The African World View and the Structure and Strategy of Traditional Business Enterprises: The Case of Kalabari of Southern Nigeria[*]

NIMI WARIBOKO
Baldwin, NY, U.S.A.

ABSTRACT

This essay answers two broad questions. Firstly, what is Kalabari explanatory system, conceptual framework about? Secondly, what is the relationship between Kalabari conceptual scheme and the 'structure and strategy' of the Kalabari traditional firm (*wari* or canoe-house corporation)? The canoe house was, "a compact and well organized trading and fighting corporation, capable of manning and maintaining a war canoe." This paper, using Horton's framework of analysis supplemented with original insights, examines not only the various ways Kalabari world view affects the structure and strategy of the *wari*, but also how world view interacts with managerial decision-making process in the canoe-house corporation.

The analysis shows that Kalabari administrative thinking features an "aggressive welfare consciousness" and a "timid subterranean market paradigm." Second, the key to understanding the relationship between Kalabari world view and structure and strategy of the *wari* is to view the structure of the traditional firm as a form of classification with the capacity to control how its members interact. The Kalabari corporate structure followed three categories of gods (ancestors or *duein*, founding heroes or *oru,* and water-spirits or *owuamaba'pu*) and they both (corporate structure and the scheme of three forces) fitted into a basic 'typology of three' in Kalabari culture. The structure of the canoe-house corporation was linked up in same analogical and metaphorical basis with the conceptual framework. Structure begets strategy. Defining strategy against a competitor boils down to placing him at a position in the structure and assessing his social ties and then designing means to contain his threat.

INTRODUCTION

This essay grapples with two broad questions. Firstly, what is Kalabari conceptual framework about? Secondly, what is the relationship between Kalabari conceptual scheme or managerial frames and the 'structure and strategy' of the Kalabari traditional firm? Neither of these questions are questions which Kalabari entrepreneurs themselves would ask, but they are questions which a management scholar or business historian must ask in examining strategies or organizational management history of the canoe house corporation of the Eastern Niger Delta city-states.

The canoe house *(wari)* was the most characteristic political and social institution of the Eastern Niger Delta states in the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries. It was not a lineage or descent group; rather it was, as Jones (1963: 55) puts it, "a compact and well organized trading and fighting corporation, capable of manning and maintaining a war canoe." Similarly, in 1913 the canoe house was defined by the British protectorate administration as "a number of persons grouped together for the purposes of trade and subject by native law and custom to the control, authority, and rule of a chief known as the head of the house"(Alagoa 1964: 15). A canoe house continued to function as long as it was dynamic, flourishing and profitable. A prosperous, senior canoe house would spin off sub-canoe houses, which kept their connections with the parent-canoe house. If a sub-canoe house became more prosperous than its parent, it absorbed the parent house and in turn became the senior house. An unsuccessful canoe house folded up, voluntarily merged with another, or was acquired by another house.

In the nineteenth century, the leaders of the canoe house system were wealthy traders who commanded the support of their organizations. A chief (manager) only held his position as long as he was successful in his business endeavours. If he were to stumble or fall, leadership was taken from him and given to any member (slave or freeborn) whose character, commercial ability, and wealth most suited the furtherance of the fortune of the house. The managers were thus primarily engaged in finding and exploiting new business opportunities and markets, and maintaining or increasing the wealth of the canoe houses.

The Kalabari of the Niger Delta were noted as great entrepreneurs and were pillars of the transatlantic trade from eighteenth to early twentieth century. The English anthropologist, Dr. Amaury Talbot (1932: 9) remarked that "they are people of great interest and intelligence, hard-headed, keen-witted, and born traders. Indeed, one of the principal agents here, a man of world-wide experience, stated that, in his opinion, the Kalabari could compete on at least equal terms with Jew or Chinaman." Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike wrote, in reporting the complaint of Bishop Ajai Crowther about the attitude of Kalabari chiefs to missionary education in the nineteenth century, that:

> "The chiefs who sent their children to mission schools stated quite frankly that they "did not want religious teachings, for that the children have enough at home; they teach them such themselves; that they want them to be taught how to gauge palm-oil and other like mercantile business as soon as possible." The children were sent to mission schools for one purpose only: that they might learn the business methods of the West" (Dike 1956: 161).

Robin Horton, the English social anthropologists who has been living in Kalabari land and has been studying them for about 40 years, has this to say in comparing Kalabari culture with that of the Tallensi of Ghana.

> "...Kalabari society, whether in its village or in its city-state variant, encourages aggressive individualism and personal achievement. If the emphasis in Taleland is on 'fitting in,' in Kalabari it on 'getting up'"(Horton 1983: 54).

Horton, in various papers in the 1960s, has explored the world view and explanatory system of the Kalabari. Kalabari explanation, according to him, is based on the use of the idea of unobservable underlying reality of gods to make sense of the contingencies of every day existence. The vast diversity of every day experience is interpreted in terms of a scheme of three forces: ancestors, founding heroes and water-spirits. Kalabari entrepreneurs use this interpretative scheme of these three forces to transcend the limited vision of cause and effect relationships provided by common sense, reaching to causal explanation of events. Ever since Horton's pioneering work no scholar has taken his analysis to the next stage: the connection between the mode of thought of Kalabari entrepreneurs and the organizational mode of their business enterprises. No one has examined this connection especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when with Bonny merchants Kalabari businessmen controlled substantial portion of the transatlantic trade along the western African coast.

This paper, using Horton's (1993, 1975a, 1975b, 1971, 1964b, and 1962) framework of analysis supplemented with original insights, examines the various ways Kalabari world view interacts with managerial decision-making process in the canoe-house corporation. I examine the relationship between the Kalabari world view and the structure and strategy of the canoe house corporation.

What were the structure and strategy of the canoe-house corporation in the nineteenth century? The structure and management process of the Kalabari canoe-house corporation was critically defined by the ability of the entrepreneurs to run their 'families' as corporations. Elem Kalabari [Kalabari] was segmented into semi-autonomous units and organized into three levels of hierarchy. There was the canoe houses (*wari*), which consisted of entrepreneurial households (a merchant, his family and his staff and relations). A group of canoe houses made up the *polo* or ward. Combination of wards made up the town, *ama*. Kalabari society was organized as thus: individual (household), wari/polo and ama.[1] The nineteenth-century management practice of the canoe-house corporation can be briefly stated as thus:

1. No specialized differentiation of functions. Work was not precisely described and defined. Managers relied on 'after-the-event controls' to supervise workers rather than create a systematic management process to coordinate and monitor the flow of activities.
2. There was a network structure of authority, control, and communication. The structure of authority in the Kalabari traditional firm was not clear, fixed and hierarchical.
3. In nineteenth-century Kalabari, owners personally managed their companies. Managerial capitalism, or Alfred Chandler's visible hand, was

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[1] Polo and *wari* are really not different in broad classification. *Polo* is either a collection of *wari* or just a single wari as was the case with *Iju* polo of *Igodome* in Elem Kalabari before 1836. See Horton (1960b, 1969a) and Jones (1963).

conspicuously absent. There were no managerial hierarchies to ensure the smooth working of the firm, to exploit economies of scale and scope, to coordinate and monitor the flow of activities, and to plan for the future allocation of resources (Wariboko 1997).

Three major observations came out of the application of the anthropological literature on world view to the thinking on business structure. First, this author observed that Horton's (1993 and 1962) position that Kalabari spiritualistic model of explanation is aimed at causal explanation of events is untenable. My position is that when a Kalabari person 'causally links' observable social conditions to the spirits, he is not claiming or implying that the sickness is 'causally explainable.' He is only saying is it is 'caused.' Kalabari only cite rules under which events fall under. The rules explain because they render the events or actions intelligible for them. More importantly, the traditional explanatory system does not attempt or pretend to uncover the causal mechanism that connects events to spirits and does not describe the pathway leading from the explanans to explanadum.

Second, the analysis shows that Kalabari management model features an 'aggressive welfare consciousness' and a 'timid subterranean market paradigm.' Third, the key to understanding the relationship between Kalabari world view and structure and strategy of the canoe-house corporation is to view the structure of the traditional firm as a form of classification with the capacity to control how its members interact. The Kalabari corporate structure followed the three categories of gods and they both fitted into a basic 'typology of three' in Kalabari culture. The structure of the canoe-house corporation was linked up in same analogical and metaphorical basis with the conceptual framework. Structure begets strategy. Defining strategy against a competitor boils down to placing him at a position in the structure and assessing his social ties and then designing means to contain his threat.

