

Rethinking Strategic Planning Models for the Survival of the Anglican Diocese of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The paper argues that the survival of the church in the 21st century revolves around a strong strategic management model as opposed to only the spiritualisation of matters. The Anglican Diocese of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe has done a lot of programmes that address the spiritual wellbeing of followers, with less effort to address poverty and unemployment engulfing the Matabeleland region. The paper is located in the Strategic Management Theory. Qualitative methods were used as an approach to generate data, where interviews and focus group discussions were employed to collect information from 10 participants. The participants responded to two questions: what are the challenges of strategic planning in the diocese, and how can strategic planning be enhanced in the diocese? The study findings reveal that for a long time, the church has focused primarily on the spiritualisation of issues such as business. In some cases, leadership positions are determined on the basis of one's spiritual acumen rather than a thorough understanding of the dynamics of business models for sustainability. The paper argues that while spiritualisation should

remain the core business of the church, strategic management is indispensable to address congregants' needs and the challenges of surviving in resource-thwarted communities such as Matabeleland. To this end, this article argues that strategic management should be an integral part of the curriculum for ministers to enable them to run churches as both spiritual and business entities, thus remaining relevant in addressing the totality of humanity.

Keywords: Spiritualisation, strategic planning, strategic management theory, leadership, church business.

1. Introduction

Strategic planning has become a critical element that has shaped the success of various businesses and institutions. It is through strategic planning that actions are attached to plans made to achieve maximum results, repurpose entities, and enhance productivity among church members. Strategic planning is a structured process that involves defining an organisation's vision, setting objectives, designing a competitive product portfolio, and formulating effective strategies to achieve long-term sustainability (Grant, 2021). Furthermore, the strategic planning process encompasses a complementary set of activities, including environmental scanning, goal setting, implementation, and continuous evaluation (Nielsen, 2023). These definitions underscore the critical role that strategic planning plays in enabling various institutions and businesses to succeed.

Some churches have not been left out in tapping into strategic planning to ensure that their programmes succeed and align with best practices of governance. In fact, with the adoption of strategic planning, church-owned businesses can align their commercial activities with their broader mission, enabling them to remain financially viable while staying true to their faith-based values (St Benedict, 2024; Ndlovu, 2024; Bono, 2023). From this perspective, some churches are adopting business models to sustain themselves, as tithes and offerings are dwindling, unemployment is skyrocketing, and donor funding is becoming unstable due to the global recession. Thus, the Diocese cannot remain an organisation that merely survives in a harsh economic environment.

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Under normal circumstances, churches are known as non-profit organisations; however, due to the depressed economic climate characterised by a lack of employment, the Diocese of Matabeleland cannot remain solely a charitable organisation in order to survive. In fact, it should strategise and utilise available assets to ensure survival while contributing to the national agenda to address poverty and unemployment, among other pressing social issues. However, while strategic planning is desirable and achievable, it remains a serious challenge for most churches, especially within the Matabeleland Diocese in Zimbabwe, which formerly included the region of Botswana. Consequently, the Diocese fails to utilise available resources to address the social and economic challenges faced by the people of Matabeleland.

It is for this reason that this article seeks to provoke a debate that will culminate in effective strategies for ensuring that the Diocese is managed effectively, which in turn would lead to a professionally managed Diocese. To shed light on this, Patel and Singh (2023) argue that the challenges associated with strategy implementation in faith-based enterprises often stem from a lack of skilled personnel, inadequate financial resources, and resistance to change among stakeholders. Thus, this work discusses strategic planning from the Diocese of Matabeleland. Before doing so, I will explore strategic planning from a theological angle as discussed below.

1.1 Locating theological basis for strategic planning

Through the Bible, there are various visible connotations of strategic planning. One of these can be traced to the building of the temple by Solomon. A typical example is found in 2 Chronicles 2:1-18 ERV:

"Solomon planned to build a Temple to give honour to the LORD's name. He also planned to build a palace for himself. He got 70,000 labourers and 80,000 stonemasons to cut stones in the mountains. He chose 3,600 foremen to supervise the workers. Then Solomon sent this message to King Hiram of Tyre: "Help me as you helped my father David. You sent him cedar logs so that he could build a palace for himself to live in. I will build a Temple to honour the name of the LORD my God. At the Temple, we will burn incense in front of him, and we will always put the holy bread on the special table. We will offer burnt offerings every morning and evening, on the Sabbath days, during New Moon celebrations, and on the other special meeting days that the LORD our God has commanded us to celebrate."

