Management international
International Management
Gestión Internacional

Call for papers

Application deadline: ***November 30, 2026***

Secrecy and silence in the management of organizations in Africa

Emmanuel Kamdem, Zouhour Ben Hamadi, Helena Karjalainen, Konan A. Seny Kan, Serge Agbodjo, Yosra Hammami

Guest editors' team:

Emmanuel Kamdem,
ESSEC Douala / IME Douala, Cameroon

Zouhour Ben Hamadi,
ESSCA, Angers, France

Helena Karjalainen,
EM Normandie, Caen, France

Konan A. Seny Kan,
emlyon business school, France

Serge Agbodjo,
Université de Toulouse, France

Yosra Hammami,
Esprit School of Business, Tunisia

Thinking, practicing secrecy and silence in management sciences

Since Simmel's pioneering work (1906), secrecy has become a subject of research in management science (Bos et al., 2015; Clarke et al., 2025; Toegel et al., 2021). Research aims to understand the conditions under which secrecy emerges, its role, and its effects on the functioning of organizations (Fedorenko et al., 2023), with a particular focus on its organizational consequences (Clarke et al., 2025). Secrecy appears to be an ambivalent practice: protective for some groups, restrictive for those who must maintain it. However, the substance of secrecy, its contextual anchors, and its uses remain less explored (Bryon-Portet, 2011; Fedorenko et al., 2023). Several questions remain open: how do organizations design their secrecy systems? What mechanisms do they use to protect themselves from disclosure? How does secrecy relate to the internal and external boundaries of the organization? How do individual relationships to secrecy play out in these systems?

The literature also highlights a functional link between secrecy and silence. For Simmel (1906), silence is a guarantee of the quality of secrecy. De Maria (2006) and Ryan-Flood and Gill (2010) show that secrecy and silence form a "powerful duo" in practices of resistance and dissimulation. In management science, however, the relationship between secrecy and silence remains largely unexplored, even though the contemporary context of growing demand for transparency—whether economic, social, or environmental—raises questions about access to deliberately concealed information (Alkhalidy & Halim, 2021). Contractor (2019, p. 261) sums up this challenge with the question: *Can a firm find the balance between openness and secrecy?*

Conceptually, secrecy refers to the intentional concealment of information or knowledge using methods and practices of dissimulation (Bok, 1982). This definition highlights its informational and ethical dimensions (De Maria, 2006). Clarke et al. (2025) adopt an interactionist perspective, emphasizing the distinction between *insiders* who know the secret and *outsiders* who are excluded from it. Secrecy thus appears as a social practice, observable at different levels: national or governmental (Horn, 2011), organizational (Bos et al., 2015; Costas & Grey, 2014), or even individual (Fedorenko et al., 2023).

Contributions of African contexts to the study of secrecy and silence

In Africa, studies on African arts, rituals, and secret societies offer relevant analytical frameworks for thinking about organizations (Kamdem et al., 2020); however, research explicitly addressing secrecy is rare. Nooter's (1993a) book, *Secrecy: African Art That Conceals and Reveals*, shows how art serves as a medium for concealment and revelation, particularly in the contexts of initiation, royal courts, divination, healing, tourism, and political resistance.

Nooter (1993b) emphasizes that African societies sacralize knowledge and regulate access to it through secrecy. Secrecy has less negative connotations in these societies than in Western contexts: it is perceived as a necessary element of social reality and as an integral part of certain methodologies for producing knowledge. Secrecy is thus inseparable from power: "*possessing secret knowledge, and revealing it, is a form of power*" (Nooter, 1993b, p. 58); this implies hierarchy, dependencies, and differentiation between those who know and those who do not. Studies of African secret societies reinforce this perspective.

Bellman (1981) and Murphy (1980), based on their analysis of Poro and *Sandé* in West Africa, show that secrecy is characterized by control of communication: what is at stake is the prohibition of speech, the restriction of the circulation of knowledge, and the management of boundaries between generations and statuses. Secrecy thus becomes a resource of authority, a means of negotiation, or even a vehicle for political and social legitimization (Nooter, 1993b).

