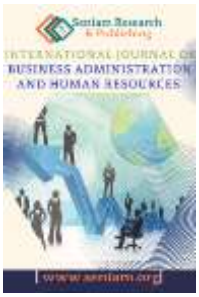
Sentam Research & Publishing

Vol. 2, Iss. 1 (2026)
Pages: 44-59

International Journal of Business Administration and Human Resources

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2026

Journal homepage: https://sentam.org/journals/ijbahr



Stratified Executive Influence on Corporate Strategy Implementation: Evidence from Soft Drink Manufacturers in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Despite extensive theorisation of the upper echelon perspective, empirical evidence on the relative weight of different top management team (TMT) characteristic clusters in driving corporate strategy implementation remains limited, particularly within Sub-Saharan African fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) contexts. This study introduces the Stratified Executive Influence Model (SEIM), a novel framework that reconceptualises TMT characteristics as operating across three hierarchical strata: a boundary stratum (demographic characteristics), an operational stratum (cognitive characteristics), and a dispositional stratum (psychological characteristics). Drawing on a quantitative cross-sectional survey of 58 top managers across eight soft drink manufacturers in Kenya, the study employs descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, analysis of variance, and multiple linear regression to test four hypotheses. Results show that psychological characteristics are the sole statistically significant predictor of strategy implementation success ($\beta = 0.525$, $p = 0.009$), while cognitive characteristics approach significance ($\beta = 0.218$, $p = 0.093$). Demographic characteristics exert no direct effect ($\beta = 0.132$, $p = 0.520$) but operate as boundary conditions that constrain the expression of higher-order traits. The combined model explains 28.3% of the variance in implementation success (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.283$, $F = 8.504$, $p < 0.001$). These findings validate the hierarchical logic of the SEIM and extend upper echelon theory by demonstrating that not all TMT characteristics exert equivalent influence on execution outcomes. The study further identifies severe gender homogeneity within Kenyan FMCG leadership (91.4% male) as a structural constraint on TMT diversity, with implications for talent management policy. The SEIM offers a portable analytical tool for TMT research in emerging market contexts where psychological and dispositional qualities of executives remain under-examined.

Keywords:
management team characteristics, corporate strategy implementation, upper echelon theory, emotional intelligence, FMCG, Stratified Executive Influence Model

INTRODUCTION

The failure of corporate strategy implementation constitutes one of the most persistent and costly challenges in strategic management. Estimates suggest that between 60% and 90% of strategies formulated by organisations are never successfully executed, with the primary causal factor attributed not to the content of the strategy itself but to the human actors responsible for its delivery (Mvubu et al., 2025; Nuwagaba et al., 2023). Within this frame of inquiry, the upper

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Published: June 27, 2026

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echelon perspective proposed by Hambrick and Mason (1984) has emerged as the dominant theoretical lens, positing that organisational outcomes reflect the cognitive and observable characteristics of those who occupy the apex of the corporate hierarchy. Over four decades of subsequent research has confirmed that top management team (TMT) characteristics, including demographic attributes, cognitive competencies, and psychological traits, meaningfully shape how strategies are conceived, communicated, and carried out (Hambrick, 2007; Mayende & Odhiambo, 2020; Oketch et al., 2020).

Within sub-Saharan Africa, and Kenya specifically, the empirical base on this relationship remains comparatively thin. Most available studies focus either on the public sector (Oketch et al., 2020, 2021) or on agricultural cooperatives (Mayende & Odhiambo, 2020), leaving the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) manufacturing sector largely unexamined. This is a notable gap given that Kenya hosts one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding soft drink markets in sub-Saharan Africa, with the carbonated drinks segment alone estimated at US$ 320 million in 2018, representing the largest share in the East African region (Oniwe et al., 2019). The sector is characterised by intense multinational competition alongside a proliferating cohort of domestic manufacturers, all of whom depend critically on effective strategy implementation to sustain market position. Understanding which dimensions of TMT characteristics most powerfully govern implementation success in this context carries direct significance for human resource strategy and talent management practice.

A further limitation in extant research concerns theoretical parsimony. The standard application of upper echelon theory treats demographic, cognitive, and psychological TMT characteristics as parallel and coequal predictors of organisational outcomes. However, this flat treatment conceals important differences in how each cluster influences execution: demographic characteristics establish boundary conditions on managerial discretion, cognitive competencies operationalise that discretion into execution capacity, and psychological traits govern the proximate motivational and interpersonal behaviours through which strategies are ultimately delivered. These are not parallel relationships; they are hierarchical ones. The present study addresses this gap by introducing the Stratified Executive Influence Model (SEIM), which reconceptualises TMT influence on strategy implementation as operating across three distinct strata of decreasing abstraction and increasing proximate effect.

