integration process is the one that is mainly linked to knowledge retention. Thelisson (2022) and Tang (2016) argued that this is the time when teams of the merged organisations start to establish a connection and work together. The relations embrace several dimensions, including recognition of each other, tie strength, distance, shared vision, and trust (Tang, 2016). Integration in the context of Mergers and acquisitions (M&As) refers to the multifaceted process in which previous individual organisations are combined. Integration involves combining the original socio-technical systems of the merging organisations into one newly combined system (Goh, 2001; Vaara et al., 2012; Annosi et al., 2021).

Integration, particularly post-merger integration, is critical for synergy between merging organisations. Post-merger integration (PMI) refers to the process of actual merger value-creation that will confidently materialise when the firms are amalgamated (Vieru & Rivard,

2015; Thelisson, 2022). Tang (2016) observes that this is the period in which employees of merging companies start to establish relationships and work together. However, Weber and Tarba (2011) state that the loss of independence that is related to the integration process can sometimes be harmful to the performance of the firm. For instance, Puranam et al. (2009) state that the levels of integration may lead to the destruction of the acquired firm's knowledge-based resources because of turnover and the disruption of organisational practices. Some scholars have noted various features of the integration process of knowledge transfer in M&As. Among these are the different factors, and the interactions between organisations in the M&A process are considered to have a considerable influence on knowledge transfer. The interactions include many components, such as identification with each other, tie strength, distance, shared vision, and trust (Van Wijk et al., 2008).

The knowledge-based view (KBV) of the firm (Butt et al., 2020; Farooq, 2019; Safari & Saleh, 2020; Issah, 2020), which stresses the need to develop and incorporate knowledge, proposes the need for specific capabilities in the post-merger integration period. Weber and Tarba (2011) define knowledge integration capability as the ability to manage acquisitions and achieve strategic goals by taking advantage of synergies through resource sharing and deploying and transferring resources and capabilities from one company to another. Capabilities can be transferred in several ways: handed to the new sister firm, shared for everyday use or taught to members of the other firm.

Furthermore, previous studies revealed that trust, which is the organisation's belief that the other organisation is loyal and adept in taking responsibility, is particularly significant to knowledge transfer in M&As (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Mishra et al., 2018). More vital trust ensures that staff members in one organisation are more eager to communicate, discuss and share their fundamental skills with employees of the other organisation. With a high degree of trust, the procedure becomes easier because colleagues need not worry about possible complications (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Mishra et al., 2018).

Apart from trust, shared vision is also assumed to be of great importance in knowledge transfer. Zasa and Buganza (2022) defined shared vision as a "common mental model of the future state that individuals or groups of people want to achieve" (p.15). Shared vision ensures that employees have a greater understanding of the benefits they may derive from sharing their knowledge (Bratianu & Anagnoste, 2011). Regular communication is significant in creating a high-trust environment and amplifying employees' shared vision. In accordance with this view, Minbaeva et al. (2003), Bratianu and Anagnoste (2011),

Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2019), and Jain et al. (2019) posit that internal communication might certainly affect the motivation of employees and, consequently, indeed also the knowledge transfer process. Weber and Tarba (2011) add that the ability for knowledge integration involves coordination across units of both organisations. It depends on communication between managers and employees of the acquiring company and between these managers and those of the acquired company.

In addition, the relationship between the merging organisations was examined. Consistent with this, Junni and Sarala (2013) state that the strategic relationship between the merging organisations can underpin knowledge transfer by easing knowledge transfer. Again, the social relationships between the two organisations' employees can manipulate knowledge transfer by influencing the employees' readiness to participate in knowledge transfer (Junni, 2011). In the CBM&As context, it has been found that characteristics of knowledge, including tacit knowledge (Junni, 2011), vagueness (Junni & Sarala, 2013) and cultural variations (Javidan et al., 2005) can encumber M&A knowledge transfer.

Another critical factor in transferring and retaining knowledge during CBM&As is the retaining of valued personnel during the M&A integration process. Casal and Fontela (2007) describe valuable employees as those in whom the core knowledge is embedded. Nonetheless, the study results in this regard are contradictory. For example, Ranft and Lord (2000) allude to the fact that retaining valuable personnel is one of the principal factors of knowledge transfer in the M&A process. In contrast, Casal and Fontela (2007) established no significant connection between retaining key employees and knowledge transfer.

