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УДК 273.921

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***ВАЖНЕЙШИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ, ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ  
 ПЕРЕМЕНЫ И СВЯЗАННЫЕ С НИМИ ТРУДНОСТИ  
 СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ЦЕРКВЕЙ КАК НЕКОММЕРЧЕСКИХ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЙ***

Церкви как некоммерческие организации (НКО) претерпевают стратегические и структурные изменения. Духовное благополучие христиан во всем мире зависит от положения церквей. Была предпринята попытка оценить изменения путем интервьюирования со сложной структурой. Исследование осуществлялось в провинции Гаутенг в Южной Африке. Было собрано и проанализировано 26 интервью церковных руководителей. Анализ проводился при помощи программного обеспечения Atlas.ti. Теория агентов и теория управления, также как модель PESTEL использовалась для объяснения результатов исследования. Данные выявили, что церкви пытаются противостоять тем стратегическим изменениям, которые являются угрозой для их стабильности.

*Ключевые слова:* христианство, церкви, среда, НКО, Южная Африка, стратегия, стратегические изменения

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***MAJOR SOCIO-ECO-POLITICAL CHANGES THAT MAY POSE  
CHALLENGES FOR MODERN CHURCHES  
AS NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS***

Churches, as not-for-profit organizations (NPOs) experience strategic and structural changes. Christians in many parts of the world depend on churches for their spiritual upliftment. Qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews was carried out. The research was conducted within the Gauteng Province of South Africa. A total of 26 church managers responses were recorded and analyzed. Data were analyzed using the Atlas.ti software. Both the agency and management theories as well as PESTEL model formed part of this exploratory research. The findings indicate that churches are confronted with strategic changes that may threaten their sustainability.

*Key words:* Christianity, churches, environment, NPOs, South Africa, strategy, strategic changes

## INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

Churches, as NPOs, have enjoyed rapid growth over the years. The Pentecostal, traditional and mainline churches have been growing at a rapid pace over time<sup>1</sup> and there is a clear indication that owing to aspects such as migration of people from one country to another, modern churches continue to attract new types of members<sup>2</sup>. Some of these members are much more sophisticated, inquisitive, and vibrant than other long-standing members.

Moreover, the style of worship, rules of engagement and freedom of association make it complex for churches to understand the dynamics of modern church members. This calls into question the type of posture that the churches ought to assume to remain relevant and attractive towards modern congregants<sup>3</sup>. The environmental dynamics have changed the way in which churches are perceived and their role in modern society.

That is why Sondejker<sup>4</sup> and Postma<sup>5</sup> caution organizations to be proactive in dealing with long-term, complex, and uncertain processes of society. Besides providing spiritual upliftment, churches are expected to play economic and social roles within their immediate communities. Over the years, changes have influenced the political, economic, and social spheres, in terms of which organizations such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC) were champions of moral fibre and provided a moral compass in the midst of the unjust apartheid government rule. The environmental analysis plays a pivotal role in enabling organizations to remain abreast of political, economic,

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<sup>1</sup> Chan D. The emergence of Pentecostalism and the Afro-Surinamese worldview. Tyndale Theological Seminary, 2010. P. 1–12.

<sup>2</sup> Francis L. J., Lankshear D. W., Eccles E. L., McKenna U. Sustaining Churchgoing Young Anglicans in England and Wales: Assessing Influence of the Home // *Journal of Beliefs & Values*. 2020. Vol. 41. N 1. P. 34–50. Doi: 10.1080/13617672.2019.1607013

<sup>3</sup> Nylén D., Holmström J. Digital InNvation in Context: Exploring Serendipitous and Unbounded Digital InNvation at the Church of Sweden // *Information TechNlogy & People*. 2019. Vol. 32(3). P. 696–714. Doi: 10.1108/ITP-05-2017-0148.

<sup>4</sup> Sondejker S. Imagining Sustainability. Methodological Building Blocks for Transition Scenarios: PhD dissertation. Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Postma A. Investigating Scenario Planning — a European Tourism Perspective // *Journal of Tourism Futures*. 2015. Vol. 1(1). P. 46–52. Doi: 10.1108/JTF-12-2014-0020.

social, technological, ecological and legal (PESTEL) intricacies in modern society. Over and above the spiritual role, governance and ethics continue to be associated with church organizations<sup>6</sup>.

There is also a biblical justification for proper management of churches: «Now, no shrub of the field had yet grown on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground»<sup>7</sup>.

This passage highlights the importance of management within a church context by suggesting that if the church is mismanaged, it is likely to close down. This consistent with the principles of both management and agency theories where managers act as agents on behalf of their principals. In explaining the essence of management, the passage refers to human beings as the creatures meant to manage the earth — and without which there could be a serious economic crisis<sup>8</sup>.

Consequently, this study explored the changes that church managers experience during their tenure. It also looked at how managers and their organisations go about rising above the challenges within their respective environments and influencing the changes that may have been experienced in respect of their key role-players<sup>9</sup>. Thus, a strategic approach in terms of environmental analysis of church managers was explored. Interesting lessons were learnt in terms of the differences between corporate organizations, which are often profit-driven, and church organizations, which are categorized as not-for-profit organizations (NPOs)<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, common or similar practices across various types of organizations were considered. In the next section, the environmental intricacies facing churches and their managers are discussed. This is followed by the research methods and, subsequently, the research findings.

<sup>6</sup> South African Council of Churches (SACC). 2007. The Constitution of the South African Council of Churches. Adopted by the National Conference on 17 July, 2007 // URL: <http://sacc.org.za> (28.10.2021).

<sup>7</sup> New Living Translation (NLT). Genesis 2 & Romans 13.

<sup>8</sup> Hill C.W.L., Hult G.T.M. International business. Competing in Global Marketplace / 12<sup>th</sup> ed. Irwin, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> King Committee on Governance, King Report IV: Draft Code of Governance Principles for South Africa. Institute of Directors of Southern Africa, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Gratton P. Organization Development and Strategic Planning for Nn-profit Organizations // Organization Development Journal. Summer, 2018. P. 27–38. Doi: 10.1080/10852352.2011.530167 (30.06.2021).

The paper concludes with recommendations and possible areas for future research.

#### CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA

During the apartheid era in South Africa, churches played an active role in maintaining the hope of a future democratic dispensation.

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) organized its members and conscientised them towards mass mobilization to fight the unjust political regime<sup>11</sup>.

Even today, the SACC continues to champion an agenda towards total transformation, social emancipation and the fight against the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality<sup>12</sup>. As a result, social justice is one of the items that features prominently on the church agenda. Nevertheless, new challenges and changes within the environment have emerged, which could hamper the church in fulfilling its primary mandate of spiritual upliftment and the total emancipation of humankind. It is not surprising that Beggeri, Testi and Bellucci<sup>13</sup> allude to the critical role that NPOs, such as churches, can play in developing society. To this end, churches should consider the various environmental variables that affect their existence.

#### **Environmental variables affecting modern churches as NPOs**

As already mentioned, churches are often affected by environmental dynamics that exist in their environment. Among others, the political climate and social settings pose challenges for church organizations in modern times<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> South African Council of Churches (SACC). 2007.

<sup>12</sup> South African Council of Churches (SACC). *Our SACC // Vital Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: SACC Brochure*. 2015. P. 1–6.

<sup>13</sup> Biggeri M., Testi E., Bellucci M. *Enabling Ecosystems for Social Enterprises and Social InNvation: A Capability Approach Perspective // Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*. 2017. No 18(2). P. 299–306. Doi: 10.1080/1945282.9.2017.1306690.

<sup>14</sup> Antonites A., Schoeman W. J., Deventer W. F. J., van. *A critical Analysis of Social InNvation: A Qualitative Exploration of a Religious Organisation*. HTS Theologiese Studies // *Theological Studies*. 2019. N 75(4). P. 1–12. Doi: 10.4102/hts.v75i4.5282

Strategy enables churches to analyze the environment effectively and to develop strategic plans to circumvent the current challenges<sup>15</sup>. In this section, the PESTEL model will be used with the objective of exploring challenges faced by the churches and ways in which managers can adopt a sustainable strategy that is responsive to the church and its purposeful agenda<sup>16</sup>. Each PESTEL variable is discussed in church context.

### Political

The political environment is an extremely dynamic and volatile environment. In many countries, the government is often charged with the responsibility to monitor church affairs as best they know how<sup>17</sup>. In some countries, democratic processes do not apply, and this puts pressure on churches to adhere to the government's prescripts — even if they sometimes disagree with them. Therefore, Agensky<sup>18</sup> cautions churches not to overlook the influence of politics on their existence. In South Africa, churches have the right of existence under the democratic rule and the principles of freedom of association, as enshrined in the South African Constitution. The Constitution states very clearly that churches have the freedom to organize themselves, provided it is within the prescripts of the law.

Over the years, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) played a significant role, both within the church and political fraternities. The SACC's aim was to liberate the oppressed citizens from any form of injustice<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, the SACC became a catalyst

<sup>15</sup> Gratton P. Organization Development and Strategic Planning for Non-profit Organizations...

<sup>16</sup> Gillespie A. Foundations of EcoNomics. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford, 2018; Ergün K. A Contemporary Approach for Strategic Management in Tourism Sector: PESTEL Analysis on the City Muğla, Turkey // İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi. 2018. Vol. 10. N 2. P. 598–608.

<sup>17</sup> Pichon L. C., Powell T.W, Ogg S. A., Williams A. L., Becton-Odum N. Factors Influencing Black Churches' Readiness to Address HIV // J Relig Health. 2016. N 55. P. 918–927. Doi: 10.1007/s10943-015-0117-3.

<sup>18</sup> Agensky J.C. Recognizing Religion: Politics, History, and the «long 19<sup>th</sup> century». European Journal of International Relations. 2017. N 23(4). P. 729–755. Doi: 10.1177/1354066116681428.

<sup>19</sup> Pillay J. An Exploration of the Idea of Ecodomy in Calvin's View of God and the World: Its Implications for Churches in South Africa Today // Verbum et Ecclesia. 2015. N 36(3). P. 14–74.

for linking the church mandate with those of the country's imperatives, including issues such as the triple challenges of unemployment, inequality, and poverty<sup>20</sup>.

On certain occasions, there were issues that the church sought to address in collaboration with government<sup>21</sup>. For instance, during the run-up to elections, various political parties' representatives visit various church denominations and are often given a platform to present their manifestos and promises to congregants who may be eager to learn what the political parties have to say about the church and its community.

### Economic

Within the economic sphere, churches play a critical role in terms of revenue generation towards the fescues. Churches procure services and products from government, the private sector and society at large. For instance, churches require builders, and they buy building materials sourced from the private sector, while community members are often employed in building church structures, which often involves payment of a stipend. Basic electrical, plumbing, and mechanical maintenance is often procured from the church's immediate community. Moreover, churches purchase equipment and electronics and pay for electricity, water, sanitation and — often — rates and taxes. There are instances where the church is instrumental in terms of tourism promotion, whereby congregants become consumers of products and services in certain areas during certain special events. For instance, during the Passover weekend (also referred to as Easter), pilgrims travel from various parts of the country — and even from various parts of the world — to convene in certain places of worship for a weekend<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Dilger H., Burchardt M., Dijk R., van. Religion and AIDS Treatment in Africa: The Redemptive Moment. Ashgate, 2014. P. 1–24 // URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264580204> (28.10.2021).

<sup>21</sup> Candy V., Gordon J. The Historical Development of Strategic Planning Theories // International Journal of Management & Information Systems. 2011. N 15(4). Q4. P. 71–90.

<sup>22</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu J. K., Kim K., Davies A., Anim E. The Spirit in the Letter: Pentecostalism and Theological Education // Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission. 2017. N 2(1). P. 4–20.

During these times, the local benefit, as do nearby outlets, shopping malls, accommodation locals and bus companies. Other public transport modes also generate income over and above what they would normally earn<sup>23</sup>. Local hawkers, vendors, security companies and ordinary local people see such events as opportunities to generate revenue, alleviate poverty and create employment. In addition, the banking sector generates large revenues from offerings, tithes and giving that come from congregants<sup>24</sup>. Churches themselves may also raise funds by selling merchandise and edible goods. That said, there is a growing reality of unemployment within the churches and surrounding communities, especially among the youth. This often affects the revenue streams of the church and threatens its sustainability prospects.

