

Responsible Management in Africa, Volume 1

If you ever thought that 'Africa is a country', this book on responsible management in Africa with chapters from the diverse regions of the continent will quickly erase that error. The book gives you two for one; an insightful history on the different peoples and how that history shaped their perspectives on managing responsibly. It is amazing how much indigenous wisdom is condensed in one proverb such as the basotho's 'give me, give me, makes one hungry' and the hausawas' 'the grass which you disregard will injure your eye'. Responsible management styles which are effective in Europe may barely hit the mean in the African continent. An example is the local practice of corporate social responsibility (CSR) discretion in Algeria and in many north African countries as against the standard western practice which may be regarded with scepticism by the peoples of that region. This book is a recommended read for anyone doing, teaching, or thinking of doing/teaching business in Africa.

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This book offers a colourful array of Africa's rich history for responsible businesses and principled entrepreneurship, and shares evidence about traditional and informal responsible management systems that existed in the continent long before the adaptation of western management practices. The book draws on the diverse indigenous African ethnicities that could positively complement the current global responsible business management movements and in turn advance the African responsible management discourse. I am looking forward to using its many chapters in my classroom and integrating parts into my assigned course readings.

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Responsible Management in Africa, Volume 1

Traditions of Principled Entrepreneurship

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

to Chinonso Anozie and Omotara Ogunyemi

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Contents

List of Tables and Figures	<i>ix</i>
About the Contributors	<i>xi</i>
Foreword	<i>xv</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>xvii</i>
Chapter 1 Indigenous African Wisdom and its Orientation to the Common Good: Responsible Leadership and Principled Entrepreneurship	
<i>Kemi Ogunyemi, Omowumi Ogunyemi and Amaka Anozie</i>	<i>1</i>
Chapter 2 Responsible Management in Pre-colonial Africa: Insights from Ancient Egyptians and the Ndop Iron Industry of the 1800th Century in Cameroon	
<i>Fonteh Amungwa</i>	<i>13</i>
Chapter 3 Indigenous Responsible Management: The Story of Egypt	
<i>Kemi Ogunyemi and Omowumi Ogunyemi</i>	<i>29</i>
Chapter 4 Akan Management Styles and Gold Trade in Ancient Ghana	
<i>Esther Chachu</i>	<i>43</i>
Chapter 5 Responsible Business Traditions Amongst the Sesotho-speaking People in Southern Africa	
<i>Khali Mofuoa</i>	<i>57</i>
Chapter 6 Responsible Management Practices of the Hausawas of Northern Nigeria	
<i>Ruqayyah Baderinwa</i>	<i>77</i>

Chapter 7 Conceptual Model of Responsible Business Management in Yorubaland <i>Elizabeth Olofin</i>	93
Chapter 8 The Ubuntu and Batho Pele Principles: The Two Overarching South African Concepts for Business and Management Application <i>Robert Dumisani Zondo</i>	119
Chapter 9 Role Clarity and Service Delivery: A Case of Masaza System in Uganda <i>Robert Frank Kyagaba, Kigozi J. C. Munene, Samuel Mafabi and Jotham Byarugaba Mbiito</i>	133
Chapter 10 Relating the Zunde raMambo Philosophy in Managing Organisations in Africa <i>Promise Zvavahera</i>	147
Chapter 11 Indigenous African Wisdom, Aristotelian Thought and Catholic Social Teaching – Responsible Business Leadership <i>Kemi Ogunyemi, Amaka Anozie and Omowumi Ogunyemi</i>	161
Index	171

