

# The Modern Church as Not-for-Profit Organisation: Is it not Time for the Church to Become More Strategic?

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## Abstract

For many centuries, churches have continued to play critical roles in society's spiritual and social lives. As is the case across the globe, millions of Christians throughout South Africa continue to seek spiritual upliftment in churches. For this research, a qualitative research method was employed by means of semi-structured interviews. The research was conducted among churches within the Gauteng province of South Africa. Data were analysed through the use of the ATLAS.ti software. The findings suggest that innumerable benefits can be realised by modern churches if proper strategic planning process tools are in place. Productivity and a clear sense of direction are the leading attributes. The study recommended that more research and advocacy work still need to be done to heighten the significance of using strategic planning process tools in church management settings. This may enable the preservation of the rich history of the church.

**Keywords:** churches; not-for-profit organisations; South Africa; strategic planning; strategic planning process tools

## Introduction and Background

Historically, churches have always been known as places of worship in which their agenda is preoccupied with spreading the “good news” to society. Over time, churches have often been implored to provide strategic direction in governance, moral and ethics agendas within society (Budde 2008; Enderle 2015) and thus, should be held in high esteem in terms of morality and ethical standards. That said, churches as not-for-profit organisations (NPOs)—also known as the third sector—ought to strategise to remain relevant, responsive and sustainable (Marren 2021). It is incumbent upon churches to have in place strategic management processes that are relevant and responsive and

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support their causes. This is a complete shift from the historical posture that the church took to manage its affairs. For this reason, the current research explored the strategic management processes of modern churches (as NPOs) domicile in the Gauteng province, South Africa

According to the agency theory, when exploring the work done by church managers (who are sometimes known as administrators), they are referred to as stewards whom the church members and denominations entrust to fulfil a managerial mandate (Doherty, Misener, and Cuskelly 2014). There is a growing need for church managers to close the gap and retain their strategic proximity to the environment. Like never before, this makes the scope of incumbents more complex than it was traditionally. For instance, politics and economics govern how churches are organised and should function perpetually. Issues such as the digitalised economy, tax laws, crowd management and human rights observation should be taken into account by church managers. Slavik, Putnova, and Cebakova (2015) and Madhok and Marques (2014) caution that societal economic and political uncertainty often brings about an urgent need for visionary, strategic and ethical leadership within organisations, including churches. In the literature section, Porter's Five Forces model is discussed in a church context. This demonstrates a shift from how churches were historically perceived by society. The central research objective was to explore the strategic planning process tools employed by churches in the Gauteng province, South Africa.

## Purpose and Research Problem

According to Gathogo (2011, 133), Christianity, which began as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, has shifted to being materially conscious. Thus, very little preoccupation regarding church management was deemed necessary by the ancient church (Brown 1987). Meanwhile, strategy in a corporate context and other profit-making businesses has been studied for many years (Ansoff 1957; Porter 1979). It is commonly known that organisations require strategic tools to align themselves with their environments (Lynch 2019; Porter 1979). Over the years, several tools have been employed by such organisations. Churches have continued to grow in terms of numbers and the roles that they are expected to play in society. As churches grow, the need for professionalism and management becomes a reality, and so does the need to strategise. Grant (2003; 2021) suggests that all modern organisations ought to strategise. That said, very little research is known in terms of managing NPOs in general, and strategy and strategic planning tools of NPOs such as churches, in particular (Millar and Doherty 2016). This poses a reputational risk that has the potential to erode the church's rich history of love and fellowship, and further questions the sustainability prowess thereof. In light of the above, Gratton (2018) credits strategy as a developmental catalyst for NPOs such as churches. For these reasons, this research explores churches' (as NPOs) strategic planning process tools.

## Literature Review

This section discusses the church management history, strategy, and NPOs and churches as not-for-profit organisations. These topics were chosen in line with the purpose and problem statement.