From the above extracts, it is clear that Solomon engaged in strategic planning to ensure the successful construction of the temple. His approach was strategic in several ways: calculating the materials needed for the temple, determining the duration of the project, managing labour, and exporting trained labourers skilled in various designs to enhance the temple's beauty. Cognisant of strategic planning, Solomon succeeded in building a temple that attracted attention worldwide, drawing visits from various kings who came to admire his wisdom and foresight, including the Queen of Sheba. The concept of strategic planning is not only present in the Old Testament; it is also evident in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, I refer to the parable of The Wise and the Foolish Builders (Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49).

Everyone, therefore, who hears these words of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. ²⁶ Everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell – and its fall was great."

From the parable cited for this work, two scenarios are presented: one who does work after engaging in strategic planning and the one who does not. From this parable, it is clear that strategic planning is a critical element for success, and the opposite is true. Drawing this argument close to the diocese

of Matabeleland, there is an indication that strategic planning has not been well conceptualised, understood, and implemented, thus presenting challenges to sustain the church in terms of its businesses, addressing unemployment and poverty, while in the process depriving the diocese of its ability to contribute to social impact. Cognisant of the foregoing, this article is unique in the sense that it seeks to respond to two questions: what are the challenges of strategic planning in the diocese and how can strategic planning be enhanced in the diocese? No article has directly interrogated the strategic planning for the diocese with the intention of making suggestions on how the church can engage it to improve efficiency and effectiveness in addressing the pressing issues of the day. The following section discusses the theorisation of the paper.

2. Theoretical Framework: Resource-Based Theory

The study utilises the Resource-Based Theory (RBT), a widely recognised strategic management framework that explains how firms can achieve sustained competitive advantage through the effective utilisation of their internal resources (Hitt et al., 2022). RBT emphasises the heterogeneity, immobility, and inimitability of resources and capabilities among firms, which enables certain organisations to outperform others (Barney, 2020). The theory posits that an organisation's ability to generate a competitive edge relies on possessing resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and organised (VRIO). Accordingly, organisations that hold these types of resources are more likely to experience sustained superior performance over their competitors (Wright & McMahan, 2022).

In terms of its origins, RBT was not developed by a single scholar but emerged from various contributions by influential academics such as Penrose (1959), Chandler (1962), Ansoff (1965), Porter (1985), Mintzberg (1994), and Barney (1991). The theory has evolved to become one of the most influential frameworks in strategic planning, particularly in explaining how firms can leverage internal resources to achieve long-term success (Barney, 2020). A key finding of RBT is that organisations possessing VRIO resources can create barriers to entry for competitors, thereby enhancing their ability to achieve a sustained competitive advantage (Lockett et al., 2021).

In the context of religious organisations, such as the Diocese of Matabeleland, Resource-Based Theory (RBT) provides a valuable lens for examining how these institutions can utilise their unique resources to fulfil their missions and achieve their strategic objectives. Churches, much like for-profit organisations, possess resources that can be leveraged to gain a competitive edge, particularly regarding community engagement, spiritual leadership, and outreach initiatives (Cescon & Osti, 2020). By identifying and utilising valuable and inimitable resources—such as dedicated congregations, strong leadership, spiritual capital, and historical significance—churches can differentiate themselves from other religious institutions and effectively pursue their goals (Hitt et al., 2022). One of the fundamental assumptions of RBT is that resources are heterogeneously distributed across organisations, meaning that different churches have varying resource endowments (Barney, 1991). These resources may include tangible assets like buildings and financial resources, as well as intangible assets such as leadership, reputation, and congregational loyalty. Churches with strong, visionary leaders who can inspire and guide their members are more likely to experience growth and success in achieving their mission (Wright & McMahan, 2022). For instance, a church that possesses a charismatic leader and a committed membership base may be able to mobilise resources for community outreach programmes, enhance its spiritual influence, and maintain long-term financial stability (Park, 2019). Using this theory for the study can help churches identify the resources that set them apart from other denominations or congregations. For example, a church with a rich historical legacy may attract visitors and donations, giving it a competitive edge over other churches that do not possess the same degree of cultural or historical significance. Additionally, churches that have strong social capital—such as extensive networks of partnerships with other religious or community organisations—can enhance their outreach efforts and bolster their reputation within their community (Hitt et al., 2022).

