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## PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AFFECTING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION IN ORGANISATIONS. A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

The failure rate of strategy implementation in both public and private-owned organisations is a cause for concern across the globe. Extant literature reveals that almost 70% of the formulated strategies do not successfully get implemented by organisations for various reasons. Therefore, this paper reviewed literature on psychological factors affecting strategy implementation in organisations. The results of the review revealed employee motivation, commitment, competence, perception and attitudes as the main psychological variables which have an impact on strategy implementation in organisations. Thus, it demonstrated that psychological factors are also key determinants in any strategy implementation exercise in all organisations. It is, therefore recommended that, for a successful strategy implementation initiative in an organisation, psychological factors have to be considered.

**KEYWORDS:** Strategy implementation, performance, motivation, commitment, competence,

### INTRODUCTION

Business organisations across the world are grappling with volatility and turbulence in the operating environment which is characterised by high technological changes, changes in consumer tastes and globalisation among other forces. In such circumstances, Stewart (2004) in Leskaj (2017:151) suggests that organisational survival is underpinned on strategy which anticipates and deals with challenges from competitors. Thus, as Irwin (1995) in Palladan and Adamm (2018:01) opined, strategic management becomes a business operating game plan for enhancing firm's competitiveness, creating customer satisfaction and achieving targeted performances. Consequently, as Kasele (2011) in Dennis et al (2019:231) observed, different types of organisations have found it necessary in recent years to engage in practices of strategic management for their corporate survival and achieve their corporate goals. The adoption of strategic management practices facilitates optimal positioning of organisations in their competitive environment (Pearce and Robinson (2011) in Dennis et al



(2019:231). Thus, as Issack and Muathe (2017:156) concluded, strategic management has been touted as one of the effective management tools in strengthening organisation performance through effective decision making and systematic strategic formulation and implementation.

However, the effectiveness of the whole process of planning diminishes if the formulated strategies are not implemented (Siddique and Shadbolt (2016) in Haurani (2017:13). While organisations may successfully discharge the responsibility of strategy formulation, the duty of strategy implementation tends to be problematic (Eke-Eresia and Soriakumar (2021:47). As such, the rate of failure in strategy implementation by both public and private sector organisations remains a cause for concern. For instance, Baroto, Arvand and Ahmad (2014) in Kabeyi (2019:29) confirm that 66% of corporate strategies are never implemented, 70%-90% of organisations fail to realise the success of implementing their strategies, and only 63% of financial objectives envisioned by companies' strategies are achieved and that strategies most often fail due to ineffective execution. Thus, Mwangi and Kihara (2021:03) conclude that several strategies fail, not because they are inappropriately formulated, but because they are poorly implemented. It is therefore, against this background that this paper seeks to review the impact of psychological factors on strategy implementation in organisations.

### **Strategy implementation**

Strategy implementation is defined as the process that involves the execution of the necessary tasks or activities to obtain a result over what has been planned (Ramadan, 2015 in Ivancic, Jelenc and Mencer, 2021:103). In other terms, Harrington (2006) in Hourani (2017:13) defines the concept as an iterative process of implementing strategies, policies, programs and action plans that allows a firm to utilise its resources to take advantage of opportunities in the competitive environment. Thus, in this review the definition of strategy implementation by Harrington (2006) cited in Hourani (2017:13) was adopted due to its comprehensive perspective on the activities relevant for strategy implementation stage of the strategic management process. The definition also augurs well with Babafemi (2015) in Azizi and Rahman (2019:143) who describes strategy implementation as putting the strategy into practice and to making sub-organisational entities begin to implement their roles in the strategic plan successfully by building an organizational structure capable of implementing the plan, allocation of supporting budgets and programmes to implement the strategy, and developing an information system and follow-up reports to monitor the progress of the implementation process, as well as creating an internal regulatory environment that is in line with the success of the strategy. Therefore, as Jooste and Fourie (2016) in Nduati et al (2022:79) aver, strategic plan implementation is recognised as a major management challenge with difficulty in knowing which factors often fail or contribute less to the implementation effectiveness



### **Theoretical review**

Leading management theories by authors such as Maslow, Herzberg and McGregor concentrate their research on human emotional needs because satisfied emotional needs can lead to improved productivity and organisational performance (Hersey et al, 1966; Cox et al., 2005 and Moore et al., 2006, in Arslan and Staub, 2013:104). Furthermore, Covin and Slevin (2002) in Arslan and Staub (2013:104) acknowledges that specific attitudes might enable managers to have a greater impact on the effectiveness of organisational performance. As such, in this paper, the resource-based theory, needs hierarchy theory, the two-factor theory and the Theory X and Theory Y were adopted in reviewing the impact of psychological factors on strategy implementation in organisations.