### **Church Management History**

The book of Acts of the Apostles provides historical accounts of how the church was managed. The then Apostles had to establish a welfare committee (see Act 6:1–7 NLT 2005 Bible Gateway). This was after the needs of the congregation had been identified, and in today's context, this is also referred to as internal environmental analysis (IEA). The IEA constitutes a critical component of strategic management processes (Venter 2019). In beseeching the ancient church, Apostle Paul, in 1 Timothy 3:1–13, alluded to the type of church manager that the church ought to have. This qualification was somewhat spiritual and biblical rather than academic and professional. While the majority of the church managers in this research had theological qualifications, very few had managerial qualifications and competencies (see table 1). The latter attributes are necessary to equip modern managers to execute their mandated duties. This brings the discussion to strategy and churches as NPOs.

### **Strategy and Churches as NPOs**

The relevance of strategic management in the corporate context comes without contestation. Still, not everyone is familiar with the use of strategic management principles for NPOs. Hansen and Ferlie (2016) infer that NPOs could employ a strategic approach for various reasons. This is where the main gaps in literature lie. These reasons make strategic management an attractive approach for both profit organisations (POs) and NPOs, such as churches. Depending on the organisation type, power relationships often influence the strategic agenda of such an organisation. With POs, client validation plays a critical role in how the organisation provides its products or services. On the contrary, NPOs are often confronted with the dichotomy of having to satisfy the needs of the key beneficiaries and the interests of the principal sponsors. Strategic leadership is thus required to find a sustainable solution in affording organisations the latitude to manage the legitimate expectations and relations with the key stakeholders (King Committee on Governance 2016; Slavik et al. 2015).

Furthermore, running NPOs may sometimes prove to be more complex than profit-making organisations. Hansen and Jacobsen (2014) and Ring and Perry (1985) warn of the numerous constraints that may hamper the efficiency and effectiveness of NPOs. These constraints lie in the fact that NPOs, by their very nature, thrive through cooperation and equity as opposed to competition and efficiency in profit-making organisations (Nutt and Backoff 1993). NPOs seek to create value and social impact as opposed to profit making and shareholder appeasement (Bryson 2018; Rainey 2009). However, there are challenges associated with running an NPO. The following constitute some of the key challenges:

- The services offered by NPOs are often intangible and difficult to measure. This may imply that the impact thereof is subjective and may differ from one stakeholder to another.
- There is often greater dependency on key stakeholders, making it difficult for the NPO to focus on a specific strategic agenda. There is a chance that some of the key stakeholders, such as sponsors, may interfere with the NPO's internal affairs if they feel that their interests are not served (Kumar, Chhabra, and Gera 2020).
- NPOs may be pressured by excessive expectations meted by the communities around them. Some stakeholders, such as the immediate community, may demonstrate a sense of entitlement.
- NPOs are sometimes subject to limited loyalty by their workers and volunteers. The majority of workers and volunteers have full-time employment or responsibilities, and the work they do for NPOs may be part-time (Marren 2021). Furthermore, there has been an increase in the accountability levels in terms of the income and spending patterns of NPOs (Schwenger, Straub, and Borzillo 2014). Complex submissions often mar this process in instances where the NPO in question has to prove that it is a credible entity. Bank statements, audited financial statements and non-disclosures of the executives and/or directors often comprise some of the basic requirements for further funding and sponsorship deals (Marren 2021). Sponsors may even make unpopular divestment decisions (Venter 2019).

### **Churches as Not-for-Profit Organisations**

Churches continue to occupy a significant place in the lives of citizens, particularly in terms of spiritual nourishment and as places of worship. If the church fraternity were to be regarded as an industry, this would be a growing industry (Woodward 2013). This is evident when considering their growth (Asamoah-Gyadu et al. 2017). In many countries, including South Africa, the requirements to start a church are less stringent than starting a profit-making business (Shange 2015; South African Council of Churches [SACC] 2007). This renders the barriers to entry very low and insignificant. This brings forward a discussion of Porter's Five Forces model in the church context: 1) the threat of new entrants; 2) the availability of substitutes; 3) the bargaining power of suppliers; 4) the bargaining powers of users; and 5) the rivalry among existing organisations.

