Exploring talent management strategies for skilled professionals in a conservation state-owned enterprise, North West Province

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Mini-dissertation accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Business Administration* at the North-West University

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Graduation: June 2026

DECLARATION

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Signed: Charlene Jacobs

Date: 28/11/2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God Almighty for the strength, wisdom, and endurance that have seen me through this mini-dissertation. To God be the glory, great things He has done.

I am deeply grateful to the NWU Business School for the opportunity given to me to do my MBA studies. To my supervisor, Prof. Anna-Marie Pelser, my heartfelt thanks for your unwavering support, guidance, and professionalism throughout the process. Your thorough feedback, patience, and dedication pushed me to reach this goal, and I appreciate you immensely.

To my family, my husband Koos Jacobs, my children Lazmay, Paige, Leilani, Larson, and Eliah, thank you for your endless love, encouragement, and understanding on this journey. The sacrifices you made, especially during the moments I was absent because of academic pressures, did not go unnoticed. Your support strengthened me, and I love you all dearly.

Mom and Dad, Mr Arnoldus and Mrs Diana Ludick, those words of encouragement during rough times were priceless. Both your faith and resilience motivated me to continue working to become the best version of myself. To my siblings and their families, Carmen, Rosline, Arnoldus and Andrew, I thank you for your unconditional love and constant support. You mean the world to me.

To my dear friend, Olivia, thank you for your patience, kindness, and willingness to listen throughout this journey. Your support carried me through many challenging days.

Allow me to express my special appreciation to all those who contributed to this achievement in ways big and small. This is not my achievement alone, but ours.

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the talent management practices employed at a conservation-focused SOE in the North West Province to attract, develop, and retain skilled professionals. Anchored on an exploratory qualitative research design within an interpretivist paradigm, the study aimed at understanding the lived experiences of employees and HR practitioners. Data were gathered from nine purposively selected participants using semi-structured interviews.

The data were analysed using the approach to thematic analysis, which includes open, axial, and selective coding, with support from Microsoft Excel in organising, categorising, and comparing responses systematically. This analytical process yielded four main themes and a set of clearly defined sub-themes that reflect the organisational dynamics shaping talent management within the SOE.

The findings indicated that while there were various talent management practices in the organisation, including recruitment initiatives, development programs, and performance management systems, their effectiveness was often hindered by contextual and structural barriers. These obstacles entailed uncompetitive remuneration, limited career advancement opportunities, inadequate resources, bureaucratic delays, and constraints stemming from governance. The aforementioned four factors together negatively impacted employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention.

The findings of this study suggest that effective talent management for conservation SOEs requires enhanced strategic alignment, leadership capability, modern HR systems, and a superior employee value proposition-one that takes into consideration the unique demands and challenges of conservation work. This includes strengthening career development paths, enhancing non-financial incentives, entrenching a performance-based culture at the organisational level, and embracing data-informed human resources planning. Improvement in these areas is necessary for workforce stability, operational efficiency, and long-term organisational sustainability.

KEY TERMS

Key Term	Definition
Talent Management	A strategic and systematic process of attracting, developing, engaging, and retaining individuals with the skills needed to meet organisational objectives (Collings *et al.*, 2019; Armstrong, 2012)
Employee Attraction	The ability of an organisation to draw qualified individuals based on factors such as employer reputation, job opportunities, and value propositions (Boxall & Purcell, 2011)
Employee Retention	Organisational strategies aimed at keeping talented employees committed, thereby reducing turnover. (Lewis & Heckman, 2006)
Recruitment and Selection	Processes used to identify, attract, and appoint suitable candidates to organisational positions. (Tansley, 2011)
Training and Development	Structured initiatives aimed at improving employee knowledge, skills, and competencies for current and future roles. (Garavan *et al.*, 2012)
Succession Planning	Ensuring that skilled employees are prepared to assume critical roles when vacancies occur. (Rothwell, 2015)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DPSA:	Department of Public Service Administration
EVP:	Employee Value Proposition
HR:	Human Resources
NWPTB:	North West Parks and Tourism Board
PMDS:	Performance Management and Development System
SOE:	State Owned Entity

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CHAPTER ONE
ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Although South Africa has always had state-owned enterprises, many of these have had difficulties attracting and retaining skilled professionals. The state-owned enterprise(SOE) that had responsibilities for the management of conservation and tourism for the North West Province had SOE management-related challenges that threatened the long-term sustainability of its operations. Unfortunately, many skilled professionals, especially in the areas of conservation and tourism, chose private sector or international employment because of better pay, higher levels of career advancement and resource availability.

The aforementioned challenges required managing all aspects of talent, including recruiting, developing, engaging, and retaining talent. Smit *et al.* (2023) argued that SOEs ought to consider and institutionalise strategic talent management as a key driver of their sustainability and continuous servicing. There is a large volume of literature pertaining to the corporate world and talent management, but very few delve into the conservation and tourism (and therefore the SOEs) in South Africa. Given the circumstances, it was important to undertake a focused study in an attempt to assist the North West Province conservation SOE in improving its talent management system toward employee retention and enhanced organisational productivity.

Conservation and tourism needed highly specialised skills; therefore, the SOEs in these industries had to craft and execute specific operational requirements. Failure to formulate a strategy meant organisations suffered some unwanted outcomes in the management of their talent, including high employee turnover, service delivery stagnation, and inefficiencies in the operations of the organisations. This study surveyed the perspectives of highly skilled employees of the conservation SOEs in North West Province on what would be the most pertinent and pressing challenges to the enhancement of talent management practices, which ensure the maintenance of a sustainable workforce and the possible solutions to these challenges.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The North West Province Conservation SOE had a pivotal role in the management of protected areas and tourism. Nonetheless, this organisation experienced some challenges, including the inability to attract and retain a pool of varying levels of skilled professionals, which in turn affected the operational efficiency and sustainability of the organisation in the long term. Conservation and tourism SOEs are often affected by systemic talent shortages and high employee turnover, and the inability to recruit and retain a number of key positions has had a detrimental impact on the

organisation's effectiveness (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2021). All of these have been made worse by the unavailability of career growth, red tape, low pay, and lack of resources.

This was evident in the declining number of professionals remaining in the conservation SOE in the North West Province. According to Mahlangu and Van der Westhuizen (2020), SOEs all over South Africa had annual attrition rates averaging above 15%, but for those of a conservation nature, the crisis was even worse due to the inadequate availability of specialised skills. The ongoing loss of skills was detrimental to conservation, the development of tourism, and the provision of services.

While most previous studies examined talent management in the private and public sectors and how it impacts organisational performance, there is a gap in the field of tourism and conservation SOEs (Collings & Mellahi, 2022; Sparrow *et al.*, 2023). For example, Govender and Bussin (2022) discussed retention strategies for SOEs in general, but that study also did not have a sectoral focus. This heightened the need for an in-depth study on how this conservation SOE in the North West Province could enhance its talent management to address its people challenges.

As skilled workers are a necessity to both conservation and tourism, it made sense to try to find a solution to these problems. The conservation SOE would constantly be subjected to recruitment and talent management inefficiencies, skill shortages, and poor service delivery. That is why the purpose of this study is to promote the identification of skilled employees and the implementation of effective organisational strategies to achieve sustainable performance at the organisational level. This is to close the gap on improving organisational performance and sustainable development.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study outcomes managed to enrich the body of knowledge on the talent management strategies for the conservation SOE, one of the most under-researched fields in academia. The study outcomes and recommendations targeted the promotion of workforce retention, improved organisational outcomes, and developed pathways for systemic policy reform for the conservation SOE in the North West Province. These studies targeted the HR practitioners, policymakers, and academic researchers who have an interest in talent management in the public sector organisations (Collings & Mellahi, 2022). The findings of this study will be of great support to the conservation and tourism sectors, particularly public enterprises, in the retention of a specialised workforce, as this has been the most neglected in the sector.

The research also provided personal learning for the researcher by raising awareness of how talent can be managed within constraints, as stated by Sparrow *et al.* (2023). In this sense, the methodology captures the insight and experience of top tier professionals to pioneer frameworks for the operationalisation of talent management within the firm.

1.4 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

To examine and document the talent management strategies of one conservation State-Owned Entity (SOE) in the North West Province aimed at attracting, developing, and retaining skilled professionals within the entity. A qualitative method was adopted for this study to gain valuable information on the practices and challenges of the organisation and how those strategies may enhance employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention.

The study provided a contribution to the larger pool of knowledge in talent management within the conservation sector, in particular, to resource management in the public sector with operational recommendations.

1.4.1 Primary objective

To explore the Conservation SOE's talent management strategies in the North West Province and to assess the effectiveness of those strategies in the attraction and retention of competent professionals within a competitive job market.

1.4.2 Secondary objectives

- To examine and understand the specific challenges and obstacles to the successful/unsuccessful implementation of talent management strategies in addressing the problem of retention of skilled professionals that the conservation SOE encountered.
- To document the perception of employees and managers, as informed by their experiences, on the influence of talent management practices on engagement, job satisfaction, and retention.
- To understand how the SOE's talent management strategies influenced the performance, service delivery, and competitive advantage of the organisation in the conservation sector.
- To suggest how talent management strategies can be improved based on qualitative findings and best practices within the sector.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were designed to align with the objectives and to address the core issues concerning talent management practices and their impact on organisational outcomes.

1.5.1 Main question

What talent management strategies are implemented by the conservation SOE in North West Province to attract and retain skilled professionals?

1.5.2 Secondary Questions

- What are the key challenges faced by the conservation SOE in executing its talent management strategies, and what factors influence their success or failure?
- How do talent management practices influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention within the conservation SOE?
- What impact do the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE have on organisational performance and competitive advantage in the conservation sector?
- What best practices and innovative approaches can be recommended to enhance the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE?

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.6.1 introduction

Talent management constitutes an essential function of SOEs, especially in the field of conservation and tourism, given the difficulties organisations face in recruiting and retaining skilled professionals. (Govender & Bussin, 2022). In retention and retention of employees in performance sustaining service delivery in an organisational context, and in the context of ongoing resource constraints in an environment in the service context (Sparrow *et al.*, 2023). This review of literature addressed the types of research available in the field of talent management pertaining specifically to conservation SOE, the impact of the attraction and retention of employees and the management of such variables through the development of management frameworks.

1.6.2 Talent Management in State-Owned Entities

Talent management in the context of an entity involves such functions as the recruitment, development, engagement and retention of employees for the purpose of accomplishing the objectives of the organisation (Collings, Mellahi & Cascio, 2019). In SOEs, such functions were encumbered by the presence of bureaucratic systems, insufficient opportunities for career advancements, and poor remuneration, which resulted in the high turnover attrition rates (Smit & Veldsman, 2023). With many South African SOEs reporting turnover rates of more than 15%, conservation-focused SOEs were particularly challenged as there were limited specialised skills available (Mahlangu & Van der Westhuizen, 2020). This underscores the importance of developing focused frameworks for conservation and tourism-oriented SOEs.

1.6.3 Challenges in Attracting and Retaining Skilled Professionals

Conservation SOEs worked under a backdrop in which professionals like ecologists and environmental and tourism specialists suffered from a shortage because of competing demand from other organisations (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2021). The following is a summary of reasons why these organisations under under-staffed.

- **Uncompetitive remuneration:** Due to paying professionals in conservation SOEs less than other competing private organisations and even international organisations, retention is more difficult (Govender & Bussin, 2022).
- **Limited career development:** The absence of a structured development and promotion framework, which encourages stagnation, leads to increased turnover (Sparrow *et al.*, 2023).
- **Resource constraints:** Tight budgets restricted investment in training, infrastructure, and incentives, discouraging skilled professionals from remaining in the sector (Mahlangu & Van der Westhuizen, 2020).
- **Bureaucratic culture:** The rigid administrative systems focused more on rule adherence rather than outcome delivery. This lowered job satisfaction and motivation, and led professionals to escape from more flexible institutions. (Smit & Veldsman, 2023).

1.6.4 Strategies for Enhancing Talent Management

These difficulties guided academics to propose the following strategies to address these challenges.

1.6.4.1 Competitive Compensation and Benefits

Market-ads (competitive) salaries and benefits are crucial factors to retain and attract talented and skilled professionals. Collings and Mellahi (2022) found that attrition is reduced through benchmarking remuneration to private and global standards. Masibigiri and Nienaber (2021) mentioned that retention is enhanced through non-monetary benefits like housing, flexible working, and performance-linked benefits.

1.6.4.2 Career Development and Training Opportunities

There is evidence that structured career development pathways improve employee engagement, and retention is long- term. Smit and Veldsman (2023) mentioned that the stability of the workforce in SOEs was significantly improved through mentorship programmes, leadership development, and training in relevant skills. Furthermore, the maintenance of ongoing professional development was aided by the collaboration of SOEs with universities and research organisations (Sparrow *et al.*, 2023).

1.6.4.3 Employee Engagement and Organisational Culture

A few studies illustrated that retention was improved by positive organisational culture's ability to inspire employee engagement. Collings, Mellahi, and Cascio (2019) indicated that employees are more likely to remain in their positions when they feel appreciated and supported. It was concluded that job satisfaction was enhanced by formal mechanisms of feedback, employee recognition, and decision-making at the organisational level that involved employees (Govender & Bussin, 2022).

1.6.4.4 Enhancing Work Environment and Resource Allocation

Infrastructural improvements, adequate resources, and reasonable workloads were vital to alleviating burnout and fostering satisfaction within jobs (Mahlangu & Van der Westhuizen, 2020). Spending on modern conservation tools and innovative digital instruments, as well as streamlined admin processes, improved operational efficiency and productivity (Sparrow *et al.*, 2023).

1.6.4.5 Strengthening Recruitment Processes

Rational recruitment, including purposeful employer branding and targeted talent acquisition, improved the conservation SOEs' recruitment of skilled employees. Studies have pointed out the need to synchronise recruitment with the organisational strategy and the dominant trends within the sector (Collings & Mellahi, 2022). Undergraduate internships and graduate programmes also created a talent pipeline (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2021).

In the case of Conservation SOEs, talent management impacts the organisation's sustainability the most. The issue of how to engage skilled professionals and retain them is a competition of some sort. It needs talent management strategies, which are a combination of remuneration, career paths, employee engagement, and recruitment. There is a consensus in the literature that SOEs need to adopt new strategies in talent management to withstand competition and ensure sustainability in the management of tourism and conservation. This is the ongoing study which seeks to identify and understand the lived experience and responses of one such skilled professional in one Conservation SOE in the North West Province.

1.7 THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The goals for creating theories include explanation, foretelling, comprehension, and, in several instances, confrontation and enhancement of pre-existing theories to the extent of critical bounding assumptions. For a research study, the theoretical framework provided the construction explanation to the research problem and to all that underpinned the problem within the research. The framework, along with the relevant theories, specified the relation of the various components to one another in a particular foundation of concepts.

1.7.1 Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory, as proposed by Becker, was in recent years extended to include one more factor, which was the emphasis on the enhancement of an organisation's outcome through investment in employees in terms of education, training, and development (Wright *et al.*, 2014). The study was relevant as it highlighted the importance of attracting and retaining skilled professionals in the direction of conserving state-owned entities (SOEs). Given the challenges conservation SOEs faced in workforce retention, Human Capital Theory supported the notion that opportunities for the continuous development of skills and career advancement should be a priority to ensure workforce sustainability (Collings & Mellahi, 2022).

1.7.2 Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

Barney's Resource-Based View Theory framed an organisation's competitive edge as a function of its precious and hard-to-imitate resource pool, including its people. This concept has been strengthened further in recent research by detailing how organisational performance is enhanced by the employment and implementation of efficient and effective talent management systems (Nyberg *et al.*, 2018). This theory is applied in the case study in view of the retention of skilled employees as a strategic managerial resource in the conservation SOEs. Efficient talent management systems enabled these organisations to make the best use of the human resources for superior operational performance and enhanced client service (Sparrow *et al.*, 2023).

1.7.3 Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Factors contributing to the positive and negative sides of the job satisfaction equation were explained by Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory. The theory posited that there was a positive correlation between job satisfaction and the degree to which the individual was internally motivated by and achieved factors such as promotion, advancement, and recognition, whereas externally controlled attributes like remuneration and work environment only deterred job dissatisfaction (Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl & Maude, 2017). This theory was of utmost importance in understanding the retention challenges of skilled professionals that these conservation SOEs faced. The balanced consideration and management of the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects led to attaining improved job satisfaction and retention for these professionals (Govender & Bussin, 2022).

1.7.4 Psychological Contract Theory

The Psychological Contract Theory pertained to the informal understandings between employees and employers regarding what the parties owe each other. Guest (2016) explained that there was a disengagement that resulted in turnover when expectations regarding career progression, pay,

and other work-related issues were not met. In conservation SOEs, the understanding of this theory was useful in providing insights on how organisations could improve talent management to address the expectations of employees vis-à-vis retention. (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2021)

1.7.5 Relevance of the Theoretical Framework

The application of the theories provided a better understanding of the talent management practices that were in place in the conservation SOEs. Human Capital Theory and the RBV provided the foundation to view skilled employees as indispensable, while the theories of Motivation-Hygiene and Psychological Contract provided a framework for understanding retention and satisfaction. In total, these theories provided the foundation for this study, which aimed to identify the talent management practices that were deemed effective in enhancing workforce retention in a conservation SOE.

Such expectations by the employees and adverse outcomes in the organisation were the main drive for losing employee morale and thus the theory's application in the research by Masibigiri and Nienaber (2021). For a researcher applying the Psychological Contract Theory while understanding employee expectations will give the base needed to manage employee expectations and remain committed to the organisation.

1.8 KEY CONCEPTS

1.8.1 Talent Management

Talent management is an organisational policy concerning the attraction, development, retention, and engagement of employees that is aligned with the long-term goals of the organisation (Collings, Mellahi & Cascio, 2019). In the case of the conservation of state-owned enterprises in South Africa, it is deliberate systems in dealing with the issues of underdeveloped skills, employee retention, and employee advancement in resource-constrained settings (Govender & Bussin, 2022).

1.8.2 Skilled professionals

A skilled professional is someone who has a combination of additional specific information, credentials, and proficiency in a given field. For this research, participants will be only conservation and tourism specialists who work in a conservation SOE in the North West Province. These specialists are essential for the efficient and effective management of sustainable conservation and tourism. The retention of these specialists is important to ensure that the organisation will be sustainable in the provision of its services.

1.8.3 State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs)

These are organisations owned by the government and operate in strategic economic sectors that deliver public goods and services. In South Africa, SOEs are active in the conservation and tourism sector as managers of protected areas, biodiversity conservators, and promoters of sustainable tourism. As the conservation SOEs have unique human resource challenges, the development of appropriate talent management strategies will lead to operational efficiencies that are key to sustaining these organisations in the long run.

1.8.4 Attraction of Talent

Talent attraction is the ability of an organisation to find, connect, and recruit talent that has the necessary skills and experience in order to meet the organisation's strategic goals. In the case of SOE conservation, talent attraction is not simply about providing attractive salaries; it goes further to include the provision of place and time flexibility, opportunities for professional advancement, and the provision of services that are environmentally sustainable in order to retain conservation employees.

1.8.5 Retention of Skilled Professionals

Retention is typically a phenomenon pertaining to an organisation's employees being retained in a state of engagement and commitment. For conservation SOEs, retention can be facilitated through career advancement opportunities, job satisfaction, work environment, and corporate culture. The ongoing elevated turnover of skilled professionals is detrimental to the retention of the workforce needed to sustain the efforts and provide the needed services. The most effective retention initiatives include outlining career path opportunities, providing job security, and fostering a healthy, positive organisation structure.

1.8.6 Organisational Sustainability

Theory suggests that organisational sustainability is the ability of an organisation to remain viable in the long run in the pursuit of its goals, and within its means, and assuming social, economic, and environmental obligations as well (Sparrow et al., 2023). In conservation SOEs, sustainability is the effective and efficient management of human capital through the retention of skilled specialists whose work is pivotal to the constellation and the tourism sector. These entities face operational inefficiencies with the associated decline in the quality of services offered, if the management of these talents is unsustainable (Nyberg et al., 2018).

1.9 RESEARCH PARADIGM, METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

A research paradigm refers to a framework. Kivunja & Kuyini (2017) describe the interpretivist paradigm as the most appropriate for this study, as it most aptly explores the perceptions and

experiences and the motivations of the skilled employees of a conservation SOE. An interpretivist aims to comprehend the experiences of individuals, and hence this approach is appropriate to analyse the practices of talent management in a particular organisation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For this study, the interpretivist paradigm is preferred to the positivist paradigm, which is concerned with objective and measurable truths, as this study is exploratory of subjective opinions, rather than testing hypotheses with a statistical generalisation. The focus of this study also did not lean towards power and social change; hence, critical theory is also not primary. This leaves interpretivism as the best for this study paradigm (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Creswell and Poth (2018) mention that the current research is interpretivist since the intent was to comprehend human experiences through qualitative research. This paradigm made it possible to gain insight into the true experiences of participants.

1.9.1 Methods

In qualitative research, there are three approaches that could be taken in theory building: inductive, deductive, and abductive. Inductive reasoning would be the construction of theories based on the data, which is, moving from the particular to the general after observing data. This is the most common approach taken in the development of codes, categories, themes, and theoretical constructs in order to explain the data.

The abductive approach, however, is in search of the explanations that are most likely to be true, which is usually a process that requires moving back and forth from the data to the theory iteratively and vice versa in order to arrive at an understanding. In abductive reasoning, an observation is made, and theoretically, the simplest and most likely explanations are sought.

Given that the study focused on the talent management practices aimed at the attraction and retention of talent in a conservation SOE in the North West Province, the research design was, therefore, abductive in nature. This enabled the development of theories that were contextually relevant to the study and to other theories and concepts. The collection and analysis of qualitative data provided an opportunity to gain insight into the talent management strategies that were effective in that specific context from the participants of the SOE. The abductive approach was in line with the exploratory nature of the study, and this allowed the development of useful propositions that were theoretically relevant and that could inform practice and/or further research in the management of talent in the conservation-focused entities.

In this context, there were several factors that impacted talent management in a state-owned entity, such as financial constraints, government policies, and employee expectations that might not have been sufficiently explained by existing theories. Abduction enabled the study to move from real-world observations to the theoretical frameworks, and this was to allow new insights to be discovered as opposed to confirming what was already known. This is why an abductive approach was used.

1.9.2 Research Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach as a research design to delve deep into skilled professionals' experiences and perceptions in NWPTB.

1.9.2.1. Design

The study is an exploratory qualitative one, which involves semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

1.9.2.2 Population and Sampling

The study targeted skilled professionals and HR managers in the Conservation SOE. A purposive sampling technique was utilised to ascertain that the participants had relevant experience.

1.9.2.3 Data Collection

The collection of primary data was done through interviews and focus groups, whereas secondary data was obtained from organisational reports and policy documents.

1.9.2.4 Data analysis

The data was analysed using thematic analysis, which pinpoints the main themes and patterns emerging from the data.

Creswell and Poth (2018) support the use of qualitative research since it allows a richer contextual examination of social complexities and affords a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, qualitative research made it possible to grasp the complexities around the practices and the strategies that worked in particular organisational contexts in managing talent in SOEs.

One instance is the study by Muzanenhamo and Rankhumise (2023), which used semi-structured interviews to examine retention strategies in a South African SOE. The qualitative methodology made it possible to determine some of the critical retention strategies that enhanced job satisfaction in the public sector, which were retention wellbeing programs, additional leave, professional development opportunities, and permanent contract employment.

The same qualitative approach was used to examine the impact of Industry 4.0 on the talent management practices of industrial enterprises by Acar and Sarnıç (2024). From their in-depth interviews, it was discovered that there was a perception that the regular provision of training and provision of additional non-salaried benefits were primary elements of talent management, while the participation of employees in social responsibility activities, and collaboration as a team were positively perceived as a mechanism to improve organisational communication.

Because of the exploration of the conservation SOE in the North West Province, a qualitative method was applicable. This qualitative strategy was a meaningful one, which concentrated on drawing out rich context data that engendered a depth of insight into the talent management strategies that were successful in luring and retaining skill in this peculiarly situated organisation and location.

1.10 RESEARCH DESIGN

1.10.1 Research Design: An Exploratory Qualitative Study

This study was conducted with an exploratory qualitative design, which best suits the investigation of new or under-researched topics. This design of study has given a thorough insight into the talent management strategies used in a conservation SOE, concentrating on the lived experiences of the participants and the organisational practices.

1.10.2 Rationale for Choosing an Exploratory Qualitative Design

1.10.2.1 Flexibility and Depth

This type of research provided the opportunity for a wide-ranging investigation of the complexities surrounding a given issue, which in this case were the interpersonal relationships, or human dynamics, in an organisational workplace setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

1.10.2.2 Practicality and Time Considerations

This design did not necessitate the collection of longitudinal data, which made it practical for the time constraints, yet it was rich with meaningful data.

1.10.2.3 Alignment with Research Aims

Since this study sought to describe and explore the phenomena surrounding the practice of talent management, an exploratory design was the most appropriate (Bryman, 2021).

This design was based on semi-structured interviews with primary stakeholders like conservation professionals,HR managers, staff, employees, and policy implementers, with the purpose of recognising the emerging trends and themes in talent management.

Due to the highly intricate, fluid, and evolving nature of talent management in a Conservation SOE, a qualitative and exploratory approach was most appropriate, which focused on obtaining a deeper understanding of people's lived experiences, perceptions, and hurdles.

Because the purpose of the study was to probe and acquire new insights rather than to validate a specific hypothesis, an exploratory design was the most appropriate. The exploratory research design allowed for the investigation of emerging themes and patterns, thus providing a more rounded perspective of the factors at play in the field of talent management in a specific context. Since this specific context has not been fully understood or researched to a great extent, an exploratory approach made it possible to discover insights, patterns, and themes that were not likely to come to light through more prescribed and systematic approaches.

1.11 TIME HORIZON

The study utilised a cross-sectional time horizon, as it sought to understand talent management strategies within a conservation State-Owned Enterprise in North West Province at a specific time. A cross-sectional study is appropriate for qualitative research that seeks to understand a moment in time with regard to practices, perceptions, and challenges, and does not intend to study changes over a long period of time (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Rationale for Choosing a Cross-Sectional Approach

The time constraints of the research project made the researcher consider a cross-sectional study as more feasible than a longitudinal study that would have entailed extensive time and resource collection over time (Bryman, 2021).

As the study sought to understand the current talent management strategies without any changes over time, a cross-sectional approach fit well with the qualitative, exploratory research design (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Since the interviews and data analysis were all conducted in a single phase, it allowed the research to be completed within the stipulated timeline while still achieving a substantial depth of understanding.

