

AFRICAN THEORY GENERATION MODEL: TOWARDS AN ERA OF EPISTEMIC DECOLONIZATION

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Abstract

Theory generation represents the highest level of scholarly contribution because it provides systematic explanations that advance knowledge, guide research, and inform practice. Despite significant expansion in higher education and research following political independence, African universities have contributed relatively few globally recognized theories across academic disciplines. Although research productivity has increased considerably, much of African scholarship continues to rely on the application and validation of theories developed outside the continent. Consequently, Africa remains a major consumer rather than producer of theoretical knowledge, despite its rich indigenous knowledge systems and diverse socio-cultural and organizational contexts that provide fertile ground for conceptual innovation. This conceptual paper addresses this gap by proposing the African Theory Generation Model as a systematic framework for promoting indigenous theory development in African academia. Anchored on Grounded Theory and informed by the Blue Ocean Strategy, the study critically reviews literature on theory development, indigenous knowledge production, and epistemic decolonization to identify the institutional and scholarly factors limiting Africa's contribution to global theoretical development. The paper argues that while existing research has strengthened empirical knowledge, limited attention has been devoted to providing researchers with a structured pathway for transforming empirical findings into original theories. To address this challenge, the study develops the African Theory Generation Model, which simplifies the theory-building process into five guiding questions: What is happening? Why is it happening? What must change? What new theory emerges? and Does the theory work beyond the original context? These questions provide a practical framework for guiding scholars from empirical investigation to conceptual abstraction, theory formulation,

validation, and refinement. The study illustrates the applicability of the model using the development of the Intent-Focused Management Theory, demonstrating how a contextually grounded African theory can emerge through systematic empirical inquiry and conceptual abstraction. This illustration confirms that theory generation is a deliberate and reproducible scholarly process rather than an accidental outcome of research. The paper concludes that the African Theory Generation Model provides a practical roadmap for repositioning African universities from knowledge consumers to knowledge producers by institutionalizing theory generation within research and postgraduate training. The study contributes to debates on epistemic decolonization by offering a structured framework for developing original, contextually grounded, and globally relevant theories. Future studies are encouraged to empirically validate and refine the model across different academic disciplines and institutional contexts within and beyond Africa.

Keywords: African Theory Generation Model, theory development, indigenous knowledge, Grounded Theory, Blue Ocean Strategy, epistemic decolonization, knowledge production.

1.1 Background to the study

Universities have historically been recognized as the primary institutions responsible for the creation, preservation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. Beyond transmitting existing knowledge through teaching and extending it through research, universities are expected to generate new knowledge capable of addressing emerging societal challenges and advancing scientific understanding (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). The highest form of scholarly contribution is not merely the production of empirical findings but the development of theories that explain phenomena, predict future outcomes, and provide conceptual foundations upon which subsequent research and practice are built (Corley & Gioia, 2011). Theories constitute the intellectual architecture of academic disciplines because they organize knowledge into coherent explanations, facilitate cumulative inquiry, and shape professional practice. Consequently, universities are not only centres of knowledge consumption but also institutions charged with generating original conceptual frameworks that influence global scholarship.

Since the attainment of political independence by most African states during the second half of the twentieth century, the African higher education sector has expanded remarkably. Numerous public and private universities have been established, postgraduate enrolment has increased substantially, and research output from African institutions has steadily

grown (Cloete, Maassen, & Bailey, 2015). Governments across the continent have invested in higher education as a catalyst for socio-economic transformation, technological innovation, and national development. Simultaneously, international organizations have emphasized the importance of strengthening research capacity to enable African universities to contribute meaningfully to solving continental and global challenges (UNESCO, 2021).

Despite these achievements, concerns persist regarding the nature of knowledge produced within African universities. While the volume of scholarly publications has increased considerably, much of the research remains heavily dependent on conceptual frameworks, theories, and models developed in Europe, North America, and other regions. Across disciplines such as management, education, sociology, psychology, economics, political science, and organizational studies, postgraduate theses, dissertations, and journal articles frequently rely on established Western theories to frame research questions, explain findings, and support conclusions. This pattern reflects the continued influence of historical academic traditions established during the colonial period and perpetuated through global scholarly networks, publication systems, and university curricula (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

The predominance of externally generated theories does not imply that African scholarship lacks intellectual capacity or that African scholars have made no theoretical contributions. On the contrary, African intellectual traditions have generated influential perspectives such as Ubuntu philosophy, Afrocentricity, African feminism, decoloniality, and indigenous knowledge systems, which continue to shape debates within philosophy, education, sociology, political science, and development studies (Asante, 2009; Mbiti, 1969; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Nevertheless, compared with the continent's expanding research infrastructure and growing academic community, the development of widely recognized formal theories across many scientific and professional disciplines remains comparatively limited. Consequently, African scholarship has often been characterized as a consumer and contextual applicator of existing theories rather than a significant producer of globally influential theoretical frameworks (Mouton, 2010).

This imbalance has important implications for the development of knowledge. Scientific advancement depends not only on empirical investigation but also on conceptual innovation. Corley and Gioia (2011) argue that the ultimate contribution of scholarly research lies in its capacity to generate novel theoretical insights rather than merely confirm or extend existing explanations. Similarly, Whetten (1989) maintains that theory development constitutes one of the defining characteristics of mature academic disciplines because theories explain why relationships exist, identify underlying mechanisms, and

provide predictive capability. Where research remains primarily descriptive or confirmatory, opportunities for conceptual advancement become limited, reducing the broader impact of scholarship.

The increasing global discourse on the decolonization of knowledge further underscores the need for African universities to strengthen indigenous theory development. Decolonization extends beyond curriculum reform or increased representation of African perspectives; it calls for the production of original conceptual frameworks grounded in African realities while contributing to universal scientific knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Indigenous contexts present unique institutional arrangements, cultural values, governance systems, conflict dynamics, leadership practices, entrepreneurial models, and social structures that may not be fully explained by theories developed in different historical and socio-cultural environments. Developing theories from these realities therefore offers opportunities to enrich global scholarship while simultaneously enhancing the relevance of research to African development challenges.

The emergence of individual African scholars proposing original theories demonstrates that theory generation within African academia is both possible and necessary. Recent conceptual developments, such as the Intent-Focused Management Theory (Omuse, 2025), illustrate that African scholars can move beyond the adaptation of existing theories to develop original frameworks grounded in indigenous organizational experiences and contemporary management challenges. Such contributions, although still relatively few, provide evidence that theory generation is an attainable scholarly endeavour when researchers deliberately engage in conceptual abstraction and theoretical synthesis rather than limiting themselves to empirical application.