List of Tables and Figures

Figures

Fig. 2.1.	A Framework for Responsible Management	18
Fig. 4.1.	The Adinkra Symbol of Nsirewa (Meaning Togetherness) from afrimod.com	45
Fig. 4.2.	ISO 26000 – Social Responsibility: 7 Core Subjects (ISO, 2010)	48
Fig. 4.3.	Map of the Old Ghana Empire from Study.com (2021)	54
Fig. 5.1.	<i>Mokorotlo</i> (Basotho Hat) Business Model	63
Fig. 5.2.	Mount <i>Qiloane</i>	64
Fig. 5.3.	<i>Mokorotlo</i> (Basotho Hat)	65
Fig. 7.1.	Yorubas and Risk Taking in Business	103
Fig. 7.2.	Key Building Blocks for Responsible Management Framework and Implementation in Business: Perspectives from Yorubaland	111
Fig. 7.3.	Results of Survey – Is Responsible Business Management Practiced in Yorubaland?	112

Tables

Table 1.1.	Some Faces of Indigenous Intellectual and Reflective Wisdom in Africa	5
Table 1.2.	An Overview of the Different Chapters in this Book	10
Table 8.1.	Derivatives of ‘Ubuntu’ in Bantu Languages	121
Table 8.2.	The Attributes of Ubuntu and Their Features	123
Table 9.1.	Profile of Informants	139
Table 11.1.	Insights Gained from the Chapters	165

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Foreword

Responsible Management in Africa

The anthropological record will show that Africans have long lived in harmony with nature and have sought to ensure the survival of all species, through various practices. Religious, medical, cultural and social engagements often connected effective human existence to environmental sustainability. In many places across the continent, nature was believed to represent the Creator and was therefore revered. Indigenous knowledge about the cosmos, nature and even military sciences have been found to have been far advanced in historical Africa. Yet, discourses on responsible business tend to ignore the African experience. Advancements in these and other areas of African existence were rudely interrupted by colonial imposition. The African philosophies that supported the responsible human–nature balance was distorted by colonialism but have struggled to survive to this day. *Responsible Management in Africa*, therefore, has managed to outlive the colonial assault.

For purposes of rendering the African inferior, the colonial project and its discourses painted a distorted picture of knowledge in Africa: a continent where no form of knowledge existed before the colonial order was imposed; a continent where people are so preoccupied with survival instincts that there is no time and effort, or even the ability, to think of anything else; a continent that remains totally dependent on Western ideologies to shape her own histories in Africa. Using various instruments of colonial rule, a caricature of Africa was created. That seems now to represent the worst in human existence – war, famine, disease, primitivism and savagery. Sadly, there exists a latent process that continues to trench such beliefs around Africa and African inferiority.

In this book, indigenous African knowledges and histories are being reconsidered to represent the truth about Africa. The collection of chapters in the volume speaks to *Responsible Management in Africa* towards demonstrating the strength of African-grounded discourses in enhancing responsible management knowledge in the global sphere. Covering a broad spectrum of areas from history, philosophy, sociology through several other disciplines, the volume presents a vibrant outline of African indigenous knowledge to suggest the active role that Africa has played – and continues to play – in responsible management. Together, these chapters share only a small bit of the wealth of African knowledge with the rest of the world, not the mention that such knowledge sharing interrupts the flow of negative information about Africa and Africans.

'Africa is various', as the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah has suggested. The continent is large enough that it will be easy to fit China, Europe, India, Japan and the United States of America together into it. The 54 countries that make up the continent do not have the same political, cultural and economic systems. Recognising this diversity, the collection of chapters in the volume attempts to capture both the geographies and knowledges of the entire continent – North, South, East, West and Central. About 77% of the continent's population of over one billion people are under the age of 35. That is, the continent's peoples are very young, with an ever enlightened sense of African identity; yet there is no singular or collective African identity. The growing interest among the youth in African histories, clothing, languages and other markers of identity underlies the need for more research to overthrow the dominant African discourses that are often in reference to Western imagination.

This volume, *Responsible Management in Africa*, is one avenue for such an effort. While offering a critical perspective in entrenching the value of Africa indigenous knowledge into the global discourse, the chapters in this volume, as a collective, take a reconciliatory approach to establishing an objective record. The approach is in sharp contrast to the colonial approach of imposition. The chapters are presented in a manner that one can appreciate the facts and arguments towards reasonable conclusions – hopefully in line with the authors' views. This does not mean a singular understanding and interpretation of the chapters. After all, 'the author is dead', as Roland Barthes would argue. However, the chapters contribute to a story, regardless of the diversity of possible interpretations. Though not written as a conscious rebuttal to the colonial discourse, the chapters in this volume come together to remedy the idea that African indigenous knowledge is inferior and of no value to the rest of the world. They speak of history, science, business, culture, power and poverty that reside in African imaginations of past and present, pointing to the idea that Africa is knowledge itself.

