

The Influence of Planning Horizon on Church Growth in Harare, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT: *The research aimed to determine the impact of planning horizon on the growth of churches in Harare, Zimbabwe, looking at both mainline and Pentecostal churches. An explanatory research design was used. A multi-stage stratified random sampling was used to select the study participants who were adult congregants and church leaders from two strata, one stratum being made up of mainline churches and the other one by Pentecostal churches. Multi-stage stratified random sampling was deemed appropriate for the research as it ensured that there was representativeness within and across the strata. Data was collected from systematically selected congregants and church leaders in selected churches through interviewer-administered questionnaires using Open Datakit, a mobile data collection platform. Data analysis revealed that there was evidence of strategic planning (mean score of 3.38) as part of strategic management practices in both Mainline and Pentecostal churches. Additionally, the findings show that the planning horizon affects the growth of churches (p -value < 0.001). Thus the adoption of planning horizon as a strategic management practice is crucial to enhance church growth. On policy and practical implications, theological studies could incorporate strategic management concepts.*

KEYWORDS: *church, church growth, planning horizon, strategic management*

I. INTRODUCTION

The planning horizon is part of strategic management practices. It is crucial to enhance strategic implementation by organizations. The planning horizon is believed to be a tool that can be used to set standards and targets meant to deliver value by enabling strategic planning and by enhancing organizational performance in today's competitive environment (Ittner & Larcker, 2003; Widener, 2007). There are five strategic management practices namely, environmental scanning intensity, locus of planning, planning horizon, planning flexibility and strategic control. The current study looked at one out of the five practices, i.e., planning horizon to get more insights into whether it contributes to church growth.

There are studies and research on church organizations that demonstrate that there has been hesitancy by some church leaders to embrace formal management practices. There are several reasons for this, some of which include lack of training in formal management, and a belief that formal management systems are not biblical. Shah, et al (2000) proved that poor planning or lack of planning can contribute to many churches' failing to achieve their ministerial and organizational goals. Apart from that, the same study showed that lack of planning affected church growth with many churches reporting declining membership and attendance levels. Stevens et al (1996) postulated that strategic planning is the highest related topic in the field of leadership and management skills required by church pastors and other leadership. Despite these arguments, it is not known how far the Zimbabwean churches have gone in embracing the planning horizon as part of strategic management practices. Ndung'u (2016) postulated that there is limited evidence to show the impact of strategic management, in particular, planning horizon on the performance of Christian churches, especially in Africa. Hence there is a need to assess the extent to which the strategic management practices are implemented within the churches in Zimbabwe and how these practices could influence sustainable growth.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study was to establish the effect of planning horizon on Church growth in Harare, Zimbabwe.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

3.1 Planning Horizon

The planning horizon can be defined as a future period that is considered in planning by strategic leaders (Letycja, 2015; Das, 1987). The planning horizon can vary from less than one year to at least 5 years (Rhyne, 1985). To decide on the nature of strategies to formulate most organizations base this on the planning horizon. The time period of the planning can assist organizations to decide on the nature of the strategies to formulate and implement. Sometimes, the planning horizon is affected by the business environment with

turbulent environments characterised by short term plans and strategies. Though not much is known about the planning horizon for most churches, the current study would elucidate the nature of planning in these churches and whether that has any influence on their growth and sustainability.

3.2 Planning Horizon and Business Performance

Several authors postulated the effect of the planning horizon and business performance, especially in the private sector organizations. The function of planning comprises evolving mission statements and objectives as well as devising the activities to achieve them (Oyedijo, 2004). Arasa and K'Obonyo (2012) asserted that there is a positive association between strategic planning and organizational performance. They postulated that proper strategic planning would result in improved organizational performance. Al-Shammari and Hussein (2007) also assessed the influence of strategic planning and firm performance; they found that companies that engaged in strategic planning had better financial and performance than firms that were not implementing that. Mutindi, Namusonge, and Obwogi (2013) established that there is a significant correlation between strategic planning, strategic competitive positioning and organizational performance. From that assertion, it can be deduced that proper strategic planning could result in improved organizational performance measured by several dimensions such as increased market share, profitability among others. Taiwo and Fasogbon (2007) also came up with the same conclusion after studying the impact of strategic planning on organisational performance among First Bank branches in Lagos, Nigeria. They claimed that strategic planning improves organizational performance. Despite various evidence on the impact of strategic planning in the private sector organizations, there is limited evidence to suggest the same among churches. The evidence put forward could help substantiate the assertion that churches can also benefit from strategic planning. The current study sought to substantiate this claim.