From a strategic perspective, the challenge of theory generation presents an opportunity rather than merely a deficiency. The Blue Ocean Strategy advanced by Kim and Mauborgne (2005) advocates creating uncontested intellectual and strategic spaces instead of competing within existing paradigms. Applied to African scholarship, this perspective suggests that rather than continuously extending externally developed theories, African universities can create new conceptual spaces by generating theories rooted in African experiences but possessing universal explanatory potential. Such an approach would reposition African universities from consumers of global knowledge to active producers of globally relevant theories.

It is against this background that the present conceptual study seeks to advance discourse on theory generation in African universities. The study argues that the future

competitiveness and global relevance of African higher education will increasingly depend not only on the quantity of research produced but also on its capacity to generate original theories that shape academic disciplines internationally. Accordingly, the paper proposes a conceptual model for theory generation grounded in Grounded Theory, demonstrating how African scholars can systematically transform empirical observations and contextual experiences into robust theoretical contributions capable of enriching both African and global scholarship.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The primary mandate of universities extends beyond the dissemination of existing knowledge to include the generation of new knowledge capable of advancing academic disciplines and addressing contemporary societal challenges. Central to this mandate is the development of theories, which provide systematic explanations of phenomena, guide empirical inquiry, and shape professional practice (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Whetten, 1989). Over the past six decades, African universities have experienced remarkable expansion in terms of institutional growth, postgraduate enrolment, research output, and international scholarly collaboration. Despite these achievements, a significant proportion of research conducted within African universities continues to rely predominantly on theories developed outside the continent. Across disciplines such as management, education, economics, sociology, psychology, public administration, and political science, undergraduate projects, master's dissertations, doctoral theses, and journal publications are largely framed using Western theoretical perspectives, with comparatively few studies seeking to develop original theories grounded in African realities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Cloete et al., 2015).

This persistent dependence on externally generated theories presents both an intellectual and developmental challenge. While the application of established theories contributes to cumulative scientific knowledge, excessive reliance on imported conceptual frameworks may limit the capacity of African scholarship to explain context-specific realities, generate indigenous solutions, and influence global academic discourse. Recent debates on epistemic justice and the decolonization of knowledge argue that universities in the Global South should move beyond knowledge consumption toward active knowledge production through original conceptual and theoretical contributions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). Yet, relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding why theory generation remains limited within African academia despite the continent's expanding research capacity and growing pool of highly qualified scholars.

Although isolated examples of indigenous theorizing, such as the Intent-Focused Management Theory (Omuse, 2025), demonstrate that African scholars possess the intellectual capacity to develop original theoretical frameworks, there remains no comprehensive model that explains or promotes systematic theory generation within African universities. Consequently, African research continues to contribute substantially to empirical knowledge while making comparatively fewer globally recognized theoretical contributions. This study therefore addresses the problem of the limited institutional and conceptual focus on theory generation in African universities by proposing a model that can guide scholars from knowledge consumption to knowledge production through a grounded and systematic theory development process.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

To develop a conceptual framework for advancing theory generation in African universities by promoting a transition from knowledge consumption to knowledge production.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the state of theory generation in African universities and identify the institutional and scholarly factors that have limited Africa's contribution to global theoretical development.
- ii. To critically review existing literature on theory development, indigenous knowledge production, Grounded Theory, and the Blue Ocean Strategy in order to establish a conceptual foundation for indigenous theory generation in African academia.
- iii. To develop an African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) that provides a systematic framework for guiding African scholars from empirical research to the development of original, contextually grounded, and globally relevant theories.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and informed by the principles of the Blue Ocean Strategy (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). The two frameworks provide complementary perspectives for understanding how original theories can be

systematically generated from empirical realities while encouraging scholars to pursue innovative and unexplored areas of knowledge creation.

1.4.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later refined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2014), is a qualitative research methodology that emphasizes the inductive generation of theory from empirical data rather than the verification of pre-existing theoretical propositions. The methodology assumes that theories should emerge from systematic observation, constant comparison of data, conceptual coding, categorization, memo writing, and theoretical abstraction until theoretical saturation is achieved. Unlike deductive approaches that begin with established theoretical assumptions, Grounded Theory allows explanatory concepts to emerge from the realities under investigation.

The relevance of Grounded Theory to the present study lies in its emphasis on theory generation as the ultimate outcome of rigorous empirical inquiry. The methodology provides a structured process through which researchers move from observing real-world phenomena to identifying recurring concepts, establishing conceptual relationships, and developing explanatory theories. In the context of African scholarship, Grounded Theory offers an appropriate methodological foundation because it encourages scholars to generate theories directly from African experiences, institutional realities, and indigenous knowledge systems instead of relying exclusively on externally developed conceptual frameworks. Consequently, the African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) adopts the inductive logic of Grounded Theory as its methodological engine for transforming empirical evidence into original theoretical contributions.

1.4.2 Blue Ocean Strategy

The Blue Ocean Strategy, proposed by Kim and Mauborgne (2005), argues that sustainable competitive advantage is achieved not by competing within existing markets ("red oceans") but by creating uncontested spaces ("blue oceans") through innovation and value creation. Rather than improving existing products or competing within established boundaries, organizations are encouraged to redefine the rules of competition by creating entirely new opportunities.

Although originally developed within strategic management, the philosophy of the Blue Ocean Strategy provides an important conceptual foundation for this study. Applied to African academia, the strategy suggests that African scholars should move beyond the continual application and refinement of existing theories developed elsewhere and instead

identify unexplored conceptual spaces arising from African realities. These realities—including indigenous knowledge systems, governance structures, leadership practices, entrepreneurship, conflict resolution mechanisms, community institutions, and socio-cultural experiences—represent intellectual "blue oceans" from which original theories can emerge. The strategy therefore complements Grounded Theory by encouraging conceptual innovation while providing the strategic rationale for indigenous theory generation.

1.5 Research Methodology

This study adopted a conceptual research design based on a comprehensive review and synthesis of existing literature on theory development and theory generation. Rather than collecting primary empirical data, the study systematically examined scholarly works on theory-building methodologies, indigenous knowledge production, epistemic decolonization, and innovation in knowledge creation to identify conceptual gaps that have limited Africa's contribution to global theoretical development. Particular attention was given to established theory-generation frameworks proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Dubin (1978), Whetten (1989), Strauss and Corbin (1998), Corley and Gioia (2011), and Charmaz (2014). These works were critically reviewed to examine their contributions to theory construction, conceptual abstraction, and theoretical innovation, while identifying opportunities for extending their application within the African higher education context.

1. The study was methodologically anchored on Grounded Theory, whose inductive principles informed the conceptualization of the proposed African Theory Generation Model (ATGM). In addition, the Blue Ocean Strategy provided the strategic lens for advocating the creation of new theoretical spaces rather than continued reliance on existing theoretical traditions. Through comparative analysis, conceptual synthesis, and logical reasoning, insights drawn from the reviewed literature were integrated into a coherent framework that simplifies theory generation into five guiding questions for researchers. To demonstrate the practical applicability of the proposed model, the development process of the Intent-Focused Management Theory (Omuse, 2025) was used as an illustrative case showing how original theories can emerge from systematic empirical inquiry, conceptual abstraction, and scholarly validation. The resulting African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) therefore represents a conceptual framework developed through rigorous literature synthesis and theoretical integration, providing a practical roadmap for guiding African scholars from empirical research to the development of contextually grounded and globally relevant theories.

