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Growing maturity and diversity of the knowledge management field in South Africa and beyond

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It is a great honour for us to serve as editors of this special *South African Journal of Information Management* (*SAJIM*) issue on the theme 'Embedding Knowledge Management into Business Processes for Operational Excellence'. This theme formed the focus of the 2025 Knowledge Management South Africa (KMSA) Imbizo conference, held in Franschhoek from 25 August 2025 to 28 August 2025. This special issue brings together five articles that collectively illuminate the diverse ways in which knowledge management (KM) is embedded into business processes to advance operational excellence. The five articles' contribution covers various organisational contexts, methodological approaches, and thematic foci, yet all converge on the importance of systematically integrating KM into practice.

The issue discussed in the five articles addresses KM from multiple vantage points. Venter and Mearns (2025) explore the human dimension in enterprise content management (ECM), highlighting how behavioural and ecological factors shape the success of ECM institutionalisation. Soonderjee and Laughton (2025) focused on knowledge sharing in remote organisations, a theme that has gained urgency since the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, emphasising trust, collaboration and digital tools. Mosimege and Maasdorp (2025) provide a global systematic review of KM in local governments, synthesising best practices and challenges to enhance public service delivery. Mabe et al. (2025) look ahead with an agenda for the future of competitive intelligence (CI) as an extension of KM, positioning CI as a strategic response within the KM organisational agenda. Finally, Mearns and Bester (2025) investigate student outlooks on the world of work in information science, exploring skills, expectations and anxieties through the lens of curriculum co-creation.

This issue also illustrates methodological diversity. Venter and Mearns (2025) adopt a longitudinal ethnographic approach supported by maturity assessments to unpack behavioural dynamics in ECM institutionalisation. Soonderjee and Laughton (2025) employ qualitative interviews with remote workers to capture the lived experiences of knowledge sharing. Mosimege and Maasdorp (2025) use a systematic literature review spanning 2010–2024 to synthesise insights across local government contexts. Mabe and colleagues (2025) apply bibliometric analysis to map current and future CI research trajectories. Finally, Mearns and Bester (2025) draw on secondary analysis of SenseMaker® micro-narratives to capture students' perspectives, blending distributed digital ethnography with self-reflection.

The contributions collectively span across public and private domains, as well as academic and professional settings. The ECM study originates from the Namibian energy sector but extrapolates to global institutionalisation practices. The remote working article is situated in a research organisation, although its implications extend broadly across knowledge-intensive firms. The systematic review foregrounds local government, identifying KM as a lever for efficiency, service delivery and citizen trust. The CI study positions itself in the South African business and competitive landscape yet highlights global research patterns. The student outlook study provides an educational and workforce development perspective, linking academia and industry. Together, these articles emphasise that embedding KM into business processes is not merely a technical or procedural endeavour but also a deeply human and strategic one. They remind us that success requires attention to behavioural dynamics, social trust, collaborative cultures and skills development, alongside robust technological and methodological infrastructures. Importantly, they offer both retrospective lessons from

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the collection titled 'Embedding Knowledge Management into Business Processes for Operational Excellence', under the expert guidance of guest editors Prof. Martie Alet Mearns, Prof. Vincent Ribière and Prof. Rexwhite Enakrire.

ethnographies and systematic reviews and forward-looking guidance through bibliometric mapping of future CI agendas and insights into student expectations of the workplace. By integrating these perspectives, this special issue provides both scholars and practitioners with actionable insights into how KM can be leveraged to achieve operational excellence in different sectors.

The 2025 KMSA Imbizo, held in Franschhoek, reinforced the centrality of embedding knowledge management into business processes as a catalyst for operational excellence, innovation and resilience. Across keynotes, panels and case studies, a unifying thread was the recognition that KM is no longer a peripheral support function but a strategic enabler that cuts across industries and sectors. Presentations highlighted how organisations are leveraging intranets, ECM systems and case-based approaches to institutionalise knowledge practices and drive efficiency. The integration of KM with international standards such as ISO 56001 showcased its role in igniting innovation and aligning with broader organisational performance goals. At the same time, the conference emphasised the human dimension: from the challenges of knowledge sharing in remote environments to the outlook of future graduates entering knowledge-intensive professions and the need for embedding co-creation into curricula and workplace practices. Artificial intelligence emerged as another dominant theme, with discussions ranging from practical KM use cases to the broader societal impact of AI on human systems, raising important questions of ethics and adaptation. The exploration of CI as an extension of KM reflected a forward-looking agenda, positioning KM at the apex of organisational learning and strategy in the context of the Fifth Industrial Revolution. Together, these conversations emphasised that achieving operational excellence requires an integrated approach – combining technology, people and strategy – and that KM's true value lies in its ability to foster continuous improvement, informed decision-making and sustainable innovation across the public and private spheres.

We hope you will enjoy reading this special issue as much as we have enjoyed selecting these papers and engaging in the insightful presentations delivered at the KMSA Imbizo annual conference. The richness of the contributions featured here reflects the growing maturity and diversity of the KM field in South Africa and beyond. We also hope that this collection will inspire you to explore new ways of embedding KM into your own organisational processes and to carry these conversations forward in your research and practice. Finally, we warmly invite you to join us at future KMSA conferences, where scholars, practitioners and thought leaders continue to connect, share and co-create knowledge to shape the future of KM for operational excellence and innovation.

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