Knowledge Management Skills in the Agentic Era: Insights from Knowledge Management Academics

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Abstract: The agentic era has arrived, marking a shift from passive generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) systems to autonomous AI systems which possess the ability to act on behalf of the user. The increased autonomy, rapid decision-making, and the growing presence of intelligent and self-directed systems, that is characteristic of the agentic era, has implications on how various functions within an organisation operate. One of these functions is knowledge management (KM). As knowledge work becomes more distributed, dynamic, and augmented by agentic technologies, traditional knowledge management skill sets need to be adapted. However, the specific knowledge management skills required for knowledge management practitioners to operate effectively in this agentic landscape remain underdefined. In a bid to address this gap, this study explores the perceptions of experienced knowledge management academics, towards knowledge management in the agentic era and the skill set required to operate effectively in the agentic landscape. This study adopted an exploratory qualitative design with asynchronous interviews selected as the data collection instrument. Asynchronous interviews were chosen as they allow for reflective engagement with the abstract and emerging notion of agency in the practice of knowledge management. The study employed a purposive sample of academics with recognised expertise in knowledge management. The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis to identify key skill domains and perspectives regarding knowledge management in the agentic era. The overall contribution of this study is to the emerging body of knowledge management literature on the agentic era by identifying the skills and competencies that knowledge management practitioners require to remain effective in increasingly AI-enabled organisational environments.

Keywords: Agentic era, Knowledge management skills, Agency, Knowledge management academics, Exploratory qualitative study

1. Introduction

Knowledge has long been recognised as a strategic resource within organisations. In contemporary knowledge-driven economies, organisations increasingly rely on their ability to create, share, apply, and preserve knowledge to achieve innovation, enhance performance and sustain a competitive advantage (Nakash, 2026). As a result, knowledge management has evolved into a critical organisational function that supports the effective management of both explicit and tacit knowledge resources. In this study, the term knowledge management practitioner refers to professionals who perform knowledge management functions within organisations, irrespective of their formal job title or level of seniority. This broader definition encompasses knowledge managers as well as other professionals responsible for facilitating knowledge creation, sharing, application and governance. As organisational knowledge practices continue to evolve, these practitioners increasingly contribute to organisational learning, collaboration, innovation and knowledge-based value creation (Muzam, 2023).

Over the past decade advances in technology have significantly transformed how knowledge management practices are implemented, specifically with how knowledge is created, shared and accessed within organisations. This shift in how knowledge management practices are implemented has resulted in increased expectations for knowledge management practitioners to develop their technological competencies (Verhoef et al., 2021).

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has marked a significant milestone in the evolution of organisational technologies by enabling systems to generate content, summarise information and support decision making processes. More recently developments suggest that organisations are entering a new technological phase referred to as the agentic era. Unlike traditional AI systems that respond primarily to prompts, agentic AI systems demonstrate higher levels of autonomy, initiative and goal-directed behaviour. These agentic AI systems can plan actions, coordinate tasks, make decisions and execute activities with varying levels of human oversight (Mohammed et al., 2026). This level of autonomy, which is characteristic of the agentic era, has reshaped how traditional KM activities are now being implemented through augmentation or delegation to AI agents (Leidner & Mousavi, 2024).

Given the rapidly changing technological landscape developments suggest that the competencies traditionally associated with knowledge management practitioners may no longer be sufficient to meet the demands of increasingly autonomous AI-enabled environments. Prompting the need for knowledge management

practitioners to acquire new skills which will allow for them to collaborate with intelligent systems, evaluate AI-generated outputs, govern knowledge created by autonomous systems and facilitate the integration of human and machine intelligence (Jarrahi et al., 2023). Although AI research and its influence on KM continues to expand, the existing literature, which is limited, focuses on Generative AI. With limited attention directed towards identifying and conceptualising the specific skills and competencies required from knowledge management practitioners operating in increasingly agentic environments, representing a gap in KM literature. To address this gap this study seeks to understand how knowledge management academics conceptualise the agentic knowledge management skills required in the agentic era for effective KM practice.