2.0 Discussion of related literature on theory generation

This section presents a discussion of related literature on: the state of theory generation in African Universities and the factors limiting Africa's contribution to global theoretical development; and, theory development, indigenous knowledge production, grounded theory, and the Blue Ocean Strategy as foundations for theory generation in African academia.

2.1 State of Theory Generation in African Universities and the Factors Limiting Africa's Contribution to Global Theoretical Development

The generation of theory represents one of the highest forms of scholarly contribution because theories provide systematic explanations of phenomena, organize empirical knowledge, predict future outcomes, and guide research and professional practice. Whetten (1989) argues that a theory contributes to scholarship by explaining what, how, why, and under what conditions phenomena occur, while Corley and Gioia (2011) contend that the ultimate value of academic research lies not merely in producing empirical findings but in advancing theoretical understanding. Consequently, universities are expected to function not only as institutions for teaching and research but also as centres for conceptual innovation capable of generating new theories that shape academic disciplines and inform policy and practice.

Following political independence, African governments invested considerably in higher education as a vehicle for national development, technological advancement, and socio-economic transformation. This investment has resulted in significant growth in the number of universities, postgraduate enrolment, research centres, and scientific publications across the continent (Altbach et al., 2009; Cloete, Maassen, & Bailey, 2015). African universities increasingly participate in international research collaborations and contribute to global scientific literature in diverse fields. Nevertheless, despite this quantitative expansion, concerns persist regarding the originality and theoretical contribution of research produced within African academia. A substantial proportion of research conducted in African universities continues to apply conceptual frameworks developed primarily in Europe and North America rather than generating new theories grounded in African experiences and realities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

The continued reliance on externally developed theories has attracted increasing scholarly attention within debates on the decolonization of knowledge. Scholars argue that colonial legacies continue to shape research agendas, methodological choices, publication systems, and the conceptual frameworks employed by African researchers. As a result, African scholarship frequently contributes empirical evidence to validate or extend existing theories without fundamentally challenging or reconstructing the theoretical assumptions upon which those studies are based. Contemporary discussions therefore advocate a shift from

knowledge dependency toward endogenous knowledge production that reflects African histories, cultures, institutions, and development experiences. Despite decades of debate, progress remains gradual, with scholars noting the continued predominance of non-African theoretical perspectives in leading journals and academic curricula.

One explanation for the limited development of indigenous theories lies in the historical evolution of African universities. Most universities established during the colonial and immediate post-independence periods adopted European academic traditions, curricula, and research philosophies. Although these institutions successfully expanded access to higher education, their intellectual orientation remained closely aligned with Western models of knowledge production (Mamdani, 2016). Consequently, postgraduate research often emphasizes testing, extending, or contextualizing existing theories rather than developing entirely new conceptual frameworks. This tendency has been reinforced by international publication standards that frequently privilege established theoretical paradigms and encourage scholars to position their work within dominant Western literature.

Institutional factors further constrain theory generation within African universities. Academic promotion systems in many institutions place greater emphasis on the quantity of publications than on the originality of theoretical contributions. Researchers often experience heavy teaching workloads, limited research funding, inadequate mentorship in conceptual scholarship, and pressure to publish within relatively short timeframes. These conditions encourage incremental empirical studies that can be completed efficiently rather than long-term conceptual research requiring sustained abstraction and theoretical synthesis. Furthermore, limited investment in interdisciplinary research reduces opportunities for integrating ideas across disciplines, an approach that has historically contributed to the emergence of influential theories.

Scholarly factors also contribute to the limited production of original theories. Many postgraduate programmes emphasize research methodology and statistical analysis while devoting comparatively less attention to theory construction, conceptual abstraction, and philosophical foundations of scientific inquiry. Consequently, students become proficient in applying existing theories but receive limited training in developing new conceptual explanations. Corley and Gioia (2011) observe that theory building requires creativity, conceptual imagination, and abstraction beyond empirical observation—competencies that must be intentionally cultivated within doctoral education. Similarly, Grounded Theory scholars maintain that new theories emerge through systematic conceptualization of empirical realities rather than through the routine application of predetermined theoretical frameworks (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Another important constraint relates to epistemological orientation. African scholarship has historically been influenced by positivist traditions that prioritize hypothesis testing over theory generation. While hypothesis testing contributes significantly to scientific validation, it seldom produces fundamentally new conceptual models unless accompanied by deliberate processes of abstraction and theoretical integration. Increasingly, scholars advocating epistemic decolonization argue that African universities should recognize indigenous experiences, languages, philosophies, and institutional practices as legitimate sources of theoretical insight capable of enriching global scholarship. Rather than rejecting existing theories, this perspective encourages complementing them with theories generated from African contexts that possess universal explanatory potential.

Despite these challenges, encouraging signs of indigenous theory development are beginning to emerge. African scholars have contributed important conceptual perspectives such as Ubuntu philosophy, Afrocentricity, African feminism, and decoloniality, while more recent developments include discipline-specific theoretical contributions such as Intent-Focused Management Theory (Omuse, 2025), which demonstrates the possibility of generating original management theories from African organizational realities. Such developments suggest that the challenge facing African universities is not a lack of intellectual capacity but the absence of deliberate institutional mechanisms that promote conceptual innovation alongside empirical research.

Viewed collectively, the literature suggests that African universities have made substantial progress in expanding research output but comparatively limited progress in generating globally recognized theories across many academic disciplines. Existing scholarship largely attributes this situation to historical academic traditions, institutional incentives, epistemological dependence, publication practices, limited emphasis on theory building in postgraduate education, and insufficient support for conceptual scholarship. Consequently, there remains a compelling need for a systematic framework capable of guiding African scholars from empirical investigation toward original theory development. It is this gap that the present study seeks to address through the development of an African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) grounded in the principles of Grounded Theory and informed by the strategic logic of Blue Ocean Strategy.

2.2 Theory Development, Indigenous Knowledge Production, Grounded Theory, and the Blue Ocean Strategy as Foundations for Theory Generation in African Academia

The ability to generate theory distinguishes mature academic disciplines from those that primarily consume existing knowledge. While empirical research expands the evidence base of a discipline, theory development provides the conceptual explanations that organize observations, predict relationships among variables, and guide future research and practice.

Whetten (1989) argues that a theory contributes to knowledge by explaining what factors are involved, how they relate, why the relationships exist, and the conditions under which they apply. Similarly, Corley and Gioia (2011) contend that the hallmark of a significant scholarly contribution is not merely the accumulation of empirical findings but the advancement of new theoretical insights that reshape existing understanding. Consequently, universities are expected to cultivate environments where scholars move beyond testing established theories toward generating original conceptual frameworks capable of explaining emerging phenomena.