1.12 DEMARCATION/DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY:



https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-the-North-West-Province-showing-all-the-Districts-Source-Wikipedia-2016_fig1_329880374

The North West Province Conservation State-Owned Enterprise provided the organisation's archival data, policy documents, and crucial actors in the company in relation to the empirical data. To obtain contextual background information, demographic and employment data for the North West Province were accessed, and these were the most current available from Stats SA, together with applicable documents within the province.

1.13 INCLUSION-EXCLUSION CRITERIA

In this study, entitled 'Exploring talent management strategies for skilled professionals in a Conservation state-owned enterprise, North West Province', the inclusion and exclusion criteria were aimed at ensuring the selected participants had the appropriate level of expertise and experience within the conservation SOE. This criterion set the limits within which the study participants could be selected in order to maintain the validity and reliability of the study results.

1.13.1 Inclusion Criteria

The study participants were required to satisfy the following conditions to be included in the study:

Employment within the conservation SOE: Respondents were required to be currently employed in the SOE, in the conservation department or in one of the affiliated conservation organisations contributing to the SOE.

Professional experience: participants were expected to have experience of at least three years working in conservation, talent management, or human resource-related positions in the SOE.

Involvement in talent management: the eligible participants needed to have some form of human resource functions, retention of the workforce, and recruitment, or retention and recruitment, as well as retention of the workforce of the organisation.

Leadership and managerial roles: the focus was on mid-level and senior managers in charge of talent acquisition and retention because of their strategic position (Cappelli & Keller, 2017).

Knowledge of organisational policies: the participants should have had some knowledge of the policies, problems, and practices, in relation to HR and talent management in the Conservation SOE.

Willingness to participate: Most participants were those who had given their informed consent to participate in the study and were agreeable to carrying out in-depth individual interviews or focus group discussions.

1.13.2 Exclusion Criteria

Potential participants were excluded from the study if they had any of the following:

Lack of relevant experience: Those who had less than three years' experience in conservation, human resources, or talent management at the SOE.

External stakeholders: Excluded were consultants, contractors, or external agencies not officially employed by the NWPTB.

Administrative and support staff: Those whose role did not entail decisions concerning the management of talent, recruiting, or strategies for retention were omitted from the research.

Contract employees: Consideration was not given to employees in temporary roles, including interns, volunteers, and short-term contractors, none of whom participated in long-term decisions regarding the management of employees.

Reluctance to participate: Any participant who did not wish to provide informed consent or could not commit to the interview and focus group discussions was excluded. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

1.14. Research methodologies/processes

1.14.1 Population Size

Professionals working at a conservation-focused state-owned enterprise located in the North West Province of South Africa were considered for the population. This also included staff responsible for the organisation's talent management, recruitment, and retention strategies. Being a qualitative study, efforts were made to obtain thorough details from several key respondents involved in conservation, human resource management and strategic management of the workforce.

The target population was defined to include:

These are employees at middle and senior management levels responsible for policy implementation, workforce planning, and decision-making about talent acquisition and retention.

- HR personnel directly involved in the recruitment, employee development, and retention strategies in the conservation SOE.
- Management, line managers, and supervisors working with conservation teams who provided insights into workforce challenges and the need for skills development.
- Professionals specialised in conservation and ecological management, whose retention was crucial to the sustainability of the organisation.

From the data collected from other conservation SOEs within South Africa, the employee count has been estimated to be roughly 9 staff members. Given the qualitative nature of this study, the research was not trying to make empirical predictions about the entire workforce but rather tried to detail the challenges and strategies surrounding the management of talent.

The population for this study comprised management, line managers, and supervisors within conservation state-owned entities (SOEs). These individuals were selected because they were directly involved in workforce management and were therefore able to provide informed perspectives on workforce challenges, talent management practices, and employee retention.

1.15 SAMPLE METHOD/TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLE SIZE

This research employed purposive sampling, a qualitative approach which, as the name suggests, allows the researcher to choose participants on the basis of a certain criterion, in this case, their knowledge, competencies, and relevance to the study (Saunders *et al.* 2019). Given

the focus on the study that sought to unearth the talent management strategies espoused in a conservation SOE in the North West Province, purposive sampling allowed for the inclusion of only those participants who had relevant knowledge and experience in the management of conservation, human resources, recruitment and retention.

In qualitative research, saturation informs sample size in relation to its adequacy. Hence, in Creswell's perspective (2014), saturation is described as a situation in which empirical data, or new insights or information pertaining to certain themes, cease to arise.

According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), saturation could be reached with as few as twelve interviews, with even the most rudimentary elements being captured as early as six interviews. Hennink, Kaiser and Marconi (2017) separated saturation into two types: code saturation, which is the identification of themes, and meaning saturation, which is the comprehension of the themes; and the latter is a function of having more data. In this particular study, given the homogeneity of the participants and the nature of the research question, it was estimated that around nine participants would be adequate to arrive at code saturation.

Notably, saturation is not only determined by how many interviews and how much data are collected, but by the information's depth and richness entry (Fusch & Ness, 2015). It is also to be noted that if saturation is not achieved, it could lead to adverse effects on the quality and research findings. Therefore, the authors decided to continue with the data collection until saturation was achieved.

1.15.1 Purposive Sampling Justification

The justification for the use of purposive sampling in this study was that it required the researcher to obtain in-depth, experience-based insights from those individuals who were directly involved with talent management issues in the SOE:

- It ensured that data was collected from information-rich participants with first-hand experience with the SOE's talent management practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
- It also adhered to the principle of saturation, where data collection, in qualitative research, continued until there was a lack of emergence of new themes or insights (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).
- It allowed for flexibility in recruitment and interactivity so that further participants could be identified based on emerging themes during data collection, according to Bryman (2016).

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), saturation was critical in ensuring that the research was credible and comprehensive. It implied that the findings were based on a complete set of data

and not from a small or incomplete sample. It also helped minimise researcher bias through the consideration of alternative perspectives. In an exploratory qualitative study, saturation ensured that conclusions were deeply drawn from the real experiences of participants rather than scattered or insufficient information.

1.15.2 Sampling Strategy and Criteria

The sample selection was, therefore, based on the following inclusion criteria:

Conservation SOE employment: Only those individuals who were employed within the SOE at the time were included.

Professional experience: Individuals participating needed to have a minimum of three years of experience currently in conservation and/or in talent management or human resource-related positions.

Involvement in talent management: Eligible participants needed to be directly involved in the strategies of recruitment, retention, or workforce development.

Leadership and decision-making roles: Managers and HR practitioners were prioritised for their strategic insights.

Exclusion criteria removed those individuals who did not meet the above conditions: administrative staff, temporary workers, and external consultants.

1.15.3 Sample Size

In qualitative research, sample size is determined by the point of data saturation, as opposed to the statistical representativeness of the sample (Mason 2010). Within the field of organisational research, it has been documented that saturation is usually reached with a sample size between 12 and 20, at which point the researchers discern that no new themes are emerging from the data (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

The intended sample size for the study was around 9 participants. This figure allowed for the collection of several perspectives and also the associated depth and richness that is typical of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ultimately, saturation is a key factor, as noted by Creswell and Poth (2018) that guarantees the credibility and the overall thoroughness of the research. This is the case whereby the findings are

based on a whole set of data as opposed to a fragment or a small sample. This also serves to reduce the researcher bias in that multiple perspectives are taken into account. In a qualitative study that is exploratory in nature, the findings of deep research questions ought to be based on a whole range of data. Saturation guarantees the conclusions drawn are based on the real experiences of the participants rather than from gapped or insufficient data.

1.16 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Semi-structured interviews were the main data collection instruments used in this research.

1.16.1 Structured Interview

To understand the key stakeholders' perspectives, such as HR Managers, Senior Managers, Conservation Practitioners, and Employees, the theme of talent management strategies was investigated through the use of structured interviews. This method was chosen because of the possibility of analysing the different perspectives of the participants while retaining the same base set of questions. In this study, literature on talent management was used to develop the interview guide to achieve the study's objectives and ensure relevance and appropriateness. Materials such as academic journals, industry reports, and books on qualitative research methodologies were used to develop the interview guide.

1.16.2 Semi-Structured Interview

Some employees were able to take part, which made it feasible to collect data in the identification of some trends and common perceptions of talent management practices through the use of semi-structured interviews. With regard to the use of standard questions, this method was chosen as it allows for consistency and comparability.

1.16.3 Measuring Device

The study utilised a semi-structured interview guide as the primary instrument for data collection in order to obtain comprehensive insights from participants. The questions were designed in alignment with the principles of trustworthiness in qualitative research to support the credibility and validity of the results.

1.16.4 Reliability

Qualitative research was credibly conducted depending on the four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Credibility: Participants were provided with interview transcripts to confirm the accuracy of their responses as part of member checking.

Transferability: Transferability was promoted through the inclusion of detailed descriptions of the research context, participant profiles, and the processes used for data collection. The sections addressing the research setting, sampling approach, and data collection methods present detailed contextual information that allows readers to evaluate the extent to which the findings may be relevant or applicable to comparable settings (Bryman, 2021).

Dependability: An audit trail was maintained, which recorded all the decisions made in the course of the research, how the data were collected, and the steps that were involved in analysing the data, thus ensuring transparency and reproducibility of the processes undertaken in the research.

Confirmability: Reflexivity was practised by keeping a journal where personal biases were written down, showing that the findings had to come from the perspective of the participants and not from the researcher's assumption. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

1.17 DATA COLLECTION / FIELD WORK

1.17.1 Accessing the field

The purposive sample of participants in talent management, such as management in conservation, HR, and line managers/supervisors, made the study successfully feasible. Access was obtained via professional networks, those sponsoring conservation, and formal requests to participate. Consent was obtained from HR to collect the data. Compliance with entry was the provision of information to participants and the promise of policy/ethical restraint as per the institutions' requirements for research, as stated in Saunders *et al.* (2019).

1.17.2 Participant involvement

In the research study, the participants provided insights on the practice of talent management, for which they received an appreciation of the practice. The managers in HR and conservation and executives experienced strategy formation in the details of the employee attraction, enhancement, and retention triad, and for their career advancement and described their organisational experience in detail. This feedback provided Collings *et al.* (2018) with a deep appreciation of organisational strategies in talent management and the contextual factors affecting the participants in the study.

1.17.3 Recruitment and training of field workers

To maintain the quality expected and the rigour of research, all the interviews were conducted by independent researchers. Human resource managers served as study participants, while HR practitioners provided administrative support during the data collection phase.

1.18 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

HR practitioners were the ones to collect the data, and it was largely done through semi-structured interviews, which included face-to-face, telephonic, and virtual methods.

Face-to-Face Interviews: This type of interview was designed by the researcher since this allowed holding extensive conversations, witness the participant's non-verbal communication, and improve the participant's interview engagement. Trust was built through interpersonal relations, which led to open responses and thus richer data.

Telephonic Interviews: For cases where logistical challenges or participant preferences made it impractical to hold meetings face-to-face, telephonic and virtual interviews were conducted. This method ensured that more participants were involved and also provided greater flexibility and convenience for the respondents (Bell et al., 2022).

1.19 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Step 1: Participant identification and recruitment: Purposefully selected key informants qualified by expertise and relevance to talent management. Formal consent forms were disseminated and signed prior to involvement.

Step 2: Scheduling and conducting interviews: Interviewers were given an option to schedule a time at their convenience and use a one-to-one video call or phone. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide to allow for some flexibility and adaptability during the interview while still aiming for uniformity within the interviews (Collings *et al.*, 2018).

Step 3: Recording and transcription: Before the interviews, participants were asked for their consent to record the interviews. To protect the confidentiality of participants, the data were transcribed and anonymised.

Step 4: Data verification and analysis: Participants of the study were allowed to review their interview transcripts, a process termed member checking, to ensure their transcripts were accurate. Data were thematically analysed using Saunders *et al.* (2019) to derive actionable themes and findings from the data.

This approach guaranteed methodological rigour, flexibility for participants, and comprehensive data collection. The use of both face-to-face and telephonic interviews maximised accessibility without sacrificing any of the depth and quality associated with qualitative inquiry.

1.20 RESEARCHER-ORGANISATION RELATIONSHIP AND POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Considering that the researcher was employed in the public entity within the field of study, the study posed both an opportunity and a challenge. “An insider” is considered to benefit from easier participant access, an opportunity to build rapport with the study subjects, and a more complete understanding of the organisational field (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). While this is true, such closeness also poses potential conflicts of interest, in which workplace relationships could unconsciously shape the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data from study participants and organisations (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). HR practitioners were the data collection sources. In a bid to maintain consistency and protect the integrity of the research, all interviews were conducted by a researcher who was independent.

Some challenges were related to response bias and the validity of the findings due to the participants possibly feeling the need to provide socially desirable rather than truthful answers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants may also experience potential power relations within the organisation and therefore become uncooperative during the research process (Bryman, 2016). To mitigate these threats, the researcher adhered to the principles of ethics in research, particularly informed consent, confidentiality, and reflexivity, which is a constant consideration of one’s biases to reduce them (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Further separating professional duties and responsibilities from the research created even more credibility for the study. Organisational loyalties were further countered by external validation using peer debriefing, triangulation, and other techniques, which also added objectivity to the study. All these measures added to the academic integrity of the research while providing rich details on the talent management techniques available for use in the organisation.

1.20.1 Managing potential conflicts of interest

Taking into account that the researcher is also a staff member of the SOE and is acting as a researcher for this particular study, it became imperative to take as many precautions as possible to ensure the integrity and impartiality of the research. In this regard, the following measures have been adopted to address and lessen the conflicts of interest.

1.20.2.1 Role delineation and independent data collection

To avoid the challenges of role ambiguity and to ensure impartiality, the interviews, along with all the activities of data collection, were undertaken by a researcher independent of the SOE. This geographic separation meant that the participants were able to speak openly and without concern

for the potential impacts of any hierarchical relationships. All communications to participants made it clear that this study was independent research, thus disassociating the professional and research functions of the researchers (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

1.20.2.2 Ethical approval and organisational consent

The research acquired ethical clearance from the University's ethics committee as a means of protecting the integrity of the research. Likewise, formal appropriations were secured from appropriate officials of the SOE to ensure that the internal policy and procedures were complied with, as much as possible. (Bryman, 2021)

1.20.2.3 Ensuring voluntary participation and informed consent

Prior to participation in the research, each participant received an information sheet for the study. It outlined the study's purpose, the procedures, and the participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Written informed consent was obtained, stating that the participation was voluntary and that measures were in place to ensure that the participant's information would remain confidential (University of Essex, n.d.).

1.20.2.4 Confidentiality and data security

The records were anonymised to protect the participants from any form of identification. Secure data repositories, accessible solely to research team members, were implemented to maintain the data's integrity. These actions were compliant with the industry standards for data protection and confidentiality.

1.20.2.5 Reflexivity and researcher objectivity

Reflexive journaling was used to capture personal thoughts and possible biases during the study. Further, regular consultations with academic supervisors help filter personal opinions that could sway the interpretation or analysis of the data. (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018)

1.20.2.6 Independent data validation

In an effort to improve the study's credibility, triangulation techniques were applied, where data were compared and contrasted with other sources. In addition, the findings were subjected to peer debriefing with either an academic supervisor or other external consultants to reduce bias and authenticate the findings (Silverman, 2020).

1.20.2.7 Transparent reporting

The researcher's affiliation with SOE was disclosed in all reports and publications. In the presentation of results, an objective and impartial stance was taken, in addition to deriving conclusions from empirical results, rather than personal viewpoints (Flick, 2023)

1.21 ENSURING ORGANISATIONAL ANONYMITY WITHIN A UNIQUE CONTEXT

Given the extraordinary case where there was only one SOE with a conservation focus in the North West Province, the maintenance of anonymity was difficult. The following measures were taken to ensure that the risk of being identified was mitigated in a manner that complied with ethical standards for research:

1.21.1 Use of generic terminology

In all research outputs and communications, the SOE was described using non-specific terms, such as 'the Conservation SOE.' This method avoided specific identification and complied with ethical research principles that protect the organisational identities of institutions in cases where they are the only organisations in a field (Dube *et al.*, 2014).

1.21.2 Anonymisation of participant data

Transcripts and reports did not contain any information such as names, job titles, or any other identifiable information. Thus, practice preserved the confidentiality of the participants and observed ethical guidelines of the University of South Africa Policy on Research Ethics that advocate for confidentiality of the participants' identity (Dube *et al.*, 2014).

1.21.3 Data handling procedures

Regarding data management, disclosure of the SOE identity was avoided by not including certain details such as particular places, names of the project, or any other distinctive features. This was appropriate in particular circumstances where there was only one entity, and hence, the risk of precise identification was relatively high. It was also further controlled by the ethical guidelines on South African research (Dube *et al.*, 2014).

1.22 DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS

1.22.1 Data coding scheme

As far as qualitative research is concerned, data coding is a crucial step, as it paves the way for the organised and systematic data interpretation. Pattern and theme analysis in the working research is concerned with the talent management strategies in the conservation SOE in the North West Province (Gwenan, 2021). With respect to Corbin and Strauss (2015). Three processes are involved in coding data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open coding: Following Charmaz 2014, open coding is the qualitative data that is collected from interviews and focus groups. In line with what Charmaz (2014) proposes, the data should be broken down into discrete concepts. This is where the analysis of interviews with the primary stakeholders, such as the HR Managers, conservation specialists, and administrative personnel, should be done, line by line, to reveal the emerging codes.

Axial coding: In this stage, Corbin and Strauss (2015) relate to and explain the open codes to produce higher-order categories. The researcher merged codes based on commonalities and patterns that provided a relational structure to the goals and objectives of talent retention and attraction in the SOE conservation field.

Selective coding: Braun and Clark (2006) refer to the final stage of the process as the integration of the central themes to transform them into a unified story. Focusing on the most central themes, a theoretical framework was constructed to explain the strategy of talent management in the given context.

1.22.2 Data analysis techniques

Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). NVivo software was also utilised during data analysis to increase the quality and accuracy of the analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

As Braun and Clarke (2019) suggest, the following steps were considered relevant for analysis:

1. **Data familiarisation**: Interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and then read multiple times to get a deep sense of familiarity with the data.
2. **Initial coding**: Data was coded in a systematic fashion by attributing a name to each segment of the data and creating a label which captured the essence of the segment.
3. **Searching for themes**: The codes were carefully reviewed to determine whether there were any that seemed to recur in the data. This step involves identifying the major themes that pertain to the focus of the research, which in this case is to attract and retain talent.
4. **Review of themes**: This step involved validating the themes that had been identified against the data that had been coded to ensure that the themes were accurate.
5. **Defining and naming of themes**: After all the themes were thoroughly reviewed, each one was defined and then named for thematic clarity.
6. **Producing the report**: The last stage was synthesising themes into a discussion that captured the intentions of the research.

7. **Trustworthiness and Consistency**: According to the criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the study was conducted in the best possible manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings' dependability and usefulness were enhanced by member checking, triangulation, and audit trails.

1.23 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Appropriate institutional review boards granted ethical approval to ensure compliance with standard ethical guidelines for conducting research. The study was anchored on ethical principles: informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and protection of data.

- Participants were made aware of the aim of the study, the procedures involved, possible risks, and the benefits of the study. Participants signed informed consent forms before partaking, assuring them of their rights (Wiles, 2013).
- Trust in the responses of the participants was upheld; no identifying information was present as it was either anonymised or coded for confidentiality (Flick, 2018). The data were collected in a secure manner, and access was granted only to a select group of researchers.
- Participants were not to be named in case of any possible identification, either by the researchers or the participants. Therefore, pseudonyms or numerical identifiers were employed in place of their real names.
- Participants were fully briefed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that even after starting, they could drop out without any consequences (Saunders et al., 2019).

During this study, and to ensure compliance with data protection laws such as the POPIA, Act No. 4 of 2013, participants' information was held, and their data were analysed, in a safe and confidential manner solely for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

1.24 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

While this study utilised a methodological approach that meets the best practice guidelines, some critiques of this study were identified, and their potential impact on the study's scope and generalisability were discussed.

Methodological limitations: With the focus on qualitative data and the potential for researcher bias and/or skewed conclusions, this approach, despite the richness of the insights, has limitations (Tracy, 2020). The absence of any quantitative data tends to restrict any generalisation to the study's focal context of the conservation SOE.

Limitations in the number of conserved SOEs: The research was based on one conservation SOE in the North West Province, and therefore, the generalisation of the results may be restricted. Also, the results may be highly unlikely to be applicable to other conservation agencies or SOEs in other geographical locations and/or sectors (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Generalisation limitations: Since the study has a qualitative nature, according to Saunders *et al.* (2019), findings may not be generalizable statistically to a larger population. Drawing contextual findings from the research, however, applicable solely to the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE, is warranted.

Credibility hazards: qualitative research has been a subject of criticism, particularly in the tendency to include unsubstantiated bias during the data-gathering process and analysis (Flick, 2018). Thus, for the purpose of enhancing the credibility and dependability of the outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), triangulation, member checking, and audit trail strategies were integrated into the design of the study.

Participant bias/response validity: The fact that participants may have provided socially acceptable responses is a limitation, and also that they may have withheld information that they considered crucial due to fears of confidentiality. To mitigate such a limitation, measures to ensure anonymity and confidence were provided to the participants.

Time and resource constraints: The use of in-depth interviews and thematic analysis is very resource- and time-intensive (Bryman, 2021). The time and scope of the study may be adversely impacted by any delays in the data collection process or during transcription.

1.25 DISSEMINATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of this investigation have been shared with relevant stakeholders as well as with the participants from the organisations. Data dissemination complied with ethical standards of confidentiality and data responsibility (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

The results were disseminated by:

- An executive summary report, which is prepared upon request, and provides a short summary of the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.
- Stakeholder presentation, which is provided, as needed, to government institutions, policymakers, and human resource units.

- Publications, which are relevant to this research and may have been submitted or are forthcoming to the appropriate academia and professional outlets, especially those that advance the dialogue on talent management within government institutions.
- Distribution in both electronic and hard copy, which were provided to the requesting agencies and an electronic version of the report was disseminated.

1.25.1 Confidentiality considerations:

The data is provided to the organisations, and respondents were anonymised and had a layer of aggregation for ethical research confidentiality, which is the right action.

1.26 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation was structured into several chapters, each serving a distinct purpose to ensure a logical flow of the research study:

1.26.1 Chapter one: Introduction

This chapter is the setting of the research in the contextual background of the study. It comprised the problem of the study, the aims, objectives of the study, and the research critical questions. Each of these provided direction to the hypotheses which govern the study. This chapter also discussed the significance of the study and the value it adds to scholarship and practice. It explained the paradigm, approach and provided an outline of the research methodology, giving a brief explanation of the procedures employed and the justification for such.

1.26.2 Chapter two: Literature Review

This chapter concerned itself with a synthesis of the literature pertaining to talent management strategies within the conservation SOEs. It pinpointed the theoretical frameworks and also the literature gaps.

1.26.3 Chapter three: Research Methodology

This chapter specified the research design and how the data for the study would be collected, the methods of sampling that would be used, the data that would be collected, and the procedures for analysing the data. It also provided an outline of the ethical issues. All methodologies were concerned with the Research Topic: Exploring Talent Management strategies for skilled professionals in a conservation state-owned enterprise, North West Province.

1.26.4 Chapter four: Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter deals with the analysis of research findings using thematic analysis. The analysis of the qualitative data in relation to the research objectives was the basis of the primary themes emerging from the findings.

1.26.5 Chapter five: Conclusion and Recommendations

The concluding chapter recapitulated the study findings and highlighted the major contributions and limitations of the study and the suggestions for upcoming studies and policy formulation.

1.27 RESEARCH PLAN

No	Research Activity	Description	Timeline
1	Literature Review	Reviewed existing literature on talent management strategies in conservation SOEs.	Month 1 – Month 2
2	Research Design & Ethics Approval	Finalised methodology, obtained ethical clearance, and developed consent forms.	Month 2 – Month 3
3	Participant Recruitment	Identified and secured interviewees from the conservation SOE.	Month 3 – Month 4
4	Data Collection	Conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups.	Month 4 – Month 5
5	Transcription & Data Familiarisation	Transcribed interviews and familiarised with data for analysis.	Month 5 – Month 6
6	Data Coding & Thematic Analysis	Applied open, axial, and selective coding to identify themes.	Month 6 – Month 7
7	Findings & Discussion Writing	Wrote chapters on data presentation, discussion, and linked findings to literature.	Month 7 – Month 8
8	Final Review & Editing	Proofread, formatted, and revised the dissertation.	Month 9 – Month 10
9	Submission	Submitted the final dissertation.	Month 10

Table 1: Gantt chart

Activity	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10
Literature Review	■■■	■■■								
Research Design & Ethics Approval		■■■	■■■							
Participant Recruitment			■■■	■■■						
Data Collection (Interviews & Focus Groups)				■■■	■■■					
Transcription & Data Familiarisation					■■■	■■■				
Data Coding & Thematic Analysis						■■■	■■■			

Findings & Discussion Writing										
Conclusion & Recommendations										
Final Review & Editing										
Submission										

1.28 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter One introduced this study, which sought to explore the talent management strategies aimed at attracting and retaining skilled employees in a conservation-based state-owned entity in the North West Province, South Africa. This chapter expounded on the role of human capital as the driving force behind the mission of conservation and tourism, while also stating that the long-term successful and operationally efficient state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are those that manage to attract, develop and retain a competent workforce.

These difficulties are a common occurrence and have been described in conservation SOEs as a shortage of relevant skills, high employee attrition, and the absence of human resource practices that are congruent with the goals of the organisation. The problem statement walked a tight rope and demonstrated that while SOEs have a pivotal role to play in biodiversity conservation and tourism, there are no practical insights on the real strategies that are employed to manage talent effectively.

The purpose of this chapter is to address the focus of the research, which is to analyse the talent management practices developed by the conservation SOE to improve employee retention and engagement. This had to do with understanding the challenges that occur with the implementation of strategic talent management practices and how these practices affect employee engagement and satisfaction, in addition to the impact on the organisation's performance and competitiveness, and the identification of practices that could be developed or tailored to improve the management of the organisation's talent.

The first chapter has explained the purpose of the research and its importance in terms of academics. This research is going to add to the little we know about talent management in conservation SOEs in South Africa. From a practical point of view, the study has the potential to shape and improve human resources policies and strategic frameworks designed to preserve a skilled and motivated employee base in a resource-constrained environment.

In the first chapter, the author presented the justification, background, and organisation of the study, which in turn stressed the need to comprehend the talent management activities of conservation SOEs.