### **Resource Based Theory**

The resource-based theory was first authored by Wernerfelt (1984) and later reviewed by other contributors who expounded on the influence that tangible and intangible assets have on the performance of an organisation (Crook et al., 2008 in Nurudeen, 2022:165). According to Wade and Hulland (2008) in Mong et al (2021:02), resources are assets and capabilities that are available to an organisation and useful in detecting and responding to market opportunities or threats. Thus, the theory magnifies the importance of internal resources within the firm and their use in formulating strategy to achieve sustainable advantage within the firm's competitive markets (Schroeder et al (2002) in Nurudeen, 2022:165). Accordingly, Russo and Fouts (1997) in Adebisi and Bakare (2019:557) opine that the capability of an organisation assists in the achievement of competitive advantage which is also dependent on how the organisation assembles, integrates and deploys its tangible, intangible and personnel resources in order to attain sustainable competitive advantage thereby ensuring its survival in its turbulent environment. Therefore, as the theory maintains, the organisation's internal capabilities determine the strategic choice it makes in competing in its external environment (Nurudeen, 2022:165).

Since organisations can develop value by enhancing the strategies according to their resources and capabilities, this theory becomes relevant in explaining the importance of competence of leaders and capabilities of employees in strategy implementation (Cruz and Haugan, 2019 in Mong et al., 2021:03). Accordingly, Grant (1991) in Nwuchukwu and Chaldková, (2018:78) equates capabilities to the way of accomplishing different activities, depending on the available resources. These resources can be tangible, such as the assets of the organisation and financial capital and intangible which ranges from quality of products, brand name as well as the image and personal-based resources such as technical know-how and knowledge (Grant, 1991 in Adebisi and Bakare, 2019:556). Thus, as Barney (1991) in Nwachukwu and Chaldková (2018:78) concluded, human resources consist of the number and characteristics of personnel available to formulate and implement a firm's strategy. It is therefore, within the context of an organisation, that the resource-based theory is used to identify and explore



human expertise necessary for strategy implementation

### **Maslow's Needs Hierarchy**

The theory is also known as the theory of human motivation and was expounded by Abraham Maslow in 1943 (Trivedi and Mehta, 2019:38). It assumes that human behaviour is related to an individual's needs hence can be adjusted according to the nature of needs to be satisfied. The theory also suggests that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy of their importance and priority namely physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualization. The theory further posits that the lower-level needs have to be satisfied first before the next higher-level needs (Marczark and Yawson, 2021:08). Thus, if one set of needs is satisfied, it ceases to be a motivating factor (Trivedi and Mehta, 2019:38).

In practice, Kaur (2013:1062) suggests that organisations must provide for their employees' basic needs for them to be able to contribute meaningfully to the organisation. The basic needs in the theory are the physiological or biological needs which are important for sustaining human life and these include rest, air, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep and sexual satisfaction (Kumar, 2013:1062). Thus, as Trivedi and Mehta (2019:39) implied, unless and until these basic physiological needs are satisfied to the required extent, other needs do not motivate an employee in an organisation. Safety or Security needs in an organisation are practically connected with the psychological fear of losing a job and work-related calamities or hazards (Trivedi and Mehta, 2019:39). According to Jerome (2013:43), these can be guaranteed through creating a safe working environment, ensure job security and also financial security where employees are paid fairly and a stable career is ensured. In elaboration, Kaur (2013:1062) postulates that the rationale is that employees working in an environment free from harm do their jobs without fear of harm thus ensuring continuity of policies of the organisation.

