

# How do Core Management Practises differ in Africa? Ethnographic Study of the Kalabari Kingdom.

Damiete Onyema Lawrence (Ph.D) & Melanie J. Ashleigh (Ph.D)

1. Admin Service Office (Finance) Nigerian Liquified Natural Gas Ltd, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
2. Associate Professor, University of Southampton, Southampton, Hampshire, United Kingdom

## ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study explores the core management practices of the Kalabari Kingdom, specifically focusing on the community of Abonnema in Rivers State, Nigeria. Drawing on historical, cultural, and contemporary insights, the research highlights the unique blend of indigenous management practices shaped by traditional governance structures, spiritual beliefs, and local norms. Using Henri Fayol's principles of management as a comparative framework, the study identifies key differences and similarities between traditional Kalabari practices and modern Western management concepts. Key findings reveal the enduring relevance of communal decision-making, the evolving role of traditional leaders, and the integration of religious values in governance. These practices underscore a dynamic interplay between cultural preservation and adaptation to external influences, such as state governance and globalization. The study employs a mini-ethnographic methodology, including thematic analysis of interviews with diverse community members, to derive meaningful insights into leadership evolution, decision-making, and the socio-cultural significance of management practices. The research contributes to global discussions on the relevance of indigenous management systems, advocating for their integration with modern theories to foster sustainability and community resilience. It also presents an updated conceptual framework for understanding Kalabari entrepreneurship and governance, emphasizing the role of unity, education, cultural preservation, and specialization in addressing modern challenges. Future studies are encouraged to operationalize this framework and explore its application across diverse socio-economic settings.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Management Practices, Traditional Leadership, Cultural Preservation, Ethnographic Study, Decision-Making Processes

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The society in which an organization operates significantly influences its managerial practices (Burchell et al., 1980). As organizations are deeply rooted in the societies they serve, management practices often reflect societal norms and values. Research emphasizes that the management style employed in any organization mirrors the level of societal development (Oghojafor et al., 2013). As societies progress, organizations tend to adapt their management approaches to align with these changes, though the reverse is rarely the case (Beusch et al., 2022).

Early research (e.g. Gbadamosi, 2003) suggests that the management perspectives of African academics and leaders have historically been shaped by Western frameworks, a legacy of the colonial era. The research gap in this ethnographic study of management practices in the Kalabari Kingdom, particularly in Abonnema, one the villages, is underscored by the historical significance and cultural dynamics of indigenous management systems that predate colonial influence. Prior to colonization, these systems were integral in navigating challenges such as slavery and economic exploitation, as highlighted by Oghojafor and Muo (2012), who argue that indigenous practices provided effective frameworks for local governance and resource management. Furthermore, Adeleye (2011) contends that the direct application of Western management concepts often fails in non-Western contexts due to differing value systems, emphasizing the need for management approaches that resonate with local cultures.

Western management concepts such as economic democracy and worker participation, which were culturally developed in their native contexts, were often transplanted into African societies without considering local conditions and indigenous management philosophies (George, et al., 2012). This disregard for local context often led to mismatches in organizational efficiency and management outcomes.

In the case of the Kalabari people of Nigeria, known for their adaptability and ingenuity, management practices have been deeply influenced by their history and culture. The Kalabari Kingdom, an Eastern Ijaw group in Rivers State (a combination of different towns/cities) with a population exceeding one million, was historically one of the most prominent commercial groups involved in transatlantic trade on the West African coast (Wariboko, 1999). This long history of trade and cultural exchange has shaped their distinct management practices. The Kalabari people were initially settled in the ancestral community of Elem-Kalabari, but internal disputes and conflicts with neighbouring communities led them to migrate to their current locations, including Abonnema, Buguma, and Bakana.

This study focuses on Abonnema, one of the key communities in the Kalabari Kingdom, to explore its core management practices through a mini-ethnographic lens. By comparing these indigenous practices with contemporary western management approaches, this research aimed to highlight both the similarities and differences between traditional Kalabari management and modern management concepts. Through this analysis, this study provides a deeper understanding of organizational management practices as seen through the lens of the Abonnema system of thought, shedding light on the relevance of indigenous practices in modern organizational contexts.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Management Concepts and Principles

Management is broadly defined as the process of accomplishing tasks by utilizing other people to achieve set objectives (Jaja & Zeb-Obipi, 2005). In Western management literature, principles such as those proposed by Henri Fayol (1949) have gained prominence, with Fayol's fourteen principles often seen as foundational in Western management thinking. Early research by Nwachukwu (1988) describes management principles as fundamental truths that explain the relationship between different variables, serving as a foundation for guiding actions and decisions. Later research (e.g. Adeoti and Adegboye (2013) further describe management as the process of designing and maintaining an environment where individuals work together in groups to efficiently achieve selected goals. Effective management is therefore rooted in a conscious awareness of how to optimize available resources while maintaining organizational resilience, which is essential for navigating the complexities of modern business environments (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2016).

