

Knowledge Management from an African Perspective: Integration of Local Knowledge, Technology, and Contextualised Development

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ABSTRACT: Knowledge management (KM) has predominantly been theorised through Western frameworks that do not always resonate with the cultural and social realities of other world regions, including the African continent. This article analyses KM from an African perspective, foregrounding indigenous knowledge, orality, and collectivity as foundational epistemological pillars. Drawing on an exploratory bibliographic review grounded in recent scholarship on the decolonisation of knowledge and on local knowledge systems, the study demonstrates that African knowledge is understood holistically, relationally, and intergenerationally—in many respects diverging from the formal and individualistic logic of conventional management models. The article concludes that hybridising modern management tools with ancestral knowledge offers a promising pathway to sustainable development, enabling the construction of more inclusive, effective, and culturally resonant KM models for African contexts. Implications for both practice and future empirical research are discussed.

KEYWORDS: knowledge management; Africa; indigenous knowledge; decolonisation of knowledge; sustainable development; information science

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management (KM) has consolidated itself, over recent decades, as a strategically critical field for organisational, educational, and social development. Historically, the models, theories, and practices disseminated globally have largely originated in Western, industrialised contexts that, while intellectually significant, do not always reflect the cultural, social, and epistemological diversity of other world regions—notably the African continent.

Against this backdrop, a growing need has emerged to interrogate and reconstruct the foundations of knowledge management from a standpoint that values indigenous knowledge, oral traditions, collectivity, and the ancestral forms through which information and knowledge are produced, shared, and preserved. The African perspective on knowledge is not merely about applying modern tools in an African setting; it is about recognising distinctly African systems of knowledge production and transmission, deeply rooted in communities, in the natural world, and in intergenerational experience.

This article analyses KM from an African perspective, highlighting the importance of indigenous knowledge, orality, and collectivity as epistemological foundations. It further examines how the recognition of autochthonous knowledge can contribute to development that is more sustainable, inclusive, and aligned with the identities and needs of African peoples.

The work originated from discussions conducted in the course "Special Topics in Information Science: Knowledge Management from an African Perspective", delivered in the second semester of 2025 at a Brazilian public university. The research is motivated by identified theoretical gaps in the literature and by the need to structure knowledge management strategies that honour the cultural richness of the African continent, contributing to the systematisation of debates in scholarly environments.

The article is organised into sections covering theoretical foundations, cultural specificities, and the challenges and opportunities of KM in this context.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature and conducted through a bibliographic review. This approach enables a critical analysis and organisation of the accumulated scholarship on knowledge management from an African perspective. Descriptors were defined using controlled vocabularies from Information Science; terms such as "knowledge management" and "African epistemologies" align with studies addressing the articulation between ancestral knowledge and sustainability (Olaopa, 2025). The study follows eligibility criteria for narrative evidence synthesis (Siddaway et al., 2019).

Inclusion criteria privileged documents at the intersection of management theory and African cultures, reinforcing the need for practices rooted in local contexts (Johnson & Mbah, 2024). Priority was given to references critiquing the Western character of

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traditional management (Girei, 2017). The search for hybrid models bridging modern and ancestral knowledge guided material selection (Salman et al., 2025). The review sought to challenge epistemic hierarchies, positioning African worldviews as protagonists.

Data collection was structured around two main axes. The first focused on broad-scope scientific databases to ensure transparency (Marzi et al., 2024): Google Scholar and EBSCOhost were consulted between September 2025 and March 2026. The use of multiple databases broadened coverage of the state of the art (Bahroun et al., 2023). The second axis involved consultation of university libraries and African repositories, enabling access to studies on ancestral knowledge frequently absent from international databases (Mdhluli et al., 2021). The digital collection of the Eduardo Mondlane University Central Library provided access to otherwise difficult-to-obtain works (Kugara & Mokgoatšana, 2022).

In addition to traditional sources, the construction of the article drew on Generative Artificial Intelligence tools—specifically Gemini and NotebookLM—as assistants for information organisation and gap identification (Schryen et al., 2025). Use of AI in literature reviews shows potential for supporting evidence synthesis and aggregation (Clark et al., 2025), and the tools were applied to optimise logical argument structure and text refinement (Sengar et al., 2024). The Consensus tool was also employed to identify international literature, with specialist digital tools rendering the review process more traceable (Mirza et al., 2026). Human methodological judgement remained central throughout all screening stages (Brignardello-Petersen et al., 2024).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study seeks to establish a dialogue between established concepts in Information Science and the socio-cultural realities of the African continent. It revisits the foundations of knowledge management from a perspective that transcends conventional efficiency-oriented organisational models, integrating human, historical, and identity-related dimensions. This section examines the particularities of knowledge conception in African cultures, advances to the critical debate on the decolonisation of thought, and underscores the importance of preserving intangible memory as pillars of authentic, contextualised development.

