

- Governance
- Sustainability
- Inclusion
- African-led

HOW THIS PLAYS OUT ACROSS THE ISSUE

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VOLUME 12 | 2026

EDITOR'S NOTE

What We Were Building

We did not tell you what we were building.

The first seven volumes of Rooted asked what institutions are, how they learn, and what African ways of organising, designing and sustaining systems might teach us about governance. Gender-conscious risk. The Regenerative Institution. The loom. Ndebele geometry, Zulu basketry, Kente cloth. Those volumes were not warm-up acts for the four that followed. They were the worldview — the soil, if the metaphor holds — from which the next phase could grow. Without them, Volumes 8 through 11 would have had nowhere to root a governance capacity in anything more than technique.

Volume 8 introduced the Weaver, and called it a human archetype — the leader who integrates analytical precision, African governance wisdom, and behavioural intelligence. It read, at the time, as one more idea in a series that had already given you the Regenerative Institution and the loom.

Volume 9 introduced the Author, though we did not use that word. We called it the Continental Standard: the institution that writes its own governance framework instead of receiving one. It read as a continuation of Volume 8's argument — the right people now need the right standard.

Volume 10 introduced the Challenger, again without naming it as such. We called it the Independent Challenger, the National Assurance Architecture, the second line that is a conscience rather than a rubber stamp. It read as a natural extension of Volume 9 — an authored standard is only as good as the mechanism that holds the institution to it.

Volume 11 introduced the Steward. Dr Kabane gave us the distinction between a coping system and a resilient one, and the question that should define every tenure: did I leave this institution stronger than I found it? It read, we suspect, as the most personal and reflective volume in the series so far.

Each volume made sense on its own. That was deliberate. But each volume was also doing something else, one layer beneath the one you were reading: it was building a piece of a diagnostic architecture we had not yet named.

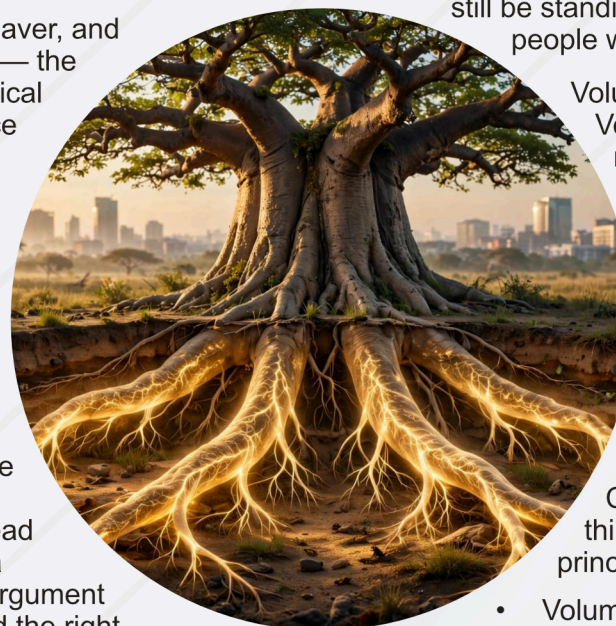
Four verbs, in fact — four capacities that emerged as increasingly difficult to ignore, none of which can simply be substituted for another:

Read. That is the Weaver. Can this institution's people see its structural health before failure becomes a statistic?

Define. That is the Author. Does this institution govern by standards designed for the conditions it actually inhabits?

Question. That is the Challenger. Is there someone inside with the permission, independence, and courage to say the institution is wrong?

Sustain. That is the Steward. Will this institution still be standing — stronger — after the people who built it have gone?



Volume 12 is not a summary of Volumes 8 through 11. It is the reveal of what they were quietly assembling all along — and, further back, of what Volumes 1 through 7 made possible. Seen whole, the series now has a shape we did not set out to build:

- Volumes 1–7 — the worldview. How should we think about institutions? Context, regeneration, systems thinking, African design principles.
- Volumes 8–11 — the capacities. What capacities make an institution healthy? Weaver, Author, Challenger, Steward.
- Volume 12 — the diagnostic architecture. How do we see those capacities together, in one institution, at once?

