The Fusion of Talent Management and Knowledge Management: An Odd Couple or Happy Nuptial

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is twofold, firstly, to explore the factors that affect the retention of knowledge workers in South African higher education institutions; secondly, to show how talent management can benefit knowledge management practices. The mixed-methods design was employed to collect and analyse the quantitative and qualitative data. Stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 347 respondents from three South African universities. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect the data from 277 participants. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to analyse the quantitative data, while the qualitative data was analysed using NVivo (version 12.0). The quantitative and qualitative findings confirmed that work-life balance, promotion and employer-employee relationship positively impact the retention of knowledge workers in South African higher education institutions. This study provides a deeper understanding of how universities could leverage employee promotion, employer-employee relationship and work-life balance to retain knowledge workers in the competitive business environment. The study demonstrates that factors of talent management such as promotion, employer-employee relationship and work-life balance, are viable tools for retaining knowledge workers to position higher education institutions at the cutting edge. These factors can benefit knowledge management practices. The study expands on the limited research on employee retention strategies, talent management and knowledge management.

Keywords: Employee-employer relationship, Knowledge management, Talent management practices, Talent retention, work-life balance

1. Introduction

Igielski (2017) argues that, in the last decades, there have been changes in the traditional approach to work to a more modern approach, such as computerisation of workstations and distance work. Consequently, employees’ skills and competencies have also changed to meet the new expectations of the employers involved in identifying and acquiring knowledge. Muzam (2022) maintains that the world economy has shifted from the traditional production system into a more service-oriented economy known as the knowledge economy. Choong and Leung (2021) and Servoz (2019) advocate that the new economy requires employees with technical know-how in almost every sector. The aforementioned assertions emphasise the importance of knowledge workers. The latter systematically acquire knowledge and have a high level of education and unique skills required to assist the organisation in achieving its goals. From the knowledge-based view (KBV) of the firm standpoint, knowledge resides at an individual level, making its integration a vital function for an organisation (Grant, 1996).

De Sordi, Azevedo, Bianchi and Carandina (2021) point out that knowledge workers use and apply organisational knowledge. Surawski (2019) compared knowledge workers with other workers, including white collars and experts, and concluded that one key feature of knowledge workers is that they work mainly with symbols and transform them into cognitive processes, creating value for the organisation. Muzam (2022) concurs that knowledge workers are autonomous individuals whose work depends on a high level of knowledge and perform complex tasks primarily focusing on problem-solving. However, it has been found that because of the competition for talent, knowledge/talent retention has become a critical issue for many firms and an equally challenging situation for most employers. For instance, Lesenyeho, Barkhuizen and Schutte (2018) assert that nearly half of the academics in South African higher education institutions (HEIs) have considered leaving their jobs. Yimer, Nega and Ganfure (2017) shared similar sentiments, in that academic turnover in South African HEIs has been a major concern as it disrupts the normal functioning of academic enterprises. In a recent study, Barkhuizen, Lesenyeho and Schutte (2020:191) argue that the voluntary turnover intentions of academics in South African HEIs are escalating, which presents significant challenges to HEIs, including “additional costs for the induction and training of new staff, loss of research outputs and organisational productivity, and reduced quality of teaching due to mid-semester replacements of lecturers”.

According to Lesenyeho and Schutte (2020), compensation and recognition, as well as institutional practices had significant influence on employees’ intention to quit their jobs. Musakuro and de Klerk (2021) acknowledge that most academics leave South African HEIs for better compensation and career opportunities.
Several scholars have proposed diverse opinions and solutions to address the retention challenge in South African HEIs. For instance, Kanyumba and Lourens (2021) found that retention strategies include compensation and benefits, succession planning, training and development and career development opportunities. Similarly, Lesenyeho and Schutte (2020) suggest that HEIs redevelop talent management (TM) practices such as compensation and recognition, career development and general institutional practices to address the diverse needs of a new generation of academics. The extant literature suggests that most empirical studies on academic retention in South African HEIs focused solely on compensation and benefits, succession planning, training and development and career development opportunities (Kanyumba & Lourens, 2021; Musakuro & de Klerk, 2021; Lesenyeho & Schutte, 2020). However, there is limited empirical research concerning the influence of promotion, work-life balance and employer-employee relationship on academic retention in South African HEIs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Talent Management