### Social

Churches exist within a social setting. For instance, in South Africa, the Department of Social Development, through the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission) regulates the existence and practices of churches. This means that an operating certificate has to be secured from the Department of Social Development before a church can be recognized as a legal entity.

This also alludes to issues mentioned in the Occupational Health and Safety Act regarding the gathering of people in a certain space, at a particular time. Moreover, government — through the CRL — intervenes whenever abuse by church managers is reported, for example when complaints are received from congregants who may have been offended by sexual abuse, financial mismanagement, fraud, and related grievances<sup>25</sup>.

Over the years, many church figures — especially within the Pentecostal movements — have been accused of sexual assault, fraud,

<sup>23</sup> Gurnani R. M. Globalization and Ethical Challenges // *The Business and Management Review*. 2015. N 5(4). P. 116–122.

<sup>24</sup> Tella S. A. Globalisation and Ethical Banking // *Challenges and Prospects accountable: Journal of Association of Professional Bankers in Education (JAPBE)*. 2017. N 1(1). P. 149–162.

<sup>25</sup> Phat T. H., Birt J., Turner M. J., Fenech J. Sporting Clubs and Scandals: Lessons in Governance // *Sport Management Review*. 2016. Vol. 19(1). P. 69–80.



and mismanagement of money. As a result, there have been calls for greater governance and oversight as far as church management is concerned. This puts tremendous pressure on church managers to prove their ethical stance in terms of acting beyond reproach when handling church managerial matters<sup>26</sup>. It follows that the church ought to self-correct and the managers thereof hold one another. Therefore, church managers need to make amends and hold one another accountable to restore dignity of the church.

The church is also confronted with the challenges of youth unemployment, youth despondency and child-headed homes. These often have the potential to stretch the already limited church resources (financial and human). In all these matters, the church needs to maintain its reputation as an institution that cares for the marginalised and disadvantaged, which is aligned with its primary mandate.

### Technological

Owing to the sophisticated nature of postmodern congregants, churches are often confronted with making difficult decisions to find a balance between the traditional ways of worshipping and embracing new ways of Doing things<sup>27</sup>. The evolution of technology appeals to the younger generation. Traditionally, the church seldom required electronics or instruments for worship and communication with and among its congregants. However, Nylén and Holmström<sup>28</sup> point to the increasing need for innovation and technological advancements in the church context. Over the years, there has been a trend to electronic equipment during worship.

Some argue that this helps to attract young people, who were often seen to be oblivious of church activities. Especially during the 1980s and 1990s, there was a move to use television and radio to reach out to both congregants and Christians in communities

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<sup>26</sup> Shange N. Commission to Probe Church Practices and Finances. News24. 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Antonites A., Schoeman W. J., van Deventer W. F. J. A critical Analysis of Social InNvation: A qualitative Exploration of a Religious Organisation. HTS Teologiese Studies // Theological Studies. 2019. N 75(4). P. 1–12. Doi: 10.4102/hts.v75i4.5282.

<sup>28</sup> Nylén D., Holmström J. Digital InNvation in Context: Exploring Serendipitous and Unbounded Digital InNvation at the Church of Sweden // Information TechNlogy & People. 2019. N 32(3). P. 696–714. Doi: 10.1108/ITP-05-2017-0148.

at large<sup>29</sup>. In recent times, the use of multimedia social media technology has become the norm. The use of Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Instagram, YouTube, Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, WhatsApp, cell-phone, and other related means has overtaken the traditional ways of communicating with audiences and in terms of how to worship<sup>30</sup>.

In the wake of lockdown regulations related to COVID-19, churches found themselves in a difficult situation because congregants were prohibited or restricted in terms of gatherings. This prompted new ways of doing things to mitigate government regulations and, at the same time, keep the church congregation involved in the things of God (spiritual activities)<sup>31</sup>. This served as an indication of how volatile the technological environment is in that it changed the way churches operated<sup>32</sup>. It compelled them to be responsive to the «new normal» and complex social dynamics by using technological devices and expertise. For this reason, new and greater investments were — and still need to be — put in place to position the modern church to respond to modern dynamics within the church environment. Clearly, this has cost implications. The question is: can the modern church afford to adjust to the new conditions and afford the costs associated with the prevailing conditions? That remains unclear.

### Ecological

In response to the ecosystem, churches are compelled to act responsibly and practice green economy habits. It goes without saying that during gatherings — especially large ones — churches have often been guilty of polluting the environment through littering<sup>33</sup>. There is also an issue of noise pollution, which Jariwala, Syed,

<sup>29</sup> Chan D. *The Emergence of Pentecostalism and the Afro-Surinamese Worldview*. Tyndale Theological Seminary. 2010. P. 1–12.

<sup>30</sup> Antonites A. Schoeman W. J., van Deventer, W. F. J. *A critical analysis of social inNvation: A qualitative exploration of a religious organisation*. HTS Teologiese Studies // Theological Studies. 2019. N 75(4). P. 1–12. Doi: 10.4102/hts.v75i4.5282.

<sup>31</sup> Cardenas N. C. *COVID-19 Emergency Vaccine Task Force: Enhancing EU and US Strategic Interconnectivity Approach on Inter-regional Blocs' Vaccination Programs* // *Journal of Public Health-Oxford*. 2021. Sep 25. DOI: 10.1093/pubmed/fdab293.

<sup>32</sup> Newman B. *The Burdens of Church History in the Middle Ages* // *Church History*. 2014. N 83(4). P. 1009–1013.

<sup>33</sup> Liu K., Lin B. *Research on Influencing Factors of Environmental Pollution*

Minarva, Pandya and Gajera<sup>34</sup> suggest is a challenge in most cities around the world. Noise pollution may serve as a nuisance to those communities within the areas surrounding the churches. Hence, Liu and Lin<sup>35</sup> advocate a comprehensive environmental pollution index. The latter is intended to increase compliance for many organizations, including churches. This point will be discussed further in the next section, where the legal aspects are discussed. Moreover, the use of natural resources such as wood and paper in the production of wooden furniture, books, bibles and other related products makes the church one of the largest consumers of such natural resources in the world. Harstad<sup>36</sup> warns of deforestation resulting from paper cultivation, while Abman, Lundberg and Ruta<sup>37</sup> advocate environmental preservation, especially during trade agreements.

