Knowledge sharing in selected municipalities of Limpopo Province, South Africa

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Knowledge is regarded as an important resource for any organisation. Sharing of knowledge is crucial to the survival of an organisation, especially in municipalities which are required to deliver basic services to citizens. This study examined knowledge sharing practices in selected municipalities of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study adopted a quantitative research approach and a survey research design, using a structured questionnaire as data collection method. The population for the study comprised of staff members in the Information and Knowledge Management and Human Resource Management units in seven municipalities in Limpopo Province, selected through stratified and proportional sampling methods. Data were analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. The results of the study showed that, although knowledge sharing is viewed as important by the respondents, it is not encouraged among employees, and appears to be the least supported task by most managers attached to selected municipalities. There is insufficient information technology infrastructure to support knowledge sharing, and there is no reward system to encourage employees to engage in knowledge sharing. Therefore, the municipalities need to implement the reward system and to acquire relevant information and communications technology infrastructure to motivate and stimulate the culture of knowledge sharing.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, knowledge management, municipal governance, service delivery, Limpopo municipalities, local government.

1 Introduction

The twenty-first century has ushered in the information and knowledge revolution which is equal in significance to the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Ondari-Okemwa & Smith 2009: 31). Knowledge has been regarded as the most essential of economic resources, surpassing the traditional resources of capital, labour and land (Drucker 1993). Today, the success of an organisation depends on how well the organisational knowledge is shared and managed. Knowledge management (KM) involves providing the right knowledge to the right people at the right time. Most KM practices depend on how knowledge is effectively and efficiently shared within an organisation. As such, scholars who study KM have emphasised knowledge sharing as one of its critical components. Botha (2007: 35) postulated that knowledge means very little unless it is shared with other people. Knowledge sharing denotes the sharing of job information and knowledge to support colleagues and collaborating with them to develop new ideas, solve problems and implement policies and procedures (Cummings 2004). Van den Hooff and de Ridder (2004: 117) noted that KM is a "process of converting knowledge and creating new knowledge as well as the process of sharing relevant information, ideas, suggestions, and expertise with others", while Yeh, Huang and Yeh (2011) emphasised that knowledge sharing facilitates the flow of knowledge among and between individuals, groups and organisations. Mesmer-Magnus and de Church (2009) asserted that knowledge sharing can assist organisations to improve service delivery. Employees who share knowledge with one another increase the resources of an organisation and reduce time wasted in trial-and-error exercises (Lin 2007). Knowledge sharing improves customer response times, saves costs through process improvements, reduces work load, increases staff retention, and further improves innovations and developments (Van der Meer 2014).

Knowledge sharing is relevant to municipalities in the Limpopo province of South Africa in the sense that municipalities need to provide quality service to citizens. KM can enable Limpopo municipalities to deploy knowledge speedily to areas that can significantly benefit from it (Syed-Ikhsan and Rowland 2004). Limpopo municipalities need to engage in knowledge sharing because no employee or department has the knowledge and capacity to complete a task without the involvement of other employees (Riley 2003: 11). Local government employees tend to be individualistic and autonomous and choose not to share their knowledge with others (Tan and Noor 2013). Gaffoor & Cloete (2010: 1) wrote that, "without knowledge

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sharing, employees and other stakeholders in organisations tend to remain fixed in silos, poorly knitted together, prone to duplication of work and repetition of mistakes, wastage of resources, forgetful of good ideas, and without the harnessing of strengths". This behaviour can have a negative impact on service delivery.

Local government in the predominantly rural Limpopo Province comprises five district municipalities and twenty-five local municipalities (South African Local Government Association [SALGA] 2017: 1). Local municipalities serve as the third and most local tier of local government (Education and Training Unit 2015). They are an arm of government in as far as service delivery is concerned because they serve and represent a subdivision of district municipalities. They are directly mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of South African (1996) to render basic municipal services within their areas of jurisdiction and to ensure sustainability of services such as electricity, sanitation, water, waste management, roads, land use, stormwater drainage, and others (Education and Training Unit 2015). However, many tasks in municipalities have been privatised or are rendered through consultancy.