TM is not a novel concept. Nevertheless, it has been obscurely defined because of its complexity (Lockwood, 2006). Vladescu (2012) conceptualises TM as the integrated set of activities used by organisations to attract, retain, and develop the most talented people they need for future purposes. According to Aytaç (2015), TM is a process deemed to attract, develop, place, retain, and integrate highly qualified workforce members while having the potential for high performance per the organisation’s long-term strategies to gain a competitive advantage.

McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi and Schuler (2017) point out that TM is gaining more significance as a vital component that creates value for organisations. Al-Dalahmeh (2020) postulates that TM has become a strategic topic for managers in global organisations. Contrary to the above findings, Al-Dalahmeh (2020) argues that although the strategic importance of TM, research in the area is still few, mainly conceptual research. Al-Dalahmeh’s (2020) findings are consistent with Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion (2020) and van Zyl, Mathafena and Ras (2017), who believed that, although some organisations have implemented diverse TM practices, there are nevertheless many unknown issues of TM (Al-Dalahmeh, 2020; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020) and these need to be investigated. This study attempts to address these issues.

2.2 Knowledge Management

In this competitive era every organisation requires knowledge in order to remain sustainable. According to Sokoh and Okolie (2021), knowledge creation is vital for organisational sustainability. The above assertion underpins the importance of knowledge management (KM) and KBV of the firm. The role of knowledge KM in organisations has become increasingly important in the knowledge-based economy. Skryme (1999) conceptualises KM as systematic activities that relate to knowledge and processes of creating, collecting, organising and carrying out in pursuit of organisational goals. Likewise, Sokoh and Okolie (2021) state that KM is concerned with discovering, creating, disseminating and utilising knowledge. Jones and Shideh (2020) discover that the essence of KM is to ensure that information is shared and transmitted to employees within organisations. For de Bem Machado, Secinaro Calandra and Lanzalonga (2022), KM represents the capacity to manage information, such as gathering knowledge, transforming knowledge into new strategies or ideas, and implementing and preserving it. Idrees, Xu, Haider and Tehseen (2023) contend that organisations have increasingly focused on KM techniques as they realised how necessary knowledge is to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

2.3 Talent Retention Strategies

The estimated cost of employee turnover ranges between 1 to 2.5 times the employee’s salary (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Talent retention involves the science of maintaining employees in their current jobs within the organisation for a longer period (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Also, Madurani and Pasaribu (2022) acknowledge that talent or knowledge retention involves retaining talent and ordinary employees to remain working with an organisation. In their study, Mabaso, Maja, Kavir, Lekwape, Makhasane and Khumalo (2021) found TM practices such as rewards, work-life balance, performance management system, improved training and development, employee recognition and career progression opportunities influenced talent retention in the consultancy industry. Moreover, Boakye, Arpoh-Baah, Odoom, Afram, Addai and Agyemang (2022) confirm that factors such as remuneration, care and concern from employers, training and development opportunities, an improved promotion system, conducive working environment and increased employee engagement, influenced retention of senior members in Ghanaian private tertiary institutions. This study focused on
retention strategies, such as work-life balance, employer-employee relationship and promotion, because these received little scholarly attention.