Eleven volumes integrated, not distilled — because nothing here is a reduction. The philosophy needed the framework to become usable. The framework needed the philosophy to mean anything at all.

These are not stages of institutional maturity. They are four different dimensions of institutional health. An institution can be strong on one and dangerously weak on another — and that mismatch, not the absence of any single quality, is where governance actually fails.

So this issue asks one question, and asks it in four different ways before it is through: **Which dimension is missing — and what is that absence already costing you?**

Enjoy Volume 12

Katlego Majola

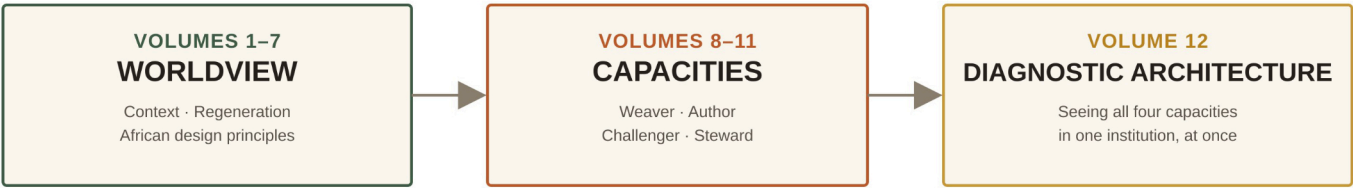
FOUNDER: KM NALA ADVISORY

THE FRAMEWORK

THE FRAMEWORK

Four Dimensions of Institutional Health

Much of governance asks whether an institution is functioning as it should. The Rooted Governance Framework asks a different question: what exactly are we testing — and what might we still be failing to see?



THE FOUR CAPACITIES, READ AS VERBS

READ
Weaver

DEFINE
Author

QUESTION
Challenger

SUSTAIN
Steward

Across eleven volumes, four distinct lines of inquiry accumulated, each responding to a different practitioner's account of where governance actually breaks. Presented together for the first time, they form not a single scale but four distinct dimensions of institutional health.

WEAVER — READ

Can we read the system before it fails? Institutional memory, continuity, diagnostic capability. Whether the capacity to sense deteriorating conditions lives in a role, or only in a person. (Vol.8 — the Behavioural Risk Index)

Scenario, Weaver absent: *The board learns of a liquidity problem the same week the newspapers do. Nobody inside the institution can explain why the warning signs went unread for months.*

AUTHOR — DEFINE

Can we define governance for the conditions we actually inhabit? Context, ownership, meaning. Authorship is not autonomy; it is accountability for the design. (Vol.9 — the Continental Standard Index)

Scenario, Author absent: *A compliance dashboard is entirely green. Every requirement of an imported framework has been met. Nobody can say why any individual rule exists, or whether it addresses a risk that actually matters here.*

CHALLENGER — QUESTION

Can we question power, assumptions, and inherited practice? Permission, Independence, Capability, Conviction, and Reach — the formal authority to challenge, the structural distance to do so honestly, and a route to the people who can act. (Vol.10 — the National Assurance Architecture)

Scenario, Challenger absent: *The risk team identifies a serious problem eighteen months before it becomes public. The finding is filed, not escalated, because no one is confident raising it will not cost them their position.*

STEWARD — SUSTAIN

Can the institution endure beyond the individuals who currently hold it? Resilience, legitimacy, long-term value. Whether the institution is a coping system, propped up by exceptional individuals, or a resilient one that survives their departure. (Vol.11 — the Stewardship Scorecard)

Scenario, Steward absent: *Three senior leaders retire within the same year. Performance does not decline gradually. It falls off a cliff, because the capability the institution relied on was never anywhere but in them.*

Four lenses. Four bodies of insight, developed independently across four volumes. Volume 12 does not merge them into a single validated instrument — that would misrepresent how they were built. What it does is show how they speak to one another, and what an institution pattern across all four reveals that no single dimension can.

