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LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY PRACTICES AND CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY IN BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY: EVIDENCE FROM THE LAGOS WEST BAPTIST CONFERENCE, NIGERIA

By

Author: Michael Abimbola Siyanbola (PhD)

Paul Esther Consulting Limited Lagos, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT: This study examined how leadership capability practices operate within Baptist ecclesiology and shape congregational vitality in the Lagos West Baptist Conference, Nigeria. The analysis integrated adaptive leadership, Ancona's four-capabilities framework, and Baptist commitments to congregational autonomy, shared governance, and the priesthood of all believers. An explanatory sequential mixed-method design was used. A total of 195 questionnaires were distributed across 39 churches selected from the 13 associations in the conference, and 185 usable responses were analyzed. Pastor responses ($n = 39$) assessed sensemaking, visioning, inventing, and relating, while the wider congregational survey assessed organizational supports and perceived vitality. The qualitative phase comprised key-person interviews and four focus group discussions, including youth-focused groups, to explain the survey patterns. Quantitative results showed a high overall leadership capability mean of 4.41 on a five-point scale. Relating was the strongest domain ($M = 4.69$), followed by visioning ($M = 4.43$), sensemaking ($M = 4.23$), and inventing ($M = 4.14$). Organizational and leadership supports for growth were also rated positively (grand $M = 3.89$). After reverse-scoring the negatively framed survival item, perceived congregational vitality was high (composite $M = 4.06$). Qualitative findings showed that biblical and doctrinal grounding strengthened sensemaking; collaboration, visitation, listening, and pastoral availability supported relating; repeated communication supported visioning; and ministry redesign, technology, and transformational discipleship expressed inventing. The findings also showed that the vitality-producing effect of these capabilities depends on congregational ownership, youth inclusion, continuity of vision, and decision processes that convert shared governance into timely action. The study proposes an ecclesiology ally congruent capability model in which Baptist polity functions not as a barrier to leadership but as the participatory mechanism through which leadership capability becomes spiritual maturity, numerical growth, and missional engagement.

KEYWORDS: adaptive leadership; Baptist ecclesiology; congregational vitality; inventing; leadership capability; relating; sensemaking; visioning

INTRODUCTION

Congregational vitality has become a central concern in practical theology and religious leadership scholarship because churches must sustain spiritual formation, communal belonging, mission, and organizational continuity amid rapid social change. Leadership is repeatedly identified as a central element in this process. In congregations, leadership influences how members interpret their environment, experience worship and pastoral care, participate in ministry, and commit themselves to a shared mission.

Recent research treats congregational vitality as a multidimensional phenomenon in which leadership is closely connected with worship, belonging, involvement, faith development, and outward engagement (Foppen et al., 2024). Earlier work similarly linked pastoral leadership with follower satisfaction, extra effort, organizational effectiveness, and satisfaction with worship services (Rowold, 2008).

The leadership-vitality relationship is particularly significant in Nigeria's urban church environment. Congregations in Lagos operate within conditions marked by demographic mobility, economic pressure, digital transformation, interdenominational competition, generational change, family stress, and heightened expectations for responsive pastoral care. The post-COVID ministry environment has also normalized hybrid worship, online communication, and digitally mediated community, increasing the competencies required of pastors and lay leaders (Afolaranmi, 2020). Within the Lagos West Baptist Conference, previous research has already shown that effective pastoral leadership combines vision, adaptability, flexibility, innovation, and a strong sense of purpose (Siyanbola et al., 2024).

These demands must, however, be understood within Baptist ecclesiology. Baptist congregations affirm local church autonomy, congregational participation, biblical authority, believer's baptism, and the priesthood of all believers. Authority is therefore not intended to rest solely in a hierarchical office. Pastors provide spiritual and organizational leadership, but deacons, church councils, ministry leaders, and the congregation participate in discernment and decision-making. Baptist history describes this free-church identity as a community of regenerate believers who covenant together, govern congregational life, and cooperate voluntarily for mission (Leonard, 2003; McBeth, 1987). In the Nigerian Baptist Convention, local church autonomy similarly creates both contextual freedom and a continuing need for collaborative accountability (Ojemuyiwa et al., 2025).

The Baptist model therefore requires a distinctive form of leadership competence. A pastor may possess theological knowledge and a compelling vision, but vitality depends on whether that knowledge is translated into shared meaning, trusted relationships, congregational ownership, and workable ministry structures. In this setting, leadership is neither individual charisma alone nor administrative control. It is the capacity to mobilize a covenant community without undermining its theological identity. This makes Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, and Senge's (2007) four-capabilities framework especially useful. The framework defines leadership through sensemaking, relating, visioning, and inventing and rejects the expectation that one leader must personally embody every competence. Leadership becomes a

distributed achievement in which the leader recognizes strengths, mobilizes complementary gifts, and connects interpretation, relationship, direction, and execution.