Another key feature of RBT is resource immobility, which refers to the difficulty of transferring resources between organisations (Barney, 1991). This characteristic is particularly relevant to churches, where many resources, such as spiritual capital and congregational commitment, are deeply embedded within the organisation's culture and practices. These resources are often unique to a specific church, making them difficult for other churches to replicate (Lockett et al., 2021). For instance, the spiritual capital that arises from a church's long-standing traditions and practices may be challenging for newer or less-established churches to imitate (Wright & McMahan, 2022). This theory is relevant to this study, as it argues that organisations, such as churches, should cultivate resources for better use to achieve their long-term goals and fulfil their mission (Park, 2019).

3. Methodology

The paper is premised on a transformative paradigm that seeks to change the current approach to running businesses within the Diocese of Matabeleland. It is a qualitative study in which ten participants were purposively selected to take part. Purposive sampling is relevant as it is a non-probability technique that ensures the identification of individuals with the relevant experience and knowledge to contribute to the study. These participants were drawn from church leaders and clergy within the Diocese of Matabeleland. For data collection, interviews and focus group discussions were employed to gather information from the participants, which included clergy, lay leaders, and congregants. They revealed key themes in response to the two core questions: *What are the challenges of strategic planning in the diocese?* And *how can strategic planning be enhanced in the diocese?* The thematic analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework and framed within the Resource-Based View (RBV) theoretical lens, which advocates for the optimisation of internal resources for sustainable advantage (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991).

The study uncovered four major themes: (1) Over-Spiritualisation of Church Matters, (2) Leadership Capacity Gaps, (3) Resource Misalignment and Poor Utilisation, and (4) Calls for Strategic Reorientation and Capacity Building. To maintain the integrity of the research and adhere to best practices for protecting participants, pseudonyms such as Matabeleland Diocese (MD) are used. In addition, all other ethical requirements were adhered to, such as the no harm principle, seeking authority to conduct research from relevant institutions, and allowing for voluntary withdrawal of participants should they feel uncomfortable continuing with the research. Pseudonyms were used throughout. Member checking was conducted to ensure that findings accurately reflected the views of the participants and their knowledge of the Diocese of Matabeleland.

4. Findings and Discussion

In this section, I present the findings of the study, which were informed by two research questions. These questions allowed me to identify several themes, including over-spiritualisation, gaps in leadership capacity, misalignment of resources, and poor utilisation. The aforementioned themes address the first research question. For the second question, themes such as the infusion of strategic planning into theological training, the drafting of informed long-term plans, and collaboration with other professional Christian bodies emerged. Thus, the following section discusses the first theme, which is over-spiritualisation.

4.1 Challenges of strategic planning in the diocese

The section below addresses the challenges faced by the church in relation to strategic planning. The first point is the overspiritualisation of church members.

4.1.1 Over-spiritualisation of church matters

One of the most dominant and recurring themes that emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions was the over-spiritualisation of church matters, particularly concerning the Anglican Diocese of Matabeleland's approach to development and institutional sustainability. Participants

strongly expressed that while the church remains a sacred institution dedicated to spiritual nourishment, there has been an excessive focus on spiritual interventions, often at the expense of socioeconomic empowerment driven by strategic planning. This theme highlights the limitations of a church model that prioritises prayer and faith declarations over practical planning, resource mobilisation, and economic empowerment initiatives. Participants emphasised that although prayer and spiritual formation are core to the identity of the Anglican Church, these cannot substitute for tangible strategies to tackle poverty, youth unemployment, and general economic insecurity in the Matabeleland region. Several respondents described this spiritual overreach as a "blinding factor" that prevents the church from recognising the urgent need for concrete interventions, which can be achieved through strategic planning.