Having said this, it behoves me to state up-front the limitation of this paper. I assume that Horton's analysis of the Kalabari conceptual system in the twentieth century can be imputed to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There has been nothing in the scanty empirical documentation in the last three hundred years to suggest that my assumption of continuity is wrong. This not to deny that there might be some changes, but to hold the position that such changes are not fundamental. Not only is the world view presumed to have largely remained the same, but also is the hierarchy of social structures, including canoe house, ward and town. As shown below, since the structural organization of the Kalabari society derived from the conceptual system, the persistence of the organizational hierarchy suggests that our assumption of the continuity of the conceptual system is not misplaced. 1. Conceptual Framework of Kalabari Entrepreneurs

This section examines the way Kalabari managers define and prioritize their duties; it includes how they strike a balance between the conflicting values of economic forces and the structures of social relations in the traditional

organization, and it extends to their system of explanation, prediction and control. Put differently, there are three questions that need to be answered in the study of Kalabari management thought system. What does management mean in the canoe house? How does the Kalabari merchant-manager cope with the forces of competitive commercial capitalism and welfare needs of members of his organization? Finally, we are concerned with how the Kalabari merchant transcends the limited causal vision provided by common sense (primary theory) to see order, regularity and predictability in the vicissitudes of economic events.

Thus, the section is divided into three parts. Part IA deals with an analysis of the meaning of management in Kalabari. In IB I examine the two principal environmental forces that shape decision-making in Kalabari business. Finally, I present Horton's analysis of Kalabari conceptual system that he observed in the twentieth century and my additions and modifications of Horton's work. This three-pronged analysis constitutes what I call the conceptual framework of Kalabari entrepreneurs.

The conceptual framework of Kalabari businessmen can diagrammatically represented as a pyramid (figure 1).

At the top of the pyramid is the Kalabari meaning of management. This could be analysed in terms of its three components: (a) the first task of the manager, (b) effectiveness versus efficiency consideration, and (c) product/relationship matrix. The middle body of the pyramid is concerned with environmental issues. At the base is the spiritualistic model of explanation. This model gives meaning to all that happens in the Kalabari man's business environment, determines the way he approaches his duties as a manager and helps him to transcend the causal vision provided by common sense. In this model there are two distinct levels of thoughts and discourse.
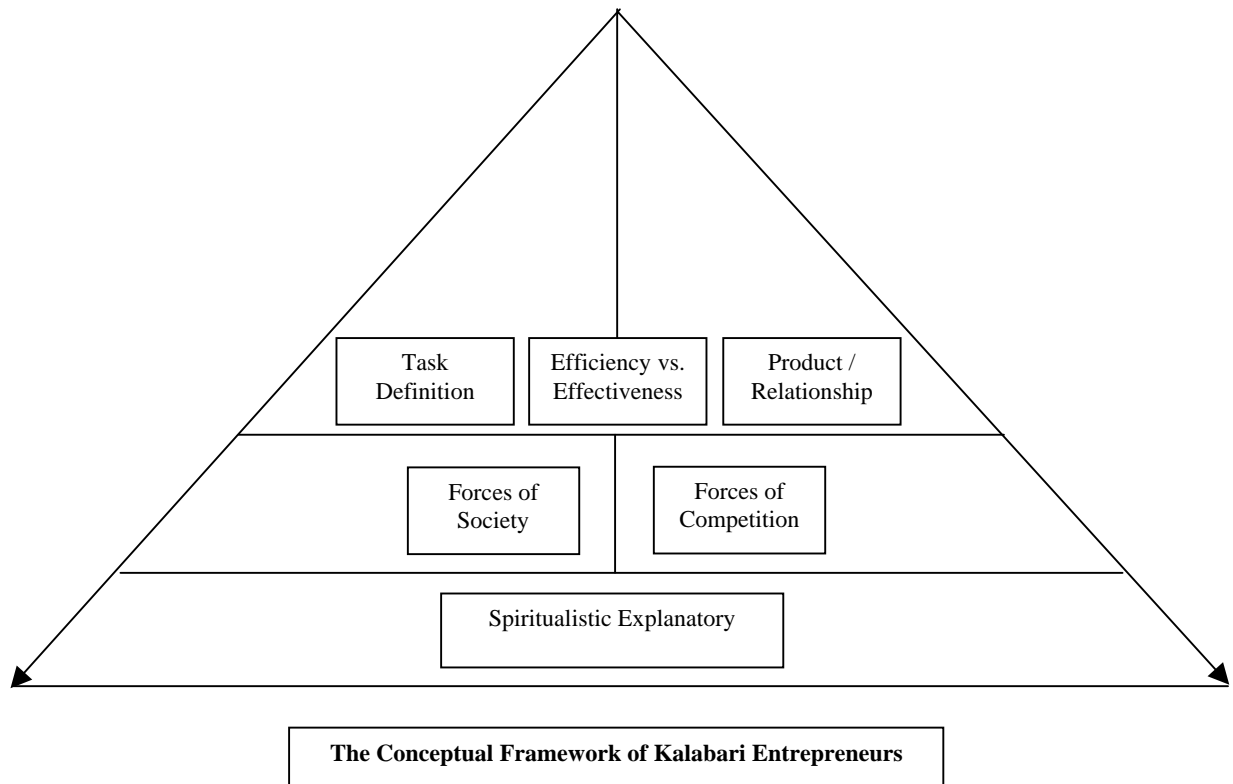
Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework of Kalabari Entrepreneurs.

At one (primary) level are things we can perceive and explain with the aid of common sense. At this level entities and processes are given or obvious. But at the secondary level they are somewhat hidden and requires a theory in order to understand them.

1.1 MEANING OF KALABARI MANAGEMENT

1.1.1 Task Definition

What is the first task of a canoe house manager? What is the primary definition of the managerial task? The Kalabari manager is to direct the resources (men, capital, goodwill) of the canoe house to attain economically significant results. Management in Kalabari means doing all one's best to achieve the best economic results from the available house funds, capital and people. *Warida* (management) is not a moral or value concept, but a commercial concept. The paramount issue is whether the house is commercially viable or it is disintegrating. A chief is judged by how well he has increased the resources of the house, how many new traders and merchants he has raised and how many new members he has absorbed or bought into the house in a given period. The manager's career sinks or soars on sound economic performance and profitable results. Not even the freedom of house members is free from this presupposition.

If a house is experiencing financial difficulty, it is expected that its chief can use house members (freeborn and slaves) to pay off debts.[2]

This definition of management in Kalabari may appear narrow. It excludes many lofty goals of today's managers in places like United States. This should not be misconstrued to mean that the Kalabari manager does not consider goals outside of the economic domain. The understanding goes like this: "make money, buy slaves, stabilize and increase the fortunes of the house and all things shall be added unto you." This concept of management is rooted in the Kalabari culture of inter-house rivalry, aggressive wealth acquisition, and growth of house membership size as the preeminent index of achievement and commercialism (Wariboko 1997).

1.1.2 Effectiveness versus Efficiency

In carrying out his functions, the Kalabari manager does not focus on efficiency as much as he focuses on effectiveness. While making profits, cutting costs and eradicating problems are important to him, the house is not organized to achieve efficiency in doing an economic activity. Given a choice between profit margin and profit stream he will choose profit stream. For he prefers exploiting economic opportunities to squeezing the next cent out of the expense line. Management is not defined by an ability to solve problems, but it is capacity to direct the resources of a house "towards opportunities for economically significant results." The question is why the emphasis is on finding and exploiting economic opportunities rather than solving problems? There are two likely reasons. First, it is because the chiefs are more of entrepreneurs than managers are – there is no professional managerial class in traditional Kalabari society. As Peter Drucker argued, "maximization of opportunities is a meaningful, indeed a precise, definition of the entrepreneurial job. It implies that effectiveness rather than efficiency is essential in business. The pertinent question is not how to do things, but how to find the right things to do, and to concentrate resources and efforts on them"(Drucker 1964: 5). In the conceptual framework of Kalabari, managerial success primarily depends on the ability of a person to find and exploit economic opportunities. Second, he only needs skills necessary to discover and deal with problems before they threaten the attainment of economically significant results.