2. Research Problem

Leadership is structurally central to Baptist life, yet empirical evidence on how leadership capability operates within Nigerian Baptist ecclesiology remains comparatively limited. Existing scholarship has often examined Baptist polity normatively or discussed church leadership in broad theological and pastoral terms. Consequently, less is known about the concrete practices through which Baptist pastors and other leaders interpret changing ministry conditions, build trusted relationships, communicate congregational direction, and create ministry systems that strengthen congregational vitality.

The research problem is especially important in the Lagos West Baptist Conference, where congregations function within a rapidly changing urban environment marked by generational transitions, digital ministry expectations, socioeconomic pressure, denominational competition, leadership fatigue, governance tensions, and the continuing need for effective discipleship and community engagement. Baptist commitments to local church autonomy, congregational participation, and shared leadership provide substantial theological resources, but these commitments produce vitality only when leaders possess the capabilities required to translate doctrine, participation, vision, and innovation into coordinated congregational practice.

The central problem, therefore, is the insufficient context-specific understanding of how leadership capability practices are enacted within Baptist congregational polity and how those practices influence the spiritual maturity and numerical growth of congregations. An integrated empirical examination is required to connect leadership theory, Baptist ecclesiology, congregational experience, and measurable vitality outcomes within the Lagos West Baptist Conference.

3. Study Objective and Research Questions

3.1 Study Objective

The general objective of this study was to investigate the implications of Deborah Ancona's leadership capability model for congregational vitality within Baptist ecclesiology in the Lagos West Baptist Conference. The study integrated Ancona's four-capabilities framework with Baptist theological

commitments and empirical congregational evidence in order to establish how leadership capabilities are practised, identify gaps between leadership intention and congregational experience, and determine how these capabilities shape spiritual maturity and numerical growth.

The specific objectives were to:

1. examine the expression of sensemaking, relating, visioning, and inventing among pastors and church leaders in the Lagos West Baptist Conference;
2. assess how these leadership capability practices influence congregational vitality, particularly the indices of spiritual maturity and numerical growth; and
3. determine the implications of the findings for leadership development, Baptist governance, and ministry effectiveness.

3.2 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following primary research question:

1. How do Ancona's leadership capabilities influence congregational vitality within Baptist ecclesiology in the Lagos West Baptist Conference?

The subsidiary research questions were:

1. How do these leadership capability practices influence the congregational vitality indices of spiritual maturity and numerical growth?
2. What implications do the findings hold for leadership development, governance, and ministry effectiveness?

4. Theoretical and Ecclesiological Framework

4.1 Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership distinguishes technical problems, for which recognized expertise and established procedures can provide solutions, from adaptive challenges, which require learning, changes in assumptions, and new patterns of collective behavior (Heifetz, 1994). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) describe leadership as the work of mobilizing people to face difficult realities and make necessary adjustments. The leader's task is not simply to supply answers but to regulate distress, keep attention on the real challenge, return responsibility to the people, and protect voices that might otherwise be marginalized.

This framework fits congregational life because many church challenges are not purely technical. Reduced youth participation, changing worship expectations, digital ministry, leadership succession, community insecurity, and tensions between inherited

practice and contextual relevance cannot be resolved by policy statements alone. They require congregations to learn together. The metaphor of moving between the balcony and the dance floor is especially relevant: church leaders must gain sufficient distance to interpret systemic patterns while remaining engaged with the lived experiences of members (Heifetz et al., 2009). Baptist congregational governance provides a natural arena for this work because authority is shared and sustainable adaptation requires congregational consent.

4.2 Ancona's Four-Capabilities Leadership Framework

Ancona et al. (2007) identify four interdependent leadership capabilities. Sensemaking is the capacity to understand a complex environment, gather multiple perspectives, recognize patterns, and create an interpretation that enables action. Relating is the capacity to build trusting relationships, inquire into the views of others, advocate clearly, and connect people across boundaries. Visioning is the capacity to create and communicate a credible and compelling image of a desired future. Inventing is the capacity to design structures, processes, roles, and experiments that turn vision into practical reality. The framework is intentionally non-heroic. Effective leaders recognize that no individual will be equally strong in all four domains and therefore cultivate complementary capability across the leadership system.

In church settings, sensemaking includes biblical and theological interpretation as well as social and organizational discernment. Relating includes pastoral presence, open communication, listening, collaboration, conflict management, and the inclusion of members whose experiences differ from those of formal leaders. Visioning gives coherence to preaching, discipleship, evangelism, stewardship, youth ministry, and community engagement. Inventing turns this direction into calendars, ministry teams, digital platforms, leadership pipelines, discipleship pathways, and accountability processes. These capabilities are therefore not imported managerial techniques detached from theology. They are practical means through which a congregation interprets its calling, lives as a covenant community, and organizes for mission.