The primary objective of this study is to assess the stratified effects of TMT demographic, cognitive, and psychological characteristics on corporate strategy implementation success among soft drink manufacturers in Kenya. Four hypotheses are tested, examining the individual and joint predictive power of each stratum. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: the literature review presents the theoretical foundations of the SEIM and develops the hypotheses; the methodology section describes the research design, sample, instrument, and analytical approach; the results section presents descriptive, correlational, and inferential findings; the discussion interprets these findings against the SEIM and the existing literature; and the conclusion summarises the theoretical and practical contributions while acknowledging limitations and proposing future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Upper Echelon Theory: Foundations and Extensions

Upper echelon theory, first articulated by Hambrick and Mason (1984) in their seminal contribution to the Academy of Management Review, advances the proposition that organisational strategies and performance outcomes are partially predicted by the background characteristics of senior executives. The central mechanism is cognitive filtration: faced with environments of irreducible complexity, executives interpret strategic

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situations through personalised cognitive lenses shaped by their experiences, values, and personalities, and these filtered interpretations drive strategic choice (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Because direct measurement of managerial cognition was methodologically impractical, the original formulation relied on observable demographic proxies, principally age, education, tenure, and functional background, as surrogates for underlying cognitive and psychological dispositions.

Hambrick (2007) revisited and updated the theory, emphasising that the predictive power of TMT characteristics on strategic outcomes is moderated by the level of managerial discretion available within a given industry and institutional context. Where discretion is high, as in competitive consumer goods markets, the idiosyncratic characteristics of senior managers exert proportionally greater influence on strategic outcomes. This theoretical refinement is particularly relevant in the Kenyan FMCG context, where market dynamism and relatively thin institutional constraints afford individual managers considerable latitude in how strategies are shaped and executed. Subsequent extensions of the theory have sought to disaggregate and rank the TMT characteristic clusters, with a growing body of evidence suggesting that psychological and cognitive attributes exert more proximate effects on execution than demographic characteristics, which tend to operate as antecedent conditions (Oketch et al., 2021; Mvubu et al., 2025).

A persistent critique of upper echelon theory concerns its reliance on demographic proxies as substitutes for unmeasured psychological constructs. Critics have noted that the demographic-to-outcome pathway is theoretically underspecified: the mechanism by which age or education translates into implementation behaviour is rarely articulated with precision (Hambrick, 2007). More recent scholarship has responded by measuring psychological and cognitive characteristics directly rather than inferring them from demographic observables, a methodological evolution that this study adopts. The present paper therefore draws on and contributes to both the original upper echelon formulation and its psychologically enriched successors.

Demographic Characteristics and Strategy Implementation

Demographic characteristics constitute the most extensively studied cluster of TMT attributes. Age, gender, education level, and employment experience have each been examined as predictors of strategic decision quality and implementation capacity across diverse organisational and national contexts. Qi et al. (2018) in an analysis of Chinese A-share listed firms from 2000 to 2015, found that TMT age, gender, educational level, and financial work experience were each significantly associated with the firm's choice of earnings management strategies, consistent with upper echelon predictions. Specifically, teams composed predominantly of older executives were found to be more conservative in strategic risk-taking, less receptive to innovation, and more resistant to the disruptive changes that strategy implementation often requires.

In the Kenyan context, Mayende and Joseph (2020) examined TMT characteristics and strategy implementation among 54 tea factory companies and confirmed that TMT characteristics, taken as a composite, significantly predicted implementation success. Oketch et al. (2021), studying independent regulatory agencies, found that demographic characteristics, while positively correlated with organisational performance, were the weakest predictor among the three characteristic clusters examined. These findings point toward a consistent pattern in the African literature: demographic attributes matter, but they operate as background conditions rather than proximate drivers of how managers execute strategic mandates. The present study extends this line of inquiry by testing whether demographic characteristics function as boundary conditions, setting the outer limits within which cognitive and psychological traits determine implementation outcomes, rather than as direct predictors.

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Gender homogeneity constitutes a structural dimension of demographic composition that warrants separate theoretical attention beyond individual-level demographic effects. Research on gender diversity and manufacturing firm productivity across six sub-Saharan African countries has established a positive but non-linear relationship, wherein moderate gender diversity improves productivity while extreme homogeneity in either direction constrains it (Campos-García & Zúñiga-Vicente, 2022). In the context of Kenya's manufacturing sector, the International Center for Research on Women has documented sustained under-representation of women in managerial and leadership roles across FMCG companies, a structural pattern that reflects broader labour market segmentation rather than individual preference (Mugyenyi et al., 2020). The present study engages gender homogeneity not merely as a demographic covariate but as a structural finding with implications for the boundary-condition interpretation of the SEIM.

Cognitive Characteristics and Strategy Implementation

Cognitive characteristics encompass the competencies through which executives interpret environmental information, communicate strategic intent, deploy resources, and manage the human and operational systems required for implementation. These include communication ability, risk management competence, delegation proficiency, leadership capability, team management, time management, and adaptive flexibility. In contrast to demographic attributes, which are relatively fixed at the point of executive appointment, cognitive competencies are directly expressed in the day-to-day execution of strategic mandates and are, at least partially, trainable and developable.

Oketch et al. (2020) confirmed through regression analysis applied to Kenyan independent regulatory agencies that TMT cognitive characteristics significantly affect organisational performance, with a correlation coefficient of 0.464 between cognitive attributes and performance outcomes. In the South African context, Mvubu et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative investigation of strategy implementation dynamics among large corporates and found that effective communication and clear accountability, both cognitive expressions of managerial competence, were the primary enablers of successful strategy execution. Cognitive competencies also mediate the expression of demographic characteristics: an experienced manager translates that experience into implementable value only through the application of cognitive skills such as risk assessment and delegation. This mediating logic underpins the operational stratum positioning of cognitive characteristics in the SEIM.