2.3.1 Work-life balance and talent retention

The term work-life balance was coined by Lockwood (2003) and has become popular in modern times, especially during the COVID-19 era. Osterman (1995) explains that work-life balance practices consist of institutionalised, structural, and procedural work arrangements and formal and informal practices, that assist people to easily manage both their work and family lives. Singh and Dubey (2016) argue that most employees leave their organisations because they feel that their emotions and passions have not been recognised. Moreover, Shockley, Smith and Knudsen (2017) and Hashim, Azman, Ghani and Sabri (2016) found that a strong link exists between work-life balance and employee retention. Likewise, Panda and Sahoo (2021) established that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between work–life balance and the retention of professionals. Based on the above, the following hypothesis could be formulated:

\[ H_1 \quad \text{There is a statistically significant relationship between work-life balance and talent retention} \]

2.3.2 Employer-employee relationship and talent retention

Torrington and Hall (1998) conceptualise the employer-employee relationship as a framework of organisational justice, which comprises organisational culture and management styles and rules, as well as procedures dealing with employee grievances. A good employer-employee relationship is also important because it encourages employees to work better and to achieve increasingly good results (Burns, 2012). Oruh, Mordi, Ajonbadi, Mojeeed-Sanni, Nwagbara and Rahman (2020) found that managerialist employment relations had a negative effect on the retention of doctors in Nigeria. Kim, Tam and Kim and Rhee (2017), in their study, discover that organisational justice and organisation-employee relationship quality have a negative association with turnover intention. Based on the above, the following hypothesis could be formulated:

\[ H_2 \quad \text{There is a statistically significant relationship between employer-employee relationship and talent retention} \]

2.3.3 Employee promotion and talent retention

Promotion has been described as the movement of an employee from a lower position to a higher position within the organisational hierarchy (Otoo, Assuming & Agyei, 2018; Dessler, 2008). Promotion often results in a rise in the employee’s salary, with a concomitant span of authority and control (Baker, Jensen & Murphy 1994). According to Netswera and Rankhumise (2005), the opportunity for promotion is an important reason for most workers remaining in their job, particularly those young and enthusiastic. Singh (2012) concurs that promotion increases the morale of employees and encourages them to take more interest in their work. Ekabu, Nyagah and Kalai (2018) and Sitati, Were and Waititu (2016) also confirm that that prospects of promotion significantly impacted employee retention within organisations. A study by Bibi, Pangil, Johari and Ahmad (2017) reveals that compensation and promotional opportunities had a significant relationship with employee retention. In their study, Ekabu, Nyagah and Kalai (2018) confirm that promotion prospect has a negative and an inverse relationship with turnover intention. By contrast, Fairris (2004) found that employee promotion is associated with high turnover. The findings by Fairris (2004) are also consistent with Joarder, Sharif and Ahmmed (2011), who discovered that employees’ opportunity for promotion has less impact on faculty turnover decisions. Following the above, the hypothesis below could be formulated:

\[ H_3 \quad \text{There is a statistically significant relationship between promotion and talent retention} \]

2.4 Theoretical Framework that Underpins this Study

The KBV of the firm is the most appropriate theoretical lens upon which the study is predicated. The KBV theory maintains that knowledge is the most crucial resource of every organisation (Bontis, 2002; Barney, 1991). The KBV assumes that the most important input of production and primary source of value is knowledge (Grant, 1996). The term ‘knowledge’ has been conceptualised as a strategic resource that does not lose value as do traditional economic productive factors (land, capital, labour, and entrepreneurship) (Alchian & Demsetz, 1972). The KBV of the firm is further based on the premise that competitive success lies in the ability of the firm to develop new knowledge-based assets that create core competencies. The assumptions of the KBV of the firm are consistent with the aims of talent retention, which stimulates and inspires talented workforce to remain working with the organisation for a longer duration. The KBV of the firm is the most
appropriate theoretical lens because, when applied, it will help HEIs to generate, integrate, share and retain knowledge required to compete in the competitive markets.

2.5 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model upon which the study is predicated is shown in Figure 1.