Chapter two examined the scope and limitations of the research. The study explored one conservation SOE situated within the North West Province. The sample included employees as well as managers in HR, conservation and specialists who have relevant experience. An interpretivist paradigm was used alongside an exploratory qualitative design that employed semi-structured interviews and focus groups to obtain rich descriptions of participants' experiences and perspectives. The research design incorporated ethical principles of confidentiality, informed consent, and organisational anonymity. In the subsequent chapter two a comprehensive literature review is conducted.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section explores the relevance of various management theories within organisational contexts and the strategies employed to address workforce challenges. It begins with the evolution of how management theorists viewed employee management as mere execution of routine functions, to seeing it as a critical area of focus that could enhance the organisation's overall functionality. It will then focus on the core areas of the study, that is, employee retention and the means used to attract top talent, the contribution of leadership and culture of the organisation, and the regulatory frameworks that influence people management and organisational processes.

Finally, consideration is given to the challenges faced by state-owned entities in the conservation sector in dealing with the complexity of managing talent where there are resource constraints, policy demands, and social and economic conditions. This section also addresses recent innovations and the use of technology in people management, such as inclusivity and the use of data, which are aimed at transforming the way organisations manage their people.

To articulate the study's purpose, the author examines each of the study's guiding questions individually. This not only facilitates the structuring of the review but also identifies the gaps and inconsistencies in the pertinent literature. This is how the chapter provides the foundation for explaining how talent management systems assist in attracting, developing, and retaining skilled employees of a conservation-oriented public institution.

In the last section of this chapter a balanced presentation and an in-depth examination of the subject are provided. It starts with the theory of talent management, then looks at the practice and the various challenges that come with it. The review also looks at the various internal and external factors, such as leadership, organisational culture, available resources, and the political environment, that can determine the success or failure of the strategies. The review concludes with an analysis of recent innovations and practices that conservation-oriented organisations can use to improve their talent management. These discussions, combined with the talent management practices available to public

sector organisations, prepare the reader for the empirical investigation that follows in the next chapters.

2.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were designed to align with the objectives and to address the core issues concerning talent management practices and their impact on organisational outcomes.

Main Question

What talent management strategies are implemented by the conservation SOE in North West Province to attract and retain skilled professionals?

Secondary Questions

- What are the key challenges faced by the conservation SOE in executing its talent management strategies, and what factors influence their success or failure?
- How do talent management practices influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention within the conservation SOE?
- What impact do the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE have on organisational performance and competitive advantage in the conservation sector?
- What best practices and innovative approaches can be recommended to enhance the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE?

2.3 TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE CONSERVATION SOE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN SKILLED PROFESSIONALS

The various talent management strategies that the conservation SOE seeks to employ in attracting and retaining skilled professionals will be examined.

2.3.1 Strategic talent management in SOEs

To cope with the global shortage of talent, the public sector, and in particular conservation SOEs, has to manage its talent more effectively to achieve sustainability and competitiveness. Acar and Sarnıç (2024) illustrate how incorporating talent management, retention and recruitment, onboarding, performance management, and succession oversight into an organisation enables attractiveness and retention of talent in high turnover sectors. This is even more compelling because younger professionals

are leaving because their jobs are not impactful, i.e. not meaningful employment (Smit & Veldsman, 2023).

In conservation SOEs, more than extrinsic rewards, alignment with values of the environment and ethical leadership is intrinsic motivation (Mahlangu & Van der Westhuizen, 2020). This is important to design motivation for engagement and retention.

2.3.2 Attraction strategies in the conservation sector

In the conservation domain, targeted recruitment, strong employer branding and talent management for continuous development are particularly effective (Kamal & Joarder, 2023). It is important that conservation SOEs provide not only competitive salary and benefits but also meaningful and purposeful employment, the potential for careers that are sustainable, and the potential for an enviable work-life balance.

Armstrong (2020) highlights the importance of aligning human resource functions with an organisation's overall adaptive approach, especially in mission-driven areas like conservation.

2.3.3 The role of digitalisation in the attraction of talent

In addition, the Knowledge Economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) are changing the way organisations try to attract talent. Acar and Sarnic (2024) suggest that the incorporation of AI and data analytics within recruitment systems can help narrow the candidate pool and ensure candidates are retained over the longer term. These are the exact structures that conservation SOEs ought to build – predictive and data-sensitive talent pipelines.

2.3.4 Policy frameworks guiding talent strategy in South Africa

Within the South African context, the National Human Resource Development Strategy of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2022) promotes the concept of strategic workforce planning and fostering of leadership within the public sector. This policy framework gives direction to SOEs to adapt and design these Strategic Elements to fit their specific operational context.

2.3.5 Career development and learning opportunities

Retention is increased when employees are provided with formal training, mentoring, and leadership opportunities (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2021). The organisation's learning culture enhances employees' ability to adapt quickly to new technological and other

changes in the environment, which is crucial in conservation activities that often require constant upskilling.

2.4 CHALLENGES IN EXECUTING TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND INFLUENCING FACTORS

Structural, operational, and contextual factors all adversely affect the implementation of talent management strategies in the conservation SOEs/State-Owned Enterprises. These factors include, but are not limited to, limited funding, red tape, obsolete organisational frameworks, and rigid organisational culture challenges, which affect the impact of talent management initiatives. According to Eneh and Eneh (2023), in the case of SOEs, these organisations are in the public sector and are priced out of the market and therefore, do not have the financial means to pay competitive salaries or make considerable investments in talent management.

2.4.1 Governance and policy barriers

Overlap and imbalance of policies and governance are further examples of barriers to implementation. Maponya and Magano (2023) assert that talent management policy inconsistencies at the various levels of government and departments create fragmentation, which hinders SOEs from developing integrated, coherent talent strategies. This concern is especially evident in conservation para-public entities, which, due to their highly specialised mandates, need to recruit niche skills that are essentially non-existent in the labour market.

2.4.2 Leadership and organisational culture

Also, internal organisational factors such as weak leadership, lack of organisational change, and poor communication may even hinder the implementation of human resource initiatives as designed. Ngobeni and Bezuidenhout (2023) argue the primary importance of leadership and the ability of management to spearhead and execute change to garner positive outcomes on the implementation of talent management initiatives in public sector institutions.

Resistance to organisational change strengthens inertia within these institutions. Change management initiatives face what can be termed as the cultural backlash of employees and middle managers who regard the new talent management programmes as threats to their established routines and even job security (Van Wyk & Pretorius, 2024). This inertia also hinders the adoption of modern practices such as agile recruitment, flexible

working arrangements, and digital onboarding, which are heavily demanded by an adaptable and competent workforce.

2.4.3 External environmental factors

The socio-economic environment, political interference, and regional skills deficits are other factors that complicate the ability to retain talent. As Bonga and Lekhanya (2022) note, these factors create a highly uncertain environment, which discourages skilled professionals and is detrimental to recruitment efforts.

2.4.4 Lack of data-driven HR planning

Under the framework of predictive analyses and the effective use of data, evidence-based HR planning is lacking. Chigudu and Maphosa (2023) explain that public sector organisations take a reactive approach to talent management as a result of the disregard for workforce analytics and predictive modelling. This reactive approach causes issues like poor timing for recruitment, poor alignment of employees' capabilities to vacant positions, and high inefficiencies in succession planning. This is a major problem in highly specialised fields like conservation, as they are high-cost issues of workforce planning.

In addition to the issues described above, some conservation SOEs still use old technology in the form of legacy HR systems that are siloed, non-automated, and lack the analytical components needed for effective strategic talent management (Dlamini & Motloung, 2023). The absence of modern HR management information systems (HRIS) closes the information gaps needed to manage a workforce in real time and prevents the effective management of succession planning and proactive talent pipeline management.

2.4.5 Financial constraints and budgetary limitations

The constraints of finances and narrowed budgets are significant obstacles to effective talent management in conservation SOE. Budget constraints are most visible in SOEs' inability to adjust financial remuneration, screen and recruit more staff, or invest in and sustain adequate HR structures needed to manage talent (Eneh & Eneh, 2023). This phenomenon of imbalanced financial inputs upon competing external and internal demands for staff retention and conservation expertise is difficult to manage.

These budgetary limits are continually evidenced in research as constraining not only the levels of remuneration but also the vital resources for training and interventions needed to build skills available in mission-driven sectors (Dlamini & Motloung, 2023).

SOEs are at risk of underfunding professional development and thus causing staff recruitment, retention, and turnover, and organisational skills to be eroded (Nkosi & Khumalo, 2024).

Further, there is the fact that the financial constraints result in the diminished effectiveness of HR operations. As Mokoena and Jacobs (2024) state, several public sector institutions, and even conservation SOEs, have HR units that are understaffed and over-resourced, resulting in a failure of strategic workforce planning, talent analytics, or succession management, which diminishes the organisation's capability to forecast and address talent needs in a timely manner. Consequently, this leads to a tendency to recruit and retain reactively and on an impromptu basis, which is detrimental in a competitive labour market.

The situation is made worse by the fiscal pressures confronting government institutions like the SOEs, which are almost entirely funded by the government and are, therefore, subject to severe cuts to the budget (Van der Merwe & Pietersen, 2022). The situation, therefore, creates a lack of operational expenditure and budgetary resources for the ability to change compensation and incentive packages to the required market levels.

In addition to financially based pressures, the ability to effectively implement alternative talent retention strategies, which are often used in the private sector, such as the introduction of flexible benefits, performance bonuses and wellness programmes, is often cited as a retention tool in the competitive recruitment landscape (Nkosi & Khumalo, 2024). SOEs risk the drain of these highly sought-after professionals to the private sector and overseas, as there is a significant gap in the remuneration.

2.4.6 Political interference as a barrier to effective talent management in SOEs

State-owned entities (SOEs) in the conservation and environment field also have various issues affecting the recruitment and retention of talent. The first and perhaps most critical issue that is seldom mentioned is political interference. Within the South African context, political influence in SOEs has almost always been linked to a problematic governance continuum, unbalanced leadership placements, and a decline in trust in the institutions (Mohuba, 2023). These interferences tend to result in the undermining of talent management policies or the neglect of their implementation in favour of immediate political objectives.

According to Chitiga-Mabugu *et al.* (2021), the lack of operational autonomy and uniformity in the application of policies results in political meddling in public sector entities, leading to a significant number of seasoned staff members leaving. Organisations that experience policy changes as a result of political shifts, lack relevant appointments to leadership, and have unclear or inconsistent objectives on what they hope to achieve are less likely to keep skilled personnel. In SOEs that are focused on conservation, this is particularly frustrating as there is a need for the long-term ecological vision to be pursued in a manner that demonstrates scientific leadership and continuity of policies and strategies.

Moreover, the resulting lack of morale on the part of the qualified professionals creates a gap that is filled by sponsors showing a lack of appreciation for the unqualified candidates for the position that undermines a complacent, exemplary work culture and accountability (Gumede, 2022). Consequently, the absence of professionalism on the part of an organisation shapes the work culture of the unqualified professionals, and leads the professionals to the work of a non-governmental organisation, an academy, or the private sector that is built on a solid professionalism foundation.

These governance challenges not only affect talent attraction but also hinder retention by fostering environments characterised by uncertainty, limited career development prospects, and declining organisational credibility. Therefore, these challenges shouldn't merely be considered a governance issue but a precursor to establishing effective and sustainable talent management systems for public conservation organisations.

To mitigate these challenges, researchers recommend building strategic alignment of HR actions to achieve organisational goals with active participation of leadership accompanied by greater organisational adaptability (Eneh & Eneh, 2023; Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2023). Conservation SOEs should also emphasise the implementation of talent intelligence systems, promote inter-organisational collaboration, and foster a culture of adaptable learning as a means to strengthen their human capital management.

2.4.7 Bureaucracy and organisational inaction

The effects of the lack of development of human resource systems and the lack of willingness to adapt and evolve impede the management of human resource potential. Bureaucratic inflexibility and organisational inaction are some of the most significant obstacles to effective human resources management in conservation SOEs. Recruitment is complicated by the existence of complex hierarchical systems and slow-moving

decision-making structures that lead to extended recruitment of talent and slow recruitment response to the talent demand. (Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2023). Such sluggishness impedes the effectiveness of management of organisations in an environment that is undergoing rapid changes in the environmental focus and workforce needs.

The bureaucratic system is characterised by too many levels of decision-making and formal procedural steps, resulting in delays in recruitment, causing top talent to seek employment elsewhere due to frustration with the slow recruitment processes. (Munyai & Sibanda, 2023). This inefficiency negatively impacts recruitment potential and also negatively impacts the organisation's ability to manage retention through prompt recognition of retention management initiatives such as timely promotion and recognition of achievement.

Additionally, the potential of strategic human resource actions focused on building a high-performance culture is lessened due to inaction and the accumulation of red tape. There is a pattern noted by Nkosi and Khumalo (2024) where public sector organisations exhibiting high levels of bureaucracy have low retention, employee empowerment, and engagement, thus impacting performance at the organisational level.

Overcoming red tape is only possible when there is purposeful leadership commitment to simplifying work processes and adapting a culture that is embraced by technological changes to one that prioritises and celebrates attention to novelty and flexibility. If such changes are not implemented, conservation SOEs will lose the capacity to manage talent to more flexible organisations in the public sector and elsewhere.

2.4.8 Factors Influencing the Success or Failure of Talent Management Strategies

In the conservation SOEs, the ability to balance the internal and external factors determines the success and failure of talent management strategies. Mohuba (2023) notes that the failure of such strategies is more likely to occur within organisations that lack sound strategies built on governance, appointment of leaders based on merit, and the transparency of human resource management systems, because such organisations lack trust and institutional credibility. Likewise, Chigudu and Maphosa (2023) contend that the role of human resource management as an administrator of policies and processes, rather than as an active stakeholder, weakens an organisation's capacity to integrate and align talent management with the organisational strategy and to proactively plan for the future human capital of the organisation.

In contrast, Van Wyk and Pretorius (2024) emphasise that the lack of will to manage organisational change constructively and the lack of leadership, more than anything else, weakens well-designed talent programmes, especially in the public sector, where the bureaucratic public service system is dominant. External factors are of importance as well. Bonga and Lekhanya (2022) note that the retention of highly skilled personnel, who tend to migrate to more economically stable and well-resourced organisations, is exacerbated by the socio-economic instability, along with the global demand for conservation skills and competition in the national labour market.

These analyses indicate that successful approaches hold on to sufficient financial and operational resources. They also depend on the institution's ability to promote adaptive leadership, shield HR functions from political influence, and cultivate a capacity to absorb external labour market shocks. These factors also act to reinforce and compound the interrelated challenges outlined above, explaining why most conservation SOEs have difficulties successfully activating their talent management systems.

2.5 INFLUENCE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, SATISFACTION, AND RETENTION

Employee attitude and behaviour are shaped by talent management practices, which also influence turnover and commitment to the organisation. In conservation SOEs, the turnover of motivated staff is easier to manage when a satisfied and encouraged workforce is present, and the increased service delivery allows the organisation to meet the demands of the market.

2.5.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Employee Engagement

Having a strategic approach to the theoretical frameworks concerning employee engagement is crucial to understanding how to shape talent management systems in conservation SOEs. More current literature is building upon classical theories such as Herzberg's Two Factor Theory and Self-Determination Theory, addressing the evolution of motivation in these types of organisations.

Herzberg's Two Factor Theory continues to appear in recent literature, whereby an individual is dissatisfied if hygiene factors are not present, such as reasonable pay and working conditions. However, engagement is a function of additional factors such as recognition, development and contribution of meaning (Smith & Johnson, 2023). Public conservation SOEs' employee engagement is further compounded by the purpose of the work. More recent literature shows a strong correlation between the factors and job

satisfaction as well as higher commitment in cases where the job and organisational aims are closely aligned (Lee & Patel, 2022).

In the same way, Self-Determination Theory has also been focused on in recent literature. Autonomy, competence and relatedness are offered as essential in maintaining intrinsic motivation in the area of specialist fields (Nguyen et al, 2024). Employees in the conservation sector, especially the environmental management area, highly value the opportunities to exercise their autonomy, develop niche skills and feel a strong sense of community and mission (Brown & Taylor, 2023). Fulfilment of these psychological needs culminates in reduced turnover and a highly engaged workforce.

Recent meta-analyses show how employees' motivational drivers can be addressed by aligning work engagement strategies with organisational practices, which leads to better retention results (Kamal & Joarder, 2023). This theory can be used to assess talent management practices in conservation and provide insight into how to design motivational and satisfying interventions.

2.5.2 Enhancing engagement through holistic talent management

Recent research shows that employees are more engaged and satisfied with their jobs when there is a system in place that recognises their contribution. There is a more integrated approach to talent management that includes career development, recognition, and work-life balance (Kamal & Joarder, 2023). Engagement increases when employees see that they have a voice and that their contributions are important to the overall mission of the organisation, and that there are opportunities for advancement. This is particularly the case with conservation organisations, as their employees work with a purpose and are committed to environmental care.

2.5.3 Personalised development and leadership for improved retention

Supported with personalised development and continuous learning opportunities, employees will display organisational attachment and less tenure mobility (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2021). While explaining retention within public sector organisations, Govender & Bussin (2022) show that trust and sense of safety and belonging are constructed, organisationally, through open lines of communication, collaborative and participative leadership, and trust building through a transparent leadership process.

2.5.4 Aligning Talent Management with Employee Value

The clear perception that talent management efforts are aligned with employees' internal drivers is a second key consideration for employee satisfaction. Conservation practitioners, for example, appreciate caring organisational practices and are less driven by financial compensation (Mahlangu & Van der Westhuizen, 2020). Consequently, public enterprises that have a positive organisational climate are more successful in retaining employees for a longer duration when caring recognition of employees is in place.

2.5.5 The role of flexibility and wellness in retention

Additionally, the importance of wellness initiatives and flexible working arrangements is a post-pandemic development (Smit & Veldsman, 2023). Maintaining employees' personal needs through flexibility and wellness initiatives positively impacts job satisfaction, diminishes burnout, and sustains retention.

To conclude, the incorporation of career tracking and development, recognition and reward systems, ethical leadership, and wellness programs is how talent management creates a culture that fosters employee engagement and retention. For conservation SOEs, the implementation of these practices is essential for the retention of a workforce that is both committed and skilled, and that can address the complexities of their mandates.

2.6 THE IMPACT OF TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Soft skills such as talent management are crucial to how an organisation functions and holds its competitive advantage, as they dictate the capacity to lure, cultivate, engage, and keep the top-tier professionals necessary to accomplish strategic objectives.

2.6.1 Linking Talent Management to Organisational Performance

The integration of talent management and organisational performance is an important dimension, particularly for mission-driven institutions, of which conservation SOEs are an example. As per Kundu *et al.* (2023), talent management frameworks positively shape the level of output derived per employee as well as operational efficiency, and the resultant ease with which an organisation sustains itself over the long term. All the above are longed-for outcomes within the conservation field, given that human capital is vital in attaining ecological and community-focused outcomes.

The retention, development, and acquisition of talent is a direct function of the organisation's ability to innovate, resourcefully manage, and provide services that are biodiversity and economy-enhancing. As reported by Al Falasi and Almarashda (2023), there is a decline in employee turnover and an increase in overall organisational stability, which fosters the attainment of its objectives as a direct result of the implementation of sound talent management frameworks.

Table 2.1: Relationship between Talent Management Practices and Organisational Performance in Public Entities

NO	Talent Management Element	Performance Outcome	Source
1	Talent acquisition	Reduced vacancy rates; improved workforce skills	Kundu *et al.* (2023)
2	Talent development	Increased innovation and adaptability	Al Falasi & Almarashda (2023)
3	Retention strategies	Reduced turnover; better institutional memory	Kambona *et al.* (2022)
4	Succession planning	Leadership continuity and capacity	Chigudu & Maphosa (2023)
5	Workforce analytics	Data-driven decision-making	Eneh & Eneh (2023)

2.6.2 Enhancing Competitive Advantage in the Conservation Sector

For public organisations with limited resources, competitive advantages derive from factors other than market share, such as institutional abilities, stakeholder trust, and strategic mandate execution. Conservation SOEs possess a competitive advantage, as pointed out by Manzani and Meyer (2022), not only for their multidisciplinary approach, but also for their ability to hire and keep skilled professionals with the purpose of interest-driven program success, stakeholder engagement, and financially sustaining partnerships.

In the South African conservation context, competitive advantage, as noted by Mtembu and Mulaudzi (2023), is amplified when skilled employees consistently produce a high-quality conservation outcome, develop community trust, and donor confidence. These

abilities are the result of successful talent management strategies characterised by ongoing learning, leadership development, and performance systems grounded in the organisation's core values.

2.6.3 Strategic Integration of Talent Management into Organisational Goals

In the words of Brandt and Mbangula (2022), from the public sector, as SOEs are required to develop and adopt an integrated strategic plan, it is necessary and obligatory that the talent strategies be incorporated into the strategic planning cycle to ensure that they are aligned with the operational priorities and public value outcomes. This alignment improves the organisation's workforce planning, resource distribution, and overall responsibility.

KPIs related to Employee Engagement, Training Hours, and Promotions help measure talent ROI and help determine other initiatives to implement. Data-oriented alignment allows for talent management to become a key driver of strategy, instead of a supporting role, as Bekker and van der Merwe (2024) describe.

2.7 BEST PRACTICES AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO ENHANCE TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN CONSERVATION SOEs

State-owned entities focusing on conservation must implement new best practices for talent management on a continuous basis to meet the demands of the sector. This part of the study focuses on new practices that successfully attract, develop and retain skilled talent in the highly constrained field of conservation SOEs.

2.7.1 Strategic workforce planning and talent analytics

Strategic workforce forecasting is increasingly acknowledged as a foundational best practice for proactive talent management. The recent literature places great emphasis on the forecasting of future talent gaps, skills gaps, and succession plans. Predictive analytics and planning are critical (Chigudu & Maphosa, 2023; Acar & Sarnıç, 2024). The use of talent analytics allows conservation SOEs to shift from reactive hiring practices to more proactive workforce planning that aligns the organisational skills. (Smit & Veldsman, 2023).

AI-enhanced recruitment tools allow organisations to expand their capabilities by better matching candidates to opportunities, limiting bias, and improving efficiency during recruitment and onboarding (Acar & Sarnıc, 2024). In conservation, SOEs (state-owned enterprises) are better able to build and sustain sectoral talent pipelines.

2.7.2 Employer branding and value proposition alignment

In sectors where there is competition for talent from the private and global markets, branding a recruitment effort is particularly relevant. According to Kamal and Joarder (2023), conservation SOEs should emphasise the value proposition of mission-driven, environmental, and community outcomes as a way to attract and retain staff. Salary and benefits are important, but so is addressing the overall work-life balance, offering training and development, and improving the organisational climate.

Recent case studies show that conservation organisations with a clearly defined employer brand that captures the essence of their sustainable vision attract and retain talent to a greater degree (Mahlangu & Van der Westhuizen, 2020; Govender & Bussin, 2022).

2.7.3 Learning and development frameworks

In talent management, continuous learning and capacity building are fundamental. Armstrong (2020) and Sparrow *et al.* (2023) state that particular learning and development programs focused on conservation skills frameworks enhance individual competencies and retention. Resource-constrained SOEs (Kamal & Joarder, 2023) promote blended learning, VR (virtual reality) for field training, and 63 learning resource sharing systems as innovative practices for the development of a learning culture.

Mentoring and coaching programs for early-career professionals have, as Smit & Veldsman (2023) state, been shown to improve retention as they can provide tailored career advice leading to enhanced job satisfaction.

2.7.4 Flexible work arrangements and well-being initiatives

In recent studies, the need for flexible work arrangements has gained even greater urgency as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Conservation SOEs are beginning to pilot flexible work hours, hybrid work models, and wellness programs, as documented by (Bonga & Lekhanya, 2022; Mahlangu & Van der Westhuizen, 2020), to cater to the diverse needs of employees and reduce burnout. These initiatives promote job satisfaction, reduce absenteeism, and enhance loyalty to the organisation. These initiatives are especially important for conservation professionals who work in the field and have irregular hours and schedules.

2.7.5 Cross-sector collaboration and talent sharing

In recent years, partnerships across the public, private, and non-profit sectors have become the norm in developing management of innovative talents. Shared collaboration of SOE's cross. Conservation can mitigate single institutional capacity constraints and bring together expertise, resources, and talent pools (Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2023). For instance, the development of career retention networks and career paths involves such factors as expanding networks, retention of employees, and transfer of employees into developing dual-use. Employee development of networks and career retention is the interdependent development of employees (Chigudu & Maphosa, 2023). This ecosystem strategy closely aligns with the human mobilities and lifelong learning strategies integrated into contemporary human capital frameworks.

2.7.6 Leadership development and change management

Talent management is inter development of strong leadership. Maponya and Magano (2023). Leadership development programmes focusing on emotional granularity, strategic intelligence, and stakeholder management aid conservation SOEs' inter- and bureaucratic resistance to change to ensure the custody of leadership change for the implementation of proper frameworks. It is the investment in leadership that signifies for the rest of the organisation, the true value of commitment to talent growth, custodian innovation. This also reinforces the organisation's commitment to gaining and improving talent to reduce effort fatigue and increase trust.

2.8 COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS: TALENT MANAGEMENT IN SOES VS. BEST PRACTICE MODELS

To place the talent management practices within conservation-focused state-owned entities (SOEs) into context, it is helpful to benchmark these practices against the best practices within the private sector and more developed SOEs. The table above outlines five key components of talent management covering attraction, development and succession planning, retention, and performance management and reveals a number of key differences across the two sectors.

In the public sector, and more specifically the conservation SOE, talent recruitment is hampered by slow recruitment cycles and a less attractive employer brand, making it a challenge to recruit top talent (Naidoo & Martins, 2022). In contrast, best practice organisations do not wait for candidates to apply but actively seek out candidates and demonstrate an investment in an attractive employer brand. A similar pattern is observed

with underinvestment in employee development within SOEs, and in contrast to leading private organisations, which embed ongoing development and leadership tracking in their talent management approaches (Meyer & Xin, 2021).

Active and planned succession in the public and conservation SOEs lacks a long-term plan, unlike high-performing organisations with a planned succession strategy in place to retain leaders of high-value organisations (Nankervis *et al.* 2022). Retention also weighs differently in public SOEs, within the confines of a budget and sustained organisational constraints, unlike best practice organisations, which retain formal flexible work policies and retain a budget for sustained organisational constraints. Finally, performance management in the public sector and management in the public sector are misaligned, stagnant management in the public and conservation SOEs lacks vision, and in public sector SOEs management misaligned, stagnant management in the public sector and public sector management is misaligned. The misalignment of management systems or performance management has a direct correlation with misalignment has stagnant performance. In exceptional public organisations, there is a high correlation between performance management systems and performance management systems, and the system stagnation or management stagnation neat systems with the management systems to performance key systems and management stagnation.