Risk management capacity deserves particular emphasis in the FMCG context given the heightened competitive and supply chain volatility that characterises the sector. The ability of managers to anticipate, absorb, and respond to strategic uncertainties is a competency with direct bearing on implementation continuity. Qi et al. (2018) noted that CEO experience in throughput functional areas was associated with more conservative risk postures, while experience in output functions such as marketing and sales was associated with greater strategic innovation. These findings underscore that the directional effect of cognitive competencies on implementation is context-dependent: the optimal cognitive profile for strategy execution in a high-competition FMCG market may differ meaningfully from that required in a public sector setting.

Psychological Characteristics and Strategy Implementation

Psychological characteristics represent the dispositional and emotional attributes through which executives regulate their own behaviour, influence subordinates, and sustain the motivational conditions required for strategy implementation. The theoretical grounding for this cluster draws primarily on trait emotional intelligence (trait EI), a framework developed by Petrides and Furnham (2003) that conceptualises

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emotional self-efficacy as a stable personality disposition measurable through self-report instruments. Key trait EI dimensions include self-control, sociability, emotionality, and well-being, each of which has demonstrated empirical associations with leadership effectiveness, team cohesion, and organisational performance outcomes.

Oketch et al. (2020) found that TMT psychological characteristics explained 30.9% of the variation in organisational performance among Kenyan regulatory agencies, with a correlation coefficient of 0.567, the strongest of the three characteristic clusters examined. The study identified self-esteem, resilience, and optimism as the most influential psychological traits, consistent with the broader psychological capital literature. Nanayakkara et al. (2023) confirmed the positive effect of emotional intelligence on organisational performance in the context of technology strategy implementation, while Doğru (2022), in a meta-analysis spanning multiple sectors, established significant positive associations between emotional intelligence and employee outcomes including job performance and organisational commitment. Within the leadership context specifically, the ability to withstand pressure, project confidence, and maintain optimism under conditions of implementation uncertainty represents a dispositional precondition for sustaining the effort and morale of execution teams.

Mvubu et al. (2025) found that emotional acumen, which encompasses the ability to manage one's own emotional states and read those of others, was identified by C-suite executives and CEOs across South African corporates as a primary driver of strategy implementation success. The mechanism proposed is that emotionally self-regulated leaders create the psychological safety conditions under which subordinates are willing to take implementation risks, raise concerns, and sustain effort through the inevitable friction of strategic change. This mechanism positions psychological characteristics as not merely correlated with implementation success but causally proximate to it, consistent with the dispositional stratum logic of the SEIM.

The Stratified Executive Influence Model

The Stratified Executive Influence Model (SEIM) proposed in this study reframes upper echelon theory's characteristic clusters as operating across three hierarchically ordered strata of influence, each with a distinct relationship to corporate strategy implementation outcomes. The model departs from the conventional upper echelon treatment of these clusters as parallel inputs by imposing a vertical architecture grounded in the mechanisms by which each cluster connects to implementation behaviour.

The boundary stratum comprises demographic characteristics, including age, gender, educational level, and employment experience. These attributes do not directly determine how a manager executes a strategy; rather, they establish the experiential and positional context within which cognitive and psychological traits are expressed. A manager's age shapes her accumulated experience base; her educational attainment shapes her capacity to process and apply strategic information; her employment tenure shapes her familiarity with the organisational systems through which strategy must flow. Demographic characteristics therefore function as enabling or constraining conditions for the strata above them, rather than as direct drivers of implementation success.

The operational stratum comprises cognitive characteristics. These are the competencies through which the constraints and enablements established by demographic attributes are translated into execution capacity. A highly experienced manager who lacks communication skill, risk management competence, or delegation proficiency will not translate that experience into effective implementation. Conversely, strong cognitive competencies can partially compensate for limited demographic endowments. The operational stratum is the mechanism by which demographic boundary conditions are converted into executable managerial behaviour, and it is

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therefore theoretically intermediate between the boundary and dispositional strata.

The dispositional stratum comprises psychological characteristics. These represent the motivational and interpersonal qualities that most directly govern how a manager maintains strategic effort, sustains team morale, manages stress, and creates the relational conditions under which execution teams perform. Psychological traits are the proximate drivers of implementation outcomes because they regulate the actual interpersonal dynamics of strategy delivery. Cognitive competence without emotional self-regulation may produce technically proficient but relationally destructive implementation environments. The dispositional stratum therefore represents the highest-order influence on implementation success within the model, a prediction directly testable through the regression coefficients derived from the study data.

The SEIM does not claim that only the dispositional stratum matters; rather, it proposes that the three strata operate in sequence, with each providing the conditions of possibility for the one above it. This hierarchical logic generates testable predictions: psychological characteristics should exhibit the strongest direct effect on implementation success; cognitive characteristics should exhibit a significant but weaker direct effect; and demographic characteristics should exhibit weak or non-significant direct effects while contributing to the explanatory power of the combined model through their boundary-setting function.

