

"Optimizing CEO Selection in Saudi Arabia: A Study on Strategies for Identifying and Recruiting Top-Performing Chief Executive Officers (CEO)"

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Abstract

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the most influential member of the top management team because there is always a link between the organization's success and the top managers who oversee these organizations. CEO makes strategic decisions based on his or her own interpretation, which is shaped by his or her demographic and managerial characteristics. Most of CEO-based research focused only on a particular set of characteristics. Accordingly, little is known, and open questions remain about the most important CEO characteristics and which characteristics are more important for Saudi Arabia organizations. In response to this knowledgeable gap, this paper aims to provide a prioritized list of the most influential CEO characteristics that matter to organizations in the Saudi Arabia. Data were collected from 89 participants including owners, directors, managers, and CEOs who work in various Saudi Arabia organizations. The participants were asked to rate 35 CEO characteristics, using a five-point Likert scale, where scores were coded from 1 that represents not important at all to 5 that represents Very Important. The data shows a substantial degree of variations in CEO candidate evaluations and reflect the importance of hiring a CEO with overall qualities. The three characteristics with the highest means and lowest standard deviations are Experience, followed by Intellectual characteristics and Personal characteristics, suggesting that candidates considered for CEO positions are perceived to have longer years of work experience, higher intellectual and stronger personal characteristics. The least important characteristics of CEO in Saudi Arabia are tenure, political connectedness and age. These findings will be helpful to shareholders in making an informed decision in selecting the perfect CEO to manage the organization.

Keywords: CEO, characteristics, selection criteria

Introduction

Undoubtedly, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the most influential member of the top management team (Crossland & Hambrick, 2007), where a link between the success of organizations and the top managers who oversee these organizations, this is in fact a part of the Upper Echelons Theory (UET) (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). To ultimately understand the reason behind highly performing organizations, it is fundamental to consider the biases and dispositions of their most powerful actors – their top executives (Hambrick, 2007). CEOs have the power and ability to make decisions that may ultimately influence organizational outcomes (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). CEOs impose their own beliefs and cognitive styles on their individual organisations, which subsequently emerge in corporate decision-making processes (Lewis et al., 2014). CEOs have a wide range of qualities and abilities that translate into corporate performance (Murphy & Zábajník, 2004; Rosen, 1981). Empirically, CEO characteristics have been studied extensively throughout the literature and the findings showed specific CEO with particular characteristics matter and have influence on the patterns of interaction among members of an organization (Giberson et al., 2009), the culture of the company (Saeed & Ziaulhaq, 2019), firm internationalization (Mouta & Meneses, 2021). CEOs have varying background and demographic characteristics that may result in differences in cognitive orientation and thus strategic decision-making (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). A CEO's characteristics may provide signs or information to investors, underwriters and other financial intermediaries regarding a firm's value (Shen, 2021).

Although several research have been conducted studies with a focus on studying the CEO characteristics, most of them only focused on a particular set of characteristics. Accordingly, little is known, and open questions remain about the most important CEO characteristics and which characteristics are more important for Saudi Arabia organizations. In response to this knowledgeable gap, this paper aims to provide a prioritized list of the most influential CEO characteristics that matter to organizations in the Saudi Arabia. The findings will be helpful to shareholders in making an informed decision in selecting the perfect CEO to manage the organization.

Research Problem

Effective CEO selection is crucial for organizational success, as the CEO's decisions can significantly impact an organization's performance. However, current research on CEO characteristics has focused on specific sets of characteristics, leaving significant knowledge gaps regarding which CEO characteristics are most important for organizations in Saudi Arabia. The lack of understanding of CEO characteristics has resulted in a limited theoretical framework on CEO selection and its relationship with organizational success. Additionally, there is a need for further research to understand how CEO characteristics influence the decision-making process and organizational performance. Methodologically, empirical studies on the most influential CEO characteristics for Saudi Arabia organizations are lacking. Moreover, research on the prioritization of CEO characteristics for effective CEO selection in Saudi Arabia organizations is inadequate. Therefore, to address these knowledge, conceptual, and methodological gaps, there is a need for research to identify the most influential CEO characteristics for Saudi Arabia organizations and prioritize them for effective CEO selection.

Aim of the research

The primary objective of this research is to identify and prioritize the most influential CEO characteristics that are crucial for organizations in Saudi Arabia. This study aims to bridge the gaps in the current literature on CEO selection by addressing the knowledge, conceptual, and methodological shortcomings in this field. By recognizing and prioritizing the most significant CEO characteristics, this study can contribute to a better understanding of effective CEO selection and its relationship with organizational success, which can ultimately lead to enhanced performance and competitiveness in the Saudi Arabian market. Furthermore, this study intends to provide practical implications for organizations in Saudi Arabia and other regions by presenting a framework for effective CEO selection that takes into account the unique cultural, social, and economic factors of Saudi Arabia. Additionally, this research seeks to contribute to the theoretical development of the Upper Echelon Theory (UET) by examining the impact of CEO characteristics on organizational outcomes in Saudi Arabia.