3.1 The African Perspective on Knowledge Management

To understand KM from an African perspective, it is first necessary to understand how knowledge is conceived within African cultures. Unlike the Western view, which often separates subject from object and privileges writing as the primary form of recording, African epistemology is holistic, relational, and contextual (Zoundi & Diallo, 2020).

Knowledge management can be defined as a set of processes directed at creating, storing, sharing, and applying knowledge to achieve organisational or societal objectives. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), knowledge comprises two fundamental dimensions: explicit knowledge, which can be formalised, documented, and communicated through systematic language; and tacit knowledge, which is personal, experiential, and intuitive, and thus difficult to formalise.

In organisational and social contexts, KM is not limited to the use of information technologies; it primarily involves people, culture, and processes. The fundamental challenge lies in converting individual knowledge into collective knowledge, ensuring that learning is retained and replicated strategically.

According to Oyelaran-Oyeyinka et al. (2025), knowledge in Africa is understood as a common good belonging to the community rather than to the individual. Its main characteristics include:

- (a) **Orality:** Knowledge transmission occurs primarily through speech, stories, proverbs, and songs, with elders serving as the principal custodians of collective memory;
- (b) **Collectivism:** Knowledge is constructed and validated in groups; wisdom is associated with the capacity to live well in community and to resolve collective problems;
- (c) **Relationship with Nature:** Knowledge is profoundly linked to the environment, to observing nature's cycles, and to harmony with the cosmos;
- (d) **Intergenerationality:** A continuous flow of knowledge exists between ancestors, elders, and new generations.

Zoundi and Diallo (2020) argue that an "autochthonous management knowledge" exists—that is, distinctly African ways of managing, organising, and transmitting knowledge that predate the introduction of Western models.

One of the historical processes that profoundly marked the African continent was the erosion of its own cultural and religious values, accompanied by the forced imposition of models and values arising from Western contexts. For centuries, through colonisation, neocolonisation, and forms of cultural and educational intervention, African societies were subjected to norms, beliefs, and practices that did not correspond to their identity, generating a discontinuity between past and present. This imposition affected not only ways of living but also ways of understanding the world: many peoples ceased to recognise their deities, sacred symbols, rituals, and spiritual knowledge, which came to be perceived as "backward", "pagan", or "inferior" relative to imported values. As Nzinga (2024) demonstrates, these consequences are directly reflected in the contemporary production, sharing, and valorisation of knowledge,

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since distrust of endogenous knowledge continues to manifest in practices that privilege external models over those constructed and validated by local populations.

3.2 Decolonisation of Knowledge

A central concept in this study is the decolonisation of knowledge—that is, questioning the assumption that imported models are the only valid or "modern" ones. As Mazibuko (2025) argues, importing theories without cultural adaptation risks generating solutions that do not address local problems, because they ignore the social and historical realities of the continent.

KM from an African perspective therefore proposes hybridisation: the capacity to employ modern tools—technology, methodologies—without surrendering the identity and richness of traditional knowledge systems.

Decolonising Africa culturally, socially, and educationally requires deep structural changes that allow the continent's own knowledge to reclaim its autonomy and the recognition it deserves internationally. In the educational sphere, this means restructuring curricula to include, valorise, and systematically study traditional knowledge, African philosophies, sciences developed over millennia, and continental histories that have long been marginalised or distorted. As Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986, p. 17) asserts: "The struggle for liberation is above all a struggle for the autonomy of the mind, and language is the primary instrument through which we construct and transmit our worldview."

At the cultural level, it is necessary to promote the preservation, dissemination, and valorisation of languages, arts, traditions, and distinct worldviews, distancing from the idea that what originates in the West is the only valid model. Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji (2014, p. 89) reinforces this position:

Endogenous knowledge is not an inferior stage of understanding but rather a rational and organised system capable of explaining the world and resolving real problems, deserving the same status and recognition as any other form of knowledge.

In the social dimension, decolonisation involves building relationships of parity and mutual respect in which African knowledge ceases to be regarded as "lesser" or "backward" and is recognised as valid, scientific, and relevant—capable of contributing to global understanding and problem-solving. According to Cameroonian historian and philosopher Achille Mbembe (2016, p. 124):

The decolonisation of knowledge consists in dismantling the epistemic hierarchies imposed by colonialism, so that African peoples may once again be the protagonists of their own history and may present their worldviews without being judged or evaluated according to external criteria alien to their reality.