2 Problem statement

Research on KM applications "is mainly found in the private sector, which utilises the KM process to attain a competitive edge" (Fowler & Pryke 2003: 255). Governments are now recognising and starting to adopt KM practices and to encourage knowledge sharing (Cong, Li-Hua & Stonehouse 2007: 250). This is evidenced by creation of KM departments and job positions such as knowledge managers and knowledge officers who are responsible for managing knowledge and its transfer (Gaffoor & Cloete 2010). However, not all employees are ready and willing to share organisational knowledge with other employees, and this is fatal for organisational survival and service delivery (Zhou 2004: 18). In many cases, the organisational knowledge available is not optimally shared among employees as some do not understand why they need to share knowledge and others believe that sharing wastes time, while in fact it can save the cost of 're-inventing the wheel' (Gorelick, Milton & April 2004: 53). The low level of information and knowledge sharing among government employees contributes towards poor service delivery in the public sector (Yusof & Ismail 2009: 1). It is not known to what extent municipalities in Limpopo Province invest in knowledge management and sharing. Therefore, there is a need to investigate if knowledge in Limpopo municipalities is shared among employees and across municipalities in order to improve service delivery and municipal governance.

3 Purpose and objectives of the study.

The aim of this study was to examine knowledge sharing in selected Limpopo municipalities. The study was guided by the following three objectives:

- To investigate the role of knowledge sharing in improving service delivery in Limpopo municipalities;
- To establish the level at which knowledge sharing is encouraged among employees and across Limpopo municipalities; and
- To identify factors stimulating or inhibiting knowledge sharing in Limpopo local municipalities.

According to Gaffoor and Cloete (2010:1), "there is an urgent need for efficient and effective local government services in South Africa". Otherwise, the provision of basic services to citizens will remain inefficient and consequently damage the reputation of the government (Marutha and Ngoepe 2017: 3). Although the importance of knowledge in government is clear, the influence of knowledge sharing has hardly been investigated in Limpopo municipalities. Therefore, this study will contribute to literature on knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities. The study bears significant value for Limpopo municipalities because they are centred on knowledge management processes such as the retrieval, sharing and dissemination of knowledge. There is a dearth of studies on knowledge sharing initiatives in South African local government (Syed-Ikhsan and Rowland 2004). Some of the studies conducted include: *e-Thekwini municipality's intranet for augmenting knowledge-sharing in the organisation* by Averweg (2012) and *Knowledge management in local government: the case of Stellenbosch municipality* by Gaffoor and Cloete (2010). This study seeks to fill the knowledge gap by examining knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities.

4 Literature review

Knowledge sharing refers to a "social interaction culture involving the exchange of employee knowledge, experiences, and skills through the whole organisation and how an organisation obtains access to its own and other organisations' knowledge" (Abdul Rahman 2011: 212). Knowledge sharing enhances the quality of service delivery of service-oriented organisations such as municipalities (Ismail & Yusof 2010:1). It is necessary for employees to share knowledge among themselves and different sections in municipalities in order to deliver effective and efficient service to citizens. Effective and efficient service in government depends on how government employees at various levels share and use knowledge (Sita Nirmala

Kumaraswamy and Chitale 2012: 309). As scholars would attest, knowledge sharing helps an organisation transfer new ideas or solutions among its members (Islam 2010, Yeh, Huang and Yeh 2011). Knowledge sharing is an important ingredient in the work of municipalities. If knowledge is effectively and efficiently shared among employees and across municipalities, the possibility is that municipal governance may improve, leading to improvement in service delivery.

This study is anchored on the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) model of KM. According to Sedighi et al. (2015), knowledge sharing in any organisation is dependent on some CSFs. CSFs are those areas in an organisation which, if practised and addressed effectively, will ensure successful knowledge management and sharing (Yaghoubi and Maleki 2012: 12024). These factors can include information technology, KM management strategies, KM project budgets, the physical environment and layout of work areas, as well as organisational culture. CSFs also include variables such as management support, rewards and recognition systems, staff retention policies and identification of knowledgeable workers, among others. Stropkova (2014: 1) categorises CSFs into three main areas: human beings, organisations and technology. CSFs in the form of human beings include leaders providing motivational support, which encourages workers to manage and share knowledge; the provision of training for employees; and sufficient funding for knowledge management projects. Organisational success factors cover aspects relating to organisational structure, physical environment and communication channels, and knowledge management processes and procedures. Technology factors take into consideration technological infrastructure to support KM initiatives. In summary, CSFs include support in the form of the provision of the necessary infrastructure, rewards, training, and the creation of a conducive environment for individuals to share knowledge in an organisation. According to Sandhu, Jain and Kalthom bte Ahmad (2011: 209), factors such as the right culture, rewards and incentives should be present for successful knowledge sharing in organisations.