#### *Threat of New Entrants*

Some rivals may pose relatively limited threats to existing organisations. However, new entrants may bring what seldom exists within the fraternity or may produce a modified version of what is perceived by the current fraternity. This may agitate existing participants, thereby pushing them out of contention and subsequently out of the fraternity. In the church context, Pentecostalism and the prophetic movement have done exactly what new entrants do within the fraternity (Chan 2010). There is sometimes

unprecedented tension, more so if younger ministers and emerging prophets come from different geographic spaces.

#### *Availability of Substitutes*

In the case of the availability of substitutes, congregants can move from one place to the other with great ease. The “consumption” of church services is often numerous and without boundaries. One does not need to be a full church member to access a place of worship (Ramabulana 2019). This means that congregants are free to visit anywhere, depending on the type of services they require at that particular point in time. With increases in the use of technology, churches are able to live-stream their church services or make the recorded versions thereof available on various platforms, including social media (Antonites et al. 2019). This makes the substitutes readily available for those who require church services.

#### *Bargaining Power of Suppliers*

Ordinarily, the forces of supply aim to meet demand (Leitner and Guldenberg 2010). Consequently, the suppliers of church services are numerous and are increasing faster than industrial establishments (Ramabulana 2019). There are even instances where industrial establishments are closed, and the premises thereof are converted into worship places (Drif 2017). With the general social challenges, churches and their leaders as spiritual and social services suppliers are bound to thrive through donations and freewill offerings. Many people see churches as places of refuge and spiritual deliverance (SACC 2007).

#### *Bargaining Powers of Users*

In this instance, churchgoers are users of the church premises and, most importantly, consumers of the “spiritual” services. With thousands of church denominations around South Africa and millions worldwide, churchgoers have a variety of churches to choose from, depending on their orientation and preferences (Asamoah-Gyadu et al. 2017). This makes them less of a captive user until a church’s membership or a particular denomination is assumed. It should be appreciated that once the churchgoer takes up membership in a particular church or denomination, more responsibilities are assumed (Woodward 2013). There are often financial and non-financial responsibilities that are attached to being a church member, with tithes and offerings being the usual expectations of members (Van de Kamp 2017).

#### *Rivalry among Existing Organisations*

Within Christian circles, there are instances where church leaders compete with their rivals for relevance. Some leaders use the number of their followers to show force, thereby seeking to attract more following (Kaufman 2010). Some even claim that their merchandises possess healing properties and divine protection (Baloyi 2014). Many reports are surfacing regarding false miracles, embezzlement of money, abuse and

indecent assault of vulnerable congregants (Offutt, Probasco, and Vaidyanathan 2016; Sánchez, Fernández, and Lara 2017). Some commentators also question if churches as NPOs should be engaged in acts of competition or should merely serve as entities for societal hope and places of worship (Ferrell et al. 2019).

All authority has been given to me in Heaven and on earth. Make disciples and baptize those who believe in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And teach them to keep all that I have commanded you. Lo, I am with you until the end of the world. (Bible Gateway Matthew 28:19–20 NLT 2005 Bible Gateway)

This is the mandate that Jesus Christ (the founder of the Christian Faith) gave to His disciples and all Christians. In this “Great Commission,” nothing was mentioned regarding competing for membership, seeking popularity and amassing wealth in the name of the Christian faith.

## Research Method

This research pursued a qualitative approach in the form of interviews and content analysis. A total of 26 participants were interviewed, and 12 strategic documents were explored. The 26 participants were SACC affiliates, and their details were sourced from the SACC membership database. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) and Lowe et al. (2018) suggest that at least six interviews are sufficient per research being undertaken. With that in mind, 26 participants were interviewed before saturation was reached (Baker, Edwards, and Doidge 2012; Tracy 2019).

The following constituted the criteria:

- The participant must be a church manager (or member of management/board [preferably the chairperson]).
- The church must be from the Gauteng region(s).
- The participant must be somehow involved in the strategic management processes of the church. This may include a church executive/board member who is involved in planning.