Business scholars have long associated the ability to find opportunity with on-the-job training, direct personal experience on the job. The thrust of the argument is that the skills of finding opportunities are acquired by first hand observation of business events. As J. Sterling Livingston (1991: 101) puts it, "a manager cannot learn to find opportunities or problems without doing it. The

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[2] This practice of settling debts with house members stopped at the beginning of twentieth century. However, it is related here to show that the Kalabari in defining the management of the traditional Kalabari firm cite such powers as integral to the running of the firm. As they say, "this is how the chiefs used to do things."

doing is essential to the learning. Lectures, case discussions, or textbooks alone are of limited value in developing ability to find opportunities and problems. Guided practice in finding them in real business situations is the method that will make a manager skilful in identifying the right things to do." Kalabari chiefs, without the advantage of writing are neither in the class of managers who analyse reports prepared by someone nor they are the types that learnt their skills in the classroom. They acquired their skills through direct, personal, firsthand experience on the job in the hurly-burly world of commerce.

1.1.3 Product/Relationship Matrix

Every business enterprise can be defined in terms of a two-by-two matrix of product and relationships. The firm has products (services) it sells to a certain group of customers or clients (relationships). In his pursuit of economic opportunities, the Kalabari manager's job is to expand the reach of the product-relationship configuration of his enterprise. The dual dimensions of product and relationship define Kalabari trading enterprise. Product is not only the merchandise in his storehouse, but also the skill-set that creates a competitive niche and develops new products. The relationship is the customer base that knows the organization, its products as well as its staff. A canoe house also maintains relationship with suppliers. Its business grows by selling more products or increasing sale of existing products to existing customers. The Kalabari manager defines his task as that of expanding his business beyond the current alignment of customers and merchandise. His approach and thinking– the interaction between products and relationships– can be represented as shown in figure 2.
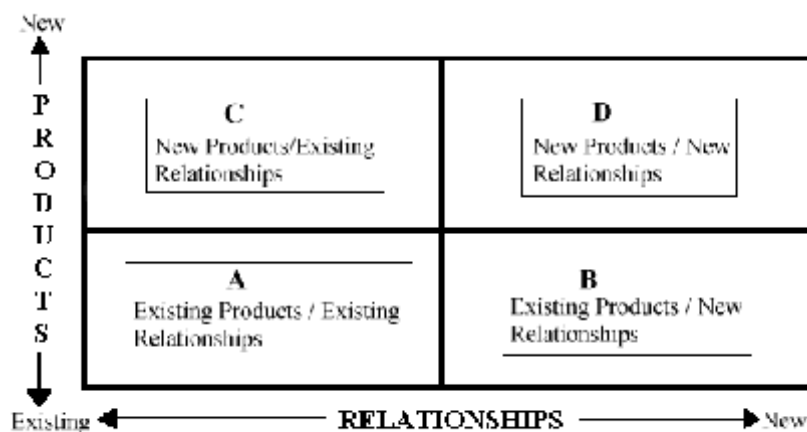
Figure 2. Product / Relationship Landscape.

   Box A is the most stable, the launching pad to other boxes, and it is where every merchant starts his value migration. In this box he has products he sells to existing customers. The task is to expand his business by going into any of the

other boxes by either leveraging on existing relationship base or product strength. If he wants to be in *Box B*, he has to figure out a way to sell existing products to new customers. After 1807, when Britain stopped the slave trade, many of Delta merchants switched to selling to Spanish and French buyers. Alternatively, he can move into *Box C* where he will sell new products to existing relationships. This occurred in the era of the 'legitimate trade' when the Delta merchant turned around from selling slaves to selling palm oil to the European nations who had hitherto bought human cargoes. The product-relationship matrix was also extended in another fashion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, Kalabari traders began to transport produce by canoes from the Oguta hinterland to Degema for European merchants at the price of one pound for a puncheon of oil (Wariboko 1984: 54). *Box D* is the most difficult box to get into. This is where merchants sell new products to new customers. It is extremely difficult to successfully operate in this box because the merchant is not leveraging off from any of his existing or relationship strengths. It requires innovation and inventions to operate in the 'brave new world' of Box D. Many Delta merchants were faced with this situation in the twentieth century. With the advent of the railways and the penetration of the hinterland by European, who were formerly confined to the coast, forced many Delta merchants into unfamiliar territory of Box D. Their Europeans customers had largely cut them off by going inland and buying directly from Ibos suppliers. The Eastern Delta merchants did not have new products (items whose supply did not depend on Ibos or Europeans) to sell, and they could not create new customer base.

1.2 FORCES OF SOCIETY VERSUS FORCES OF COMPETITION

Let us now try to study the entrepreneur in relation to his environment and examine the forces he has to contend with in making his decisions. There are two poles of extreme in the sphere of decision-making in the canoe house. The house as a welfare organization abhors strict profit rationality in the administration of its members. At this end, the entrepreneur makes his decision based on the full consideration of his relationships within the canoe house, the ward and the community. His decision is influenced not by dollar and cents (cowries) calculations but by the need for a 'pure communion' within the canoe house, ward and community in particular order of diminishing importance. At the other pole, the canoe-house system approves and pursues profits and encourages inter-house competition. In this respect, the canoe house as a trading corporation is run to produce profits and wealth. The entrepreneur makes his decision regarding every one in the house, ward and community as instruments, as means, to achieving his end. At this extreme his decisions are characterized by means-ends practical reasoning. In real life his decisions fall somewhere in between, depending on the relative importance of each pole.

The first pole we will call the 'conscious welfare paradigm.' Both the entrepreneur and his house members are aware of the desires, the hopes and welfare needs of the house. The entrepreneur lives and dies with this and openly proclaims it. The Kalabari conception of the self and community will throw some light on why the decision-making criteria at this end of the pole are what they are. The individual in Kalabari is not conceived as a "sovereign agent, individuated apart from or before his community experience," who has innate right to choose his ends. The community and the shared experience of its members contribute something significant to the self-definition of the individual. The individual is bound by the community, and the boundaries of the selfhood are not fixed independently of his ends, attributes and shared experience, and the boundaries of selfhood change with time. But this is not "simply to say that great many of them profess communitarian sentiments and pursue communitarian aims, but rather that they conceive their identity … as defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part. For them, community describes not just what they *have* as fellow citizens but also what they *are*, not a relationship they choose (as in voluntary association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity" (Sandel 1982: 150, author's italics). The other pole is what I call 'subterranean market paradigm.' The management of the house funds is based on profit and loss consideration. In the competitive and aggressive society of Kalabari, a house that consistently falls behind the competition and incurs debts soon finds itself in bankruptcy or on its way to absorption by a more prosperous house. The profit rationality, which ultimately influences all decisions, is not 'accessible' and open to house members. No chief will openly argue that 'bottom line' calculations are driving his decisions. He will not openly state that he wants to get arid of a house member because that member's productivity has fallen below average productivity in the house. Never mind that he is expected to run the house for profit and everyone accepts that it is the market destiny that determined the fortunes of the house.

Obviously the two paradigms are in conflict with each other. The canoe house entrepreneur's decision-making milieu is indeed an enforced amalgam of distinct and warring forces. The conflict centres on welfare of house members. Whilst the conscious paradigm submits to house authority and togetherness, the subterranean market paradigm hates and rejects it. Therefore, Kalabari administrative thinking features an aggressive welfare consciousness and a timid subterranean market paradigm.

This conflict is also played out at levels below the chiefs. In the canoe house there are layers of traders under the chief. The promotion of any trader to a higher rank depends on trading skills and war capabilities– both criteria reflected by wealth accumulation. When a man starts his career his canoe house limits his initial choice of working partners and his pursuit of economic opportunities. Driven by personal ambition and competitive aggressiveness he can quickly build up his wealth. If he showed promise in his service to the chief

as a minor trader, he will be assisted with finance and slaves to build up his own sub-house. And if his house becomes more prosperous than the parent house he could absorb it and become the new head-chief. From this thumbnail sketch of the career of a trader it is evident that ascribed characteristics are not of much value in productive activities in Kalabari society. The major determinant of status is individual initiative, which may actually encourage flouting of community norms. To succeed he has to combine aggressive individualism with his community responsibilities. The aspiring trader is expected to live in harmony with both men and gods. This means he has to make personal sacrifices to promote the welfare of every house member. If he ignored this the spirits will punish him with sickness and misfortunes. Successful men – wealthy people – are those who have been able to master the forces of collectivism and individualism inherent in the Kalabari conceptual scheme.