Theory development is an iterative intellectual process that begins with systematic observation of reality, followed by conceptualization, abstraction, integration of concepts, and the formulation of propositions that explain observed relationships. Dubin (1978) describes theory building as the systematic organization of concepts into an explanatory structure capable of predicting and interpreting organizational and social phenomena. Likewise, Sutton and Staw (1995) emphasize that theory is more than a collection of variables or hypotheses; it is a coherent explanation that provides causal logic for understanding complex phenomena. Effective theory generation therefore requires creativity, critical thinking, conceptual abstraction, and continuous interaction between empirical evidence and theoretical reasoning.

Despite the centrality of theory in scientific inquiry, much contemporary research, particularly within developing contexts, remains dominated by the application, extension, or validation of existing theories. Corley and Gioia (2011) argue that many studies produce incremental empirical contributions without advancing conceptual understanding, thereby limiting their influence on the evolution of academic disciplines. This concern is particularly relevant to African academia, where postgraduate research frequently adopts established Western theories as analytical lenses while comparatively fewer studies seek to formulate new theories grounded in African experiences and institutional realities.

The growing discourse on indigenous knowledge production provides an important intellectual foundation for addressing this imbalance. Indigenous knowledge refers to knowledge systems that emerge from the historical experiences, cultural practices, social institutions, and environmental interactions of particular communities. Unlike externally imported knowledge, indigenous knowledge reflects local realities and often provides contextually appropriate explanations and solutions to societal challenges (Briggs, 2013). Recent scholarship argues that indigenous knowledge should not merely complement scientific knowledge but should also serve as a legitimate source of conceptual innovation capable of informing theory development and enriching global scholarship (Onwuegbuzie, Mafimisebi, & Orighoyegha, 2024).

Within the African context, indigenous knowledge production has become closely associated with the broader agenda of epistemic decolonization. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 2021) argues that colonial legacies continue to influence knowledge production by privileging Western epistemologies while marginalizing African intellectual traditions. Consequently, African researchers frequently employ imported theoretical frameworks without critically examining their contextual relevance or developing alternative conceptual explanations rooted in African realities. Recent systematic reviews similarly conclude that although African scholarship increasingly recognizes the importance of indigenous knowledge, the deliberate use of indigenous theories and theorization remains limited across many disciplines. Ngulube (2025) observes that African scholars continue to rely predominantly on externally developed theories despite growing calls for epistemic freedom and context-sensitive theorizing.

Indigenous theory generation does not imply rejecting established international theories or isolating African scholarship from global scientific discourse. Rather, it advocates developing theories that originate from African experiences while possessing broader explanatory value beyond their original contexts. Such an approach enriches global knowledge by introducing alternative perspectives capable of explaining organizational, social, political, and economic phenomena that may not be adequately addressed by existing theories. The objective is therefore not intellectual replacement but intellectual diversification through contextually grounded conceptual innovation.

Among the qualitative methodologies available for theory development, Grounded Theory provides one of the most rigorous approaches for generating new theories directly from empirical evidence. Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Grounded Theory emerged as a response to the dominance of deductive research approaches that relied heavily on pre-existing theoretical assumptions. Instead of testing predetermined hypotheses, Grounded Theory employs systematic data collection, constant comparison, coding, categorization, and theoretical sampling to allow concepts and theoretical relationships to emerge inductively from observed reality (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). The methodology therefore places conceptual discovery at the centre of scientific inquiry.

Charmaz (2014) further refined Grounded Theory through the constructivist perspective, emphasizing that theory emerges through the interaction between researchers and the social contexts they investigate. Rather than treating theories as objective discoveries independent of researchers, constructivist Grounded Theory recognizes that conceptual frameworks evolve through continuous interpretation, comparison, and abstraction. This makes the methodology particularly suitable for African scholarship, where researchers seek to

explain organizational and societal realities that may not fit neatly within existing theoretical paradigms.

Grounded Theory has increasingly been recognized as an effective methodology for indigenous theory development because it begins with local experiences rather than imported conceptual assumptions. Recent methodological studies demonstrate that Grounded Theory facilitates the emergence of context-specific theories capable of contributing to broader academic discourse while maintaining strong empirical foundations. Its emphasis on theoretical sensitivity, constant comparison, and iterative conceptualization enables researchers to move systematically from observations to explanatory models without being constrained by existing theoretical frameworks.

While Grounded Theory provides the methodological mechanism for generating theories, the Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) offers a complementary strategic perspective that justifies why African scholars should pursue original theorization. Developed by Kim and Mauborgne (2005), Blue Ocean Strategy argues that sustainable success is achieved not by competing within existing spaces ("red oceans") but by creating uncontested spaces ("blue oceans") through value innovation. Rather than competing directly with established approaches, organizations create entirely new markets where competition becomes largely irrelevant (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005).

Applied to academia, Blue Ocean Strategy suggests that African universities should shift their scholarly focus from repeatedly validating or extending imported theories toward creating new conceptual spaces through indigenous theory generation. Instead of competing with established Western theoretical traditions on their own terms, African scholars can generate theories rooted in African institutional experiences, leadership practices, governance systems, entrepreneurship, conflict management, and indigenous knowledge systems. Such theories have the potential to contribute unique perspectives to global scholarship while simultaneously addressing local development challenges.

The relevance of Blue Ocean Strategy to theory generation has gained increasing scholarly attention. Studies applying Grounded Theory to Blue Ocean Strategy demonstrate that innovation emerges through systematic identification of unexplored conceptual spaces rather than incremental improvements within existing paradigms. This reinforces the argument that theory generation itself represents an intellectual "blue ocean," where scholars create new conceptual value instead of competing solely within established theoretical traditions.

Viewed collectively, the literature demonstrates a strong conceptual relationship among theory development, indigenous knowledge production, Grounded Theory, and Blue Ocean

Strategy. Theory development provides the desired scholarly outcome; indigenous knowledge offers the contextual source of novel concepts; Grounded Theory supplies the methodological pathway for transforming observations into theory; and Blue Ocean Strategy provides the strategic rationale for creating original intellectual spaces rather than competing within existing theoretical traditions. Together, these perspectives establish a robust conceptual foundation for advancing indigenous theory generation in African universities. Building upon this foundation, the present study proposes an African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) that seeks to guide African scholars in transforming empirical inquiry into original theoretical contributions capable of enriching both African and global scholarship.