Several African countries have begun implementing concrete policies to promote decolonisation, including the valorisation of national languages in teaching and learning processes. In Mozambique, for example, the government has developed bilingual teaching materials in national languages such as Makua, Changana, and Tsonga, given that only approximately 17% of the population speaks Portuguese as a mother tongue (Leite, 2023). In South Africa, the constitution recognises eleven official languages, nine of which are indigenous, and policies have been introduced to expand their use in education, countering the apartheid-era legacy of privileging only English and Afrikaans (Makgoba, 2024). Ghana has similarly reinforced teaching in local languages at early stages of schooling (Osei-Tutu, 2022).

From an African perspective, Traditional Knowledge Management constitutes a distinctive epistemological field indispensable to Information Science, insofar as it challenges the Eurocentric view that restricts information to written and archived documents (Diop, 1974; Quijano, 2005). In Africa, knowledge is essentially intangible, dynamic, and socially constructed, transmitted orally across generations and preserved in the collective memory of communities—constituting what UNESCO (2003) designates as Intangible Cultural Heritage. Information Science, in this context, assumes a strategic role in devising appropriate methods and instruments for organising, processing, and preserving endogenous knowledge, recognising national languages and community elders as legitimate information sources (Chikonzo, 2006; Nhampossa, 2012). Research in Mozambique demonstrates that informational exclusion and structural poverty are directly linked to the devaluation of local knowledge and the scarcity of memory spaces integrating orality into the national information system (Macie et al., 2020).

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS

The application of KM in the African continent reveals a set of distinctive characteristics that challenge purely Cartesian efficiency metrics. Far from being a mechanical data-processing endeavour, KM in these contexts manifests as a living practice in which the human dimension and territory play preponderant roles. This section details the pillars sustaining this model—from the centrality of orality and the strategic value of local knowledge to the force of community relationship networks—while exposing both the richness of ancestral practices and the contemporary challenges of their preservation and technological integration.

4.1 Orality as a Knowledge Management Tool

In the African context, organisational and social memory is not confined to physical or digital archives; it resides intrinsically in people. Oral tradition is described as a complete mode of creating, justifying, and safeguarding knowledge, functioning as a living system of knowledge management (Osei-Tutu, 2022). This system allows knowledge to be validated and transmitted through narratives, proverbs, and myths that preserve collective memory (Bayuo, 2025). Such communities have historically kept their

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trajectories in orality—an element often disregarded by conventional Western archives (Wiafe, 2023). Consequently, KM emerges from a dynamic that prioritises human capital and interpersonal relationships.

Elders are recognised as repositories of wisdom and custodians of communal memory, responsible for educating new generations by transmitting norms, histories, and taboos through rituals and practical instruction (Ihejirika, 2024). Among groups such as the Vhavenda, the loss of an elder is understood as an irreparable loss of collective memory and informational heritage (Kugara & Mokgoatšana, 2022). Ceremonies, songs, and dances serve as vehicles for the sustainability of environmental and spiritual knowledge across centuries (Malapane et al., 2024).

The sharing of knowledge is thus perceived as an organic part of social and cultural life. African philosophy, grounded in concepts such as Ubuntu, understands knowledge as socially constructed and oriented towards the common good (Kiwelu & Steen-Johnsen, 2025). The act of sharing manifests in everyday practices of mutual care, communal cooperation, and co-creation of narratives (Nanthambwe, 2025). This holistic and relational vision distinguishes the African perspective from the individualistic logic prevalent in conventional management models.

4.2 Local Knowledge as a Strategic Asset

Traditional knowledge—also referred to as local or indigenous knowledge—is not "backward" but rather a valuable asset. In agriculture, medicine, natural resource management, and social engineering, local knowledge offers time-tested solutions adapted to local ecosystems. Owino et al. (2025) highlight that integrating this knowledge into formal management systems enables the creation of solutions that are less costly, more sustainable, and more readily accepted by local populations.

An illustration of distinctly African knowledge systems is found in the conception and measurement of time. African knowledge of temporal structure is one of the richest and most profound manifestations of indigenous wisdom, radically distinguished from the linear and quantitative view prevalent in many Western cultures. For African societies, time is not an abstract quantity measured by clocks or numbers; it is linked to events, to nature's cycles, and to communal life. As Kenyan philosopher John Samuel Mbiti (2025, p. 47) explains: "Time is simply the composition of events that have already occurred, those that are occurring, and those that recur throughout collective life."

Rather than advancing continuously towards the future, many African cultures perceive time as cyclical, with past, present, and future interconnected. Among Bantu peoples, time is divided into two main dimensions: Sasa, representing the present moment and the immediate past, and Zamani, encompassing ancient history, ancestors, and the traditions guiding current life. This temporal framework serves not merely to organise days but to maintain bonds between generations and ensure that community values and norms are preserved and transmitted.