Imagine Africa as a recognised part of the global research agenda on Responsible Management. Impact!

This is only the beginning as you join this journey of rediscovering African through indigenous methods and practices that inform *Responsible Management in Africa* for the world. Welcome to Africa!

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November 30, 2021

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The notion of responsible management in Africa is one that is very much in need of elaboration and exploration. This project which contributes to the dialogue on the discovery of indigenous wisdom and how they connect to western concepts of responsible management was made possible through the efforts of many people. We thank all those who contributed to making it a reality.

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Chapter 1

Indigenous African Wisdom and its Orientation to the Common Good: Responsible Leadership and Principled Entrepreneurship

Kemi Ogunyemi, Omowumi Ogunyemi and Amaka Anozie

Abstract

This chapter explores African indigenous wisdom and its orientation to the common good in the practices that characterise responsible leadership and entrepreneurship. Traditionally, a wise leader was grown from the community and steeped in its communitarian traditions which led the leader to apply practical wisdom in seeking the collective good. These considerations of such wise practices are central to responsible management. Based on a qualitative literature review that is complemented with a micro-study (semi-structured interviews) of African sages and on the analysis of wisdom found by chapter contributors to this volume, insights indigenous to Africa are presented and then discussed. The countries referenced across the two studies are Kenya and Uganda (Eastern Africa), Ghana and Nigeria (Western Africa), Egypt (Northern Africa) and South Africa (Southern Africa), thereby providing some geographical spread though far from being exhaustive.

Keywords: Indigenous wisdom; Africa; responsible leadership; principled entrepreneurship; communitarian traditions; common good; wise practices

1. Introduction

Indigenous wisdom played a major role in the management of traditional institutions. The reliance on traditional tenets for guiding trade and human interactions is a common trait of many African communities. Good leadership is an essential feature of responsible management. In fact, the growing emphasis on responsible management in contemporary debates, invites a redefinition of the fundamental role of leaders in different societies. This chapter explores such indigenous wisdom and its orientation to the common good in the practice and teaching of leadership. Traditionally, who is a wise leader? Based on a micro-study accomplished through interviews with African elders and 10 chapters written by scholars across Africa using a variety of methods to investigate indigenous wisdom that guided principled entrepreneurship in the continent, insights are drawn out.

1.1. Indigenous Wisdom in Ancient Leadership Traditions

The wisdoms or philosophies indigenous to Africa can be found mostly in oral traditions conveyed through ‘language, folktales, proverbs, songs, ceremonies, cultural artifacts, performing arts, myths ... customary law’ (Ilmi, 2015, p. 97); customs and way of life. A good example is found in Ghanaian music which illustrates how ‘Akan and other Ghanaian cultural communities revere elderly women as custodians of local knowledge ... noted for their circumstantial wisdom and judgment, which they often display with an admirable spontaneity’ (Dor, 2014, p. 19).

These indigenous traditions constitute a wealth of practical wisdom that could be tapped for application in today’s world (Dor, 2014; Harris & Wasilewski, 2004) in order to enhance the understanding and practice of leadership in Africa and the rest of the world. Leadership activity, being very complex, requires wisdom to carry it out. Perhaps not unrelated to awareness of such complexity, there is a certain sense, in indigenous wisdom, that humans are stewards in an interconnected world (Spiller, Pio, Erakovic, & Henare, 2011). It is with this sense of stewardship permeating their understanding of their role as leaders that they accord proper respect for others’ dignity, give others’ a voice in decision-making, ensure fair hearing, practice dialogue, engage in consensual decision-making, resolve conflicts and all other practices that fall within their leadership purview.