![Conceptual Model Diagram]

Source: The Authors

**Figure 1: Talent Retention Strategies in Higher Education Institutions**

As depicted in Figure 1, work-life balance, employer-employee relationship and employee promotion positively impact talent retention in South African HEIs. This assumption is consistent which previous empirical research, which states that work-life balance (Mabaso et al., 2021; Smith & Knudsen, 2017), employer-employee relationship (Oruh et al., 2020) and promotion (Sitati et al., 2016) statistically impact talent retention in organisations.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted pragmatism as the research paradigm because it offers an alternative approach integrating positivist and constructivist paradigms into one research, thereby determining how quantitative and qualitative methods are used. Descriptive and exploratory studies were conducted to adequately describe and provide an in-depth understanding of the talent retention strategies in South African HEIs. The mixed-methods research was used to validate the research findings. The study was conducted in three South African HEIs in Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria. The target population for the study was 3613, which included academics, cluster leaders, deans, and professional services. The stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 347 participants for the study. The study variables were measured on a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The questionnaire comprised 16 items: work-life balance (4 items), promotion (4 items) and employer-employee relationship (7 items). The measuring instrument was validated and fit for this study. Quantitative data quality was determined through reliability and validity, while qualitative quality control was assessed through trustworthiness – credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability. The quantitative data was collected from 265 respondents, whereas the qualitative data was collected from 12 participants. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 27.0) was used to analyse the quantitative data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed to interpret the findings. For instance, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the measuring instrument, while factor analysis was computed to assess the validity of the measuring instrument. Moreover, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure and Bartlett’s Test were utilised to assess the sample adequacy. Pearson’s correlation ($r$) was used to determine the relationship between the dependent (talent retention) and independent variables (employer-employee relationship, promotion and work-life balance). The qualitative data was analysed using NVivo (version 12.0). The thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data to identify, organise and report the patterns or themes from the dataset.

4. Findings

Cronbach’s alpha was computed to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. It helped to determine whether tests and scales adopted in this study are fit for purpose. Traub and Rowley (1991) suggest that the reliability score ranges from 0 to 1, with perfect reliability equalling 1 and no reliability equalling 0. According to the rule of thumb, reliability scores between 0.70 and 0.80 may be acceptable (Downing, 2004). The findings are shown in Table 1 below.
Table 1: Reliability of the Questionnaire - Cronbach Alpha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer-employee relationship</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-life balance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that the reliability scores range from 0.74 (for promotion) to 0.92 (for employer-employee relationship), suggesting internal consistency. From the statistical point of view, the findings suggest a reasonable degree of reliability because they met the threshold. Therefore, the research instrument used to collect the data was reliable, and can be adopted by scholars in similar research. Table 2 below shows the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

The EFA is usually applied in social science research (Razak, Ma’amor & Hassan, 2016). EFA aims to provide in-depth relationships among variables in a study. Therefore, EFA was used to evaluate the relationship between latent variables developing theoretical constructs. The EFA, using the principal component extraction method, was computed to reduce the number of factors in the structural model. Items with loadings >0.40 were regarded as highly significant when extracting the factors, making them more interpretable.

Table 2: Validity of the Questionnaire- Pattern Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EER1</td>
<td>.741</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EER2</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EER3</td>
<td>.809</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EER4</td>
<td>.742</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EER5</td>
<td>.736</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EER6</td>
<td>.742</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EER7</td>
<td>.790</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td></td>
<td>.699</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td></td>
<td>.339</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td></td>
<td>.546</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td></td>
<td>.493</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QWL1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QWL2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QWL3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QWL4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>7.09</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of variance</td>
<td>47.26</td>
<td>11.57</td>
<td>6.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 3 components extracted.

From Table 2, the findings revealed that three factors could be extracted: Factor 1 (Employer-employee relationship), Factor 2 (Promotion) and Factor 3 (Work-life balance). The three factors explained 65.13% of the variance of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the findings showed that all the items in the questionnaire suggested acceptable loadings of >0.30.