The increasing use of electrical or electronic gadgets/devices, such as e-books, audio books and audio bibles, contributes towards the preservation of the environment<sup>38</sup>. That said, this may pose a challenge for the older generation of congregants who find it difficult to adjust from using hard copies to electronic copies. Therefore, it is incumbent on church managers to find a balance between the traditional way of Doing things and embracing green economy practices within the church.

To this end, the church must be cognisant of the fact that all its actions, especially those that are likely to violate the environmental protocols, may have severe legal implications.

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in China: A Spatial EcoNmetric Analysis // *Journal of Cleaner Production*. 2019. Vol. 206(1). P. 356–364. Doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.09.194.

<sup>34</sup> Jariwala H. J., Syed H. S., Pandya M. J., Gajera Y. M. Nise Pollution & Human Health: A Review. In *Nise and Air Pollutions: Challenges and Opportunities*. Ahmedabad, India, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Liu K., Lin B. Research on Influencing Factors of Environmental Pollution in China: A Spatial EcoNmetric Analysis // *Journal of Cleaner Production*. 2019. Vol. 206(1). P. 356–364. Doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.09.194.

<sup>36</sup> Harsta B. TechNlogy and Time Inconsistency // *Journal of Political EcoNmy*. 2020. Vol. 128(7). P. 2653–2689. Doi: 10.1086/254195.

<sup>37</sup> Abman R., Lundberg C., Ruta M. The Effectiveness of Environmental Provisions in Regional Trade Agreements. World Bank. 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Monti L., Vincenzi M., Mirri S., Pau G., Salomoni P. Rave Guard: A Nise Monitoring Platform Using Low-end Microphones and Machine Learning // *Sensors Journal*. 2020. N 20(19). Doi: 10.3390/s20195583.

## Legal

Churches are required to act within the ambit of the law. For churches to be fully registered, policy documents such as the church's constitution, among other things, need to be submitted to the relevant government and non-government entities. It is also incumbent upon churches to update and scrutinize their constitution frequently, as this is a legally binding document. The constitution of the church can not infringe neither the laws of the country, nor the laws of the Bible. That is why the Bible states that everyone must respect those in authority in their respective countries<sup>39</sup>. The South African law is largely based on the Roman-Dutch law<sup>40</sup>. With a church constitution in place, it is easier for disputes to be resolved, even within the court system. The municipal bylaws also regulate places where churches can exist<sup>41</sup>.

In certain municipalities and districts, churches are often compelled to act with due consideration of communities that may not be church members. This means that aspects such as noise pollution, parking spaces and territories need to be taken into consideration<sup>42</sup>. In essence, church managers must act in accordance with the bylaws at all times. To this end, they must familiarize themselves with the legal prescripts that govern the church and, when necessary, seek legal advice on how to remain within the ambit of the law. This will enable the church to be seen as a respecter of the law, which is consistent with Bible teachings.

### EMERGING VIEWS OF STRATEGY IN RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

As the environmental conditions change, strategy may also have to change. As strategy changes, so do all the organization's processes. This calls for new ways of Doing things and agile approaches to Doing business. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic restricted

<sup>39</sup> New Living Translation (NLT). Genesis 2 & Romans 13.

<sup>40</sup> Quach T. Legal System and Sources of Law. South African Law Library Guide. 2020 // URL: [unimelb.libguides.com/c.php?g=929734&p=6718215](http://unimelb.libguides.com/c.php?g=929734&p=6718215)

<sup>41</sup> Walker C. Landmarked: Land claims and land restitution in South Africa. Johannesburg, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Rogerson C. Mega-events and small enterprise development: the 2010 FIFA World Cup opportunities and challenges. Development of Southern Africa. 2009.

human beings around the globe from gathering together in large numbers<sup>43</sup>. Many countries across the globe enforced such regulations. As in other countries, in South Africa many businesses and places of public gatherings, such as churches, were forced into hard lockdown, following the National State of Disaster declaration by government<sup>44</sup>. These unprecedented environmental conditions prompted churches to revisit their strategic management processes. More agile, progressive and emerging strategic approaches had to be adopted to position churches as entities that still catered for the needs of modern and sophisticated congregants. This inevitably prompted those in church management to make critical and none-repetitive decisions<sup>45</sup>.

Regarding emerging strategies, Lynch<sup>46</sup> alludes to these as a non-linear and often messy process that strives for agility and responsiveness and the components of which may not be as structured as those involved in traditional strategic approaches. Kim and Mauborgne<sup>47</sup> propose the blue ocean strategy (BOS) as part of the emerging strategies. With BOS, competition becomes irrelevant, as the organization creates its own existence, space and focus on value creation for its key role-players<sup>48</sup>.

The emerging strategies are credited for their flexibility and are thus ideal in volatile environments. It is for this reason that Dixit, Singh, Dhir and Dhir<sup>49</sup> advocate for creativity and strategic thinking for modern organizations. Given the unprecedented environ-

<sup>43</sup> Lone S. A., Aijaz Ahmad A., COVID-19 Pandemic — an African Perspective. *Emerging Microbes & Infections*. 2020. Vol. 9:1. P. 1300–1308. Doi: 10.1080/22221751.2020.1775132

<sup>44</sup> Cardenas N. C. COVID-19 Emergency Vaccine Task Force...

<sup>45</sup> Pauw J. C., Woods G., van der Linde G. J. A., Fourie D., Visser C. B. *Managing Public Money-systems for the South*. Johannesburg, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Lynch R. *Strategic Management*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. London, 2018 // URL: [www.pearsoned.co.uk/lynch](http://www.pearsoned.co.uk/lynch) (28.10.2021).

<sup>47</sup> Kim W., Mauborgne R. *Eight Core Principles of Blue Ocean Strategy: The Fundamentals that will Jump Start Your Strategy Development Process*. Cambridge, 2014 // URL: <http://www.blueoceanstrategy.com/blog/8-core-principles-of-blue-ocean-strategy/> (28.10.2021).