Bresman et al. (2010) provide a scenario where the buying organisation may have better knowledge or skills that it desires to share with the target firm to ensure its effectiveness and responsiveness. They concluded that communication, visits, and meetings may enable the sharing of that knowledge (Bresman et al., 2010).

4 Statement of the problem

Organisations across all sectors, including those in telecommunications, are confronted with knowledge loss because of different attrition problems such as mergers and acquisitions (Singh & Gupta, 2020; Sumbal et al., 2018; McKinney et al., 2017; Tseole & Ngulube, 2022). Organisational knowledge loss is a significant issue that should not be neglected. Knowledge loss affects the sustainability and organisational performance of many business enterprises (Durst & Zieba, 2019).

Apparently, tacit knowledge is prone to loss since mergers and acquisitions comprise intricate processes where critical decisions need to be made, and yet this takes place relatively seldom (Durst & Zieba, 2019; Sumbal et al. (2020). Staff turnover resulting from M&As is cited as one of the critical factors leading to knowledge loss (Durst & Zieba, 2019; Massingham, 2018; Tseole and Marutha; Tseole & Ngulube, 2022). Consequently, losing this much-needed knowledge may lead to detrimental consequences (Klammer & Gueldenberg, 2019; Galan, 2023). These consequences include a deterioration of the organisational knowledge base, loss of organisational identity and a decrease in performance and productivity (Galan, 2023; Brymer & Sirmon, 2018).

Several studies have been undertaken to establish the role of human resources practices in knowledge management (Parayitam et al., 2021; Aktar & Pangil, 2018; Sammarra et al., 2017; and Gope et al., 2018; El-Farr & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019). However, according to McKinney et al. (2017), research on M&A's human resources is limited. This study, therefore, considers the role of human resources management practices in augmenting knowledge retention in the cross-border mergers of the telecommunications industry.

This study investigates the role of human resource management practices in improving knowledge retention in the cross-border mergers of the telecommunications industry. The specific objectives were to establish the role of HRMPs in facilitating knowledge retention in the cross-border mergers of the telecommunications industry, identify critical factors in retaining knowledge in organisational mergers, and propose a framework for improving knowledge retention in cross-border mergers of the telecommunications industry using HRMPs.

5 Methodology

This is a quantitative case study that used questionnaires as data collection instruments. Data were purposively collected from 28 staff members who were available during the merger process, as well as the other former employees who left during the transition stage. Out of the 28 questionnaires delivered, 21 were correctly responded to, thus attaining a response rate of 75%. This turned out to be a great response. Before data were analysed, they were cleaned to ensure quality. The actual data analysis was performed using SPSS software (version 17). The findings were presented with the assistance of Microsoft Excel and the design of charts and tables.

6 Findings and discussions

Consistent with the study objectives, the following section presents the findings.

6.1 The role of HRMPS in facilitating knowledge retention in the cross-border mergers of the telecommunications industry

HRM practices refer to the practices, systems, and policies that organisations use to influence the behaviour, performance, and attitudes of employees. HRM practices are essential in managing knowledge in organisations. They can also increase the ability and skills of staff members, thus influencing their behaviour and attitudes towards learning. Similarly, Ur Rehman et al. (2020) posit that HRM practices initiate positive exchange relationships among teams and organisations by satisfying employees' needs. For example, equal employment opportunities, training and development, and recruitment and selection fulfil employee needs and, therefore, generate favourable attitudes (Ntini & Dewah, 2023). In the same vein, HR practices foster the perception among employees that they are receiving a high level of organisational support. Trust is also perceived as a significant aspect of social exchanges because of its ability to initiate social exchange relationships based on reciprocal trust.