**Table 1:** Profiles of participants

<b>P</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Major denomination</b>
1	Male	White	Tshwane	2	Master of Science Bachelor of Theology	Protestant
2	Female	African	Tshwane	10	Master of Art	Protestant
3	Male	African	Johannesburg	13	Doctor of Philosophy (Theological)	Protestant
4	Male	African	Sedibeng	10	Diploma in Theology, Diploma in Project Management	Adherent
5	Male	White	Sedibeng	8	BTech in Marketing	Adherent
6	Male	White	Sedibeng	20	Doctor of Philosophy (Theological) BA in Psychology	Protestant
7	Female	African	Sedibeng	30	Master of Education	Protestant
8	Male	African	Sedibeng	3	Bachelor of Theology	Adherent
9	Male	African	Sedibeng	5	Bachelor of Theology	Adherent
10	Male	Asian	Johannesburg	4	Master of Theology; MBA	Adherent
11	Female	White	Sedibeng	Not disclosed	Bachelor of Theology	Adherent
12	Male	White	Ekurhuleni	20	Diploma in Business Studies BA In Biblical studies (Current)	Protestant
13	Male	African	Ekurhuleni	8	Honours Bachelor of Theology	Adherent
14	Male	African	Ekurhuleni	33	Master of Theology	Protestant
15	Male	African	Tshwane	27	Sales and	Protestant

					Marketing Cert.	
16	Male	African	Tshwane	2 years 6 months	Honours Bachelor of Theology; Honours BA Ancient History; Diploma in Organisational Development	Protestant
17	Male	African	Tshwane	17	Doctor of Philosophy (Religious Studies); Church Development and Leadership; Short Business Programme	Protestant
18	Male	White	West Rand	38	Doctor of Philosophy (Theological) x 2	Protestant
19	Male	White	West Rand	10	Studied Music Unconfirmed	Protestant
20	Male	White	Tshwane	21	Bachelor of Practical Theology Diploma in Building a Local Church	Protestant
21	Male	White	West Rand	10	Undisclosed	Protestant
22	Male	African	West Rand	1 year 2 months	Matric, 2nd year student Bachelor of Theology	Protestant
23	Male	African	West Rand	7	Degree in Public Management	Protestant
24	Male	White	West Rand	38	BA in Church History, Bachelor of Theology	Protestant
25	Male	African	Tshwane	5	Matric	Protestant
26	Female	African	Tshwane	1	Administration Diploma	Protestant

P means Participant

\*Means participated in the interview along with the colleague

**Source:** Data from primary research

The research was conducted within the five sub-regions of the Gauteng province. The Gauteng area was chosen because it is still considered an economic hub of South Africa (Mahlangu 2012). These regions were the City of Johannesburg, City of Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, Sedibeng, and West Rand.

This approach aimed to ensure a geographic spread among participants. A random selection of participants took place. A last-minute cancellation occurred, and a snow-ball selection took place where fellow participants recommended a potential replacement (Kirchherr and Charles 2018). A total of 26 participants were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, and the church managers were the units of analysis. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, online videos (Zoom meetings and WhatsApp video calls), telephonically and via email. Some of the interviews started face-to-face and were later completed telephonically, or supplementary submissions were made via email. These diverse data collection strategies were in response to the Covid-19 regulations and participants' preferential requests. In all these instances, the strategic planning process tools of the churches in question were explored. The ATLAS.ti was employed to analyse the data. The findings of the research were derived from the analysis of the data from both the strategic documents and the transcribed interviews. As a precursor, some useful information regarding the participants is provided in table 1.

Table 1 profiles the participants of the research in terms of gender, race, region within the Gauteng province, years of experience (as church manager), highest qualification and denomination. It is noteworthy that only four participants were female, suggesting that church management tasks are still male-dominated. That, still, is a departure from the historical accounts enshrined in the biblical texts where female church managers were seldom unheard of. These historical accounts are averse to what Proverbs 31 referred to, namely the woman of virtue who was social entrepreneurial in attributes (see Proverbs 31 NLT 2005; Bible Gateway; cf. Antonites et al. 2019). Over half of the participants were of African origin, 10 of the participants were White individuals, while the Asian population had only one representative. This suggests a spread of participants in terms of race.