One way Kalabari entrepreneurs handle the conflict between profits and society-legitimated welfare demands is by demarcating their value domain to emphasize one norm over the other. Occasionally, when confronted, the entrepreneur would say "*miye tubo, ani oru, duein, wari gbolomaa,*" this is trading, not welfare, or issues of spirits, ancestors and house. One finds this approach even in their dealing with the gods. If the people have decided an issue in a way that is contrary to the revealed desires of gods, the Kalabari people would say, "what the people say the gods concur." If a Kalabari god becomes too demanding or more dangerous than useful, Kalabari would say *agu nsi owi baka kuma, en k'o karare sin en dugo k'o piri ba* – "when a spirit becomes too furious, people will tell him the wood he was carved from." That is, people can unanimously annul the power of a spirit by refusing to worship it. In this vein, the power of the welfare demand on a chief could be annulled if it becomes more dangerous than useful to the bottom line. After all, in times of severe economic constraint the manager can offset corporate liabilities with house members.

In summary, the Kalabari conceptual model stands on two legs: forces of society and forces of aggressive competition. Though the individual is expected to master or balance these forces in making decisions, the Kalabari explain managerial success or failure, or evaluate individual fortunes, with reference to the competitive forces only. A man succeeds based on his individual striving and aggressive competition. If we juxtapose the conflicting forces on one side and the explanation of managerial decisions on the other, there appears to be a contradiction. Or one can reasonably ask why the communitarian pressure or impetus is excluded from the explanation of success? I think there is no contradiction. It means that Kalabari management thought postulates that even though economic decisions are to be driven by profit motive and strong individualism, they be conditional on and embedded in structures of social relations.

1.3 EXPLANATION IN KALABARI MANAGEMENT THOUGHT: THE SPIRITUALISTIC MODEL

There are two main epistemological categories in Kalabari world view.[3] *There is oju* (body) representing material objects. *Teme (*spirit) is the other, and is immaterial. *Teme* cannot be seen, touched or heard by an ordinary person. Ask a Kalabari person how do you know spirits exist, he will likely say " the spirits are there but I do not see them." Priests and mediums who have undergone the training of "clearing the eyes and ears" can see and communicate with spirits. Spirits are defined as incapable of direct observations, but by reference to their effects. It is the behaviour of observable objects (bodies) that are assumed to be symptoms of variations in the unobservable (spirits). Spirits also differ from bodies in another crucial respect. They can be in two places at the same time – they are anywhere and everywhere. Bodies, on the other hand, are confined to a space and time quadrant at any one time. Finally, spirits are unobservable entities that underlie the visible and tangible everyday world.

There are three categories of religious objects, which are defined, with different combination of the attributes of spirit and bodies (Horton 1970, 1969b, 1962, 1960a, and 1960b). There are ancestors (*duein*), village heroes (*oru*) and water-spirits (*owu*). Ancestors and village heroes exist in spirit, but water-people have both bodies and spirits and live at definite localities. Kalabari believe that ordinary folk can see, hear and smell water-people if the person meets them in the mangrove forest. These three forces have varying relations with the observable world and have been clearly spelt out by Horton. Thus he says:

> "First, the Ancestors. These are postulated as the forces underpinning the life and strength of the lineages, bringing misfortunes to those who betray lineage values and fortunes to those promote them. Second, the Heroes. These are the forces underpinning the life and strength of the community and its various institutions. They are also the forces underpinning human skills and maintaining its efficacy in the struggle against nature. Third, the Water-spirits. On the one hand, these are the 'owners' of the creeks and swamps, the guardians of the fish harvest, the forces of nature. On the other hand, they are the patrons of human individualism – both its creative and its destructive forms. In short, they are the forces underpinning all that lies beyond the confines of the established social order" (Horton 1993: 217).

There are two major aspects to Kalabari religion (Horton 1993: 19-49). The first is spiritual communion with gods. Here the worship of gods has an intrinsic value to persons; they are entered into as ends in themselves. The second quest for religion is explanation, prediction and control of this-worldly events. The emphasis is on manipulation of gods for this-worldly benefits of prosperity,

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[3]   This section is heavily indebted to the corpus of Horton's writings recording the beliefs and mode of thought of Kalabari.

health and children. The gods are taken as instruments for achievement of goals, for the practical control of the world. Kalabari traditional religion puts more premiums on the second aspect of religion than the first.

One has gone this length to explain the religious system of the Kalabari because its religion is above all else a body of "theory regarding the underlying character of the world, from which flow repertoires of action aimed at practical control of the vicissitudes of life"(Horton 1993: 119). For Kalabari, explanation is based on the use of the idea of unobservable underlying reality of gods to make sense of the contingencies of every day existence. The vast diversity of everyday experience is interpreted in terms of a scheme of three forces: ancestors, founding heroes and water-spirits. These are the forces at work behind observed events. Failures, sickness, fortunes and misfortunes are causally linked to a wide range of social conditions via the gods. Kalabari entrepreneurs use the interpretative scheme of the three basic forces to transcend the limited vision of cause and effect relationships provided by common sense. A Kalabari merchant on realizing that in a particular month he suffered a massive loss of income because of falling prices will consult a diviner as to the cause of his troubles (Horton 1968, 1964b). The diviner is likely to tell him that his ancestors are angry with him for not taking proper care of a widow in his house. He will then make a placatory sacrifice to the ancestors. This kind of response to market forces will definitely puzzle a modern manager. How could Kalabari manager literally see a spirit in the operations of demand and supply of palm oil? The Kalabari manager or priest does not literally refer to spirit agency; he only uses the idea of the agency to link price fluctuations to happenings in the observable, tangible world.

One may still ask the question: why the Kalabari entrepreneur does not set out to collect information that would show the operations of the laws of demand and supply rather than going to the gods for answers. As in modern science, theoretical models dictate the data that are collected, classified and described to explain any phenomenon. It happens that rather than consumers and suppliers peopling Kalabari theoretical models, we have spirits and gods. This does not mean that spirits and gods are swirling and bubbling every where in the decision-making process. It is very easy, if one is not careful, to misconceive the relation of the spiritualistic model to the primary observation. What is most essential in the Kalabari framework is not necessarily the sanctity of the explanation provided by a diviner but the quest for the explanation itself. Kalabari entrepreneurs do not attempt to give meaning to their daily business decisions by first looking at the spirits independently defined. That is, it is not the explanation given by the spirits that primarily define the decisions to be made, but rather the principles that they have acknowledged to govern the background conditions under which these business decisions are to be made and the manner in which they are to be executed. For the canoe-house guiding principles (market rationality and 'welfarism') are prior to the decisions which are affirmed by or emanating from the spiritualistic model. Whatever

explanation may be provided by the spirits is among numerous ones to be chosen and they will be chosen by human beings – not by gods. As the Kalabari say, if a god becomes too furious they annul his influence in the society. If all that business decisions consisted in were a concatenation of various contingent desires of angry gods and upset ancestors there would be no way for the entrepreneur to identify the aims and desires of any particular canoe house. If the Kalabari entrepreneur is only a receptacle for the wishes of the spirits, he would not have a standpoint of appraisal independent of prevailing welfare values. And since his explanatory model derives from human relations and the spiritualistic model of explanation largely strives on mysterious connections between morality and natural events, market rationality would be permanently ignored if he were bound to the contingent wants and aims of the spirits. Thus the theme of the Kalabari conception of gods and the aggregation of gods as an explanatory system is that human beings (vis-à-vis gods) are sovereign agents of choice, who can very much choose their ends, their gods and the explanations provided by the gods. The Kalabari entrepreneur acts out his will and not act out of cognition. That is to say the Kalabari entrepreneur, though he often recourses to the spirits to transcend the common sense environment, is a being who chooses his explanations rather than a being who discovers his explanations. This is because the explanations are not given (accepted) in advance. The managerial decision-making or the acceptance of an explanation involves the exercise of will. No spiritualistic explanation can be so essential that turning away from it would call into question the managerial effectiveness or the existence of the canoe house. The main purpose of the canoe house enterprise is not affected by changes in contingency or happenstance of spirits. This rules out the possibility of any explanation (provided by a diviner) being able to reach beyond the entrepreneur's profit calculations and values to engage his main purpose itself.