What is evident in public sector conservation SOES is the need to rethink their talent management and the need for adaptive, strategic and more deliberate future orientation. These public entities will be exposed to more added value to mitigate environmental conservation with increased complex challenges.

Table 2.2: Benchmarking Talent Management Practices – Conservation SOEs vs Best Practice Models

Talent Management Element	Conservation SOEs	Best Practice Models
Talent Attraction	Reactive recruitment; limited employer branding; bureaucratic hiring processes	Proactive recruitment; strong employer value proposition (EVP); use of digital sourcing
Talent Development	Inconsistent training opportunities; limited budget; focus on compliance	Continuous learning culture; leadership development; personalised learning paths

Succession Planning	Ad hoc or informal planning; lack of long-term vision	Structured plans aligned with strategic needs; identification of high-potential talent
Retention Strategies	Limited incentives; rigid work environment; high turnover in critical roles	Competitive benefits; flexible work arrangements; career progression opportunities
Performance Management	Standardised KPIs; limited feedback mechanisms; misalignment with organisational goals	Real-time feedback; performance-linked incentives; strategic alignment of goals

2.9 SYNTHESIS OF TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN CONSERVATION SOES AND IDENTIFIED RESEARCH GAPS

2.9.1 Integration and alignment of talent management practices

There is a strong case in the literature for adopting an integrated and aligned system for the management of the organisational talent of conservation state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Not only is this an alignment of the human resource functions, but it also entails the integration of recruitment, training, retention, performance management, and succession planning into the overall strategies of the organisation (Acar & Sarnıç, 2024; Armstrong, 2020). When integrated, these functions bolster organisational effectiveness and advance the fulfilment of specific challenges within the conservation realm.

Concerning improvements in integrated approaches to talent management, studies continue to report problematic issues in public sector organisations. Fragmented policies, siloed functions within divisions of departments, and complex governance frameworks yield these disconnections, which more often than not result in a reactive approach to talent management as opposed to being proactive (Maponya & Magano, 2023; Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2023). In conservation SOEs, these challenges of fragmentation in talent management systems are significantly problematic, particularly the recruitment and retention of experienced professionals in environmental management.

The literature talks about how integrated activities are more successful with leaders' commitment and cultural change in the organisation. The absence of senior leaders' engagement and support makes attempts at developing a consolidated unified talent management system unsuccessful. Chigudu and Maphosa (2023) posit that leaders initiate a positive culture that enhances a purposeful conservation workforce cohesion

towards employee development and HR practices alignment with the organisation's mission and values.

In addition, the prospective integration of analytics in human resource management will become a necessity in the near future. Data analytics, digital HR systems, and performance monitoring enable organisations to gain insights to understand the skills in demand, forecast need, and enhance the well-being of employees (Smit & Veldsman, 2023). However, many public institutions, especially those located in resource-constrained regions such as the North West Province, appear to have challenges with the full adoption of such technology (Bonga & Lekhanya, 2022).

In the case of conservation SOEs in the North West Province, it would seem that there are specific talent management strategies that should be aligned with the local context, especially the socio-economic, environmental, and spatial configurations of the region. The establishment of partnerships with local educational institutions, for instance, could facilitate the fostering of talent and improve retention in the area while promoting community development (Kambona *et al.*, 2022).

To conclude, conservation SOEs need to act urgently in the integration and alignment of talent management strategies to streamline the interaction of formal HR policies with their informal counterparts, to enhance the accountability of leadership to practice and to adopt a more proactive stance in the use of technology. This will not only enable organisations to address their talent management needs but also achieve sustainable viability.

2.9.2 Challenges limiting talent management effectiveness

There is still no doubt that there are several sector-specific challenges posed by the idiosyncrasies of the sector balance SOEs employ that continue to have an impact on the scope of their talent management. Financial challenges continue to be a major concern, as these organisations have limited capabilities to provide competitive salaries, invest in staff training, or offer any form of talent management. More often than not, limited funding resources force these organisations to narrow their focus to short-term goals, which sacrifices long-term talent management strategies into a vicious cycle of skills and staff turnover (Eneh and Eneh, 2023; Bonga and Lekhanya, 2022).

The absence of a focused skill set is also a top-level challenge. There is an evident need for specialist staff in environmental and biodiversity management within conservation

SOEs. However, the human asset base is limited, and the better-resourced private sector and NGOs siphon off what little there is. It becomes very difficult, therefore, for these SOEs to attract and retain the professional talent crucial for their conservation and ecological goals (Bonga and Lekhanya, 2022).

Because of political influence, recruitment and retention are interrupted and disrupted in public sector organisations. Employee intimidation and instability occur due to changes in political focus, recruitment of employees through favouritism, and bureaucratic red tape. The lack of succession in the organisational leadership and fostering of development activities results in poor organisational performance (Ngobeni and Bezuidenhout, 2023)

Furthermore, within the organisational culture, the lack of willingness to embrace change is a large part of the problem. Many employees in conservation state-owned enterprises work within a conventional, rigid social structure and may resist attempts to manage new initiatives in the recruitment and retention of employees, particularly those using innovative technology or advanced data management in human resources. The lack of mobility of the human workforce analytics makes the anticipation of talent pooling and performance management systems and employee system development ineffective, with human resources management being less dynamic and responsive to the sector's performance (Ngobeni and Bezuidenhout, 2023).

On the other hand, the innovative practices being used around the world provide workability. The use of recruitment technology to artificially manage recruitment is expected to improve employee selection by minimising bias and increasing efficiency, and the collaboration models with other educational and commercial resources, such as universities, private companies, and international non-government organisations (NGOs), are expected to use resources more efficiently. The use of such innovations, though, remains underexplored and too little in conservation state-owned enterprises, which makes it justifiable to further investigate to understand their use and the obstacles to their effective application. (Acar and Sarnic, 2024; Chigudu and Maphosa, 2023)

In summary, although there have been positive steps toward better talent management, conservation SOEs continue to grapple with a complex set of financial, political, and cultural challenges. Overcoming these barriers through strategic resource allocation, addressing skills shortages, navigating political dynamics, and fostering openness to

technological and organisational change is essential for achieving sustainable talent management outcomes in this sector.

2.9.3 Gaps and opportunities for future research

While the existing body of literature offers valuable insights into talent management within the public and environmental sectors, there remains a significant dearth of research that is both context-specific and empirically grounded in conservation State-Owned Entities (SOEs) within South Africa's North West Province. Many studies have concentrated on global public sector organisations or broader environmental agencies, often neglecting the nuanced socio-economic, political, and institutional conditions that uniquely characterise this region (Mahlangu & Van der Westhuizen, 2020; Kamal & Joarder, 2023). As a result, findings and recommendations from these studies are not always directly transferable or practically relevant for local conservation SOEs.

Also, scant empirical attention has been devoted to the linkage of talent management and digital transformation in conservation-focused public institutions. Even as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and digital HRM technologies transform and restructure the talent strategies of various industries, the use and effectiveness of such technologies in conservation SOEs in resource-constrained provinces remain underexplored (Bonga & Lekhanya, 2022; Al Falasi & Almarashda, 2023). Predictive workforce analytics, e-learning, AI-driven recruitment, and other digital tools remain highly underutilised in the context. The influence of flexible work arrangements on employee engagement, burnout, and resilience of conservation SOEs lacks empirical attention. It is obvious that such practices are on the rise, and they are also being adopted in environments of organisational rigidity that have defaulted to bureaucratic practices (Smit & Veldsman, 2023; Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2023). Also, the implication of workforce generational diversity, especially the youth, in conservation talent pipeline design, is profoundly understudied, particularly against the backdrop of prevailing demographic transitions, and high youth unemployment in South Africa (Kambona *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, the impact of the leadership development and succession planning of the state-owned enterprises on the long-term sustainability of the conservation activities remains an important and sometimes neglected research oversight (Chigudu & Maphosa, 2023). These gaps point to the emergence of more robust and more qualitative research on the obstacles to and the facilitators of effective talent management in certain provincial and institutional contexts.

In attempting to respond to these research gaps, this study will generate context-specific insights anchored on the lived realities of a conservation SOE in the North West Province. It intends to understand the pathways through which talent management practices can be improved to effectively address the retention and recruitment of professionals, particularly in the context of scarcity of resources, siloed policies, and systems, and closed systems.

2.9.4 Implications for the current study

The available literature emphasises the need for the design of differentiated and responsive talent management approaches when it comes to conserving state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the North West Province. These institutions work under a specific complex of ecological and financial public sector constraints. Some human resource management practices are of low relevance in the context due to siloed, weak, and bureaucratic leadership (Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2023; Maponya & Magano, 2023).

In order to implement such employee retention and recruitment practices, conservation SOEs need to adopt flexible approaches, especially considering the challenging financial circumstances, lack of external support, and the need for a rapid, purposive leadership. Leadership and teaching capacity are the main enablers of such an adaptive, flexible, and resilient workforce. Also, while these environments have underutilised predictive and prescriptive employee management systems, the systems have the potential to enhance employee involvement and organisational effectiveness (Chigudu & Maphosa, 2023; Smit & Veldsman, 2023).

This research explores an empirical gap within conservation state-owned enterprises (SOEs), especially located in the North West Province, where talent management has received little attention. This has led to the handling of research within these areas of the public or environmental domain, to overlook the micro socio-economic environment, organisational culture, and societal context of the region (Kamal & Joarder, 2023; Mahlangu & Van der Westhuizen, 2020). This research aims to enrich the body of knowledge on effective talent management within conservation SOEs in the North West Province by exploring the lived experiences of workers and leaders to understand the challenges, like resource deficits, politics, and institutional neglect and the challenges like collaborative leadership, strategic fit, and right technology and their influence on talent management.

The contribution of the research is in two-fold dimensions, which are the formulation of policies as well as the addition to the body of knowledge by context-specific recommendations. This will enable the construction of effective talent management frameworks that will enhance the retention of human resources and institutional effectiveness in conservation SOEs within the North West Province. This will enable the conservation SOEs to address the economic and environmental challenges.

2.9.5 Evidence-based outcomes of talent management strategies

There are measurable returns from purposefully integrated talent management practices in the public sector and conservation. The integration of these practices in conservation SOEs is still nascent; however, cross-national and sector-specific data provide valuable indicative evidence on the outcomes that can be expected from the optimal integration of talent management practices.

2.9.5.1 Vacancy reduction and efficiency

There is a correlation between proactive, structured talent management and low vacancy rates and enhanced productivity in organisations. More than 20% reduction in vacancy rates is attributable to organisations that emphasise internal talent mobility and have succession management strategies in place (Kundu *et al.*, 2023). This is particularly relevant to conservation SOEs that are chronically understaffed and have lengthy recruitment cycles; thus, developing a talent pipeline is likely to close staffing gaps and enhance the responsiveness of the organisation.

2.9.5.2 Innovation through development

Working towards talent development is associated with positive impacts on innovation and adaptability. Al Falasi and Almarashda (2023) show that a 15% increase in process innovation in public institutions is a result of focused investment in administrative learning and professional development programmes. In conservation SOEs, where agility towards ecological management and stakeholders is critical, a learning culture may improve both technical and service delivery capacity.

2.9.5.3 Retention and institutional memory

Along with demographic and institutional memory, retention strategies also protect memory, which is essential for the long-term sustainability of the conservation action. For example, in describing retention programs that are beneficial to the retention of employees as well as the continuity of organisations, Kambona *et al.* (2022) mention the effects of career advancement, mentorship programs, and employee recognition

systems on retention of the employees, which in turn facilitate retention of organisational continuity and reduce operational stagnation. For organisational memory to be preserved in instances where historical ecological knowledge and relational capital with local communities are needed, retention of memory becomes a strategic imperative.

2.9.5.4 Leadership sustainability

Consideration of the succession of leadership also facilitates the continuity of leadership, which in turn promotes the stability of the organisation at a strategic level. Studies have shown that organisations which have succession plans are likely to have a 35% decrease in leadership voids as well as a decrease in the level of turbulence in the leadership of senior management (Chigudu & Maphosa, 2023). In the case of conservation SOEs, where leadership frequently encroaches on political appointments and administrative turnover, building a sustainable internal leadership pipeline could ensure continuity in conservation priorities and governance practices.

2.9.5.5 Data-driven agility

Utilising analytics is crucial to elevating an organisation's agility. Eneh and Eneh (2023) state that data-informed methods of workforce planning facilitate prompt, grounded reactions to emerging talent and operational trends. Considering the conservation sector's rapid adaptation challenges due to external factors, such as climate variability and policy changes, HHR analytics is integral to promoting responsive and resilient talent strategies.

2.10 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research is grounded on three interconnected frameworks, namely Human Capital Theory, the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, as well as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. Collectively, these provide the best way to understand how talent management strategies of a conservation-focused state-owned enterprise (SOE) in South Africa influence employees' engagement, retention, as well as their satisfaction.

2.10.1 Human capital theory

The Human Capital Theory, first described by Becker (1964), states that an employee's talents, skills, and knowledge must be considered as economic resources. This has been amplified by more recent works, such as that of Nyambegera and Gachunga (2023), which claim that investments geared towards the employee such as systematic training, employee advancement, and continued educational offerings, positively impact productivity and the overall value of the organisation, Becker posited that investments in

employee training, advancement, and education positively affect productivity and overall value of the organisation. However, in the case of SOEs in conservation, where funding is limited, and positions are in remote areas with few amenities, such investments become necessary to attract and retain talent.

2.10.2 Resource-based view

The Resource-Based View (RBV), within modern strategy theory, defines internal resources, especially human resources, as the most important source of enduring competitive advantage if they are valuable, scarce, hard to imitate, and meshed with the organisational systems and processes (see Grant, 2022; The Journal of High Technology Management Research, 2024). In conservation SOEs, which are in competition with well-resourced private sector organisations for under-supplied high-skilled workers, talent is therefore a primary source of competitive advantage (Govender & Bussin, 2022; McNulty & De Cieri, 2022).

RBV emphasises that it is not merely the presence of skilled employees but also the ways in which organisations cultivate, deploy, and retain them that determine performance outcomes (Collings & Mellahi, 2022; Abiwu & Martins, 2024). Strategies such as fostering a strong employer brand, implementing comprehensive leadership pipelines, and offering both financial and non-financial incentives aligned with conservation values are particularly important in resource-constrained environments (Van Zyl & Mathafena, 2022; Liu, Wang & Liang, 2024).

Talent management approaches aligned with RBV principles strengthen organisational resilience and adaptability (Ng and Sears 2023, Kaur et al 2023). For instance, workforce analytics and strategic HR planning in public sector institutions facilitate the optimal management of human resource retention and improve operational activities (Kaur et al 2023). In conservation SOEs, RBV-informed approaches enable the protection of organisational knowledge, institutional memory, and distinctive competencies critical for the long-term fulfilment of ecological and tourism activities (Smith and Veldsman 2023, Nkosi and Khumalo 2024).

In addition, the RBV framework allows the organisational focus on constant human capital development. By investing in professional development opportunities, mentoring, and situational training, conservation SOEs can improve their competitive advantage, even with the usual financial and operational constraints mapped out for South African provincial entities (Mokgoatlheng and Moeketsi 2023, Hlongwane and Radebe 2023).

Hence, RBV offers a valuable theoretical and practical grounding for considering talent management, not as a peripheral HR exercise, but as a primary organisational approach that centres on the desired conservation and tourism outcomes.

2.10.3 Herzberg's two-factor theory

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory has been greatly influential in shaping our understanding of employee motivation and retention even in today's public and hybrid work settings (Almohtaseb & Almajali, 2023; Yamoah & Suharti, 2022), as it was first developed in 1959. Herzberg differentiates between hygiene phenomena (e.g. pay, job security, and working conditions) and motivators (e.g. recognition, achievement, autonomy and growth), which are the ones that drive engagement and satisfaction (Gimpl 2025; Almohtaseb & Almajali 2023).

In the case of conservation SOEs, employees often display a strong sense of intrinsic motivation which stems from environmental and heritage public service values (Brown \& Taylor 2023; Govender \& Bussin 20202). Literature suggests that \emph{non-financial} motivators, such as participative decision-making, career development, and public recognition, are the most effective in increasing commitment and decreasing turnover (Yamoah \& Suharti 2022; Ngobeni \& Bezuidenhout 2023).

Recent research indicates how the intersection of RBV and Herzberg can provide talent management strategies at a finer level. Higher employee engagement and performance at the organisation level is attainable when institutions treat the human capital as a strategic resource and address the motivation issues at the same time (Abiwu & Martins, 2024; Liu, Wang & Liang, 2024; Smith & Veldsman, 2023). For example, in the conservation SOEs, recognition programmes combined with skills development initiatives help achieve retention of human capital as the organisation's goals and employees' values are joined (Mabasa & Mthethwa, 2023; Van Zyl & Mathafena, 2022).

Furthermore, Herzberg's framework can provide a way of dealing with the challenges of the sector, specifically, the mundane and often excessive workload as well as the limited monetary gains associated with the South African public entities (Mokgoatlheng & Moeketsi, 2023; Hlongwane & Radebe, 2023). Focusing on the motivators as opposed to the hygiene factors as much as possible, the conservation SOEs can build an engaged workforce, which in turn improves the retention of human capital, and the desired benefits of implementing the conservation and tourism programmes are achieved.

2.10.4 Visual conceptual framework

This part of the document describes a conceptual framework intended to understand how talent management strategies affect primary outcomes of human capital, such as employee engagement, job satisfaction, and the retention of skilled personnel in a conservation state-owned enterprise (SOE). Such variables affect the organisation's performance and, subsequently, the competitive advantage the organisation secures in the conservation domain.

This consolidates the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991; Becker, 1993), Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), and the most recent public sector talent management writings (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2021; Govender & Bussin, 2022; Bekker & van der Merwe, 2024). It considers talent management as a strategic variable that produces a range of positive outcomes from employee motivation at the micro level to the sector being competitive at the macro level.

Table 2.10: Conceptual Framework – Talent Management Constructs and Relationships (Source: Adapted from Barney (1991), Becker (1993), Herzberg (1959); Masibigiri & Nienaber (2021); Govender & Bussin (2022); Bekker & van der Merwe (2024))

No	Construct	Description	Key Sources
1.	Talent Management Practices	Strategic human capital practices encompassing attraction, recruitment, development, succession planning, performance management, and leadership alignment.	Masibigiri & Nienaber (2021); Govender & Bussin (2022); Mokoena (2022)
2.	Employee Engagement	The degree of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural commitment to the organisation, driven by meaningful work, leadership, and a supportive culture.	Menezes (2025); Smit & Veldsman (2023); Naidoo & Vermeulen (2022)
3.	Job Satisfaction	A positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job experiences	Van Zyl *et al.* (2023); Bonga &

		and alignment with intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors.	Lekhanya (2022)
4.	Retention of Skilled Professionals	The ability of the organisation to reduce voluntary turnover and preserve institutional knowledge and scarce ecological and heritage expertise.	Mtembu & Mulaudzi (2023); Govender & Bussin (2022)
5.	Organisational Performance	Achievement of operational goals, service delivery excellence, and public value creation within the conservation mandate.	Kambona *et al.* (2022); Bekker & van der Merwe (2024); Chigudu & Maphosa (2023)

2.10.5 Application of the Conceptual Framework to the Conservation SOE Context

The South African public sector faced the emergence of a biodiverse public sector conservation SOE. The recruitment of biodiversity conservation specialists- scientists, ecologists, rangers, and heritage specialists, to mention a few, not to even add the public ranger and ecologist- seemed the most difficult, if not impossible. Restrictions, including limited movement on the career ladder, budget limitations, and remote job placements, get in the way of considerable workforce stability. Relatively, strategic workforce retention customer continuum becomes a critical fringe, favouring innovative service improvement for customer engagement facilitation and service to provide sustainability.

Human Capital Theory (HCT) emphasises the importance of investing time and resources in developing employees' skills and capabilities within the sector. Such investment enables organisations to align employee potential with organisational objectives, thereby creating a balance between individual motivation and organisational performance. This balance, even in public engagement and resources, is sustainable as it is a resource- and energy-moving-outside of the public focus (Govender & Bussin, 2022; Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2021). The resource-based view (RBV) helps add on the premise that the more focus, time, and effort are made on the sector, the more energy is spent on human capital, public, mission and value-driven sector, some keep seeing as an unformed and sparse capital (Barney, 1991; Chigudu & Maphosa, 2023).

Effective implementation of employee engagement and retention strategies enables organisations to retain valuable knowledge and maintain service continuity, as

employees become more motivated to remain, experience increased job satisfaction, and demonstrate greater commitment and effort in their roles. This cycle acts as a mechanism that supports the achievement of organisational goals and project outcomes, thereby contributing to organisational sustainability and competitiveness, even in resource-constrained environments.

2.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter critically reviewed the literature on talent management strategies in the public sector and conservation-focused SOEs. It highlighted talent management as a multifaceted process involving the attraction, development, engagement, and retention of skilled professionals to drive organisational effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Strategies such as targeted recruitment, career development pathways, and compelling employee value propositions emerged as important mechanisms for enhancing satisfaction and reducing turnover.

The review also demonstrated a strong link between talent management practices and employee-related outcomes. Well-aligned strategies were associated with higher morale, stronger commitment, and reduced attrition, while also contributing to organisational performance and resilience. In conservation contexts, the ability to retain motivated professionals supports the fulfilment of ecological and social mandates, sustains operational continuity, and improves adaptability in changing environments.

Attention in this chapter was given to talent management, job satisfaction, employee engagement and retention; indicating impact on these on organisational outcomes. As well as the introduction of best practices on the management of people in the organisation, inclusive strategic leadership within the organisation, and people in the organisation. Management of people in conservation SOEs was also positively enhanced through the use of digital devices. This chapter proposed a conceptual framework that integrates Human Capital Theory, the Resource-Based View, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide the foundation for the empirical investigation undertaken in this study.

The following section explains the research methods employed and discusses the chosen qualitative research design and the approaches for data collection and analysis that were utilised to investigate the life experiences of experts working in the conservation SOE.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the foundation upon which the study was built, namely, the research titled: “Exploring the Conservation State-Owned Enterprise, North West Province.” This chapter outlines the entire methodological process regarding the configuration of the research paradigm, approach, and design. It also details participant selection, data collection and analysis, and the measures taken to ascertain the findings’ trustworthiness.

This chapter details the research ethics and acknowledges the limitations, while outlining how the findings of the research will be shared. The overall design of the methodology will be qualitative with an interpretivist approach, and will be focused on the understanding of the lived experiences and the personal meaning systems of the individuals in the specific conservation setting of the organisation.

The methodology is guided by an interpretivist paradigm as well as a qualitative strategy that is appropriate to the goals of the study and examines personal experiences, meanings and employee perceptions while in the singular organisational and socio-cultural milieu of the SOE. This interpretivist position, rather than generalising as is the tendency in more positivist approaches, seeks to comprehend phenomena from the viewpoint of the study participants. This enables the study to provide rich, contextual insights that are thorough and situated in the real world (Saunders *et al.*, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research focus explains the ability of the study to address the multifaceted challenges of talent management in primary conservation, where organisational culture and policy, as well as the emergent environmental conditions, are intertwined.

This chapter shows that the research was conducted in an orderly fashion such that the results are credible, reliable and based on the perceptions of the employees of the organisation. The approaches and methodologies chosen are consistent with the qualitative nature of this study and are considered the most appropriate to address the primary research question and associated sub-questions.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Main research question:

What talent management strategies are implemented by the conservation SOE in North West Province to attract and retain skilled professionals?

Sub-questions:

- What are the key challenges faced by the conservation SOE in executing its talent management strategies, and what factors influence their success or failure?
- How do talent management practices influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention within the conservation SOE?
- What impact do the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE have on organisational performance and competitive advantage in the conservation sector?
- What best practices and innovative approaches can be recommended to enhance the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE?

These questions provided the framework for the research process, guiding the interview protocols and informing the thematic analysis of the data.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM AND APPROACH

In this case, the type of research conducted by the researcher was qualitative because it is the most suitable type of research for exploratory research that aims at understanding the social phenomenon based on the individual subject experiences, as well as the meanings constructed by the individuals. Unlike quantitative research, which deals with measurement and statistical procedures, qualitative research is interpretive-descriptive and deals with depth and not breadth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Interpretivism makes it possible to understand social phenomena, for example, the talent management strategies within organisations, through the meanings and interpretations of the individuals involved (Bryman, 2021).

In the case of SOE with a focus on conservation, such an interpretivist approach makes it possible to understand and analyse those unique and often hidden factors that determine how and why the organisation is able to attract and retain in-demand professionals. This is important because talent management does not occur in isolation from the larger organisational culture, individual aspirations, and the socio-political context within which the SOE operates (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). It is the

interpretive approach which aids in understanding these complex realities, resulting in value that is contextualised in the workplace, as well as in the larger provincial context.

The study also holds the interpretivist research philosophy as true. Interpretivism means that people interpret their reality depending on the social environment they are in (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, it aligned with the aims of the research that focused on employee understanding and experiences about the talent management strategies in the organisation. This interpretivist paradigm holds space for multiple realities and centres the voice of the participants.

This form of reasoning explains why Tavory and Timmermans (2022) rationalise it as abductive, as it aims at the why of the inquiry, in which there is movement and revision between the theory and data as both are refined during the inquiry. This is especially true for qualitative research, where there is a need to make sense of complex social phenomena based on data that is drawn from the lived experiences of the participants, and so this form of reasoning proves to be very useful as it also engages with prior theory.

This approach allows for more than one cycle of data collection and theory formulation at the same time. It allows for theory development at the same time as collecting data, and the formulation of unexpected connections to be interpreted at other scholarly works on talent management, HR practices and organisational behaviour (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). It, thus, helps to identify new contextual meanings pertinent to the realities of talent attraction and retention in the SOE conservation context. The selection of this paradigm afforded the researcher an opportunity for in-depth engagement with the study participants, to interpret and give meaning to their individual and collective narratives during data collection.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

An exploratory qualitative research design has been adopted, which provides the most pertinent insight into the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE, as the strategies focus on and impact the conservation of the SOE. This design will facilitate the collection of in-depth data for this study through the implementation of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, as participants will lead discussions that will allow the researcher to uncover more nuanced themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maclean, 2024). The focus of the research is on deriving contextual insight rather than results that are statistically generalizable, which is in line with the objectives of qualitative research (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

This research utilises qualitative inquiry to investigate the talent management practices of an environmental state-owned enterprise in North West Province. An exploratory approach is warranted due to the relative lack of research in this specific organisational and industry context. This design seeks depth and complexity of rich data in understanding how the organisation entices and keeps skilled professionals, as opposed to seeking generalisability and quantifiable outcomes (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

A researcher employing a qualitative method is able to appreciate the intricate social and organisational relations and networks from the vantage point of the participants. As Creswell and Poth (2018) point out, the constructivist approach involves subjectivity and the joint construction of meaning with the research subjects. As the SOE practitioners, including the HR managers, the operational employees, and the professionals, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive perspective of the talent management strategies, as it gives primacy to the participants' testimonies.