This study is guided by the following questions:

- How are knowledge management skills understood and conceptualised by knowledge management academics?
- Which types of skills and capabilities are perceived as essential for knowledge management practitioners to operate effectively in the agentic era?
- Which organisational conditions are perceived to enable or constrain the development and adoption of agentic knowledge management skills.

2. Conceptual and Empirical Foundations

To establish the theoretical basis for this study this section defines the concepts knowledge management, knowledge management skills and agentic era. It does so by reviewing empirical and secondary KM literature.

2.1 Knowledge Management

Contemporary KM literature recognises knowledge as a critical organisational asset and emphasises the importance of managing knowledge flows to enhance innovation, organisational agility, and sustainable competitive advantage in increasingly knowledge-driven and AI-enabled environments (Farooq et al., 2025).

Knowledge management can be defined as systematic process of creating, curating, organising, utilising and continuously refining knowledge to support decision-making, innovation, learning, and organisational performance. As illustrated in Figure 1, knowledge management is a continuous and interconnected cycle in which knowledge is created, organised, shared, applied, and refined to generate ongoing organisational value.

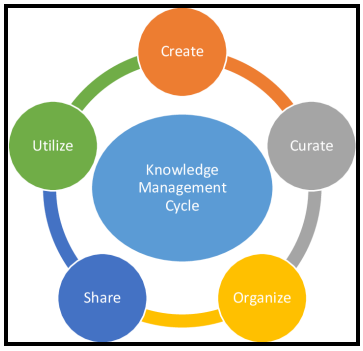

Figure 1: Knowledge Management Cycle (Manjunatha, 2023)

Over the years knowledge management has evolved from a focus on the storage and retrieval of information to a broader organisational capability that facilities the process of creating value from both tacit and explicit knowledge. Effective KM enables organisations to capture individual expertise, foster collaboration, support organisational learning, and preserve institutional memory in the face of workforce mobility and technological change (Abbas et al., 2025).

The evolution of knowledge management has closely been linked to advances in information technology and changing organisational contexts. While traditional KM approaches emphasise human-driven processes of knowledge creation, sharing and application, contemporary KM increasingly incorporates intelligent technologies that augment how knowledge is generated, accessed and utilised. The emergence of AI introduces new possibilities for enhancing knowledge discovery, automation of knowledge processes and personalised access to organisational knowledge. However, these developments also reinforce the importance of human judgment, contextual understanding and governance in ensuring that knowledge remains accurate, meaningful and ethically applied (Dalkir, 2023).

2.2 Knowledge Management Practitioner Skills

The effectiveness of knowledge management initiatives is dependent on the competencies of knowledge management practitioners responsible for facilitating knowledge creation, capture, storage, sharing and application (Farooq, 2022).

Historically knowledge management practitioners were primarily responsible for implementing all knowledge functions from, capturing knowledge, storing it, classifying it, retrieving it and disseminating it. However, the knowledge management practitioner role has evolved in response to the changing technological landscape. Contemporary knowledge management practitioners not only focus on managing knowledge repositories, rather they focus on balancing traditional repository oversight with advanced technological and strategic functions. Therefore, knowledge management practitioners require a combination of technical, managerial, interpersonal and strategic skills to support knowledge processes and organisational objectives (Farooq, 2022; Muzam, 2023).

The increasing adoption of AI within knowledge management is reshaping the competencies expected of knowledge management practitioners. While traditional knowledge management skills remain essential, AI-driven environments require practitioners to develop additional technical and human-centred capabilities to effectively support organisational knowledge processes. These emerging competencies include AI literacy and the ability to interact with generative AI systems, including prompt engineering; which involves designing effective instructions to optimise AI-generated outputs. Practitioners are also expected to develop AI literacy skills to understand the capabilities and limitations of intelligent systems and apply critical thinking to evaluate the accuracy and reliability of AI-generated knowledge and demonstrate ethical awareness to ensure responsible use of AI in organisational knowledge processes (Storey, 2025; Ravinithesh, Annapureddy , Fornaroli & Gatica-Perez, 2024).