The dynamic nature of contemporary organizations requires managers to not only coordinate resources effectively but also to adapt to changing circumstances and challenges, thereby ensuring sustainability and competitive advantage (Obi & Nwanegbo, 2006; Akpor-Robaro & Omoyele, 2019). Moreover, the integration of indigenous management philosophies into contemporary practices can enhance organizational effectiveness by aligning management strategies with local cultural values and beliefs, fostering a more holistic approach to achieving organizational objectives (Uzo & Meru, 2018). Thus, understanding these multifaceted dimensions of management is crucial for developing effective managerial practices that resonate within specific cultural contexts. Later research by Abubakar et al., (2019) argues that management principles are essential because they guide managers in making more accurate decisions based on experience and are applicable across various contexts, which concurs with Osuala (2002) research. Additionally, indigenous management practices in Africa provide valuable insights, such as South Africa's 'Ubuntu' management philosophy (Mangaliso, 2001) and Egypt's financial management systems (Ojera, 2018).

This review compares the management principles of the Kalabari community to Western (or contemporary) practices, which gained popularity during the colonial era. Below are eight out of Fayol's fourteen key principles that will be considered in this comparison. These eight were chosen based on relevance to indigenous context and focus on core management aspects.

1. **Principle of Division of Work:** Fayol (1949) argues that division of labour promotes specialization. Workers performing a specific task consistently will develop greater accuracy and efficiency, thereby improving overall productivity. Specialization ensures that tasks are assigned to the most qualified individuals (Edward, 2018).
2. **Principle of Authority and Responsibility:** Fayol posits that authority and responsibility go hand in hand. Those held accountable for certain duties must be granted the authority to carry them out effectively. Efficient managers use their authority responsibly, without shirking accountability.

3. **Principle of Discipline:** Discipline involves sincerity in carrying out assigned tasks and following organizational policies. It fosters productivity by ensuring that employees adhere to organizational goals and the directions of their superiors.
4. **Principle of Unity of Command:** Fayol emphasizes that each employee should receive orders from only one superior to avoid confusion and ensure accountability. A violation of this principle can result in disciplinary issues.
5. **Principle of Remuneration:** Fair and satisfactory wages promote harmony between workers and management. Both parties should agree upon fair compensation to reduce tension and enhance productivity (McLean, 2011).
6. **Principle of Degree of Centralization:** Fayol advocates for a balance between centralization and decentralization, where decision-making power is distributed based on situational needs. The central authority provides overall direction, but decentralization allows for flexibility in operations.
7. **Principle of Order:** Orderliness in the allocation of resources—whether human, material, or physical—is key to ensuring sustainability and stability. Almashagba and Nemer (2010) highlight the importance of systematically assigning the right people to the right tasks for optimal outcomes.
8. **Principle of Initiative:** Providing employees with opportunities for creativity and strategic input fosters innovation and helps meet organizational goals. Encouraging initiative ensures the continuous improvement of organizational practices (Edward, 2018).

## 2.2 Brief History of the Kalabari Kingdom

The Kalabari Kingdom, part of the Ijaw ethnic group in Rivers State, Nigeria, has a rich historical background that reflects its social and political evolution. The kingdom's origins are rooted in a series of migrations and settlements influenced by internal conflicts and external pressures. Over time, the Kalabari people established their identity and governance structures, adapting to changing circumstances. The Kalabari community initially settled in the ancestral region of Elem-Kalabari but faced various challenges that prompted migrations to current prominent towns such as Abonnema, Bakana, and Buguma. These towns have become central to the cultural and economic life of the Kalabari people.

Throughout its history, the Kalabari Kingdom has been governed by a succession of leaders who played pivotal roles in shaping its political landscape. The leadership structure has historically been characterized by a blend of traditional authority and communal decision-making processes, reflecting the values and norms of the society. The Kalabari people are known for their adaptability and ingenuity, which have been crucial in navigating both local and regional challenges. Their involvement in trade, particularly during the transatlantic period, significantly influenced their economic practices and social organization. Today, the legacy of these historical developments continues to inform contemporary management practices within the Kalabari community. The focus on collective governance and resource management remains relevant as these practices are integrated with modern organizational frameworks.