The Tshwane region was the most successful outing for the researcher in terms of the number of keen participants, and Sedibeng and the West Rand followed. The second-least number of keen participants was from the Ekurhuleni region, and the least number was from Johannesburg. Moreover, the participants had work experience as church managers ranging from one year to more than 30 years.

## Research Findings

As alluded to in the methodology section, the research was in the form of an interview. This section deals with interview findings.

## **Interview Findings**

During each interview, the researcher solicited information of a strategic nature from the participants. It is normal to find various time paradigms among different churches for management in general and strategic management in particular. It is also true that strategy could be a completely unfamiliar subject for some of the churches and their denominations. All the same, the interviews sought the views of various participants regarding the strategic planning process tools. Also refer to the research methodology, which explains how the themes and codes were generated. The responses were explored in terms of whether they were aligned with the central question of this research.

### *Research Question*

The central research question posed to the participants was as follows: Which churches employ strategic planning process tools? Participants described the strategic planning process tools within their respective churches at length. These responses indicated how processes of planning and matters of strategic nature are pursued. Their descriptions demonstrated who is involved and how often they are involved in the strategic planning processes, as well as the tools they employ during such processes. The following are verbatim responses from participants relating to their strategic planning process tools.

And we do have people who are professional in the corporates who work on different management fields that we do ask them to come and present things to us to help us with your SWOT analysis, to help us evaluate what we call. We had a five-year plan to evaluate how far we are and so on. (Participant 4)

Participant 4 alluded to holding monthly meetings, developing the statement of needs (an internal analysis item) and performing a SWOT analysis to develop and/or review/evaluate a five-year plan. This is consistent with the literature on the significance of SWOT analysis in any context (Vasileva 2018). Participant 6 provided a new dimension in change management, although theoretically, this leant more towards strategy implementation.

The greatest thing we do is in the beginning of the year in the congregation [it]self. I send a paper out and ask them what would they like to change. What do they like, and what do they not like? And what would they do to make a difference? Then, we bring that back; we analyse it. I've got a guy here who like[s] statistics, and he puts everything in nice columns and gets all the things that should be together.

Then once again, according to what the people tell us—their experience, how they feel about it—from there, we go further and once again set goals to say how do we give answers to them. How do we get them to commit let's say with us as a church? And then yes, we give feedback about the analysis to say this is what you told us. (Participant 6)

Suggestion boxes are a traditional and easy way for data collection and fact-finding and proved to be one of the tools for environmental and situational analysis. This may

further infer the use of consultative and inclusive approaches, an ideal attribute of strategic management (also see King Committee on Governance 2016). This also demonstrates due diligence regarding the members' legitimate wishes of key role-players. The following participant alluded to the suggestion box as a strategic tool for information gathering and analysis:

We have a box in the church where people put in their inputs, categorising them according to the need. Their input is significant. And then another strategy that we use now of late is to have group chats—but we still use the basic strategies, checklists, surveys or open debates. However, now because of Covid, we don't have; we just use what we can use, like the platforms of WhatsApp. (Participant 7)

Once more, a suggestion box proved to be a popular and easy way in which members could feel that they are part of the church's strategic decision-making and strategy evaluation processes. For this data collection tool to yield the intended results, various factors need to be considered.

Aspects such as literacy and the eyesight of members, especially regarding the elderly, may play a major role in the data collection processes and the outcomes. There could be instances where older members or physically challenged members may depend entirely on another member who is deemed younger, learned, and vibrant. This is also an ethical and moral matter (also see Enderle 2015). The challenges of bias, fabricated responses, and confidentiality of participating members may be questioned. However, a greater pool of feedback may be realised, given the user-friendly approach of the suggestion box. The following participant was able to articulate the threats and challenges that were confronting his church:

So, after looking at our strengths, we also verify our weaknesses. We have weaknesses, which sometimes is ah—community life is not very easy, so we find quarrels and jealousy. Then ah, our growth opportunities, to overcome these weaknesses sometimes is [sic] ah, for example, financial weaknesses. We do have fundraisers, which we normal[ly] do outside the church; we go out, and maybe we do road running or parties or something.