<sup>48</sup> Yip M., Phaal R., Probert D. R. Stakeholder engagement in early stages product-service system development for healthcare informatics // *Engineering Management Journal*. 2014. Vol. 26(3). P. 52–62.

<sup>49</sup> Dixi S., Singh S., Dhir S., Dhir S. Antecedents of Strategic Thinking and Its Impact on Competitive Advantage // *Journal of Indian Business Research (JIBR)*. 2021. DOI: 10.1108/JIBR-08-2020-0262.

mental conditions that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, the emerging strategies could have enabled churches to thrive, regardless of the challenges. The next section discusses the methodology and design of this research.

### Methodology

During this research, a qualitative method was followed, involving a total of 26 participants. The participants were drawn from five Gauteng Provincial regions within South Africa consisted of persons who are actively involved in church management affairs. These church managers were responsible for the strategic planning, implementation and control of their respective church organizations. Thus, church managers constituted the units of analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and were then transcribed and processed with the Atlas.ti data analysis tool.

Data were further grouped, coded and classified according to categories, inferences and statements. Sentences and paragraphs were organized for sense-making purposes. This contributed to the findings of this research. Relevant quotations from participants were highlighted to answer the research questions and thus address the research objectives.

### Findings

As a point of departure, information on the participants and their demographics needs to be highlighted. Table 1 below displays such information to help the reader to understand the type of people who participated in this research.

Table 1 profiles the participants of the research in terms of their gender, race, region of Gauteng Province, years of experience (as church manager(-s)), highest qualifications and denominations. It is noteworthy that only four participants were females; this suggests that the church management tasks are still male-dominated. There was an even spread across African and white persons. Persons from 18 years and above were eligible to participate in this research. Even though not explicitly reflected in the above table, there was also an even spread of participants in terms of age. It is to be noted

Table 1. Details of participants. Source: Primary data (2020–2021)

Number of order	Gender	Race	Region	Years of experience	Qualifications	Major denomination
1	Male	White	Tshwane	2	Master of Science,	Protestant
2	Female	African	Tshwane	10	Bachelor of Theology	Protestant
3	Male	African	Johannesburg	13	Master of Art	Protestant
4	Male	African	Sedibeng	10	Doctor of Philosophy (Theological)	Protestant
5	Male	White	Sedibeng	8	Diploma in Theology, Diploma in Project Management	Adherent
6	Male	White	Sedibeng	20	BTEch in Marketing	Adherent
7	Female	African	Sedibeng	30	Doctor of Philosophy (Theological), BA in Psychology	Protestant
8	Male	African	Sedibeng	3	Master of Education	Protestant
9	Male	African	Sedibeng	5	Bachelor of Theology	Adherent
10	Male	Asian	Johannesburg	4	Bachelor of Theology	Adherent
11	Female	White	Sedibeng	Not disclosed	Master of Theology, MBA	Adherent
12	Male	White	Ekurhuleni	20	Bachelor of Theology	Adherent
					Diploma in Business Studies	Protestant
13	Male	African	Ekurhuleni	8	BA in Biblical Studies (current)	Adherent
					Honours Bachelor of Theology	Adherent

14	Male	African	Ekurhuleni	33	Master of Theology	Protestant
15	Male	African	Tshwane	27	Sales and Marketing Certificate	Protestant
16	Male	African	Tshwane	2,5	Honours Bachelor of Theology, Honours BA Ancient History and Diploma in Organizational Development	Protestant
17	Male	African	Tshwane	17	Doctor of Philosophy (Religious Studies), Church Development & 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,	Protestant
21	Male	White	West Rand	10	Diploma in Building a Local Church Undisclosed	Protestant
22	Male	African	West Rand	1 year and 2 months	Bachelor of Theology (2nd year)	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

*MAJOR SOCIO-ECO-POLITICAL CHANGES THAT MAY POSE CHALLENGES ...*



that the older the potential participant, the better the chances were for them to participate in this research.

### Central research question

*Question 1: Which major socio-eco-political changes were observed during your (i.e. the church manager's) tenure?*

*Question 2: How did you (i.e. the church manager) deal with the major socio-eco-political changes during your tenure?*

The first question required the managers' answers to cover the time from when they assumed their roles within their respective church organizations until the time of the interview. So, within this timeframe, the researcher wanted to discover what strategic changes they had observed in their respective environments.

For the second question, the participants were asked how they dealt with such strategic changes. Their responses were divided into the internal and external environments, as well as resource availability.

The following responses describe how these central questions were answered during the interviews:

Those priests whom we grew up with as priests in the diocese have retired, some have died. So, in terms of that, things have changed. We have seen a good number of younger clergies coming on board, new vocations. Yes, and one of the things that has changed also is how we do church and great impact is now during Covid (COVID-19 pandemic). — Participant 4

Participant 4 mentioned changes in personnel as the major changes that have affected his church in a negative way. The participant mentioned that he had lost experienced members of the management team because of retirement, death, reassignment and departure for other reasons. In strategic management terms, this issue inevitably has a significant effect on the successful implementation of the strategy in place. This matter is highlighted under people barriers and management barriers (Barrows, 2009). Without knowledgeable people, the strategic trajectory of the church may be adversely affected. This participant further alluded to the effects of the recent changes.

How we do church. For example, how we minister to people online. And how do we encourage this online giving and avoid bringing hard

cash to church. So, a lot has changed, a lot has changed in the church.  
— Participant 4

There were also noticeable changes in the style of worship and gathering patterns. Owing to the restrictions on gatherings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the church had to adapt to the new ways of worshipping, including holding virtual church worship services. It was not clear if this approach was accepted by all church members, especially the elderly and those with limited or no access to IT infrastructure. That is where the principles of innovation and stakeholder engagement needed to be balanced.

Yah, external environment it's ah, politics, they are affecting the church almost every day. For example, where we are now at Emfuleni where the municipality that is kind of like dead and somehow as a priest you find yourself having to phone the mayor, to say the sewerage has been like this the whole week or what, the ward councillor is not available and so on. — Participant 4

In the above comment, the participant alluded to the intricacies he had to deal with political environment. Service delivery failure affected the wider communities and the church negatively. This seems to suggest that church managers were compelled to fulfil whatever role was needed, including environmental analysts, who were joint problem-solvers alongside the state and its officials. This is just one of the unusual roles that modern church managers are confronted with. The aforesaid participant also went on to explain how resources and their availability have changed.