## 2.3 The Concept of Kalabari Indigenous Management Practices

Indigenous Kalabari management practices are deeply rooted in the community's social structures and leadership approaches. Leadership is viewed through four distinct contexts:

1. **Leadership as Essentialist:** Leadership in this context is seen as an inherent quality possessed by individuals, manifesting through their actions and behaviours. Leaders are considered to have innate traits that set them apart from subordinates (Bolden & Kirk, 2009).
2. **Leadership as Relational:** Uhl-Bien (2006) and Gronn (2000) argue that leadership resides not within individuals but within the relationships they form with others. Leadership is a group phenomenon, shaped by social influence and collaborative decision-making processes.
3. **Leadership as Critical:** From this perspective, leadership is a mechanism that perpetuates existing power dynamics within organizations. It is often used to legitimize unequal distributions of power and resources (Gemmell & Oakley, 1992), reflecting broader communal and emotional processes (Bolden & Kirk, 2009).

4. **Leadership as Constructionist:** Leadership is seen as a social construct that helps individuals make sense of their situations. This view emphasizes leadership as an ongoing process of understanding and reframing challenges (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006; Pye, 2005).

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Abonnema community within the Kalabari Kingdom has grappled with issues of identity, reflecting their deep connections to transatlantic commercial traders, from whom they adopted names, clothing styles, and religious practices (Alagoa, 1999). The establishment of Abonnema as a distinct town in 1882 marked a significant point in this ongoing process of cultural adaptation and identity formation (Didia & Owukio, 2022)

## 2.4 Indigenous Kalabari Management Practices and Their Contemporary Relevance

Considering the significant gap identified in existing literature regarding the blending of indigenous management practices with modern organizational frameworks, this study aims to explore how traditional Kalabari management principles can inform contemporary Western practices. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do core management practises in Abonnema differ from contemporary Western management practices?
2. What changes in management style over successive leadership have there been in Abonnema?
3. What is the role of religious beliefs in current Abonnema management practices?

By examining these questions, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how local cultural values and historical practices shape modern management strategies. Furthermore, the findings highlight the relevance of indigenous practices in enhancing organizational effectiveness and resilience, thereby offering valuable insights for both academic discourse and practical applications within non-Western contexts.

This study emphasizes the need for empirical research that documents and analyses these unique practices, which are often overlooked in existing literature. By comparing indigenous management practices across various Nigerian communities, it becomes evident that recognizing these practices not only validates local knowledge but also contributes to broader discussions on African management theories. Ultimately, this research advocates for the inclusion of indigenous management principles as legitimate contributions to global management thought, addressing the pressing need for frameworks that resonate with local cultures and contexts.

## The Kalabari Entrepreneur by Wariboko



Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework of The Kalabari Entrepreneur

Source: (Wariboko, 1997)

From Wariboko's (1997) representation of the Kalabari entrepreneurial framework, it becomes evident that the actions of Kalabari entrepreneurs were deeply rooted in spiritual manifestations. These entrepreneurs were religious individuals who believed in the guidance of spiritual beings and mediums in their business affairs. They acknowledged that their business decisions were not only influenced by market forces but also governed by spiritual entities (Wariboko). This spiritual dimension shaped their internal strength and competitive strategies. Before defining tasks, deciding on products, forming networks, or acquiring tools, they would often consult oracles for guidance. Consequently, a chief's success in the Kalabari Kingdom was often measured by his ability to manage and expand his resources within the framework of societal norms, competition, and spiritual foundations. Chiefs were also judged by how well they maintained internal self-worth, which was often linked to this spiritual explanatory foundation.

However, a key limitation in the Kalabari entrepreneurial model is that the entrepreneur was more of a businessman than a manager. He prioritized economic viability over problem-solving, largely because formal managerial education or professional managerial classes were not available at the time. As Drucker (1964) pointed out, entrepreneurship focuses on the maximization of opportunities, which is essential for any business. In the case of Kalabari entrepreneurs, they were more concerned with finding the right opportunities (i.e., "what to do") than with executing tasks efficiently (i.e., "how to do things"). Additionally, Wariboko's (1997) framework suggests that canoe houses maintained vital relationships with suppliers to expand their business outreach and increase the sales of existing products.

In summary, the entrepreneurs in Kalabari society—who were also chiefs and community leaders, held significant control over what happened within their houses, compounds, and towns. Their influence was directly proportional to the resources and power they had accumulated. This created both direct and indirect mechanisms for managing law and order, economic sustainability, and social activities within the community. These chiefs effectively balanced the spiritual and economic dimensions of leadership, creating a unique form of governance.