Although this work is central to anthropology and religious studies (Sarah & Diat, 2016), it is rarely used in management science. More generally, the connection between secrecy/silence and debates on African

management still needs to be established (Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Jackson, 2013; Kamdem, 2002; Kolk and Rivera-Santos, 2018; Mutabazi, 2008; Nkomo, 2017; Seny Kan et al., 2015, 2022; Zoogah et al., 2015).

From this perspective, analyzing secrecy and silence in African organizations can:

- shed light on past and present managerial practices, their continuities and transformations;
- highlight the tensions, opportunities, and constraints associated with regimes marked by plurality of norms, powers, and knowledge;
- contribute to the development of locally anchored theories (Chevalier and Kamdem, 2019) responding to calls for a critical and contextualized shift in management research in Africa (Kolk and Rivera-Santos, 2018; Ngantchou and Biwolé Fouda, 2021).

Objectives of the special issue

This special issue aims to explore secrecy and its practice, in relation to silence, as central dimensions of knowledge, power, and action in the management of organizations in Africa. It follows on from previous issues of *Management International* devoted to Africa (Cheriet et al., 2020; Mbengue et al., 2022), while distinguishing itself by focusing on the paradoxical unity of concealment and revelation (Nooter, 1993a; Simmel, 1906) as a key to analyzing organizational phenomena.

The ambition is twofold:

1. Contribute to the usability and actionability of African management (Seny Kan et al., 2015) by mobilizing secrecy and silence as distinctive objects of social and managerial dynamics;
2. To examine how knowledge produced from African contexts can renew international literature in management sciences, particularly in international management (Kamoche and Wood, 2023; Nachum et al., 2022).

Topics for contributions

Contributions may be conceptual, empirical, or methodological, and may fall within various disciplines of management science. The following topics are indicative and not exhaustive.

1. Theorization of secrecy and silence in the African context. Comparison of work in the humanities and social sciences dedicated to secrecy (Nooter, 1993a, 1993b; Speed, 2021) with debates on African management (Seny Kan et al., 2015 ; Nkomo, 2017), in order to propose grounded conceptualizations.
2. Finance, accounting, and taxation. Studies of accounting and tax secrecy in arbitration: selective disclosure, informal governance, quality of financial information, etc. (Ben Hamadi, 2020; Hillier et al., 2016).
3. Ethics, corruption, auditing, and organizational silence. The role of secrecy and silence in concealing informal or illicit practices (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2007), but also as a form of ethical resistance (Younès et al., 2020). Silence of audit teams (Clor-Proell et al., 2022; Nelson et al., 2016) and phenomena of “organizational silence” (Kim and Wang, 2024; Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison and Milliken, 2000).
4. International management, intercultural relations, and political economy. Analysis of secrecy in negotiations, transnational partnerships, knowledge transfers, and agreements on strategic resources (Kumar & Patriotta, 2011). Studies of confidentiality as an instrument of power, dependence, or resistance in relations between African states, multinational corporations, international organizations, and civil societies (Abaté, 2018).
5. Strategy and innovation. Secrecy as a strategic resource; knowledge protection, building competitive advantages, developing emerging strategies, forming informal coalitions. Potentially dysfunctional effects:

hindering internal coordination, cooperation, and innovation. The role of silence as a strategic resource in crisis management (Le et al., 2019).

6. Human resources and organizational behavior. Interpretations of silence at the individual level: guilt, self-protection, or protection of others (Dimitrov, 2015) and at the collective level: negligence, indifference, implicit validation (Johannesen, 1974).
7. Methodological and epistemological approaches. Proposals for research methods to understand secrecy and silence in an African organizational context.

Calendar and Key Dates

- February 28, 2026: distribution of the call for contributions
- November 30, 2026: submission of complete manuscripts
- March 31, 2027: feedback on evaluations
- August 31, 2027: feedback of revised manuscripts
- May 31, 2028: completion of the evaluation process
- December 31, 2028: publication of the special issue
- "Secrecy and silence in the management of organizations in Africa"

Article Submission

Article submissions must be identified as follows:

"Submission for the special issue on "Secrecy and silence in the management of organizations in Africa".