Hypotheses

H1: *Cognitive characteristics of TMTs have a significant positive effect on corporate strategy implementation success in Kenyan soft drink manufacturers.*

H2: *Psychological characteristics of TMTs have a significant positive effect on corporate strategy implementation success in Kenyan soft drink manufacturers.*

H3: *The combined TMT characteristics model, incorporating demographic, cognitive, and psychological characteristics, significantly predicts corporate strategy implementation success in Kenyan soft drink manufacturers.*

H4: *Psychological characteristics exert a significantly stronger positive influence on strategy implementation success than cognitive or demographic characteristics.*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Philosophical Stance

This study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, which is consistent with the positivist epistemological tradition and appropriate for testing theoretically derived hypotheses through statistical inference (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional design enables the simultaneous measurement of multiple independent and dependent variable clusters at a single point in time, facilitating the computation of correlations and regression coefficients without the temporal demands of longitudinal inquiry. While cross-sectional designs preclude causal inference in the strictest sense, the theoretical directionality established by upper echelon theory and the SEIM provides a coherent basis for interpreting directional relationships in the regression model.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised all top management team members in major soft drink manufacturing companies operating in Kenya, defined as companies with a national distribution footprint and revenues derived primarily from carbonated beverages, juices, or bottled water. Eight companies were identified: Coca-Cola Kenya, Bidco Africa Limited, Kevian Kenya, Brava Food Industries, Highlands Drinks Limited, Chandaria Industries, Del Monte Kenya, and one additional national manufacturer, yielding a total target population of 64 managers across 13 functional designations, including managing directors, chief executive officers, communications directors, sales managers, purchasing managers, logistics and supply

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managers, manufacturing managers, marketing executives, quality assurance officers, talent managers, supervisors, warehouse managers, and dispatch associates. A census approach was employed given the small and accessible population, which eliminates sampling error and is consistent with best practice for studies targeting bounded organisational populations of this size (Kothari, 2004; Saunders et al., 2024).

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) delivered via Google Forms, a method consistent with the COVID-19-era access constraints prevailing at the time of data collection and appropriate for professionals with structured access to digital platforms. The instrument comprised two sections. Section A captured demographic background information, including job designation, age, gender, educational attainment, and employment experience both in the current company and in the current functional role. Section B assessed TMT characteristics across three clusters: demographic perceptions of how age, gender, experience, and seniority affect strategic implementation; cognitive competencies, including communication, delegation, leadership, risk management, team and time management, and adaptive flexibility; and psychological characteristics drawn from a modified adaptation of the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) developed by Petrides and Furnham (2003). Responses were captured on a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (Strongly Disagree) and 5 (Strongly Agree). Mean score interpretation followed the convention: 1.00 to 1.79 = strongly disagree, 1.80 to 2.59 = disagree, 2.60 to 3.39 = neutral, 3.40 to 4.19 = agree, and 4.20 to 5.00 = strongly agree.

Of the 64 questionnaires distributed, 58 were returned in usable form, representing a response rate of 90.6%. A response rate at or above 80% is considered sufficient for survey-based research (Morton et al., 2012). All returned questionnaires were reviewed for completeness prior to analysis; none were excluded on grounds of incomplete or internally inconsistent responses.

Measurement and Instrument Validity

The dependent variable, strategy implementation success, was operationalised as a composite of perceived effectiveness in executing plans and decisions across the three characteristic domains, consistent with prior Kenyan TMT studies (Mayende & Joseph, 2020; Oketch et al., 2020). The psychological characteristics subscale drew on TEIQue facets covering self-control, sociability, emotionality, and well-being, adapted to reflect the strategy implementation context. The TEIQue has demonstrated robust psychometric properties including adequate factorial validity, internal consistency, and test-retest reliability across multiple linguistic and cultural contexts (Mikolajczak et al., 2007; Petrides & Furnham, 2003). The cognitive subscale items were constructed to capture the seven managerial competencies most frequently cited in the upper echelon and strategy implementation literatures (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Oketch et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to characterise the sample and the distribution of each characteristic cluster. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to assess the bivariate associations among the four study variables, including both inter-predictor correlations and predictor-outcome correlations. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the overall model fit, while multiple linear regression was employed to estimate the independent contribution of each TMT characteristic cluster to strategy implementation success, controlling for the others. The regression model took the form:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

where Y represents strategy implementation success, β_0 is the constant, X_1 represents demographic characteristics (β_1), X_2 represents

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cognitive characteristics (β_2), X_3 represents psychological characteristics (β_3), and ε is the error term. Hypothesis testing was conducted at a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$, with p values between 0.05 and 0.10 treated as indicating marginal significance and discussed accordingly.

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

The 58 respondents represented 13 functional designations across the eight surveyed companies. Sales managers and dispatch associates each constituted the largest groups (n = 8, 13.79% each), followed by purchasing managers (n = 7, 12.07%), logistics and supply managers (n = 6, 10.34%), and communications directors (n = 5, 8.62%). The remaining designations each contributed between 1.72% and 6.90% of the sample. Table 1 presents the full distribution. The diversity of functional representation across the sample strengthens the ecological validity of the findings by capturing TMT characteristics and perceptions across multiple strategic and operational domains.