Overall, the objective of this research is to provide valuable insights that can assist organizations in Saudi Arabia in optimizing their CEO selection practices and improving their overall performance. Ultimately, the findings of this research will help organizations in Saudi Arabia to make more informed and effective decisions when selecting CEOs.

Significance of the study

This study holds significant importance in providing insight into the most influential CEO characteristics for organizations in Saudi Arabia. By identifying and prioritizing these characteristics, organizations will be better equipped to make informed decisions when selecting CEOs, which can ultimately lead to improved organizational performance. Moreover, the study addresses significant knowledge gaps, conceptual gaps, and methodological gaps in the current literature on CEO selection. The findings of this research can contribute to the development of a theoretical framework on CEO selection and its relationship with organizational success. Additionally, the results of this study can help inform policymakers and stakeholders about the importance of effective CEO selection and its impact on organizational performance. Overall, the significance of this study lies in its potential to inform effective CEO selection strategies and contribute to the development of organizational success in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the significance of this study goes beyond the Saudi Arabian context, as it provides valuable insights for organizations in other regions regarding effective CEO selection. The findings of this study can be applied to various cultural, social, and economic contexts, enabling organizations to optimize their CEO selection practices. Additionally, this research contributes to the development of the Upper Echelon Theory (UET) by examining the impact of CEO characteristics on organizational outcomes in a specific context. The practical implications of this study can assist human resource managers, executives, and CEOs involved in the CEO selection process by providing them with a better understanding of the most influential CEO characteristics. Furthermore, this study can inspire future research on CEO selection and organizational performance in other regions and industries, promoting knowledge sharing and enhancing the practice of effective CEO selection.

Research Objectives

The selection of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) is a critical decision that organizations must make to ensure their success. CEOs are the key decision-makers who steer organizations towards their strategic goals and objectives. Therefore, selecting the right CEO is crucial for organizational success. Despite the importance of CEO selection, there is a gap in the current literature regarding the most influential CEO characteristics that matter to organizations, particularly in the unique context of Saudi Arabia. This research aims to identify and prioritize the most important CEO characteristics for organizations in Saudi Arabia to help them make more informed and effective decisions when selecting CEOs. The findings of this research will contribute to filling the knowledge gaps in the literature and provide valuable insights into effective CEO selection and its relationship with organizational success.

Major Research Question

What are the most influential CEO characteristics that matter to organizations in Saudi Arabia, and how can these characteristics be prioritized to inform effective CEO selection?

Minor Research Questions

1. What is the current state of knowledge on CEO selection, and what are the gaps in the literature that need to be addressed?
2. How can the Upper Echelon Theory be applied to understand the impact of CEO characteristics on organizational outcomes in Saudi Arabia?
3. What methods can be used to identify and prioritize the most important CEO characteristics for organizations in Saudi Arabia?
4. What insights can be gained from the findings of this research, and how can they be applied to improve CEO selection practices in Saudi Arabia and beyond?

Research Approach

The research approach or strategy refers to the overall plan or framework that guides the research process. It involves making decisions about the type of research to conduct, the methods to use, and the data analysis techniques to employ. The research approach for this study is a mix of exploratory research and quantitative research. The exploratory research approach is employed to investigate the most influential CEO characteristics that matter to organizations in Saudi Arabia. The aim of this research is to identify and prioritize these characteristics to contribute to a better understanding of effective CEO selection and its relationship with organizational success. A questionnaire was developed to collect primary data from a sample of participants who hold various positions, including owners, directors, managers, and CEOs in various organizations in Saudi Arabia. Qualtrics.com was used to publish and distribute the questionnaire online. The questionnaire includes two main sections: demographic data and data about 35 CEO characteristics in total, five demographic characteristics that were adopted from the literature review, and 30 managerial characteristics that were adopted from Kaplan et al. (2012). Participants were asked to rate each characteristic on a five-point Likert scale. Scores are coded from 5 to 1, where 5 represents Very Important and 1 represents not important at all. The quantitative research approach is used to explore and understand the subjective perceptions, experiences, and opinions of CEOs in Saudi Arabia regarding the importance of various CEO characteristics in organizational success. Through this approach, the researcher can gather rich and detailed information about CEO characteristics that matter most to organizations in Saudi Arabia. The statistical analysis was run on SPSS to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire. A total of 89 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis. The participants consisted of a diverse group of individuals, including owners, CEOs, directors, consultants, and managers, providing a broad range of perspectives on the most influential CEO characteristics for organizations in Saudi Arabia.