As noted by Asika (2007), all management theories and practices arise from attempts to solve specific business or management problems. This study aimed to explore how modern Kalabari (particularly in Abonnema) management practices related to Western contemporary organizational management practices. It investigated how traditional management practices influence the attitudes, psychology, and sustainability of the Kalabari people, as observed in cultural events such as chieftaincy coronations, marriage rites, masquerade displays, and burial ceremonies. By employing a mini-ethnographic research methodology, this study explored how current management practices in Abonnema address local challenges and contribute to the community's overall effectiveness and sustainability. examine the effectiveness of existing management practices in Abonnema.

## 2.5 Ethnographic Study

Ethnography, as a qualitative research method, involves the detailed description and interpretation of a culture or social group. Holloway et al. (2010) describe ethnography as *"the description and interpretation of culture or social group"* (p. 76), emphasizing the in-depth study of a culture and the behaviours of its participants. Similarly, Fusch, et al., (2017) highlighted ethnography as a method that examines everyday conduct within a cultural group to derive meanings behind actions.

Ethnography has its origins in ancient Greek and Roman accounts of foreign cultures, with fieldwork being a critical component where researchers immerse themselves in the studied culture to construct narratives and explore behaviours (Holloway et al., 2010). Mini focused ethnography, is a variant that examines specific cultural phenomena within a community over a shorter time frame, allowing researchers to observe and represent cultural norms and values from the subjects' perspectives (White, 2009; Alfonso et al., 2012). This method has been effectively applied in various fields, including medical studies and marketing research, demonstrating its reliability and value in interpretivist research on ethnicity and culture (Kelly & Gibbons, 2008).

For this study, mini ethnography was employed to investigate the core management practices of the Abonnema community within the Kalabari Kingdom, and how these practices related to Western contemporary organizational management approaches. By examining the cultural context, this study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the managerial practices in Abonnema, particularly focusing on leadership, decision-making processes, and the role of traditional beliefs.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

An interpretivist approach was employed to explore meaningful experiences, emphasizing thematic interpretations that highlight interconnected patterns and relationships within the data. This approach aligns with literature that underscores the importance of themes in understanding social and experiential constructs (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Flick, 2009).

A purposive, non-probability sampling method ensured appropriate participants selection to address the research questions (Ritche & Lewus, 2003). The recruitment process involved engaging with community leaders and local organizations to explain the purpose of the research, which helped gain trust and support within the Kalabari community. Clear selection criteria were established, targeting a diverse range of participants. Direct outreach to potential participants was conducted through personal invitations during community gathering, while a snowball sampling technique was employed to encourage initial participants to refer others from their demographic groups.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood their rights and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Throughout this process, cultural norms were respected to foster trust and ensure participants felt valued. The data were organized to identify underlying causes, key themes, and strategies, which were then used to create a theoretical model. Interviews lasting 15–20 minutes were conducted with participants' consent and recorded to ensure accuracy. These interviews provided valuable insights into participants' thoughts and emotions, contributing rich and detailed feedback for the study (Genise, 2002; Shneiderman & Plaisant, 2005).

| Participant Type | Age group         | gender | Role tenure | CODE |
|------------------|-------------------|--------|-------------|------|
| Chief            | 50years-60years   | M      | 10 Years    | CF   |
| Elderly Men      | 60years -75years  | M      | 10 Years    | EM   |
| Elderly Women    | 60years -75years  | F      | 10 Years    | EF   |
| Young Women      | 25years - 45years | M      | 10 Years    | YW   |
| Young Men        | 25years - 45years | M      | 10 Years    | YM   |

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the research were categorized into various themes and sub-themes that address the research questions. Each theme reflects critical aspects of the governance and management practices in Abonnema, providing a nuanced understanding of its socio-political structure. The themes discussed below encapsulate the intersections of traditional customs, evolving leadership dynamics, and the influence of religious beliefs.

To derive these themes, a systematic approach was employed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method recognized for its ability to identify patterns within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The process began with familiarization with the data collected from 20 respondents.

Thematic analysis involved several key steps as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, the transcripts were read and re-read to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. Following this, initial codes were generated to highlight significant features related to the research questions. These codes were then grouped into broader themes based on common patterns observed across the data.

By employing this rigorous thematic analysis framework, meaningful insights were elicited from participants' experiences, contributing to a theoretical model that reflects the complexities of management within the Kalabari Kingdom. This approach not only provided a structured method for analysing qualitative data but also ensured that the findings were grounded in the lived realities of the community members.