4.3 Baptist Ecclesiology as the Context of Capability

Baptist ecclesiology locates the primary expression of the church in the gathered local congregation. Historically, Baptist identity developed around believer's baptism, liberty of conscience, biblical authority, voluntary association, congregational governance, and the competence of believers under the lordship of Christ (Leonard, 2003; McBeth, 1987). These convictions shape the exercise of leadership. Pastors lead by preaching, teaching, pastoral oversight, moral example, persuasion, and the facilitation of collective discernment rather than by unilateral control. Deacons, church councils, ministry leaders, and members share responsibility for the church's life and mission.

This structure gives special importance to relating and visioning. Decisions that are technically sound but relationally untrusted may be rejected. Vision that is not repeatedly communicated and owned by members may remain a pastoral aspiration rather than a congregational commitment. Inventing may also move more slowly because proposals pass through councils, committees, and church-in-conference processes. Yet the same structure can strengthen implementation when members understand the issue, participate in deliberation, and take responsibility for the agreed response. Ojemuyiwa et al. (2025) show that Nigerian Baptist autonomy can enhance flexibility and contextual relevance when it is balanced with coherence and accountability.

Baptist ecclesiology is therefore treated in this study as an interpretive and organizational mechanism. It shapes how leadership capability is practiced and how it is converted into vitality. The central proposition is that leadership capability produces stronger congregational outcomes when the four capabilities are enacted in ways that honor biblical identity, shared governance, and congregational ownership.

4.4 Congregational Vitality

Congregational vitality refers to the spiritual, relational, missional, and organizational health that enables a church to live its identity and sustain its ministry. It includes spiritual maturity, participation, discipleship, worship, membership retention, numerical growth, stewardship, leadership development, organizational stability, and engagement with the surrounding community. Vitality is broader than attendance alone. A congregation may increase numerically while

remaining weak in discipleship or shared ownership; conversely, a smaller congregation may demonstrate strong faith formation, service, and relational cohesion.

Leadership is embedded in the vitality system. Foppen et al. (2024) found leadership to be closely connected to other dimensions of church health, while Rowold (2008) demonstrated associations between transformational pastoral leadership and follower and worship outcomes. Schwarz's (2006) natural church development framework likewise treats empowering leadership as a central quality of healthy congregations. In the Lagos West context, Siyanbola et al. (2024) identified adaptive and innovative pastoral leadership as a catalyst for congregational development. These perspectives support the expectation that sensemaking, relating, visioning, and inventing will be positively reflected in congregational stability, growth, discipleship, and member engagement.

4.5 Integrated Conceptual Proposition

The integrated framework positions Ancona's four leadership capabilities as the primary leadership practices, Baptist ecclesiology as the theological and governance context through which those practices are interpreted, and congregational vitality as the outcome. Adaptive leadership explains the process by which leaders and members face changing conditions and learn new responses. In practical terms, sensemaking identifies the ministry reality; relating builds trust and shared participation; visioning gives the congregation a common direction; and inventing creates the structures that sustain action. Baptist ecclesiology moderates each stage by requiring biblical coherence, congregational discernment, and distributed responsibility. The expected outcome is vitality expressed in spiritual maturity, numerical growth, organizational stability, and missional engagement.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design and Setting

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-method design in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative inquiry that explained the survey pattern and addressed the stated study objective and research questions. The quantitative phase assessed leadership capability and congregational vitality, while the qualitative phase examined how the capabilities were

experienced and interpreted within Baptist ecclesiology.

The setting is suitable for leadership-capability research because it combines urban complexity with Baptist congregational polity. Churches vary in size, social composition, resources, generational profile, and technological capacity, yet share common ecclesiological commitments and conference relationships. This diversity permits the study of leadership practices across a coherent denominational context.

5.2 Quantitative Sampling and Data Collection

A multistage sampling procedure was used. The 13 associations served as clusters, and three local churches were selected from each association by balloting, yielding 39 churches. In each selected church, the pastor and one church council member were purposively selected because of their direct leadership responsibilities. Three additional members were selected through a systematic procedure based on the church membership roster. Five questionnaires were therefore targeted in each congregation, producing 195 distributed questionnaires. A total of 185 usable questionnaires were returned and analyzed, representing a 94.9% usable response rate.

The leadership capability items were adapted from Ancona's framework and organized around sensemaking, visioning, inventing, and relating. Pastor responses (n = 39) were reported on a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. Congregational vitality was assessed through organizational and leadership supports for growth and through statements describing perceived stability and flourishing. The instruments were subjected to psychometric review before administration. Two trained research assistants supported questionnaire distribution and retrieval.