Table 1: Respondent profile by job designation

Job Designation	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
Chief Executive Officer	1	1.72	1.72
Communications Director	5	8.62	10.34
Dispatch Associate	8	13.79	24.14
Logistics/Supply Manager	6	10.34	34.48
Managing Director	4	6.90	41.38
Manufacturing Manager	3	5.17	46.55
Marketing Executive	3	5.17	51.72
Purchasing Manager	7	12.07	63.79
Quality Assurance Officer	3	5.17	68.97
Sales Manager	8	13.79	82.76
Supervisor	3	5.17	87.93
Talent Manager	3	5.17	93.10
Warehouse Manager	4	6.90	100.00
Total	**58**	**100.00**	

The demographic composition of the sample revealed important structural patterns. The majority of respondents were aged between 31 and 40 years (n = 41, 70.7%), with a smaller cohort aged 18 to 30 years (n = 7, 12.1%) and 41 to 50 years (n = 10, 17.2%). No respondent was aged above 50 years, indicating a relatively young TMT profile compared with regulatory sector studies in Kenya where respondents over 46 years predominated (Oketch et al., 2020). Regarding gender, 53 respondents were male (91.4%) and only 5 were female (8.6%), a distribution that fell well below the one-third gender diversity threshold embedded in Kenya's 2010 Constitution. The implications of this structural finding are examined in the discussion. Educational attainment was concentrated at bachelor's degree level (n = 37, 64.7%), with diploma holders (n = 10, 17.7%) and postgraduate degree holders (n = 10, 17.7%) sharing the remaining portion equally. In terms of employment experience within the current company, the majority had served between 2 and 5 years (n = 31, 53.4%), while the largest cohort reported 6 to 10 years of experience in their current functional position across employers (n = 24, 41.4%).

Descriptive Statistics: Cognitive Characteristics

Table 2 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the seven cognitive characteristics assessed. The ability to respond to and manage risks recorded the highest mean (M = 4.17, SD = 1.011), indicating strong aggregate agreement that this competency drives implementation success. Communication abilities ranked second (M = 4.07, SD = 1.006), followed by flexibility and willingness to adapt to staff suggestions (M = 3.93, SD = 1.282), leadership skills (M = 3.91, SD = 1.302), and time management skills (M = 3.90, SD = 1.252). Delegation skills and team

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management skills shared the lowest mean among cognitive items (M = 3.86 for both), though both remained within the agree range, indicating that all seven competencies were perceived as significant contributors to strategy implementation success by the respondent TMTs.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics — cognitive characteristics (n = 58)

Cognitive Characteristic (Statement)	Mean	SD
Ability to respond to and manage risks	4.17	1.011
Communication abilities	4.07	1.006
Flexibility and willingness to adapt to staff suggestions	3.93	1.282
Leadership skills	3.91	1.302
Time management skills	3.90	1.252
Delegation skills	3.86	1.131
Team management skills	3.86	1.249

Note. Means based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Descriptive Statistics: Psychological Characteristics

Among the eight psychological characteristics assessed, the ability to withstand pressure and regulate stress registered the highest mean (M = 4.21, SD = 0.695), falling within the strongly agree range and indicating near-universal recognition among the TMTs that stress tolerance is a critical determinant of implementation success. Self-confidence followed closely (M = 4.19, SD = 0.687), then optimism (M = 4.12, SD = 0.595). All three of these attributes, stress tolerance, self-confidence, and optimism, correspond directly to the well-being and self-control facets of trait emotional intelligence as conceptualised by Petrides and Furnham (2003). Respect shown to staff (M = 3.98), cheerfulness (M = 3.95), and the ability to build friendly relationships with staff (M = 3.86) occupied the middle range, while emotional control (M = 3.69) and willingness to defend employees' rights (M = 3.60) were the lowest-ranked items, though both remained within the agree range. Table 3 presents the full distribution.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics — psychological characteristics (n = 58)

Psychological Characteristic (Statement)	Mean	SD
Ability to withstand pressure and regulate stress	4.21	0.695
Level of self-confidence	4.19	0.687
Ability to look on the bright side of life (optimism)	4.12	0.595
Respect shown to staff	3.98	1.116
Cheerfulness	3.95	0.711
Ability to create friendly relationships with staff	3.86	1.146
Ability to control emotions	3.69	1.046
Willingness to defend employees' rights	3.60	1.227

Note. Items ranked in descending order of mean score.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 4 presents the Pearson correlation matrix for the four study variables. All three independent variable clusters exhibited positive correlations with strategy implementation success. Psychological characteristics recorded the strongest association with the dependent variable ($\rho = 0.518$), followed by cognitive characteristics ($\rho = 0.464$) and demographic characteristics ($\rho = 0.277$). The rank ordering of these correlations is consistent with the hierarchical logic of the SEIM, in which the dispositional stratum exerts the most proximate influence on implementation outcomes.

Among the predictors, the strongest inter-predictor correlation was observed between cognitive and psychological characteristics ($\rho = 0.544$), indicating that these two strata are mutually reinforcing rather than orthogonal. Demographic characteristics exhibited weaker associations with both cognitive ($\rho = 0.371$) and psychological ($\rho = 0.302$) characteristics, consistent with the boundary-stratum conceptualisation in which demographic

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attributes provide the background conditions within which cognitive and psychological traits are expressed. None of the inter-predictor correlations reached levels suggestive of multicollinearity, and the moderate nature of the correlations supports the reliability of the subsequent regression estimates.