Regarding technology, Bopape (2010) stated that information and knowledge management activities require information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure for capturing, storing, organising, retrieving, processing and transmitting data. Therefore, one of the CSFs in the application of knowledge sharing in municipalities is information technology. According to Chong, Chong and Lin (2010), information technology refers to the infrastructure of tools, systems, platforms and automated solutions that improve the development, application and dissemination of knowledge. Ndlela and du Toit (2001: 3) highlighted organisational culture as a key factor of a successful information and KM programme. The authors maintained that people are the key constituent of KM because the culture that exists within an organisation is critical to the success of KM and sharing initiatives. Lyu and Zhang (2016), who investigated the effects of organisational incentives and the level of information technology on the motivation to share knowledge, stated that organisational culture dynamically improves with knowledge sharing and learning. While information technology facilitates learning and sharing of knowledge in organisations, incentive systems help to align organisational and individual goals. Therefore, building a well-balanced incentive system that would attract and retain employees, and at the same time encourage them to share their expertise with other employees, remains the responsibility of those in leadership positions (Stropkova 2014).

Contrary to CSFs, there are barriers or challenges to knowledge sharing in municipalities. According to the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (2009), challenges facing the Local Government sector in South Africa include, among others:

- limited resources, requiring that risk and cost be managed effectively to provide the best development impact;
- high turnover of technical and professional staff;
- in some cases, strong dependence on consultants, who often leave municipalities in a position of having to consistently 're-purchase' advice and intellectual property;
- inability in some municipalities to deliver on the core set of critical municipal services; and
- poor financial management such as negative audit outcomes.

Most municipalities today operate in a highly political terrain. Political influence may pose serious barriers to the effectiveness of inter-organisational knowledge sharing. It has been observed that the political climate in Limpopo municipalities is such that everyone is suspicious of the next person, particularly if one's political affiliation is not known. Thus, the culture of knowledge hoarding reigns. There are cultural expressions that exacerbate knowledge hoarding. For example, the adage, *Kgomo ga e ntšhe boloko ka moka*, is a northern Sotho expression meaning that a person should not share his or her entire knowledge with others. Lin, Hung and Chen (2009) emphasised that knowledge sharing is typically voluntary and, as such, employees cannot be compelled to share their knowledge. Organisations that are thoughtful about knowledge create a conducive environment and culture that continuously supports knowledge sharing.

Knowledge might not be shared within an organisation because of 'stickiness' (Szulanski 1996): it often remains with particular people and is hard to transfer without a great deal of effort. In an organisation, knowledge becomes 'sticky' because the person who holds the knowledge may be demotivated to do the work to transfer it to someone he or she does not know well or may explicitly decide not to transfer it for fear of losing power or status (Brown & Duguid 2001). As such,

knowledge becomes stagnant, even when it is in the best interest of the organisation to have knowledge flow. Competition may also lead to the devaluing of knowledge from other sections of an organisation or the refusal to share knowledge between sections. Schepers and van den Berg (2007) argued that an organisational environment that emphasises competition among employees inhibits knowledge sharing, while teamwork creates trust, a critical success factor for knowledge sharing.

Knowledge can also be 'leaky' (Brown & Duguid 2001: 199). Leakiness "focus[es] on the external and undesirable flow of knowledge, in particular the loss of knowledge across the boundaries of the organisation to competitors" (Brown & Duguid 2001: 199). For municipalities to render effective and efficient service, they should guard against knowledge leaking. Dyer and Nobeoka (2000) refer to this unwanted flow as "knowledge spillovers", the unauthorised transfer of ideas, insights, inventions and practices to other organisations. It is clear that knowledge sharing is not a simple process. Despite challenges, employees should be encouraged to share the knowledge they hold with others by making it explicit.

5 Methodology
This study used survey research to measure the extent to which knowledge sharing is supported and encouraged among employees attached to selected municipalities in Limpopo Province. A questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. Respondents were requested to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with statements about knowledge sharing in their municipalities. A three-point Likert scale (where 1= *to no extent at all*, 2 = *to a lesser extent*, and 3 = *to a large extent*) was used to measure the extent to which knowledge sharing was encouraged among employees in and among municipalities in the province. A five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*) was used to measure the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with a negative statement that was formulated about critical CSFs or variables that influence knowledge sharing initiatives in municipalities. Data were analysed using SPSS version 23 and presented in bar graphs and tables form.

This study investigated seven municipalities in the province and the respondents were drawn from the Information and Knowledge Management and Human Resource Management units in each municipality. Municipalities were first stratified, and a proportionate sample of respondents was drawn from each municipality in order to ensure that members of the same stratum were as similar as possible in terms of characteristics of interest (Crossman 2016).