None of the four would mean much without what came before them. Regeneration (Vol.7) is what Steward protects. African design traditions (Vols 7–9) offered a parallel language for the structural ideas that emerged in Weaver and Author.

The first seven volumes gave Rooted its worldview. The next four gave that worldview institutional capacities. Volume 12 puts those capacities into a diagnostic architecture.

The rest of this issue exists to demonstrate that claim rather than repeat it.



FEATURE



THE FEATURE

When Strength Hides Absence

Volume 12 carries no interview. After eleven conversations with practitioners who each anchored one piece of this framework, the most honest thing this issue can do is turn the lens on the work itself.

Consider a composite institution — not named, because its parts are drawn from patterns visible across public sector, financial services, and development finance institutions this series has studied, not from any single organisation. It is composite as an institution.

It is not hypothetical as a governance pattern: its individual features are familiar across sectors; what is unusual is seeing them together in one place.

It has a strong second line. Its risk committee can name, unprompted, three signals that have begun deteriorating before they appear in any formal report. Its board asks hard questions and receives honest answers. On the Weaver and Challenger dimensions, this institution is healthy.

It has also never once asked whether its governance code was designed for its own operating conditions. Every policy, every control,

every reporting template was adopted from a template built elsewhere, for institutions with infrastructure this one does not have. Nobody currently employed there could tell you why a given rule exists — only that it is audited.

And its leadership succession plan does not exist. Three people hold, between them, almost the entire institutional memory of how the organisation actually functions. When asked what would happen to performance if all three left within the same year, the honest answer would be: we don't know, and we're afraid to find out.

A conventional governance review could call this institution well-governed, if it only asks the questions this institution happens to answer well. That is the precise failure the Rooted Governance Framework exists to correct: sophisticated governance machinery can coexist with an undiagnosed structural absence.

An institution can pass every audit it is given and still be one retirement announcement away from collapse, because nobody was asking the third and fourth questions.

Governance health is not the presence of good practice.

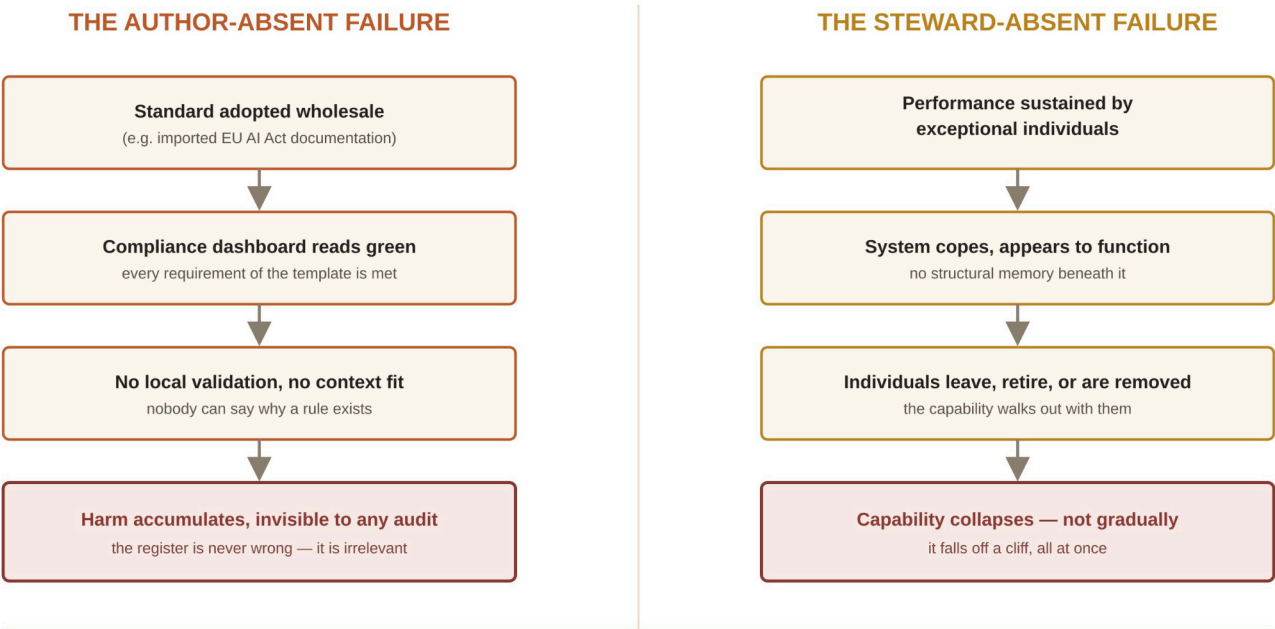
It is the absence of undiagnosed blind spots. A framework that only measures what an institution is already good at will always tell that institution it is doing well.

CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY

What Absence Costs

Two institutions. Two different missing dimensions. Two different failures.



Different institutions. Different missing dimensions.

The bank's Challenger function did nothing to compensate for its missing Author function.
The health department's local policy fit did nothing to compensate for its missing Steward function.

Institution	Missing Dimension → What Happened
The bank in Volume 10's "imported standard trap"	AUTHOR — Adopted an Act documentation wholesale. Every compliance dashboard read green. Internally: no model validation capacity, no local stress-testing, a discriminatory credit algorithm operating undetected. Compliance increased. Governance did not exist.
The Limpopo health department under Section 100 administration, Volume 11	STEWARD — Governance failures and financial mismanagement forced national intervention. The deeper cause was not a shortage of money or people — it was that the systems converting resources into outcomes had quietly stopped functioning, and no institutional memory survived to notice in time.



CASE STUDY



The bank is an illustrative case, as it was presented in Volume 10 — a composite drawn to show a governance pattern, not a named institution. The Limpopo intervention is a matter of public record, described here as Dr Kabane recounted it in Volume 11.

The bank had a Challenger function of sorts — auditors, a second line, a compliance department. What it lacked was Authorship: no one had asked whether the standard it complied with was designed for the conditions it actually operated in. The register could be perfectly accurate and still tell the institution almost nothing about whether the standard was fit for its context. The register was not wrong. It was answering the wrong question.

The health department, by contrast, may well have had policies that were locally appropriate. What it lacked was Stewardship: institutional capability that did not depend on the specific individuals holding it. When governance discipline eroded, there was no structural memory to catch the decline before it became a constitutional crisis.

Different institutions. Different missing dimensions. The bank's Challenger function did nothing to compensate for its missing Author function. The health department's local policy fit did nothing to compensate for its missing Steward function.

That is not incidental. It is the framework's central methodological claim.

THE NON-COMPENSATION PRINCIPLE

Strength in one dimension cannot be assumed to compensate for absence in another.

Some institutional weaknesses cannot be averaged away by strengths elsewhere. Distinct is not the same as isolated; complementary is not the same as substitutable.

Conventional governance thinking tends to aggregate — enough good things add up to good governance. The Rooted Governance Framework says otherwise. A profile of Weaver: strong, Author: weak, Challenger: strong, Steward: absent is not a moderately healthy institution. It is an institution with two specific, addressable vulnerabilities that its two strengths will never reach.

SPOTLIGHT

SPOTLIGHT THE PATTERN WAS ALWAYS THERE

SPOTLIGHT

The Pattern Was Always There

Three cultural traditions have appeared across this series, each introduced as an independent case study, each illustrating a different volume's argument.

Ndebele wall art (Volume 7) taught that the black line — the structural discipline — must be drawn before the colour is added. Structure precedes expression.

Zulu basketry (Volume 8) taught that the coil's tension must be calibrated before the pattern is visible, and that a well-bound structure becomes more cohesive, not less, under the pressure of what it is asked to hold.