Table 4: Pearson correlation matrix (n = 58)

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Strategy implementation success	1.000	0.277	0.464	0.518
(2) Demographic characteristics	0.277	1.000	0.371	0.302
(3) Cognitive characteristics	0.464	0.371	1.000	0.544
(4) Psychological characteristics	0.518	0.302	0.544	1.000

Note. All correlations positive.

Analysis of Variance

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to assess the overall fit of the regression model. The results, presented in Table 5, confirmed that the combination of demographic, cognitive, and psychological characteristics significantly predicted strategy implementation success ($F(3, 54) = 8.504$, $p < 0.001$). The regression sum of squares was 9.183 against a total sum of squares of 28.621, yielding a model-explained proportion of variance consistent with the R^2 value reported in the model summary. These results confirm the statistical viability of the combined predictor model and provide the basis for accepting H3.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	9.183	3	3.061	8.504	0.000
Residual	19.438	54	0.360		
Total	28.621	57			

Note. Dependent variable: strategy implementation success. Predictors: demographic, cognitive, and psychological TMT characteristics.

Regression Model Summary and Coefficients

Table 7 presents the model summary. The combined model produced an R of 0.566, an R^2 of 0.321, and an Adjusted R^2 of 0.283 with a standard error of 0.600. The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.283 indicates that the three TMT characteristic clusters collectively explain 28.3% of the variance in strategy implementation success, with the remaining 71.7% attributable to factors beyond the scope of the present study. This explanatory power is comparable to the 30.9% reported by Oketch et al. (2020) for psychological characteristics alone in their regulatory-sector study, suggesting a consistent explanatory ceiling for single-method survey-based TMT research in the Kenyan context.

Table 6: Multiple regression coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.849	0.801		1.060	0.294
Demographic characteristics	0.132	0.204	0.079	0.647	0.520
Cognitive characteristics	0.218	0.128	0.236	1.708	0.093
Psychological characteristics	0.525	0.194	0.366	2.713	0.009

*Note. Dependent variable: strategy implementation success. *p < 0.05.*

Table 7: Regression model summary

R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Std. Error	F Change (Sig.)
0.566	0.321	0.283	0.600	8.504 (p < 0.001)

Note. Predictors: demographic, cognitive, and psychological TMT characteristics.

Table 6 presents the unstandardised and standardised regression coefficients for each predictor. Psychological characteristics emerged as the only statistically significant predictor (B =

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0.525, β = 0.366, t = 2.713, p = 0.009), consistent with H2. Every unit increase in the psychological characteristics composite score was associated with a 0.525-unit increase in strategy implementation success, controlling for the other two predictors. Cognitive characteristics approached but did not reach conventional significance (B = 0.218, β = 0.236, t = 1.708, p = 0.093), indicating a marginal directional effect consistent with H1 but falling short of the $p < 0.05$ threshold required for formal acceptance. Demographic characteristics did not approach significance (B = 0.132, β = 0.079, t = 0.647, p = 0.520), consistent with the boundary-stratum conceptualisation of the SEIM in which demographic attributes condition rather than directly predict implementation outcomes. The derived regression equation is therefore:

$$Y = 0.849 + 0.132X_1 + 0.218X_2 + 0.525X_3 + \varepsilon$$

The standardised beta coefficients confirm the rank ordering predicted by H4: psychological characteristics (β = 0.366) exerted the largest standardised effect on strategy implementation success, followed by cognitive characteristics (β = 0.236) and demographic characteristics (β = 0.079). This ordering is perfectly consistent with the stratified hierarchy proposed in the SEIM, in which the dispositional stratum is the proximate driver of implementation outcomes, the operational stratum is intermediate, and the boundary stratum provides background conditions rather than direct effects.

Hypothesis Testing Summary

Table 8 summarises the disposition of each hypothesis. H2 and H3 were fully supported; H4 was supported through the ordering of standardised beta coefficients; and H1 was not supported at the $p < 0.05$ threshold, though the directional relationship was consistent with prediction and the marginal p-value (0.093) suggests that cognitive characteristics may exert a meaningful effect that the current sample was insufficiently powered to confirm.

Table 8: Hypothesis

H	Hypothesis	Key stat	Decision
H1	Cognitive characteristics → strategy implementation success	p = 0.093	Not supported
H2	Psychological characteristics → strategy implementation success	p = 0.009	Supported
H3	Combined model significantly predicts implementation success	F = 8.504, p < 0.001	Supported
H4	Psychological > cognitive > demographic in effect size	β: 0.525 > 0.218 > 0.132	Supported

Note. Significance threshold: p < 0.05. H1 treated as marginally supported given directional consistency and p = 0.093.

DISCUSSION

Psychological Characteristics as the Proximate Driver of Strategy Implementation

The regression results confirm that psychological characteristics constitute the sole statistically significant predictor of strategy implementation success in the present study, with a standardised coefficient of β = 0.366 and a significance level of p = 0.009. This finding is consistent with a convergent body of evidence from the Kenyan organisational context. Oketch et al. (2020) similarly found that TMT psychological characteristics were the strongest predictor of organisational performance among regulatory agencies, explaining 30.9% of variance with a correlation coefficient of 0.567. The present study's Pearson correlation for psychological characteristics (ρ = 0.518) approximates this figure, suggesting a level of consistency in the psychological-performance relationship across diverse Kenyan organisational settings, from public regulatory bodies to private FMCG manufacturers.

