

# **Indigenous Nigerian Management Thoughts and Practices: A Study of Isiugwu Ohafia People**

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**Abstract:** *This study examines an indigenous Nigerian management thoughts and practices of Isiugwu Ohafia people. The emphasis is on identifying the core management principles in the way of living of Isiugwu Ohafia people. This study adopted the use of meticulously arranged survey articles from primary and secondary sources, supported by an articulated interaction with various age-grade members in the Isiugwu Ohafia community in addition to the author's personal observations. This study became essential because studies on Isiugwu Ohafia management philosophies and practices are either few or non-existent. The study reveals that the ancient Isiugwu Ohafia indigenous management thoughts and practices as seen in the age grade system can be aligned with some of the Henri Fayol management principles, particularly division of labour, authority and responsibility, subordination of individual interest, the degree of centralization, scalar chain, stability of personnel tenure, equity and esprit-de corp. These principles were not traditionally are not written or documented but they are passed through oral communication and practice from one general to another among the age grades. These management thoughts and practices have remained relevant to the indigenous management practices of Isiugwu Ohafia community.*

**Keywords:** *Indigenous Management Principles, Isiugwu Ohafia, Age grade system, Ukeji Ogo, Ndi Ichin, Eze Ogo*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Human organization and management have been projected by several scholars to be as old as man's existence (Koontz & O'Donnell, 1974 in Oghojafor & Ofuani, 2015), These scholars also argue that in every human organization there are management practices that drive their daily activities and economic development. According to Robins, (2003) in Oghojafor, Muo & Adeloju, (2012) an organization is a consciously coordinated social unit comprised of two or more people that function on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal; such organization could be a family, a community, a church or a corporate organization. Management, according to Wiehrich, Cannice & Koontz, (2010) can be seen as the process of designing and maintaining an environment where people work efficiently as a group to achieve set goals and objectives. Management involves humans in formal or informal organization who are also indigenous to various communities without which there will be no management. Hence, indigenous management thoughts and practices can be likened to the judgments, opinion or beliefs and observations of a people that specifically refers to management views and applications in a given society or community.

In Africa there are indigenous management philosophies that have guided Africans from ancient times, on their ways of living and human organization. By implication therefore, management in Africa did not emerge as a result of colonialism. This thought is supported by Fashoyin (2005), who argued that management in Africa is solidly embedded in cultural beliefs and traditions, though western management thoughts and practices has influenced and predominantly dictated our African ways of reasoning and living for a long time now. This development is unconsciously making it almost impossible for the propagation and advancement of our African and Nigerian indigenous management thoughts and practices.

In 2003 for instance, Gbadamosi, posited that in the past, the thinking of African academics and managers had been drenched and controlled by western management concepts and writings without demonstrating how

African culture had and could still be accommodated in managerial practices. This scenario therefore, appears to suggest that Africa has no input as far as human management practices are concerned. But several scholars have argued against this assumption submitting that the very first universities in the universe were built in African countries of Egypt (970 AD) and Morocco (859 AD) respectively, while the western world built their first university only about 200 years later in Italy, (Osuntokun, 2000 in Muo & Oghojafor, 2012). Supporting this view Inyang (2008), stated that before the advent of colonialism, Africans had their own management thoughts and practices that were derived from their cultures. This is evident in the temple buildings of the *Egyptian Pyramids* in 2900 BC (cite source, pse). As has been mentioned by some scholars, the management functions of planning, directing, organizing and controlling were applied by the ancient Egyptians which attest to their managerial and organizational ability. They used multi-criteria practices, such as output control form, showing each worker his location, number of stones required, number delivered and the remaining balance for every task including control notes which provides information about dates, procedures for transporting stones and the wages (Ezgi, 2014).

Over the last two decades, there has been increased research on African indigenous management theories and practices which from all indications has been in existence prior to contemporary management theories and principles. Before the advent of colonialism, Africa and indeed Nigeria had their own management views and approaches through which they co-existed (Mou & Oghojafor, 2012). These management views and approaches as well as the activities in Africa and Nigeria were based on solid management principles which were the foundation for their management theories and practices (Inyang, 2008).

The pieces of information provided so far is an attempt in confirmation of existence of early management practices in Africa, to justify that all activities of men either in a family, community, church or circular organizations involve all the functions of management. Redding (2002), as cited in Oghojafor & Ofuani, (2015), stated that as humans advanced into the Industrial Revolution era in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of management became more significant as a new phenomenon.

Historically, in the traditional African society leadership styles are classified into two, centralized (chieftaincy-based) style and decentralized (consensus-based) style. The Centralized style of leadership is organized under well established, highly political authority, with laid down laws and regulations that serve as a guide to all the members of the community. In the decentralized style approach, allocation of resources and other socio-political issues are controlled by dynamic clanship, age grades or kinsmen 'Umunna' (ECA, 2007; Otumfuo, 2004 in Muo & Oghojafor, 2012).