Regarding employees' social needs, Jerome (2013:43) suggests that organisations have to create an environment of team spirit and generate a feeling of acceptance and belonging. The author further suggests that this can be achieved through training, holding get together events such as sporting activities and allowing employees deployed away from their families, time to meet with their families. This consequently results in employees feeling that their welfare is being taken care of, thus showing a positive attitude during strategy implementation exercise. According to Trivedi and Mehta (2019:40), esteem needs include the need to be respected by others, need to be appreciated by others, need to have power and finally to have a prestigious position in an organisation. These are two-fold in nature – self-esteem needs which include those for self-confidence, self-respect and competence and those related to one's status, reputation, recognition and appreciation by others (Trivedi and Mehta, 2019:40). Therefore, as Trivedi and Mehta (2019:40) conclude, in an organisation employers can satisfy the ego need of their employees by giving recognising their good work. According to Kaur (2013:1062) self-actualisation is the need to become all that one is capable of being to develop one's



fullest potential. Thus, as Jerome (2013:43) suggested, employees are motivated with challenging and meaningful assignments which helps in encouraging and exploring their creativity and innovation ability.

### **Herzberg's two-factor theory**

According to Sanjeev and Surya (2016), the two-factor theory was proposed by Fredrick Herzberg (1959) and is also called the motivator-hygiene theory. It is based on the premise that the presence of one set of job attributes (motives) lead to job satisfaction and absence of a completely different set of job attributes (hygiene) lead to job dissatisfaction (Sanjeev and Surya, 2016). According to Steers et al (2004) in Bundtzen (2020:145), the theory approaches the topic on motivation from an organisational perspective as it concentrates on the job itself and work activities, their influence on an employee's motivation and performance. The theory concludes that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are two distinguishable dimensions of work-related values of growth needs and lower-order needs (Knoop, 1994 in Bundtzen, 2020:146).

According to Herzberg et al (1959) in Bundtzen (2020:146), the hygiene factors do not increase motivation but lead to dissatisfaction if they are not prearranged in an organisation. These hygiene factors include company policies, supervision, salary, relationship with peers, status and security. Knoop (1994) in Bundtzen (2020:146) adds that satisfaction characteristic of hygiene factors refers more to the gratification of needs and wants of an employee and have an extrinsic character whereas motivation factors are of an intrinsic nature as they result in more motivation if put into practice by an organisation. Motivational factors include achievement, recognition, work itself and responsibilities (Herzberg, 1966 and Herzberg et al., 1959, in Bundtzen, 2020:146). According to Lawler (1969) in Bundtzen (2020:146), satisfaction indicates an employee's motivation of coming to work but only indirectly influences the motivation for doing the job effectively. Thus, the theory determines that jobs should be designed to challenge workers with responsibility while giving them opportunities for advancement. Motivation in this case caters for two perspectives namely the general commitment towards an endeavour and specific needs of a person (Yousaf, 2020:86). Thus Pareek (1974) in Yousaf (2020:87) explains that the former refers to general work satisfaction or commitment, while the latter means specific satisfied needs one acquires through the job in an organisation.

The theory also determines the relevance of underlying factors that can directly impact job satisfaction in an organisation and elaborated that a job's content, nature and tasks it entails were crucial to motivate employees to do their respective jobs (Yousaf, 2020:88). Therefore, Herzberg's motivator factors are mainly associated with higher-order needs while hygiene factors are more like lower-order needs of Hierarchy of needs theory (Hur, 2018, in Ozsoy, 2019:12).





### **Theory X and Theory Y**

According to Aithal and Kumar (2016), Theory X and Theory Y were developed by Douglas McGregor in the 1960s. The authors further aver that the theories describe two contrasting models of workforce motivation applied by managers in human resources management, organisational behaviour, organisational commitment and organisational development. Thus the model proposes that the two opposing sets of general assumptions of how workers are motivated form the basis for two different managerial styles.

According to Aithal and Kumar (2016), Theory X is based on pessimistic assumptions of the average worker which presupposes that average employee dislikes work and avoids it if possible, lacks responsibility, has little ambition and seeks security above all he/she has little or no ambition, shies away from work or responsibilities, and is individual-goal oriented. Generally, Theory X style managers believe their employees are less intelligent than the managers are, lazier than the managers are, or work solely for a sustainable income (Aithal and Kumar (2016). As a result of these assumptions, Theory X concludes that the average workforce is more efficient under strict supervision and authoritarian approach to management (Aithal and Kumar, 2016). Accordingly, Theory X believes that all actions should be traced and the responsible individual given a direct reward or a reprimand according to the action's outcomes (Allio, 2009 in Arslan and Staub, 2013:104). This managerial style is more effective when used to motivate a workforce that is not inherently motivated to perform.