As explained above, the KMO and Bartlett’s test measures the sample size adequacy, ranging from 0 to 1, reaching 1 when all the items were perfectly estimated without an error. Table 3 below shows the results of the KMO and Bartlett’s test.
From Table 3, the measure of sample adequacy (MSA) score was 0.901 (marvellous). Statistically, the requirements of sampling adequacy were met. Thus, the sample was adequate for the factor analysis. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data in an organised manner, which helped to explain the relationship between variables in the sample. Measures of central tendency such as Mean was used to determine the inter-item consistency of the various constructs that formed part of the study. Using the scale of 1-5, a mean score value of 3.00 and beyond was considered significant, hence acceptable. Moreover, measures of dispersion, including standard deviation (SD) was used to describe the degree to which the data value for the construct is spread around the mean value.

The findings from Table 4 suggest that the items measuring employer-employee relationship (Mean = 4.42), work-life balance (Mean = 4.41) and promotion (Mean = 4.32) have very high mean scores, exceeding 3.00. The findings indicated that all the variables that form part of this study are highly significant. This implies that the respondents perceived employer - employee relations, work-life balance and promotion as TM practices that influence the talent retention in HEIs. Table 5 shows the results of the inferential statistics using Pearson’s correlation.

**Table 3: Meyer-Olkin Measure and Bartlett’s Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy</th>
<th>.901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity</td>
<td>.901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx. Chi-Square</td>
<td>2273.605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Df</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Bound</td>
<td>Upper Bound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer-employee relationship</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.64409</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-life balance</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>0.61909</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4.5000</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5: Pearson’s Correlation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talent retention</th>
<th>Talent retention</th>
<th>Employer-employee relationship</th>
<th>Work-life balance</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>265</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.909&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>265</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.869&quot;</td>
<td>.681&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>265</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.767&quot;</td>
<td>.492&quot;</td>
<td>.619&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>265</td>
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<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**
Table 5 showed a strong positive relationship between talent retention and the employer-employee relationship ($r = 0.909, p < 0.001$). Moreover, a strong positive relationship existed between talent retention and work-life balance ($r = 0.869, p < 0.001$). Furthermore, there was a strong positive relationship between talent retention and promotion ($r = 0.767, p < 0.001$). The subsequent section presents the qualitative findings. The data analysis suggests that talent retention strategies in South African HEIs included employee promotion, employer-employee relationships, and work-life balance. The following section describes the qualitative findings.

The qualitative data was collected from 12 participants through online interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data was transcribed manually and analysed using NVivo. The study adopted the six qualitative data analysis steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). These include data familiarization, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and write-up. Thematic analysis was adopted to help identify, organise and report the patterns from the dataset. Following this, mind maps were used as the visual representation to help sort the different codes into themes. Some codes were classified as main themes, whereas others were categorised as sub-themes. The thematic analysis revealed that promotion, employer-employee relationship and work-life balance were the talent retention strategies most employees valued most in higher education institutions. The themes which form the basis of the findings are shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Talent Retention Strategies](image)

### 4.1 Theme 1: Promotion

Based on the interviews, most (N = 7) participants argued that promotion was an essential TM practice that helped reduce labour turnover in South Africa. The following are some of the participants’ quotes related to the findings.

**Participant 7:**

In academia, promotion is considered an important issue. Promotion, as a TM tool, can influence staff retention either positively or negatively. Institutions that value staff promotion is more likely to retain their human capital (Institution A).

### 4.2 Theme 2: Work-Life Balance

From the interviews, the majority (N = 9) expressed a similar opinion that quality of work-life balance was a vital TM practice that helped retain talent. The following are some of the quotes that emerged from the interviews.

**Participant 1:**

A better quality of work-life balance is the key to attracting and retaining qualified and motivated employees in an organisation. To reduce labour turnover, institutions like this have designed and implemented programmes such as flexible work arrangements to improve the quality of work-life for all staff (Institution B).
4.3 Theme 3: Employer-Employee Relationship

From the interviews, most (N = 7) participants believed that, although the employer-employee relationship influenced talent retention, the relationship among staff in South African HEIs was problematic. Some of the participants' views on the findings are stated as follows.