Among the Ohafia people in Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State, observations and studies about their culture which include the age grade system, indicates that they practice a hybrid of both the centralized and decentralized styles of leadership. In their centralized style of leadership in Ohafia, the Udumeze is the traditional ruler overseeing the twenty six (26) villages with their semi-autonomous Eze-Ogos for the various villages. Each Eze Ogo and his council govern their villages, make relevant laws for their villages in line with the traditions of the Ohafia people. Within each of the Eze-ogo in Councils a speaker is designated from among the councilmembers to pronounce major decisions taken in the council to the Committee of Elders, (Ndi Ichin) as well to the entire community.

## **1. Concept of Indigenous Nigerian Management Thoughts and Practices**

According to Fashoyin (2005:43), "management in Africa is strongly rooted in cultural beliefs and traditions". Ogundele (1985) in Akpor-Robaro (2018), posited that the concept of indigenous management refers to management thoughts and practices developed by native scholars. Akpor-Robaro (2018), argued that this concept represents management theory developed by scholars with African management philosophy and practice irrespective of their nativity. Aligning with Akpor-Robaro (2018), the concept of indigenous Nigerian management thoughts and practices can be defined as management thoughts and practices developed by scholars bearing in mind our multifaceted nation with diverse cultural heritage. Generally, this concept is developed exclusively for the Nigerian environment, though it could be applied to any other country with similar cultural heritage.

It is evidence from above that extensive literature materials exist on the concept of management thoughts and practices. The focus in the study will therefore be on the concept of indigenous Nigerian management thoughts and practices.

## **II. Brief History of Isiugwu Ohafia People**

This may seem like a little diversion from the main focus of this study/write-up which is on the Indigenous Organization and Management Practices in Nigeria and Africa. But this has become relevant to establish the connection for the existence of an indigenous organization and management practices among the Isiugwu Ohafia, one of the twenty-six (26) semi-autonomous villages that make-up the Ohafia clan.

Ohafia is a clan of twenty-six (26) semi-autonomous villages and also a local government area in Abia State, Nigeria. They are adventurers, who against all odds succeeded in founding for themselves a permanent home in a place now called Ohafia. Historically the ancestors of Ohafia people are believed to have journeyed through the old Benin Empire, to Andoni and settled in Isi-Eke near Ibeku. At Andoni in Rivers State they fought wars. As was the culture at this time their tradition revolved around one's prowess in organizing for and winning in wars to preserve and protect your people.

A notable event that took place in their midst at Andoni, according to their oral history, was the demise of their ancestral leader, Akpo Uku; hence, the responsibility of leading the people fell to his son Atita Akpo Uku. From Andoni they sojourned near Isi-Eke, Ibeku in present Umuahia Local Government Area of Abia state. Once again, while at Isi-Eke area, the Ohafia people were said to have had minor disagreements with their Ibeku and Leru neighbours, which surprisingly escalated into laying of sharpened knives across footpaths. A man called Ukoha, from among the Ibeku people was said to be the leader of this mischievous group. As a result of this disagreement the Ibeku and Leru indigenes at this point were no longer comfortable living with their Ohafia neighbor. As this was happening, oral history has it that a communal fight broke out between sections of Umuahia and Ossa Ibeku people. This in turn, this prompted Ossa people to seek refuge with the Ohafia people (who were known as brave and courageous warriors). At Isi-Eke Ibeku, the present Ohafia people were known as Umuachichi.

Afterwards Ibeku people held a meeting where a plan to attack the Ohafia people was hatched. But providence saved the Ohafia people, by a spy informant, a son in-law of Ukoha, who was present in that meeting and revealed their conspiracy to Ukoha who in turn alerted the Ohafia people. They beefed up security and were ready for war as usual but an inexplicable thing happened which led to the exodus of Ohafia people from Isi-Eke Ibeku. There are various versions to the reason for this exodus; one of the versions has it that they heard a strange rattling sound of calabashes (food containers made from the dried skin of gourds). They took the sound to mean that they were being invaded by the Ibeku and Leru neighbours, this led to an uproar in their camp. One might take this to be true because one of the idiomatic expressions of Ohafia made reference to this, "aka metu ngu, ngu emetu oba, oba eme kpogoro; usoso mben, erule. Leru n'oso, mben n'uso" (Ndukwe, 2016). Another version has it that it was the barking of a dog caught in a trap that frightened an Ohafia woman named Mgbo who raised an alarm. The alarm led to commotion and eventual evacuation of Ohafia people from Isi-Eke Ibeku.

Fleeing from Ibeku the Ohafia people made a stop-over at Bende, they sojourned through Okputong section of Bende from where they continued their journey with Ezema Atita and his brother Onyerubi Atita who lost their father Atita Akpo Uku to natural causes at Isi-Eke as their leaders. Onyerubi Atita's wife Orié who was heavy with pregnancy went into labour and could not continue with the journey, this forced Onyerubi to terminate his journey in order to assume his responsibility as the head of his family. The spot where Nne Orié's labour started was cleared and made habitable for permanent settlement and it was named Amaelu Abam. However, Ezema Atita in company of others sojourned further and finally arrived at "Ugwumbo" in Elu Ohafia where he decided to settle and build a formidable force of Ohafia people (Ndukwe, 2016).