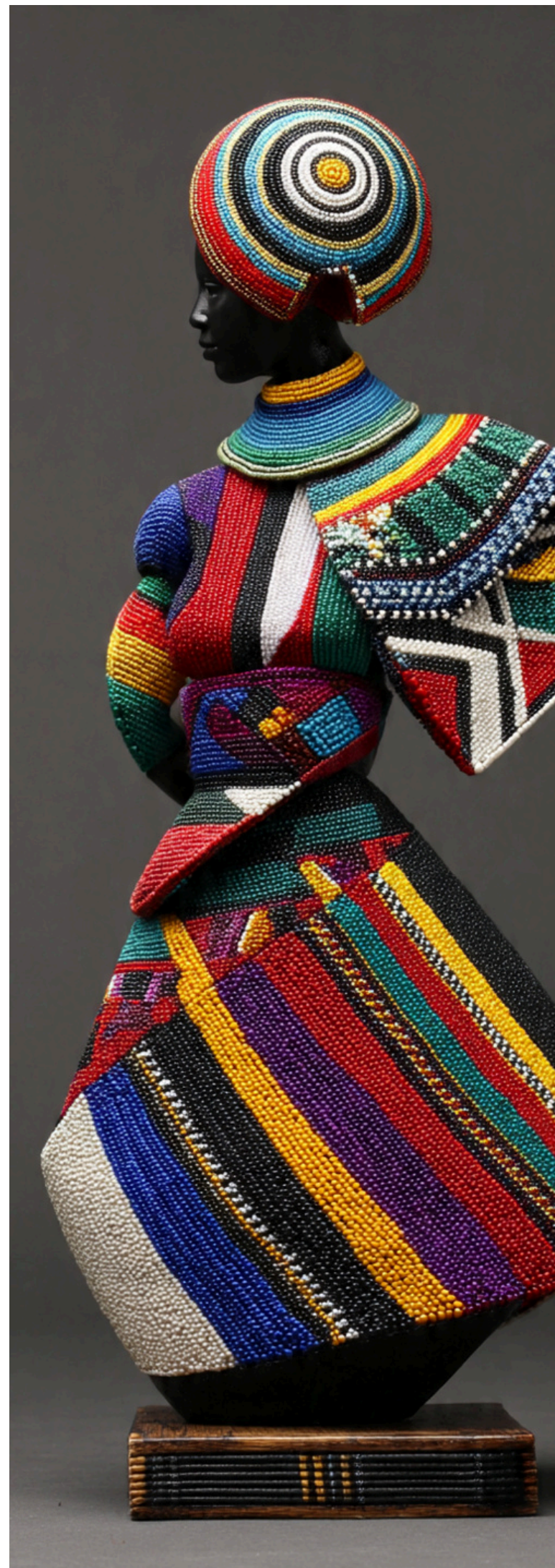
Kente cloth (Volume 9) taught that no individual strip carries the pattern. The pattern exists only in the relationship between strips, woven separately and assembled with intention.

We described these, at the time, as illustrations of that issue's governance argument. Looking back across all three, we no longer think that is quite right. The cultural traditions were never illustrations of the governance argument. They were another way of thinking about it — a parallel line of inquiry running alongside the archetypes, in a different material, arriving at the same design principle independently.

Each tradition was discovered by a different African community, centuries apart, using entirely different materials, and each one landed on the same proposition: systems can be distinct without being isolated. Coherence does not require uniformity.

A basket does not need every coil to be identical to hold water. A cloth does not need every strip to carry the same pattern to read as one design. And an institution does not need to score identically across Weaver, Author, Challenger, and Steward to be well governed. It needs each dimension to be genuinely present, and it needs the relationship between them — like the relationship between Kente's strips — to be intentional rather than accidental.

This is the final spotlight of the monthly Rooted. Not because the well of African design traditions has run dry, but because the pattern these three were quietly describing has now been named. Rooted has been developing two intellectual threads at once — a governance philosophy and a visual one — without announcing that they were the same argument. Volume 12 is where they meet.