Participant 8:

*I am not sure that the relationship in this institution is a healthy one. We are supposed to be working together as teams, but some people act otherwise. For example, it is difficult for most staff to collaborate to publish papers (Institution A).*

5. Discussion

Barkhuizen et al. (2020, p.191) contend that the voluntary turnover intentions of academics in South African HEIs are escalating, which presents significant challenges to HEIs, including “additional costs for the induction and training of new staff, loss of research outputs and organisational productivity, and reduced quality of teaching due to mid-semester replacements of lecturers.” Against this background, the study investigated TM practices influencing talent retention in South African HEIs. Three hypotheses supported the study. Hypothesis 1, indicated a statistically significant relationship between work-life balance and talent retention. Moreover, interviews were conducted to confirm and validate the quantitative results. This hypothesis was tested and achieved via mixed-methods research. The results of the quantitative and qualitative studies confirmed that work-life balance positively impacted talent retention in South African HEIs. The findings are consistent with previous studies (Shockley et al., 2017; Singh & Dubey, 2016), which state that a strong relationship exists between work-life balance and employee retention. According to Singh and Dubey (2016), most employees leave their organisations because they feel that their emotions and passions have not been recognised. In a recent study, Panda and Sahoo (2021) confirmed that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between work-life balance and the retention of professionals. This study confirms that work-life balance leads to a stronger organisational commitment. It has been proven that employees who adhere to work-life balance programmes think more strongly about remaining in the same organisations for a maximum period. According to Panda and Sahoo (2021), 60% of research demonstrated that those employees who can balance professional responsibility with family and personal responsibilities have a greater tendency to remain in a particular organisation. The views of the above authors are also consistent with Kanwar, Singh and Kodwani (2009), who state that work-life balance programmes demonstrate the likelihood of increasing employee morale, reducing absenteeism and retaining employees.

Hypothesis 2, states that a statistically significant relationship occurs between employer-employee relationship and talent retention. This hypothesis was also tested and achieved through mixed methods. The results from the quantitative and qualitative studies agreed that the employer-employee relationship influenced talent retention in South African HEIs. Oruh et al. (2020) found that managerialist employment relations had a negative effect on the retention of doctors in Nigeria. By contrast, Kim et al. (2017) discovered that organisational justice and organisation-employee relationship quality are negatively associated with turnover intention.

Hypothesis 3, states a statistically significant relationship between promotion and talent retention. The results of the quantitative and qualitative studies confirmed that promotion positively impacted talent retention in South African HEIs. The findings are also supported by existing research. Sitati et al. (2016) confirm that promotion prospects significantly impact employee retention within organisations. Moreover, Bibi et al. (2017) confirm that compensation and promotional opportunities had a significant relationship with employee retention. Likewise, a study by Ekabu et al. (2018) reaffirms that promotion prospect has a negative and an inverse relationship with turnover intention. On the contrary, Fairris (2004) argues that employee promotion is associated with high turnover. Joarder et al. (2011) also found that employees’ opportunity for promotion has less impact on faculty turnover decisions.

6. Managerial and Theoretical Implications

This study explored TM practices influencing talent retention in South African HEIs. The findings will be important tools for HEIs to retain their intellectual capital or knowledge workers. Theoretically, the findings will help expand knowledge on TM, KM and talent retention in HEIs. Thus, the study will provide better understanding of TM, KM and talent retention in HEIs.
7. **Conclusion**

Labour turnover in academic institutions worldwide has become a concern for many stakeholders of HEIs. For this reason, the study examined the TM practices that influence talent in South African HEIs. The findings demonstrated that TM practices, such as employer-employee relationship, work-life balance and promotion, positively impacted talent retention in South African HEIs.

8. **Limitations and Directions For Future Research**

The scope of the study only applied to South African HEIs, limiting the generalisation of the findings because of the differences in an organisational context. Hence, future research should focus on different industries.

**Data Availability Statement**

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

**Ethics Statement**

The research protocol (HSSREC/00000852/2019) was approved by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

**Author Contributions**

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**Competing Interests**

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

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