A MD 1 member stated:

"We are told to pray when we don't have food. When a young person is unemployed, we organise prayer meetings instead of skills training workshops. The spiritualisation is total – everything must be resolved on the altar."

In addition, MD 2 added that

"Our priests preach about faith and miracles, but we see no projects that can help us start businesses or feed our families. Spirituality is important, but so is survival."

Also elaborating on this challenge, MD4 remarked that;

"They tell us that Jesus will provide, but they do not teach us how to create wealth or find employment. It's always about 'believe and fast' – we are tired."

From the foregoing statements by the participants, I support the observation made by Chitando and Togarasei (2021), who argue that while African churches are rightly rooted in spirituality, an overdependence on spiritual rhetoric without corresponding action results in developmental paralysis. Churches may unwittingly perpetuate suffering by failing to balance prayer with practical responses to social problems. It is clear that by spiritualising all activities of the church, the diocese is deprived of the opportunity to benefit from the best minds within the church who can engage in strategic planning to advance its work, which will not only benefit the church financially and professionally but spiritually as well. While this is desirable and expected by the diocese members, the participants viewed the current church leadership as deeply invested in theology and prayer, but inadequately equipped or unwilling to implement practical programmes that address congregants' lived experiences.

The notion of religious overreach without developmental backing reflects the concern raised by Gathogo (2021), who asserts that many African churches have allowed spiritual narratives to obscure the socio-economic agency of congregants. Rather than promoting self-reliance, some faith-based leaders fall into a passive spiritual trap, encouraging dependence on divine intervention alone without offering structures to support innovation, entrepreneurship, or job creation. As such, these churches become socially and economically irrelevant in addressing the challenges faced by the communities they seek to serve. The Zimbabwean community, especially in Matabeleland, is confronted with high unemployment, and the church should contribute towards alleviating it.

In addition, the use of spiritual criteria in making administrative decisions was highlighted as a key barrier to strategic growth. Participants described how spiritual maturity often supersedes competency in business, administration, or resource management when selecting individuals for leadership positions. A participant referred to as MD 5 noted:

"A person can pray well and speak in tongues, and that qualifies them to lead a diocesan committee. Whether they know anything about budgeting or project management doesn't matter. That is our biggest weakness."

This observation demonstrates how the phenomenon of over-spiritualisation has affected not only external programming but also internal governance. It creates a mismatch between the church's developmental needs and the leadership's capacity to address those needs effectively. As Barney (1991) suggests within the Resource-Based View framework, internal capabilities—particularly human capital—are essential for long-term organisational effectiveness. A spiritual qualification alone does not equip someone to manage diocesan resources effectively.

Furthermore, the implications of this over-spiritualisation are not merely administrative; they are also theological and social. MD 7 argues that:

"We should preach a gospel that feeds the stomach and the spirit. Jesus didn't just pray – He fed people, healed them, and challenged systems. Our church must do the same."

Such sentiments align with recent theological discussions around the "integrated gospel," which seeks to bridge the gap between the sacred and the secular by ensuring that Christian ministry addresses the whole human condition (Frahm-Arp, 2020; Aboagye-Mensah, 2021). Within this framework, prayer and strategic planning are not mutually exclusive but complementary tools for holistic transformation. Therefore, the theme of over-spiritualisation captures a critical tension within the Anglican Diocese of Matabeleland, namely the struggle to maintain spiritual integrity while remaining responsive to the socio-economic realities facing its members. Participants were clear in their view that spirituality should not be discarded but must be integrated with practical strategies for development. A strategic planning model that balances prayer with planning, and faith with financial foresight, is essential for the survival of the church in the 21st century. This perspective is influenced by Teece's (2018) observation that the sustainability of any organisation, whether corporate or ecclesiastical, depends on its ability to dynamically adapt to its environment. For the church, this means retaining its spiritual identity while also responding innovatively and strategically to the structural poverty and economic instability engulfing regions such as Matabeleland.