BEAD & BLUEPRINT • VOL.06

The Rooted Diagnostic

Every Bead & Blueprint has asked one question of itself: does this change how a practitioner thinks, or does it merely look elegant? The Rooted Diagnostic is built to answer that question about the framework as a whole.

The Rooted Governance Framework does not ask which archetype an institution is. It asks which institutional capacity is present, which is absent, and what that absence makes possible.

This is not a scorecard that produces a number. The output is a profile, not a score — because an average across four dimensions can conceal the very gaps the diagnostic is designed to expose. It is the shape of the gaps, read through the Non-Compensation Principle: strength in one dimension cannot be assumed to compensate for absence in another.



No dimension sits "above" another — four independent axes of one profile

The Diagnostic Canvas

For each dimension, ask four questions:

- What does this institution currently possess?
- What evidence demonstrates it — not what the institution claims, but what can be observed?
- Where is the vulnerability — what would break this if tested?
- What happens if this dimension is genuinely absent, not merely underdeveloped?

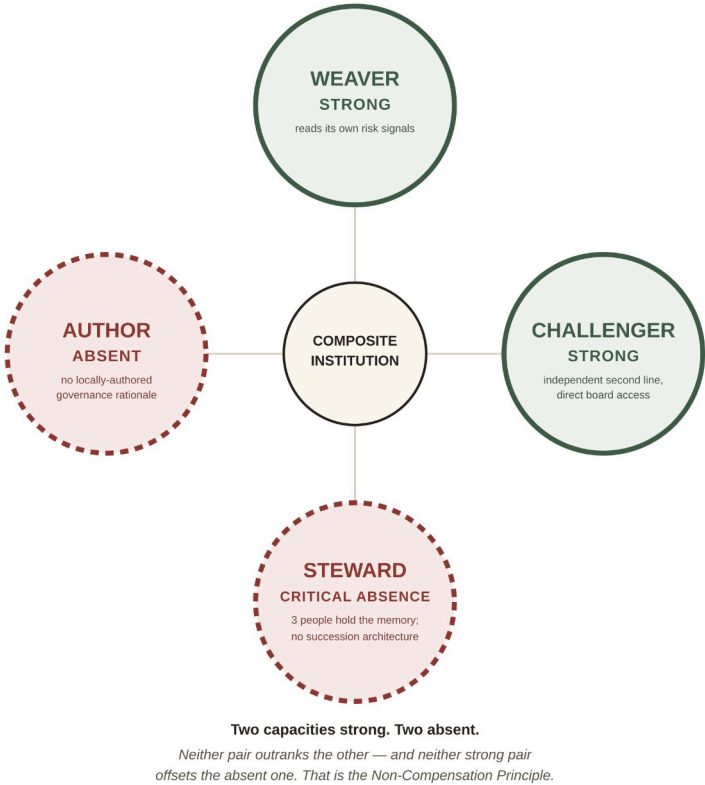
A Worked Example

The Framework's Geometry

No dimension sits "above" another — the Rooted Governance Framework is four independent axes around a single centre, not a ladder to climb.



Applying the canvas to the composite institution from this issue's Feature produces a profile that a single score would flatten:



Dimension	Present?	Evidence	Vulnerability
Weaver	Strong	Risk committee names deteriorating signals before they become statistics	None significant observed
Author	Absent	No governance policy can be traced to a locally-authored rationale	Every rule is a liability the moment local conditions diverge from the template it was copied from
Challenger	Strong	Independent second line with a written mandate and direct board access	None significant observed
Steward	Critical absence	Three individuals hold nearly all institutional memory; no succession architecture exists	Total capability loss possible within a single budget year

Read as a profile rather than a score, this institution is not “60% governed.” It is an institution whose Weaver and Challenger strength has nothing to offer its Author and Steward gaps. Those two absences will not be solved by doing more of what the institution already does well.

Run the canvas on your own institution before your next board cycle. The question worth asking first: which dimension has never been formally assessed at all — not scored poorly, but never asked about?