Furthermore, the growing integration of AI into knowledge work requires practitioners to collaborate effectively with multidisciplinary teams, facilitate organisational adoption of AI-enabled knowledge systems and ensure that human expertise continues to complement machine-generated insights. Consequently, the role of the knowledge management practitioner is evolving from primarily managing organisational knowledge assets to orchestrating the interaction between human knowledge, organisational processes and intelligent technologies (Storey, 2025).

2.3 The Agentic era and its Impact on Knowledge Management

Current developments in artificial intelligence have given rise to what is referred to as the agentic era. While earlier forms of artificial intelligence were largely reactive and dependent on direct human input, agentic artificial intelligence systems present greater levels of autonomy (Shrestha, Krishna & von Krogh, 2024).

The transition from generative artificial intelligence to agentic artificial intelligence represents a significant technological shift, where autonomy influences organisational structures, workflows and knowledge-intensive activities. This occurs as agentic artificial intelligence systems can plan actions, make decisions, coordinate tasks and execute activities with varying degrees of human oversight (Park et al., 2023).

Knowledge Management is particularly affected by the emergence of agentic technologies, as activities traditionally undertaken by knowledge management practitioners, such as information retrieval, content creation, knowledge synthesis, pattern recognition and decision support can now be augmented or partially automated by artificial intelligent agents (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Alavi et al., 2024). The agentic era introduces significant opportunities for Knowledge Management as agentic artificial intelligence systems have the potential to enhance access to organisational knowledge, accelerate knowledge discovery automate routine knowledge-intensive tasks and improve decision-making processes (Alavi et al. 2024; Islam & Ajmal, 2025).

Despite these opportunities, the integration of agentic technologies also introduces challenges. Some of these challenges include the quality and reliability of knowledge, as AI-generated outputs may contain inaccuracies, hallucinations, biases and contextual limitations that can negatively influence decision-making, if not appropriately governed (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Floridi & Chiriatti, 2020). Knowledge, therefore, faces increasing responsibility to validate, contextualise and govern knowledge generated by intelligent systems. The growing presence of AI agents also raises concerns regarding trust, accountability, transparency, explainability and ethics linked to the use of AI agents (Shrestha et. Al., 2024). Thus, organisations must develop governance policies that clearly define how autonomous systems interact with organisational assets and how

accountability is assigned when decisions are influenced by AI-generated knowledge (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021).

Another important challenge to keep in mind involves the changing nature of knowledge management expertise, where agentic technologies are likely to transform the competencies required for knowledge management to be implemented effectively. Competencies related to human-AI collaboration, AI literacy, knowledge governance, critical evaluation of AI-generated outputs and the integration of human and machine intelligence are expected to become increasingly important (Alavi et al., 2024; Shrestha et al., 2024).

Additionally, the agentic era reinforces the importance of adaptability and continuous learning as knowledge management practitioners need to keep up with the rapid pace of emerging AI developments (Islam & Ajmal, 2025). Organisations that support AI experimentation and continuous learning are likely to be better positioned to leverage the benefits of agentic systems while mitigating associated risks.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design to identify the perceived skill sets required by knowledge management practitioners in the agentic era and to understand the perceived organisational conditions that may enable or constrain the development and adoption of agentic knowledge management skills.