4.1.2 Leadership capacity gaps

The second challenge raised by the participants highlighted the limitations in leadership competencies, particularly concerning business acumen and strategic planning. The allocation of leadership roles was criticised for being based more on perceived spiritual maturity than on professional or managerial capabilities. To elaborate on this, a participant referred to as MD 9

"Many of our leaders are prayerful and committed, but they cannot interpret a basic budget. Some have never written a strategic plan. Yet they make decisions about diocesan finances."

MD 8 in a focus group participant added,

"There is no training in strategic thinking. You just rise through the ranks spiritually, but no one checks if you can run a church project efficiently."

From the sentiments expressed, the rise to critical positions within the diocese is often associated with one's spiritual stamina, as judged by the leadership. This perspective undermines the importance of formal qualifications and training in relation to leadership. The current arrangement of the diocese contradicts Barney's (1991) observation, which argues, based on the Resource-Based View (RBV), that organisations must develop and deploy key internal resources—such as skilled leadership—to achieve sustained effectiveness. My submission is that while spiritual maturity cannot be compromised within the diocese, there is a need to equip leaders or recruit capable individuals with the right competencies to drive sustainable development within the diocese. Failure to do so risks inefficiency and missed opportunities for growth (Teece, 2018). To avert these challenges, strategic planning is essential to ensure that both the diocese and its members comprehend the ideal processes of effective governance needed to manage large organisations such as the Anglican Church.

4.1.3 Resource misalignment and poor utilisation

In the absence of strategic planning for the diocese, participants noted that resource misalignment and poor utilisation are affecting the church. It emerged that if brilliant minds were afforded the opportunity to engage in strategic planning regarding the resources within the diocese, there could be a repurposing that would reposition the church as a hub of both spirituality and effective resource utilisation (Ndlovu, 2022).

In elaborating on this challenge, participants noted the disconnect between the diocese's available assets, both tangible and intangible, and their actual application in addressing the economic and social challenges faced by congregants. According to participants, the Anglican Diocese of Matabeleland possesses significant resources such as land, infrastructure, and a wealth of human capital, which, when managed and planned effectively, can position the diocese to be socially relevant, especially in relation to transforming the lived realities of the people it serves. For example, the Diocese of Matabeleland has schools such as Cyrene Mission, St James Mission, and St Columbus, which have land and income-generating projects such as farming and metalwork, among others. However, these resources are either underutilised, mismanaged, or entirely neglected. Thus, the failure to engage in strategic planning was viewed as a major constraint on the diocese's ability to contribute to development and sustainability within the region. During the discussion, MD5 noted that:

"We have large tracts of church land that are not being used productively. Some of it could be used for farming projects or leased to investors, but no one is thinking in that direction."

In addition, MD 10 added:

"There are buildings in the city and even in the rural areas that just sit there. They could generate income for the church if turned into guest houses or rented for community events."

While the diocese has various resources, MD 6 added his voice by noting that;

"We always talk about economic empowerment and youth projects, but the church has never supported a single one. We don't even have access to basic tools or capital even though the church could help with those."

The contradiction here indicates that resources to ensure sustainability exist within the diocese; however, due to the absence of strategic planning by capable individuals, these resources are not put to tangible use. This sentiment was echoed across several focus group discussions, where participants expressed frustration that the church speaks of poverty alleviation but does not act on it using its existing assets. The participants argued that the church is uniquely positioned in Matabeleland, not only as a spiritual authority but also as a potential development agency with both physical and human resources that could be used to combat poverty and unemployment. These comments align with the Resource-Based View (RBV), which asserts that competitive advantage arises from the effective and efficient utilisation of internal resources (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). The diocese's failure to mobilise its assets for socioeconomic development represents not only a missed opportunity but also a strategic weakness that threatens its sustainability and relevance in a context of rising poverty and economic instability in Matabeleland. In essence, participants emphasised that there is little strategic thinking surrounding resource deployment. In many cases, church resources remain idle due to a lack of vision or fear of commercialisation. MD 10 noted that:

"There is a fear that if we start talking about using resources for business purposes, we are moving away from the spiritual mandate. But Jesus fed people too; he did not just preach."