The total population was 2,189 which was reduced to 327 after using Raosoft's sample size calculator (2004). However, as shown in Table 1, the study took a sample size of 438 in order to enhance the confidence level of the study which was 95% while the margin of error was 5%. From the sample of 438, the Information and Knowledge Management staff constituted 329 (75%) while the Human Resource Management proportion was 110 (25%). Out of 438 questionnaires administered, 305 (70%) copies were completed and returned, meaning 133 (30%) questionnaires were not returned.

Table 1 The distribution of samples across the seven municipalities

District	Name of Municipality	Total population	Sample
Capricorn	Aganang	105	21
	Blouberg	207	41
	Lepelle-Nkumpi	236	48
Mopani	Greater Letaba	215	43
	Greater Tzaneen	690	138
Sekhukhune	Fetakgomo	86	17
Vhembe	Thulamela	650	130
Total		**2,189**	**438**

6 Results
This section presents the findings of the study based on its objectives.

6.1 The role of knowledge sharing in improving service delivery
The first question sought to solicit the respondents' views about the significance of knowledge sharing in their organisations. Table 2 summarises the respondents' answers in terms of to what extent they agreed or disagreed with general statements on the role and relevance of knowledge sharing in the municipalities to which they are attached.

The statements that received considerable support were that knowledge is the key factor for service delivery, with 138 (45%) who agreed and 131 (43%) who strongly agreed; that knowledge sharing in municipalities results in increased performance, with 131 (43%) who agreed and 123 (40%) who strongly agreed; knowledge sharing can ensure continuity

and consistency in service delivery, with 148 (49%) who agreed and 78 (26%) who strongly agreed; and that knowledge sharing can ensure transparency and accountability in service delivery, with 129 (42%) who agreed and 83 (27%) who strongly agreed with the statements. On the other hand, 138 respondents (45%) strongly disagreed with the statement that there is a growing awareness of the benefit of knowledge sharing in their municipality, while 144 respondents (47%) strongly disagreed that knowledge sharing is vital to the private sector only.

Table 2 The role of knowledge sharing in improving service delivery (N=305)

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree
Knowledge is the most important factor for a service delivery	5 (2%)	11 (4%)	136 (45%)	131 (43%)	20 (7%)
Knowledge sharing in a municipality results in increased performance	6 (2%)	11 (4)	131 (43%)	123 (40%)	34 (11%)
Knowledge sharing will enable a municipality to save time and financial costs.	9 (3%)	28 (9%)	118 (39%)	107 (35%)	43 (14%)
Knowledge sharing is important only to private sector.	144 (47%)	96 (32%)	25 (8%)	14 (5%)	25 (8%)
The importance of knowledge sharing is clearly communicated.	135 (44%)	63 (21%)	50 (16%)	31 (10%)	26 (9%)
There is growing knowledge awareness of the benefit of knowledge sharing.	138 (45%)	76 (25%)	44 (14)	20 (7%)	27 (9%)
Knowledge sharing can ensure continuity and consistency in service delivery.	17 (6%)	29 (9.5%)	148 (49%)	78 (26%)	33 (11%)
Knowledge sharing can ensure transparency and accountability in service delivery.	7 (2%)	29 (10%)	129 (42%)	83 (27%)	57 (19%)