Ezema Atita died after a short while and his son Uduma Ezema was saddled with the responsibility of leading the people. He was responsible for all the arrangements regarding a permanent settlement, therefore Ohafia is said to be founded by Uduma Ezema earning them the nickname (Ohafia Udumeze). Uduma Ezema's offsprings established the twenty six (26) villages of Ohafia after many years. Elu Ohafia is the ancestral headquarters of Ohafia, with each federating village is governed by an Eze Ogo (Village Chief) who are the traditional rulers of their villages with one central traditional ruler Prime Minister (Udumeze of Ohafia) with his palace located in Elu Ohafia. The Eze-Ogo-in-Council with the Nde-nwe-Ali decides on how the community should be governed, while Udumeze intervenes mainly on matters between Eze-Ogo and a subject. In all these movements of the people, they showed uncommon prowess in organizing and holding their people together to survive through wars and conquests. They also displayed an uncommon ability in security gathering and strategic approaches in their survival war campaigns.

Ohafia people are endowed with diverse cultural practices which includes the Age Grade system which stands as the backbone of their human organization and for economic growth and development and social co-existence and cohesion. This age grade system involves the Igba Ekpe (a celebration by the “Village Police” Age grade) and the Igba Uche (a celebration of retirement into old age people), and other traditional practices such as Igba nkwu nwanyi (Traditional Marriage), and festivities such the Ohafia War Dance and the New Yam Festivals among several others.

**a. Ohafia War Dance**

Ohafia culture and history will be incomplete without reference to the heroic adventures of our ancestors in the art of war. In the past, during the ancient days when wars were waged with machetes, shields and cudgels, Ohafia warriors were known for their prowess in war because they had no rivals. Male folks were respected based on the proficiency to defend their territory by showing extraordinary skills in diverse communal battles. At one point; some of the warriors were hired as mercenaries by neighbouring communities to assist them to overpower their enemies. The tradition of celebrating Ohafia war heroes was personified in the performance of the War Dance (Iri Agha), demonstrating to their august guests and admirers the skulls of beheaded fallen foes which was an adventure’s celebration/practice. It was like a loud celebration of war victories where human skulls of their fallen foes were valued as a souvenir, and represents evidence of a warrior’s bravery. This was then the height of honour to an Ohafia man.

This ceremony gradually developed into a human organization for the celebration and management of warriors and war veterans known as the ‘*Ogbu Isi*’ (Headhunters Society) Society and can only be joined by those who have fought wars and brought home human head, Though Christianity and human development have changed many things in that, they are no longer fighting crude communal wars but modern Ohafia people remembers their past victories by staging the famous Ohafia War Dance during important events. It has become and remains an identity for every traditional Ohafia indigenes.

**b. Age Grade System in Human Organization and Management in Ohafia**

The Age grade system (Uke) is another major component of an indigenous human organization and management practice from traditional times which has played an important role in the development of communities in Ohafia. It is a traditionally structured management practice that has brought unity and oneness within the Ohafia society. There is no legitimate son or daughter of Ohafia kingdom or those married into an Ohafia family by an Ohafia son that can afford to distance themselves from the age grade system. This is not just because it is the only structure for grassroots community development, but many socio-political functions are carried out through the age grade system. The age grade system comprises of male and female members born within the same age bracket of 3 years plus or minus. In rare occasions, a person may choose to join a slightly younger or older age bracket, but it must not be beyond one year interval from the suitable age bracket, therefore an age grade may include members that are 4 years younger to eight years older (Ndukwe, 2016). It is pertinent to know that family pedigree, religious belief, political affiliation, socio economic status, gender and so on are not obstacles to an aspirant of any age grade, provided the individual met the requirements for joining the age grade. It is important to also know that wives married from other tribes into Ohafia as well as daughters married to other tribes can join any age grade of their choices provided the members of such age grade are within her age bracket; they are also entitled to enjoy all the privileges that are available to that group as long as they comply with the laid down rules.

### **III. Ethnography**

Ethnography is a qualitative study that explores and gives in-depth explanations about people’s culture which reflects in their everyday behavior. It is a Greek word, *ethnos* (people, nation) and *graphia* (writing) which means writing about a particular people or populace (Holloway, Brown & Shipway 2010). Because ethnography is qualitative in nature, the research techniques help researchers to understand, define and interpret the ambiguities which are tackled by exploratory research designs (Thomas & Quinlan, 2014). Exploratory research involves various patterns such as direct observation of places, people and phenomena, in-depth interviews and interpretation of information gathered during investigations which often comprises unstructured interviews, it is used when the statement of problem is not explicitly defined (Dowlatshahi, 2010). It is pertinent to know that fieldwork is a crucial part of ethnographic studies because it avails the ethnographer the opportunity to be immersed in d culture under study (Holloway et al., 2010).