Conversely, according to Aithal and Kumar (2016), Theory Y states that work is as natural as play or rest, people are not inherently lazy, they have become that way as a result of experience. The theory further assumes that people will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of the objectives to which they are committed and have potential and under proper conditions, they learn to accept and seek responsibility (Arslan and Staub, 2013:104). In addition, Aithal and Kumar (2016) claim that people also have imagination, ingenuity and creativity that can be applied to work. Thus, as Russ (2011) in Arslan and Staub (2013:104) concludes, this finding supports the argument that theory Y assumptions contribute positively toward more participative decision-making ultimately benefiting the organisation. With these assumptions, the managerial role is to develop the potential in employees and help them release that potential toward common objectives (Aithal and Kumar (2016).

Theory Y also assumes that people in the work force are internally motivated, enjoy their labour in the company, and work to better themselves without a direct reward in return. Theory Y employees are considered to be one of the most valuable assets of the company, and truly drive the internal workings of the corporation. The theory further asserts that these particular employees thrive on challenges that they may face, and relish on battering their personal performance (Aithal and Kumar, 2016). In addition, workers tend to take full responsibility for their work and do not require the need



of constant supervision in order to create a quality and higher standard product.

### **Empirical review**

This part presents a brief review of some of the research findings on factors that influence strategy implementation in organisations, in general. The objective is therefore, to find out from the extant literature if psychological factors also affect strategy implementation in organisations.

Alharthy et al (2017) carried out a study to identify strategy implementation influencing factors and their effects on performance within both public and private sectors in the Middle East. The study identified poor or vague strategy, clear objectives, communication, engagement, sufficient resources, accountability, talent management, involvement, buy-in, alignment, monitoring, leadership, commitment, governance, selection and prioritisation as some of the factors affecting strategy implementation. Thus, the presence of motivation and commitment among the factors confirms the importance of psychological variables in the determination of strategy implementation. The findings also support the notion of Gagne (2018) and McAdam et al (2019) in Lees and Ghapnat (2021) that it is important for organisations to be aware of the factors that motivate employees towards the attainment of desired outcomes during strategy implementation.

Pella et al (2013) investigated the factors affecting poor strategy implementation. The research evaluated the influence of strategy implementation problems on strategy implementation success and firm performance. The survey was conducted in 60 Indonesian companies where data collected was statistically analysed using structural Equation Modelling Partial Least Square (SEM PLS). The research results show significance influence of strategy implementation problems on the degree of successful strategy implementation and perceived firm performance. Problems related to corporate scorecard, key performance indicators, information technology, competence, performance appraisal, strategy management office and financial support emerged as the main factors affecting poor strategy implementation. Competence emerged to be one of the factors affecting strategy implementation confirming the impact of psychological factors in the exercise.

In 2021, Katuse studied employee perceptions on organisational strategy implementation in the Covid-19 era in United Arab Emirates. The study was precisely on how employees' perception impacts on the process of strategy implementation. A descriptive research design was adopted and the study established that employee perception has a significant influence on strategy implementation. Thus the way employees perceive affected the strategy implementation process during the Covid-19 pandemic. The psychological factor of perception emerged to be the main element affecting strategy implementation in this study. This therefore affirms the assertion by Zafar, Butt and Afzal (2014) in Elbanna, Al Katheeri and Colak (2020:563) that any strategy implementation initiative should start



with people, their perspective, their character and their drive since they are critical for successful strategy implementation. Moreso, Boswell (2006); Copeland (2013) and McAdam et al (2019) in Lees and Dhanpat (2021) concur that employees are most likely to take action and adapt their behaviours towards the achievement of strategic objectives when they understand how their efforts contribute towards organisational outcomes.