6.2 Level of knowledge sharing encouragement among employees and municipalities

Respondents were also asked to indicate the extent to which municipalities encourage knowledge sharing (KS) among municipal employees. As shown in Figure 1, the highest number of 146 respondents (48%) indicated that knowledge sharing was encouraged among employees to a lesser extent, while a minority of 42 (14%) stated that knowledge sharing among employees in their municipalities was encouraged to a great extent and 117 respondents (38%) indicated knowledge sharing was not encouraged at all (meaning that there are no activities or strategies that encourage knowledge sharing in their municipalities).
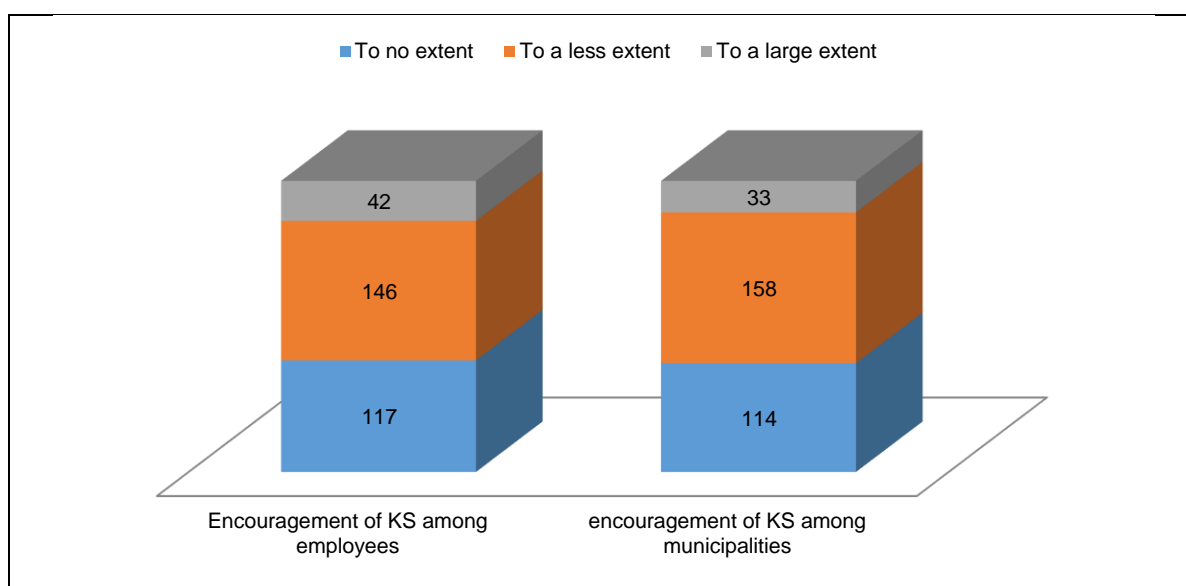
Figure 1 Level of knowledge sharing encouragement among employees and municipalities (N=305)

Since service delivery in South Africa is the mandate of the local government sector, it is important that municipalities learn good practice from each other. Hence, respondents were further asked to specify the extent to which their municipalities encouraged knowledge sharing with other municipalities within the local government sector. Figure 1 shows

that 158 respondents (52%) noted that their municipalities encouraged knowledge sharing within the local government sector to a lesser extent. On the other hand, 114 respondents (37%) stated that their municipalities did not encourage knowledge sharing within the local government sector at all, while only 33 respondents (11%) indicated that their municipalities encouraged knowledge sharing within the local government sector to a great extent.

6.3 Factors stimulating or inhibiting knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities

To identify stimulating or inhibiting knowledge sharing factors in Limpopo municipalities, in the third question, respondents were asked about the variables that affect knowledge sharing activities in their organisation. Those variables were information technology, rewards and recognition systems, systems for identifying knowledgeable colleagues, organisational culture, staff retention, budget, and support from management. These challenges are discussed in this section. The results are depicted in Figure 2 and are analysed descriptively.

6.3.1 Information technology systems

The results show that 129 respondents (42%) strongly agreed that inadequate information technology systems in Limpopo municipalities discouraged knowledge sharing; 71 (23%) agreed, 59 (19%) strongly disagreed and 37 respondents (12%) disagreed with the statement.

6.3.2 Reward and recognition system

Regarding the reward and recognition system, Figure 2 shows that a majority of 177 respondents (58%) strongly agreed, and 89 (29%) agreed, that participating municipalities lacked the reward and recognition system to stimulate staff to share knowledge. Some 17 respondents (6%) strongly disagreed that their municipalities lacked the reward and recognition system to stimulate staff to share knowledge, 16 (5%) disagreed, while six respondents (2%) were uncertain.

6.3.3 System to identify knowledgeable colleagues

Respondents were asked whether they disagreed or agreed with the statement that there was no system to identify colleagues with knowledge to share. The aim of this question was to identify whether the municipalities were able to track colleagues in terms of the type of knowledge that they possessed. The results show that over half of the respondents (164; 54%) strongly agreed that their municipalities did not have such a system, 104 (34%) agreed, 19 (6%) disagreed and 11 (4%) strongly disagreed that their municipalities had no system to identify knowledgeable colleagues. Few, that is, seven (2%), respondents reported uncertainty about the non-availability of systems used to identify colleagues to share knowledge.

6.3.4 Physical environment and layout of work areas

The physical environment and layout of work areas play a major role in knowledge sharing. Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agreed with the statement that the physical work environment and layout of work areas restrict knowledge sharing. Figure 2 shows that, generally, the respondents agreed that the physical environment and work area layout restrict effective knowledge sharing. One hundred and twenty-one (121; 40%) respondents strongly agreed that the physical work environment and layout of work areas in their municipalities restrict effective knowledge sharing. Seventy respondents (23%) agreed, 63 (21%) disagreed, while 29 respondents (10%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Figure 2 also shows that 22 respondents (7%) were uncertain about whether the physical work environment and layout of work areas restrict effective knowledge sharing.