Community versus the individual – the revolving of the world around self and self-interest has dominated much of Western philosophical thought since the time of Descartes (Spiller et al., 2011). Instead, ideas of community, relationality and reciprocity dominate many indigenous philosophies (Spiller et al., 2011), as for example is the case with Ubuntu, kaitiakitanga, dhaqan and others like them. These ideas facilitate and promote ways of thinking that considers the common good above personal interests, since the self is perceived as part of a larger community, a larger system.

Pre-western contact value systems, moral codes and social structures show that many indigenous peoples were systems thinkers – Harris and Wasilewski (2004) pointed this out in their bid to understand the Maori people and other Native Americans. Systems thinking was a useful tool for promoting a profoundly democratic outlook in the villages and communities as they sought to consider

the whole picture and all potentially affected parties in making decisions. Thus, traditionally, rulers and leaders were considered the fathers of the people and had the responsibility for them. The community was typically made up of clans which were in turn made up of families. People were seen as their families rather than as individuals – because of this, the name of the family mattered greatly and had to be borne with honour. Systems thinking was also a way to test the orientation of every decision, every plan of action, to the common good.

The direction to the common good was set by two compasses: one internal and the other external. The internal drivers of the common good orientation and to ethical behaviour were akin to the virtues (paralleling virtue ethics), while the external drivers were the family, the community and informal ‘codes’ (recommendations of wise and ethical behaviour contained in wisdom sayings, songs and stories handed down via oral tradition from one generation to the other and injunctions and taboos to ensure good conduct and compliance). On viewing the wealth of information and literature on traditional practices in Europe and pre-colonial tenets in the Americas, one sees the need to explore the ancient tenets that contribute to responsible management and leadership in Africa. This book contributes to the quest for knowledge about Africans.

For example, for Yoruba living in different African countries and in some African American and Latin American communities, internal drivers include Iwa: virtue, character, good behaviour; Ogbon: wisdom, cleverness or cunning; Imo: knowledge; and Oye. The connection can be seen in wisdom sayings such as ‘*omo to gbon kii s’iwa hu*’ meaning ‘a wise child does not misbehave’. Hence, the wise leader displays *iwa*, which is virtue and ethical behaviour and in so doing shows *imo* (knowledge), *oye* (understanding) and *ogbon* (wisdom), and attains the status of *Omoluwabi* when this is done consistently. The term *Omoluwabi* refers back to the community from which the wise leader springs from and whom the wise leader serves. It also brings honour to the person’s family.

Wisdom Nugget

Omo to gbon kii s’iwa hu (a wise child does not misbehave).

Similarly, for Somali, the concept of family is a notion that revolves around ideas of righteousness and being part of a collective community (Ilmi, 2015). Behavioural standards within a family are connected with honouring one’s family name. The family name’s interaction with society had given rise in many African traditions to epic poems sung in honour of the person’s lineage, known as *oriki* for Yoruba, for example. These poetic compositions were the deepest praise of the person being as they were lyrical narratives of his or her lineage – it was very important not just to be remembered but to be remembered for good. A good name or a bad name could affect even the marriage prospects of a person. In general, African poetry is musical and tends to be sung, often with ‘moral or didactic intent’ (Dor, 2014, p. 20) to inspire the person to upright behaviour in and for the community.

The collective or common good of the community is paramount for African societies. Somalians emphasise and value collective responsibility and the imperative to do what is good for the community (Ilmi, 2015). This has been described as communitarianism by Gyekye (2003, p. 299), and he describes it as seeing ‘the human person as an inherently (intrinsically) communal being’. This is echoed by Sarra and Berman (2017) describing Ubuntu, the South African humanistic

philosophy as ‘the notion of individuals’ well-being as intertwined with that of others’ and as a vision of being human where ‘personhood is defined in relation to the community’ (p. 460). Marriage, as the foundation for family, is a community event, involving the elders of the community and garnering communal assistance for setting up a new household (Ilmi, 2015). The community provides for members who set out on a journey and for strangers who pass through on journeys, and settles disputes (Ilmi, 2015). It is within the community that the person finds moral identity and validation. It is not surprising to find that the best way to live, for a typical Kenyan, was to dedicate oneself selflessly to the improvement of one’s community and to service of one’s neighbour (Presbey, 1999).