Ethnography studies process involves collection of data through audio and video materials, field notes, journals, magazines, cultural artifacts, unstructured questionnaires, focus interviews etc. Denzin (2012), posits that methodological triangulation is correlating data from multiple collection methods which adds depth to the data that has been collected. He further suggested that triangulation should be seen as crystal refraction to reduce the researcher's bias as well extrapolates the meaning ingrained in the data. The importance of methodological triangulation and analysis to ascertain reliability and validity of data and results in ethnographic studies cannot be over emphasized (Chenail, 2011). Ethnography is longitudinal in nature, which enables the researcher to observe and record changes over a period of time, it provides you with a detailed and rich database for further investigation, and it entails working with others rather than treating them as objects of study. A researcher can make an ethnography study interesting and adventurous; both traditional ethnography and mini ethnography have similar characteristics; the difference is time duration and finance involved in conducting the studies.

### **3.1 Mini Ethnography**

Focused ethnography which is also referred to as mini ethnography is adopted when investigation focuses on a specific or a narrow area of inquiry; more also when there is evidence of funding or time constraints (White, 2009). Mini ethnography normally occurs in lesser time compared to full scale ethnography; it is common within the marketing and medical field research. Scholars have argued that mini ethnography could be conducted within weeks to below one year ((Alfonso, Nickelson, & Cohen, 2012; Robillard, 2010; Sandall, 2010; Yang et al., 2011). Mini ethnography is prevailing because of the short duration and affordable finance required to go to the field (Storesund & McMurray, 2009). Data saturation is easily accessed in mini ethnography because the study could be carried out with few participants and in a particular place.

### **3.2 The Importance of Ethnography**

It gives the researcher an opportunity to be embedded into the culture being studied; this gives room for interpersonal relationships which enables the researcher to see things from the perspective of the participants. It equally provides an in-depth account of the complexity for group behaviour, helps researchers to thoroughly understand specific societies under study and then align their culture with other cultures Mintz, (2000) in Sudeep Kumar (2014). Ethnography also has some limitations, it is expensive and time consuming, and researcher bias can influence data collection and analyses. Study groups may not amount to actual representative of the larger population, large quantities of data may not be effectively processed and little data can also lead to false assumptions about behaviour patterns.

## **IV. METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method because it can help the researcher explain the phenomenon of this research, its characteristics, and its concern on what rather than on how or why something has happened. Our study involved naturalistic data; that is, we have attempted to study Isiugwu Ohafia cultural practices in their naturally occurring settings without any interference or manipulation in the collection of data. The pieces of information used are from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained through observation, unstructured questionnaires, in-depth interviews which include audio and video interactions with individuals representing various age grade groups. The interview schedule contained twelve (12) items on the age grade system and management principles that could possibly be aligned to it. The secondary data was gathered from documented literature materials including journals, magazines and online publications.

### **ISIUGWU OHAFIA: STAGES OF THE AGE GRADE SYSTEM**

Since traditional times the age grade system in Ohafia, and Isiugwu Ohafia in particular, has brought various developments to the community. The impact of the various age grade groups has been felt in the various sectors of human and community development such as education, health, power supply and maintenance and other infrastructural developments. Age grades have built health centres, community secondary schools, town square, roads and a multi-purpose hall. They have contributed so much to bring electricity to their communities.

In traditional times when records were not properly documented because our parents were not privileged to receive western education, the age grade system served as quick census/community roll calls. It was very easy to identify a spy during wars because each age grade group recognizes their mates since each age grade group is assigned to a location where they keep watch and to notify others when intruders are sighted.



## **THE AGE GRADE SYSTEM AS AN INDIGENOUS HUMAN ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICE**

In Isiugwu Ohafia there are various stages of age grade grouping, which includes uke ekpe, uke ekwe, uke akpan and ukeji ogo. At each of these stages the system ensures that the community under the age grade structure is organized for the active contributions and participation in the socio-economic development of the community under the following structural organization.

### **i. The Uke Ekpe Age Grade**

The first formal age grade structure is the Uke Ekpe age grade. This is the age grade/group that has formed their initial association and has also indicated their interest in performing the official naming ceremony to the Ndi Ichin and Eze-Ogo-in-Council. They are then assigned the responsibility of supervising the Ekpe Masquerade Ceremonies for the period of four to seven 7 years. Within these years, they will guarantee that the Ekpe Masquerade Ceremony is performed to the satisfaction of the community during the various festivities. They are also expected to undertake at least one developmental project as earlier mentioned. At the completion of their service when they must have successfully superintended the Ekpe Masquerade ceremonies and carried out the community project assigned to them, they graduate to the next level known as the Uke Ekwe, while the younger age grade takes over as the Uke Ekpe.

### **ii. The Uke Ekwe Age Grade**

The Uke Ekwe is the second level of the age grade structure in Isiugwu Ohafia, and their symbol is the ekwe (wooden gong) that is used to produce musical sounds. This age grade is responsible for the security of lives and properties of the community. Their assignments include the security of the Oba (Yam Barn), at the outskirts of the village and the rice plantations around the entire community farm lands. As one of the major farming occupations in Isiugwu Ohafia is yam farming, there is a land area mapped out since ancient times, behind Obayi lake, where individuals are given a portion for their yam storage called Oba Ji (the Yam Barn). This age grade keeps watch over this Oba Ji on rotational bases to prevent theft of the yams. It is important here to note that women are exempted from all the masculine/strenuous duties by their age grades. The elders of the community may also delegate other responsibility to this age grade as required by their custom to execute. From the day an age grade is ushered into Uke Ekwe, their children and loved ones start to make preparations for the Igba Uche ceremony which is one of the biggest celebrations we have, not only in Isiugwu but in Ohafia generally.