This reflects what scholars like Gathogo (2021) have noted – that many African churches continue to suffer from a spiritual-secular dichotomy, where anything perceived as ‘business-like’ is treated with suspicion, even when such ventures could uplift communities. Consequently, strategic initiatives such as microfinance, agro-based projects, or vocational training programmes are either not initiated or not sustained.

4.1.4 Underutilisation of human capital due lack of strategic planning

In the absence of strategic planning, it was clear that the diocese not only suffers from failing to capitalise on physical assets but also neglects the human capital available within its community. The diocese has various professionals, such as accountants, engineers, teachers, and entrepreneurs, who attend church regularly but are rarely engaged in the planning and implementation of strategic initiatives. This may be because they are judged to be less spiritual compared to those appointed to assist the diocese. MD 1 noted that:

“We have a lot of professionals in our congregation, but the church doesn’t ask for their input beyond asking them to lead prayers or read scripture. That’s a waste.”

Similarly, MD 5 added:

“I am a trained accountant, and I have offered to help the Diocese with budgeting and auditing. But I was told those issues are dealt with by the church treasurer alone. It’s as if professional skills are not welcome unless you are ordained.”

Cognisant of the above, a new approach should emerge through strategic planning, where human resources within the diocese are fully utilised to ensure the professionalism and effectiveness of the diocese in addressing pressing issues such as poverty and unemployment. In light of this, I argue that the exclusion of skilled congregants from strategic planning processes not only demotivates members but also deprives the church of valuable insights and competencies. The RBV framework underscores the importance of intangible assets—such as knowledge, skills, and networks—as strategic resources that must be harnessed and nurtured for sustainable growth (Teece, 2018). To conclude this point, I emphasise the importance of strategic planning as a key concept for the effective utilisation of organisational resources and activities. Therefore, ignoring such an important element has the potential to render the diocese ineffective, not only spiritually but also in terms of governance and professionalism. In light of the challenges raised above, the following section addresses the need for strategic planning as an entry point to effectiveness and appropriate resource utilisation.

4.2 Calls for strategic reorientation and capacity building

This theme emerged strongly across all interviews and focus group discussions, highlighting an urgent need for the Anglican Diocese of Matabeleland to undergo strategic reorientation and prioritise capacity building among its clergy and lay leadership. Participants noted that the church’s over-reliance on spiritual charisma, without adequate managerial training, has resulted in stagnation, inefficiency, and missed development opportunities. There was broad consensus that, to maintain its relevance and sustainably impact communities, the church must equip its leadership with modern skills in strategic management, entrepreneurship, and project planning. As I begin this section, I argue that for the diocese to overcome these challenges, faith-based organisations must adopt structured implementation models that emphasise leadership commitment, operational efficiency, and stakeholder engagement (Bryson et al., 2022).

4.2.1 Infusion of strategic planning in theological training

To ensure that strategic planning is an integral part of the Diocese, it is important for the church to incorporate the theological underpinnings, such as training and curriculum, that include elements of strategic planning. This does not negate the spirituality of the diocese; rather, it provides a basis upon which the diocese can be more effective in addressing spiritual matters and social trajectories. During

this research, participants repeatedly stressed that the current theological training curricula are insufficiently responsive to the complex realities of running a church in a socioeconomically depressed region like Matabeleland. While the spiritual formation of clergy remains critical, it was argued that this alone does not equip ministers to manage church affairs in a holistic manner.

Informed with the foregoing, MD 9 noted:

"Our theological colleges prepare us to preach and perform sacraments, but they don't prepare us to lead people economically. You graduate knowing Greek and Hebrew but nothing about financial planning or community development."

In addition, MD 7 argued that:

"We are led by people who are spiritually strong but administratively weak. The church needs pastors who can think strategically, plan programs, write proposals, and run institutions."