3.3 Gaps in existing knowledge

Few known studies looked at strategic management implementation in churches. Though Liabotis (2007), postulated that the determination of the church's strategic direction has an influence on infrastructural growth he did not look at other aspects of church growth, which were considered by the current study. Additionally, there is limited evidence on the implementation of strategic management practices in Zimbabwean churches and how these can influence the growth of those churches. Some studies looked solely at leadership succession and styles (Nhumburudzi & Kurebwa, 2018; Mwenje, 2016). Though there could be a relationship between strategic management and leadership styles, these studies did not look at strategic management influences. The current study would develop new knowledge in strategic management implementation and influence, especially in Zimbabwean churches.

Chikhata, Makande and Madzivire (2020), postulated that strategic control affects the growth of churches. Strategic control is one of the strategic management practices that can be used by organizations including churches to enhance performance. The planning horizon should be tied to the socio-economic business environment. Chikhata, Makande and Madzivire (2020) further expounded that, churches like any other organization can be affected by the change in the socio-economic environment and thus they should employ appropriate strategies to remain viable and relevant. The paper did not espouse on planning horizon and its influence on church growth. To fill the existing gap and build upon the existing literature, this paper sought to establish the existence of a relationship between planning horizon and church growth.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An explanatory research design was used to carry out the study. The explanatory research design was chosen for this study because it helped the researchers to gain insight into whether there are any relationships between strategic control and the growth of churches as measured by the increase in membership, infrastructure, social ministries, financial (physical growth) and Interconnectedness of Humanity, Spiritual Identification, Relationship with God and Living with integrity (spiritual growth). The population for this study comprised congregants and pastors from both mainline and Pentecostal churches in Harare. A multi-stage stratified random sampling technique was used to draw 384 congregants, including pastors, from the total population. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale administered by Research Assistants using Open Data Kit (ODK), a mobile data collection platform. The collected data was uploaded to an encrypted cloud-based server. The response rate was 100%. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 23.

V. RESULTS/FINDINGS

This section presents the results from the research in line with the research objective.

5.1 Assessing Normality

The dataset was subjected to a normality test, assessing whether the data were normally distributed. The Shapiro-Wilk (S-W) test was used to assess the normality assumptions were not violated. The results of the normality test, using SPSS, Version 23.0, are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Results of the Shapiro-Wilk (S-W) test of normality of data

Composite variable	Shapiro-Wilk (S-W) test	
	Statistic	Significance
Planning horizon	.998	.221
Spiritual church growth	.992	.150
Physical church growth	.989	.089
Overall church growth	.994	.164

As Table 4.1 shows, the p-values for the composite variables were as follows: planning horizon 0.221; for spiritual church growth 0.150; for physical church growth 0.089; and overall church growth 0.164. All such values exceeded 0.05, and thus there is no difference between the distribution of this data set and the normal distribution. This implied that the dataset was normally distributed.

5.2 Reliability Test

The reliability test was conducted to test for internal consistency of the interviewer-administered questionnaire. Cronbach’s alpha test was used in this research and the results are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Reliability Statistics

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha (α)	Decision
Planning Horizon	4	0.704	Accept
Church growth(physical)	15	0.805	Accept
Church growth (spiritual)	64	0.933	Accept

As indicated in Table 4.2, Cronbach alpha coefficients are 0.704, 0.805 and 0.933 for planning horizon, physical church growth and spiritual church respectively. According to George and Mallery (2003), a Cronbach Alpha score above 0.7 is considered acceptable for most research studies. For each variable as shown in table 4.2, the assumptions of internal consistency were not violated, implying that the data was reliable as all the alpha values > 0.70.