2.3 Existing Theory Development Models

Theory development has attracted considerable scholarly attention because theories provide systematic explanations that advance scientific knowledge, guide research, and inform practice. Over the years, several theory development models have been proposed to explain how concepts evolve into coherent theoretical frameworks. One of the earliest systematic approaches was advanced by Dubin (1978), who argued that theory development involves the identification of concepts, specification of relationships among concepts, establishment of theoretical boundaries, and empirical testing. Dubin viewed theory construction as a structured and logical process that transforms isolated observations into explanatory systems. Similarly, Whetten (1989) proposed that a strong theory should clearly explain what factors are involved, how they are related, why the relationships exist, and when and where the theory applies. Whetten's framework has become influential in evaluating the quality and completeness of theoretical contributions.

The development of Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) marked a significant shift in theory generation by advocating an inductive approach in which theories emerge directly from empirical data rather than being deduced from existing theoretical assumptions. This methodology was later refined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), who introduced systematic procedures for coding, categorization, constant comparison, and theoretical integration, and further advanced by Charmaz (2014) through a constructivist perspective that recognizes the co-construction of meaning between researchers and participants. Collectively, these approaches emphasize that theory should be firmly grounded in empirical evidence and progressively developed through conceptual abstraction.

More recently, Corley and Gioia (2011) argued that the value of academic research should be assessed primarily by its theoretical contribution rather than its methodological sophistication alone. They contend that meaningful theory development requires originality,

conceptual clarity, and practical relevance capable of advancing scholarly understanding. While these models have made substantial contributions to explaining how theories are developed, they primarily focus on the methodological and conceptual processes of theory construction. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to providing a practical framework that guides scholars, particularly within African universities, from empirical research to the deliberate generation of indigenous and globally relevant theories. It is this conceptual and contextual gap that the proposed African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) seeks to address by integrating the methodological principles of Grounded Theory with the innovation philosophy of the Blue Ocean Strategy into a simplified framework for systematic theory generation.

2.4 The call for a theoretical framework

The third objective of this study was to develop an African Theory Generation Model. According to Nachmias and Nachmias (2008), a theoretical framework supports a theory in a research study, introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem under study exists. It permits the researcher to evaluate assumptions more critically, forces the researcher to address questions of why and how, connects the researcher to existing knowledge and permits the researcher to intellectually transit from simply describing a phenomenon that have been observed to generalizing about various aspects of that phenomenon. This study proceeded to suggest a theoretical framework known as the African Theory Generation Model. The framework is explicitly rooted in African realities, indigenous knowledge systems, and the broader agenda of epistemic decolonization. It provides a strategic roadmap for how African scholars can systematically generate, institutionalize, and disseminate indigenous theories that contribute to global knowledge.

3.0 Developing an African Theory Generation Model (ATGM): A Framework for Indigenous and Globally Relevant Theory Development

The development of original theories represents the highest level of scholarly contribution because theories extend knowledge beyond isolated empirical findings to provide systematic explanations of complex phenomena. While research findings answer specific questions within defined contexts, theories establish generalized principles capable of guiding future research, informing policy, and shaping professional practice (Whetten, 1989). Corley and Gioia (2011) similarly argue that the significance of academic research should be judged by its theoretical contribution rather than solely by its methodological rigor or empirical findings. Consequently, universities aspiring to become globally competitive must deliberately cultivate environments that encourage scholars to move beyond knowledge application toward knowledge creation through theory development.

The preceding literature demonstrates that African universities have made substantial progress in expanding research output but comparatively limited progress in generating globally recognized theories across many academic disciplines. This imbalance suggests that the challenge confronting African scholarship is not simply increasing research productivity but establishing systematic processes through which empirical knowledge can be transformed into original theoretical contributions. Existing studies largely focus on improving research capacity, publication output, research funding, and international collaboration while paying comparatively little attention to institutional mechanisms that intentionally promote theory generation as an academic outcome (Cloete, Maassen, & Bailey, 2015).

Theory generation is fundamentally a process of conceptual abstraction. It begins with careful observation of empirical reality, progresses through systematic identification of recurring concepts and patterns, and culminates in the formulation of explanatory propositions capable of predicting and interpreting similar phenomena across contexts. Dubin (1978) describes theory building as the integration of concepts into coherent explanatory systems, while Sutton and Staw (1995) emphasize that theories must provide convincing explanations rather than merely describing observed relationships. Accordingly, successful theory generation requires deliberate movement from descriptive knowledge toward conceptual generalization.

Grounded Theory provides one of the most appropriate methodological pathways for achieving this transformation. Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and subsequently refined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2014), Grounded Theory advocates generating theory inductively from empirical observations rather than imposing predetermined conceptual frameworks upon data. The methodology employs iterative processes of data collection, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, memo writing, and conceptual abstraction until theoretical saturation is achieved. Through this systematic process, researchers progressively transform empirical observations into higher-order concepts and ultimately into theoretical explanations.

The suitability of Grounded Theory for indigenous theory development has received increasing scholarly recognition because it begins with contextual realities rather than imported theoretical assumptions. Instead of asking whether existing theories apply within African contexts, Grounded Theory encourages researchers to investigate African realities on their own terms and allow explanatory concepts to emerge from those realities. Recent methodological studies similarly argue that Grounded Theory provides an effective approach for developing indigenous and native theories capable of enriching international scholarship while maintaining strong empirical foundations.

Although Grounded Theory provides the methodological foundation for theory generation, the Blue Ocean Strategy offers the strategic rationale for why African scholars should pursue indigenous theorization. Kim and Mauborgne (2005) argue that sustainable competitive advantage is achieved by creating uncontested spaces rather than competing within existing ones. Instead of competing in established "red oceans," organizations create "blue oceans" by developing entirely new value propositions and redefining the boundaries of competition. This reconstructionist perspective suggests that innovation occurs through creating new conceptual spaces rather than improving existing ones.

Applied to African academia, Blue Ocean Strategy suggests that the continent should avoid competing solely through incremental extensions of existing Western theories. Instead, African scholars should identify unexplored conceptual spaces emerging from African institutional experiences, governance systems, leadership practices, entrepreneurship, indigenous knowledge systems, conflict resolution mechanisms, community structures, and socio-cultural realities. By conceptualizing these realities into formal theories, African scholarship can create its own "blue oceans" within global academic discourse, thereby contributing novel theoretical perspectives rather than merely validating existing paradigms. Recent reviews of strategy research also note the importance of expanding conceptual innovation into underexplored contexts rather than concentrating only on established theoretical traditions.

The concept of indigenous knowledge production further strengthens the case for a systematic African approach to theory generation. Indigenous knowledge represents accumulated understanding that is developed through historical experience, cultural interaction, and practical problem-solving within specific communities (Briggs, 2013). Scholars advocating epistemic decolonization argue that indigenous realities should not merely provide data for testing imported theories but should constitute legitimate sources of conceptual innovation capable of generating universally applicable theoretical frameworks (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; 2021). Consequently, African theory generation should neither reject international scholarship nor remain confined to local relevance; rather, it should transform context-specific observations into theories possessing broader explanatory and predictive capability.