It is again necessary to point out, from another salient perspective, that even though Kalabari managers use spirits in their theoretical thinking, the spirit world is not ever present in their daily lives or business decisions. In their daily business world they rely on common sense and their acquired decision-making skills to get by. It is only when they are confronted with the unusual that the limited causal vision of common sense can not handle that they resort to spiritualistic theoretical thinking. For instance, if a chief is to lose his wares in the market to thieves, he is likely to start by blaming his boys for negligence. He will then take measures to increase the security of his property to forestall future occurrence. If the measures did not work and he is robbed again, he would then consult a diviner to investigate if any of his boys was doing the stealing. Alternatively, he might ask the diviner to prepare an amulet, which he will hang over his the door post of his shed as visibly as a modern anti-burglary alarm, to scare thieves away. If all these measure did not yield the expected results he would suspect that *jenso ani bio emi*; that is, "there is something else in the series of burglary." To understand this 'something else'– to transcend the

limited causal vision provided by common sense – he would consult a diviner who would explain the circumstances by reference to spiritual agencies. If the initial burglary were severe the chief would have made the jump from common sense to theoretical thinking immediately.

The characteristic feature of Kalabari explanation is that it uses personal idioms, focussing on human relations and people activities. For example, a so and so undesirable economic event occurred because there was an infraction of kinship morality. So and so event happened to the chief because he did not provide for the welfare of a widow or because some neighbour he had offended was angry with him. The set of phenomena that the Kalabari entrepreneur draws upon as the prototype of an explanatory model is related to the vicissitude of his swampy environment and the level of material development of his society. He finds his prototype in people activities in society, in people and their relations, because these are the areas of his life that disclose order and regularity. Managers, whether in New York or in Niger Delta, create new theoretical models by tracing an analogy between the structure of certain observations they want to explain and the structure of certain phenomena whose regularities of behaviour they are familiar with. As Horton (1993: 214) puts it, "since the overriding aim of explanation is to disclose order and regularity underlying apparent chaos, the search for explanatory analogies must tend towards those areas of experience most closely associated with such qualities." In the technologically backward, traditional Kalabari society, where the rate of change is slow, social life of the people is more ordered, regular and predictable than the riverine environment. It is therefore not surprising that the Kalabari entrepreneur turns to human beings and their social relations as his source of explanatory models. In modern societies, the impersonal world is the preferred locus of order and regularity. "In these, not only do social relations have a greatly increased complexity: their commitment to continuous change gives them a pervasive aura of uncertainty which blurs any appearance of order and regularity, and in this respect they become inferior to the inanimate world. In such societies, impersonal explanatory models come to have strongest appeal as much in the realms of psychology and anthropology as in the realm of physics"(Horton 1964a: 99).

Up to this point, I have by and large used Horton's framework of analysis to lay out the Kalabari spiritualistic model of explanatory. It is pertinent at this juncture to state that I do not wholly agree with him on his interpretation. Horton (1993: 206-207) argues that the African spiritualistic model is aimed at causal explanation of events or postulating natural connexions. But I posit that when a Kalabari person or diviner 'causally link' observable social conditions (like misfortunes or sickness) to the spirits, he is not claiming or implying that the sickness is 'causally explainable.' He is only saying it is 'caused.' It is important to understand the difference between 'cause' and 'causally explainable.' Take the favourite example philosophers like to use to make the difference clear: *signing a check.* You can sign a check in various ways: with

pencil or pen, standing or sitting, left hand or right hand. Every time you sign a check there is no doubt that the action is *caused,* but is your action *causally explainable*? Since you can sign checks in innumerable ways there is no one law that can connect every case of check signing and a set of invariable prior events. You require as many laws as there are different ways you can sign a check to cover all cases. This means "that there can be no finite set of generalizations connecting the general class of events of check signing to any other general class of prior events, no causal laws of check signing, and no causal explanations of it"(Rosenberg 1995: 98). The explanations of what you are doing when you sign a check are not causal and are not based on any causal regularities.

Horton was no doubt aware of the multiplicity of different causes that are assignable by a diviner to a single event and the fact that in the diviner's world there are more than one correct possible description of an event.[4] The problem of 'converging causal sequences' indicates that the diviners have a deep ignorance of the deterministic causality assumed to be operating. One does not have an adequate causal structure of the process of predicting future fortunes or illnesses if one has to invoke behaviour or events in the past, as the diviner does. For this approach to causal explanation involves the problem of *hysteresis.*

Horton in all his writings on the subject never clearly showed what is the underlying causal mechanism in the African spiritualistic model? He could not because there is none. Kalabari diviners do not produce or even pretend to describe or discern the causal mechanism and the laws on which illness (fortune) depends on gods. Perhaps the issue I am pressing – the relevance of causal mechanism in any causal explanation – will become clearer with this simple example. An old man was seating on a stool that had a fragile leg, after being on it for several minutes the leg broke and the man fell down. The cause of the man's fall was the fragile leg, but to establish this finding one must show the series of events that moved the state of the stool to the fallen man on the ground. In other words we must show a 'continuous and contiguous chain of causal links.' This means we have to show how a current state leads to a new state. The series of events connecting the fragile stool leg to the fallen man constitute the causal mechanism connecting the fragile leg to the fallen man. The traditional diviner may diagnose that spirits cause sickness but he never uncovers the causal mechanism that connects them, nor does he describe the pathway leading from the explanans to explanadum.

The absence of a causal mechanism becomes understandable and tolerable once we understand that spirits are conceptualized as people, not as atoms or particles. Given this conceptualization, explanation can not reasonably be made

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[4]   This in the context of what Horton termed 'converging-causal-sequences' which describes this problem. This is a system of convergent causality in which several causes, A, B, C, D, … all account for one effect. This system does not allow for a critical test of any particular causal connection. If a particular connection theorized in one case does not hold, the diviner or the patient will attribute the failure to false diagnosis (Horton 1993: 238-241).

in terms of constant conjunction – given initial conditions, subsequent event could not but follow. As 'people,' spirits can employ such indirect strategies as 'one step backward, two steps forward' and also learn from 'useful failures.' For the spiritualistic model to have causal mechanism the processes of the spirits must be deterministic; and like natural processes (such as 'natural selection') be incapable of certain kinds of human behaviour like problem solving and deferred gratification. Spirits are not bound to one course of action in any given circumstance. Spirits like human beings always have alternatives and explaining spiritistic actions in Humean pattern would not make sense. When the diviner is looking for antecedents of action (effect, illness) he is not searching for invariant causal connexion but looking for available alternatives and asking why which category of spirit transmitted the effect.

From the foregoing we can say that the conceptual scheme of Kalabari does not attempt to provide causal explanations, causal regularities, and generalizations. Rather it aspires to explain events and actions by citing the rules they fall under. The rules explain because they render the event or action intelligible to them. The diviner's explanation that a sickness is caused by an infraction of group norms makes the event of the sickness intelligible to the inquirer or the patient. Or an explanation that a man was executed because he murdered a war captive within Elem Kalabari territory is intelligible because there is a rule sanctioned by the national goddess, *Owamekaso*, that forbids killing a human being within the confines of the town. Explanation is, therefore, primarily knowing these rules and applying them. These rules are derived from analogy to social relations.

2. MANAGERIAL FRAMES: STRUCTURE AND STRATEGY

Business strategists have posited that a given managerial world view determines a particular strategy (Senge 1990; Gary and Hamel 1993; Drucker 1994). It is desirable to dig deeper to show how world view affects individual manager's behaviour or strategies. This is our task in this section of the paper. The thrust of our argument is that world view do not plausibly determine strategic policies; rather they make some decisions or policies more likely than others. World views exert their influence on strategy by imposing incentives and constraints on the entrepreneur. If we want to know how the entrepreneur will behave in a business environment of choice, we need to know what his world view and goals are and what choices are available to him through which he can pursue his goals. I will in this section try to show if the incentives and constraints imposed by the Kalabari world view on the entrepreneur lead to predictable choices.

(a) Explanatory systems limit what is seen as facts or reasons.