So, we look at those opportunities and utilise them to overcome those weaknesses that we see. And ah, the threats that come by—normally our threat is, ah, from the ageing population; some of them are dying. Our threats also come from government policy, some laws, circular laws that directly interfere with the church's teachings. (Participant 8)

The SWOT analysis featured prominently in the discussions with participant 10. He was extremely conscientious in explaining how this analysis was developed. Moreover, in addition to identifying the weaknesses, the church devised practical solutions to overcome them. There are overlaps between the SWOT analysis and PESTEL, whereby the influence of government policy on the church may present a possible threat that

requires mitigation (also see Siems and Seuring 2021). This further heightens the notion that the SWOT analysis is both an inward- and an outward-looking tool.

We do internal audits. We have a general body appointed internal auditor as such, but it will all build down to the general body in terms of the SWOT analysis. So, when the general body is there, we have the reports that the management committee submits for the sake of the previous year. So that report would state all our achievements of the year, state our short falls of the year and financial and otherwise. The general body then hears that, then accordingly makes decisions for the year coming forward. (Participant 10)

In terms of the reference to a strategic tool if you will, the entire church procedures, everything we have, our worship services, our faith, our financial structures and church administration, everything is all based on the church's constitution, and that's our primary document. This constitution of this parish is based upon the constitution of the mother church. (Participant 10)

In some instances, it became apparent that a strategic approach was employed during the annual strategic planning and reviews of the participants' organisations. The use of an internal audit as a strategic and internal analysis tool is imperative. During this process, financial performance and planning in terms of master budgets are at the centre of scrutiny, analysis and deliberations (also see Davis and De Witt 2021)

This is also consistent with adherence to the constitution and church policies. Therefore, audits and the SWOT analyses encompass environmental analysis and form an integral part of strategy implementation and control.

Participant 13 added:

The SWOT analysis for the committee is critical because you would always have strengths to look at how we use what we have effectively and look at our weaknesses. People in the committee tend to adopt certain attitudes to w[e]aken the strategy. There were also interruptions, so we had to enter into a conversation. Eventually, they said they had to leave the place. So those are the things we use the SWOT analysis to iron out those kinds of things. (Participant 13)

We are involving a lot of tools that the academics are using for change. You know, like, for example, model of change—the three parts, the unfreezing allow[s] change, then refreeze, something like that. So, we ask academics to help us to be able to find change within ourselves so that everybody can say, “Okay, we understand where we are coming from.”

Then we at least have an idea where we want to go as a congregation. So, we do use other tools outside the church to help us. (Participant 16)

In this instance, the participant employed a change-management model as a strategic tool. The introduction of such a tool was a rare occurrence. The change-management

approach is a valuable strategic tool, mainly if it is employed during the strategy implementation stage. This approach requires strategic church managers to instil a conducive culture which is strategy friendly.

This may not always be easy in traditional churches that rigidly hold on to their customs and are not prepared to adopt change strategy, culture and approach (also mentioned by Kumar et al. 2020.) In the current study, it became apparent that the two neighbouring churches perceived each other as rivals and a threat to their existence. The participant's church employed the SWOT analysis to assess its surroundings. Eventually, there was a favourable outcome on their part. The following participant also mentioned budget analysis:

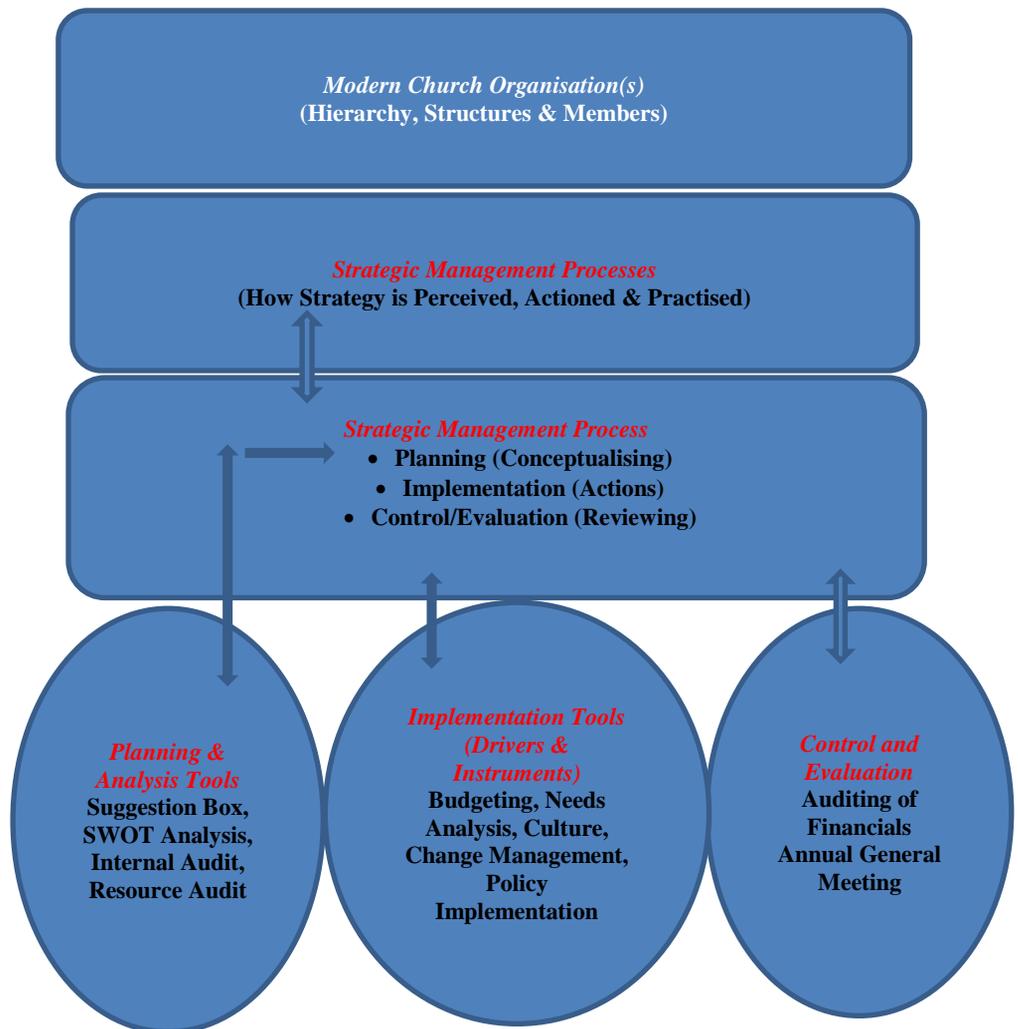
We do SWOT analysis. You know, I'm not a strategy person but still learning there, but we did, we do SWOT analysis, we do budget analysis, we do, yeah, we do most of those. So now, we're working on a five year plan. But now the challenge in churches is that people who come into leadership are voted, and once you vote people in, they may not necessarily have the skills, the management skills [sigh]. (Participant 17)

The participant's church went further in analysing their budget, and this may strengthen their future budget initiatives since they are carried out with objectivity. Among the challenges articulated were the church's lack of requisite management and related skill sets.

This also answered the question of capabilities regarding the resource-based view of the church. Participant 20 also alluded to systems of accountability.

## Discussion

The discussion of the findings takes the form of a diagram that serves as a summary thereof. This is followed by an overview of the interpretations of the findings. This illustrates how strategy is perceived and processed by churches as NPOs. It is noteworthy that there is a distinction between the strategy in the NPO context and in profit-driven organisations. The former focuses on value creation, whereas the latter thrives on profitability. This is reflected in figure 1 and the discussion below.