The present study therefore proposes the African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) as an integrated framework that combines the methodological strengths of Grounded Theory with the innovation philosophy of the Blue Ocean Strategy. The model recognizes that theory generation is neither accidental nor exclusively dependent upon individual scholarly brilliance. Instead, it is presented as a systematic process through which empirical observations are progressively transformed into concepts, conceptual categories, theoretical propositions, and eventually mature theories capable of contributing to global knowledge.

Unlike traditional research models that conclude with empirical findings, the African Theory Generation Model positions theory formulation as the primary scholarly outcome. The model encourages researchers to begin with African realities, identify recurring patterns through systematic inquiry, formulate abstract higher-order concepts, integrate those concepts into explanatory propositions, and subsequently validate and refine the resulting theories through empirical investigation. In doing so, African scholars become producers rather than consumers of theoretical knowledge.

The proposed model also emphasizes that theory generation should be institutionalized within African universities. Doctoral training, research supervision, research funding, promotion criteria, and publication policies should deliberately reward conceptual innovation alongside empirical productivity. Such institutional support would gradually establish a culture in which original theory development becomes an expected scholarly contribution rather than an exceptional achievement. Ultimately, the African Theory Generation Model seeks to reposition African universities as active contributors to global knowledge by providing a systematic pathway through which local experiences are transformed into internationally relevant theories. The proposed African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) consists of nine interrelated stages:

1. African Realities and Indigenous Contexts – The process begins with authentic African social, economic, political, organizational, and cultural experiences.
2. Empirical Observation – Researchers systematically observe and investigate phenomena requiring conceptual explanation.
3. Grounded Inquiry – Using Grounded Theory techniques, researchers collect and analyse evidence without imposing predetermined theoretical assumptions.
4. Concept Identification – Significant ideas emerging from empirical evidence are identified and labelled.
5. Conceptual Categorization – Related concepts are grouped into higher-order categories through constant comparison.
6. Pattern Recognition – Researchers identify recurring relationships among categories that explain observed phenomena.
7. Theoretical Abstraction – The categories are synthesized into explanatory propositions capable of generalization.
8. Theory Formulation and Validation – The emerging theory is articulated and subjected to empirical testing and refinement.
9. Globally Relevant African Theory – The refined theory contributes to international scholarship while remaining grounded in African realities.

African Theory Generation Model (ATGM)

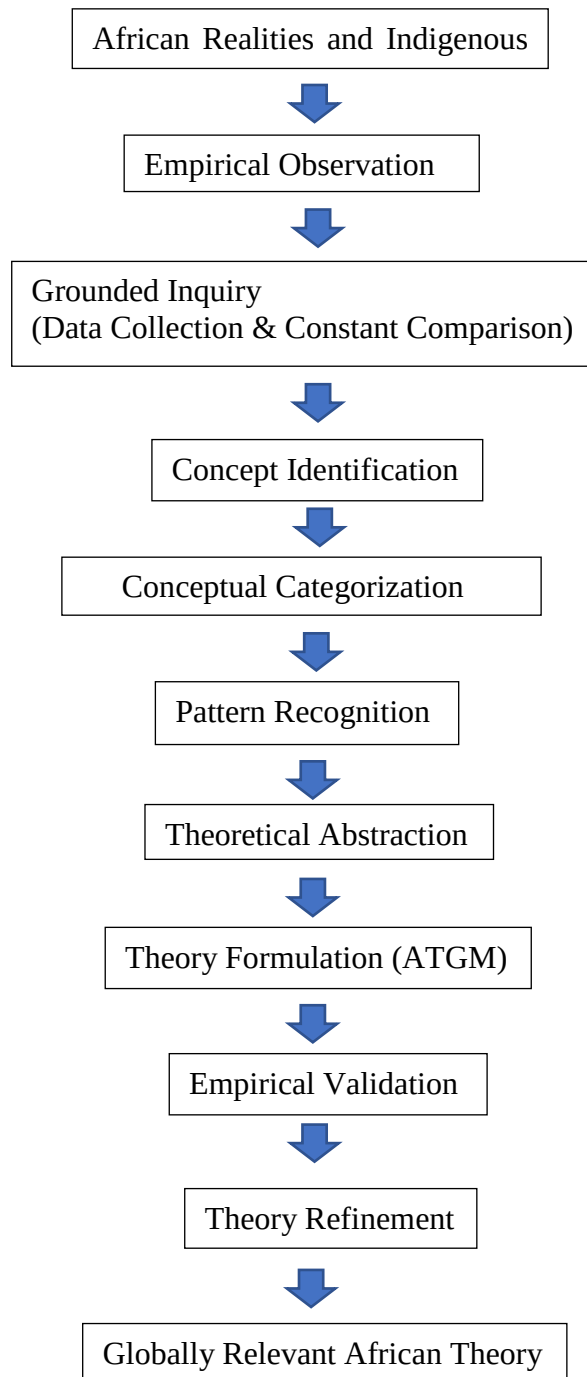


Figure 3.1: African Theory Generation Model (ATGM)

3.1 Application of the African Theory Generation Model (ATGM): The Case of Intent-Focused Management Theory

The proposed African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) is illustrated through the development of the Intent-Focused Management Theory (IFMT) developed by Omuse (2025). The theory demonstrates that indigenous theory generation follows a systematic process rather than occurring through spontaneous intellectual creativity. Each stage of the model can be mapped to the development of IFMT as illustrated below.