African behavioural ‘codes’ are informal and advisory, transmitted as oral tradition (Ilmi, 2015; Presbey, 1999) covering a vast variety of subjects, and expressed as proverbs, admonitions, sayings and quips. These codes shape the way of living as individuals and as a community. Practical wisdom is applied to select the precept applicable in each situation for the individual and for the common good, often by examining the circumstances.

2. Responsible Management and Traditional Values

Although in many African cultures there are no words that directly translate to ethics, there are many ways of speaking that refer to character (Gyekye, 2011). This is reflected in Table 1.1 below, which comments on the orientation to the common good of different wisdom concepts that provide a foundation for ethical behaviour across Africa. People of good character often have a title, whether officially recognised as chieftains or simply as well respected members of the community. Such people are often put in charge of managing the community resources and are responsible for keeping peace and settling disputes.

There are different approaches and ways of understanding responsible management as defined by qualitative studies carried out in business schools across Europe. Scholars have attempted to create a universal description of the elements of responsible management in an attempt to get a better understanding of the phenomenon for the purpose of incorporating it into business education (Nonet, Kassel, & Meijs, 2016). Leaders and managers play a key role in promoting responsible management, even when there is institutional pluralism with a wide variety of opinions and learning and working styles (Radoynovska, Ocasio, & Laasch, 2020). It is therefore unsurprising that traditional leaders can contribute to responsible management with the proper exercise of their authority. While there are scholarly attempts to enhance education for responsible management for leadership in business schools in the western world (Prandini, Vervoort Isler, & Barthelmess, 2012), it is also important to promote such education in Africa.

A way of bringing such an education home to Africans is to engage features in the culture that foster responsible management. The elements of traditional wisdom discussed earlier are helpful for responsible management. In fact, one may consider some of these tenets as indicators of the values attributed to good leadership that are important for responsible management. Within the continent, one can see how traditional values imbued everyday life and guided everyone, managers or not. These values contributed to developing communities which fostered well-being.

Table 1.1. Some Faces of Indigenous Intellectual and Reflective Wisdom in Africa.

Countries	Wisdom Concept(s) at the Root of Ethical Behaviour	Common Good Orientation
Somalia	<i>dhaqan</i> philosophies; communalism	Resources are shared for the collective good (Imi, 2015)
South Africa	Ubuntu: ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ – ‘a person is a person through the humanity of others’	Who one is connected to others’ well-being, such that the good of the other(s) is as important as personal good (Moyo, 2016)
Nigeria	Iwa; omoluwabi as evidence of practical wisdom and virtue	The virtuous leader exhibits moral excellence and prioritises the common good (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2011)
Ghana	Wisdom and hospitality of the old lady, communitarianism	Welcoming the visitor as a son is wisdom – strangers are simply extended family (Dor, 2014)
Kenya	Love for others and generosity are aspects of wisdom	Caring for others as traditional (Presbey, 1999)

The indigenous values explored in the two volumes of this book are applied in the context of responsible management. From the ancient Egyptians and Sumerians, to the Ndop Plain Iron Industry in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon in the eighteenth century, management practices sustained foreign trade and alliances between empires and kingdoms. Although there are recent explorations on the antecedents of responsible management in Egypt (Mousa, Massoud, & Ayoubi, 2021), there is still a need for further exploration of the African tenets that are comparable to the fundamentals of responsible management in the western world. For example, the Yoruba concept, Omoluwabi, discussed by Olofin in Chapter 7, is a cultural notion from western Nigeria that encourages ethical conduct and solidarity by reminding individuals of a responsibility for the development of their community. Culturally, a Yoruba person would aspire to be acclaimed ‘omoluwabi’ by his community or society.