3.1 Data Collection

- **Data collection method:** Given the exploratory nature of this study, online asynchronous interviews were selected as the primary method for data collection. Asynchronous interviews were chosen as they allowed for participants to answer the interview questions in their own time (Tilston et al., 2024). This method proved beneficial for this study as knowledge management academics were afforded sufficient time to reflect on their experiences and formulate comprehensive responses. For this study Google forms were utilised to create and disseminate the asynchronous interview schedule.
- **Sampling strategy:** A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants who possessed the specialised knowledge and experience required to address the research objectives. Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate in qualitative research, as it enables the deliberate selection of information-rich participants who can provide in-depth and contextually relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020). In this study, the sampling strategy ensured that participants had the necessary expertise in Information and Knowledge Management to contribute meaningful perspectives on the skills required in the agentic era.
- **Sample and selection criteria:** To be eligible for participation, individuals were required to meet the following inclusion criteria:
- *Hold the academic rank of **Senior Lecturer** or higher at a higher education institution in Johannesburg.*
- *Teach and/or conduct research within the field of Information and Knowledge Management.*
- *Demonstrate knowledge of emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence and its implications for knowledge management.*
- *Be willing to participate voluntarily and provide informed consent.*

These criteria ensured that participants possessed the academic expertise and professional experience necessary to provide informed perspectives on the knowledge management skill sets required in the agentic era. Purposive sampling was therefore considered appropriate, as it enabled the selection of information-rich participants who could contribute meaningful insights aligned with the objectives of the study.

- **Recruitment of participants:** Participants were recruited through the researcher's professional network using a purposive sampling approach. Senior lecturers working in the field of Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) at higher education institutions in Johannesburg who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study via email. The invitation included an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the ethical considerations. A link to the Google Forms asynchronous interview schedule was provided, enabling participants to complete the interview at their convenience. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study.
- **Sample size:** A total of six senior lecturers in the field of Information and Knowledge Management from two higher education institutions in Johannesburg participated in the study. This sample size was

considered appropriate for the exploratory qualitative design, which prioritises obtaining rich, in-depth insights from participants with specialised knowledge rather than achieving statistical representativeness (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.2 Data Analysis

The findings obtained from the asynchronous interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. This approach was deemed appropriate as it supports the systematic examination and interpretation of qualitative data, allowing for a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences. In addition, thematic analysis provides methodological flexibility while facilitating the identification and analysis of recurring themes and patterns across participant responses (Byrne, 2022).

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Prior to the commencement of data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the College of Business and Economics Research Ethics Committee at the University of Johannesburg. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and all participants were provided with sufficient information regarding the purpose, scope and requirements of the research before consenting to participate.

To protect the participants identity, all responses were treated confidentially, and any identifying information was removed during the data analysis and reporting stages. Participants were informed that the data collected would be used exclusively for academic purposes. In addition, participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the study and any stage without repercussions.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data, which was solicited from the asynchronous interviews. The themes presented in this section are derived from the purpose and the questions of this study, which are stated in the introduction.

4.1 Knowledge Management Academics Understanding and Conceptualisation of Knowledge Management Skills

The findings from the asynchronous interviews suggest that knowledge management academics conceptualise agentic knowledge management skills as an extension of traditional knowledge management competencies rather than a completely new set of skills. Participants, overall, viewed these skills as enabling knowledge management practitioners to work effectively alongside AI-driven and autonomous systems while maintaining human oversight and strategic control.

A prominent theme emerging from the participants responses, was the notion of human-AI collaboration. With one participant describing agentic knowledge management skills as the ability to use artificial intelligence as a "thinking partner" and as a tool for automating tasks that previously required significant manual effort. This view suggests that agentic knowledge management skills involve leveraging AI capabilities to augment human performance rather than replacing human expertise. Similarly, another participant highlighted the value of AI in locating and summarising large volumes of explicit knowledge, particularly in situations where traditional search methods may be insufficient.

The findings also indicate that AI literacy and technological awareness are central components of agentic KM skills. Participants also emphasised the importance of understanding both the strengths and limitations of AI systems. Requiring knowledge management practitioners to constantly familiarise themselves with emerging AI tools, evaluate their applicability to organisational needs and make informed decisions regarding their implementation. Overall, the findings suggest that knowledge management exerts conceptualise agentic KM skills as a combination of traditional KM competencies and AI-related capabilities.