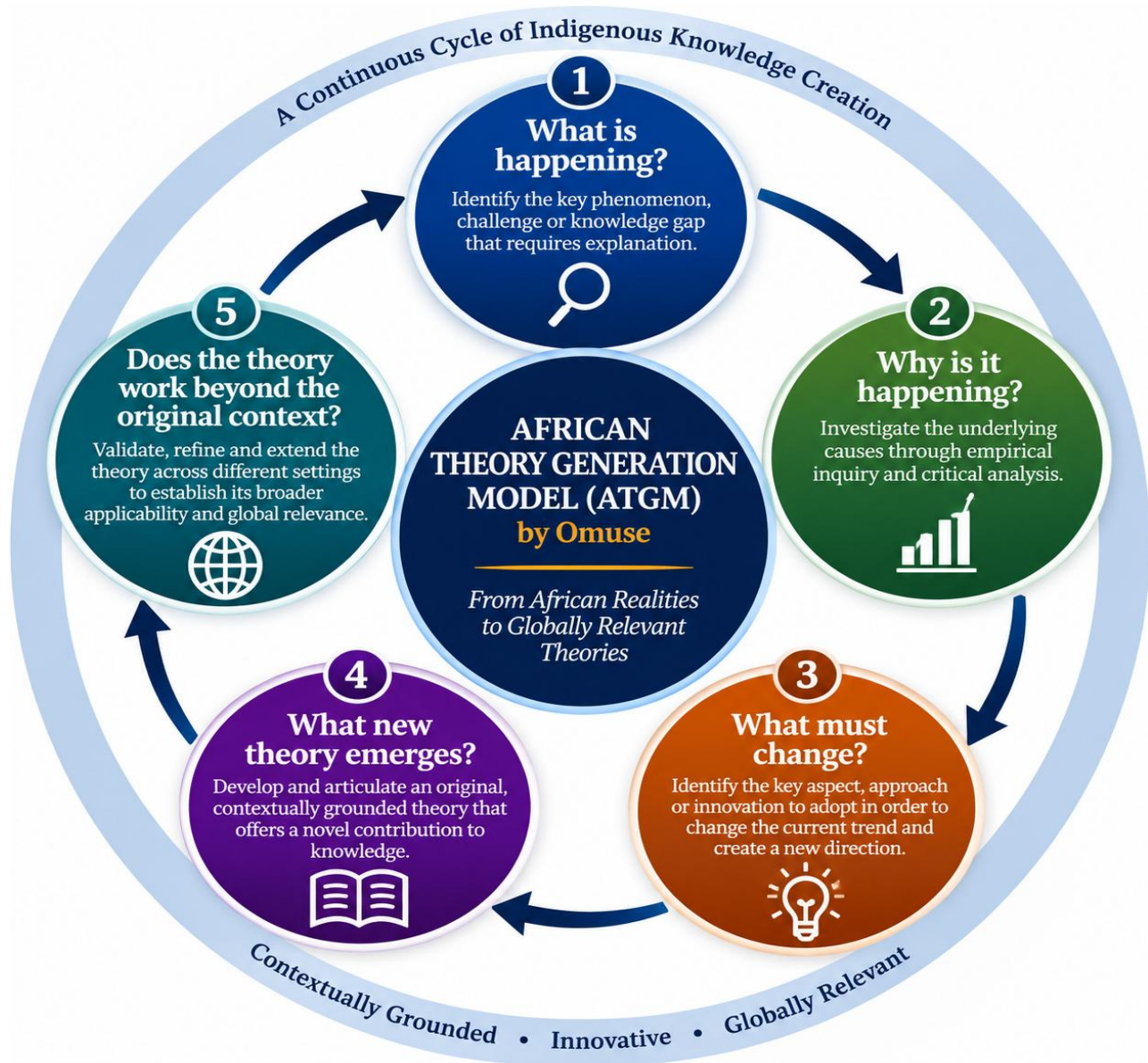
Table 3.1: African Theory Generation Model (ATGM)

ATGM Stage	Application in Intent-Focused Management Theory
1. African Reality / Context	Observation that many African organizations possess strategic plans yet consistently underperform because managers become preoccupied with organizational functions instead of the organization's original intent.
2. Problem Identification	Recognition of a persistent management gap whereby planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling become ends in themselves rather than instruments for achieving organizational purpose.
3. Grounded Empirical Inquiry	Continuous observation of organizational management practices, leadership behaviour, institutional performance and management literature, leading to identification of recurring management challenges.
4. Concept Identification	Emergence of the concept of Intent as the central driver of organizational effectiveness rather than management functions themselves.
5. Concept Categorization	Integration of concepts such as organizational purpose, strategic alignment, managerial decision-making, resource allocation, leadership commitment and performance into coherent conceptual categories.
6. Pattern Recognition	Identification of a recurring relationship showing that organizations maintaining continuous alignment between managerial decisions and organizational intent consistently outperform organizations driven

	primarily by routine administrative processes.
7. Conceptual Abstraction	Development of the proposition that organizational intent governs and aligns all management functions , making intent the independent organizing principle of management.
8. Theory Formulation	Formulation of the Intent-Focused Management Theory, proposing that effective management depends upon maintaining continuous alignment between organizational intent and management functions.
9. Validation and Publication	Publication and scholarly dissemination of IFMT, allowing further empirical testing, refinement and application across organizational settings.
10. Knowledge Expansion	The published theory stimulates further research, practical application and development of additional indigenous theories, thereby restarting the African Theory Generation cycle.

3.2 Simplifying the African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) into Five Guiding Questions

The African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) was intentionally simplified into five guiding questions to enhance its clarity, usability, and applicability across academic disciplines. Although theory generation is inherently a complex and iterative intellectual process involving observation, conceptualization, abstraction, proposition development, validation, and refinement, reducing the framework to five fundamental questions provides a practical heuristic that scholars can easily remember and systematically apply throughout the research process. Rather than oversimplifying theory development, the questions encapsulate the essential stages of conceptual inquiry while preserving the methodological rigor of Grounded Theory and the innovation philosophy of the Blue Ocean Strategy.



2.

Figure 2: Simplified African Theory Generation Model (ATGM)

The simplification is also consistent with established practice in scientific inquiry, where influential frameworks are often expressed through a limited number of guiding questions or principles to facilitate understanding, teaching, and application. For example, Lasswell's (1948) communication model is summarized through five questions ("Who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect?"), while Kipling's "Five Ws and One H"

has long guided investigative and research processes. Similarly, the ATGM translates the complex process of theory generation into five sequential questions that encourage researchers to progress logically from identifying a phenomenon to developing and validating an original theory.

The first two questions—What is happening? and Why is it happening?—guide researchers in identifying a significant phenomenon and investigating its underlying causes through empirical inquiry. These questions reflect the problem-identification and analytical stages common to scientific research. The third question—What must change?—represents the model's distinctive contribution by encouraging researchers to identify the conceptual, methodological, or institutional innovation required to address the identified gap. This question reflects the influence of the Blue Ocean Strategy, which advocates creating new intellectual spaces rather than competing within existing paradigms (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). It shifts researchers from merely explaining problems to envisioning transformative solutions.

The fourth question—What new theory emerges?—focuses on conceptual abstraction and theory formulation, drawing directly from the principles of Grounded Theory, which emphasizes allowing theoretical explanations to emerge inductively from empirical evidence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). Finally, the fifth question—Does the theory work beyond the original context?—emphasizes empirical validation, refinement, and generalizability. This stage recognizes that a theory achieves scholarly significance only when it demonstrates explanatory power across different contexts and contributes meaningfully to broader academic discourse.

The simplification therefore serves both pedagogical and practical purposes. It transforms the ATGM into an accessible framework that can be adopted by undergraduate students, postgraduate researchers, doctoral candidates, supervisors, and experienced scholars without compromising its conceptual integrity. By framing theory generation as five interconnected questions rather than numerous procedural stages, the model encourages scholars to think systematically about theory development while remaining sufficiently flexible to accommodate different disciplines, methodologies, and research contexts.

Ultimately, the Five Questions of the African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) are not intended to replace the detailed processes of theory building. Rather, they provide a concise conceptual roadmap that integrates empirical inquiry, indigenous knowledge production, conceptual innovation, and theory validation into a coherent and memorable framework for transforming African scholarship from knowledge consumption to knowledge production.