Kohtamäki et al (2011) add to the existing body of knowledge on the link between strategic planning and company performance by exploring the mediating role of personnel commitment to strategy implementation and organisational learning. Using data from 160 small and medium-sized Finnish IT companies, the authors conducted an Mplus-analysis. The findings indicate that participative strategic planning positively affects personnel commitment to strategy implementation, which thereby increases company performance. Psychological factor of personnel commitment emerged to be critical in strategy implementation. Commitment describes the extent to which organisational members are determined to execute their implementation responsibilities and support strategic goals (Noble and Mokwa, 1999 in Twase and Tabesh, 2020:06).

Nwachukwu et al (2019) carried out a study entitled ‘Strategy implementation drivers in correlation with strategic performance’, in Nigerian telecommunication firms. A census survey method was used to collect data. Human resources, financial resources, flexible organisational structure, strong organisational policies and employee commitment were used as hypothesis for effective execution of strategies and enhance strategic performance. The correlation analysis technique was used to examine the relationship between strategy implementation drivers and strategic performance. It emerged that strategy implementation drivers of human resources, financial resources, organisational structure, organisational policy and employee commitment to strategy implementation were positively and significantly correlated with strategic performance. As such, the psychological factor of employee commitment also emerged as one of the drivers of strategy implementation in organisations. This thus confirms the claims by Dooley, Fryxell and Judge (2000) cited in Yang (2019:363) that employees’ recognition and commitment to the strategy is the decisive factor in the formation of strategy execution.

Mbaka and Mugambi in 2014, carried out a research study on factors affecting strategy implementation in the water Sector in Kenya. The review adopted a desk study where secondary data was analysed to explore the factors that affect strategy implementation. The study identified strategy formulation process, relationship among different units/departments and different strategy levels, executors, communication, implementation tactics, consensus, commitment, organisational structure, employees and inadequate resources as the main factors affecting strategy implementation in organisations. Resultantly, commitment and employee motivation emerged as psychological factors





affecting strategy implementation in organisations. The importance of commitment to strategy implementation success is critical because implementation occurs within a context of imperfect control where discretionary behaviours are serious (Greer et al, 2017) in Tawse and Tabesh, 2020:06). Moreover, Victor and Hoole (2017) in Lees and Dhanpat (2021) also conclude that motivated employees are efficient, creative and persistent in challenging tasks such as in strategy implementation, consequently offering high levels of productivity.

Nyaga and Litunya (2018) also investigated the factors influencing strategy implementation in State corporations in Kenya. Training and involvement of employees in development and implementation of strategies was found to be critical for successful strategy implementation. This supports an assertion by Othman (2007) cited in Twase and Tabesh (2020:06) on the importance of using the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, through structural actions such as use of balanced scorecard in conjunction with formal scenario planning, which allows an organisation to better predict the capabilities required to deal with future competitive contingencies. Additionally, Hrebiniak (2006); Mantere (2008) and Shimizu (2017) in Ivancic, Jelenc and Mencer (2021:101) claim that without the integration of knowledge, information and experience brought in by all hierarchical levels within an organisation, the process of strategy implementation cannot be successful. As such, Badri, Bashiri and Hejazi (2013) in Rotich and Osodo (2017:20) concluded that the effectiveness of strategy implementation is, at least in part, affected by the quality of people involved in the process.

In 2019, Yang developed a model for enhancing strategy execution. The study specifically focused on the ability to achieve strategic goals through strategy execution and it made three conclusions. Among the three conclusions, attitudes of members in an organisation was found to have an effect on strategy execution. This therefore, confirms the notion that for every change exercise, employees experience such cognitive, emotional and intentional attitudinal responses, become part of their decision processes on whether to resist or support the change effort (Armenakis et al., 2007; Piderit, 2000). In addition, Noble (1999) in Elbanna, Al Katheeri and Colak, (2020:563) also argued that at the organisational level, a proper relationship between strategy, structure and control can create an environment that is conducive to implementation success while at the individual level, cognitive processes and commitment to strategy are important for performance.

Nkosi (2015) explored factors that affect successful strategy implementation of Luthuli Local Municipality in Mpumalanga Province in South Africa. The results of the study revealed weak continuous professional development as the hindrance in successful strategy implementation in the municipality. Employee development involves enhancement of competencies which are the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for executing tasks that support strategic objectives (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020:06). In other words, Spencer and Spencer (1993); Mulyasa (2004) and Hutapea

(2008) in Martini et al (2020:03) state that work competence is a characteristic of a person consisting of knowledge, skills and attitude that have a causal relationship with extraordinary work performance or work effectiveness. Moreover, Wibowo (2007) in Martini et al (2020:03) also argues that work competence is an ability to carry out or do a job or task based on skills and knowledge and is supported by the work attitude demanded by the job. Therefore, equipped with the necessary skills, employees are able to execute organisational strategies with ease.