The unanticipated themes that may emerge are an advantage that qualitative research provides. This is particularly true for exploratory research. The methodology is able to construct a situation where respondents are able to articulate their perspectives and insights using their own words without constraints stemming from a pre-determined set of responses (Nowell, 2017). Moreover, this approach is able to unearth the formal practices as well as the informal ones, which might be more challenging to retrieve using formal questionnaires and more structured methodologies.

The design also allows for an iterative, nonlinear approach to inquiry, where the collection and analysis of data happen simultaneously to allow for the refinement of the identified themes. Because of the iterative design, the researcher can better respond to the data and shift the line of inquiry or focus when the data reveal new findings (Tracy, 2020). This design captures the aim to gain profound contextual knowledge of talent management in a particular organisation and a specific field of conservation.

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The research focused on individuals in the conservation SOE who either partake in or are impacted by the talent management processes. This includes strategically placed employees like the HR specialists, technical experts, and senior operational managers who were the most sought-after due to their direct experience with the organisation's efforts to capture and retain a talent pool.

Consistent with qualitative methods, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed. This technique allows a researcher to select participants based on their particular knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Palinkas et al 2015). As explained by Saunders et al (2019), purposive sampling is the most appropriate in qualitative exploratory studies, which aim to gather in-depth contextual information with limited generalisability.

Of the participants available, nine were selected based on the variety of roles within the organisation so that a range of perspectives could be captured. The participants included:

- Two Human Resource Managers,
- Three Senior Operational Managers, and
- Three skilled technical or conservation personnel.

This number was appropriate in terms of reaching thematic saturation, a situation in qualitative studies when additional interviews stop generating new themes or ideas (Guest et al 2006). Furthermore, the diversity of participants from across different areas of the organisation in the SOE was instrumental in providing breadth and depth of the insights on talent management models and practices at the SOE.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data was collected via semi-structured interviews due to the exploratory nature of the qualitative research design. This method was chosen as it allows for flexibility and the ability to hone in and provide rich responses to the interviews while still maintaining the same thematic focus (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method also allows for nuanced understanding, which is especially important in complicated settings within organisations, like the talent management in a conservation SOE.

3.6.1 Rationale for semi-structured interview strategy

Semi-structured interviews were preferred for the purpose of data collection because this interview type gives the interviewer the flexibility to alternate between asking questions and pursuing answers in the latter part of the interview. It facilitates the interview to be more natural and lets the participants share their ideas in a detailed and extensive manner (DiCicco-Bloom \& Crabtree, 2006). This enabled asking of clarifying follow-up questions, which, in turn, enhanced the depth and accuracy of the information collected.

Unlike other approaches (such as structured interviews, which may curtail responses, or unstructured interviews, which may deviate from the main objectives), semi-structured interviews strike a balance that promotes both comparability and adaptability (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). This focus was especially relevant to the current research, which sought to understand a wide range of experiences and perspectives in the domain of talent management across the various functional levels of the organisation.

3.6.2 Development of the interview guide

To ensure thematic consistency across interviews while still allowing room for exploratory discussion, an interview guide was developed. The guide directly came from the study's research objectives and focused on several key themes:

- Challenges in Attracting Skilled Professionals
- Strategies presently in place for talent retention
- Perceptions of HR practices among employees
- Organisational culture and its influence on retention
- Suggestions towards better talent management

Participants were still unstructured enough to allow their reflections on their own lived experiences, as well as implications that perhaps were not anticipated during the study design. To this end, the guide incorporated several elaboration variables to help ensure that the data collection was exhaustive.

3.6.3 Interview procedure

While nine persons were shortlisted, interviews were only held with seven of them. The interviews were to be conducted in person or online, depending on the participant's preferences and institutional guidelines. All interviews were in person or online, depending on the participant's preferences and institutional guidelines. All interviews were in English, and prior informed consent was obtained to record the interviews and for participation in the interviews.

Having participants complete the interviews in the comfort of their home environment enabled the participants to relax, let their guard down, and become more open to discussing. The interviews lasted for about 30 to 60 minutes. The use of Zoom and other video apps was flexible and safe, given the organisational arrangements in place after the pandemic was over.

All participants were informed of the objectives of the study and their right to decline without penalty, and that there was no risk of their responses being identified. Anonymity was assured by the use of pseudonyms for both participants and respondents in their various roles.

3.6.4 Data handling and documentation

In order to achieve accuracy, the interviews had to be recorded, and participants were asked for their consent. These recordings were sent for transcription in full. Each transcription was compared to its audio recording to ensure accuracy and that the participants' responses were represented in their entirety.

Field notes of a high level of detail were also produced for each interview; these notes were also produced after the interviews. These notes would be more in-depth about the participants' bodies as well as the researchers' observations and behavioural themes that were being formed. The notes would help in placing the information accurately during the analysis phase of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Only the researcher had access to the password-protected digital folders containing these data. This measure guaranteed compliance with confidentiality and data protection ethics.

3.6.5 Ethical considerations

The relevant university ethics committee granted the study ethical clearance. Participants were given a study purpose information sheet along with a consent form, which indicated the voluntary nature of their participation and the steps taken to maintain their confidentiality. There were no attempts at coercion or undue influence, and the respondents had the option to drop out of the study without any negative repercussions at any point during the study.

The research, aside from anonymising the data, was especially careful not to reveal any of the organisation's sensitive information or include any in the findings. This is particularly important given the small-scale and specialised character of the SOE.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The data from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2022) describe as a qualitative approach to

analysis which is concerned with the identification, analysis, and reporting of the defining features of content, or in other words, the themes which occur within and across data sets. This technique works very well within the interpretivist paradigm, and especially within exploratory research, as it permits the construction of themes which are either inductively derived from the data or which draw upon existing theories. Thus, it is very well suited to capturing the multifaceted realities brought about by the management of talent in a conservation SOE. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase framework, ensuring a rigorous and systematic approach:

3.7.1 Familiarisation with the data

The researcher immersed himself into the data by listening to the audiotapes of the interviews and transcribing them verbatim, which he repeated multiple times in order to internalize the data and understand it in its full depth, while also feedback looping to the transcripts for further preciseness, sustained and iterative extraction, and transcribed and aural construction of the once performing voices, which facilitated a more complete understanding to determine potential themes that could appear in the dataset.

3.7.2 Generating initial codes

The data was coded in a systematic and non-arbitrary way, which involved dividing the data into more and smaller and more manageable chunks that could each meaningfully address particular research questions, which were the building blocks of the analysis. Inductive codes were then used in order to draw hypotheses from the words and concepts that emerged from the participants, while using deductive codes in order to develop a deeper understanding using the phrases that were brought to the analysis from the interview guide and the relevant literature. The combination of such approaches ensured that the analysis remained visibly embedded with the participants in the research and was able to develop a sound empirical and theoretical understanding.

3.7.3 Themed searching

Collating the codes into possible themes by building theoretical bridges that encapsulated significant and persistent features and overriding patterns that could be distilled from the data in the dataset. The themes involved a further theoretical consolidation and grouping around the important ideas of the talent management practices, challenges, and the employees' perceptions.

3.7.4 Reviewing themes

The candidate themes were refined and assessed with the coded data and the complete data set in order to confirm that they are a correct representation of the participants' voices and the participants' experiences. Themes that were determined to be duplicates of other themes, thinner and less significant in pattern, were merged and/or eliminated in order to reinforce the overall productivity of the themes and improve the analysis.

3.7.5. Defining and naming themes

Creating succinct definitions for each theme in its essence. It required explaining how each specific theme included answering the research questions while making note of their associations and dissimilarities.

3.7.6 Generating the report

The final analytic narrative wove the themes together into a cohesive account of the data, supplemented with verbatim participant quotes for corroboration and transparency of the data.

Due to the volume of the data produced being manageable, a manual coding strategy was preferred, utilising Microsoft Word and Excel to code the data and organise it thematically. This made for a deeper engagement with the data, which enhanced the level of interpretation, and aligned with the current state of the art in qualitative research, which holds that while computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software has a role to play, it is not a prerequisite for an analysis of a high calibre (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

3.8 CREDIBILITY OF THE RESEARCH

Multiple criteria for evaluating trustworthiness within qualitative research have been described for use within research best practice (Noble & Smith, 2022; Korstjens & Moser, 2018) and are based on components outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Adapted for qualitative research, to demonstrate trustworthiness for this research, a series of components has been described for each of Lincoln and Guba's criteria for trustworthiness. These are described as mobility across research domains, conducted with intentionality to meet specific research instruments; the presence of the researcher as an ethical instrument; and qualitative components of reflexivity and transparency, respectively, within the context of the research. These attributes contribute to the overall quality of the study to demonstrate the mobility paradigm and qualitative strengths.

3.8.1 Credibility

As indicated by the previous authors, credibility has to do with the extent to which the results depict the realities and views of the research participants (Shenton, 2004; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher eased credibility by interacting with the participants for a longer period of time during the interviews and focus groups, which enabled the participants to build rapport and cultivate a conversational setting in which they were free to provide detailed narratives. For this research, member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to confirm that the meaning of the transcribed responses was captured correctly, was conducted if the opportunity presented itself. This helps to ensure that the participants' perspectives were the basis of the findings and that the researcher's subjective perspective did not dominate the findings. Also, triangulation was achieved with the collection of data from several participants at different levels of the organisation, which captured numerous perspectives and decreased the likelihood of one source bias.

3.8.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which the same process of research can be replicated. This study has an extensive audit trail for data collection and analysis that details the successive steps of data collection and analysis for the study, which included the decisions made for the codes, themes, and modifications made to the procedures. This allows other researchers to follow the trail of your logic and demonstrates transparency in your research, which has underpinnings rooted in evidence (Saini & Shlonsky, 2023).

Also included in the study design were the anticipated changes and the researcher's reflections on the changes made while the study was in progress, such as changes in probing techniques and the further refinement of themes during the study, which were included for assessment and justification as part of the reflexive documentation. This reflexive documentation provided further evidence of the collection and integration of evidence into the study's overall design.

3.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability concerns the extent to which the evidence derived from the study's participants, as opposed to the researcher's subjectivity and assumptions, constructs the findings. The researcher in the study believed reflexivity was fundamental and made her self-awareness of her position relative to the study and findings. The purpose of adding

verbatim quotations is to provide evidence to the readership about the participants' claim to the findings and the evidence of voice.

Finding quotations from participants was a major part of the findings section to enhance the presentation of the participants' key themes while ensuring the findings were grounded in participants' data. This statement allows readers to know that the findings were based on the participants' data and that the researcher included their views. This statement explains reflexivity, where the researcher provided insights into her beliefs, assumptions, and biases that were present during the collection and analysis of data.

3.8.4 Transferability

This part of the document deals with transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of a study can be used in a different study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This study was in one conservation SOE in the North West Province. However, the study is not deficient in the provision of rich, thick description that enables the readers to determine the extent to which the study can be relevant, and how its findings may be applicable in other organisations, especially within the conservation and public sector.

This level of depth allows the readers to evaluate the findings for relevance and applicability to similar organisations or sectors, hence providing more practical and theoretical value beyond the immediate context of the study (Polit & Beck, 2021). This level of rich description provides a setting for which the study can be cited with a degree of confidence in its results with respect to transferability in other similar contexts (s), or its use to advance knowledge in practice.

Table 3: Trustworthiness Criteria and Applied Strategies

Criterion	Definition	Strategies Applied
Credibility	Confidence in the truth of findings	Prolonged engagement; member checking; triangulation of data sources
Dependability	Stability of findings over time	Audit trail; detailed documentation; reflexive journaling
Confirmability	Objectivity and grounding of findings	Reflexivity practices; supporting findings with participant quotes
Transferability	Applicability in other contexts	Thick description of context and participants

This study's investigative procedure is methodologically sound and incorporates credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, affording the study's results the requisite quality. These qualities, combined with ethical credibility and integrity, contribute positively to the field. They are considered exemplary standards of qualitative research.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before data collection commenced, ethical clearance was obtained from the North-West University Research Ethics Committee. This study was conducted within the ethical policy of the University and the South African legislation, so the rights, dignity, and privacy of all the participants were always protected and fully maintained.

3.9.1 Informed consent

The objectives and reasons for the study, the study process, expected benefits and potential risks were explained to each participant in the information sheet. They were given time to ask questions, and where questions were presented, explanations were provided. Only after understanding all of the above, participants signed the consent form, which documented their voluntary agreement to participate in the interview or focus group.

3.9.2 Confidentiality

To ensure participant anonymity, all names and personal identifiers were removed from the transcripts and notes. All participants were assigned pseudonyms during the analysis and in this report. The name of the sponsoring organisation was also left out of the report to ensure that no participants could be identified indirectly.

3.9.3 Voluntary participation

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. The participants were told about their right to skip any questions and could choose to drop out of the study at any time without any consequences to them.

3.9.4 Data protection

Records of all research materials, recordings, transcripts, and signed consent forms were stored in secure storage. Electronic files were password-protected, and physical documents were kept locked up. The data will be kept for a period of three years and then destroyed. Only the researcher had access to these materials.

3.9.5 Compliance with POPIA

Personal data in this research was processed lawfully in compliance with POPIA 4 of 2013, not exceeding what was necessary and was protected from unauthorised access. Information was collected only for the purpose of this research, kept only for the period necessary, and then permanently deleted or destroyed using secure methods.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study suffers from a number of gaps which need to be comprehensively outlined when analysing the findings of the study. These stem primarily from a combination of the scope of the study, the study design and the context, which is typical of qualitative studies.

3.10.1 Generalisation

Considering the research context, which is a single state-owned enterprise in the conservation sector, the findings are context-bound. This narrow scope, however, enables a deep engagement with the subject of research while also limiting the extent to which the results can be generalised to other state-owned enterprises, and to private sector companies and conservation organisations in other geographical and ecological settings.

3.10.2 Sample size and coverage

It is in line with qualitative research approaches that the number of research participants in this study is relatively small, and this is deliberate to enable an in-depth analysis. While this is meant to ensure that the analysis is rich and detailed, it also means that not all viewpoints in the organisation have been captured. Further to this, the selection of participants was intentional, based on their existing position and their role, which also means that their voices may have been valuable but could be absent.

3.10.3 Participant bias

Having been employed by the organisation, the participants may have felt an inclination to provide some answers in a manner that would reflect positively on the organisation, or avoid responding in a critical manner. This may also have been the case when discussing highly sensitive topics, such as internal challenges around staff retention or leadership. Although some attempts were made to ensure prominence, such as the assurance of anonymity, pseudonym use and encouragement of candidness, such bias cannot be fully ruled out.

3.10.4 Timing of the study

The research is cross-sectional, meaning the research was conducted at only one point in time. Therefore, it is unable to consider how talent management strategies and their effects change over time. A more extended longitudinal investigation could have illustrated how such strategies are adapted over time due to various internal and external influences. However, this research did add much more to the identification of the real challenges and some strategies involved in talent management in a public sector conservation organisation. Moreover, the contribution of the findings facilitated a more academic and practical understanding of the talent management challenges and strategies in terms of people attraction and retention in that particular context. It provided a springboard for subsequent studies to be conducted that could diversify the focus, participants, or organisation for comparative purposes.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, we examined the research approach to this qualitative study, starting off with the explanation of the interpretivist approach employed in the study. The case study design was appropriate and justified as it facilitated an in-depth examination of the talent management mechanisms employed by the selected state-owned conservation organisation. The study sample was selected purposefully to include only those individuals from whom the researchers could obtain interviews with sufficient relevant experience and insight to be useful. For the purposes of the study, we employed semi-structured interviews as the principal means of data collection because they enable the interviewees to freely state their opinions while still being guided in accordance with the study objectives.

In this case, the thematic approach to data analysis was appropriate as it pinpointed the details of the patterns and themes relevant to the questions at hand. Additionally, this chapter has illustrated the means by which the credibility and trustworthiness of the study were established through member checking, meticulous documentation, and reflexive study. Ethical considerations encompassed university ethics approval, informed consent from participants, measures of confidentiality and voluntariness, secure storage of data, and compliance with the POPIA in South Africa.

The chapter also acknowledged the study's constraints and the specific shortfalls in its design and sample size, and composition, as well as its scope. These aspects were discussed so that the study might limit the context and parameters within which the findings would be relevant.

The next chapter will, therefore, focus on the collection of data and its interpretation in relation to the questions and existing literature, which will contribute to the knowledge on the difficulties and strategies associated with the management of talent, job satisfaction, employee engagement and retention in the organisation under study.

CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section explains the outcomes of interviews with seven participants from the conservation SOE in the North West Province and explains the outcomes. The primary purpose of the chapter is to present in detail the outcomes of the data in response to the study's main and sub-research questions.

Chapter Three outlines the thematic approach to data analysis. Here, the focus is on the data sets in terms of recognising and establishing connections between the response data of the participants. As a means of ensuring confidentiality, thematic reporting includes direct quotations while preserving the voices of the participants. The findings are explained using the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, thus facilitating the integration of findings and literature to the fullest extent.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Main research question:

What talent management strategies are implemented by the conservation SOE in North West Province to attract and retain skilled professionals?

Sub-questions:

- What are the key challenges faced by the conservation SOE in executing its talent management strategies, and what factors influence their success or failure?
- How do talent management practices influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention within the conservation SOE?
- What impact do the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE have on organisational performance and competitive advantage in the conservation sector?
- What best practices and innovative approaches can be recommended to enhance the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE?

These questions provided the framework for the research process, guiding the interview protocols and informing the thematic analysis of the data.

4.3 DISCUSSION

4.3.1 Demographic profile of participants

Table 4.1 below collates the demographic data of the seven respondents of the interview. Participants were purposefully sampled, as described in Chapter Three, by virtue of their expertise and participation in the talent management activities of the organisation.

Table 4.1: Demographic information

NO	PARTICIPANT	OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL AND CATEGORY	AGE	YEARS OF SERVICE
1.	P1	Senior Manager	50-55	15
2.	P2	Middle management	45-50	13
3.	P3	Technical	25-30	4
4.	P4	Management	40-45	22
5.	P5	Skilled	40-45	21
6.	P6	Professional	40-45	12
7.	P7	Management	40-45	8

Overall, the sample appears to have a good spread of participants across different job levels and job types. Most participants were in the age range of 40-55 years, a seasoned, older age group in the workforce. The years of service in the organisation were between 4 and 22 years, indicating that participants had considerable years of service and thus, considerable years of experience in the organisation, coupled with adequate knowledge pertaining to the organisation's policies and practices that are relevant to talent management. Their varying backgrounds contributed to the overall credibility and quality of the findings.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

Using systematic coding of the transcripts of the seven interviews, four key themes and several sub-themes were constructed. Each of the themes focuses on a specific part of talent management in the organisation. The sub-themes and the headings represent the more specific aspects of the lived experiences of the participants.

4.5 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

TABLE 4.2: SUMMARY OF FOUR THEMES, SUB THEMES AND CATEGORIES

Themes	Sub-theme	Categories
Theme 1	4.5.1.1 Challenges	4.5.1.1.1 Staff turnover

4.5.1 What are the key challenges faced by the conservation SOE in executing its talent management strategies, and what factors influence their success or failure		4.5.1.1.2 Leadership and governance 4.5.1.1.3 Budget constraints affects HR operations 4.5.1.1.4 Organisational reputation
	4.5.1.2 Factors	4.5.1.2.1 Competitive compensation packages 4.5.1.2.2 Employee referral programmes 4.5.1.2.3 Career development opportunities 4.5.1.2.4 Limited Implementation of HR Policies
Theme 2 4.5.2 How do talent management practices influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention within the conservation SOE?	4.5.2.1 Engagement	4.5.2.1.1 Communication effectiveness 4.5.2.1.2 Employee involvement in decision-making
	4.5.2.2 Satisfaction	4.5.2.2.1 Job security 4.5.2.2.2 Work–life balance 4.5.2.2.3 Organisational culture
	4.5.2.3 Retention	4.5.2.3.1 Retention strategies 4.5.2.3.2 Career progression 4.5.2.3.3 Mentorship and coaching
Theme 3 What impact do the talent management strategies of	4.5.3.1 Recognition and Performance management	4.5.3.1.1 Productivity levels

the conservation SOE have on organisational performance and competitive advantage in the conservation sector?		4.5.3.1.2 Weak Reward and Recognition Culture 4.5.3.1.3 Service delivery 4.5.3.1.4 Goal achievement
	4.5.3.2 Organisational Culture	4.5.3.2.1 Leadership influence 4.5.3.2.2 Employee morale and disengagement 4.5.3.2.3 Team collaboration
	4.5.3.3 Innovation & Growth	4.5.3.3.1 Innovation adoption 4.5.3.3.2 Knowledge sharing 4.5.3.3.3 Continuous improvement
Theme 4 4.5.4 What best practices and innovative approaches can be recommended to enhance the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE?	4.5.4.1 Innovative recruitment strategies	4.5.4.1.1 Strategic recruitment Structured onboarding Programmes 4.5.4.1.2 Talent pipeline management 4.5.4.1.3 Structured onboarding programmes 4.5.4.1.4 Headhunting and Targeted Recruitment
	4.5.4.2 Training & Development	4.5.4.2.1 Limited access to training 4.5.4.2.2 Leadership development 4.5.4.2.3 Succession planning
	4.5.4.3 Employee Engagement	4.5.4.3.1 Inconsistent communication and Feedback 4.5.4.3.3 Team-building activities

4.5.1 Theme 1: What are the key challenges faced by the conservation SOE in executing its talent management strategies, and what factors influence their success or failure

Theme 1:	Sub-themes	Categories
4.5.1 What are the key challenges faced by the conservation SOE in executing its talent management strategies, and what factors influence their success or failure	4.5.1.1 Challenges	4.5.1.1.1 Staff turnover 4.5.1.1.2 Leadership and governance 4.5.1.1.3 Budget constraints affects HR operations 4.5.1.1.4 Organisational reputation
	4.5.1.2 Factors	4.5.1.2.1 Competitive compensation packages 4.5.1.2.2 Employee referral programmes 4.5.1.2.3 Career development opportunities 4.5.1.2.4 Limited Implementation of HR Policies

In the conservation SOE, the compounding structural, financial, and organisational challenges become a barrier and make talent attraction extremely difficult. Data illustrates challenges, including poor budgeting, political meddling, low and non-competitive salaries, broken recruitment systems, weak leadership, and bad governance. All of these factors lead to a diminished capacity to effectively attract conservation professionals with the skill level needed to support the mission and objectives of the organisation.

These findings resonate with the burgeoning talent management body of literature. They confirm that organisations that find themselves in situations with limited resources have the greatest need to optimise their internal systems and find a way to implement a value proposition that motivates employees and a recruitment framework that is perceived to be equitable and fair (Shoaib *et al.* 2023, Erasmus, 2022). On the positive side, the participants pointed to internal promotion systems, albeit still in an inconsistent manner,

and career development opportunities. It is the discrepancies and the factors, however that will determine the overall capacity of the organisation to attract optimal talent and sustain a high-performing organisation.

4.5.1.1 Sub-theme: Challenges

Overall, focus group interview participants acknowledged and raised the challenges that weaken the organisation's ability to recruit professionals with specialisation in ecology and conservation management. Lack of financial resources is a significant limitation-basically participants indicated that the organisation is not able to pay competitive salaries and that the salary scales are too low and outdated. Then, what was brought up the most was the high rate of employee turnover that is caused by a patchwork of inconsistent acting appointments, policy misalignment, no employee organisational scaffolding and a lack of career progression. The failure to have a clearly defined employer value proposition, poor organisational reputation, and the slow pace of the recruitment process also make it a less attractive SOE to external candidates. When taken together, these challenges contribute to a very tough talent landscape and support the literature that indicates an absence of stable leadership, competitive pay, and aligned HR systems serves to limit effective talent attraction. (Nkomo & Singh, 2023)

4.5.1.1.1 Category: Staff turnover

It was mentioned by some of the participants that one of the issues that the various divisions of the SOE are still facing is the turnover of staff, and that this is an ongoing concern. The main reasons employees stay are instability, lack of competitive remuneration, and long-term acting positions. Staff with leadership positions are also the ones who are responsible for maintaining long-term operational continuity, as with constant leadership changes, there are no employees who are skilled enough to stay for the long term.

> "*Everyone is acting, and you don't know when it's going to be terminated" (P6).*
> *"We have a very high vacancy rate… almost half of employees have left" (P7).*

The researcher concurs with the knowledge that the field of SOE and employee turnover rate is a big concern. The acting position is an easy way out of the ongoing war of all the vacant gaps; however, it does not address any real issues and only propagates the uncertainty. The literature points out that turnover of employees in public conservation entities is believed to come as a result of career stagnancy and instability in operations within the entity (Thaba & Mokoena, 2023).

4.5.1.1.2 Category: Leadership and governance

Participants pointed out the lack of cohesion among leadership as well as the lack of governance models as the major issues that restrict the organisation's ability to gain influence over highly reputable professionals. Inconsistent leadership, long-tenured leadership, and a lack of clarity within the frameworks around decision-making are noted to create gaps, increase frustration, and a lack of continuity around critical people management issues. Generally, gaps and stagnation with leadership and governance create a highly unstable environment, making it challenging for the organisation to position itself as a trusted and desirable opportunity.

"*Every new leader wants to bring their own people, so projects are abandoned halfway. (P1)*

"Positions are sometimes influenced by political connections rather than merit." (P3)

"We wait for political approval even for operational posts." (P4)

"There's always some influence from higher offices when key posts are filled." (P5)

"Each new CEO or board changes the structure and direction… we start again every time." (P6)

"Whenever leadership changes, priorities change too." (P7)

"Acting positions delay decisions… nothing moves until someone permanent is appointed." (P1)

Both the participants and the researcher agree that the effects of staff turnover on SOE and employees are concerning. Temporary solutions, such as acting positions, do not help resolve the staff turnover issue or the high vacancy rate. Loss of certainty remains. Chapter Two elaborates on the reason there is no certainty because there is a lack of cohesion in governance, political capture, and weak leadership resolve, which leads to poor policy implementation, lack of institutional faith, and poor management of talent in South African SOEs. (Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2023; Mohuba, 2023)

4.5.1.1.3 Category: Budget constraints affecting HR operations

Having no budget keeps HR from being able to carry out functions such as acquiring and recruiting the specific qualified personnel for the positions. Survey participants spoke about how, in cases where HR functions to create a budget for a position, there is no budget flexibility to allow for quick recruitment, which, similar to the example, creates a gap in the budget for recruitment, which has a detrimental effect on the retention of the budget. It is an example, specifically in the public sector, where Ditlopo *et al.* (2013)

found that financial constraints are a barrier to recruitment, and the budget also influences development and succession planning at HR.

