

Chapter 17

Studying Knowledge Management and Human Resource Management Practices in the State-Owned Entities Using Mixed Methods Research Design

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ABSTRACT

The chapter demonstrates the lessons learnt from the application of an exploratory sequential design in a mixed methods research project to investigate the integration of knowledge management and human resource management practices for the reduction of knowledge loss in the public-owned entities in context. The research design was considered to be suited for studying a research problem from different perspectives and offers complementarity and diversity in data collection and analysis. The chapter revealed that qualitative data need to be complemented with the statistical or quantitative data to make an informed and complete analysis, conclusions, and recommendations of the research findings because, alone, qualitative data lack completeness and generalisability. The chapter presents a framework to design, apply, and evaluate a mixed methods research study so that information scientists, knowledge management researchers, and scholars from other related fields may play a role in its application and development when researching complex phenomena.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Complex research phenomena require more than just one research method to provide complete and reliable research findings. Ngulube (2020a) asserts that it is for this reason, that mixed methods research (MMR) is growing in popularity and application because of its potential to study complex problems and offer a complete picture in situations whereby a single method is unable to address research issues. Knowledge management (KM) problems such as organisational knowledge loss and its associated risks remain complex research issues in the literature (Mariano, Casey, & Olivera, 2020; Singh & Gupta, 2020). Dalkir (2020) posits that human resource management practices contribute to knowledge management and plays a significant role in addressing KM challenges such as knowledge loss and retention. In order to effectively deal with the risks associated organisational tacit knowledge, both the human resource management (HRM) and knowledge management need to work together in a more integrated manner and in complementary to one another. However, a number of researchers (Dalkir, 2020; MacNeil, 2003) lament the lack of research (case studies and empirical studies) on relationships between HRM and HRM.

Many scholars are missing the fact that effective management of organisational knowledge in practice is largely dependent on HRM. HRM practices such as recruitment, training, succession planning, compensation and rewards systems have a critical role in the organisational knowledge transfer and retention practices (Gope, Elia, & Passiante, 2018; Zaim, Keceli, Jaradat & Kastrati, 2018). In South Africa, the problems associated with employee mobility, skills shortage, ageing workforce and brain drain have been widely researched, nevertheless, mainly and purely from human resource management perspectives (Fourie, 2014; Phaladi, 2011; Erasmus & Breier, 2008). What complicates the research landscape on organisational knowledge loss is the fact that HRM and KM researchers have been investigating these research issues independently of one other. Researching these problems predominantly from either KM or HRM perspective denies the scientific community and practitioners complete, diverse and complementary views and solutions to effectively address the challenges associated with knowledge loss from both perspectives.

As such an MMR approach is becoming even more applicable to studying such complex phenomena and it offers a plethora of solutions for building complete, complementary, reliable and diverse perspectives (Ngulube, 2020b; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016; Ventakesh et al., 2013; Bryman, 2012). However, despite all these benefits Ngulube (2019) laments the low uptake and prevalence of mixed methods research by scholars in the knowledge management field. Organisational knowledge loss is complex research phenomenon in the state-owned entities. According to Ngulube (2020b) such knowledge management problems provide a perfect setting in which to conduct mixed method research. He asserts that by taking up MMR, KM scholars will not be either substituting qualitative or quantitative research approaches but will benefit from their strong points and leverage on robustness of the MMR. By researching the organisational tacit knowledge loss from both the KM and HRM perspectives, the researcher was aiming at getting the most accurate and authentic picture of the research phenomenon.

Researchers need to frame their thoughts in the process of gathering information about a research problem. Philosophically, the study is grounded in the pragmatism research paradigm. The research problem, given its complexities, is such that it needed more pragmatist approach to understand its nature and dynamics in totality especially in complex organisations such as in the state-owned entities. Ngulube (2018, p 8) opines research philosophies or paradigms as the foundation of the philosophical assumptions or beliefs made by the researcher. In other words, assumptions are traditions, beliefs, norms and values

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