The first effect of a conceptual framework on structure and strategy is that what serves as reason or counts as fact in a market or competitive analysis is itself determined by one's own world view or explanatory system. The entrepreneur's observation of events or his idea of reasons in the marketplace or within the organization is given content by particular conceptual framework, cultural and historical traditions. To what extent an entrepreneur is 'imprisoned' within his own framework depends on the presence of what Horton calls 'inter-theoretic competition.' A society with a plural tradition is more likely to urge reflective understanding of decisions and the decision-making process within the organization. There is little or no 'inter-theoretic competition' in traditional Kalabari society (Horton 1993: 221-237, 320). I need to quickly add that the absence of a plural tradition does not mean that disputes about decisions boil down to 'un-analysable differences in world view.' In the traditional Kalabari firm all decisions must ultimately submit to the market rationality. The entrepreneur's prior commitment to generating profits provides the ultimate basis for rejecting some decisions or accepting others.

We also need to clear up another possible misunderstanding about the relationship between world view and strategy. Even though we claim that all strategy is mediated by world view, we do not argue that it is ultimately based upon world view. This is because we may never definitely know if a particular strategy represents a process of sheer thinking or world view or a reaction to changed economic facts. What I am saying is that entrepreneurs apprehend the competitive environment and choose their strategies through the medium of their world view.

(b) Spiritualistic model lead to 'satisficing,' away from 'maximization'.

There are two conditions about the spiritualistic model that conspire to create complex-choice situations even for the simplest of decisions. How do you make decisions (which are essentially about future states of events) when you lack the concept and information about probability or when you do not believe in chance? The second condition is due to the phenomenon of 'converging causal sequences' which ensures that for every event there are many options and possible outcomes. Decision-making under this condition, as Herbert Simon (1979) has shown, will not be focussed on maximizing utility of benefit, but on *satisficing*. The goal of the entrepreneur or manager in circumstances of complex-choice situations is not to seek for optimal solution but for a satisfactory one that fulfils a minimum set of predetermined parameters. It is pertinent to point out that while the modern manager is driven to *satisficing* because of information cost associated with the search for optimal solution to a

problem, the Kalabari entrepreneur is driven to *satisficing* by information cost, absence of the concept of probability, too many options and possible outcomes.

(c) The personalistic and mechanistic world-pictures represent relations between people differently.

It is important to understand that the impersonal, mechanical idiom ultimately represents relations between people as though they are relations between inanimate things. Impersonal idiom carries with it the burden of reification of relations. In analysing prices and markets as well as sickness things and events are seen as no longer representing social relations between people or effects of disturbances in the social relationships.

   Once a managerial frame encourages or entertains the reification of social relations, the system of organization ensuing from it is likely to produce bureaucracy, managerial hierarchies and explicit generalized rules for administration. Ernest Gellener (1973: 172) posits that the "central idea in the notion of bureaucratic conduct is the orderly cases in accordance with fixed rules – the ethic rules as opposed to the ethic of loyalty. The mechanistic world-picture is, in this sense, simply the bureaucratization of nature." More importantly, the mechanistic viewpoint, by the sheer nature of its reification tendency "consider[s] social relations as things to be controlled and manipulated and treated under abstract categories according to a set of procedures, under general categories shorn of their sensuous particularity and individual idiosyncrasies: objects and not subjects."(Young 1997: 28) This is not to deny that trade or sales volume and technology encourage the creation of managerial hierarchies as argued by Alfred Chandler (1977: 49), but it is to say that we do not expose the whole truth if we ignore the interaction between world view and organizational structure.

(d) Western mechanistic world view encourages a concept of management as control in a way that the Kalabari spiritualistic model, which draws its analogy from people, does not.

In Wariboko's (1997: 64-66) work on Kalabari management practice, it is surmised that there are two principles that pertain to the corporate structure of the canoe house in the nineteenth century: federalism and 'subsidiarity.' He then stated that these two principles demanded a different way or managing people. Employees were managed by results and not by controlling how they work and when they work. Managers relied on 'after-the event controls.' This system of control affected the way managers (chiefs) worked with their employees. The managers did not specify the details of what had to be done. They only indicated the boundaries of discretion of each worker.

   Generally speaking, the modern (Western) manager does not believe in 'after-the-event-controls.' He emphasizes control and predictability as he sees

his organization as a gigantic piece of engineering in which every part obeys some innate rules of mechanics. Thus as, Charles Handy (1990: 131) opined, most Western managers feel more comfortable when work is clearly and closely defined, when they can control the individual and when they can "control the methods and therefore the results, the means and not the ends." In general, the literature on management and management practice is concerned with the search and techniques of "how best to control people, information and other resources in the light of continuous change and uncertainty." As Yiannis Gabriel (1997: 1) stated, "standing as the guarantor for order, predictability and reliability, control has become virtually co-extensive with what most managers understand by organization."

The Kalabari entrepreneur, living in a recalcitrant environment, which is unpredictable and untamed, has his focus on how to control his environment and relies on human relations to fill in the gaps in the organization. In the West, given its mechanistic world view and man's better control of his natural environment, it is human relations that are more recalcitrant and therefore the focus is to control man. Employees' behaviours are to be controlled and commanded like machines. Western managers work to exorcise *Fortuna* (the Roman goddess of unpredictability) and banish her fear from the organization by controlling human beings. Kalabari entrepreneurs manage unpredictability by controlling, coaxing or placating *Fortuna*. Kalabari focus or emphasis is on controlling the spirits (controlling 'unpredictability' directly) is even reflected in its arts and sculpture. Kalabari sculptures are a necessary instrument for controlling, confining and localizing the spirit its represents, not for aesthetics (Horton 1965a: 8-9, 15). In sum, the focal goal of the Kalabari 'non-mechanistic' management style is to control the spirits (the environmental forces) and to capture employees attention and interest.

(e) Emphasis on people relations – minimizing the stress on workers' control- does hinder the creation of managerial hierarchies in the organization.

Scholars argue that differences in managerial emphasis on control or people lead to vastly different approaches to management and organizational design: *strategy-structure-systems* versus *purpose-process-people*. In firms where the managerial framework is purpose-process-people, managers see themselves as shapers of organizational purpose, facilitators of management process, and the developers of the knowledge, expertise, and capabilities of their employees (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1994: 79-88). This approach to management has three characteristics that distinguish it from the strategy-structure-systems framework that cast top managers as strategic gurus. The executives articulate the corporate ambition in terms designed to capture the employees' attention and interest rather than in terms related to strategic or financial goals. They engage the organization in developing, refining, and renewing the ambition. And they

ensure that it is translated into measurable activities to provide a benchmark for achievement and a sense of momentum (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1994: 82).

The alternative to this framework is the strategy-structure-system approach. Strategy begets the structure. Systems of control and planning support the structure. The objective of this framework is to minimize errors and human idiosyncrasies by creating a complex division of labour in the organization, and by narrowly and carefully defining and delineating functions. In the ensuing division of labour, the function of top management is to provide the strategic vision, state the strategic intent, and control the strategic priorities of the organization. "Top-level managers view themselves as the designers of the strategy, the architects of the structure, and managers of the systems that direct and drive their companies" (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1994: 79).

To throw more light on the relationship between the strategy-structure-system (control) framework and the mechanistic world view of the West let us examine the origin of this management approach. Two hundred years ago, Adam Smith 'discovered' that the best way to execute a job was to break it down into its simplest and most basic tasks. He had visited a pin factory and was deeply impressed by what he saw. The factory, by adopting the principles of the division of labour – each specialized worker performing a single task in the manufacture of a pin – raised labour productivity by many factors. Thus, with labour specialization and consequent fragmentation of work as the central ideas, the organizing principle of industrial management was born. As production marched on with the development of industrial capitalism, factories came to be organized along functional lines dictated by the principles of the division of labour.[5] The emerging organizational model proved very useful and enabled companies to exploit cost advantages in the economies of scale and scope. Marketing and distribution came to be organized along the same principles as companies diversified from producing single products into producing many products.

Some of the new products required specialized skills, specialized transportation, and specialized storage facilities. Specialized staff units were therefore required to handle the new products' marketing and distribution. Thus, product-specific marketing and distribution and purchasing networks came to replace the marketing of several products by the general all-purpose merchant or wholesaler. New expanded management was needed to coordinate and monitor the production process, to supervise the marketing and distribution of products and to plan for the efficient allocation (spatial and temporal) of corporate resources. Management hierarchies were organized along the principles of the

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[5] In a society where time is reckoned in blocks of varying length and not measured precisely, a structure that depends on strict division of labor is not likely to be conceived. Time in traditional Kalabari society is a social construct and not mechanistic, not embedded in definite cosmological and ecological phenomenon. One can therefore justifiably doubt if division of labor – a scientific culture- can flourish in a society where there are no precise measurements.

division of labour, following the lines of production and distribution activities. Work within each department was sliced into tiny, piecemeal tasks; the work divided into several separate steps, each performed by a specialized worker. The line-and-staff system of administration was then borrowed from the military establishment to run the resulting organization. At the corporate office, which was at the peak of the pyramid, top management concentrated on evaluation of the different divisions and departments of the firm, made decisions on whether to expand or reduce the various operating divisions, and set the strategic priorities of the overall firm.