#### Theme 1: Core Management Practices in Abonnema

Research Question 1: How do core management practices in Abonnema differ from contemporary management practices?



| Theme 1                          | Sub-Theme                            | Description  |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Core Management Practices</b> | <b>Traditional Leadership Styles</b> | The Kalabari management style comprises various strata of authority, including government, religious leaders, and the Council of Chiefs. <i>CF3</i> , explaining that “ <i>Chiefs represent the traditional legal institution</i> ”. Chiefs are central to upholding traditions and customs in Abonnema, reflecting a traditional leadership model without a monarchy. <i>CF1</i> noted that during conflict resolutions, the indigenes go to the customary court to seek justice. They emphasized the chiefs' role as traditional legal institutions. <i>CF1</i> stated saying; “ <i>during conflict resolutions, the indigenes go to the customary court to seek justice, which is headed by the chiefs</i> ”.   |
|                                  | <b>Decision-Making Processes</b>     | Decision-making is communal, with chiefs guiding traditional functions such as marriages and burials. This process aligns with Fayol's "Principle of Authority and Responsibility," where chiefs manage societal functions and maintain order within the community, as Stated <i>EF1</i> : “ <i>when a chief speaks everyone listens, their decision most times are final as it relates to community/compound/family matters</i> ”.<br><br>Five respondents highlighted that chiefs receive compensation for their time during traditional functions, illustrating a blend of traditional practices with modern incentives (Fayol's "Principle of Remuneration"). As quoted by <i>EF2</i> : “ <i>when chiefs dey go meeting, judge case sometimes them they carry money comeback, sometimes foodstuff, drinks and so “</i> |

The research question is addressed through the theme of core management practices. The analysis reveals that Abonnema's management practices prioritize traditional leadership styles and communal processes, contrasting sharply with the formalized and efficiency-driven approaches of contemporary systems. This difference underscores the cultural specificity of Abonnema's governance. This reveals a strong reliance on Abonnema traditional leadership styles, with chiefs playing central roles in managing community functions. These leaders primarily utilize customary courts to resolve disputes and oversee governance, underscoring the importance of indigenous judicial mechanisms. This aligns with Fayol's principles of authority and remuneration, emphasizing the blend of traditional practices with modern incentives.

This approach starkly contrasts with contemporary management practices, which emphasize formalized organizational structures and bureaucratic processes (Gutterman, 2023). Fayol's principles outline the necessity of formalisation, explaining that work process, organisational structure, and formalisation into total organization ensures clarity in decision -making (Rahman, 2012). However, in Abonnema, decision-making processes often prioritize collective cultural norms and values, relying on historical precedents rather than codified policies. The divergence illustrates a unique adherence to traditional governance that coexists alongside external influences from modern state systems. This method prioritizes consensus-building and cultural preservation over efficiency or rigid organizational structures. This divergence highlights the resilience of traditional governance structures in navigating modernization. The persistence of customary courts and communal decision-making processes suggests an ongoing negotiation between preserving cultural identity and accommodating state-driven formalization.

## Theme 2: Changes in Management Style Over Successive Leadership

Research Question 2: What changes in management style over successive leadership have there been in Abonnema?

| Theme 2                            | Sub-Theme                                   | Description  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Changes in Management Style</b> | <b>Evolution of Leadership Approaches</b>   | There has been a noticeable decline in respect for chiefs compared to the past. Respondents indicated that previous chiefs were more authoritative and courageous, as noted by <i>EF3</i> : " <i>before before, when chief dey talk people dey listen.</i> " This shift suggests changes in leadership dynamics as governmental influence grows, leading to a hybrid management style. One of the Respondents ( <i>CF2</i> ) lamented that " <i>our hands are tied, and the Government has taken over,</i> " reflecting this evolution.  |
|                                    | <b>Adaptation to Contemporary Practices</b> | The current chieftaincy system includes House Chiefs (Wari Dabo), Compound Chiefs (Polo Dabo), and Town Chiefs (Paramount Ruler). The criteria for becoming a chief have evolved; <i>CF4</i> explained " <i>wealth is now more significant than historical displays of power (e.g., war boats)</i> ", aligning with Fayol's "Principle of Order." This adaptation illustrates how traditional roles are being redefined in response to contemporary societal expectations. As <i>EM3</i> explained " <i>for you to become a chief you must have the financial muscle and clout</i> " |

The second research question is explored under the theme of leadership evolution. The findings reveal significant shifts in leadership styles over successive generations, reflecting broader socio-political changes. Historically, chiefs held unchallenged authority, acting as the central figures in community governance. Over time, however, this authority has diminished, influenced by the increasing role of government in local administration - the role and authority of chiefs have experienced significant transformation. Historical accounts and community insights indicate a gradual decline in the centralized power of chiefs due to increased governmental presence and intervention.