4.2 Essential Skills and Capabilities for Knowledge Management Practitioners in the Agentic era

Table 1 serves as verbatim responses of the skills identified by knowledge management academics. It is important to note that participants generally viewed the skills required for knowledge management practitioners in the agentic era as an extension of traditional knowledge management competencies, rather than a complete shift in capability requirements. Participants highlighted the importance of knowledge management practitioners equipping themselves with traditional AI literacy through AI certifications and organisational support structures that can facilitate AI adoption and capability development. Capabilities such

and "*prompt engineering, AI governance, knowledge validation, agent orchestration, data stewardship and digital adaptability* "were some of the emerging skill sets that were identified by participants.

Equally important were behavioural attributes such as curiosity, openness to experimentation and a willingness to engage with emerging technologies. Participants also emphasised the need for analytical and quantitative skills to interpret performance metrics, evaluate AI-generated outputs and optimise system effectiveness. Core professional competencies, including analytical thinking, written communication, presentation skills and established knowledge management practices were also identified as essential, suggesting that success in the agentic era will depend on combining traditional KM expertise with AI awareness and data-informed mindset.

Table 1: Themes describing agentic knowledge management practitioner competencies in the agentic era (own source developed from participant responses, 2026)

Theme	Description	Representative participant evidence	Interpretation
AI literacy and informed use of AI	Knowledge management practitioners require an understanding of AI capabilities, limitations and appropriate applications to support knowledge work. AI should be viewed as a tool and thinking partner rather than a replacement for human expertise.	*"One needs to be well versed in the strengths and limitations around using AI."* (P1); *"Skills that involve the use of AI as a thinking partner."* (P4)	Participants viewed AI literacy as a foundational competency that enables practitioners to make informed decisions about the use of agentic technologies.
Human–AI collaboration	AI enables practitioners to automate routine activities, allowing greater focus on higher-value knowledge work, decision support and organisational needs.	*"It challenges KM practitioners to grow in their skills and takes time away from manual work."* (P4); *"KM practitioners should be influencing tool performance and use."* (P5)	Rather than replacing practitioners, AI was perceived as augmenting professional judgement and expanding the strategic contribution of knowledge management.
Critical thinking, knowledge validation and governance	Practitioners must critically evaluate AI-generated outputs, ensure responsible use of AI, and establish governance mechanisms for trustworthy knowledge.	*"Increased governance and correct use of prompts."* (P2); *"Ethics is always important and there are new ethical challenges in this AI world."* (P1)	Participants emphasised that the increasing autonomy of AI heightens the importance of governance, ethical oversight and validating AI-generated knowledge.
Data literacy and analytical capability	The ability to interpret data, evaluate AI outputs and use performance metrics to optimise AI-enabled systems is increasingly important.	*"One needs a quantitative understanding to review the metrics and data these tools generate."* (P1); *"Analytical thinking."* (P2)	Participants recognised that data literacy extends traditional KM competencies by enabling evidence-based evaluation of AI-supported knowledge processes.
Adaptability, curiosity and continuous learning	Successful practitioners require an openness to experimentation, continuous learning and willingness to adapt as AI technologies evolve.	*"People just need to be open to try and be curious."* (P1); *"Adaptive or change skills."* (P3)	Participants consistently identified curiosity and adaptability as essential behavioural competencies for operating effectively in rapidly changing AI-enabled environments.
Balancing technical and human-centred competencies	Technical competencies should complement, rather than replace, traditional human-centred skills such as sensemaking, communication, facilitation and ethical judgement.	*"Both are equally important."* (P3 & P4); *"It depends on the context."* (P2)	Participants rejected the notion that technical skills alone are sufficient, arguing instead for an integrated competency profile combining digital and human capabilities.
Strategic orientation of knowledge management	Agentic technologies require knowledge management practitioners to contribute strategically by influencing AI adoption, organisational learning and technology-enabled knowledge practices.	*"KM has to be seen as a strategic pillar rather than an operational one."* (P3); *"Leadership sets the stage in driving the use of Agentic KM."* (P6)	Participants viewed the practitioner's role as becoming increasingly strategic through supporting organisational AI adoption, capability development and knowledge governance.