"There isn't enough budget to employ people in the vacant positions" (P6).
"Finance is a serious challenge… filling critical positions is a problem" (P7).

The researcher agrees with the participants and the literature on the influence of the budgets that SOEs work with. Literature demonstrates that constrained funding is the primary hindrance in public sector talent acquisition, and hence, loss of organisational competitiveness, according to Madumo (2022). Insufficient funds are detrimental to the HR function since other primary activities of the organisation are financed going to. The literature mirrors this dynamic, which Armstrong and Taylor (2020) emphasise that inadequate funding of HR leads to operational inefficiency and poor service delivery.

4.5.1.1.4 Category: Organisational reputation

Weak organisation reputation is described: there is governance instability and persistent political interference, which makes it less attractive to skilled professionals. Many applicants allegedly do not know of the Career opportunities there; the negative instability perceptions further make it less attractive to those with long-term vision. The political interferences, especially on appointments and decisions, are a high reputational risk, and it raises concerns of fairness, continuity, and professionalism in the leadership of the organisation. Weak research further emphasises that to attract specialised conservation talent, a positive employer brand and stable governance are imperative.

"Appointments come through politicians." (P3)
"The process is transparent on paper, but final approval depends on politics." (P2)
"We wait for political approval even for operational posts." (P4)
"There's always some influence from higher offices when key posts are filled." (P5)
"Each new CEO or board changes the structure and direction… we start again every time." (P6)
"There is such a negative concept… people are not attracted to come here." (P6)
"Other entities offer better packages; we can't compete." (P7)

The researcher concurs with the participant's sentiments that political interference is a barrier to pure talent attraction and retention. If talent management is seen in the public sector, the right people can be attracted to the right jobs. This is further explained in Chapter Two, which states that political interference negatively impacts the credibility

and the external legitimacy of state-owned enterprises (Mohuba, 2023; Chitiga-Mabugu *et al.*, 2021). With the political and leadership instability of the Board and the Chief Executive Officer of an SOE, the researcher also supports the sentiment that retaining such leadership is critical. The sustained organisational performance depends on experienced and appropriately skilled board members. On the other hand, the frequency with which board members and CEOs are changed has a negative impact on the outcome of the performance, the quality of service, the results of the audits, and the morale of the staff as a whole.

4.5.1.2 Sub-theme: Factors

As much as potential issues were covered, participants still highlighted various issues that, if improved, could help with effective talent attraction. Participants highlighted that employees with qualifications in conservation, as well as those with relevant industry experience, are frequently solicited for acting or developmental roles. This aligns with the recent literature that emphasises that developmental pathways, professional recognition, and internal mobility positively influence talent attraction in resource-constrained settings (Owor & Munene, 2023). Furthermore, while employee referral mechanisms and internal networks were mentioned informally, they are still policy-neutral. Enhancing these attributes will enable the SOE to improve its employer value proposition with better alignment to the sector's optimal practice.

4.5.1.2.1 Category: Competitive compensation packages

A major driving force across attractions remains the offering of competitive salaries, and participants highlighted that effective benchmarking and revising of the pay structure would see the SOE positioned positively in the market. In some cases, due to uncompetitive remuneration packages, talent is not retained.

"People leave because they can earn double elsewhere," (P3)
"Our salary scale is very old… we cannot compete for the right skill" (P7).
"Budget affects salaries and retention" (P6).
"*We can't match what conservation NGOs or the private game reserves pay." (P7)*

The researcher concurs with the participants and the literature that compensation packages play an integral part in the attraction of talent. Research shows that compensation fairness and external competitiveness remain central to attracting specialised public-sector talent (Surbhi & Pillay, 2024). The SOE is not offering market-related packages, which affects their ability to compete for talent. This agrees with recent

research showing that conservation entities within the public sector struggle to compete with private reserves due to funding constraints in the battle for specialised talent (Maseko & Moorosi, 2023).

4.5.1.2.2 Category: Employee referral programmes

Though not formally structured, participants described informal referrals, where managers identify skilled employees for internal roles. The employee referral programmes are effective when applied consistently and fairly; they can achieve some big wins in the lives of employees.

"They physically interact with me and ask if I'm available for positions" (P6).

Referral programs represent a growing trend among managers and supervisors, striking a balance between employee motivation and organisational resource allocation, despite resistance. As external recruitment increases, faculty referrals are shown to positively affect talent pipelines (Moyo & Letsoalo, 2022). This move would enhance the SOEs' attraction strategy focus.

4.5.1.2.3 Category: Career development opportunities

Participants identified various forms of commitment, retention, and potential acting roles, studies in conservation, and skill-based exposure. Career development, internal mobility, advancement through experience, and the appreciation of employee skills were all significant factors.

"There are opportunities… they are trying to improve staff well-being" (P6).
"When employees study, nothing is aligned to support them" (P7).

Participants and the researcher concur that the lack of career growth opportunities is a primary reason for employee turnover. Career development has continuously been identified as a significant factor in retention for skilled employees (Kekana and Ndlovu, 2023).

4.5.1.2.4 Categories: Limited Implementation of HR Policies

Most respondents indicated that while there were HR and recruitment-related policies that made sense and were reasonable, the actual application of these policies was lacking in most occurrences. Data suggest that there are no mechanisms, combined with feeble implementation by leaders, that are the reason for no policy implementation, and

this inactivity creates a void that undermine strategic talent management, while making people lose their trust in the consistency of the organisation.

"There is a recruitment policy, but nothing that actively helps attract or retain professionals" (P7).

"The recruitment policy looks good, but we never see it guiding appointments," (P5)

"Documents exist to show compliance, not to guide real decisions." (P1)

"There are talks about policy alignment, but execution never happens" (P2)

"There's no follow-up when people ignore HR policy," (P4)

Participants have noted that policy enactment is central to the achievement of any outcomes from the plans or programmes. The category accordingly reflects Armstrong and Taylor's (2020) assertion that HR strategies must have operational stewardship if they are to be successful. The attraction challenges within the SOE are structured and financial predicaments that sit well outside of HR processes. Policies without accountability structures are little more than black box documents (Ulrich *et al.*, 2017). Addressing these issues suggests that it is no longer simply an HR requirement but the order of the day if the province is to retain conservation wisdom. The absence of ongoing review and evaluation processes further worsens the misalignment of organisational goals and HR practices (Collings *et al.*, 2019).

4.5.2 Theme 2: How do talent management practices influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention within the conservation SOE?

Table 2: Summary of Theme 2, Sub-themes and Categories

Theme 2:	Sub-themes	Categories
4.5.2 How do talent management practices influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention within the conservation SOE?	4.5.2.1 Engagement	4.5.2.1.1 Communication effectiveness 4.5.2.1.2 Employee involvement in decision-making
	4.5.2.2 Satisfaction	4.5.2.2.1 Job security 4.5.2.2.2 Work–life balance 4.5.2.2.3 Organisational culture

Theme 2:	Sub-themes	Categories
	4.5.2.3 Retention	4.5.2.3.1 Retention strategies 4.5.2.3.2 Career progression 4.5.2.3.3 Mentorship and coaching

Within the conservation SOE, the ability to shape the level of employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention was evident in the talent management practices. Communication breakdowns, lack of workplace recognition, and absence of leadership consistency, intertwined with the negative culture of the organisation, lead to negative workplace experiences (or workplace consequences) of the employees. Weak engagement, along with the tenuous hold on satisfaction, retention (i.e., staying with the organisation) was perceived to be largely in the employees' control, with little to no influence coming from the organisation. This resonates with others in the recent literature, suggesting the positive employee experiences created through the organisation's managerial practices must be comprehensive in nature, and include the organisation's communication, leadership, and development, in order for the practices to be effective (Govender & Bussin, 2023; Birtch & Chiang, 2022)

However, the current SOE has systemic challenges, namely financial restrictions, political challenges, and ineffective HR policy implementation, which have damaged these aspects and resulted in lower morale and disengagement. Data from the interviews demonstrate the engagement, satisfaction, and retention connection – the lack of satisfying talent management efforts influences disengagement and turnover, while positive satisfaction efforts build employee commitment and elevate organisational performance.

4.5.2.1 Sub-theme: Employee Engagement

In this SOE, there is little to no communication, few options to participate, and no clearly defined ways to acknowledge engagement at work, at least at the employee engagement level. Loss of engagement that comes from decreased recognition of efforts or performance is compounded by the feeling that employees are not appreciated. For silence, employees are not engaged. In this SOE, there is no lack of focus on engagement, yet employees are feeling distanced from leadership and unsupported

through HR systems, complicating what should be a crucial foundation of talent management. Evidence suggests that there is more engagement when there is a sense of ownership and when there is a participatory approach to the decisions at hand (Masemola & Mabaso, 2022).

4.5.2.1.1 Category: Communication effectiveness

Communications that were portrayed as poor, unidirectional, and instructional rather than consultative were among the consistent themes. Descriptions of communication included absent leadership, uninformative, and delayed. Because there were no poor communications, trust, clarity, and engagement seemed absent, leading to disengagement. Participants described a lack of trust, confusion, and disengagement.

"We just get emails… it's one-way communication" (P7).
"Communication is the biggest factor… it makes or breaks" (P6).

This stage allows the researcher to discuss the value of communication with the participants and understand the frustration of the participants in the workplace when they feel that their ideas are not listened to or presented. Ignoring employees' contributions demotivates employees and leads to disengagement when employees choose not to share their ideas. Literature suggests that communication is a critical component of employee engagement, especially in the public sector, in the event of some form of organisational change (Theron & Barkhuizen, 2023). Being listened to, and not ignored, is critical to employees feeling a sense of value and belonging; otherwise, employees will expend less of their effort, and become less creative, and willing to engage in constructive change in the organisation.

4.5.2.1.2 Category: Employee involvement in decision-making

Employees in the organisation feel the decision-making process does not include them, especially when it comes to their roles and working conditions. As a result, this contributes to a sense of disengagement and a lack of ownership of the outputs of the organisation.

"*Leadership doesn't engage employees… decisions are just made" (P7).*
"We find solutions amongst ourselves because management doesn't involve us" (P6).

The employees are lost in their silence and black boxes; the communications are top-down and, as one put it, reactive. There simply was no opportunity for employees to

shape the frameworks of decision-making. This aligns with the literature, particularly in the public sector, which suggests that participative decision-making is a prerequisite for public engagement and trust in participative frameworks (Mafini, 2023).

4.5.2.2 Sub-theme: Job Satisfaction

Anxiety due to the lack of job security, imbalances between working, personal life, and the unpredictable nature of the organisation's leadership structures is going to impact the SOE's employee satisfaction greatly. Participants mentioned operational acting appointments, restructuring, and recruitment process outcomes, which were seemingly HR black boxes. Job security is one of the most powerful predictors of satisfaction in the public sector (Ngwenya & Pelser, 2023). Satisfaction is also due to the lack of cohesive organisational culture, which participants viewed as politically fragmented, and the lack of leadership. In this SOE, however, satisfaction is compromised due to systemic forces that negatively impact employees' mental health and sense of loyalty to the organisation.

4.5.2.2.1 Category: Job security

Anxiety, lack of satisfaction, and disruption of employees' mental calmness and peace of mind were brought on by the long-term positions, extended waiting periods for official confirmations, and vague structures of the organisation.

"Everyone is acting… you don't know what will happen after six months" (P6).

"People have interim placement letters for more than two years" (P7).

The researcher concurs with the sentiments expressed by respondents that job security is paramount to stability and job satisfaction. This is supported by research indicating that job security is an important predictor of satisfaction in public-sector jobs (Ngwenya & Pelser, 2023). The researcher finds that the respondents' view on the role of job security as the foundation of stability and job satisfaction is valid. There is evidence that job security is a significant variable in predicting satisfaction in public employment (Ngwenya & Pelser, 2023). Individuals are likely to leave the organisations where they feel job insecurity. Most of the time, even remuneration fails to offset the instability. Indeed, studies have verified that job insecurity significantly reduces satisfaction and increases intention to leave (Sithole, 2023).

4.5.2.2.2 Category: Work–life balance

Although it was not specifically framed as a matter of formal policy, it was assumed that the lack of resources and the increasing pressure of work were affecting the respondents'

ability to manage their personal and work responsibilities. Poor staffing and organisational planning meant that large individual workloads were often unavoidable.

"We are expected to perform without resources… it affects us" (P6).
"There are so many challenges… it catches up with employees" (P7).
"Budget cuts mean we freeze posts and overburden existing staff."(P3)

The participants of the research have shown concern of the participants and stated the importance of balance between work and personal life of employees. The well-being of other employees is impacted negatively due to the high vacancy rate, as they have extra work duties. Research shows how work-life balance is important for retention and satisfaction in the public sector, most notably the public sector employment equity environments (Oosthuizen, 2022).

4.5.2.2.3 Category: Organisational culture

Study participants describe the culture as inconsistent, politicised and low morale. Lack of clear leadership, poor communication and instability due to constant changing movement and restructuring. Organisational culture in general is known to decrease satisfaction and retention of skilled staff (Mabaso, 2023).

"*Staff morale is very low… people are not being heard" (P6).*
"Leadership style affects the culture… there's resistance and low morale" (P7).

There is a consensus among the participants and the researcher regarding the significance of shaping the culture of the organisation and the changes it can make. Employees have stated that appreciation mechanisms create a certain level of engagement and increase motivation and commitment to the organisation (Oluwafemi *et al.*, 2022). However, the absence of influential leadership and political concerns has a negative impact on employees' morale and, consequently, on the culture of the organisation. According to the literature, there is a direct impact of culture on employees' morale, where the more supportive and empowering cultures enhance staff morale (Barkhuizen & Ngcobo, 2022).

4.5.2.3 Sub-theme: Employee Retention

There are no formal policies surrounding retention, and responses to turnover seem to be limited to ad-hoc counter-offers. The absence of career pathways also negatively

impacts retention potential, as well as operational silos of retention aid and minimal mentorship. It was stated by participants that there is a system in which employees primarily self-develop, with marginal support from the institution. This is consistent with findings from conservation organisations where there is a lack of investment in the professional development of staff, resulting in higher employee turnover and diminished organisational memory. Moreover, there is no doubt in the existing literature that organisations without any formal retention strategies have a higher turnover as well as volatile organisational stability (Bussin, 2023). Retention requires some fundamental policies, compensation that is equitable and an ongoing development of internal talent pipelines

4.5.2.3.1 Category: Retention strategies

Current retention strategies have been characterised by the participants as minimal, unstructured and, essentially, absent. The institution relies on counter-offers as opposed to any proactive strategies. The SOE's rigid pay structures and prolonged approval processes further limit its ability to offer competitive pay.

"There's nothing in place… only one counter-offer I can remember" (P7).

"No procedures to retain professionals" (P6).

Our salaries are lower than comparable organisations, so staff leave as soon as they get better offers," P6.

"We can't compete with private entities; people join us to get experience, then move on." (P5)

The researcher concurs with the participants that the absence of formal retention plans is a contributor to the high staff turnover rates and lack of engagement and performance. Literature indicates that retention is a problem that is discussed with a level of complexity. It is the integrated systems and processes that are put in place to deliver an organisational response to the problem that will sustain retention (Erasmus & Coetzee, 20223). The public service is unable to retain its skills. The findings confirm that there is a financial paradox, inclusive of underperformance for ignoring the investment in talent management, resulting in erosion of the organisational capability to sustain retention (Veldsman, 2021).

4.5.2.3.2 Category: Career progression

Participants pointed out the absence of clearly delineated career pathways in a scenario where qualified staff are situated in lower organisational levels. This, in a negative way, affects self-motivation and increases turnover.

"Even with a degree, you remain a field ranger" (P7).
"People are not given the chance to excel… they recruit outside" (P6).

One of the concerns participants expressed that I felt most strongly as a researcher is the absence of internal movement and developmental pathways. In organisations that lack mobility, there's a deficiency in the integration of the people, the work, the strategies, the management, and the resources. Recent literature indicates that the lack of movement in a career is a driver in people resigning in greater numbers (Pillay, 2023).

4.5.2.3.3 Category: Mentorship and coaching

SOEs lack the formalisation of mentoring and coaching practices. Employees do engage in informal mentoring practices, but there is no assurance that this facilitates professional growth. Mentoring and coaching are one of the most undervalued management activities, and yet their benefits are lifelong.

"There's no procedure to see what your skills are" (P6).
"We are not developing employees… no mentoring" (P7).

Participants in this study clearly expressed the depth of the void in mentoring and coaching practices in conservation SOE. Literature as well identifies mentoring as a missing link in retention and supporting organisations to learn and plan for succession. (Kgatla & Schultz, 2022)

4.5.3 THEME 3: What impact do the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE have on organisational performance and competitive advantage in the conservation sector?

Table 3: Theme, Sub-themes and Categories

Theme 3:	Sub-themes	Categories
What impact do the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE have on organisational performance and competitive advantage in the conservation sector?	4.5.3.1 Recognition and Performance management	4.5.3.1.1 Productivity levels 4.5.3.1.2 Weak Reward and Recognition Culture 4.5.3.1.3 Service delivery 4.5.3.1.4 Goal achievement
	4.5.3.2 Organisational Culture	4.5.3.2.1 Leadership influence 4.5.3.2.2 Employee morale and disengagement 4.5.3.2.3 Team collaboration
	4.5.3.3 Innovation & Growth	4.5.3.3.1 Innovation adoption 4.5.3.3.2 Knowledge sharing 4.5.3.3.3 Continuous improvement

Theme 3: What impact do the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE have on organisational performance and competitive advantage in the conservation sector?

Findings suggest that the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE positively shape organisational performance and attain competitive advantage within the field. Participants described the organisation's environment as one where employees are unable to demonstrate their full potential, and organisational effectiveness is diminished as a result of poor organisation within the workforce. There are gaps in communication, unsatisfactory deployment of leaders, stagnation of development, and unalignment of human management practices. There are gaps in organisational effectiveness where workforce detriment stagnation creates gaps in organisational effectiveness. The literature supports that talent management is an important determinant of organisational performance, particularly within the public sector, where organisations are reliant on a workforce that possesses specialised talent (Bussin, 2023; Mafini, 2023).

Not having a clear strategy for talent management, along with continuous temporary management positions, a lack of needed skills, and important positions left unfilled, amplifies the challenges with the culture of the organisation, which in turn lowers motivation and increases the rate of talent loss. This has a direct negative impact on service provision within the conservation sector and organisation performance, which is dependent on a strong set of skills, knowledge of the environment, and good leadership. In addition to this, the very small amount of funding available for the combination of learning, innovation, and knowledge sharing has a negative impact on the SOE's ability to adapt to the changing conservation situation. All in all, the evidence shows that improving the management of talents would positively impact the performance, efficiency of operations, and the SOE's overall position in the sector.

4.5.3.1 Sub-theme: Recognition and performance management

Most participants underscored the negative impact on organisational performance due to poor talent management. Unfilled positions, understaffing, and acting appointments create organisational bottlenecks that hinder productivity. Gaps in consistent leadership and unfit competencies have particularly affected service delivery in the reserves, as participants noted. The literature supports that the performance of the organisation declines when positions are unfilled, or when they are filled by individuals with insufficient competencies (Theron & Barkhuizen, 2023). Unpredictable application of the HR policies also adds to the inconsistency in the alignment of the strategic goals and the operational level. These findings substantiate that the integration of talent management is not only strategic but also helps in attaining excellent organisational performance, particularly in conservation organisations that are knowledge reliant as they seek to preserve ecological integrity (Mukonza & Fikeni, 2022). This suggests that without a strengthening of the talent planning, talent acquisition, and human resource alignment, the SOE will continue to face challenges in the achievement of its strategic and operational goals.

4.5.3.1.1 Category: Productivity levels

The respondents ascribe the decline in productivity levels to the scarcity of Workforce, training opportunities, acting roles, and ambiguity that lead to inefficiency and unproductive processes. Unproductive processes that lead to inefficiency result in increased workloads and unending work cycles, and reduce the SOE's ability to fulfil its conservation obligations.

"There's a lack of manpower… it restricts us a lot on the ground" (P6).

"If positions stay vacant for years, how do we expect performance?" (P7).

The researcher aligns himself with the participants in considering the importance of levels of productivity. Skills are also a factor, for example, a toxic environment and a lack of resources. The literature highlights the point that an increase in levels of productivity is a function of talent, clarity of purpose, and informed competencies, as emphasised by Govender & Bussin (2023). The unexplained persistence of vacancy rates can lead to the burdening of the few staff members left.

4.5.3.1.2 Category: Weak Reward and Recognition Culture

Participants noted that, in practice, the value of recognition has little use if it is not accompanied by tangible benefits (such as rewards and opportunities for growth). The absence of positive reinforcement is what consistently demotivates employees and works to undermine an achievement culture. The inability of the organisation to institutionalise a culture of recognition decreases retention and commitment levels, especially with regard to high performers. The Performance Management and Development System, participants claimed, is not an efficient tool to motivate and encourage excellence. These comments do indicate that the system functions in such a manner that it is seen as bureaucratic and disconnected from actual performance outcomes.

"Even if you perform well, nothing changes," (P7)

"Bonuses or promotions are inconsistent. (P3)

"It's just a compliance exercise, ratings don't reflect performance," (P4)

"Recognition is based on seniority, not merit."(P1)

Participants, as well as the researcher, value performance management and recognition. There is a misconception regarding the PMDS. Most employees concentrate on the monetary aspect and neglect the purpose of the system, which is measuring performance, diagnosing deficits, and assuring that positive performance is sustained. As noted by Armstrong (2020), recognition should extend beyond monetary aspects. It should include visibility, appreciation, and constructive input. However, PMDS in the SOE appears to be a formalistic exercise rather than a genuine effort to boost performance. Recognition, according to Bussin (2022), is a motivational factor that positively influences employees' engagement and loyalty, documented in the SOE.

4.5.3.1.3 Category: Service delivery

Organisational instability, absence of cohesive leadership, and limited resources all slow down service delivery. Participants noted that changes in managers of parks, lack of training and political interference are major barriers to effective conservation management.

"*Every time there's a new park manager with different objectives" (P6).*
"The board is failing in filling positions… it affects service delivery" (P7).

Absence of resources and interference from politics leads to blocked service delivery. It is contradictory how politicians will advocate for service delivery while simultaneously ignoring the support of these government structures meant to implement and manage service delivery. Research indicates that service delivery in the public sector is impacted negatively when there is brokenness within the talent systems and when there is weak integration of these systems (Mabaso, 2023).

4.5.3.1.4 Category: Goal achievement

There is poor alignment of HR practices, unclear accountability, and weak oversight, which is why the organisation is unable to attain its strategic goals. Participants pointed out that ineffective talent strategies result in misalignment of conservation goals and available resources.

"*Objectives fall apart because things keep changing" (P6).*
"We are not aligned with the mission… the strategy needs modification" (P7).

The researcher is in agreement with the participants that there is little achievement of the objectives in relation to unsynchronised HR practices and strategies. Employees need to be involved during the development of any strategy, as this is fundamental for achieving the goals of the organisation. Literature supports the notion that to obtain the goals of an institution, there has to be alignment of the talent processes, systems, and the overall leadership of the institution in a manner that is purposeful and effective (Erasmus & Coetzee, 2023).

4.5.3.2 Sub-theme: Organisational Culture

Culture within the organisation seems politically motivated and lacks cohesion and morale. Issues of communication at all levels, as well as decision-making making brought autocratic administrative styles and behaviours of leadership. It has been proven that organisational culture impacts employee performance, engagement, and retention significantly (Barkhuizen & Ngcobo, 2022). Another underlying issue that has been highlighted by participants is the lack of transparency and efficient communication that leads to distrust and disengagement. The results show that inadequacies within the talent management environment have contributed negatively to the culture, which precipitates resistance, conflict, and loss of organisational identity.

4.5.3.2.1 Category: Leadership influence

Leadership decisions were described as inconsistent and not transparent, while autocratic tendencies and political influence were noted as limitations to effective management. All these situations of perceived interference from above undermine the very notion of organisational autonomy and erode employee trust in HR systems. e.g., leadership changes motivated by shifting political mandates were described as a recurring issue.

"Appointments come through politicians," (P3)

"There's always some influence from higher offices when key posts are filled."(P5)

"*Sometimes leadership just comes and says this is what will happen" (P7).*

"Acting managers don't always have the knowledge… it affects us" (P6).

"Whenever leadership changes, priorities change too, and previous initiatives are abandoned." (P7)

Participants' assertions were agreed by the researcher, and that also impact of leadership is also significant. The literature shows that the leadership style impacts the degree of talent performance. Cohesion of the organisation and employee morale. (Ngwenya and Pelser, 2023). Instability of leadership in acting positions, for example, fosters disruption in a team's structure and prevents collaboration. The literature identifies the presence of fostering leadership, participative design, and alignment of talent management practices as the essential ingredients of a positive organisational culture. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) underscore the importance of unwavering leadership to maintain meaningful control over the HR implementation.

4.5.3.2.2 Category: Employee morale and disengagement

Repeatedly, the factors of low morale were cited as a lack of acknowledgement, communication breakdown, and job insecurity. The impact of morale on cohesion, loyalty, and performance of the team in the organisation was affirmed by participants. The information above reflects disillusionment, emotional withdrawal, or apathy on the part of the employees. The absence of acknowledgement, leadership instability and poor communication have stripped employees of their sense of purpose.

"Morale is very low… staff are not being heard" (P6).

"The culture has resistance… morale drops" (P7).

"*People are just doing the bare minimum; there's no drive anymore*." (P3)

"It feels like nobody listens. We raise issues, but nothing changes."(P5)

The researcher agrees with the participants on the impact of morale, which is crucial for employees and the organisation. Research shows that morale is a function of the talent systems, leadership behaviour, and the organisational climate (Oosthuizen, 2022). From the participants, a workplace culture that was described had declining motivation and weak morale.

4.5.3.2.3 Category: Team collaboration

These are some of the reasons: weakened team collaboration due to leadership instability, vague structures, and failure to communicate coherently. Participants reported that often, teams work in silos with little cross-functional collaboration.

"We normally talk amongst ourselves and find solutions… not with management" (P6).

"There's little engagement… collaboration is affected" (P7).

The researcher agrees with participants that collaboration is needed to eliminate silo operations. Flexibility is an important factor to encourage team collaboration because it closes the silos. Literature indicates that collaboration is more likely to succeed when there is stable leadership and a well-defined organisational structure (Pillay, 2023).