Prior to this, Henri Fayol's principles of management, particularly the principle of order, provides a foundation for understanding modern adaption in leadership roles including formalized recognition of chiefs' responsibilities (Fayol, 2016). A notable change involves the transition toward formalized recognition of chiefs' roles through compensation. The introduction of compensation for chiefs marks a critical adaptation, signalling a shift toward formalized recognition of traditional roles. This adaptation reflects a shift in leadership expectations, where the community acknowledges the evolving responsibilities of chiefs in a modern context. Chiefs have had to balance their traditional roles with the need to accommodate external pressures, such as compliance with state laws and integration with national governance frameworks (Abah, 2017; Agogbua et al., 2017). This hybrid model demonstrates how leadership in Abonnema has evolved to integrate elements of modern governance while retaining its traditional core. The decline in the absolute power of chiefs reflects broader global trends where indigenous leadership structures face challenges from centralized state systems. However, the adaptation seen in Abonnema suggests that traditional leadership can coexist with modern governance by evolving its methods and expectations.



### Theme 3: Role of Religious Beliefs in Current Management Practices

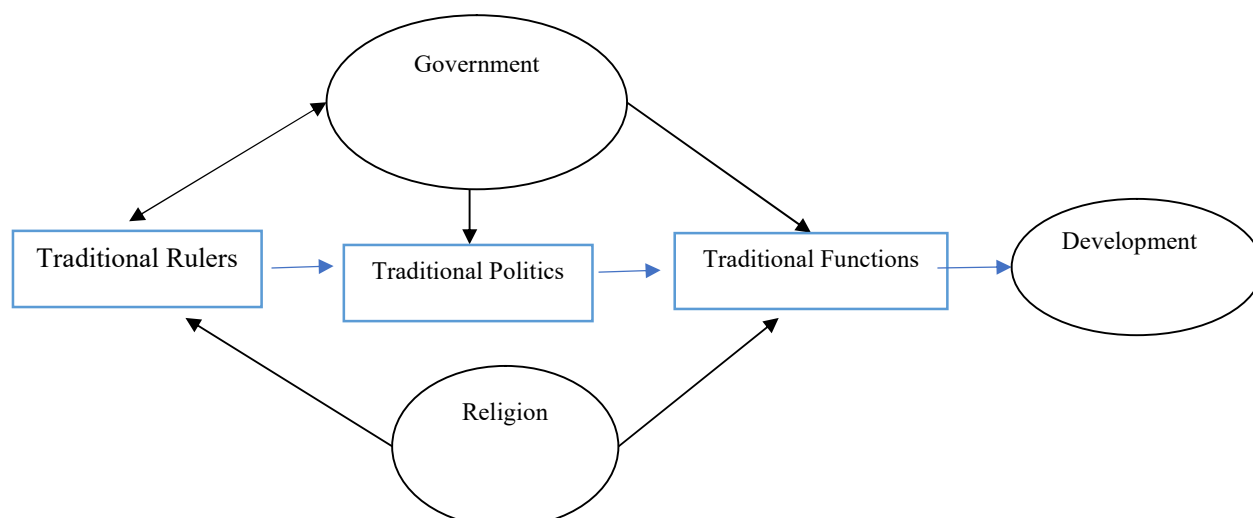
Research Question 3: What is the role of religious beliefs in current Abonnema management practices?

| Theme 3                          | Sub-Theme                                  | Description   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Role of Religious Beliefs</b> | <b>Influence on Community Decisions</b>    | Approximately 60% of respondents identified as Christians, indicating that religious beliefs significantly shape community values and decision-making processes. <i>EM3</i> acknowledged that some individuals still worship other deities alongside Christianity, reflecting a blend of religious influences in management practices; he stated that “ <i>some people still believe in our world ways but gradually it is fading out</i> ”. As well <i>EM4</i> added that sometimes they pray to God before taking any major decision, they go to church for thanksgiving. He explained “ <i>When my daughter one do surgery I pray well-well for God to open way for my family to raise money, we pray for compound 5 days in a row, and after the surgery we go church do thanksgiving</i> ”.  |
|                                  | <b>Integration in Management Practices</b> | Religious leaders play a role in guiding community decisions and actions, especially during traditional functions like burials. The council of chiefs assists bereaved families in setting funeral dates, demonstrating how religious and cultural practices are integrated into the management framework of Abonnema. <i>YM4</i> stated that “ <i>the compound or family chief puts the house together</i> ” for burial arrangements, highlighting collaborative strategies within the community. And <i>YW2</i> and <i>YW4</i> expatiated that before they go back to school their parents always pray them for them, as quoted by <i>YM4</i> “ <i>before I travel back to Port Harcourt, my mother dey pray for me to do well for school</i> ”.<br><br>Furthermore, <i>EF3</i> confirmed this saying “ <i>I dey always pray for our children, make work come make them stop to dey do bad things</i> ”. Even when they are old, they still have a sense of duty and responsibility due to the division of work during their early age. |

This question is addressed through the theme of religious influences. Religion emerges as a fundamental aspect of management practices in Abonnema, shaping both governance and societal values. Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping decision-making and management practices within the community. The coexistence of Christian and traditional beliefs creates a dual-framework approach that significantly impacts governance.