In fact, HRM practices and knowledge management are antecedents. Furthermore, Ntini and Dewah (2023) noted that human resource departments in many organisations are strategically placed to play a significant role in knowledge retention by integrating innovative HRM practices that consist of both individual and organisational learning, motivation, talent identification, and management and training. In this section, the respondents were requested to mention how far they either agreed or disagreed with the assertion that ETL provides training and development to its employees and the findings and as shown in Figure 1, the majority 10(47.6%) agreed, and 4(19%) strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 4(19%) disagreed while 2(9.5%) strongly disagreed and 1(4.8%) were not sure.

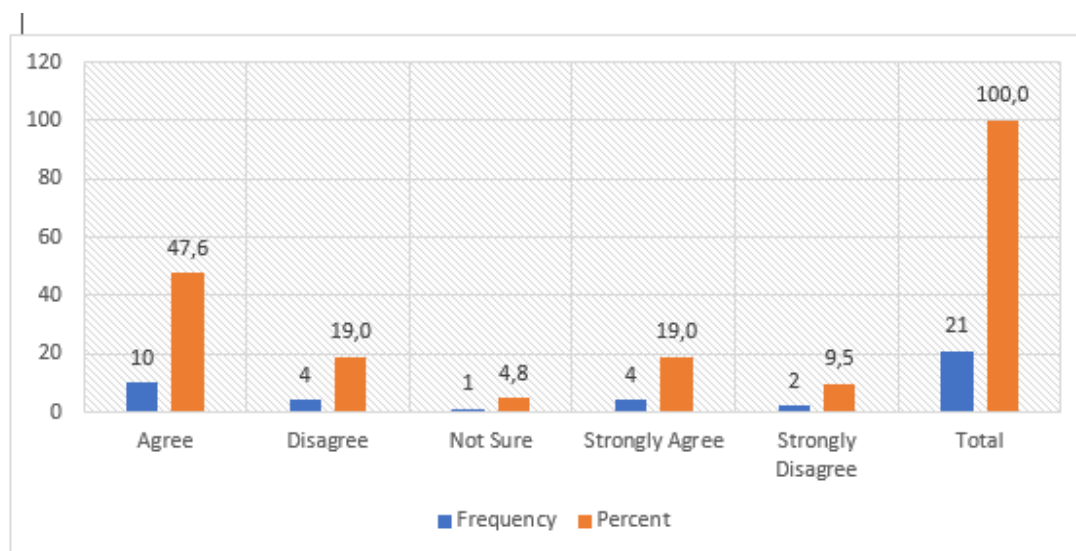


Figure 1: Provision of training and development to staff members

In line with the study findings, Ur Rehman et al. (2020) suggest that HRM practices such as training and development have been found to be closely related to knowledge creation and innovation in an organisation. Organisations, therefore, need to train employees to acquire and retain knowledge. As a follow-up, respondents were requested to state if ETL pays for training and development, and the results show that most participants agreed, with 11(52.4%) and 4(19%) agreeing and strongly agreeing, respectively. On the other hand, 3(14.3%) disagreed, while the other 2(9.5%) were not sure and 1(4.8%) deciding not to respond.

In addition, respondents were asked to state if ETL employees are compensated for sharing knowledge, and the results indicated that no compensation is provided for sharing knowledge. However, one participant agreed that employees are given incentives for sharing knowledge. In fact, 15(71.4%) and 4(19%) of the participants disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. However, 2(9.5%) were not sure while 1(4.8%) agreed. The fact that employees are not compensated for sharing knowledge is worrying because compensation and rewards are associated with influencing the knowledge retention behaviour of employees (Ur Rehman et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Ur Rehman et al. (2020) and Singh et al. (2021) point out that equal employment opportunities, training and development, recruitment and selection, as well as compensation and rewards, fulfil employee needs and, therefore, generate favourable attitudes. In the same vein, HR practices foster the perception among employees that they are receiving a high level of organisational support. Trust is also perceived as a significant

aspect of social exchanges because its ability to initiate social exchange relationships is based on reciprocal trust.

6.2 Key factors in transferring and retaining knowledge in M&As

This objective aimed to identify the factors that are essential in the transfer of knowledge in the context of cross-border mergers. The factors that were investigated include regular meetings and visits, as well as trust.