**Figure 1:** Strategic planning process tools for the modern church

Source(s): Fieldwork interview data

NPOs differ significantly from strategies at the corporate level and in profit-making organisations (Hansen and Jacobsen 2014). Various organisations have their structures, hierarchies and membership types (Kong 2008) as indicated in figure 1, which presents the various strategic planning process tools. It should be appreciated that strategy at the church level may be in response to the broader vision that has been introduced at the denominational, diocese or presbytery levels (Millar and Doherty 2016). This often establishes the type of strategies that need to be implemented within the churches themselves.

Deacons and elders may form part of the church executive and may be referred to as the church council. It should be appreciated that the type of church management influences the type of strategy or strategic path that the church may pursue (Robinson and Simmons 2018). This means that the perception of the church regarding the strategies, actions and practices that it pursues relates to the church management and its culture. Importantly, this section on hierarchies, structures and members was not discussed in the interviews but was enshrined in many of the church documents and websites of participants. Permission was granted by participants for additional sources to be explored.

During the planning phase, tools such as the SWOT analysis that examines the church's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats constituted some of the tools employed to analyse the environment from an internal and external perspective. The current research appeared to be an overlap between the SWOT analysis and the PESTEL model, where PESTEL discusses the political, economic, social, technological and ecological settings that affect the organisation (Tassabehji and Isherwood 2014; Vishnevskiy, Karasev, and Meissner. 2016).

Other useful tools employed for the internal analysis were in the form of suggestion boxes, internal audits and the resource-based view. In most churches, managers made time to examine their skills audit, tangible and intangible resources, and how the churches appealed to society (Vaidyanathan 2018). Furthermore, internal audits of processes and the roles played by certain church departments, guilds and leaders were apparent (Kagermann, Kinney, and Küting 2021).

It is unusual to use suggestion boxes as a tool where church members are asked to share their strategic inputs on how the church organisations can grow and move forward. Upon closer analysis, suggestion boxes seemed to be a traditional way of collecting data from ordinary church members and supporters. Previously, church organisations would have excluded great ideas and contributions from their key stakeholders. This approach fared well as an inclusive approach, an approach that strategy commentators and governance champions are advocating for (Wach 2015).

Regarding implementation tools, the drivers and instruments (e.g., policies and constitutions) of the church organisations became apparent in terms of how they monitor the trajectory of the actions of management and ordinary members. The church constitution was a key instrument employed to enable the organisation to make key strategic management decisions during sittings (Okereke, Vincent, and Mordi 2018).

In terms of strategic evaluation and control aspects, including reporting and auditing of financial statements (Lynch 2019), the annual general meetings were seen as review sittings in which critical decisions were taken (also see Van de Kamp 2017). There were also instances in which management personnel suggested aspects of adjustment. While this illustrates how strategies are employed in NPOs such as churches, it should be appreciated that not all organisations follow the same strategic approaches.

## Conclusions: Managerial Implications

It became apparent that there is a need for strategic management in all types of organisations and all sectors of society, including churches. Strategies and their analytical tools are becoming indispensable for modern organisations. Skills development in terms of managerial capacity is imperative.

Perhaps collaboration between management and leadership institutes and churches could strengthen churches by instilling a strategic approach. While it should be acknowledged that not all strategy analysis tools are relevant for churches, the more standard tools such as the SWOT analysis, internal audit, the suggestion box, Porter's Five Forces and change-management models could make a difference.

Follow-up research could be conducted to evaluate progress made as a result of such interventions. It should be remembered that churches require a strategic approach, even though they are not profit-making entities (Grant 2021; Millar, and Doherty 2016). For this reason, more research in terms of NPOs is required. While corporates require profit maximisation, NPOs' survival depends on value creation of all their role-players.

While it is unclear which management tools (with the exception of internal environmental analysis) were employed by the ancient church, the research presents possible strategic management tools that the modern church could explore. This research further contributes to the body of knowledge in that it highlights the requisite value that strategic tools offer to modern churches as NPOs. It also deepens the reality that all modern organisations, including churches, ought to take strategy very seriously.

Among the proposed future research, a comparative analysis of modern and ancient churches could be made. The inferences of changes to the course of church history may shape how church managers conduct themselves moving forward in modern churches as NPOs.

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