Resources are a huge challenge. I would say especially for our churches in the townships where we lack resources, churches in the rural it's worse. Churches in the former suburbs like your Van der Bijl Park, Vereeniging, Mondeor, churches who use to be white churches, white congregation, they are also affected now because things have changed. People have relocated, people have moved, the culture of giving in the church. The church is the major fundraising of the church is people. So, when people are being retrenched, when people go through salary cuts, when people are unemployed, when we have a lot of child-headed families, so we have very limited resources. — Participant 4

This participant alluded to the challenges that the churches face regarding significant reductions in resources. Urban and economic

migration of church members who were volunteering their skills and were economically active have depleted the church's human and financial resources, as well as other related resources.

Inevitably, this seemed to reduce the required resources to fulfil the church's strategic agenda. Another challenge raised was the issue of child-headed homes within the church. This situation, which is compounded by the ageing church population, is straining the already stretched financial and skilled human resources of the church. As a result, modern church managers must constantly scan their internal environments, anticipate challenges, and thereby mitigate any possible unfavourable impacts. The inability of the church to generate resources could threaten their sustainability prowess and prospects.

Another participant mentioned her frustration regarding how her church was co-managed.

In first place, I would say the management of the church was a little bit, you know, confined in itself, not communicating well with the members of the church, you know, uhm, you know, even as a manager yourself sometimes we did not meet regularly and make decisions together. You'll find somebody Doing something you don't know, ene [and] you'd have no platform to raise your concerns at the end of the day. So, at the beginning the management was very difficult for the past ten years. A lot of changes took place on how we manage the church. — Participant 7

This participant highlighted the challenges that the church management team had to deal with, one of them being poor communication among the management team members, as well as with the rest of the church members. Furthermore, there appeared to be lack of synergy in communication and actions among the management team, which caused frustration and confusion. These actions were contrary to the literature, which has suggested that strategy be properly communicated for it to be properly implemented<sup>50</sup>.

The church management team was supposed to play a leading role by providing clear strategic direction and cultural influence to suit the organisation's strategic agenda. These are clearly articulated as

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<sup>50</sup> Gratton P. Organization Development and Strategic Planning for Non-profit Organizations... ; Lynch R. Strategic management.

key principles of management theory. Participant 7 continued as follows:

More than anything, our churches especially those in townships are usually in poverty. Our church structures are not up to standard, but now there are some changes, and you know other churches are really slow in changing with latest developments. Like now we had the challenge with the Covid, the pandemic just affected a lot of things. But we had to put strategies about how people get sermons, how people get involved by using the Facebook, the group chats and whatever, but we saw a very big gap there as management that things didn't take a good direction so much. The only thing is only a few people were exposed to that so we had to incorporate the older people, form group chats so that information about funerals, about whatever can be disseminated on the members of the church but not hundred percent. — Participant 7

The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on gatherings seem to have negatively affected churches in general and the participant's church in particular. This exposed weaknesses in the management of their church. Processes of scenario planning and special alert control may have been missing. As a result, the church may have been unprepared to mitigate the unfavourable environmental conditions caused by COVID-19. Nevertheless, improvisation and adjustments had to be put in place to continue with the church agenda, using new modes of communication, most of which were virtual. This prompted the management to find other ways to accommodate church members who did not have access to such communication platforms. Some of the affected were the elderly. This was not surprising because many churches were confronted with the dilemma of modernising, while at the same time accommodating their ageing population by not being seen to be tampering with the church's identity and traditions. However, such a balancing act was not proving easy to execute. This participant raised further concerns about the unavailability of requisite resources. The intricacies of dealing with complex management dynamics did not spare this and other churches.

As I had indicated, the resources especially the buildings as I had indicated to you but sometimes our churches are not friendly in so many ways. For example, we had to make different services just to accommodate because we have very large numbers but little

development in our structures because as a church, we don't get help from other organisations, even the government doesn't support us. We have to do it on our own. So, some of the changes, the maintenance even, just to maintain the church, the running of the church it is not always perfect, there are challenges.

And sometimes there is lack of attendance especially if there's a project in fundraise or something that needs to be done, there is only a few that will remain but the strategies that we do in terms of when there is a fundraising, we start with fundraising before the event so that the monies are in before the event takes place. — Participant 7

This participant alluded to the limited resources that her church was confronted with. Among other things, the physical capacity of their church was not ideal to accommodate larger crowds. Although this was not ideal, in mitigation, their management had to resort to hosting church services at different times to accommodate the growing church population.

Moreover, the church struggled to attract the requisite revenue whenever they embarked on fundraising initiatives. The participant alluded to lack of support from both government and the private sector, stating that they had to depend on voluntary offerings and contributions from ordinary church members. Yet this approach did not appear to assist much in that the church membership was engulfed by poverty. Consequently, during fundraising days, the attendance would normally be poor. In addition, it would appear that the existing contributions were insufficient for the church to fulfil its strategic agenda. As a result, the management team had to come up with creative ways to collect revenue. This suggests that in this instance, the church management were solution driven as it is incumbent upon modern managers irrespective of their organizational type.

The next, participant 10 proceeded to provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges that confronted his organization:

For the past four years there have not really been any significant changes in the sense of administration. Uhm, there have only been changes in the sense of day to day affairs as such. The reason being our circumstances have changed over the past four years. This has been existent in this country for the last 20 years. We are registered as an NPO in 2010, but we have been a recognised from our mother

church since 1990. So, since 1990 obviously as every organisation for the first several years it was pretty much ad hoc, you know. People just gathered around, they just engaged on the daily affairs and that was pretty much it. But then it was after we were registered as an NPO it became necessary for us to have our proper yearly rules, financial statements and etc. Uhm that was pretty much what was put into place, now it's been over 10 years.