5.3 Qualitative Sampling and Data Collection

The qualitative phase used key-person interviews and four focus group discussions to deepen interpretation of the quantitative findings. Participants were drawn from pastors, church or unit leaders, and members across the conference. Each focus group comprised approximately 8 to 11 participants, and two groups were youth-focused so

that the experiences and expectations of younger members could be heard directly. Interview and focus group prompts explored the four leadership capabilities, congregational growth, discipleship, decision-making, communication, innovation, youth participation, and the practical influence of Baptist governance.

The qualitative material was coded thematically with MAXQDA 2024. Initial codes followed the four capability domains, while additional subthemes were developed from recurring patterns in the participants' accounts. Attention was given to convergence and divergence between leader self-perceptions and member experiences.

5.4 Data Analysis and Mixed-Method Integration

Quantitative analysis used frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. A decision benchmark of 3.00 was used for the five-point measures. Capability-domain means were calculated from the relevant items, and the negatively worded congregational survival item was reverse-scored when computing the overall vitality composite. Qualitative themes were then used to explain why particular capabilities appeared stronger or weaker and how Baptist ecclesiology influenced their enactment.

Integration occurred through side-by-side comparison and a joint interpretive display. Survey ratings established the pattern of capability and vitality, while interview and focus group evidence explained the mechanisms behind that pattern. This approach produced a coherent account of not only whether leadership capabilities were present but how they became—or failed to become—shared congregational practice.

6. Results

6.1 Leadership Capability Profile

The pastor survey showed consistently positive ratings across all four leadership capabilities. Every item exceeded the 3.00 benchmark, and the overall weighted mean was 4.41. Relating was the strongest domain, followed by visioning, sensemaking, and inventing. The item-level results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Leadership capability practices reported by pastors (n = 39)

Capability	Item	Mean	SD
Sensemaking	Creates urgency that promotes timely action	4.41	0.99
	Enables others to view old problems in new ways	4.05	1.23
Visioning	Expresses clearly what the church could and should do	4.36	0.99
	Provides compelling images of the desired future	4.15	1.18
	Communicates and aligns members with the church's vision, goals, and objectives	4.77	0.74
Inventing	Creates annual plans and models for congregational programs	4.15	1.29
	Permits departure from convention in response to new challenges	4.13	1.24
Relating	Works collaboratively with members of the congregation	4.79	0.52
	Maintains frequent and open communication	4.67	0.77
	Welcomes feedback from the congregation	4.62	0.85

Note. Domain means: relating = 4.69; visioning = 4.43; sensemaking = 4.23; inventing = 4.14. Overall weighted mean = 4.41. Scale midpoint/decision benchmark = 3.00. Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The strongest individual item was collaborative work with congregational members ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 0.52$). This result was reinforced by high ratings for open communication and willingness to receive feedback. Vision communication and alignment also received a very high rating ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 0.74$). The lowest item, although still strongly positive, concerned helping others think about old problems in new ways ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.23$). The larger variability on this item and on the inventing items indicates that adaptive reframing and implementation were less uniform across the 39 churches than collaboration and formal vision communication.

At the domain level, the pattern suggests that pastors were most confident in relationship-oriented practices. Visioning was also prominent, particularly the alignment of ministry with stated goals. Sensemaking and inventing remained positive but showed greater room for deeper contextual interpretation and faster conversion of ideas into new structures.

6.2 Organizational and Leadership Supports for Growth

The wider congregational survey assessed the extent to which administrative, technological, financial, governance, and leadership conditions supported congregational growth. All 15 indicators exceeded the 3.00 benchmark, and the grand mean was 3.89. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2. Organizational and leadership supports for congregational growth (n = 185)

Indicator	Mean	SD
Leadership structure	4.16	0.91
Communication among leadership	4.15	0.90
Administration of finance, personnel, and property	4.14	0.98
Communication between leadership and congregation	4.12	0.93
Leadership creativity	4.09	0.91
Decision-making	3.98	0.98
Regular giving	3.96	0.98

Indicator	Mean	SD
Facility conditions	3.95	0.97
Willingness to serve in leadership roles	3.95	1.03
Technology and equipment in worship	3.81	1.03
Stewardship of congregational expenditure	3.78	0.96
Public technology: websites and social media	3.65	1.19
Endowment or other financial resources	3.59	1.15
Technology and equipment in the church office	3.54	1.17
Influence of unofficial leaders	3.54	1.14

Note. Grand mean = 3.89; decision benchmark = 3.00. Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Leadership structure, communication among leaders, administration, and communication between leaders and the congregation were the highest-rated supports. These findings show that respondents associated vitality with orderly governance and communication rather than with charisma alone. Leadership creativity also scored strongly, indicating that members recognized the value of adaptive and innovative ministry.