From the above, I resonate with Chitando (2021), who argues that contemporary African church leaders require both spiritual and managerial competencies to address the full spectrum of human needs. Churches can no longer operate solely on spiritual intuition; they must embrace professional training and organisational strategy to remain viable. There was strong support for the institutionalisation of strategic planning as a routine function within church governance. Participants called for churches in the diocese to formulate long-term development plans that address poverty alleviation, youth unemployment, education, and health. Strategic planning, they argued, should be rooted in both theological vision and the contextual realities of society. For the diocese to achieve these goals, I argue that strategic planning should be a concept reflected in both the theological training of ministers and diocesan teachings as an art to survive harsh economic conditions.

4.2.2 Drafting informed long-term plans for the diocese

As part of enhancing strategic planning within the diocese, the participants suggested that the church should engage in long-term planning for the utilisation of resources, some of which are underutilised in mission schools, among other areas. To elaborate on this point, MD 4 noted that:

"We need five- or ten-year plans at the parish level. Plans that include business models, community engagement, and skills development. Not just plans to grow spiritually but also plans to grow economically."

The insight from the participant is supported by Amoah and Brew (2020), who state that strategic planning enhances the church's ability to respond effectively to dynamic environments and helps align resources with community needs. Moreover, Gathogo (2022) emphasises that churches without forward-looking strategies often become reactive rather than proactive in addressing social challenges. In addition, participants advocated for the adoption of business models to complement spiritual mandates, focusing on long-term plans. This includes treating church-owned assets such as land, buildings, and vehicles as potential income-generating resources, rather than simply as heritage sites or venues for Sunday gatherings. Participants proposed that churches should invest in long-term planning for projects such as agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, skills training centres, and rental properties to ensure financial sustainability.

4.2.3 Collaboration with professional Christian bodies

To cultivate strong strategic planning, the diocese can either collaborate with or benchmark against various corporate and Christian organisations, such as Roman Catholic institutions, which value strategic planning (St Benedict Catholic Church, 2024). Such propositions align with modern ecclesiastical governance practices, where expert committees and strategic units play a central role in guiding church development (Makukula & Kalemba, 2023). I argue that strategic planning is a fundamental tool for organisational success, as it provides a structured approach to goal setting,

resource allocation, and performance evaluation (Cescon & Osti, 2020). Engaging in this process promotes professionalism and allows the church to engage effectively with development partners, government agencies, and NGOs. Participants revealed a consensus on the importance of partnerships with external organisations. They emphasised that churches must move beyond isolationist practices and actively seek collaborations with civil society, academic institutions, and development agencies to enhance their strategic capacity.

A clergy member stated:

"Partnerships can bring in knowledge, training, and even funding. But we must be willing to step out of our spiritual cocoons and engage the world."

This observation is consistent with recent research advocating for inter-sectoral collaboration in faith-based development initiatives (Togarasei & Chitando, 2022). Churches that network effectively are better positioned to acquire new competencies and broaden their impact. The success of this collaboration depends on effective strategic implementation, a well-defined organisational structure, leadership commitment, and a supportive organisational culture (Kim & Lee, 2023). This approach aims to recentre and repurposes the diocese towards effectiveness, which requires not only spiritualisation but also effective strategic planning.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I presented various challenges encountered by the diocese when it neglects strategic planning. It emerged that the diocese is still stuck in the concept of spiritualisation as an act to run church business, thereby leading to limitations in executing effectiveness and impact due to associating strategic planning with the unorthodox practices of the church. As I began the paper, I demonstrated the roots of strategic planning in the Old Testament and the New Testament to build an argument that the concept of strategic planning has always co-existed with biblical teaching, and any church that abandons it risks challenges such as poor governance, low profits, and sustainability. In conclusion, I argued that the church should ensure strategic planning is an integral part of the theological training of church leaders and the entire diocese. Furthermore, I concluded by calling for benchmarking and collaboration between the diocese and other NGOs that have successfully developed models of strategic planning to ensure the organisation realises its impact and relevance in society. Indeed, spiritualising can help to an extent, but spiritualising and engaging in strategic planning can recentre and repurpose the diocese towards addressing the lived realities of the people of Matabeleland.

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