The connections of responsible management and Zunde raMambo, a traditional Zimbabwean concept, is explored in one of the chapters of this book. The concept applies responsible and collaborative management in achieving joint goals. The Zunde raMambo (King’s granary) has been proposed as a means of managing resources in special conditions, for example, in the care of orphans and vulnerable children (Ringson, 2017). In this book, the richness of that traditional philosophy that promotes the well-being of the members of the communities is

Wisdom Nugget

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (*a person is a person through the humanity of others*).

Wisdom Nugget

Dhaqan philosophy: Resources are shared for the collective good.

explored as a part of responsible management. Although there is some literature on the management of specific resources, for example, in forestry and in managing mineral resources, it is difficult to find literature that explores the concept of responsible management among the Basotho people of Lesotho. The task of exploring the traditional values that contribute to the success of the people who are known to be a very enterprising ethnic group, will provide helpful information for today's businesses. The chapter that discusses the ethnic group's contributions to responsible management relies on an analysis of existing literature to make incisive contributions that enrich the African perspectives presented in this volume.

The Hausa of northern Nigeria are a very large ethnic group who have been involved in trade since pre-colonial times with successful partnerships in trans-Saharan trade for centuries. It is therefore unsurprising that there are aspects of their beliefs and value systems that are congruent with the principles of responsible management. A look at the cultural norms and values of the Hausa's can shed light on practices that are similar to and necessary for responsible management. Although there are claims that the Hausas are not as sophisticated in business as the other tribes in Nigeria in spite of having a longer tradition of trade with the rest of the world (Sabiou, Zainol, & Abdullah, 2019), the duration of the commercial exchanges for centuries makes one think that there are values which kept the relationships going for centuries. To discover if there are such values and what they were, one of the contributing authors explores Hausa history, predominant religion and culture.

Also, within west Africa, the Akan management styles used in the trading of gold. The traditional sayings and proverbs call for ethical practices in the business. Traditionally ethical practices were encouraged in exchange of goods and the traders understood that to possess virtue was better than gold. Some Akan speaking areas are known for mining activities and the inquiry into the features within their cultural norms and beliefs that influence responsible management is interesting. The strong traditional ethical values of the Akan people in Ghana influenced their way of managing businesses. Taboos, proverbs, chieftaincy institutions and folklore are some of the mechanisms that ensure good management practices among the Akan people of Ghana (Abban-Ampiah, Yobanya, & Ofori-Dankwa, 2020). Even though it may seem that traditional values from Akan culture may not be popular among Ghanaians today, scholars have advocated for a return to traditional ethics, stressing the need to revisit the ancient ethical principles in order to assess their relevance for today's life (George, 2015). In line with this, contributors to this volume explore Akan ethical frameworks and how they can contribute to attaining responsible management in today's world.

3. Indigenous Wisdom and Responsible Management – Perspectives from the Micro-study

The interviewees described the way of life of indigenous societies and the wisdom that guided their leaders. According to Noble (Nigeria, 77 years old), wisdom for native rulership or government is a distinct type of wisdom. The native ruler or

leader had to be a custodian of the different types of wisdom – in management of people, discerning in what roles individuals fit, knowing the demands of the people, knowing the directing of the people and what to achieve during the term, knowing how to manage peace within and with the other communities – neighbouring villages. Often, the ruler was simply the first settler in a community, who would then apportion land to all newcomers and draw up rules and regulations based on ancient beliefs and traditions – for example, on how to keep the environment clean (especially the waterways), days for communal labour, the importance of being one another's keeper and all protecting the common good, the plan for helping one another in cultivating the farms, days set aside for dispute resolution and so on (Ajua, 75 years old, Ghana).