A copy of the manuscript should be sent to Prof. Emmanuel KAMDEM (corresponding guest editor): **kamdemma@yahoo.fr**.

Articles submitted to *Management international* must follow the guidelines for authors and the editorial policy of the journal:

http://www.managementinternational.ca/section-des-auteurs/soumettre-un-article/

For more information about the journal *Management international*:

http://www.managementinternational.ca/catalog/

References (selective)

Abaté, A. M. (2018). Les motivations et logiques de l'informalisation des entreprises formelles. *Revue Congolaise de Gestion*, 1(25), 11-66.

Alkhalidy, M. K. J., & Halim, Z. B. A. (2021). Regulatory approaches of the right to information access in the Arab states. *Law, State and Telecommunications Review*, 13(1), 119-130.

Amankwah-Amoah, J. (2018). Cultivating greater self-confidence in African management research. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 60(4), 511-522.

Bellman, B. L. (1981). The paradox of secrecy. *Human Studies*, 4, 1-24.

Ben Hamadi, Z. (2020). Indépendance de l'auditeur et peur dans un contexte de corruption : la Tunisie de pré-révolution. *Comptabilité, Contrôle, Audit*, 26(3), 35-66.

Blundo, G., & Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. (2007). *État et corruption en Afrique*. Paris : Karthala.

Bok, S. (1982). *Secrets : On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Bos, B., Broekhuizen, T. L., & de Faria, P. (2015). A dynamic view on secrecy management. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(12), 2619-2627.

Bryon-Portet, C. (2011). La culture du secret et ses enjeux dans la « Société de communication ». *Quaderni*, 2(75), 95-103..

Cheriet, P., Beddi, H., Ado, A., & Kamdem, E. (2020). Management international en Afrique : spécificités, stratégies des acteurs et enjeux de développement. *Management International,* dossier thématique, 24(3).

Chevalier, F., & Kamdem E. (2019). Field Research & Grounded Theory: An Avenue for Future African Research. In H. Kazeroony, A. Stachowicz-Stanusch, & W. Amann, (Eds), *Advancing African Knowledge Management and Education*, Information Age Publishing, USA, 81-98.

Clarke, N., Higgs, M., & Garavan, T. (2025). Legitimating Organizational Secrecy. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 197, 19-38.

Clor-Proell, SM, Kadous, K. & Proell, CA (2022). Les sons du silence : un cadre, une théorie et des preuves empiriques de la voix de l'équipe d'audit. *Audit : un journal de pratique et de théorie*, 41 (1), 75-100.

Contractor, F. J. (2019). Can a firm find the balance between openness and secrecy? Towards a theory of an optimum level of disclosure. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *50*(2), 261-274.

Costas, J., & Grey, C. (2014). Bringing secrecy into the open. *Organization Studies*, 35(10), 1423-1447.

De Maria, W. (2006). Brother secret, sister silence. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 65, 219-234.

Dimitrov, R. (2015). Silence and invisibility in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 41(5), 636-651.

Fedorenko, I., Berthon, P., & Edelman, L. (2023). Top secret: Integrating 20 years of research on secrecy. *Technovation*, 123, 102691.

Hillier, D., Hodgson, A., & Ngole, S. (2016). IFRS and secrecy: assessing accounting value relevance across Africa. *Journal of International Financial Management & Accounting*, 27(3), 237-268.

Horn, E. (2011). Logics of political secrecy. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28(7-8), 103-122.

Jackson, T. (2013), Reconstructing the indigenous in African management research, *Management International Review*, 53(1), 13-38.

Johannesen, R. L. (1974). Les fonctions du silence. *Western Speech*, 38(1), 25-35.