In day-to-day operations Kalabari managers do not focus on formal structures and hierarchies. Rather the norms and practice of the organizational culture of the traditional firm emphasizes cooperation across 'hierarchical' lines and effective management process. As a result, there are no proper management structures and no systematic management to coordinate and monitor the flow of activities and plan for future allocations of resources. The essence of the Kalabari entrepreneur's decision-making is not to collect data; analyse alternatives, risks, and opportunities; and then to proceed deliberately. To him the management process must not be logical, systematic, and comprehensive. He studies alternatives and opts for the one that brings him closer to his goal. He is opportunistic, and successively refines his decisions.[6]

(f) World view tends to orient managers differently towards the organizing principles of the division of labour.

Mechanistic world-picture do prepare the manager's mind for the principles of the division of labour in a way personalistic world view of prescientific society does not. "The industrial manager knows that anything a man can do a machine can do. That is to say, all specifiable tasks for human beings can be reduced to routine movements, which a machine can perform" (MacIntyre 1963: 67). The idea of work itself is another area of difference. The idea of work in Kalabari society is different from the idea of work in the modern factory: multiplication versus division. Task in the traditional African society is not broken up into segments and fanned out to many workers, rather it is multiplied out. You are more likely to find ten employees working on ten different tasks than ten workers working on segments of the same task. [7]

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[6]   Perhaps, the management style of Kalabari entrepreneurs reminds you of Wrapp's (1984: 8) concept of a successful manager.

[7]   It is pertinent to mention that the relationship between division of labor and world view is a complex one. As stated by Barnes (1973: 78-79), the personal idiom reigns in undifferentiated labor, and it is lack of division of labor that creates non-differentiation of labor. This in turn promotes the personal and anthropocentric conceptual structure and idiom. See also Douglas (1966: 78-82).

There is also a distinction in mechanistic concepts between that which is causally manipulated and that which does the manipulating. In the modern Western corporation management is up there at the top echelon doing strategy and workers are on the factory floor being manipulated, corralled or controlled. This is a distinction that does not exist in the traditional Kalabari firm.

(g) In the absence of mechanistic-world picture, competition between firms is more likely to be seen in personal terms, and assumes the character of warfare.

The very idea of self and the firm in Kalabari is conceived in social terms. Individuals in Kalabari, as in most African societies, identify themselves by their social relationships. An entrepreneur does not regard himself as an independent entity, for interpersonal relations are part of himself. He is not an autonomous unit of action in the society; he is not one who regards his relations with every other person as something out of the boundaries of the self. His firm is seen as the extension of himself – not as a separate entity individuated apart of the owner. The firm and its owner put a high premium on harmonious integration within the society. Therefore, the sense of competition includes the context of relationships. Competition is not simply defined, once and for all, as one legal entity versus another (others) engaged in struggle to claim society's resources, but it is something that is constantly redefined according to the nature of the social relationships (of the people and people activities) which make the struggle sensuous. Competition is not just one canoe house versus another, but people, sentient beings, pitted against flesh and blood. Competition is conceived as *ori ebibi buru si wate*, meaning he wants to remove food from my mouth. In his honest and brutal rendition of the same meaning, the Kalabari entrepreneur will say *jen nji peiya nji beleki soa* – meaning a fish that does not eat another fish does not have fat, or he who does not win the competition does not make profits. The idea of winning is not always exactly the same as we understand it in the New York or Tokyo of the 1990s.

In Kalabari traditional society the idea of beating down the competition essentially boils down to either of two basic things: control or eliminate. The clue to understanding this partly adheres within the domain of the relationships between Kalabari and their gods. When spirits caused illness or misfortunes the Kalabari patient seeks to have relationship with them. But it is a relationship of control which he seeks. The belief is that a spirit that is not adequately controlled (*fubara yanaa oru*) is dangerous (Horton 1965a: 8-9). And if a spirit cannot be controlled its power is annulled by refusing worship. This is the basic idea behind the Kalabari saying, "if a spirit becomes too violent, they will tell him the stick they carved him from."

Let me bring another perspective to the analysis of why competition is conceived in personal terms. The explanation of events in personal, emotional terms does not mean that the traditional African entrepreneur does not

understand technical nature of events. Kalabari readily admit that in a competitive market environment it is invariably that two firms will go head to head and one will emerge as the winner. They believe that if a person gets in the way of a fast moving car the person will be destroyed. The technical nature of competition or the general rule of a car in motion killing a man is obvious and generally accepted. When an accident happens or when an entrepreneur confronts an opponent, he does not dwell much on the technical nature of the matter, his "curiosity turns instead to focus on the involvement of a particular person with the universe" (Douglas 1966: 91). Such technical requirements that may pertain to an event only provide a backdrop against which personal and emotional issues of a single event are addressed. There were many people that crossed the road but they were not crushed by cars. The accident victim could have been delayed for a few minutes but he was not. There have been many people who crossed the path of a moving car, but they live to tell the story because the driver swerved the car and their lives were saved. Why did the deep-pocket competitor decide to attack my competitive advantage? Why did not the new entrant firm take on another firm? When a car kills a person or when the price of a commodity falls at a time when the entrepreneur has invested heavily in the product, Kalabari will quickly move beyond the technical arguments and really focus "on the emergence of a unique event out of the meeting point of two separate sequences"(Douglas 1966: 91).

Many scholars have rightly described the competition in nineteenth century palm oil trade in the Niger Delta as 'cutthroat.' This should not be taken as mere metaphor in the light of the preceding discussion. Indeed the competition was life and limb, blood and tears. The competition among the Delta states for market shares, market power, and market domination was always one of the major reasons, if not the main cause, for the numerous wars in the nineteenth century.

(h) Aggressive self assertion is for individuals and the house, and slow assertion even when under challenge is for the town. The national refrain is that the Kalabari person does not act in haste, that he takes his time to make the right decisions.

Horton captured this idea very well when he wrote:
> "the men of New Calabar [Kalabari] see themselves as people who are slow to act in a crisis, but who win in the end by meeting superior numbers with intelligence, cunning and bluff. This is at once a distinctive theme of their history, which they can illustrate with many ancient examples, and a pillar of their present character. "This is how our *ama teme so* [destiny of the town] is," they say in explanation of themselves" (Horton 1970: 198).

In Kalabari, the individual, *wari* or the town is believed to have a two-part personality. The component parts of this personality act as separate persons. One

is conscious, the other is unconscious. The unconscious part before birth decided the destiny, the life course of the whole person. The other only works out its fortunes on earth. The conscious part is aggressive, rivalrous, competitive and desires to excel. The unconscious depending on what was spoken before *Tamuno,* may be amiable, uncompetitive and destined for failure, or cantankerous, competitive and destined for success. This characterization is true for the individual and the wari, but less true for the town, *ama*. For the town, the unconscious part is invariably non-aggressive, non-rivalrous, peaceful, and slow self-assertion even under attack. Thus, when it comes to decisions that will affect the town as a whole Kalabari are unusually slow to act. One might be attempted to explain this as rational reaction to 'public goods;' the hard bitten Kalabari merchants are slow to act on the production of 'non excludable' goods. But Kalabari think differently, they say it is in their spoken destiny, *ama teme so*, it is because of the nature of their national goddess, *Owamekaso*. A historian E. J. Alagoa gives this report about the *Owamekaso* ideology:

> "The early direct contact with white men and participation in the overseas slave trade placed Elem Kalabari in a class with Bonny as against the other states of Nembe and Okrika which had no direct access to the European traders. But the adoption of a female god opposed to war and bloodshed probably placed Elem Kalabari apart. Although Elem Kalabari took a subsidiary war god Okpolodo and had the military institution of *peri*, her adoption of Owamekaso as national god tended to redress the balance of prestige towards peaceful pursuits..." (Alagoa 1972: 144).