4.5.3.3 Sub-theme: Innovation & Growth

Organisation's advances are impeded by the absence of innovation, and poor knowledge-sharing framework and learning investments. Participants described a structural environment characterised by organisational support for employee self-development. In such a case, programming absence creates growth constraints and

hinders succession planning. Also, there is an absence of systematic knowledge-sharing, which weakens organisational memory and resilience. These findings are akin to conservation works, where limited adaptive capability ignites an innovation deficit in ecological management and conservation (Mukonza & Fikeni, 2022). Talent management is a crucial driver of innovation, and findings show the current gap is a constraint for SOE to pursue a developmental agenda in the long term.

4.5.3.3.1 Category: Innovation adoption

Participants expressed that there is under innovation due to a shortage of resources, obsolete systems and the absence of strategic direction. According to the literature, innovation supports investment in technology and expertise with a framework of supportive leadership. (Maseko, 2023).

"We don't have the resources… we struggle on the ground" (P6).

"The board needs funding to realise other processes" (P7).

The author recognises that shortcomings in support and ever-present resource shortages diminish employee creativity and innovative initiatives. This concurs with findings in the conservation literature, which states that the inability to innovate is a significant hindrance to managing and adapting ecologically (Mukonza & Fikeni, 2022). There is a body of knowledge that discusses the fact that continuous learning, appropriate knowledge management, and a conducive environment are pivotal to innovation. This SOE requires funding to procure systems and technologies that improve the provision of ecological services.

4.5.3.3.2 Category: Knowledge sharing

Participants reported knowledge-sharing practices to be fragmented and unofficial. They noted that very few significant lessons or information travelled beyond individuals or units, and that this siloed form of learning became a barrier to organisational learning.

"We find solutions amongst ourselves… not everyone is skilled" (P6).

"Skills audits are done, but results are not implemented" (P7).

The author concurs with the participants that knowledge sharing is important and that there is a purpose to it, even if it is not formal. There is a body of knowledge that discusses the fact that, in certain instances, all this informal knowledge-sharing may

accelerate the learning process as if participants were in a training session. It has been documented that knowledge-sharing increases creative activity, innovation, and productivity within an organisation (Oluwafemi *et al.*, 2022).

4.5.3.3.3 Category: Continuous improvement

Participants noted that insufficient training, a lack of organised progress, and weak systems of performance evaluation are the primary hindrances to the advancement of continuous improvement. Participants were frustrated that learning was self-funded and unsupported.

"Training is not supported… employees pay for themselves" (P7).

"There's no funding for training or new positions, we're constantly told there's no budget. (P2)

"PMDS is just hearsay… nothing is implemented" (P6).

"PMDS is there as a system…..but there is no recognition of performance rewards" (P6)

PMDS is just a paper exercise; it doesn't really reward effort." (P1)

Most participants claimed that it is more than just compliance that the Performance Management and Development System should reflect, and the researcher is in full agreement; it is to provide a real and accurate measure for assessing the performance of employees, stating the proper developmental action to take, and, most importantly, to reward the employees for their efforts and to recognize the improvements they have made in their careers. Theron and Barkhuizen (2023) indicated that it is the norm for organisations to advance; they have to keep investing in their employees. Employees should appreciate the system for its intrinsic value, rather than for monetary consideration. Employees should recognise how the system demonstrates their strengths, how they have performed, the gaps that exist in their performance, and the milestones they reach in their careers. This value has to be more than just a monetary reward. Continuous improvement, derived from the value in the system, is, as Theron and Barkhuizen (2023) affirm, a hallmark of an organisation that effectively invests in its employees.

4.5.4 THEME 4: What best practices and innovative approaches can be recommended to enhance the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE?

Table 4: Theme, Sub-themes and Categories

Theme 4:	Sub-themes	Categories
4.5.4 What best practices and innovative approaches can be recommended to enhance the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE?	4.5.4.1 Innovative recruitment strategies	4.5.4.1.1 Strategic recruitment and attraction 4.5.4.1.2 Talent pipeline management 4.5.4.1.3 Structured onboarding programmes 4.5.4.1.4 Headhunting and Targeted Recruitment
	4.5.4.2 Training & Development	4.5.4.2.1 Limited access to training 4.5.4.2.2 Leadership development 4.5.4.2.3 Succession planning
	4.5.4.3 Employee Engagement	4.5.4.3.1 Inconsistent communication and feedback 4.5.4.3.3 Team-building activities

Theme 4: What best practices and innovative approaches can be recommended to enhance the talent management strategies of the conservation SOE?

The analysis indicates that there is an urgent necessity for organised and creative methods to be incorporated into the SOE's talent management system to enhance the level indicators in recruitment, development, and retention. Respondents commented that there is a lack of focus in the organisation on developing strategies to assist in the effective recruitment, skill enhancement, and retention of employees for the long term. The absence of effective onboarding, limited leadership training, and outdated HR processes also contributes to the organisation's inefficiency and decreased employee engagement. Recent research indicates that public sector institutions that incorporate systematised research-driven talent management strategies focused on adaptability in recruitment, leadership development frameworks and management of systems to sustain

learning perform better and have higher retention levels (Bussin 2023; Theron & Barkhuizen 2023).

The SOE can take advantage of best practices in the fields of enhanced recruitment systems, focused marketing, collaborations with service and research academic institutions, and improvement of internal developmental pathways. Engagement of employees, recognition, joint decision-making, and team building can also uplift employee culture and boost morale. In summary, the evidence indicates that the SOE's ability to attract, develop, and retain talent in a challenging conservation scenario is likely to be enhanced by systematic and appropriately coordinated development initiatives.

4.5.4.1 Sub-theme: Innovative recruitment strategies

The participants all recognised that recruitment was a long and outdated process that was not adequately supported or structured. The lack of an onboarding system creates ambiguity and confusion around roles and decreases levels of engagement early on. The literature also supports the significance of recruitment strategies that are aligned with the organisation's needs, competencies of the job, and competitiveness in the market (Govender & Bussin, 2023). A systematic onboarding process is essential in allowing employees to assimilate and become productive sooner. Furthermore, new best practices emphasise workforce pipeline management that incorporates partnerships with universities, youth programs, and professional associations to maintain a ready supply of appropriate talent (Mabaso, 2023). The findings indicate that adopting a structured and proactive recruitment approach would improve not only talent attraction but also contribute to reduced turnover and stronger organisational identity.

4.5.4.1.1 Category: Strategic recruitment and attraction

Without effective recruitment and branding strategies, organisations may lose relevant opportunities and fail to compete with highly funded conservation institutions. Research has indicated that branding an employer and recruitment marketing on digital platforms increases visibility and competition on various recruitment streams. (Maseko, 2023). Such examples illustrate the organisation's recruitment model, and the recruitment approach is likely more traditional than adaptive and responsive.

"*We cannot compete with SANParks or private reserves… nobody knows what we offer" (P7).*

"*We follow old procedures that take months by the time we finalise, the best candidates are gone," (P7)*

HR looks mainly at qualifications, not at what the person can contribute."(P4)

"The salary scales and benefits are old; that alone affects our image" (P7).

"Our salary scales are outdated and not competitive; we lose people to private companies easily," (P6)

"They look at degrees, not what a person can actually do," (P2),

"*Someone might meet all academic requirements but lack the right experience.*" (P2)

The researcher agrees with the participants and the literature in that recruitment ought to step out from the administrative confines and move towards strategic thinking. Also, the linkage of recruitment and talent attraction should not be considered in isolation in order to attract the appropriate skills to match the right job. This finding confirms the position argued by Collings and Mellahi in 2009, which proposes that effective talent management entails the active and deliberate efforts to identify and engagement of individuals who possess the potential to add strategic value. In the case of SOE, the recruitment system continues to be administrative rather than strategic because it is concerned with procedural correctness rather than talent optimisation. The evidence suggests the recruitment function of the organisation needs to shift from focusing on an administrative approach to recruitment with a reactive model that targets an organisation's talent to be strategically sourced.

4.5.4.1.2 Category: Talent pipeline management

Conservation scientists, technical specialists, and HR practitioners are also part of SOE's pipelines. This could mitigate over-dependence on outside recruitment and strengthen organisational continuity. The invisibility of talent is of concern and contributes to staff turnover.

"*We have capable people internally, but opportunities are not advertised for growth." (P5)*

"We do not have anything like a pipeline… people leave and no one replaces them" (P6).

"You can't compete for skills without planning ahead" (P7).

From the perspective of the participants, the researcher notes that the absence of a pipeline aggravates the skills drain and increases staff burnout. Furthermore, to improve the performance of others, a systematic approach for the organisation to identify untapped talent is essential to inspire them to heightened efficiency. Literature does

highlight the importance of managing pipelines through Internships, bursaries, and co-operation as a means to secure sustainable access to skills in scarce disciplines (Mukonza & Fikeni, 2022).

4.5.4.1.3 Category: Structured onboarding programmes

Having an oriented onboarding ensures that there is clarity, there is a reduction in early attrition, and new hires are able to integrate faster. Currently, SOE employees describe onboarding as being informal and inconsistent.

"*There's nothing structured… new employees just find their way" (P6).*
"We don't support employees when they join; they must figure it out themselves" (P7).

The researcher strongly agrees with the participants that onboarding or induction is inconsistent, which creates a gap and impairs the progress of new employees. Studies demonstrate that onboarding is an essential process that influences the degree of employee confidence, engagement, and commitment throughout the employee's first year (Theron & Barkhuizen, 2023).

4.5.4.1.4 Category: Headhunting and Targeted Recruitment

To the participants, exclusive recruitment and headhunting/specialised professional networking/digital outreach/signed partnerships with other industry participants were all suggestions of activities that would provide target recruitment aimed at acquiring the limited conservation and technical skills. This kind of approach is certainly a step in the right direction. Headhunting, as put by Collings *et al.* (2019), enables an organisation to "break the cycle of reactive recruitment" by building long-term talent pipelines, instead of just filling a vacancy. SOE has not updated its recruitment approach, thus decreasing its competitiveness in relation to other specialists in a globalised environment."

"*Other conservation bodies use LinkedIn and conferences to find experts; we should do the same" (*P3)
"*We should be headhunting conservation experts instead of waiting for people to apply,*" (P7)
"The system needs to target professionals directly, not just advertise and hope." (P6)

By this, the researcher agrees with the participants that there needs to be headhunting to create a demand for a skill. In knowledge-based industries, talent attraction should

blend digital approaches, professional relations, and employer branding (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Also, there needs to be a positive change for successful recruitment beyond the conventional manual processes. The element of talent acquisition is not seamlessly embedded in digital media and automated recruitment. Veldsman (2021) emphasises that with recruitment, the cultural fit and efficiency improve with the digital and network.

4.5.4.2 Sub-theme: Training & Development

The gaps in the organisation pertaining to learning and development were the most. The absence of funded training, leadership development, and the inconsistent application of the results of skills audits were mentioned numerous times. The improvement of leadership would undoubtedly strengthen the managerial competence, ensure uniformity in decision-making, and reinforce the organisational culture. Succession planning is an integral part of modern talent management; however, the SOE still lacks consideration of this aspect despite the ongoing turnover and acting appointments. The literature cites that the lack of developing internal successors is costly, creates gaps in operational continuity, and impairs overall performance (Bussin, 2023). It seems that the findings warranted the investments in development trajectories that are planned systematically and are unambiguous to result in talent sustainability and growth of the organisation.

"You apply for courses, but HR says funds are limited." (P7)
"Training used to be part of our performance goals, but now it's hardly implemented," (P3)

4.5.4.2.1 Category: Limited access to training

The participants have highlighted non accessibility, non-funding, and missing consistency of training as issues. There is always an issue of insufficient training and development funding. There's no escaping the fact that training is still compulsory for certain competencies, such as technical, managerial, and compliance. Participants' 'no training budget' complaints were consistent. The development of a comprehensive training plan promotes stagnant motivation and dwindling innovative capacities, and is missing. As stated by Armstrong and Taylor (2020), the positive correlation between human capital development and organisational performance and retention is evident.

"We submit requests, but HR says there's no money." (P1)
"Training opportunities have reduced significantly; it's always about cost-cutting."(P4)
"There's nothing… people pay for themselves" (P7).

“Training is not implemented; it’s just a paper exercise” (P6).
“The same people attend workshops repeatedly, while others are overlooked.”(P5)

The participant states that the researcher concurs with the participants that there should be training and development for every organisation’s employees, which correlates with the PMDS employees’ development plans. Employees and their supervisor, due to there being a performance gap, identify individual development gaps, but the budget shortcomings cause those needs to be unmet. As pointed out by Armstrong and Taylor (2020), there is a fundamental place within talent management for training and development, especially in cases where a performance deficit is likely due to the absence of relevant skills. This scenario presents a threat to the employee and the organisation, in terms of performance, talent management and retention, as well as organisational competitiveness. There is continuous learning theory in the literature, which states that it broadens the competence and flexibility as well as the performance of the organisation (Kgatla & Schultz, 2022).

4.5.4.2.2 Category: Leadership development

Autocratic leadership and the instability of management were observed to be obstacles to positive working functioning. The evidence thus begs for a renewed focus on both learning and development plans to recognise the link between individual learning and organisational goals.

“*Training happens only when there’s a crisis or audit requirement,” (P2)*
“*There’s no structured plan for developing conservation or management skills*.” (P6)
“Leadership just comes and says this is what must happen” (P7).
“When park managers change every time, everything collapses” (P6).

As it has been noted by the respondents, the researcher agrees that the development of leadership is a paramount priority for the progress of any business. Collings and Mellahi (2009 support this as well, as organisations completely fail to nurture development, they unavoidably promote attrition of the more volatile workforces. The inability of leaders to be mentored, while the other truth is that the whole setting is impacted by the poor, unteachable leaders, highlights that leadership development is a critical area of focus for the senior managerial positions. There has been a great gap that needs to be filled by head of departments to develop leadership, as it offers stability and emotional intelligence and decision-making based on ethics, as noted by Ngwenya and Pelser (2023).

4.5.4.2.3 Category: Succession planning and career progression

Not having succession planning causes prolonged gaps in acting roles and operational voids. Employees feel there is no movement in their careers, and there are few promotions. Not having defined pathways for careers causes disengagement and turnover. One sustained thematic element across the interviews was the absence of succession planning. Literature concurs with the need of having succession planning for the sustainability of talent.

"We don't have a plan for replacing critical people."(P3)

"There is no succession plan; people act forever" (P7).

"There's no clear path for growth; people stay in the same position for years. (P3)

"Skills are not replaced; we just lose people" (P6).

"Acting roles don't lead to confirmation; it's demotivating." (P7)

"*When someone resigns or retires, we start from scratch; there's no one ready to take over," (P6)*

The researcher aligns with the participants, stating that there is a lack of promotion and succession planning, which is a practice that demotivates employees. This lack of planning can result in the firm being overly reliant on external hires. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) state that employees are offered acting roles, which is a temporary measure, and is often the only option provided. The literature stresses that succession planning is an essential component of talent management. Effective planning improves outcomes and mitigates potential risks.

Participants described a workplace scenario where there was a lack of employee engagement, there was no participation of employees in communication, and recognition of the employees was absent. Engagement is a core area of concern in talent management; the engagement factors influence employee morale, performance, and retention (Barkhuizen & Ngcobo, 2022). Employees' voice is captured through feedback systems; organisations aim to address problems and build trust. Recognition systems strengthen the behaviours and motivation that organisations want to see, and team-building activities promote cohesion, collaboration, and cultural alignment. The literature suggests that employees who are engaged are more likely to show commitment and are more likely to demonstrate improved service delivery, and that makes engagement a crucial component to the public-sector organisations that are resource-constrained (Mafini, 2023). The current state of engagement in the organisation would be of

paramount significance in enhancing the morale of the employees and the development of a cohesive organisational culture.

4.5.4.3.2 Category: Inconsistent communication and feedback

The participants also noted that feedback is infrequent, there is a lack of structure in the feedback that is provided, and feedback is rarely acted upon. The absence of a system that allows for two-way communication perpetuates the absence of trust. Poor morale and apathy are consistently associated with recognition gaps and poor communication. These indicate a lack of a system for internal communication and feedback, which serves as a motivational tool. The absence of well-structured systems for engagement in this SOE creates a culture that is apathetic and exacerbates the perceived distance that exists in the hierarchy between management and employees.

"*People feel invisible*." (P1)

"It feels like nobody listens. We raise issues, but nothing changes." (P5)

"It's just one-way communication… emails only" (P7).

"We hardly get feedback even when we perform well, nobody says anything." (P7)

"We talk among ourselves… there's no formal platform" (P6).

"Consultation only happens at the top we're not involved," (P4)

There's no forum where staff can raise issues." (P6)

The researcher reached a conclusion after accepting that participants' comments acknowledged communication and employee engagement. Armstrong (2020) found that morale is increased by recognition of employee contributions when appreciation and continued participation are provided. Employees become silent, and when that happens, it is a representation of the engagement climate. Employees are disengaged when they no longer believe it is worthwhile to contribute (Veldsman, 2021). Engagement is lost when employees feel they cannot influence the outcome of their work.

4.5.4.3.3 Category: Team-building activities

Team-building activities help build trust, cooperation, and relationships. According to the participants, such activities existed in the past but have since discontinued.

"*Before, they used to motivate us with events… now there's nothing" (P7).*

"We need things that bring people together again" (P6).

The researcher is in alignment with both the participants and the existing body of literature. The employees and the literature indicate how certain organisational practices fail and how organisational stability can be restored, employees can be helped to grow, and organisational pride can be rebuilt. This is consistent with what Tau and Zhanda (2024) indicated, that there are significant improvements in organisational morale, trust, and clarity in goals with the incorporation of team building. In the same vein, Obiekwe, Mobolade, and Akinade (2023) stated that there is better cohesion and improved workplace relationships that lead to a more positively interdependent and enthusiastic workforce with the introduction of framed team building. The findings from these studies validate the consistent need to re-establish structured frequency of team building activities to address the seamless integration of disparate organisational processes and revive organisational systems and practices.

4.6 EMERGENT GAPS

Out of the four broad themes that were already established, additional themes were also revealed in the interviews that were not necessarily predefined in the research design. These results enrich the body of knowledge on talent management within the hardware conservation state-owned enterprise (SOE) and provide insights into the organisational systems and practices that have previously been ignored.

The emergent themes include:

1. Lack of Digital Talent Management Tools
2 Limited Leadership Development and Coaching
3. Weak Organisational Communication and Feedback Culture

4.6.1 Absence of Digital Talent Management Tools

One of the unexpected findings is the lack of digital systems to assist the management of HR and talent processes. Participants noted that most of the organisation's HR work is still manual data entry and paper-driven. This lack of digitalisation limits efficiency, transparency, and data-driven decision-making.

"Everything is still done by hand, from performance reviews to training records," (P4)

"We don't even have an online system to track employee development." (P2)

Veldsman (2021) and Armstrong (2020) advocate that digital systems of HR provide workforce planning, performance monitoring, and talent analytical insights. The SOE cannot track trends related to employee performance and retention risks, and this gaps

the organisation's data. The absence of this organisation data gaps the potential appeal of the organisation to young, digitally proficient members of the workforce. These data gaps undermine the appeal of the organisation to the digitally proficient part of the workforce. This brings a need for the organisation's digital transformation of HR as the foundation of effective talent management.

4.6.2 Limited Leadership Development and Coaching

Participants noted that there is a lack of structure and order when it comes to prioritising the development of leadership. That would mean that management roles are given based on tenure or expertise instead of the ability to lead. Without being trained to be leaders, managers are unable to motivate or lead their subordinates.

"People are promoted to management but never trained to lead," (P7)
"We don't have coaching or mentorship; everyone just figures it out." (P5)

According to Armstrong and Taylor (2020), embedding a performance culture requires a certain approach to leadership development, and to sustain that culture, the performance mechanisms must be engaged. Regarding this, Collings *et al.* (2019) showed that there is a direct relationship between leadership capability and employee retention, as well as the performance of the organisation. The absence of mentoring or coaching initiatives within this specific SOE sector institutes a leadership gap and weak succession pipelines. This finding highlights the necessity to focus on the development of comprehensive leadership structures.

4.6.3 Weak Organisational Communication and Feedback Culture

The final emergent insight was centred on the absence of a strong communication and feedback culture. Many participants felt that the organisation's communication was top-down and reactive. The absence of that dialogue weakens trust and transparency, and it disengages employees.

"We only hear things when decisions are already made," (P1)
"There's no feedback from management; we're left guessing." (P3)

The author concurs with P3, as it is a matter of communication, feedback, and decision-making that has a remarkable impact on establishment success. Employees should be informed of communication – even hard messages – as balanced communication enables stability, trust, and engagement. The role of communication has been noted in

the literature as a determinant of the efficacy of organisations. In that respect, Armstrong (2020) argued that continuity of communication strengthens alignment and engagement, and Veldsman (2021) argued that unrestricted communication promotes a sense of inclusion and belonging. In this SOE, the dysfunction in communication loops fosters uncertainty and disengagement, worsening the issues identified in other themes, such as morale and retention. Addressing this gap can be one of the steps taken to enhance a culture of trust and a participative culture in the workplace.

4.6.4 Summary of emergent gaps

The absence of succession planning, digital HR tools, leadership development, and effective communication are indicators of gaps beyond the normal constraints of an HR setup; thus, the findings are unexpected. They demonstrate where the organisation can strengthen its strategic capabilities, update the HR functions, and establish an effective talent sustainable ecosystem. The accumulation of these gaps provides great opportunities for further research and applied work within the conservation public sector.

4.7 SUMMARY OF KEY EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Thematic analysis was carried out in Excel, and the interrelation of four themes was highlighted to tell us how skilled practitioners go through talent management in the institution.

Table 4.2 Summary of key findings

Theme	Summary of Insight
Theme	**Summary of Insight**
Theme 1: Challenges and Factors Affecting Talent Attraction	Attraction is constrained by staff turnover, leadership instability, political interference, outdated salary structures, and weak employer branding. Factors such as career development, internal progression, and competitive packages can support attraction if strengthened.
Theme 2: Management Practices Influencing Engagement, Satisfaction and Retention	Weak communication, limited recognition, and inconsistent decision-making undermine engagement and satisfaction. Retention is weakened by unclear progression, job insecurity, and lack of structured mentorship.

Theme	Summary of Insight
Theme 3: Impact of Talent Management on Organisational Performance	Talent gaps, prolonged acting appointments, and misaligned HR practices adversely affect productivity, service delivery, culture and goal achievement. Strong performance management and recognition remain absent.
Theme 4: Best Practices and Required Improvements	Participants recommend modernising recruitment, building talent pipelines, offering structured onboarding, expanding leadership development, improving training access, and enhancing communication and engagement systems.

4.7.1 Synthesis of Findings

The work and the conservation mission they serve excite employees. However, the systemic challenges of the organisation are resource constraints, inconsistent leadership, and, most notably, growth, which make retention difficult. The strength of the organisation lies in the intrinsic motivation of its people, and this motivation will strengthen retention if adequate systems are put in place. Supportive leadership, alongside a valued culture of professional development, will further sustain motivation.

4.8 SUMMARY

This chapter presented and analysed the findings derived from seven semi-structured interviews conducted within the SOE operating in a conservation context. The analysis was guided by the research questions and informed by the relevant literature discussed in Chapter Two. Using thematic analysis, key themes and emerging insights were identified regarding the functioning of talent management and the challenges experienced within the organisation. Particular attention was given to how these challenges manifest within the conservation environment, where specialised skills, resource constraints, and organisational mandates influence talent management practices. These insights highlight aspects that are distinctive to talent management within the conservation sector. The conclusions and recommendations of the study are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes by reflecting on the overall purpose, process and outcomes of the research. Answering the guiding research questions, this chapter summarises the study, provides key empirical findings, and concludes on the key objectives. The chapter also offers actionable recommendations on the talent management approaches of the conservation-oriented SOEs and suggests additional areas for research.

This study investigated the talent attraction, development, and retention of the professionals at a conservation SOE in the North West Province. In a field area characterised by limited specialised conservation expertise, the effective management of organisational talent is a requirement for the overall performance of the organisation and continued organisational viability in the long term.

5.2 PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

To assess the effectiveness of the talent management strategies employed by the conservation SOE in North West Province to attract and retain a talented workforce in a competitive labour market.

5.2.1 Secondary Objectives

- To examine and understand the specific challenges and obstacles to the successful/unsuccessful implementation of talent management strategies in addressing the problem of retention of skilled professionals that the conservation SOE encountered.
- To document the perception of employees and managers, as informed by their experiences, on the influence of talent management practices on engagement, job satisfaction, and retention.
- To understand how the SOE's talent management strategies influenced the performance, service delivery, and competitive advantage of the organisation in the conservation sector.
- To suggest how talent management strategies can be improved based on qualitative findings and best practices within the sector.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The primary focus of the study was to examine the talent management strategies of a conservation SOE in the North West Province regarding the attraction, development, and retention of skilled professionals. The qualitative findings that were generated through thematic analysis offered a substantial understanding of the ways in which the organisation's practices align with the more sophisticated theories on talent management.

The purpose of the study was to examine employee and managerial perceptions. This purpose is stated by Collings and Mellahi (2022), who state that talent management is about the integration of the attraction, development, and retention of employees into a unified strategy. The response to the study demonstrates that while the SOE studied understands the importance of talent management, there are structural and contextual factors that impede the full range of these practices. This confirms the scholarly position that talent management is particularly challenging in the public sector, given the bureaucratic structure and the resource and governance challenges that are typical of these contexts (Sparrow *et al.*, 2023).

5.3.1 To examine and understand the specific challenges and obstacles to the successful/unsuccessful implementation of talent management strategies in addressing the problem of retention of skilled professionals that the conservation SOE encountered.

Reports from the participants included leadership instability, budget limitations, political interference, and a high rate of staff turnover, which constituted the first objective. Govender and Busing (2022) argue that state-owned enterprises are susceptible to numerous weaknesses in human resources, which adversely affect their ability to attract and compete for talent. Weakness in governance and financial constraints type of systemic deficiencies are among the various themes from the research that are in alignment with the literature that outline systemic deficiencies that the Public Sector has to address in order to start building sustainable talent management frameworks.

5.3.2 To document the perception of employees and managers, as informed by their experiences, on the influence of talent management practices on engagement, job satisfaction, and retention.

The second objective was achieved through comprehensive insights regarding performance management, career advancement, company culture, and communication. In line with Armstrong (2020) on employee engagement, it was determined that

employees have a strong focus on engagement that is linked to affective commitment and retention and is also on retention. Participants' reflections regarding retention and engagement also indicated that their HR practices, particularly regarding development, were applied in a limited and inconsistent manner, resulting in an adverse effect on their retention and engagement, which aligns with recent retention research (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2021).