### **iii. The Uke Uche Age Grade Retirement Ceremony and Human Management Structure**

The age grade retirement ceremony is called *Igba Uche* in Isiugwu Ohafia and some other villages within the locality, while some other villages within Ohafia called it *Igboto Mma*, *Igwa Nmanwu*, *Itogbo Mma*, *Ipu Ogo*, *Igba Ota Omu*. It is an age long tradition of the Age Grade system in Ohafia to mark the exit of a particular age grade/group from compulsory active community service in their villages. After the Igba Uche ceremony the age and those older are only assigned selective contributions and supervisory community services to participate in, for a period of between 10 to 12 years. The next stage of the age grade system of this community human organization and management is to induct them into *Ndi Ichin* (Committee of Village Elders). Igba uche encourages community development, through emulation among age mates. Members of the community, both indigenes of Isiugwu Ohafia within Nigeria and in Diaspora usually visit home for the Igba uche which is always during the Christmas holiday period. Friends of the community all over also visit to celebrate this great occasion with them. This festival brings about an economic boom to the community because those into business make more sales during this time. The celebrants usually receive various gifts from their children and loved ones ranging from clothes, electrical appliances, cars as well as houses etc. It is pertinent to note that these gifts are not compulsory, and there is no standard rule set for it, you give with love based on what you could afford. Assorted food items, drinks and souvenirs are also shared to those who visit the celebrant's stand. The Ohafia War Dancers and the Ekpe masquerade usually add colour to the occasion by entertaining the crowd.

### **iv. The Uke Akpan Age Grade**

Uke akpan comprises of those who have graduated from uke ekwe and have also done their Igba uche (age grade retirement) their symbols of authority are two musical instruments, nkwa akpan (an authoritative musical drum) and ogele akpan (metal gong). Their responsibility is that of law enforcement officials, they see to it that

individuals comply with any fines or penalties given to them as a mark of punishment for their offenses. They also collect bad debt from difficult members as well entertain the people during festive periods, they equally serve as publicity arm of the community, when there is serious issue such as murder, death of a very important person, theft, etc they move round the community sounding the nkwa akpan to draw people's attention to what has happened. Upon completion of their service at this level, they graduate to Uke Ji Ogo (Uke Ji Ezi).

**v. The Uke Ji Ogo Age Grade**

The Uke Ji Ogo is the exalted and the last level of a single age grade structure in Isiugwu Ohafia before they join Nde Ichin. At this stage the age grade is seen as the working arm of the community government authority and responsibility rests upon their shoulders. Their responsibilities include sharing and supervising labour in the community during construction, reconstruction and maintenance of inter and intra village roads, local bridges across various rivers and streams. They inspect lands in dispute with the objective of resolving the misunderstanding between parties involved, they also administer oaths in cases such as stealing, murder, land dispute, poisoning etc. and whatever decision they make concerning any matter cannot be altered by anybody in the community (Ndukwe, 2016).

**vi. The Ndi Ichin Isiugwu (Committee of Elders of the Village)**

The Ndi Ichin group is made-up of the committee of elders that has retired from compulsory active community services because compulsory active community services end at Uke Ji Ogo. Thus Ndi Ichin group includes all the surviving members of the age grade that have celebrated the Igba Uche Ceremony, and have served in various compulsory community services for at least 10 to 12 years at the Uke Akpan and Uke Ji Ogo levels respectively before proceeding to the Ndi Ichin group. Ndukwe (2016), described them as the policy-making organ with the royal family (Ndi Nwe Ali). They also administer justice in the community customary court, and also serve as advisers to the Eze-Ogo-in-Council (the Community Chief and his council) which includes some of the Nde Ichin.

**V. ALIGNMENT OF MODERN MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES WITH ISIUGWU OHAFIA AGE GRADE SYSTEM**

Towards the end of the 18th Century to the earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the significance of management as an integral feature that determines success of an organization has been stressed by researchers (Witzel, 2003). Pioneers of management thought, such as Frederick Taylor, Henri Fayol, Max Weber, Elton Mayo, Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, among others conducted several experiments during and after the industrial revolution. Their experiments during and after the industrial revolution led to the development of management principles popularly known as led to the development of management principles popularly known as Henri Fayol's 14 principles of management. In this write-up, we will be aligning some of these principles with the Isiugwu Ohafia age grade system. As mentioned earlier, Ohafia as a kingdom is endowed with numerous cultures, practices and traditions but our focus here is on the age grade system.

Some of these Henri Fayol's 14 principles of management that can be aligned with the age grade system include, division of labour, authority and responsibility, subordination of individual interest, the degree of centralization, scalar chain, stability of personnel tenure, equity and esprit de corp.