6.3.5 Municipal culture to support knowledge sharing

Respondents were asked to indicate how they agreed with the statement that the existing organisational culture does not support knowledge sharing. The results showed that 142 respondents (47%) strongly agreed with the statement, 116 (38%) agreed, while 9 (3%) were uncertain. The results revealed that 28 respondents (9%) disagreed and 10 (3%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

6.3.6 Retention of highly skilled and experienced staff

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that the retention of highly skilled and experienced staff was not a priority in Limpopo municipalities. The aim of this question was to discover if municipalities value the tacit knowledge held by skilled and experienced staff. Figure 2 shows that 131 respondents (43%) strongly agreed with the statement, while 100 (33%) agreed, 29 (10%) disagreed, 28 (10%) were uncertain, while 17 respondents (6%) strongly disagreed that the "retention of highly skilled and experienced staff is not a priority" in their municipalities.
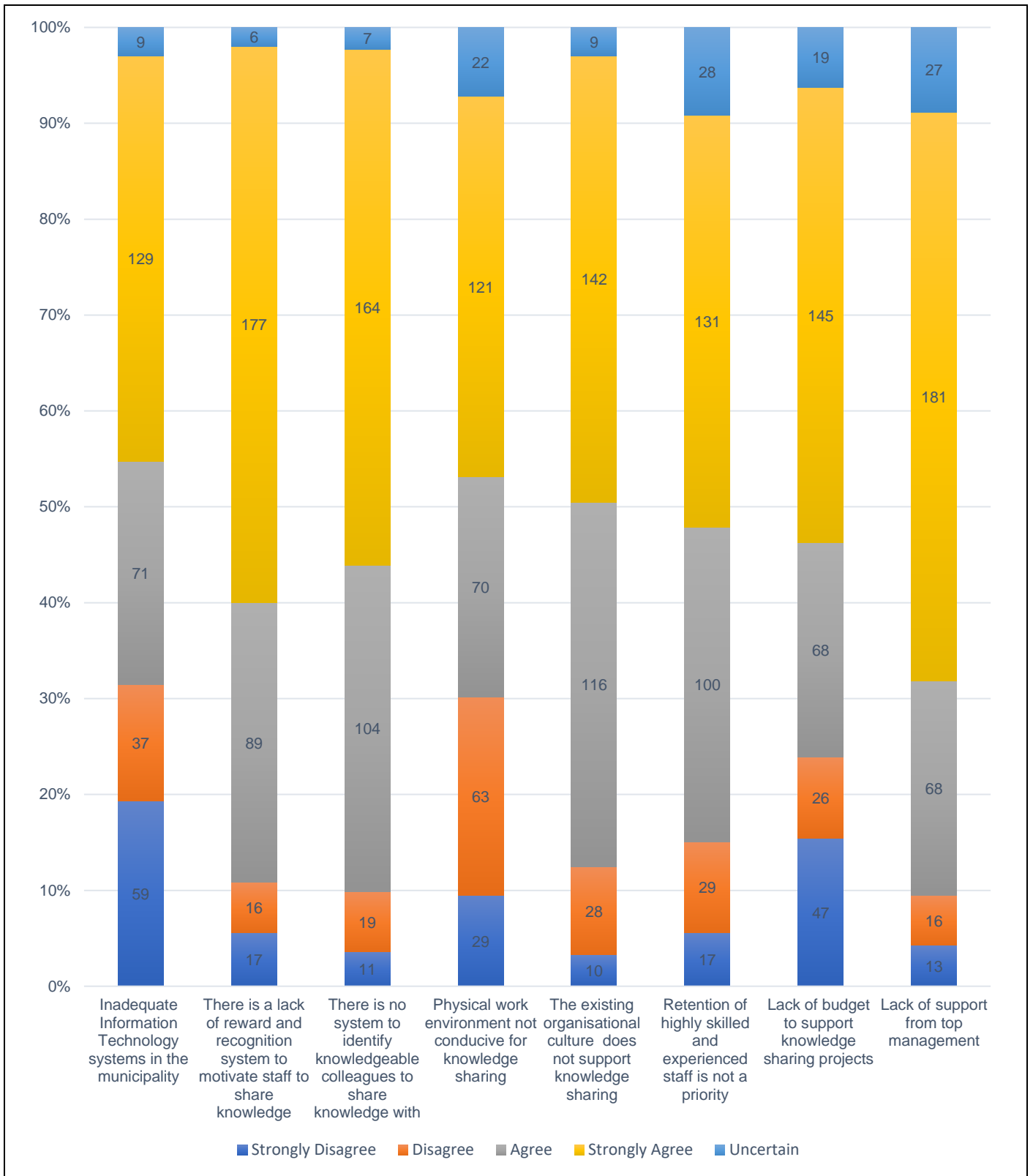
Figure 2 Factors stimulating or inhibiting knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities (N=305)