The literature review revealed several modes of interactions that may be used to improve the quality of relationships in M&As, which includes regular meetings and visits. The questionnaire also sought to find out if there were any such meetings and visits during the integration stage of the merger, and the results were inconsistent. For example, the majority of respondents 11(52.4%) strongly disagreed. On the other hand, 7(33.3%) and 1(4.8%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Furthermore, 1 (4.8%) disagreed, while another 1(4.8%) was not certain.

Contrary to the findings of this study, regular meetings and visits are regarded as one of the critical factors in the transfer of knowledge in cross-border mergers. For instance, Bresman et al. (2010) state how the acquiring organisation may be in possession of valuable knowledge it wishes to share with the target firm. They argue that visits and meetings may be vital for transferring that type of knowledge, and in the absence of such, they concluded that significant knowledge could be lost. Both merging organisations and high-tech firms are characterised by casual processes and comparable components of organisational culture. They usually arrange brainstorming meetings and visits, which facilitate implicit knowledge transfer. This mechanism is also discussed in the literature as a facilitator factor.

With more trust, staff members from one organisation are able to share their knowledge with staff from another organisation during integration. Respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the above statement, and according to the study findings, the majority of participants, 11(54.2%) and 3(14.3%), agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. On contrary, 5(23.8%) disagreed while 2(9.2%) indicated their uncertainty. Several scholars also corroborate these results. In order to build trust during cross-border mergers, organisations must communicate well and consistently and, as a result, avoid unnecessary conflicts between partners.

Similarly, scholars argue that trust plays a significant part in ensuring knowledge transfer and a continuous alignment of objectives, as well as connection to each other's networks. The importance of trust in this context is highlighted by the fact that merging organisations

exhibit conflicting characteristics, predominantly in terms of the level of formalisation and the intricacies of organisational structures. In the context of M&As, the knowledge-exchange process requires trust because organisational employees filter the knowledge they share with others based on the amount of trust they have and the formality of the relationship with them. However, it is essential to note that the very presence of trust may be hindered by the presence of cultural variations that are synonymous with CBM&As.

The importance of shared vision, according to Bratianu and Anagnoste (2011), can never be underestimated in mergers and acquisitions. The quicker employees of both organisations deal with the sense of a combined organisation, the more likelihood that they will be able to transfer their knowledge and show commitment to it. Furthermore, Bratianu and Anagnoste (2011) argue that if employees of the two organisations have a shared vision, that could likely improve employees' motivation to be actively engaged in the knowledge retention process. On this objective, the respondents were required to mention the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that if employees have the same vision, they have a deeper understanding of the benefits they could derive from sharing their knowledge. All 21(100%) participants were in agreement. The findings of this study are also validated by the literature review, where respondents showed that successful M&As are dependent on a shared vision between merging organisations. In order to create the meaning and shared vision of the merger, communication must be abundant, but everything must be communicated constantly during the merger process. The shared vision also propels employees towards achieving the strategic objective of M & A and provides a motivational platform. In creating a shared vision, managers should involve all employees of merging organisations to partake in the advancement of efficient vision and new practice values, which aim to make employees buy into the vision and realise their support.

The respondents here were expected to state how much they either agreed or disagreed with the statement that the success of the integration process in M&As is dependent on effective communication between managers and employees of merging organisations, and the study findings corroborated this statement and all 21(100%) were in total agreement with the statement. The reviewed literature also viewed communication as one of the success factors in M&As. For instance, Weber and Tarba (2011) consider communication in M&As to be the “glue” that holds the two merging organisations together. Similarly, McKinney et al. (2017) and Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2019) posit that a lack of communication in mergers and acquisitions is directly related to employee departure and

retention. However, sufficient communication among managers and employees lessens uncertainty, rumours, distrust and anger towards management.

When two organisations merge, there is much confusion, and only successful communication can dispel this confusion and help conduct the merger successfully. To ensure the success of a merger or acquisition, it is essential to focus on communication. Communication is one of the most valuable HR tools in the context of M&As. More importantly, pre-acquisition should emphasise communication that accurately carries strategic objectives. In addition, integration plans can lessen suspicions and worries related to M&As.