**1. Division of Labour**

This first principle of Henri Fayol states that personnel or team perform better when given a specific task based on their ability or specialties, this leads to specialization of personnel or team on their task. In Isiugwu Ohafia each age grade group can be likened to a team and there is such a division of labour, from the various age grade stages enumerated under age grade system, each group has a specified responsibility given to them, no two groups perform the same task. The uke ekwe that are in charge of the security of the community also divided themselves into various groups in order to rotate tasks in a way that various teams are designated to keep watch over the community in the morning, afternoon and night. Again, no two age grade groups undertake the same community development project; this gives them an opportunity to focus and ensure they deliver quality projects that could stand the taste of time.

**2. Authority and Responsibility**

The principle advocates for managers to be delegated with power and authority relevant to their areas of responsibilities in the organization to be able to command their subordinates. Grimsley (2014), posited that

this will aid the managers in achieving specific objectives necessary in meeting the core goal of the organization. This principle is very operational in the Isiugwu Ohafia age grade system since it is in hierarchical form; the ukeji ogo is the last stage of age grade before ndi ichin. Ndi ichin are the policy making organ, they can be seen as the community manager with the authority and responsibility, as managers report back to their managing directors, CEO etc, so do the ndi ichin reports back to the eze ogo and his council.

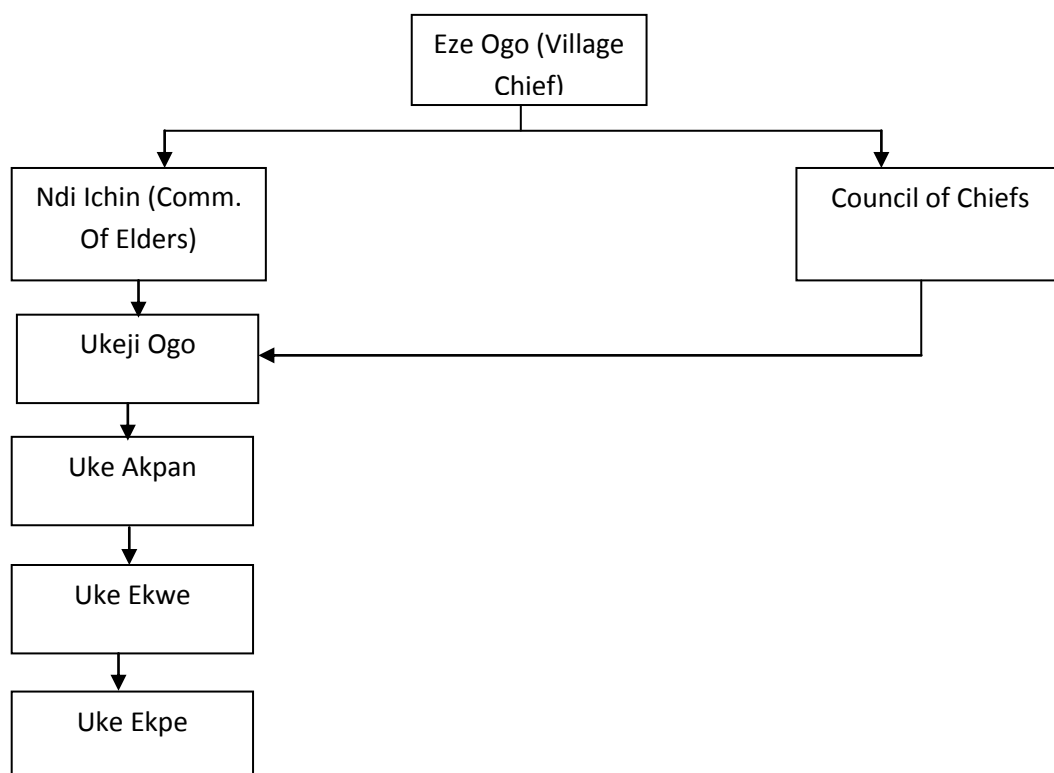
### 3. Subordination of Individual Interest

This principle proposed that the interest of the organization supersedes the interest of any personnel; each personnel must sacrifice for the good of the organization (Uzuegbu & Nnnadozie, 2015). Such principle is seen in the Isiugwu Ohafia age grade system. The interest of the age grade group and the community supersedes every other interest of the individual. We can cite the uke ekwe as an example for this principle where the members deprive themselves of night sleep in order to keep watch over their community, they also have vigilante group raised from various age grade groups to support the uke ekwe in securing the community.