Kamdem, E. (2002). *Management et interculturalité en Afrique : expérience camerounaise*. Québec/Paris : Presses de l'Université Laval/L'Harmattan

Kamdem, E., Chevalier, F., & Payaud, M.-A. (dir.) (2020). *La recherche enracinée en management*. Caen: EMS.

Kamoche, K., & Wood, G. (2023). International business and Africa: Theoretical and applied challenges, and future directions. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *54*(5), 956-967.

Kim, H. S., & Wang, J. (2024). Silence in the workplace: what do we know from research? *European Journal of Training and Development*, 48(10), 56-83.

Kolk, A., & Rivera-Santos, M. (2018). The state of research on Africa in business and management. *Business & Society*, 57(3), 415-436.

Kumar, R., & Patriotta, G. (2011). Culture and International Alliance Negotiations: A Sensemaking Perspective. *International Negotiation*, 16(3), 511-533.

Le, P. D., Teo, H. X., Pang, A., Li, Y., & Goh, C. Q. (2019). When silence is golden: The use of strategic silence in crisis management. Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 24(1), 162. -178.

Mbengue, A., Seny Kan, K. A., Biga-Diambeidou, M., & dt ogilvie (2022). La recherche en management internationale et l'Afrique. *Management International*, 26(3).

Milliken, F. J., Morrison, E. W., & Hewlin, P. F. (2003). Employee Silence. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(6), 1453-1476.

Morrison, E. W., & Milliken, F. J. (2000). Organizational Silence. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), 706-725.

Murphy, W. P. (1980). Secret knowledge as property and power in Kpelle society: elders versus youth1. *Africa*, 50(2), 193-207.

Mutabazi, E. (2008). Culture et gestion en Afrique noire : le modèle circulatoire. In E. Davel, J.-P. Dupuis &, and J.-F. Chanlat, (Eds), *Gestion en contexte interculturel : approches, problématiques, pratiques et plongées*. Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval et Télé-université (UQAM).

Nachum, L., Stevens, C. E., Newenham-Kahindi, A., Lundan, S., Rose, E. L., & Wantchekon, L. (2022). Africa rising: Opportunities for advancing theory on people, institutions, and the nation state in international business. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 1.

Nelson, M. W., Proell C. A., & Randel, A. E. (2016). Team oriented-leadership and auditors' willingness to raise audit issues. *The Accounting Review* 91(6), 1781-1805.

Ngantchou, A. & Biwolé Fouda, J. (2021). La recherche sur le management en Afrique : état des lieux et perspectives. *Management international*, 25(5), 171-187.

Nkomo, S. M. (2017). Time to look in the mirror. *Africa Journal of Management*, 3(1), 7-16.

Nooter, M. H. (1993a). *Secrecy: African Art That Conceals and Reveals*. New York: Museum for African Art.

Nooter, M. H. (1993b). Secrecy: African art that conceals and reveals. *African Arts*, 26(1), 55-102.

Ryan-Flood, R., & Gill, R. (2010). *Secrecy and silence in the research process*. London: Routledge.

Sarah, R. & Diat, N. (2016). *La force du silence : contre la dictature du bruit*. Paris : Fayard.

Seny Kan, K. A., Apitsa, S. M., & Adegbite, E. (2015). African management: concept, content and usability. *Society and Business Review*, 10(3), 258-279.

Simmel, G. (1906). The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies. *American Journal of Sociology*, 11(4), 441-498.

Speed, C. K. (2021). Secrecy as a Way of Seeing, Knowing, and Acting. In *Encyclopedia of African Religions and Philosophy*. Springer.

Toegel, I., Levy, O., & Jonsen, K. (2021). Secrecy in Practice: How Middle Managers Promote Strategic Initiatives behind the Scenes. *Organization Studies*, 43(6), 885-906.

Younès, D., Courpasson, D., & Jacob, M. R. (2020). Ethics from below: Secrecy and the maintenance of ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 163(3), 451-466.

Zoogah, D., Peng, M., & Woldu, H. (2015). Linking management research and African organizations: Institutions, cultures, and resources. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 29(1), 7-31.