The comparatively lower ratings for public technology, office technology, endowment resources, and the influence of unofficial leaders identify the

areas in which congregations were less uniformly equipped. Even so, the means remained above the benchmark. The overall pattern is one of positive organizational health accompanied by uneven access to technology and long-term financial resources.

6.3 Perceived Congregational Vitality

Respondents also evaluated direct descriptions of congregational health. Most rejected the suggestion that their congregation might not survive, while strong majorities affirmed stability, strength, and flourishing. The negative survival item was reverse-scored for calculation of the composite vitality mean.

Table 3. Perceived congregational vitality (n = 185)

Statement	Mean	SD	Composite scoring
I am not sure this congregation will survive much longer	2.04	1.30	Reverse-scored
We are struggling but still viable	3.04	1.56	Direct
We are stable	4.39	1.06	Direct
We are strong and steady	4.41	1.00	Direct
We are growing and flourishing	4.52	0.93	Direct

Note. Reverse-scored composite mean = 4.06. The low raw mean on the negatively framed survival item indicates disagreement with anticipated decline. Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The highest mean was recorded for the statement that the congregation was growing and flourishing (M = 4.52, SD = 0.93), followed by strong and steady (M = 4.41, SD = 1.00) and stable (M = 4.39, SD = 1.06). The mean of 2.04 on the negatively worded survival

statement confirms that most participants did not perceive their churches as approaching collapse. After reverse-scoring that item, the composite vitality mean was 4.06.

The greatest dispersion occurred on the statement that the church was struggling but still viable (SD = 1.56). This suggests variation in how respondents understood present challenges, even within a generally positive assessment of congregational

health. The combined quantitative picture is therefore one of high vitality, with some congregations or member groups experiencing the pressures of growth and sustainability more sharply than others.

6.4 Qualitative Findings: How the Capabilities Operate

Sensemaking: Doctrinal Grounding and Contextual Interpretation

Participants consistently associated Baptist leadership with biblical knowledge and doctrinal soundness. One participant observed that Baptist pastors are “grounded in the Word and have an in-depth knowledge of God's Word” (FGD3, Participant 3). Members also valued the capacity to read situations and interpret the environment in ways that make Scripture relevant to congregational life. This form of sensemaking protected doctrinal identity and gave members confidence that leadership decisions were anchored in the faith of the church.

The discussions also clarified the developmental task within this strength. Scriptural knowledge generated vitality most effectively when it was connected to unemployment, family stress, youth aspirations, technology, emotional wellbeing, and the practical decisions members faced. Participants distinguished knowing Scripture from using Scripture to help the congregation understand contemporary realities. Sensemaking in this context is therefore both exegetical and contextual: it interprets the biblical text, the congregation, and the surrounding environment together.

Relating: Trust, Pastoral Presence, and Participation

Relating emerged as the most visible capability in the quantitative data and was strongly represented in the qualitative material. Participants described pastors who visited families, maintained harmony among leaders, listened to congregational concerns, empowered ministry teams, and worked collaboratively. A member recalled that the pastor personally visited several families, demonstrating responsibility for building relational connection (FGD1, Participant 8). Others emphasized accountability to church structures, openness to suggestions, and the ability to carry people along.

The member narratives also showed that relationship quality was not experienced evenly. Some long-standing members could not recall a pastoral visit or the church's vision statement, and youth participants desired deeper access to ministry

creation and decision-making. The finding does not negate the strong relating score; it shows that relating must move beyond cordiality and formal consultation to sustained inclusion. Relational capability becomes vitality when members experience recognition, feedback, mentoring, and meaningful responsibility.

Visioning: Direction, Communication, and Congregational Ownership

Leaders understood visioning as the capacity to articulate the future and connect local ministry to the broader mission of the church. Participants described pastors who translated a vision into monthly and weekly themes, repeated congregational values, and used preaching and programs to persuade members to act. One participant described the lead pastor's transmission of vision and ideas as a source of unity and progress (FGD3, Participant 5). This is consistent with the high survey rating for communicating and aligning the church with its vision, goals, and objectives.

At the same time, some participants experienced the vision as insufficiently visible, frequently changing, or overshadowed by routine programs. A member reported seeing “confessional program and the rest normal routine” more clearly than a sustained vision (FGD1, Participant 2). The qualitative evidence therefore distinguishes vision communication from vision ownership. Repetition by the pastor is valuable, but ownership requires members to understand the enduring purpose, see how programs contribute to it, and participate in shaping its local expression.

Inventing: Innovation within Congregational Polity

Inventing was evident in annual planning, transformational discipleship, church-wide learning programs, redesigned Sunday school ministries, technology use, and the development of specialized ministries for children, teenagers, language groups, and other constituencies. Respondents described creativity as a practical tool for increasing participation and making discipleship more experiential. These activities show that innovation was already present within the conference and contributed to spiritual, numerical, physical, and financial growth.