5.3 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis was done from the collected data to determine the means and standard deviations for the variables obtained in the study. The results of the descriptive analysis are shown in table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Mean scores and standard deviations of church growth variables

Variable dimension	Mean	Standard deviation
Planning horizon	3.38	0.67
Physical Church growth	3.53	0.43
Expansion in the church’s infrastructure	3.31	0.69
Numerical increase in church membership	3.31	0.72
Expansion of the church’s social ministries	3.64	0.61
Increase in church’s financial resources	3.18	0.70
Spiritual Church growth	3.96	0.39
Interconnectedness of humanity	3.97	0.48
Spiritual identification	4.22	0.33
Relationship with God	3.92	0.47
Living One’s Philosophy of Life with Integrity	3.71	0.64

As highlighted in table 4.3, the mean score for the planning horizon was 3.38 with a standard deviation of 0.67. Additionally, the mean scores for the spiritual church growth were higher than those of the physical church growth. A paired sample t-test was conducted, and it was found that there was a significant difference between physical church growth and spiritual church growth (p-value <0.001). The mean scores obtained for the church growth variables ranged from 3.18 with a standard deviation of 0.70 being the lowest for the increase in financial resources to 4.22 being the highest mean, scored by spiritual identification with a standard deviation of 0.33. The low standard deviation (less than 1) showed that there was less variability from the mean for those variables.

5.4 Regression analysis

Regression analysis was done to assess the predictive relationship between planning horizon and church growth variables. The results in the tables below show the extent of the relationship between the planning horizon and the church growth variables

5.4.1 Planning Horizon and Overall Church Growth

The study also sought to assess the relationship between planning horizon and overall church growth. The results of this are shown in tables 4.4 – 4.9.

Table 4.4: Planning horizon model summary for overall church growth

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.206 ^a	0.043	0.040	0.34493

a. Predictors: (Constant), Planning horizon

The result of the model estimates for planning horizon and overall church are shown in Table 4.4. The result of the coefficient of determination (r square) was 0.043. The result of Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) was 0.206. The r-square value shows that the planning horizon explains 4.3% of the variability in the overall church growth with the correlation coefficient value showing a positive relationship between planning horizon and overall church growth.

Table 4.5: Planning horizon coefficients^a (against overall church growth)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients Beta	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.378	0.091		37.113	0.000
	Planning horizon	0.108	0.026	0.206	4.099	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Overall Church growth

The results of the beta coefficients for planning horizon and overall church growth are shown in table 4.5. The result of the intercept (β_0) was 3.38 while the result of β_1 (the model regression coefficient) was 0.108. The positive β_1 value implies that there is a positive relationship between planning horizon and overall church growth (p-value < 0.001). A unit increase in the planning horizon is expected to result in a 0.108 unit increase in overall church growth, implying that as the planning horizon increases, the overall church growth increases as well.

5.4.2 Planning Horizon and Spiritual Church Growth

The relationship between planning horizon and spiritual church growth was assessed and the results are shown in tables 4.6 and 4.7.

Table 4.6: Planning horizon model summary for spiritual church growth

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.251 ^a	0.063	0.060	0.38114

a. Predictors: (Constant), Planning horizon

Table 4.6 shows the result of the model estimates for planning horizon and spiritual church growth. The result of the coefficient of determination (r square) was 0.063. The result of Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) was 0.251. The R-square value of 0.063 implies that 6.3% of the variability of the spiritual church growth is explained by the planning horizon. The remaining 93.7% is explained by other factors.

Table 4.7: Planning horizon coefficients^a (against spiritual church growth)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients Beta	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.460	0.101		34.408	0.000
	Planning horizon	0.147	0.029	0.251	5.033	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Spiritual Church growth

The results of the beta coefficients for planning horizon and spiritual church growth are shown in table 4.7. The result of the intercept (β_0) was 3.46 while the result of β_1 (the model regression coefficient) was 0.147. The positive β_1 value implies that there is a positive association between planning horizon and spiritual church growth (p-value < 0.001).