The respondents were requested to state the extent to which they either agreed or disagreed with the statement that retention of senior staff members is paramount for the success of the integration process, and the findings show the majority of participants agreeing. For example, 11(52.4%) and 5(23.8%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively. However, 1(4.8%) of participants disagreed, and 4 (19%) seemed unsure, as shown in Figure 2. Consistent with these findings, the literature likewise confirms that the retention of senior staff members is significant for the smooth integration as well as knowledge retention between the two organisations. For example, McKinney et al. (2017) posit that normally, high top management turnover has a negative impact on the overall success of M&As because management is vital for smooth integration and knowledge retention between the merging entities. General employee turnover may disturb the acquisition and integration processes, particularly in high-technology sectors such as telecommunications. Staff members are the firm's most important resources because they are the carriers of organisational knowledge.

Contrary to that, there is evidence showing that organisational employee turnover is not only detrimental to organisational performance but can also be advantageous. Turnover provides an organisation with the opportunity to engage new employees with recent training, and they are not locked into existing ways of doing things. Some more positive results are higher quality, less expensive replacements, displacement of poor performers, innovation, flexibility, adaptability, and opportunities to encourage talented and high performers.

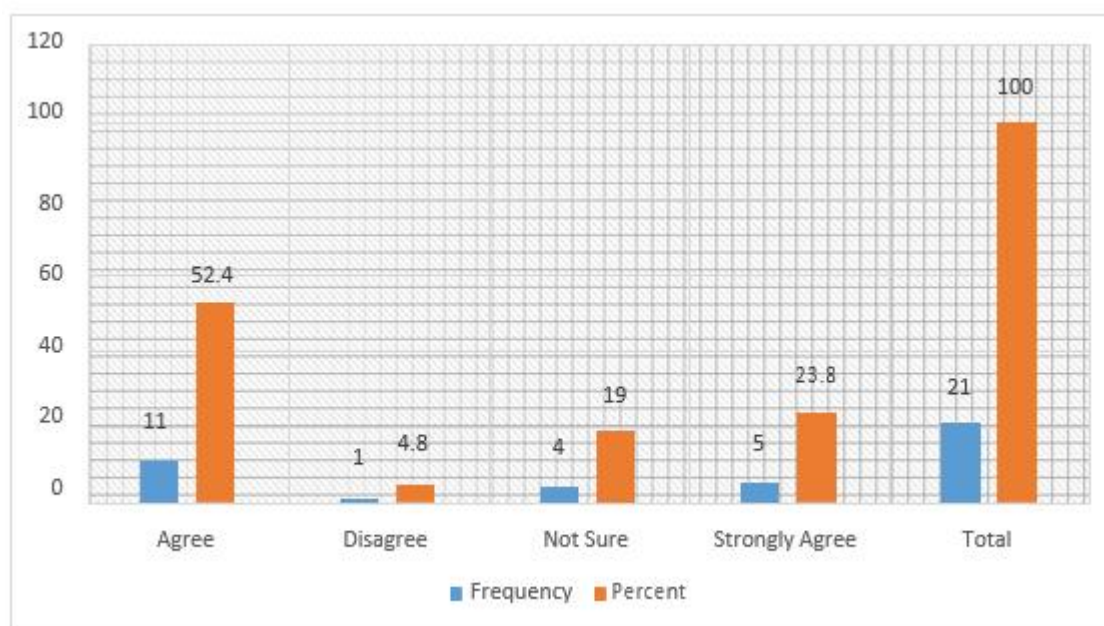


Figure 2: Retention of senior staff members in M&As

6.3 Recommended framework for knowledge retention through HRM practices

The last objective of this study is to recommend a framework for knowledge retention using HRM practices. The proposed framework is presented in Figure 3.

One of the objectives associated with this study was to propose a framework that may be used for knowledge retention using HRMPs. As can be seen from Figure 3, the proposed framework suggests the link factors at both the pre-merger and post-merger stages. The suggested link factors include the HRMPs, which are at the centre of the merger stages. Firstly, the framework suggests the adoption of different knowledge-based HRMPs, both in the pre-merger as well as in the post-merger stages, with the aim of retaining organisational knowledge. In particular, the study has identified the following HRMPs: knowledge-based selection and recruitment, knowledge-based compensation and rewards and knowledge-based training and development. Secondly, the framework suggests that certain factors are essential and, therefore, should be considered during the adoption of the selected knowledge-based HRMPs, and they include regular meetings and visits, trust, shared vision, communication, and the retention of senior staff members. Lastly, according to this framework, the adoption of knowledge-based HRMPs in line with the suggested key factors is believed to lead to improved knowledge retention.