In addition to the aforementioned elaborated empirical perspectives, the table below gives a summary of other previous research studies and their findings on the factors that influence strategy implementation in organisations. From the findings, motivation, commitment, competence, perception and attitude psychological factors in affecting strategy implementation, are more prevalent.

**Factors influencing strategy implementation**

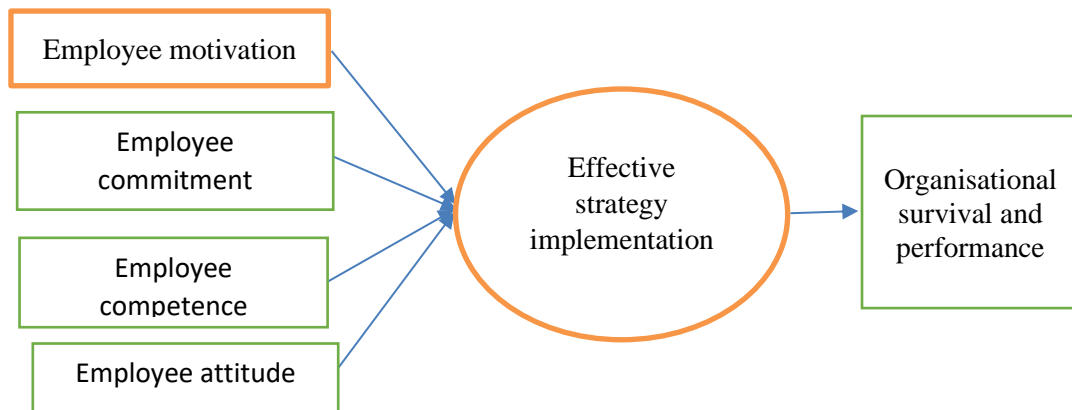
<b>Researcher/Author</b>	<b>Factors/Elements</b>
1	2
David (1987)	Motivation, leadership and direction skills, coordination
Skivington and Daft (1991)	Intended strategy, structure, systems, interactions, sanctions
Roth et al (1991)	Coordination, managerial philosophy, configuration, formalisation, centralisation, integrating mechanisms
Yip (1992)	Organisational structure, culture, people, managerial processes
Bryson and Bromiley (1993)	Context, process, outcome
Lingle and Schieman (1994)	Market, people, finance, operation, adaptability and environmental factors.
Okumus (2001)	Context, content, process and outcome
Higgins (2005) 8s	Strategy and purposes, structure, systems and processes, style of leadership, staff, resources, shared values, organisational culture and strategic performance.

Birnbaum (2007)	Action planning; organisational structure; human resources; the annual business plan, monitoring and control; the linkages; the foundation for everything else.
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**Source: (KIISEO LU.M et al (2009) cited in Pournasir (2013:67 – 68)**

**Conceptual framework**

These common psychological factors that affect strategy implementation can be summarised diagrammatically as shown below.



**Psychological factors affecting strategy implementation**

**METHODOLOGY**

In reviewing the psychological factors affecting strategy implementation in organisations, the study adopted both the theoretical and empirical perspectives. Theoretically, the Herzberg’s two-factor theory, Resource-Based theory, McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y, and Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs theory, were used in the review.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The review was able to demonstrate that psychological factors are also key determinants in the implementation of strategies in organisations. The results of the review confirmed employee motivation, commitment, competencies and attitudes as the main psychological factors that positively and significantly influence strategy implementation in organisations. It can therefore be concluded that psychological factors play an important role in the determination of the success or failure of strategy implementation initiatives in organisations.



## CONCLUSION

The review confirmed the importance of psychological factors in the implementation of strategies in organisations. It is therefore recommended that they be considered for good results in any strategy implementation initiative. It is also recommended that a further research study in the area, with a different methodology and targeting specific organisations in different environments, be undertaken for conclusive results.

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