6.3.7 Budget to support knowledge sharing projects

The respondents were asked about the lack of budget to support knowledge sharing projects. If budgeted for, factors such as rewards and incentives for those involved in knowledge sharing would be addressed. Enablers such as ICT tools would be made available and maintained. It was important for this study to find out if municipalities had budgets for knowledge sharing to show their commitment to knowledge sharing activities. The results revealed that 145 respondents (48%) strongly disagreed that their municipalities lacked budget to support knowledge sharing practices, 68 (22%) agreed, 47 (16%)

strongly disagreed, while 26 (9%) disagreed with the statement and 19 respondents (6%) stated that they were uncertain about the statement.

6.3.8 Lack of support from top management
Lastly, the respondents were asked to point out the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that there was lack of support from management regarding knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities. This question was meant to understand the role of management in shaping the culture of human thought and behaviour in terms of knowledge sharing (Niranjana and Pattanayak 2005). The results reveal that a majority of 181 respondents (60%) strongly agreed and 68 (22%) agreed that knowledge sharing in their municipalities did not have support of top management, 27 (9%) were uncertain, 16 (5%) disagreed with the statement and 13 respondents (4%) strongly disagreed that their municipalities lack support from top management.

7 Discussion of the findings
Many organisations have realised the importance of knowledge sharing among organisational members. De Angelis (2013) posited that knowledge sharing activities may promote transparency in public administration and help in releasing information more rapidly and making it available more widely to the public. Van der Meer (2014) stipulated that knowledge sharing can also contribute to improved employee performance that translates into improved productivity levels and quality of work.

A picture depicted by the results of this study is that, within the local government sector of Limpopo Province, municipalities work in silos, thus failing to leverage other municipalities' experience. In a similar study, Ondari-Okemwa (2006) found that Kenyan government organisations practise and apply knowledge management practices to a limited extent due to factors such as lack of knowledge management policies, inadequate financial resources, lack of explicit value for money from knowledge management, and little understanding of knowledge management.

Technology infrastructure is regarded as an important enabler of knowledge sharing. Hence, organisations use technological infrastructure to create and disseminate knowledge within organisations (Ryan et al. 2010). The effective use of ICT guarantees well-timed access and sharing of knowledge for decision-making processes (Ho, Kuo & Lin 2012). This study found that inadequate and underdeveloped ICT is a major barrier to knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities. The results are consistent with the findings of two case studies on knowledge sharing in the public sector in the United States of America (USA) where it was established that inadequate technology is the main barrier to knowledge sharing (Gorry 2008). The results that emerged from this study and the public sector in the USA suggest that public sector organisations are loosely organised which creates a stumbling block to the creation of a knowledge sharing culture.

Lack of rewards has an undesirable impact on knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities. Weddell (2008) observed that the presence or absence of a rewards or incentive system can encourage or discourage employees to be involved in knowledge sharing. There is no link between the rewards system and knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities as advocated by Jahani, Effendi and Ramayah (2013). A lack of rewards system in Limpopo municipalities discourages knowledge sharing among the employees and across the municipalities.

There is no clear way of accessing and exploiting existing knowledge in Limpopo municipalities. This means that there is no knowledge mapping in these municipalities. According to Joseph and Dieter (2013: 17), "knowledge mapping is about facilitating the discovery of sources of knowledge, tracing its flow, mapping its existence and its changes, and identifying relationships with other sources of knowledge". Without knowledge mapping, the selected municipalities might not be able to know, locate and use the knowledge they already have to improve service delivery.

In Limpopo municipalities, the office space is arranged in such a way that managers are assigned single occupancy plans while the general staff are assigned multiple-occupancy plans. A more open, shared environment increases knowledge flow and collaborative work (Pinder et al. 2009). While layout of this nature may infringe on the privacy of employees, it does explain why employees feel that the physical work environment and layout of work areas restrict effective knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities.