3.3 Grounded Theory Versus African Theory Generation Model

Although the Grounded Theory and the proposed African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) share the common objective of facilitating theory development, they differ in purpose, scope, and application. Grounded Theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later refined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2014), is primarily a qualitative research methodology that explains how theories can be inductively generated from systematically collected and analysed empirical data through processes such as coding, constant comparison, and theoretical abstraction. Its principal concern is the methodological rigor of theory construction. In contrast, the African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) is a conceptual and strategic framework designed to institutionalize theory generation within African academia by guiding scholars from the identification of context-specific phenomena to the formulation and validation of original, globally relevant theories. While the ATGM adopts the inductive logic of Grounded Theory as its methodological foundation, it extends beyond methodology by integrating the innovation philosophy of the Blue Ocean Strategy and simplifying the theory-generation process into five practical guiding questions. Furthermore, unlike Grounded Theory, which is context-neutral and applicable across diverse research settings, the ATGM is explicitly rooted in African realities, indigenous knowledge systems, and the broader agenda of epistemic decolonization. Consequently, Grounded Theory explains how theories emerge from empirical inquiry, whereas the ATGM provides a strategic roadmap for how African scholars can systematically generate, institutionalize, and disseminate indigenous theories that contribute to global knowledge.

3.4 Departure of the African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) from Earlier Theory Generation Models

Although several scholars have proposed influential frameworks for theory development, including those by Dubin (1978), Whetten (1989), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1998), and Corley and Gioia (2011), these models were primarily developed to explain the methodological and conceptual processes of building theory. The African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) departs from these earlier approaches by shifting attention from the mechanics of theory construction to the broader objective of institutionalizing indigenous theory generation within African academia. Rather than focusing solely on how theories are built, ATGM asks how African scholars can systematically become producers of globally relevant theories grounded in African realities.

First, whereas earlier models are generally methodological frameworks, the ATGM is both a methodological and strategic framework. It combines the inductive logic of Grounded Theory with the innovation philosophy of the Blue Ocean Strategy, encouraging scholars not merely to explain existing phenomena but to identify unexplored conceptual spaces

from which original theories can emerge. This integration broadens theory development from an analytical exercise to a deliberate strategy for knowledge creation.

Second, ATGM is explicitly context-driven. Traditional theory-building models are largely context-neutral and intended for universal application. In contrast, the ATGM begins with African realities, indigenous knowledge systems, institutional experiences, and societal challenges as legitimate sources of theoretical innovation. It argues that context should not simply serve as a setting for testing imported theories but should constitute the foundation for generating new theoretical perspectives with global relevance.

Third, the model introduces a practical five-question framework—*What is happening? Why is it happening? What must change? What new theory emerges? Does the theory work beyond the original context?*—which simplifies the complex process of theory generation into an intuitive sequence. Unlike earlier models that often require extensive methodological expertise, these guiding questions make theory generation more accessible to undergraduate students, postgraduate researchers, doctoral candidates, supervisors, and experienced scholars alike.

Fourth, the ATGM explicitly positions theory generation as the ultimate outcome of research rather than treating theory as an incidental by-product of empirical investigation. It therefore encourages universities to align doctoral training, research supervision, funding priorities, publication strategies, and promotion criteria with the goal of producing original theories alongside empirical findings.

Finally, the model demonstrates its practical applicability through the Intent-Focused Management Theory (Omuse, 2025), providing a concrete illustration of how a contextually grounded African theory can emerge from systematic empirical inquiry. By incorporating a worked example, the ATGM moves beyond conceptual prescription to demonstrate a reproducible pathway for indigenous theory generation.

Collectively, these features distinguish the African Theory Generation Model from earlier theory-building approaches. Its originality lies not only in describing how theories are developed but also in providing a strategic, context-sensitive, and practical framework for transforming African universities from knowledge consumers into knowledge producers.

Table3.2: Summary of the ATGM's Distinctive Features

Earlier Theory Generation Models	African Theory Generation Model (ATGM)
Emphasize methodological processes of theory building	Integrates methodological and strategic dimensions of theory generation

Largely context-neutral	Begins with African realities and indigenous knowledge
Focus on generating theory from empirical data	Focuses on institutionalizing indigenous theory generation in African universities
Present detailed methodological procedures	Simplifies theory generation into five memorable guiding questions
Primarily intended for researchers with methodological expertise	Designed for use by students, supervisors, researchers, and institutions
Theory emerges from research	Theory generation is the explicit objective of research
Limited emphasis on institutional change	Calls for reforms in postgraduate training, supervision, funding, and research policy
Rarely illustrated with an indigenous theory-generation example	Demonstrated through the development of the Intent-Focused Management Theory (Omuse, 2025)

This comparison highlights that the ATGM's principal contribution is not a replacement of established theory-building methodologies but their extension into a practical, contextually grounded framework aimed at fostering sustained theory generation within African higher education.

4.0 Conclusion

The advancement of knowledge depends not only on the generation of empirical evidence but also on the development of original theories that explain, predict, and guide practice. This study has argued that despite significant growth in higher education, research capacity, and scholarly publications since independence, African universities have made comparatively limited contributions to global theoretical development. While African scholars have increasingly participated in knowledge production through empirical research, much of this scholarship remains anchored in the application and validation of theories developed elsewhere. This pattern has perpetuated Africa's position as a consumer rather than a producer of theoretical knowledge, despite the continent's rich indigenous knowledge systems, unique institutional experiences, and diverse socio-cultural realities.

To address this gap, the study proposed the African Theory Generation Model (ATGM) as a systematic and practical framework for guiding scholars from empirical inquiry to the development of original, contextually grounded, and globally relevant theories. Anchored on Grounded Theory and inspired by the innovation philosophy of the Blue Ocean Strategy, the model simplifies the theory-generation process into five guiding questions that provide a structured pathway for conceptual innovation while remaining sufficiently flexible for application across academic disciplines. By demonstrating the applicability of the model

through the development of the Intent-Focused Management Theory (Omuse, 2025), the study illustrates that theory generation is a deliberate, systematic, and reproducible scholarly process rather than an accidental outcome of research.

3. The study therefore concludes that repositioning African universities from knowledge consumers to knowledge producers requires more than increased research output; it requires a deliberate institutional commitment to cultivating original theory development. The African Theory Generation Model provides a practical roadmap for achieving this transformation by embedding theory generation within research training, postgraduate supervision, funding priorities, and scholarly practice. If widely adopted, the model has the potential to stimulate a new generation of indigenous theories that not only address African realities but also enrich global scholarship. Future empirical studies are encouraged to validate, refine, and apply the ATGM across diverse disciplines, institutions, and cultural contexts, thereby strengthening its contribution as a foundational framework for theory generation in African academia.

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