### 4 The Degree of Centralization/Scalar Chain

These principles are similar in nature the first deals with decision making while the later deals with information dissemination but both recognizes hierarchy. Centralization posits that decision making should be centralized, that means that decision making should come from the top to the bottom in a vertical form. The Isiugwu Ohafia age grade system operates on this principle, they are in hierarchy, and the Eze Ogo who is the community chief takes decision with his council, who in turn passes the decision to Ndi Ichin who also communicate same to Ukeji Ogo down to the various age grade groups. While the scalar chain states that communication should be from top to bottom in vertical form, horizontal or landscape communication should only be used when it is unavoidable. The flow of information in Isiugwu is also same as the decision making flow, but on some occasions the Eze Ogo can summon the council of chiefs and ndi ichin together to pass information to them. The council of chiefs can also pass information to the ukeji ogo without necessarily passing through ndi ichin, this can be seen from the diagram below:

**Figure 1:** Isiugwu Ohafia decision making structure



Source: Author 2023



**5. Stability of Personnel Tenure (Succession Planning)**

In this principle, Fayol articulated the need to engage the right staff and train them on the job with a hope to retain them for long. The foundation of this principle is that a stable team of employees should be engaged for an organization to be successful. Schein, (1997) as cited in Caruso, Groehler & Perry (2005), defined succession planning and management as a purposeful and systematic effort made by an organization to ensure employee growth and development. This principle can be clearly seen through structured Isiugwu Ohafia age grade stages where each group moves up from one level to the other every four (4) to seven (7) years. They undertake diverse training at each stage, those at the top of the hierarchy supervise those below in order to achieve the community’s objective; this will ensure transferability of culture from one generation to another.

**6. Equity**

Equity (egbe bere ugo bere) means fairness to all, and there should be nothing like nepotism, in any form of organization managers are expected to be fair to their staff at all times, both in maintaining discipline as necessary and acting with kindness where appropriate. Dessler, (2001) in Oghojafor & Ofuani (2015), posits that discipline is a procedure that punishes or corrects a staff or member of a team because a rule has been flouted. In the Isiugwu Ohafia age grade system, the principle of equity is being practiced, the same rules and regulations apply to the rich, influential, educated, uneducated as well as the poor. The same to the indigenes by birth and indigenes by marriage, when an offense is committed the same penalty is given and when the age grade is invited to an occasion, the cash reward given to such celebrant is the same irrespective of such member’s ability or inability to entertain the age grade group.

**7. Esprit de Corps (Igwebike)**

This principle talks about love, unity, peace, oneness, justice, fairness, Oghojafor, Alaneme and Kuye (2013), posits that before the advent of colonialism, the igbo society of Nigeria are known for their decentralized pattern of leadership, that involved peaceful co-existence, love, justice, fairness, equity, co-prosperity, united we stand and divided we fall etc. It also advocates that organizations should endeavour to maintain group unity, pointing out that when divisions exist in a group, it would be difficult to achieve organizational goals (Grisley, 2014). This attributes is domiciled in Isiugwu Ohafia age grade system, there is a slogan that says “igwebike” (unity is strength), the average Ohafia citizen believe in love, unity, peaceful co-existence, oneness, justice and fairness, these attributes has transcend from one age grade stage to the other making Ohafia a very peaceful kingdom where people from neighbouring communities resides and do their business without fear or anxiety. Finally, the age grade system can as well be aligned to management functions of planning, organizing, directing and controlling, because there is evidence of all the management functions seen at each stage of the age grade groups.

**VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

In this section the findings based on the data analysis are here presented. Each of the presentations would be accompanied with the relevant deductions and conclusions.

**Demographic Data of the Respondents**

The age, years of experience in community association, occupation and highest educational qualification of the respondents are here presented in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1:** Distribution of the Respondents by Age, Years of Experience, Occupation and Educational Qualification

S/N	Age	Frequency	Remarks
1	21– 30	30	Age Grouping Identification
2	31 – 40	20	Official Recognition/Naming
3	41 – 50	10	Igba Ekpe (Uke Nkpa/Village Police
4	51 – 60	15	Igba Uche(Traditional Retirement)
5	61 – 70	8	Uge-ji-Ogo/ Akpan Ukwu
6	70 and Above	6	Ndi Ichin(Committee of Elders of the Village)
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>89</b>	
<b>YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION</b>			

<b>1</b>	1 – 10	39	Age Grade, Community, Church & Trad. Services
<b>2</b>	11 – 20	21	Age Grade, Community, Church & Trad. Services
<b>3</b>	21 – 30	17	Age Grade, Community, Church & Trad. Services
<b>4</b>	31 - 40	12	Age Grade, Community, Church & Trad. Services
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>89</b>	
<b>OCCUPATION</b>			
<b>1</b>	Public Servant	28	In Active Activity Service/Employment
<b>2</b>	Businessman/Businesswoman	18	In Active Activity Service/Employment
<b>3</b>	Artisan	12	In Active Activity Service/Employment
<b>4</b>	Farmer	21	In Active Activity Service/Employment
<b>5</b>	Retired Civil Servant	10	Retired but Active in Community Service
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>89</b>	
<b>HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION</b>			
<b>1</b>	B.Sc/B.A/LLB/HND and Above	8	Public Servant/Self Employed/In Business/Farmer/Retired
<b>2</b>	Diploma/NCE	16	Public Servant/Self Employed/In Business/Farmer/Retired
<b>3</b>	SSCE/GCE	21	Public Servant/Self Employed/In Business/Farmer/Retired
<b>4</b>	Primary School	23	Public Servant/Self Employed/In Business/Farmer/Retired
<b>5</b>	Craft/Artisan/Apprenticeship Training	11	Public Servant/Self Employed/In Business/Farmer/Retired
<b>6</b>	Not Educated	10	Public Servant/Self Employed/In Business/Farmer/Retired
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>89</b>	