4.3 Organisational Conditions to Enable or Constrain the Development and Adoption of Agentic Knowledge Management Skills

The findings from the asynchronous interviews suggest that the development and adoption of agentic KM skills are strongly influenced by *"organisational support structures, culture and strategic priorities*". Participants identified leadership commitment as fundamental enabler, particularly through the provision of resources, dedicated learning time, governance mechanisms, and the integration of AI into organisational processes. An organisational appetite for innovation, that encourages experimentation and learning from failure was also viewed as essential.

Furthermore, participants noted that *"agentic KM skills are more likely to develop when KM practitioners operate in environments where such capabilities are required and valued".* The positioning of KM as a strategic organisational function, rather than merely an operational activity, was also seen as essential to securing investments for technology, and human capital development through training.

While the development and adoption of agentic KM skills present opportunities to improve knowledge accessibility, accelerate knowledge discovery and enhance organisational learning, various barriers were identified as constraining the development and adoption of agentic KM skills. These barriers included the financial cost associated with AI technologies, limited time for learning, resistance to change, generational divides in technology adoption, and insufficient budgets for experimentation. Participants also highlighted the lack of opportunities for employees to apply emerging skills, often resulting from limited organisational awareness, understanding, or buy-in regarding the value of agentic KM practices.

Across the responses, leadership, culture, and strategy emerged as interconnected factors that shape adoption outcomes. Ultimately, organisations that view AI and KM as strategic components of an organisation appear more likely to embrace and invest in agentic KM practices. Whereas organisations characterised by weak leadership support and an organisational culture which is anti-change may hinder the successful development and adoption of AI.

5. Conclusion

The emergence of the agentic era represents a significant shift in the technological and organisational landscape. As AI systems become increasingly autonomous and capable of acting on behalf of users, the knowledge management profession faces both opportunities and challenges. The purpose of this study was to explore how knowledge management academics conceptualise agentic knowledge management skills. This study also focused on identifying KM skills required in the agentic era and to examine organisational conditions influencing skill development.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that agentic knowledge management skills extend beyond traditional knowledge management competencies to include competencies such as, AI literacy, AI governance, Prompt Engineering and human-AI collaboration. This study also highlights the importance of repositioning knowledge management as a strategic function capable of supporting organisations in increasingly agentic environments. To achieve this, organisations should invest in competency development programmes that strengthen both technological and human-centred capabilities. Knowledge management practitioners must be equipped to utilise agentic technologies and to govern, evaluate and integrate them responsibly within knowledge management initiatives.

As this study adopted an exploratory qualitative design and drew on the perspectives of six knowledge management academics from higher education institutions in Johannesburg, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than generalisable. Nevertheless, the study provides valuable preliminary insights into the competencies that may be required of knowledge management practitioners in the agentic era and offers a foundation for future research.

Future research could build on these findings by exploring the agentic knowledge management skills required from the perspectives of Knowledge Management professionals operating across diverse industries and organisational contexts. Such research would provide valuable practitioner insights into the evolving skill requirements of the profession and enhance understanding of how these competencies are shaped by different organisational environments and varying levels of technological maturity. Longitudinal studies may also provide valuable insights into how these competencies evolve, as agentic technologies become increasingly embedded within organisational practices.

Ethics Declaration: Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Johannesburg's, College of Business and Economics (CBE) Research Ethics Committee.

AI Declaration: The author declares that the Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool, Gemini, was used. The AI assistance was limited to idea organisation based on the responses from the asynchronous online interviews. All intellectual content, critical analysis, and final interpretations were conducted by the author. The use of the AI tool complied with ethical standards and authorship criteria.

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