The findings reveal that there is no culture of knowledge sharing in the selected municipalities. This may be attributed to trust among the employees. If there is no trust within an organisation, knowledge sharing cannot, and will not, be successful because, where there is fear, employees will not share knowledge and will be doubtful about their organisation's true intentions (Davenport & Prusak 2000).

Lindner and Wald (2010) affirm that culture is by far the most important factor of success for knowledge sharing. In the absence of knowledge retention strategies, organisations continue to lose valuable knowledge (Dewah 2012, Chigada 2014: 46). Knowledge retention involves all systems and activities that preserve knowledge and allow it to remain in the system once introduced (Chigada 2014). However, knowledgeable staff leave municipalities without the municipalities capturing their knowledge. Poor knowledge retention strategies are not peculiar to Limpopo municipalities, but cut across industries.

Wamundila and Ngulube (2011) found the existence of knowledge retention challenges at the University of Zambia; according to these authors, retention challenges took the form of retirements, resignations and deaths. Dewah (2012) revealed that the South African Broadcasting Corporation and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation lose skills, expertise and knowledge because of staff attrition. According to Chigada (2014), loss of knowledge can prove to be costly when organisations recruit experts and acquire knowledge.

The findings of this study further show that knowledge sharing is not a funded mandate or activity in the selected municipalities. This means that employees are not accountable to anybody if they decide to share or not to share knowledge. Ondari-Okemwa (2006) established that lack of explicit value for money from knowledge management makes it difficult for organisations to fund KM practices.

Even though support from top management is necessary to ensure that knowledge sharing harmonises with organisational culture (Davenport & Prusak 1998), the results of this study show that there was lack of support from top management of Limpopo municipalities. Lack of support and budget from top management are in accordance with previous studies (Riege 2005, Chigada 2014, Kathiravelu et al. 2014).

8 Conclusion and recommendations

Some Limpopo municipal employees understand that knowledge sharing plays a vital role in the improvement of service delivery. However, the role of knowledge sharing in the improvement of service delivery in Limpopo municipalities is not clearly communicated to everyone, and there is little effort to raise awareness about the role of knowledge sharing in these municipalities. In order to ameliorate the situation, there is a need for an inclusive province-wide knowledge sharing workshop comprising representatives of all levels of staff. The entire personnel in Limpopo municipalities needs to be trained on KM so that they can have a common understanding, as well as an appreciation, of knowledge sharing among employees and across municipalities. Communities of practice or knowledge fora should be formed at each work level for employees to share challenges, problems, solutions and best practices among themselves and across municipalities.

The study concludes that there is minimal effort and little interest on the part of Limpopo municipalities to encourage knowledge sharing. This is evidenced by the low level of knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities. Simply put, there is no proper means of encouraging it. These municipalities need to realise that the "presence of rewards and motivation facilitates knowledge sharing and transfer, while the absence of rewards and motivation hinders the sharing and transfer of knowledge" (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar 2016: 8). Lack of the reward and recognition system has led to a low level of knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities. According to Sandhu, Jain and Kalthom bte Ahmad (2011: 209), the reward system should be present for successful knowledge sharing in organisations. Therefore, the reward system may be used to encourage knowledge sharing. In this regard, Limpopo municipalities should consider knowledge sharing as an important factor that should be integrated into the work plans, performance contracts and performance appraisals of their employees. The study also revealed some major challenges that affect knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities. For instance, it found that the information technology system is inadequate which affects and discourages knowledge sharing in the municipalities. Top management has a role to play in providing budget for ICT infrastructure and related training. Therefore, support from top management is necessary for knowledge management and sharing.

There is no clear way of accessing and exploiting existing knowledge in Limpopo municipalities. As a result, the municipalities may not be able to determine what they know and what they do not know. The situation calls for knowledge mapping. In order to retain the knowledge of highly skilled and experienced staff, Limpopo municipalities should consider documenting and integrating knowledge into the municipalities. To achieve this, knowledge should be captured and stored in documents, databases, products and services, software and processes (Chigada & Ngulube 2015). Support from top management and political buy-in are the key factors for knowledge sharing in Limpopo municipalities. Without management support and political will, knowledge sharing will not succeed. Therefore, it is important for Limpopo municipalities to solicit support from municipal managers and the mayors to teach their employees to value and create a knowledge sharing culture. Political buy-in and the involvement of top management will ensure that the necessary time, infrastructure and budget are allocated to knowledge sharing.

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