• THINK • LISTEN • ACT

THINK



LISTEN



ACT



Eleven Volumes. What We Are Carrying Forward.

THINK

- Revisit Dr Apanisile's pre-probabilistic framing (Vol.8) alongside Dr Kabane's coping-vs-resilient distinction (Vol.11) — read together, they describe the same failure at two different time horizons: one before the event, one after the leader leaves.
- Revisit the Authorship Litmus Test (Vol.9) — Transparency, Enforcement, Universal Minimum — as the safeguard that keeps “define your own standard” from becoming an excuse to weaken one.
- Ask: across the four dimensions, which has your institution never formally assessed at all?

LISTEN

- Return to Sharon Goodwill's account of the imported standard trap (Vol.10) — it is the clearest single explanation in this series of how compliance and governance quietly diverge.
- Return to Dr Kabane's five Stewardship Questions (Vol.11) — they were designed for a leadership transition, not an annual review. Ask them at your next one.

ACT

- Run the Rooted Diagnostic Canvas on your own governance body. Do not compute a score. Produce a profile.
- Identify the one dimension your institution's most recent governance review did not ask about at all. That silence is where your next investment belongs.
- Take the “what absence costs” case study to your own board. Ask which of the two failures — the bank's or the health department's — your institution more closely resembles, and why.



WHAT'S ON OUR RADAR

ROOTED, REFRAMED

From Exploration to Practice
KM NALA ADVISORY

That first phase of the work is complete — not because the questions have run out, but because the framework we were building toward now exists.

Seen whole, the monthly Rooted turned out to have three phases, none of them planned as such at the outset: Volumes 1–7 gave us a way of seeing institutions — a worldview rooted in context, regeneration, and African design. Volumes 8–11 gave us four capacities through which to see institutional health — Weaver, Author, Challenger, Steward, none substitutable for the others. Volume 12 gives us a way to diagnose what we see.

For twelve volumes, Rooted has been an exploration: long-form thematic essays, archetypes, cultural metaphors, and frameworks built one idea at a time, in conversation with practitioners across the continent.

Beginning next quarter, Rooted moves from a monthly thematic series to a quarterly practice publication, drawing on a set of recurring editorial pillars rather than a fixed structure — typically four or five of the following, depending on what the quarter's work calls for:

- The Signal — one governance development or emerging issue worth naming.
- The Pattern — what is actually happening beneath the obvious story.
- The Practice — a practitioner perspective.
- The Diagnostic — the Rooted Governance Framework applied to a live case.
- The Field Note — a short observation or lesson from the work.
- Think / Listen / Read — curated, as always.
- From the Rooted Desk — what KM Nala Advisory is seeing and building.

Worldview. Capacities. Diagnostic architecture. What comes next is the application.

“Leadership begins when we choose to act with purpose, not just power.”

— KM NALA

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ROOTED NEWSLETTER

Ideas & impact from the African Continent

JULY 2026
vol.11

pg 11

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTORS



Got something to say? CALL FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Submission deadline: 30 September 2026

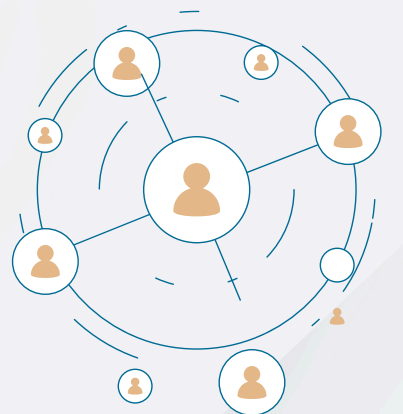
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Length: 600–800 words | Include a 2-sentence bio

*Careers are measured not by the positions we hold,
but by the institutions we strengthen
and the people we prepare to lead after us.*

*The children in nappies today
will inherit the institutions we build — or fail to build — now.*

FINAL NOTES + STAY CONNECTED



“Leadership begins when we choose to act
with purpose, not just power.” – KM Nala

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