Beyond cultural and spiritual dimensions, there are also practical systems of time measurement based on the observation of nature and the stars. Among the Ankore people of Uganda, the day is organised around cattle-herding activities; on the East African coast, the Swahili time system begins counting hours from sunrise rather than midnight, reflecting maritime and commercial realities; in North Africa, the Amazigh Calendar combines astronomical observation with seasonal cycles in a 365-day system based on systematic calculation rather than religious belief alone. As researcher Thebe Medupe (2026, p. 112) notes, the astronomical observation structures at Nabta Playa, dating back more than eleven thousand years, demonstrate that African peoples possessed advanced knowledge of celestial cycles long before many systems known in the Western world.

4.3 Community and Relationship Networks

In the Western view, knowledge is frequently structured through rigid hierarchies and formal flowcharts. By contrast, from an African perspective, knowledge is understood as a web of relationships integrating people, nature, and spirituality (Carstens & Preiser, 2024). Paradigms such as Ubuntu emphasise interdependence and relationality, proposing an epistemology grounded in collectivity rather than the isolated individual (Romm & Nkambule, 2022). In this view, knowledge is a communal good and cannot be treated as individually owned (Nanthambwe, 2025). Trust and social bonds emerge as prerequisites for informational flows to occur.

KM practices must therefore valorise networked work and face-to-face encounters above the mere implementation of technological tools. Knowledge is constructed from experiences and narratives refined into orientations for collective practice (Nansubuga & Munene, 2019). Knowledge sharing strengthens mutual trust, with new technologies used only when they are perceived as supports for socialisation (Kipkosgei et al., 2020). Even in modern digital networks, the best outcomes arise when these complement face-to-face interaction spaces (Munthali et al., 2021).

4.4 Principal Challenges and Opportunities

The implementation of KM models that respect African identity still faces significant obstacles:

- Invisibility of indigenous knowledge: Traditional knowledge is often devalued in favour of foreign theories, generating learning discontinuities;

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- Documentation: The challenge of capturing and preserving tacit and oral knowledge without distorting its essence or decontextualising it;
- Infrastructure: Limited access to technologies in some regions, though mobile penetration is rapidly expanding;
- Academic training: The need to develop managers and researchers capable of engaging with multiple epistemologies.

This cultural discontinuity is reflected in successive generations who, across large parts of the continent, no longer possess fluency in autochthonous languages—including Bantu languages and other traditional African idioms—instead communicating predominantly in Western languages introduced through colonisation (Portuguese, English, French, Spanish). Since language carries culture, values, beliefs, worldviews, and intergenerational knowledge, the loss or reduced use of indigenous languages means, in practice, the weakening of traditional knowledge transmission, collective memory, and cultural identity (Thiong'o, 2018).

Conversely, the landscape presents substantial opportunities:

- Mobile and digital technology: Africa has led in mobile solutions adaptable for rapid and inclusive knowledge dissemination;
- International recognition: A global trend towards valuing cultural diversity and local knowledge as a means of addressing global challenges (e.g. climate change);
- Inclusive innovation: KM in Africa can generate organisational and social models serving as global references for their human and sustainable character;
- Contextualised education: Teaching KM from this perspective equips students to become agents of genuine transformation in their own realities.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has analysed knowledge management from a standpoint that values the cultural, social, and historical specificities of the African continent, proposing a necessary dialogue between contemporary theoretical models and ancestral knowledge. It has become evident throughout the discussion that KM is not a universal and neutral concept but rather a practice profoundly influenced by the context in which it is applied.

The African perspective on KM proves far richer and more complex than the simple application of technological tools. It is grounded in pillars such as orality, collectivity, intergenerationality, and harmony with nature—elements that, long marginalised or considered "informal", prove highly effective in preserving cultural identity and resolving local problems. The most promising path is therefore not the replacement of traditional knowledge by modern knowledge but their hybridisation and integration.

Challenges persist in documenting tacit knowledge, in available infrastructure, and in the cultural devaluation that endures in some academic and professional environments. Nevertheless, the opportunities are vast, particularly given the advance of mobile technologies and the global search for more sustainable and humane development models.

As a practical extension of the coursework that motivated this study, this article underscores the importance of training critical professionals and researchers capable of regarding their own reality with respect and confidence. Studying KM from an African perspective is, above all, an act of identity affirmation and the construction of a future that honours the roots of the past.

For future research, empirical studies in diverse African countries and organisational contexts are recommended, alongside the development of KM frameworks and methodologies genuinely arising from African realities, thus contributing to the decolonisation of knowledge and to global science.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

[Authors to include acknowledgements of institutions, funding bodies, and individuals here. If AI tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript, this should be disclosed here per Sage's AI use policy.]

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

[Author contributions should be listed here following CRediT taxonomy. Note: Author identities should not appear in the main submission document; this section should be provided separately as required by the journal's double-anonymised review policy.]

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