(i) World view and structure are all about one thing: classification.

If we look at structure within any organization as essentially a form of classification with the capacity to control how its members interact, then its relation to conceptual scheme readily falls into relief. The Kalabari corporate structure, individual household, *wari* and *ama*, appear to follow the three categories of gods, and these in turn fit to a theoretical structure and are a part of the same order. The issue then, as in other forms of classification in society, is how does sameness of properties get assigned to classes. As Mary Douglas (1986: 59) puts it the "identity or sameness is conferred on objects by being held in the embrace of a theoretical structure … sameness is not a quality that can be recognized in things themselves; it is conferred upon elements within a coherent scheme."

Table 1. Kalabari theoretical scheme of social interaction.

Dimension	Class A	Class B	Class C
Typology of three	Earth, *kiri*	Sky, firmament, *So*	Waters, *minji, toru, mu*
Spirits and gods	Hero-gods, *oru*	*Duein, ancestors*	Water-spirits, *owuamaapu*
Structure of political and corporate organization	*Ama*	*Wari, polo*	Individual, person, *tombo*
Levels of competition	*Ama*	*Wari, polo*	Individual, Single household
Ownership of *owu*	Town ownership	House ownership	Personal ownership
Three themes of Iria (Female) Appearance	Economic and political power	Motherhood, fecundity	Creativity, excellence, religiosity
Traditional Kalabari house	*Wariku*	*Biokiri*	*Kalabio*
Funeral room – *ede*	*Wariku'e ede*	*Biokiri'e ede*	*Kalabio ede*
Clothes used in *ede*	Imported fabrics- velvet, woolen European fabrics	Fabric of local extraction- e.g. *ikaki, acraa,*	*Injiri* – gingham, george,

In Kalabari theoretical scheme of social interaction the world is polarized into three classes: hero-gods, *duein*, and water-spirits; town ownership of *owu* (masquerade), family ownership of *owu*, personal ownership of *owu, ama, wari* and *tombo* (the person, the individual) (Jenewari 1976; Daly 1984; Erekosima 1989; Horton 1967, 1966, 1965b and 1963). Elements on the same side of the taxonomy are grouped together as shown in table 1.

The classification system justifies the particular lot assigned to the person in his relation with the gods. The person, the trader can use the water-spirits to further his personal competitive advantage, endeavours or ambition. The other sets of gods are accordingly related to segments of the structure on their same side of the taxonomy. As Horton (1993: 35) points out "in any case of a system in which relations between the segments of a group at any level in the whole are markedly competitive, every level will have its own set of cults distinct from those of all other levels in the system." World view, structure and strategy are linked by a common classification system. For the entrepreneur who formulates strategy his world view directs his attention to the relations and categories they authorize. As Douglas (1986: 94) stated, classifying events according to the generally accepted conceptual scheme in the society saves the thinker the trouble of justifying his classification. In sum, the point being made is that Kalabari ideas about structure and strategy are entrenched by their coherence with other ideas and theories in society.

Structures are linked up in the same analogical and metaphorical basis with conceptual framework. Managers look for structures that have at least superficial resemblance to objects in another realm. Alfred Sloan equates the structure of the modern corporation, managerial hierarchies to Adam Smith's pin factory. He recognized similarities between them. As Douglas has shown, institutions depend on analogy for their legitimacy. "There needs to be an analogy in which the formal structures of a crucial set of social relations is found in the physical world, or in the supernatural world, or in eternity, anywhere, so long as it is not seen as a socially contrived arrangement" (Douglas 1986: 48). Once this connection is made – by recognizing the resemblance – structure or conceptual scheme can serve as an explanation for the other. And a manager can attempt to control or influence either of them (structure or conceptual scheme) by manipulating the other. The manager may start with structure using it to control the mode of thought or the mode of thought changes and the structure changes.

The preceding paragraphs have posited that world view and structure are related to strategy in two ways: shared common classification and same analogical basis. There is a third way structure is related to strategy in Kalabari. In formulating competitive strategies about how to deal with other canoe houses, (which as we seen are regarded as people or extensions or externalizations of the owners) the inquiry starts with the place of the person in the structure of society, his 'spatially bounded negotiations and networks,' and ends with a territorial based classification of the person. The question a Kalabari entrepreneur will first ask a person or a competitor is *O ta anga bo* or *tubo ori eyi*, meaning "Where are his origins?" Kalabari do not place people, friends, competitors or opponent by asking what they do for a living, or what their niche is in the chain of production and distribution. They would not start an analysis of a competitor with a determination of his core competence. Such questions about production do not reveal the social ties of the person which supposedly define person *qua*

person; they do not give a sense of the predictability about the person behaviour; and they would not show what kind of ideology the person upholds. The common thinking is that it is far more fruitful to know if you are dealing with a Kalabari or Ibo, Amakiri or Seliye Fubara than knowing if the person is palm oil trader or a fisherman. Lawrence Rosen in his analysis of Moroccan social relations came to similar conclusion about the Moroccans: the view of person as being rooted in space as against what he does for a living:

> "A very considerable part of an individual's character is constituted by the social milieu from which he draws his nurture. To Moroccans [read Kalabari], geographical regions are inhabited spaces, realms within which communities organize themselves to wrest a living and forge a degree of security… their main focus is on the identity of the person in *situ* because the site itself is a social contest through which an individual becomes used to ways of creating a lived in space. To be attached to a place is, therefore, not only to have a point of origin – it is to those social roots, those human achievements, that are distinctive to the kind of person one is" (Rosen 1984: 23 quoted in Douglas 1986: 103).

3. CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis shows that it is structure that begets strategy in the management of the traditional Kalabari firm. This is so because the structure of the firm flows from society's schema of classifications. The conceptual categories the entrepreneur uses to define his firm's structures are derived from the cosmological scheme of his universe. Defining strategy against a competitor boils down to placing him at a position in the structure and assessing his social ties and then designing means to contain his threat. This is contrary to what obtains in the modern firm under the sway of the strategy-structure-and-systems framework. In the modern corporation, a manager decides on his strategy and then selects the organizational structures that best support the strategy.

World view operating via the concept of the family also influenced the strategy of the canoe house. Families, households and canoe houses are, in some sense, basically the same way of expressing the same idea. The family is run as a corporation (canoe house) and the corporation is run as a family – the corporation is regarded as a familial life raft of the family. Much more than this, the family is seen as the anchor and sustainer of trust needed to run the corporation. Kinship provides the basis for trust and obligations, which are graded and reduces in intensity as one moves from the household, to *wari/polo* to *ama*. Family, and its super form, as canoe house takes precedence over any other social ties and associations. Whereas a chief and his employees may trust themselves and work very closely, the bonds that exist between people who are not relations are very weak. A crucial characteristic of Kalabari familism is that you trust your house members absolutely, but outside the family circle you

assume that every body is out primarily looking of their own interest and might even hurt your interest. As the saying goes *Jen nji peiya nji beleki soa*, meaning he who does not maul the competitor does not make profit. The lack of trust for non-family members made it difficult, even if the business prospered and grew in scale and scope, for founding entrepreneurs to bring in complete strangers as professional managers. The preference of entrepreneurs is to personally manage their outfits. This preference for personal, owner management means that the canoe houses did not develop central organizations and create managerial hierarchies. Preference for owner management, as Chandlers (1990) has shown in his analysis of the modern corporation, has a tendency to lead corporations away from investments in production, marketing and managerial hierarchies. According to Chandler, the collective histories of American, British and German enterprises demonstrate that three-pronged investments in production, marketing, and management is the essential key to creating and maintaining competitive capabilities. Attempts by the canoe houses to maintain market power solely by monopoly power, cartelisation, intimidation and warfare in the nineteenth century were doomed to failure once they were challenged by British commercial firms like the Royal Niger Company who had made the necessary investment in managerial hierarchies and developed capabilities.

The preference for owner management persisted and the lack of managerial hierarchies continued because the business environment was not dynamic enough to force frame-bursting changes upon the Kalabari entrepreneur. And as long as technological change was low, the speed of movement of trade and volume of good were not large enough to require the creation of administrative structures, and capital requirements were relatively small there was no incentive to change the inherited structure and to separate ownership from management. And as long as technological development was slow, and social relations were not made complex by increased specialization and differentiation, the entrepreneur was content with using people and social relations as the source of his explanatory models.

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