Traditionally, life starts from the family to the kindred to the town to what is now called state (Noble). The organiser, leader or chief was at the head of the community, in most cases chosen by the people based on personal qualities. The leader would decentralise by appointing people to report to him on different aspects. Ability and honesty were prized, as were truthfulness, prudence and a sense of justice. Ruling well necessarily entailed not converting community goods into personal goods. Hence, it meant leading communal projects to build schools, markets and hospitals. The community always strove to place honest and prudent men who would serve it in charge at every level. Whenever it happened that people who were self-interested got into leadership positions, it would reflect in the kind of people they chose as their representatives, mostly sycophants who would sing their praises regardless of whether or not they acted rightly or for the common good. These types of leaders usually did not achieve much – they diverted goods to themselves and their families. Thus, true leadership was properly predicated only of people who prudently ruled for the common good, in contrast to despots who ruled for self-interest.

The typical African example of communal living is described by Kwame, 60 years old, Ghanaian. Life was organised in communities which were in turn made up of extended families – grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, siblings, cousins, etc. and the grandmother as the matriarch prepared and distributed food to all. Housework was also a shared responsibility such that each one played their roles for the common good of everyone. Tasks were rotated so that no one had to do the same thing permanently. Moreover, the education of children was a shared responsibility of all adults in the community. At times, a family would identify responsible and outstanding adults in the extended family, or teachers and pastors, and give them children not theirs biologically (a kind of fostering) for mentoring and coaching. This could happen as early as three years of age, as with Ndiame who is now 52 and grew up with an aunt as one of her children. Neighbours were meant to discipline children for wrong behaviour before reporting to the family. Thus, it was the duty of the community, not just the family, to ensure that children grew up to become responsible adults. Such an atmosphere ensured an orientation to common good, rather than personal good, as a way of life. When a child was old enough to reach beyond the community for further education, apprenticeship, training or even a job, it was a communal event. The child would go to inform the family and neighbours of the impending departure

and they would contribute in cash, kind, advice on ethical behaviour and prayer to the expedition.

Amadi (Nigeria) sees Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' as a good source for an understanding of traditional wisdom, especially with the character of Okonkwo who was well known for his leadership attributes and ability to get a team to work for the common good. For him, the contrast between the wisdom indigenous to Africa and received Western wisdom is that, traditionally, the leader is in front of the system, pulling the cart, whereas, in the new corporate world, the leader is pushing the cart. One is seen by the world before the other. The leader is assessed and analysed, in Africa. Conversely, nowadays, the corporation is assessed before asking who is behind it. If people's interests are prioritised above the organisation's it causes problems. It could also mean that the organisation goes up and down with the individual.

Many traditional Africans are agriculturalists. Yet, being a leader was independent of the size of one's barn (of one's wealth). After all, leaders were required only for war and for community leadership – for the common good. The latter task was typically undertaken by elders who would take collective decisions, to preserve fairness. There was also leadership within the family – people followed the footsteps of their parents. The leadership of a father in his home was important – one's ambition was to be like one's father. Work was with one's father. The family had primacy over personal plans and interests. On the farms, everyone in every family was expected to work hard (Amadi).

The village would come together to share what they had all worked for. Laws were hardly ever challenged – they had been crafted with the common good as their purpose and everyone knew the importance of holding together. These practices were more or less the same all through the South East of Nigeria (Amadi).

Incidentally, indigenous wisdom does not foster risk taker behaviour, as people feared losing what they had (Amadi). It is not surprising then that much of indigenous practical wisdom urges care and caution. Yet, when they have to act, they do so with courage, again based on practical wisdom applied to the situation at hand, for the common good.

The importance of one's name was paramount (Ilmi, 2015) and sometimes led to a strong desire for male children (Amadi, interviews). The commingling of ancient and modern wisdoms has in some cases led to confusion in identification of which tradition one belongs to, with its consequences – for example, a recent trend of people wanting their children to bear their own name reflects a modern tendency, at times subconscious, to cling to the personal over the collective and a growing shift of emphasis to seeking personal achievement over the common good (Amadi, interviews).

4. Indigenous Wisdom and Responsible Management – Perspectives from the Book Chapters

The chapters in our book provided us with a much wider range of evidence for the orientation of traditional wisdom to the common good than the micro-study.