Today however, the second generation of them are mostly based in the major cities, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban etc. So, there has been a shift in the number of members where they are, so those things have affected our daily administrative services but apart from that the general structure has not really changed. — Participant 10

This participant informed the researcher about the progress that had been made in his church, which was considered a traditional church that maintained an Asian following. Most of their members were migrants from Asia who have been in South Africa for almost 50 years. The participant was managing the second generation of migrants and there seemed to be adjustment challenges, especially in terms of the laws and culture of the country. The participant also alluded to setbacks that slowed their progress. The political economy was at the heart of their challenges. The church was not always able to deal with stringent migration laws and this affected the church membership. By extension, the church's strategic agenda and resources were adversely affected. This demonstrates how the environmental variables and changes may have adverse effects on modern churches. This requires church managers to anticipate such challenges and mitigate them. The participant then continued to provide the detailed challenges facing his church and denomination in terms of the external environment. The PESTEL model variable became apparent.

In terms of external environment uhm, I would say primarily the fact that South African borders are closed off to new immigrants coming here. I mean there are job opportunities, possibilities etc. But it's not really an open gate and so therefore, if you were to compare it to other international places say Europe, America or Australia etc., you have pretty much close to zero immigrants coming here. The possibility of our church growing in terms of numbers are very minimal. So, it's

only our members, our existing members, maybe their children who have their families of their own that are registered as new members but essentially, they are part of the children of their families. There are no new members, if we had a hundred members ten years ago, today it would pretty much be them and their children as a separate unit. Apart from that, the economic situation of the country. So, let's say five years ago we had a lot more members/youngsters but because the economy of the country is not really stable, a lot of them have immigrated for New Zealand, Australia, Canada or whatever. So, this has affected our, you know, the standing of our church again. Firstly, there are not a lot of people coming in, secondly the people that here are going out as well and then thirdly the biggest external factor we had to face was the council restrictions etc. It was then in 2016 when we managed to buy this property and the application for building a church... this is just our hall that we have temporarily well not temporarily.

So, the church is actually yet to be constructed and it's the council protocols in place that have actually delayed this, so we put our application in February 2017 and our application was only approved in August 2019. So, it took two and half years for the council of Joburg to say «okay fine you can build your church». And since then, we had to go back with the building plan etc., etc., all the other factors. Like you know with any other organisations, to construct something and then if you have an exist building you want to use for a different purpose it's quite easy. — Participant 10

The participant alluded to the challenges that affect his church and that brought about changes in their planning and implementation patterns. At the heart of the concerns raised was the relationship between the church and the state. It became apparent that these relations jeopardise the existence of the church. It is to be noted that the church was a member of a denomination that is traditional, conservative and of Asian origin. This meant that the majority of the church members were of Asian descent. Given its traditional style of worship, the church thus attracted more members of Asian descent. That said, the current immigration laws seem to make it difficult for it to grow its membership from people who might have arrived from some Asian countries. Because of the South African migration policies, the church is unable to grow its membership with persons of Asian origin. Moreover, owing to the limited employment

opportunities resulting from the ailing South African economy, some members of the church had to migrate to growing economies.

Unemployment among church members also prompted them to migrate for survival purposes. This has strained the economic life of the church, which might mean that it is unable to meet its financial obligations in the future. This reality poses a real threat to the sustainability of the church. Another example of strained relations between the church and the state involved the regulations, compliance issues and recognition of the church as an NPO. The applications made by the church for formal recognition and to receive a demarcated a piece of land for worship purposes took longer than the church had anticipated. This is one example of how the regulatory environment exerts an influence, even on NPOs such as churches. Churches must remain vigilant to respond to any unfavourable realities within their environment. The participant then explained the mitigating measures that his church undertook.

So, in terms of resource availability, we've actually had a major change in the past two years. So, like I said we had this property bought in 2017, however we applied for the permission of the church but then that took longer than expected.

So, at the moment, we have a set subscription amount per owning member so if a husband and wife are both working, they are expected to contribute towards that subscription. So, this builds up to our major income for you know, for every purpose not just for running costs but capital cost also. — Participant 10

Participant 10 continued to comment on changes in their resource availability. Even though their revenue was decreasing, the church made efforts to secure themselves some land and some funds to erect a church building. This appeared to constitute an accumulation of tangible resources that could position it to serve its constituents better. The main source of contributions towards the church building came from the working members of the church. Even though the rate of unemployment in the country affected their marginal propensity to contribute, this did not deter those who were employed from Doing so. Thus, the economic situation of the country had a bearing on the church members' abilities to contribute to the economic life thereof.



The next participant explained the internal challenges and changes that he observed within his church, denomination and society.

I think, I think one of the major changes that I've seen is just the participation of lay people in the strategic planning of the church, much of our work is based on voluntary, you know. I think in the last 20 years... I think there is a decline in the participation of people I don't know if it's because we are becoming more professional in the way that we manage the church organization or if it's just because of lack of time you know, I think people seem to not have time that they had 20 years ago to what they not to be able to participate in the areas that are beyond the morning worship service on the Sunday. — Participant 20

This participant alluded to a more inclusive approach and participation of ordinary church members in developing the strategic plans of the church. He also observed a decline in the human resources who would volunteer to manage the church. This seemed to put a strain on the few volunteers that were still available to serve. The level of volunteers' involvement also seemed to suggest that other pressing commitments took precedence over church responsibilities. Church members appeared to focus on economic activities that would enable them to generate revenue. This presents a challenge for the modern church and its strategic agenda.

It would thus appear that the church members participated more in setting strategy and less on its execution. This may have affected the morale of strategy implementors. The ambivalence of volunteering and reward systems within churches seemed apparent.

In the light of all the responses from participants, the next section seeks to summarize the findings of this research.

## DISCUSSION

The environment has been changing very rapidly in recent times. For instance, there have been several disease outbreaks, such as listeriosis and Ebola, and now the COVID-19 pandemic.

There have also been outbreaks of public violence and changes in political leadership and policies. All these factors placed citizens and entities in a predicament and churches were not spared, as noted during the fieldwork interviews aimed at collecting information on the changes that church managers have observed throughout their

tenure. It became apparent that most of these changes were affecting churches negatively. The pertinent issues are illustrated in Figure 1. This is followed by a brief summary of the findings of this research.