Table 1.1 shows distribution of the respondent's background information. A total of eighty-nine (89) respondents were interviewed to access information about the Isiugwu Ohafia age grade system and Ohafia culture. All the respondents were between the ages of twenty-one (21) and eighty (80) years. Their experiences vary based on their age, education exposure and the age grade group they belong to. Ten retired public servants. The information extracted from the respondents reveals that human organization, management and its principles is not new to the indigenous traditions of Isiugwu Ohafia people. The information shows that there are core management principles that align with the age grade system. Further investigation into the age grade system through the various levels of age grade groups which include Uke Ekpe, Uke Ekwe, Uke Akpan and Uke Ji Ogo shows that division of labour, authority and responsibility, subordination of individual interest, the degree of centralization, scalar chain, stability of personnel tenure, equity and esprit de corp are some of the management principles that have been identified in the age grade system culture of Isiugwu Ohafia.

The study shows that division of labour is being practiced along the various age grade levels, uke ekpe is designated to guide the ekpe masquerade and to ensure that it entertains the community during diverse festivals, uke ekwe is responsible for the security of lives and properties of the community, uke akpan are the executive arm of the government of the community, they enforce penalties and collect bad debts while ukeji ogo are the legislative arm of the government of the community. Each of this age grade group are given community development projects to execute during ekpe and igba uche ceremonies but no two age grade embarks on the same project, so that each group will specialize in their project and also deliver a quality job, division of labour can be clearly seen here.

The result also shows that authority and responsibility rests on the shoulders of Ndi Ichin, as the policy making organ of the community they have been delegated with power and authority by the constitution of the community. The study also shows that subordination of individual interest domiciled in all the stages of age grade; when there is a project to be executed, all the members of that group work together as a team to deliver this project at the appointed date to the community, and they place the interest of the community above their own interest. The result reveals that the degree of centralization and scalar chain is being practiced by the Isiugwu age grade system as shown in figure 1 in page 16. Decision making and dissemination of information flow that shows hierarchical form from the Eze Ogo down to the uke ekpe.

The study equally revealed that stability of personnel (age grade) tenure is evident in the Isiugwu Ohafia age grade system. The various age grade groups spend at least 4 years on each stage; they pass through training and are designated with different responsibilities during this period; before moving to the next stage in a succession plan and management form. The experiences acquired at each stage prepare the senior age grade group for the task of mentoring the junior ones in future for the purpose of transferring the community culture from one generation to another. The result further shows that equity which represents fairness to all and esprit de corp (igwebike) are also part of management principles practiced by the Isiugwu age grade.

## VII. Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that the people of Isiugwu Ohafia community right from their existence have been practicing indigenous Nigerian management thoughts and practices through their various cultures especially the age grade system. The advent of colonialism relegated some of our indigenous management practices to the background; but over the past two decades, research on indigenous management theories, thoughts and practices has been on the increase causing the management scholars to embark on a series of research for the purpose of sustaining indigenous Nigerian management theories, thoughts and practices. The study also revealed that some core management principles have been evident in the age grade system of Isiugwu Ohafia which has strengthened and sustained the age grade system over the years. Finally, Nigerian scholars should dedicate more time to studying and understanding our culture, and expand their research prowess in order to evolve indigenous Nigerian management thoughts and practices that are appropriate and applicable for the Nigerian environment and culture.

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**APPENDIX I**

**Some Pictures of the Isiugwu Ohafia People**



Onyirimba Age Grade



The Late Eze Ogo during his Coronation



Ekpe Masquerade during Eze Ogo's Burial.



Ohafia War Dancer displaying at Ogbo (play ground) during Eze Ogo's Burial



War Dancer displaying with Iriagha Accompanied by a vigilante officer At the Eze Ogo's burial.



Ekpe Masquerade entertaining the villagers during the New Yam Festival.

**OBAYI ISIUGWU LAKE (A NATURAL WATER POOL)**





Obayi is a nature wonder in Isiugwu, a natural swimming pool located along Oba (Yam Barn) road. It's a clear and glittering Sandy body of water with abundant fish species that intermingles freely With swimmers, killing any fish or other aquatic animals in The Lake is strictly forbidden. It is believed that every indigene of Isiugwu is represented by a fish inside the lake. It serves as source of water for all commercial and domestic use and a very beautiful tourist attraction (Ndukwe, 2016).

#### **GWOGWO WATERFALL/CAVE**



The Gwogwo waterfall/cave is a tourism destination situated at the Ugwuogbarali area, off Ndi Udumawoke-Isiugwu old road. It is a natural waterfall that can be harnessed for electricity generation, domestic water supply and irrigation water source for farming.

#### **UDUMA RIVER**



The Uduma River is the main collation channel of all water, streams, springs, rivulets etc from all areas of the community. In the 60s and 70s this River served as navigation for traders who sailed to Itu, Oron, Ikot Abasi, Calabar etc loaded with diverse farm wares and returned with stock fish. If developed and dredged it can serve as a means to generate funds for the community.