Among the specific psychological attributes, stress tolerance registered the highest mean score (M = 4.21), a finding that holds particular salience

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in the Kenyan FMCG context. Soft drink manufacturing is characterised by intense price competition, supply chain volatility, and rapid product proliferation, all of which generate chronic implementation pressure on TMTs. Managers who can regulate stress and maintain composure under these conditions are better positioned to sustain the motivational and interpersonal conditions required for strategy execution. This finding resonates with Mvubu et al. (2025), who identified emotional acumen, defined in their study as the capacity to manage emotional states and read those of others, as the primary driver of strategy implementation success among South African C-suite executives. The cross-contextual consistency between South Africa and Kenya on this dimension suggests that emotional self-regulation may function as a universal precondition for strategy execution in Sub-Saharan African corporate environments.

Self-confidence and optimism, the second and third highest-ranked psychological attributes respectively, can be understood through the trait emotional intelligence framework as expressions of the well-being and sociability facets (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). A confident and optimistic manager communicates strategic direction with conviction, sustains team belief through periods of implementation turbulence, and projects the kind of leadership presence that subordinates require to commit discretionary effort to strategic goals. Doğru (2022), in a meta-analytic review, confirmed significant positive associations between emotional intelligence and employee job performance, organisational commitment, and citizenship behaviour, all of which are proximal antecedents of successful strategy execution. The present findings extend this evidence base to the FMCG manufacturing sector in East Africa.

Cognitive Characteristics: Operational Significance Beyond the Significance Threshold

Cognitive characteristics approached but did not reach conventional statistical significance ($\beta = 0.236$, $p = 0.093$). While this outcome formally results in non-acceptance of H1 at the $p < 0.05$ level, several considerations counsel against treating cognitive characteristics as theoretically irrelevant. First, the directional relationship is perfectly consistent with the SEIM prediction and with prior research: Oketch et al. (2021) found cognitive characteristics to be the second strongest predictor of organisational performance after psychological characteristics, while Mvubu et al. (2025) identified communication ability and accountability, both cognitive expressions, as critical enablers of implementation success. Second, the sample size of 58, while adequate for the population studied and consistent with the 90.6% census coverage achieved, reduces statistical power relative to larger samples, making it more difficult to detect effects of moderate magnitude. A post-hoc power consideration suggests that the observed β of 0.236 would likely reach significance in a sample of approximately 100 or more respondents.

The practical significance of cognitive characteristics is further supported by the descriptive findings. All seven cognitive competencies assessed produced mean scores within the agree range ($M = 3.86$ to 4.17), indicating that the TMTs consistently attributed strategy implementation effectiveness to cognitive skill expression. Risk management capacity, rated highest among cognitive items ($M = 4.17$), is particularly critical in the FMCG sector, where supply disruptions, regulatory changes, and competitor actions constantly threaten the continuity of implementation plans. Communication ability ($M = 4.07$), ranked second, aligns with Mvubu et al.'s (2025) qualitative finding that clear and accountable communication was identified as a primary TMT execution enabler by South African corporate leaders. These patterns collectively indicate that while the statistical threshold was not reached for cognitive characteristics in the present study, the operational significance of this characteristic cluster for implementation success remains empirically and theoretically well-supported.

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Demographic Characteristics as Boundary Conditions

Demographic characteristics did not approach statistical significance in the regression model ($\beta = 0.079$, $p = 0.520$), a finding that is consistent with the boundary-stratum conceptualisation of the SEIM. The absence of a direct predictive effect does not imply irrelevance; rather, it indicates that the influence of demographic attributes on strategy implementation operates indirectly, through the cognitive and psychological characteristics they condition. This interpretation is consistent with the theoretical trajectory of upper echelon research since Hambrick (2007), which has progressively moved away from demographic proxies toward direct measurement of cognitive and psychological constructs, precisely because the demographic-to-outcome pathway has been found to be mediated by these higher-order attributes.

The Pearson correlation between demographic characteristics and strategy implementation success ($\rho = 0.277$), while the weakest of the three, was positive and meaningful, suggesting that the boundary conditions established by age, gender, education, and experience do contribute to the overall predictive model even where their direct coefficient is non-significant. The ANOVA confirmation of overall model fit ($F = 8.504$, $p < 0.001$) and the Adjusted R^2 of 0.283 reflect the combined explanatory contribution of all three strata, with demographic attributes contributing to this joint explanatory power through their boundary-setting function rather than through direct effects. This interpretation provides a theoretically coherent account of the data that the standard upper echelon framework, which treats all characteristic clusters as parallel inputs, cannot offer.