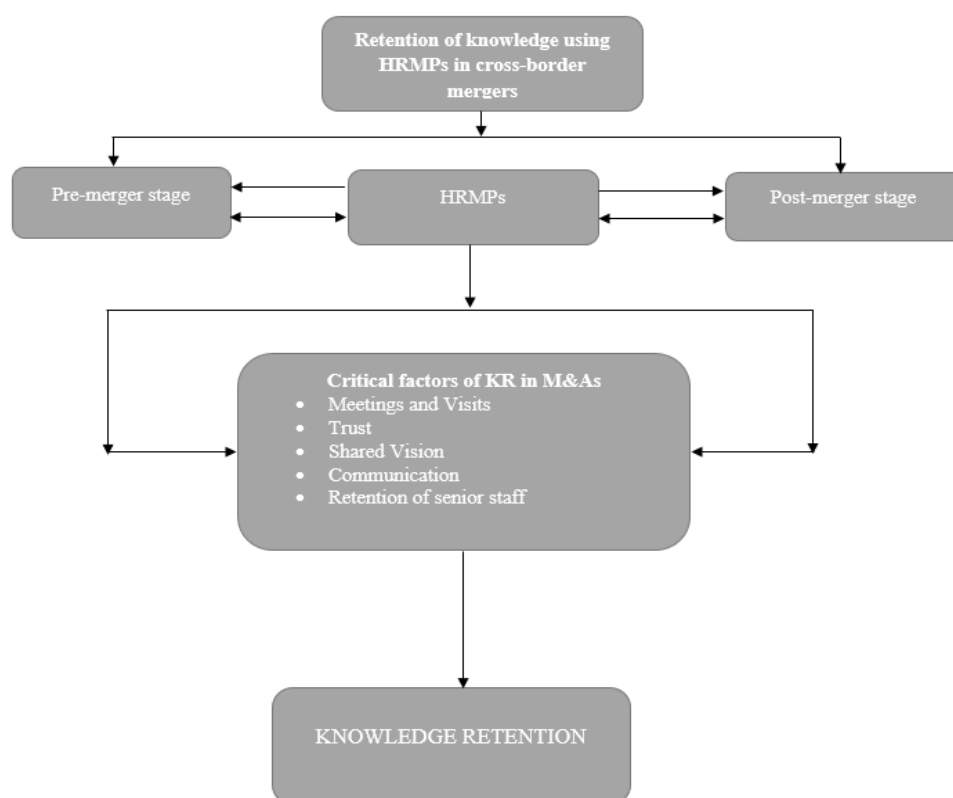


Figure 3: Recommended framework for knowledge retention in cross-border mergers through HRM

7 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of HRMPs in supporting knowledge retention in the context of cross-border mergers. Consistent with the findings above, the study, therefore, concludes as follows: Firstly, even though ETL had adopted HRMPs such as training and development, there were no compensation and rewards targeted to employees who share knowledge. Secondly, the study concludes that, even though there is a general understanding of the role of certain critical factors in improving knowledge retention, they were not all adopted. This study focused only on Lesotho's telecommunications industry and covered only a single merger. However, other mergers in the same industry did take place. Furthermore, other mergers in different industries also took place but were not included in the current study.

8 Recommendations

Consistent with the study findings, the study makes the following recommendations: Firstly, the study recommends the adoption of human HRMPs, such as compensation and rewards, as they directly influence the knowledge retention behaviour of employees.

Secondly, the study proposes a framework that may be used to improve knowledge retention in the context of cross-border mergers and acquisitions in the telecommunications industry. The suggested framework is likely applicable not only to organisations undergoing mergers and acquisitions in the telecommunications industry but also to organisations going through M&A in other industries.

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