Based on the feedback from participants, four major elements were identified, namely skills sets, shrinking resources, political and legal issues. The first two elements affected the church internally, whereas the last two were effects of the external environment. The participants gave accounts of changes they had observed from the beginning of their tenure to date. While a few participants alluded to an increase in professionalism, formalization of processes and accumulation of financial and other resources, most of them mentioned challenges that resulted from such changes. Internally, participants raised concerns about the lack and loss of skilled church members, who would have otherwise enhanced the strategic management processes of their churches. At the heart of this challenge was the growing reality of urban and economic migrations. Most skilled church members often migrated to other regions in search of employment and other economic opportunities, leaving their churches with a void in terms of requisite skills. Over and above the skills that these churches lost when such members departed, revenue in the form of tithes and offerings was also lost. Some of the skilled members who left these churches also had the ability of raise funds through their entrepreneurial prowess. This change and challenge led to liquidity changes and challenges within the church, meaning that the churches were unable to meet their financial obligations.

Regarding external changes observed, churches were confronted with a volatile regulatory atmosphere stemming from both the political and legal environments. The municipal bylaws and the Department of Social Development seemed to have become hostile to some church managers. Issues of noise pollution, church registration as NPOs, demarcations and tax laws were some of the constant changes that churches found to be challenging; these went as far as threatening their future relevance and existence. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic regulations restricted mass gatherings, which affected all churches, but especially the megachurches.

The government was compelled to enforce these regulations strictly and any violators were warned that they would be fined or

the managers thereof jailed. Such changes challenged the traditional ways that churches functioned. Given how the participants responded to the questions, it was apparent that they did not fully analyze their environments, nor did they have the requisite capacity to deal with these challenges. This indicated that the church managers may have lacked the strategic mindset and the capacity to analyze environmental trends. Based on these findings, it is clear that churches may need to change their position and how they interact with both their environment and key stakeholders. Failing to do so may mean that they are no longer strategically relevant in respect of their key stakeholders. It goes without saying that no organization can thrive — or even survive — if it loses touch with its key stakeholders, and churches are no different.

#### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

From both the literature and the primary data, it became apparent that churches as NPOs, are subject to environmental intricacies that may threaten their existence, as it is the case with all other entities. While dealing with internal changes and the associated challenges these pose, churches are confronted with the need to reposition themselves in society. Clearly, some of the environmental realities are beyond the churches' control. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon church managers to find practical, strategic and sustainable ways to mitigate such challenges. Churches need to structure themselves in an organized and professional manner, given the hostile environment in which they exist and the sophisticated needs of modern congregants. The use of modern technology to analyze the environment and service their key stakeholders is no longer a luxury for churches, but a pressing need. This means that churches ought to invest in a skills audit and capacity development of their current and future managers.

Moreover, the strategic mindset of church managers and the technological infrastructure of churches for strategic management and environmental analysis need to be in place. In addition, the harmonious co-existence between the church and the state needs to be carefully managed and monitored so that it remains harmonious. It is also to be noted that churches would benefit a great deal if they

were to engage and involve the younger generation in their strategic agenda, management team and strategy implementation. This would provide a good succession plan and respond to the sophisticated needs of younger congregants. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that new initiatives never violate biblical principles nor church policy documents, such as church orders, constitutions, rule books or canons. Moreover, these initiatives should not be in conflict with the laws of the country. Then the church and the state could fulfil complementary roles, instead of viewing each other as opposing forces. In all these initiatives, ordinary citizens stand to benefit.

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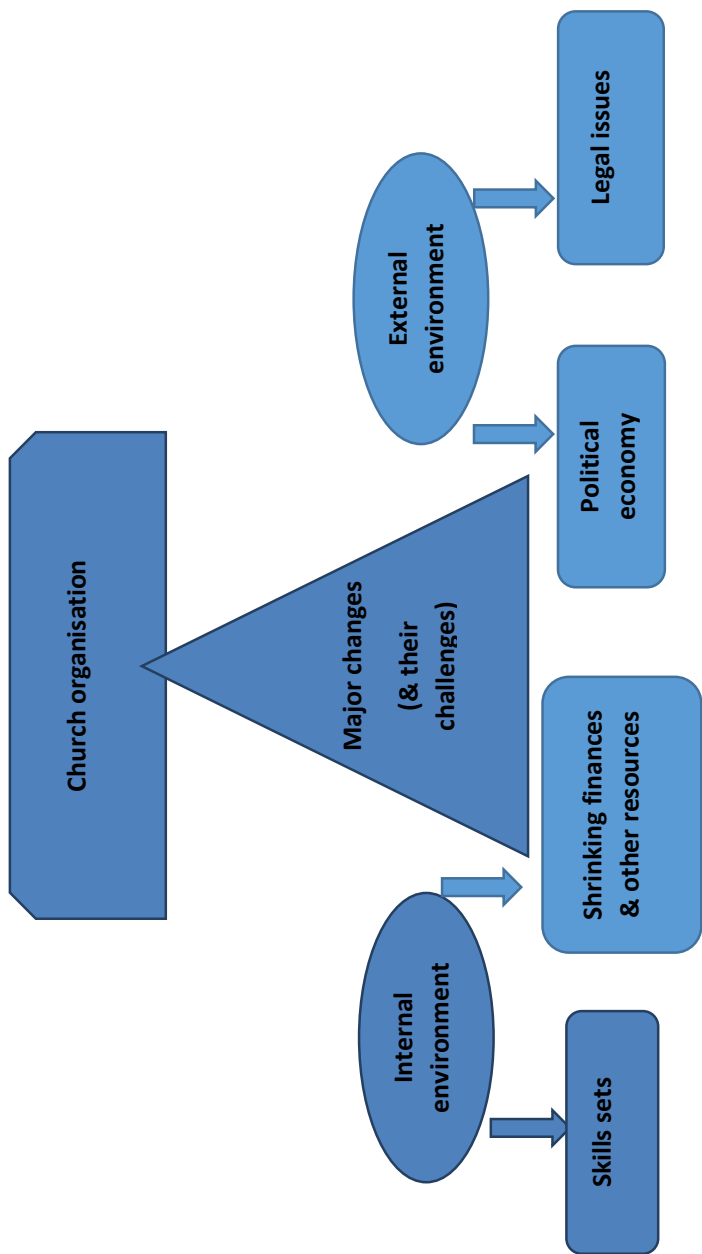


Figure 1. Major socio-eco-political changes observed by modern churches. Source: Primary data (2020–2021)