Traditional religious practices often underpin the legitimacy of the chiefs’ authority, while Christian influences have introduced new ethical and moral considerations (Abah, 2017; Fayol, 2016). The involvement of religious leaders in decision-making processes indicates the deep integration of spirituality into management practices. This duality results in a complex and dynamic management structure, where religious doctrines inform both conflict resolution and broader communal decisions (Agogbua et al., 2017). The integration of spiritual elements highlights the cultural depth and unique governance practices of Abonnema (Raghavulu et al., 1991). The role of religion in governance highlights its capacity to unify diverse community members and legitimize traditional leadership structures. By embedding spiritual values into management practices, Abonnema ensures that governance aligns with both moral and cultural expectations.

In essence, a synergy between the Government, Religious Leaders and Traditional Leaders will bring community development – hybridizing the management style of the Abonnema. This is seen in the critical role the chiefs play in managing community affairs, resolving conflicts, and overseeing traditional functions.

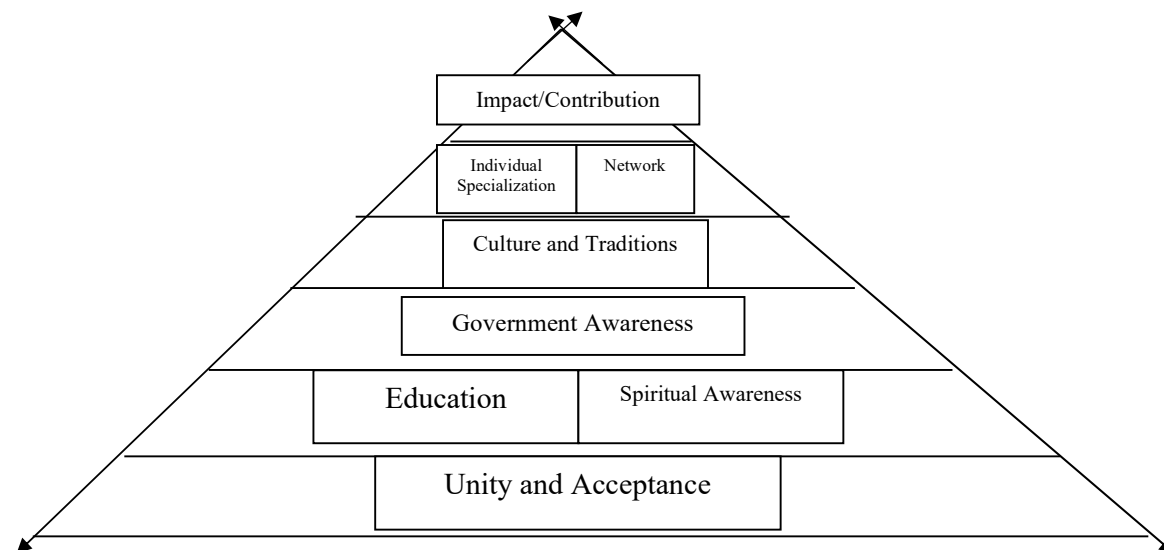


**Figure. 2** Source: Conceptualized by the Researcher (2025)

## CONCLUSION

Drawing from Wariboko's (1997) framework in *The Kalabari Entrepreneur*, as illustrated in Fig. 1, the study initially emphasized that the Kalabari businessman prioritized spirituality as the foundational factor. According to his framework, societal and competitive forces, task definition, effectiveness, interpersonal relationships, and product considerations collectively shaped entrepreneurial actions. However, this study has uncovered a significant shift in the priorities of Kalabari entrepreneurs. The focus has transitioned from spirituality as a core management practice to a unified collaboration of religion, government, and tradition. Historically, Kalabari entrepreneurs were primarily traditional leaders, heading various “War Canoe Houses,” which functioned as central units of community management. In contrast, the findings of this research highlight a management transition that reflects the dynamic influence of environmental factors and evolving societal priorities. This evolution is expected to continue as the community adapts to changing circumstances.