Inventing nevertheless received the lowest capability-domain mean. Participants repeatedly linked the slower implementation of new ideas to the Baptist decision process. One participant stated that

“the structure we run in the Baptist setting will not give room for quick improvements” (FGD4, Participant 3). Another noted that the pastor has major input but is not the sole decision-maker (FGD3, Participant 3). The central issue was therefore not hostility to innovation but the time required to create agreement. Inventing in Baptist ecclesiology must include the design of participatory decision processes, pilot projects, feedback cycles, and clear authority for implementation.

6.5 Congregational Growth and Discipleship

Key-person interviews described the churches as growing and strongly committed to discipleship. Participants referred to transformational discipleship systems, annual church-wide discipleship programs, Nigerian Baptist Convention materials adapted for practical use, renewed Sunday school participation,

pastoral support for teachers, and intentional ministry to children and teenagers. Growth was described in spiritual, numerical, financial, and physical terms, including testimonies of conversion, improved management, new facilities, and specialized worship communities.

The qualitative evidence connected this growth with all four capabilities. Pastoral availability and collaboration expressed relating. The prioritization of discipleship as a central ministry response reflected sensemaking. The articulation of a growing and spiritually mature church expressed visioning. New discipleship formats, technological tools, and specialized ministries expressed inventing. The data therefore support a capability pathway in which congregational vitality is produced through the interaction of the four domains rather than through one isolated leadership trait.

Table 4. Mixed-method integration of leadership capability and congregational vitality

Capability	Convergent evidence	Explanatory tension	Vitality pathway
Sensemaking	Strong biblical and doctrinal grounding; leaders interpret situations for members	Contextual application was less consistent	Spiritual discernment, relevant teaching, adaptive response
Relating	Highest survey domain; collaboration, communication, feedback, visitation	Some members and youth experienced distance from leaders and decisions	Belonging, participation, trust, service, retention
Visioning	High alignment score; themes and repeated communication clarify direction	Vision was sometimes seasonal, unclear, or displaced by routine programs	Shared mission, unity, motivation, discipleship focus
Inventing	Planning, technology, discipleship redesign, and specialized ministries	Approval processes slowed implementation	Innovation, ministry access, organizational adaptation, growth

7. Discussion

7.1 Relating as the Primary Capability for Baptist Vitality

The most important empirical pattern is the strength of relating. The domain mean of 4.69 and the high ratings for collaboration, communication, and feedback indicate that Baptist pastors understood leadership as relational and participatory. This finding is ecclesologically coherent. In a congregation where members retain meaningful authority, leadership must be exercised through trust, persuasion, accountability, and shared action. Relating is therefore not a supplementary interpersonal skill; it is the primary means through which leadership moves in a congregational system.

The qualitative evidence deepens this conclusion. Visitation, pastoral availability, listening, and harmony among leaders generated belonging and encouraged participation. Yet the different experiences reported by some members and youth show that relational leadership must be assessed from the congregation's perspective, not only from leaders' intentions. A pastor may communicate frequently while particular groups remain unheard. The vitality-producing form of relating is inclusive: it intentionally reaches across age, status, ministry role, and proximity to formal leadership.

7.2 Sensemaking as Biblical and Contextual Discernment

Sensemaking was strongly grounded in Scripture and doctrine. This is a major resource for Baptist

vitality because it protects the congregation from adapting merely to popularity or competitive pressure. Theologically disciplined sensemaking asks not only what is happening but what faithful response the gospel requires. The participants' respect for pastors who were grounded in the Word confirms that doctrinal credibility remains foundational to leadership legitimacy.

The findings also indicate that contextual interpretation is the next stage of capability development. Urban congregations need leaders who can connect biblical truth to employment, migration, digital culture, mental and emotional pressure, family life, youth identity, insecurity, and social fragmentation. Adaptive leadership contributes here by requiring leaders to distinguish technical fixes from deeper changes in values and behavior (Heifetz et al., 2009). Sensemaking becomes a driver of vitality when it helps the congregation name its real challenge, interpret it theologically, and accept responsibility for learning a faithful response.

7.3 Visioning from Pastoral Communication to Congregational Ownership

Visioning was the second strongest capability, and pastors reported strong alignment of members with church goals. The qualitative data confirm that many pastors repeatedly communicated direction through preaching themes and ministry programs. This aligns with leadership research in which compelling direction supports follower effort and satisfaction (Rowold, 2008). In congregations, vision can integrate worship, discipleship, evangelism, stewardship, and community ministry into a coherent account of what the church believes God is calling it to become.

The crucial distinction is between a pastor's vision and a congregation's shared vision. Where members could not state the vision or perceived it as seasonal, the direction had not yet become part of congregational identity. Baptist ecclesiology requires a participatory vision process: leaders interpret and articulate direction, but the congregation discerns, owns, and enacts it. This does not reduce pastoral leadership. It increases the likelihood that vision survives changes in personnel and becomes embedded in ministries, budgets, leadership development, and everyday member behavior.