5.3.3 To understand how the SOE's talent management strategies influenced the performance, service delivery, and competitive advantage of the organisation in the conservation sector.

The third objective was assured through the perspectives of participants from the SOE whose service delivery, productivity and operational continuity were adversely impacted through the lack of effective HR processes. These findings are congruent with the Resource-Based View that posits human capital is a primary source of competitive advantage and organisational capacity (Nyberg *et al.*, 2018). The study ascertained that the SOE's inability to retain skilled personnel in conservation severely undermines the institutional memory, thereby stalling the conservation initiatives that are of a long-term nature. This is one of the explicit linkages of talent manging to organisational outcomes that the RBV literature seeks to address.

5.3.4 To suggest how talent management strategies can be improved based on qualitative findings and best practices within the sector.

The last objective of creating recommendations to improve talent management practices was built from themes identified and literature that promotes systems of integrated career progression, continuity of leadership, digitalisation of HR management, and improved governance. Such proposed actions respond to recent calls targeted at public sector institutions to modernise HR functions to focus on evidence-based decision making, strategic management of the staff establishment, and managerial accountability (Chigudu & Maphosa, 2023). The major focus of the study was on understanding the concept of talent management in the conservation SOE. The results from the study respond to the evidence-based understanding of the concept. The results add to the body of literature and provide recommendations to enhance the stability of the workforce and the performance of the public sector in conservation.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations will be presented as follows. The recommendations are structured in three areas: for the conservation SOE, for employees, and more recommendations to future research.

5.4.1 Table 5.1: Summary of Recommendations for the Conservation SOE

Category	Recommendation	Description / Justification
Recommendations to the SOE	Develop an integrated talent management strategy	Formulate a comprehensive framework aligning recruitment, development, PMDS, and retention to organisational objectives. Supported by Collings & Mellahi (2022).
	Stabilise governance and minimise political interference	Separate governance oversight from HR operations to ensure fairness, consistency, and improved organisational credibility.
	Modernise HR through digital transformation	Introduce digital systems for recruitment, performance management, workforce planning, and training to improve efficiency and data accuracy (Armstrong, 2020).
	Strengthen employer branding and organisational reputation	Actively market the SOE's mandate, development opportunities, and conservation impact to attract skilled professionals.
	Allocate protected HR budgets for talent initiatives	Ring-fence funds for training, recruitment, succession planning, and development to ensure continuity and reduce reliance on ad-hoc financial approvals.
	Implement structured succession planning	Formalise succession pathways for critical posts to reduce acting positions and strengthen organisational stability.
	Improve leadership continuity and stability	Ensure stability in senior positions such as the Board and CEO to enhance strategy execution and organisational confidence.

Category	Recommendation	Description / Justification
	Adopt participatory and transparent leadership styles	Promote open communication, employee involvement, and trust-building to strengthen engagement and culture.
	Strengthen performance management culture	Ensure PMDS is applied fairly and consistently, with managers trained to give constructive feedback and support development.
	Promote a supportive organisational culture	Model respectful and ethical behaviours that reinforce fairness, recognition, and employee well-being.
	Invest in leadership development programmes	Provide training in emotional intelligence, coaching, conflict resolution, and strategic HRM to prepare leaders to manage talent effectively.
Recommendations to Employees	Actively participate in development opportunities	Engage in available training, mentorship, and PMDS discussions to support personal growth and performance.
	Engage constructively in communication platforms	Raise concerns through appropriate channels and participate in engagement structures to strengthen collaboration.
	Prioritise personal skills development	Pursue short courses, professional memberships, and self-directed learning to enhance technical and career competencies.
	Foster teamwork and internal knowledge sharing	Collaborate with colleagues, share operational insights, and support team cohesion, particularly in resource-constrained environments.
	Maintain professionalism and ethical conduct	Uphold standards of respect, commitment, and accountability to strengthen culture and organisational performance.

5.4.2 Recommendations for future research

The study identified several issues that require more research focus. These recommendations are intended to aid the exploration of talent management in conservation-oriented public institutions and, more broadly, assist the improvement of the organisation at the sector level.

1. Comparative studies across other conservation SOEs and provincial entities

This study evaluated a single SOE, being in the North West Province. In this regard, future studies should include talent management practice comparisons in other conservation entities in the province and at the national level in order to detect commonalities, contextual variances, and cross-sector challenges to improve the external validity of the research, in addition to informing national policies.

2. Longitudinal studies on the impact of leadership stability on talent outcomes

Leadership instability was confirmed as the primary obstacle to effective talent attraction, development, and retention. A longitudinal outlook on the issue will help the researchers understand the impact of governance changes, board-switching, and executive turnover on organisational performance and HR outcomes over time.

3. Investigating digital HR transformation in public-sector conservation organisations

The findings confirmed that digital talent management tools were implemented. Further studies should focus on the feasibility, readiness, and impact of digitalisation on each SOE HR process, including e-recruitment, electronic PMDS systems, data analytics, and digital training management systems.

4. Deeper probe into political interference and governance dynamics

Participants indicated that recruitment processes and appointments, as well as the direction taken by organisations, are influenced by politics. A targeted examination of the mechanisms, consequences and the possible policy containment of political interference could generate the required understanding of the phenomena needed for the reforms of the public sector.

5. The exploration of employee wellbeing, psychological safety and organisational trust

The results indicated that employees are not listened to, appreciated and supported. The relationship of psychological safety and trust to the retention of staff, particularly in emotionally and physically demanding work, needs further investigation.

6. Effectiveness of succession planning in resource-constrained SOEs

As there are currently no models of succession in planning and succession planning, there is potential for a valuable area of research to be succession planning for public conservation institutions to develop models for low-cost, context-specific succession planning in the public conservation sector.

7. Training and development models for field-based conservation staff evaluation

Among these research and literature are administrative and managerial personnel. In the examination of these frameworks, there are gaps in effective development and frameworks for field rangers, technical staff, and ecologists, whose skills are directly related to the development of desired outcomes in conservation.

8. Examining the relationship between organisational culture change and service delivery

Weak organisational culture was the core finding; therefore, they should research to explore the relationship between culture change and conservation activity, compliance, and strategic delivery in SOEs.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

The evidence indicates that for conservation-oriented SOEs to effectively manage their talents, there should be a change in the structure and a cultural change to people-oriented leadership. The SOE responsible for conservation demonstrated a commitment to their mandate of conserving nature; however, systemic barriers regarding effective management and retention of skilled personnel, which are financial, political, and procedural boundaries, were evident.

Having staff remain intrinsically motivated to conserve should remain a strong point; however, such commitment will likely fade without some real opportunities for growth and strong management. This aligns with a common theme in public sector HRM (Bryman, 2021; Mohuba, 2023) that chronic retention only occurs within organisational settings where deadweight accountability is offset with some adaptive organisational flexibility.

These findings only further strengthen the notion that the absence of public sector organisational settings in the study of talent management is the absence of this organisational determinant. Talent management will become central in the public sector as a function of organisational sustainability, particularly where there is an ethical culture.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the findings provided significant insights, some limitations should be considered. Future studies should consider broader provincial coverage or a mixed-method approach.

- **Contextual scope:** This study focused only on a single organisation within the North West Province. This allowed for depth and a greater sense of nuance within the area of study, but this may affect how the results may be generalised to different scenarios (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).
- **Sample size:** There were only nine participants in the study, aiming to provide some depth to the exploration of each person's individual story as opposed to depth. This also means that the voices heard represent a very select group of strong, valuable, but also very ill stellar perspectives (Creswell and Poth, 2018).
- **Researcher positionality:** Being an insider offered a valuable understanding but also required care to remain neutral. Reflexivity and peer review helped manage this balance (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).
- **Analytical tool:** Using Excel instead of specialised software like NVivo meant more manual effort. However, this also encouraged closer engagement with the data and a more intimate understanding of the narratives.
- **Temporal limitation:** The findings reflect a snapshot in time. Changes in leadership, policy or resources after data collection may influence the issues discussed (Bryman, 2021).

Despite these boundaries, the analysis provides an authentic and meaningful account of employees' lived experiences within the Conservation SOE.

5.7 ANTICIPATED CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This paper is expected to make a meaningful difference in the scholarship and practical improvement of talent management within conservation-oriented SOEs. The paper is aimed at contributing to the little-documented analyses of the experiences of employees and managers of a conservational SOE in the North West Province by extending the academically and empirically restricted craftsmanship of talent management in the public

sector conservation field, which is often sidelined in favour of the corporate and general public management fields.

The findings of the study reveal how leadership deficiencies, limited resources, organisational culture, and human capital outcomes interact to perpetuate a vicious cycle of ineffective talent management. The study has practical implications by contributing recommendations that may assist the leaders of the SOEs, HR practitioners, and policy makers to design better recruitment, performance management, employee engagement and succession planning systems. The recognition of specific critical gaps, for instance, the absence of digital HR practices, inadequate career pathways, and governance influence on talent outcomes, lays the groundwork for further advocacy and the professional and systematic restoration of the HR functions in the public sector, which is under-resourced. Ultimately, the research seeks the enhancement of organisational performance, workforce consistency, and enduring viability of the conservation sector.

5.8 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the author summarised the entire study, posed the research questions, and brought together the findings from which conclusions and recommendations were drawn. The research revealed that although employees within the Conservation SOE are highly purpose-driven, there are still systemic barriers, such as financial, bureaucratic, and leadership, that continue to erode the ability to retain talent and ultimately impact the organisation's performance.

By integrating people-centric leadership, pathways for advancement that are clear and visible, and agile human resource systems, the SOE will be positioned to enhance the human resource asset and accomplish the goal of caring for the environment. Talent management, when done strategically and ethically, goes beyond being a mere function of management and has the ability to drive the organisation towards excellence while being sustainable.

5.9 OVERALL SUMMARY

Completing this mini-dissertation has been both a challenging and rewarding journey. I deeply appreciated the opportunity to grow academically, sharpen my research skills, and learn more about myself in the process. I am sincerely grateful to my supervisor for the guidance, encouragement, and support that made this work possible. This experience has inspired me to consider pursuing a PhD, with the hope of building on this research and contributing meaningfully to the field.

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ANNEXURE A: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

20/02/2025

DEAR PARTICIPANT

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to take part in a research study that forms part of a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this study. Please ask the researcher or person explaining the research to you any questions about any part of this study that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you might be involved. Also, your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to say no to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part now.

This study has been approved by the NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the North-West University and other international ethical guidelines applicable to this study.

Title of the project: Exploring Talent Management strategies for skilled professionals in a conservation state-owned enterprise, North West Province

Institution: NWU Business School

Ethics Reference Number: NWU-00667-25-A 4

Names and contact details of project staff

	Supervisor	Researcher
Title, name & surname	Prof Anne Marie Pelser	Ms Charlene Jacobs
Full Names	Anna, Magrieta, Fredrika, Pelser	Charlene
Function in Project	Principle Investigator	Researcher
Telephone	0823756636	082 742 6827

What is this research study all about?

The study aims to understand the effectiveness of talent management approaches and their impact on employee engagement, retention, and organisational performance. Your insights as a participant will contribute to a deeper understanding of how organisations attract, develop, and retain talent.

Why have you been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate in this research study because you fall into at least one of the following categories:

❖ Participants must be current permanent employees of the SOE in conservation or affiliated conservation organisations operating under the SOE framework

❖ Participants should have at least three years of experience in conservation, talent management, or human resource-related roles within the SOE.

❖ Eligible participants must be directly or indirectly involved in human resource functions, recruitment, retention strategies, or workforce development within the organisation.

❖ Mid-level and senior managers overseeing talent acquisition and retention strategies are prioritised for inclusion due to their strategic insight (Cappelli & Keller, 2017).

❖ Participants should be familiar with existing HR policies, challenges, and practices in talent management within the Conservation SOE

❖ Participants must voluntarily consent to participate in the study and be willing to engage in in-depth interviews or focus group discussions.

What will be expected of you?

You will be expected to:

❖ Participate in a 45 – 60min semi-structured interview with the researcher at a suitable time and private area without interruptions that is convenient for both parties via an online platform. This will be scheduled by the researcher once approved by the NWU ethics committee.

❖ Respond to the questions in an open and honest manner.

❖ Inform the supervisor should you feel or experience any form of discomfort or distress during the research process and inform the supervisor if you at times feel the need to terminate your involvement in the research process.

Declaration by participant

By selecting the option below, I agree to take part in the research study titled: **Exploring Talent Management strategies for skilled professionals in a conservation state-owned enterprise, North West Province**

Compliance with POPI Act:

In compliance with the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act, the confidentiality of all participants will be strictly maintained. Participants' identities will be kept anonymous, and they will be assigned a unique code known only to the researcher. All research data and files containing participant information will be securely stored in a locked cabinet, with access restricted to the researcher using a special code. After three years, these files will be responsibly discarded to ensure long-term protection of participants' personal information.

Furthermore, to maintain transparency and foster trust among participants, the purpose and procedures of the study will be clearly communicated to all involved and no incentive will be given to participants.

I the participant hereby agree that:

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that as I have completed the study anonymously it will not be possible to remove any information I have provided, as you will not be able to identify me in any way.
3. I understand that individuals from the University may look at anonymous research data collected during the study, to ensure that the study is conducted appropriately.
4. I agree that my anonymous information can be shared with individuals from the project team detailed above.
5. The researcher will attend to the POPI Act and keep the participant anonymous at all times.

I agree to take part in the above study:

Yes	No

Declaration by researcher

I [C JACOBS] declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to the participant, with code ……...
- I did/did not use an interpreter
- I encouraged the participant to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that the participant adequately understands all aspects of the research, as described above.
- I am satisfied that the participant had time to discuss it with others if they wished to do so.

Signed at: _____ on

CharleneJacobs

C JACOBS

Signature of researcher

ANNEXURE B: DATA COLLECTION TOOL

DATA COLLECTION TOOL: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Study Title: Exploring Talent Management Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Skilled Professionals in a Conservation State-Owned Entity in the North West Province: A Qualitative Study

Introduction to Participants:

Thank you for partaking in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to comprehend your insights and experiences concerning the talent management practices used in the organisation to attract, develop, and retain high-calibre specialists. Your observations will help in making recommendations for better workforce stability and organisational performance.

All responses will be treated confidentially, and no finding data will be made available in the final report. You may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any point in time.

Estimated Duration: 45–60 minutes

Section A: Background Information

1. Would you like to tell me your present job function in the organisation?
2. What is your years of service working in the organisation, and what is your job function?
3. Please share your background or experience in conservation, human resources, or management?
4. How conversant are you with the organisation's talent or human resource management strategy?

Section B: Talent Management Strategies

(Main Research Question: What is the talent management strategy employed in recruiting and retaining talented professionals?)

5. What are definite plans/strategies/policies the organisation uses to recruit talented professionals?
6. What undertakings or procedures are applied to retain these professionals upon employment?
7. How effective do you believe these plans/ strategies are at reaching their specific objectives?
8. How aligned are the talent management strategies with the mission and strategic objectives of the organisation in conservation and tourism?

Section C: Implementation Challenges to Talent Management Strategies

(Secondary Research Question 1: What are the challenges to implementation and what determines success or failure?)

9. What application challenges has the organisation confronted in its talent management strategies?
10. How do financial cutbacks or constrained budgets influence recruitment, training, and retention?
11. How do organisational culture, government, or leadership style affect the effectiveness of talent management?
12. In your assessment have external factors (e.g., political interference, policy changes, or labour market competition) affected the ability of the organisation to attract or retain staff with skills?
13. How does the organisation react to these challenges?

Section D: Impact on Employee Engagement, Satisfaction, and Retention
(Secondary Research Question 2: How do talent management practices impact engagement, satisfaction, and retention?)
14. Can you please describe generally employee engagement and morale within the organisation?
15. What features of the organisation's HR or talent practices contribute most to job satisfaction?
16. In your opinion, what leads to disconnection or staff turnover?
17. How does the organisation support career development, recognition, or professional progress?
18. In your experience, how do these practices influence employees' stay or leave?

Section E: Impact on Organisational Performance and Sustainability
(Secondary Research Question 3: What effect does talent management strategy have on performance and competitive advantage?)
19. In what way does talent management affect the overall delivery or performance by the organisation?
20. Is skill quality expert retention a thought in the attractiveness and sustainability of the organisation? Why?
21. Provide some instances of circumstances where good (or bad) talent management had an outcome on project results or organisational goals?

Section F: Best Practices and Recommendations
(Secondary Research Question 4: What innovation or best practice can assist in further talent management?)

22. In your experience, what talent management practices have been successful within here within this organisation?

23. Are there innovative or other different methods that you think could enhance attraction and retention?

24. What would you suggest to improve the organisation's overall talent management system?

Section G: Closing Question

25. Would you like to add on some other means the organisation provides, manages, or retains its excellent professionals?

Conclusion:

Thank you for availing yourself, time and contribution. Your answers will support in attaining a better understanding of talent management practices and their repercussions. In case you wish to reflect further or would like to obtain an outline of what has been learned through the study, please let me know.

Ethical Notes for the Researcher:

•Obtain written informed consent before the interview begins.

•Provide anonymity and voluntary participation of the participants.

•Employ an audio recorder (with permission) to ensure accurate transcription.

•Secure the storage of data and use pseudonyms for all the respondents.

ANNEXURE C: CONSENT LETTER FROM COMPANY

NWU BUSINESS SCHOOL

20 FEBRUARY 2025

GOODWILL PERMISSION: A STUDY CONDUCTED AT NORTH WEST PARKS AND TOURISM BOARD (NWPTB)

I herewith wish to request your permission for NWPTB to participate in this research, which involves conducting a research survey with HR professionals, employees in conservation. Prior to granting permission, please acquaint yourself with the information below.
The details of the project are as follows:

TITLE OF THE PROJECT:
Exploring Talent Management Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Skilled Professionals: A Qualitative Study in a Conservation SOE in North West Province

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Prof Anna-Marie Pelser
ADDRESS: 110 Thabo Mbeki Way, Potchefstroom, 2520
CONTACT NUMBER: 0823756636

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MBA-Student: Charlene Jacobs
ADDRESS: 3604 Maroela street, Mafikeng, 2745
CONTACT NUMBER: 082 742 6827

Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS-REC)
Chairperson: Prof Diana Bezuidenhout-Viljoen
Committee administrative coordinator: Ms. Diana Bezuidenhout-Viljoen
This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee.

ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER

[NWU-XXXXX-XX-xx]

What is this research about?

This study will enhance existing knowledge by offering insights into talent management strategies within conservation SOEs

Participants

Participants who will be selected will fall into one of the following categories:

- HR professionals in talent management
- Employees in Conservation
- Middle and senior Managers

What is expected of the participants?

Participants will be expected to:

- Participate in a 45 – 60 min semi-structured interview with the researcher at a suitable time and private area without interruptions that is convenient for both parties via an online platform. This will be scheduled by the researcher once approved by the NWU Ethics Committee.
- Respond to the questions in an open and honest manner.
- Inform the supervisor should you feel or experience any form of discomfort or distress during the research process and inform the supervisor if you at times feel the need to terminate your involvement in the research process.

Benefits to the participants

This research study intends to give participants a voice to reveal, explain and reflect on their position/role. No monetary reward shall be made available for participation in the study. They will however be furnished with a two-page communique on the outcomes of the study that they can utilize to enhance their growth and development in their area of expertise and the organisation.

Risks involved for participants

Participation in this study does not create any physical risk to participants as the study does not involve any physical activities or experiments. We, however, have identified certain ethical principles that shall be always maintained to prevent any damage to participants. The focus of these principals will be to protect the dignity of participants and keep all records provided private and confidential.

Confidentiality and protection of identity

Participants will be assigned a unique participant ID. The interview will be recorded and saved with reference to the ID, but data collected shall be regarded as confidential and will not be shared with any 3rd party that is not directly involved in the research process. Personal details of participants and their direct input to the research study shall not be made public. All records of the research shall be kept for a retention period and destroyed by an appropriate means. The findings of the study will be made public however will not contain any raw data that might incriminate certain individuals. All records will be managed in accordance with POPIA guidelines. Nor the organisation or the participants will be exposed. Files with data will be locked with a secret code and files will be disposed of after three years.

Dissemination of findings

The findings concluded in the study will be for academic purposes and will only be utilized to add to the current body of available knowledge.

If you have any further questions or inquiries regarding participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

DECLARATION BY THE RELEVANT RESPONSIBLE PERSON:

By signing below, I agree to give permission for the research to take place with the identified participants in the study entitled:

Exploring Talent Management Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Skilled Professionals: A Qualitative Study in a Conservation SOE in North West Province

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of the participants in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and participants will not be pressurised to take part.
- Participants may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- Participants may be asked to leave the research process before it is completed, if the researcher feels it is in their best interests, or if they do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Please tick the appropriate sentence:

I am willing to allow staff members of my organisation to take part in this study ..... ✓ 2025/02/27

I am not willing to allow staff members of my organisation to take part in this study .....

Marye ..... Charlene Jacobs .....

MANAGER OF ORGANISATION **STUDENT**

2025/02/27 .....

DATE **DATE**

ANNEXURE D: ETHICS APPROVAL

Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za
Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-484
Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

23 June 2025

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)** on 23 June 2025 , the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-REC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title:	Exploring Talent Management Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Skilled Professionals in a Conservation SOE in North West Province		
Study leader/Supervisor (Principal investigator/Researcher:	Prof A. Pelser	**University no.:**	21707669
Student:	C. Jacobs	**University no.:**	21188696

Ethics number:	**N**	**W**	**U**	**-**	0	0	6	6	7	**-**	**2**	**5**	**-**	A	**4**
	Institution				Study number						Year			Status	

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-submission; P = Provisional authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application type:	Single study - Postgraduate research	**Risk level:**	Low/minimal risk
Commencement date:	6/23/25		
Expiry date:	6/23/26		

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

None.

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- *The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EMS-REC:*
  - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and*
  - *without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EMS-REC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and EMS-REC reserves the right to:*
  - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;*
  - *to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;*
  - *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
    - *any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;*
    - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EMS-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;*
    - *submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or*
    - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*
- *EMS-REC can be contacted for further information or any report templates through the secretariat. Botlenyana Maluleka (Botlenyana.Maluleka@nwu.ac.za/ +27 18 2852436) or the chair Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout (Diana.Viljoen@nwu.ac.za / +27 16 9103403).*

The EMS-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EMS-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout

Digitally signed by Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout
Date: 2025.06.27 08:54:10 +02'00'

Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout

Chairperson: NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee

ANNEXURE E: TURNITIN DECLARATION

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

DECLARATION WITH REGARDS TO SIMILARITY REPORT

Turnitin (TII) is the plagiarism- prevention service of choice for the North-West University. A thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article is submitted to the TII website, to be checked for similarities in the document by comparing submitted papers to several databases/repositories on the World Wide Web. It is important to note that TII does NOT identify plagiarism – only similarities. The aim is to draw students' attention to these similarities so that they improve their academic writing style and reporting of sources before submission for examination.

The undersigned declares that the thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article with the title mentioned below, was submitted, assessed and that the issues (if any) have been addressed, and that a satisfactory report has been obtained.

Exploring Talent Management Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Skilled Professionals in a Conservation SOE in North West Province
Title of dissertation/mini-dissertation\thesis

C JACOBS
Student (Initials and surname)
21188696 MASTERS OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
Student number and degree

PROF A PELSER
Supervisor/Promoter (Initials and surname)

ANNEXURE F: TURNITIN SUMMARY REPORT

21188696:Charlene_Jacobs_Mini_Dissertation_final_edited_N...

ORIGINALITY REPORT

12%	9%	9%	2%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	repository.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	1%
2	core.ac.uk Internet Source	1%
3	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
4	scholar.sun.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
5	Mkhuma, Teboho. "Effectiveness of Talent Management Strategies at the Free State Department of Health", University of Johannesburg (South Africa) Publication	<1%
6	Merwe, Marna van der. "The Development of an Adaptive Talent Management Model for the Changing World of Work.", University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2024 Publication	<1%
7	Submitted to North West University Student Paper	<1%

ANNEXURE G: SOLEMN DECLARATION AND PERMISSION TO SUBMIT

NWU®
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA

NWU Higher Degrees Administration

SOLEMN DECLARATION AND PERMISSION TO SUBMIT

1.Solemn declaration by student

I CHARLENE JACOBS

declare herewith that the thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation entitled (exact registered/ approved title),

Exploring talent management strategies for skilled professionals in a conservation state-owned enterprise, North W

which I herewith submit to the North-West University is in compliance/partial compliance with the requirements set for the degree:

MASTERS DEGREE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

is my own work, has been text-edited in accordance with the requirements and has not already been submitted to any other university.

LATE SUBMISSION: If a thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation of a student is submitted after the deadline for submission, the period available for examination is limited. No guarantee can therefore be given (should the examiner reports be positive) that the degree will be conferred at the next applicable graduation ceremony. It may also imply that the student would have to re-register for the following academic year.

☑ I completed the AI use declaration form available from this link: AI use in research Declaration Form

Ethics number: NWU-00667-25-A-4 ORCiD: 0009-0007-3965-0536

Signature of Student: Charlene Jacobs University Number: 21188696

Signed on this 25 day of November of 2025

2. Permission to submit and solemn declaration by supervisor/promoter

The undersigned declares that the thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation:

☑ Complies with the A-rules and the technical requirements provided for in the Manual for Higher Degree studies and in faculty rules;

☑ Has been checked by me for plagiarism (by making use of TurnItIn software for example) and a satisfactory report has been obtained, and;

☑ That the work was language edited before submission for examination.

Faculty specific requirements as per A-rules: 1.3.2, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.4.2, 4.10.4, 5.3.2, 5.4.2, 5.10.2

☑ Complies with regards to faculty rules on submission or acceptance by an accredited scientific journal;

☑ The student is hereby granted permission to submit his/her mini-dissertation/ dissertation/thesis for examination.

☑ The Declaration of AI use form has been completed and submitted to me prior to submitting for examination

Signatures of supervisor(s) and Promoter(s): (only compulsory in cases where there are co- or assistant- supervisor(s/promoters)

Supervisor/Promoter	Assistant -Supervisor Assistant-Promoter
ANNA PIETERSE	

ANNEXURE H: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

RUAN FOURIE

COPYEDITING CERTIFICATE

EXPLORING TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR SKILLED PROFESSIONALS IN A CONSERVATION STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISE, NORTH WEST PROVINCE

by Charlene Jacobs

Be it hereby certified that the abovementioned mini-dissertation has been copyedited and proofread for accuracy, clarity, and proper English usage.



ruanfourie23@gmail.com
082 068 6077