The study proposes an updated version of Wariboko's (1997) *Kalabari Entrepreneur Conceptual Framework*, depicted in Figure 3, to address these changes.



**Figure. 3** Source: Conceptualized by the Researcher (2025)

The updated framework not only highlights the modern Kalabari entrepreneur but also underscores the imperative for every Kalabari indigene to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset as a core strategy for community survival and continuous development (MacAlex-Achinulo, 2023; Fayol, 2016; Agogbua et al., 2017). Rooted in a blend of traditional values and modern management principles, it fosters a sense of communal responsibility similar to organizational behavior, enhancing Abonnema's collective management practices and contributing to a resilient and adaptive structure (Abah, 2017; Ekong & Emmanuel, 2020). By integrating Fayol's principles—such as equity, unity of direction, and collaboration—into indigenous systems, the framework demonstrates the convergence of traditional governance models and contemporary management theories, emphasizing sustainable development (Raghavulu et al., 1991; Nnadozie & Uzuegbu, 2020).

This framework's potential lies in its holistic approach to fostering community development by prioritizing unity, education, cultural preservation, and specialization. It presents a roadmap for individuals and communities to navigate modern challenges while respecting their cultural heritage. However, its limitations include the need for clearer articulation of how the various layers interact and the absence of measurable indicators to evaluate progress. For instance, while the importance of government awareness and cultural traditions is evident, how they tangibly influence entrepreneurial outcomes remains underexplored. Furthermore, its practical application could benefit from case studies that demonstrate its adaptability across diverse socio-economic settings.

Future research should focus on operationalizing this framework by developing specific metrics for each layer, such as indicators for measuring unity or educational impact, and by exploring how external factors like globalization and technological shifts influence its efficacy. Additionally, incorporating strategies for enhancing collaboration between traditional leaders, government entities, and entrepreneurs could further refine its scope. By bridging indigenous knowledge systems with modern management paradigms, this framework not only validates the importance of local governance models but also offers valuable insights for sustainable development in both African and global contexts.

This study concludes that traditional management practices in Kalabari society, while evolving, retain significant relevance. Chiefs, who now play diminished roles as governmental influence expands, should leverage localized knowledge to enhance governance, collaboration, and overall effectiveness. Furthermore, parallels between Abonnema's traditional management practices and modern managerial principles—such as delegation, equity, and remuneration—underscore the compatibility and relevance of these practices in today's context.

Future management practices could advance community sustainability by aligning with Lawrence's (2017) factors: a peaceful society, environmental stewardship, resource management, and population control. This study fulfils the pressing need for empirical research documenting and analysing these unique practices, which are often overlooked in existing literature. As Akpor-Robaro and Omoyele (2019) argue, the absence of formalized African-oriented management theories limits a comprehensive understanding of effective management within African societies. By comparing indigenous practices across Nigerian communities, this study validates local knowledge while contributing to broader discussions on African management theories. Uzo and Meru (2018) advocate for such inclusion as a legitimate contribution to global management thought. Ultimately, recognizing and integrating these frameworks can bring vitality not only to Africa but to the world at large.

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## APPENDIX

### Research Question 1

1. How do core management practices in Abonnema differ from contemporary management practices?

#### **Interview Questions:**

- **What is the process of coronation for the chief and king?**
- **How was the coronation conducted in the past compared to now?**
- **What character traits should a chief possess?**
- **What are the processes involved in coronation?**
- **What are the duties of a chief?**
- **What rewards exist to overcome any gaps in understanding our management style and practices?**

- **How does management practice need to be transformed, and what educational opportunities can provide meaningful insights that can help our people (in health and relationships)?**
- **If things go wrong, how do we manage it?**
- **Do you think our style is among the best in the world?**

#### Research Question 2

2. What changes in management style over successive leadership have there been in Abonnema?

##### *Interview Questions:*

- **Please describe a typical day in Abonnema.**
- **How are market days organized?**
- **Please list the sequence of events that take place in Abonnema.**
- **What motivates the Abonnema people to adopt current management practices?**
- **How is conflict resolution handled in the community?**
- **How is the community organized, including age grades?**

#### Research Question 3

3. What is the role of religious beliefs in current Abonnema management practices?

##### *Interview Questions:*

- **How do beliefs and values contribute to the interests of the Abonnema people?**

#### Additional Context (Burial Practices)

While not directly related to your primary research questions, you may also consider these questions about burial practices as supplementary context for understanding cultural values:

- **When someone dies in the family, what do they do first?**
- **How do burial practices differ for adults, chiefs, and young people?**
- **How do they preserve the body?**
- **What is the process of burying individuals?**