7.4 Inventing as Ecclesiological Design

Inventing was positive but comparatively weaker, and this pattern is understandable within

congregational polity. New ideas must pass through relational and governance processes before they can be implemented. If innovation is treated only as the pastor's creative idea, the structure appears to be an obstacle. If inventing includes the design of the decision process itself, Baptist governance becomes an asset. Committees, councils, and church conferences can function as spaces for sensemaking, testing, accountability, and distributed ownership.

This interpretation extends Ancona's framework in an ecclesial direction. Inventing in Baptist churches includes not only programs and technology but also decision architecture: who must understand the issue, who should participate, what can be piloted, what authority is delegated, how feedback is gathered, and when the congregation reviews the result. Such processes preserve autonomy while reducing unnecessary delay. The strong ratings for leadership structure and communication suggest that many congregations already possess the foundation for this form of participatory innovation.

7.5 The Capability-Vitality Relationship

The quantitative and qualitative strands converge on a positive relationship between leadership capability and congregational vitality. High capability ratings occurred alongside positive organizational support ratings and a corrected vitality composite of 4.06. Participants described spiritual maturation, conversion, numerical growth, giving, new facilities, specialized ministries, and renewed discipleship. These outcomes were not attributed to a single technique. They were associated with leaders who interpreted the context, maintained relationships, communicated direction, and organized ministry responses.

The relationship can be understood as a sequence. Sensemaking creates clarity about the congregation's identity and challenge. Relating creates the trust and participation required for shared response. Visioning connects the present challenge to a compelling future. Inventing builds the ministries and structures that make action repeatable. When any capability is weak, the vitality pathway is interrupted: interpretation without relating produces distance; relating without vision produces fellowship without direction; vision without inventing produces aspiration without sustained practice; and inventing without sensemaking produces activity without theological coherence.

The study therefore supports an ecclesiological congruent capability model. Baptist polity mediates the relationship between leadership and vitality by converting individual leadership capacity into collective ministry ownership. Congregational governance is most effective when it is not reduced to voting at the end of a process but used throughout the process for listening, discernment, participation, delegation, and review.

7.6 Youth Inclusion as a Strategic Vitality Practice

Youth engagement was one of the clearest cross-cutting themes. Younger participants valued Baptist biblical formation but desired greater participation in ministry design, leadership, and decision-making. This finding is significant in Lagos, where young adults are shaped by digital communication, educational mobility, economic uncertainty, and highly adaptive religious alternatives. Youth inclusion should therefore be treated as a leadership-capability issue rather than as a separate youth-program concern.

Sensemaking requires leaders to understand the realities of younger members. Relating requires mentoring and access to leaders. Visioning requires young people to see themselves within the future of the congregation. Inventing requires opportunities for youth-led experiments, digital ministry, creative discipleship, and service. Churches that integrate these practices strengthen both present participation and future leadership succession.

7.7 Theoretical Contribution: Ecclesiological Capability Conversion

The study contributes to leadership theory by showing that capability does not move directly from an individual leader to an organizational outcome. In congregational settings, capability must be converted through an ecclesiological system. The pastor's sensemaking becomes congregational clarity only when interpretation is taught, discussed, and connected to lived experience. Relating becomes collective capacity only when trust opens space for participation and responsibility. Visioning becomes shared direction only when members can state the purpose, recognize their role, and align resources with it. Inventing becomes sustained change only when decision structures authorize, resource, and evaluate the new practice. This conversion process explains why a leader may report strong capability while some members experience weaker effects. The capability

exists at the leader level, but its congregational expression depends on participation, communication, and institutionalization.

This interpretation also extends adaptive leadership. Adaptive work is often described as mobilizing people to confront difficult realities, but Baptist ecclesiology clarifies the institutional location of that mobilization. The congregation is not merely the audience of change; it is a theological decision community. Members carry spiritual gifts, local knowledge, relational influence, and formal authority. Effective leaders therefore regulate the process without removing the congregation's responsibility. They frame the challenge, protect dissenting voices, facilitate biblical discernment, and create experiments through which the church can learn. In this way, adaptive leadership and congregational polity reinforce one another.

A further contribution is the identification of capability balance. The data show that relating and visioning were stronger than sensemaking and inventing. This balance supported cohesion and direction, but the qualitative evidence revealed that contextual application and implementation could still lag. Congregational vitality requires movement across the entire capability cycle. Strong relationships can preserve harmony but may also protect routine if the church does not reinterpret its environment. Strong vision can inspire members but may become seasonal rhetoric if structures do not change. Inventing can produce activity but may fragment ministry if it is detached from theological sensemaking. Capability development should therefore be evaluated as a system rather than as four independent scores.