5.4.3 Planning Horizon and Physical Church Growth

Table 4.8: Planning horizon model summary for physical church growth

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.109 ^a	0.012	0.009	0.42719

a. Predictors: (Constant), Planning horizon

The results of the model estimates for planning horizon and physical church growth are shown in Table 4.35. The result of the coefficient of determination (r square) was 0.012. The result of Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) was 0.109. The coefficient of determination value of 0.012 implies that 1.2% of the variability of the physical church growth is explained by the planning horizon.

Table 4.9: Planning horizon coefficients^a (against physical church growth)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.295	0.113		29.233	0.000
	Planning horizon	0.070	0.033	0.109	2.129	0.034

a. Dependent Variable: Physical Church growth

The results of the beta coefficients for planning horizon and physical church growth are shown in table 4.36. The result of the intercept (β_0) was 3.295 while the result of β_1 (the model regression coefficient) was 0.070. The positive β_1 value indicates a positive relationship between planning horizon and physical church growth ($p=0.034$).

5.5 Hypothesis Testing

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses.

4.4.1 Hypothesis 1

H_{01} : Planning Horizon does not influence spiritual church growth

Table 4.4: Planning horizon ANOVA²

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	3.680	1	3.680	25.329	0.000
Residual	54.912	378	0.145		
Total	58.592	379			

2. Dependent Variable: spiritual church growth

Predictors: (Constant), planning horizon

The p-value from the ANOVA table (table 4.4) < 0.001 ; this is less than 0.05 as such the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that the planning horizon affects the spiritual church growth.

H_{02} : Planning Horizon does not influence physical church growth

Table 4.5: Planning horizon ANOVA³

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	0.828	1	0.828	4.535	0.034
Residual	68.983	378	0.182		
Total	69.810	379			

3. Dependent Variable: physical church growth

Predictors: (Constant), planning horizon

The p-value from the ANOVA table (table 4.5) is 0.034, which is less than 0.05 as such the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that the planning horizon affects the physical church growth.

H_{03} : Planning Horizon does not influence overall church growth

Table 4.6: Planning horizon ANOVA¹

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	1.999	1	1.999	16.804	0.000
Residual	44.972	378	0.119		
Total	46.972	379			

1. Dependent Variable: overall church growth

Predictors: (Constant), planning horizon

The p-value from the ANOVA table (table 4.6) < 0.001 ; this is less than 0.05 as such the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that the planning horizon affects the overall church growth.

VI. DISCUSSION

The conducted research aimed to analyse the impact of the planning horizon on the growth of churches in Harare, Zimbabwe. The findings showed that the planning horizon affects both physical and spiritual church growth, though the percentage contribution in terms of explaining the variability in church growth was less than 10%. The arguments for the need for churches to engage in strategic planning has been supported by several scholars. This result is in line with the result of a study conducted by Al-Shammari and Hussein (2007) who assessed the effect of strategic planning and firm performance; they found that companies that engaged in strategic planning had better financial performance than organizations that were not applying that practice. Additionally, the result is in tandem with the research findings from a research by Kraus et al., (2006) who opined that strategic planning is one of the dimensions that are believed to be able to enhance employee's performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of organizational planning. Additionally, these results agree with the study by Arasa and K'Obonyo (2012) which showed that there was a positive correlation between strategic

planning and business performance. The results are also consistent with Mutindi, Namusonge, and Obwogi (2013), and Taiwo & Fasogbon (2010), who all postulated that strategic planning enhances organizational performance. The results reveal that the planning horizon should be considered as an important factor when formulating strategic plans for churches as organizations. Since there has not been enough literature to compare similar studies in churches, these findings are of paramount importance in strategic management implementation in churches. Additionally, the findings will add value to the existing body of knowledge.

VII. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study concludes that the planning horizon was significant in influencing church growth in Harare, Zimbabwe. According to the study results, the planning horizon has a small but positive contribution to the performance of churches as measured by growth in Harare, Zimbabwe. The results thus propose that strategic church leaders could contemplate embracing planning horizon as a factor in formulating strategic plans to enhance church performance in Harare, Zimbabwe. The adoption of planning horizon as a strategic management practice is crucial to enhance church growth. On policy and practical implications, theological studies could incorporate strategic management concepts. This would inculcate a strategic management culture among bible students, thus preparing them to be good strategic managers when they graduate as pastors.

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