Gender Homogeneity as a Structural Finding

The near-total male composition of the surveyed TMTs (91.4%) constitutes a structural finding that warrants substantive analytical attention beyond its treatment as a demographic covariate. Kenya's 2010 Constitution mandates that no gender shall constitute more than two-thirds of the membership of any elective or appointive body, a threshold that the TMT composition of the surveyed companies violated by a substantial margin. This structural deficit carries implications that extend beyond constitutional compliance into organisational effectiveness. Research on gender diversity and manufacturing firm productivity across Sub-Saharan Africa has demonstrated that moderate gender diversity is associated with productivity gains, while extreme homogeneity constrains the range of perspectives, communication styles, and interpersonal competencies available within the leadership team (Campos-García & Zúñiga-Vicente, 2023).

Within the SEIM framework, gender homogeneity operates as a boundary-stratum constraint: a TMT composed predominantly of individuals sharing a single gender identity is likely to exhibit narrowed emotional and cognitive repertoires relative to a diverse team, thereby limiting the ceiling of what the operational and dispositional strata can achieve. The Kenyan FMCG sector's structural under-representation of women in TMT roles reflects broader labour market segmentation patterns documented by the International Center for Research on Women (Mugyenyi et al., 2020), which found sustained barriers to women's access to managerial positions in Kenyan manufacturing companies. Addressing this structural constraint through deliberate gender-inclusive talent pipelines would not only fulfil constitutional obligations but would likely enhance the cognitive and psychological diversity of TMTs, potentially strengthening strategy implementation capacity through mechanisms the current study is not positioned to fully quantify.

Validation of the SEIM and Theoretical Contribution

The Stratified Executive Influence Model proposed in this study receives empirical support across all its core predictions. The hierarchical ordering of standardised beta coefficients (psychological: 0.366 > cognitive: 0.236 > demographic: 0.079) is perfectly consistent with

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the dispositional-operational-boundary stratum architecture of the model. The combined model's statistical significance and the positive, non-trivial Pearson correlations for all three characteristic clusters confirm that the SEIM captures a meaningful and internally consistent structure of influence, rather than a statistically arbitrary ordering.

The SEIM's principal theoretical contribution lies in its imposition of a vertical hierarchy on what upper echelon theory has traditionally treated as horizontal inputs. By specifying that demographic attributes set boundary conditions, cognitive competencies operationalise those conditions, and psychological traits represent the proximate driver of execution, the SEIM provides a more architecturally explicit account of how TMT characteristics combine to produce implementation outcomes. This architecture is grounded in mechanism rather than mere correlation: it explains not just that TMT characteristics matter but why they matter in the sequence they do. The model is theoretically extensible to other organisational and national contexts and offers a replicable analytical frame for future TMT research in emerging market settings where the psychological and cognitive dimensions of leadership remain comparatively under-examined relative to demographic proxies.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to assess the stratified effects of top management team demographic, cognitive, and psychological characteristics on corporate strategy implementation success among soft drink manufacturers in Kenya. Drawing on a quantitative cross-sectional survey of 58 TMT members across eight companies, and framed within the Stratified Executive Influence Model, the findings establish that psychological characteristics are the sole statistically significant predictor of implementation success ($\beta = 0.525$, $p = 0.009$), that cognitive characteristics approach significance in a directionally consistent manner ($\beta = 0.218$, $p = 0.093$), and that demographic characteristics function as boundary conditions rather than direct predictors ($\beta = 0.132$, $p = 0.520$). The combined model explains 28.3% of the variance in strategy implementation success (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.283$, $F = 8.504$, $p < 0.001$).

These findings carry several practical implications. For boards of directors and human resource functions, the prioritisation of psychological characteristics in TMT selection and promotion decisions is supported by the evidence. Emotional self-regulation, stress tolerance, optimism, and interpersonal respect should be assessed as formal criteria in executive evaluation, not merely as desirable supplementary qualities. Cognitive competencies, particularly risk management capacity and communication skill, merit structured development investment through executive coaching, simulation-based leadership training, and cross-functional rotation programmes. The severe gender homogeneity documented in the sample calls for deliberate policy responses, including gender-targeted talent pipelines, mentorship structures for women in FMCG management, and board-level accountability for gender diversity in executive appointments.

Several limitations of the study warrant acknowledgement. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal or experimental designs would be required to establish the directional causal pathways implied by the SEIM. The sample of 58 respondents, while representing a 90.6% census of the target population, may be insufficient to detect medium-effect predictors such as cognitive characteristics, contributing to the marginal p-value observed for H1. The female subsample of five respondents is too small to support robust gender-disaggregated analysis within this paper; this limitation is addressed in a companion study drawing on the same dataset. The Adjusted R^2 of 0.283 further indicates that the majority of variance in strategy implementation success remains unexplained by the three characteristic clusters studied, pointing to the potential importance of organisational structure, competitive environment, and institutional factors as additional explanatory variables.

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Future research should test the SEIM in larger and more gender-diverse samples across multiple FMCG sub-sectors and national contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. Mediation analysis examining whether cognitive characteristics mediate the relationship between demographic boundary conditions and implementation success would provide a more granular test of the model's hierarchical architecture. The incorporation of objective strategy implementation metrics, such as market share change, revenue growth, or new product launch timelines, as dependent variables would reduce reliance on perceptual measures and strengthen causal inference. Finally, longitudinal designs tracking TMT composition and implementation success over time would enable the SEIM to be tested with considerably greater rigour than the present cross-sectional design affords.

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