The proposed Baptist Capability-Vitality Pathway consists of five linked movements: contextual and biblical interpretation; relational inclusion; shared articulation of direction; participatory design and implementation; and review through spiritual and organizational vitality indicators. Feedback from the final stage returns the congregation to renewed sensemaking. The pathway is cyclical, allowing churches to remain faithful to enduring convictions while learning continuously in response to changing conditions.

8. Implications for Leadership Development and Baptist Governance

The findings support a leadership-development strategy that treats the four capabilities as an

integrated practice rather than as isolated workshop topics. Leadership formation within the Lagos West Baptist Conference and comparable Baptist bodies should combine theology, self-assessment, practice,

feedback, and congregational application. Table 5 translates the findings into a practical development framework.

Table 5. Capability-based leadership development framework for Baptist congregations

Capability	Development focus	Required ministry output	Evidence of congregational effect
Sensemaking	Biblical interpretation, contextual diagnosis, stakeholder mapping, data use	A shared ministry challenge statement and theological interpretation	Members can explain the challenge and the faithful response
Relating	Listening, visitation, conflict engagement, mentoring, feedback, inclusion	A stakeholder engagement and communication plan	Broader participation, trust, retention, and service
Visioning	Mission clarification, storytelling, goal alignment, repeated communication	An enduring vision with annual priorities and member roles	Members can state the vision and connect programs to it
Inventing	Project design, delegation, digital ministry, pilot testing, evaluation	A time-bound pilot with authority, resources, and review points	New practices are implemented, assessed, and sustained

- Develop capability-based formation for pastors, deacons, ministry leaders, and emerging leaders. Training should include contextual and theological sensemaking, listening and conflict engagement, vision development and communication, project design, digital ministry, delegation, and evaluation. Each participant should apply the capability to a current congregational challenge and receive feedback from leaders and members.
- Institutionalize multi-source leadership feedback. Because leader self-perceptions and follower experiences may differ, periodic feedback should be gathered from church councils, ministry teams, adult members, youth, and other constituencies. The purpose should be developmental: to identify relational distance, communication gaps, emerging needs, and areas where capability should be distributed across a team.
- Create stable vision architecture. Congregations should distinguish enduring mission and values from annual themes and short-term programs. The enduring vision should be visible, repeatedly taught, connected to budgets and ministry plans, and reviewed through congregational participation. Annual priorities should clearly show how they advance the larger direction.
- Design faster participatory innovation processes. Churches can preserve congregational authority

while enabling timely action through delegated pilot projects, defined approval thresholds, time-bound committee reviews, scheduled feedback, and evaluation before full-scale adoption. This turns polity into a system for responsible experimentation rather than a sequence of delays.

- Build youth leadership pathways. Youth and young adults should participate in ministry design, digital communication, discipleship facilitation, community service, and selected governance conversations. Mentoring should connect them with pastors and experienced leaders, while succession plans should identify concrete stages from service to responsibility and leadership.
- Strengthen technology and resource stewardship. The lower ratings for public technology, office technology, and long-term financial resources call for coordinated investment, shared services across churches, training, and transparent planning. Technology should be integrated with discipleship, communication, administration, and outreach rather than treated as equipment alone.
- Measure vitality as a balanced set of outcomes. Conferences and congregations should track spiritual formation, participation, leadership development, member retention, youth engagement, community service, numerical growth, giving, and ministry innovation. Review of these indicators should be

linked to the four capabilities so that leaders understand which practices are producing results and where adaptation is required.

9. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that leadership capability practices are deeply connected with congregational vitality in the Lagos West Baptist Conference. Pastors reported strong performance across sensemaking, relating, visioning, and inventing, with relating emerging as the strongest domain. Congregational respondents also rated leadership structure, communication, administration, creativity, stability, and flourishing positively. The qualitative findings confirmed that biblical grounding, pastoral presence, collaborative relationships, repeated vision communication, discipleship innovation, and ministry redesign contributed to spiritual and organizational health.

The most significant contribution of the study is the interpretation of Baptist ecclesiology as the mechanism through which capability becomes vitality. Shared governance does not diminish leadership; it determines the form effective leadership must take. Leaders must interpret faithfully, relate inclusively, envision collectively, and invent participatively. When these practices are integrated, congregational autonomy becomes a source of ownership, distributed ministry, and contextual responsiveness.

For the Lagos West Baptist Conference, the pathway forward is therefore not to replace Baptist polity with a more centralized model. It is to strengthen the capabilities that allow Baptist polity to work at its best. Capability-based formation, stable shared vision, multi-source feedback, youth leadership pathways, and well-designed innovation processes can deepen spiritual maturity, sustain numerical growth, and strengthen the missional witness of Baptist congregations in Nigeria's changing urban environment.

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