Time Horizon

The research employs a cross-sectional time horizon, where data is gathered from participants at a particular point in time. This design provides a snapshot of current CEO selection practices and the significance of CEO characteristics in Saudi Arabian organizations. Cross-sectional design is suitable for this study due to its cost-effectiveness and efficiency in collecting data from a large sample within a specific period. Additionally, this design enables the investigation of multiple variables simultaneously, which is essential in exploring the relationship between CEO characteristics and organizational success.

Population & Sample

The population of this study comprises of organizations operating in Saudi Arabia. The sample for this study was selected using purposive sampling, where participants were selected based on their job titles and their position within their organizations. The research design utilized in this study can be classified as a cross-sectional survey design, where data was collected through a questionnaire. A questionnaire composed of two main sections was published and distributed online using Qualtrics.com. In the first section, demographics are collected, in the second section, 35 CEO characteristics are collected, five demographic characteristics are derived from the literature review, and 30 managerial characteristics are derived from Kaplan et al. (2012). Each characteristic was rated on a five-point Likert scale. Scores are coded from 5 to 1, where 5 represents Very Important and 1 represents not important at all. The statistical analysis was run on SPSS. The sample was chosen to be diverse in terms of industry type and organization size to ensure the generalizability of the results to different sectors in Saudi Arabia. The primary data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed using statistical methods to draw insights and conclusions rather than test a specific hypothesis.

Literature review

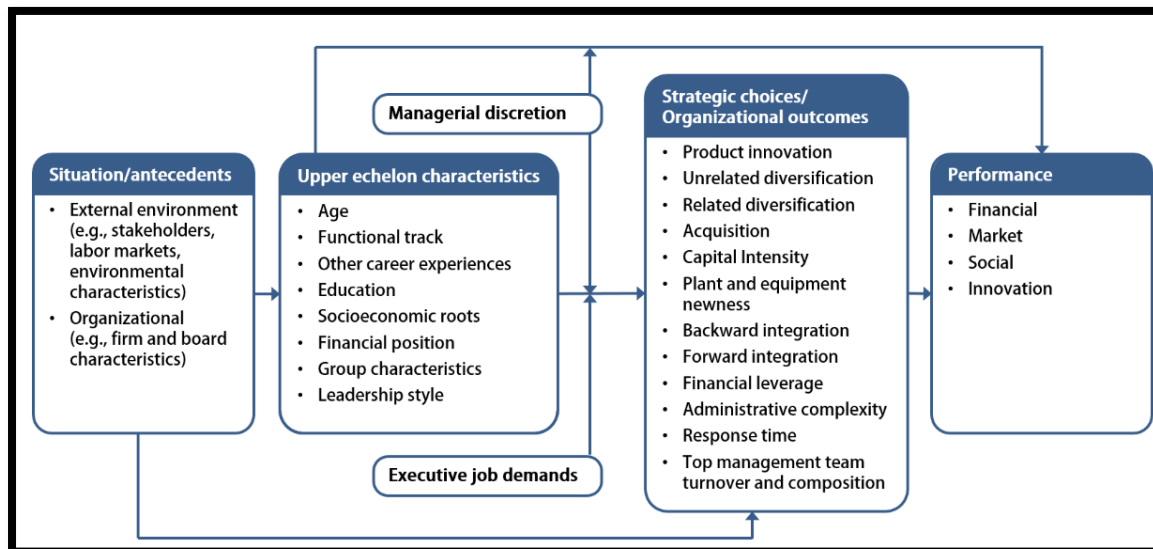
Board of Directors and CEO

Companies' boards of directors (BODs) are the cornerstone and critical aspect in corporate performance since it is the board's role to appoint the general manager and CEOs. The BOD is in charge of establishing work policies, plans, programmes, and goals; defining responsibilities and powers for each corporate department; and appointing the general manager and CEOs. The BOD establish the organization's vision, mission, and goals, which is frequently determined in collaboration with the company's CEO or general manager (Kanakriyah, 2021).

One of the main factors that has been evidenced to improve a firm's ability to achieve economic goals and enhanced performance is the CEO (Saleh et al., 2020). The CEO is an individual who serves as the senior corporate officer, executive or administrator, who oversees the organization and is responsible for its overall operations (Saleh et al., 2020). The CEO of an organization frequently interacts with the BOD and is responsible for increasing the company's profitability (Ghardallou, 2022). Therefore, it is essential for the BODs to have a check list of the most important CEO characteristics.

Upper Echelon Theory (UET)

The assumptions that executives and top managers are key players that influence the organizational outcomes is based on the UET. In strategic management and organisational behaviour UET asserts that CEOs' experiences, personalities, and values heavily impact their strategic decisions, which in turn influence organisational outcomes (Hambrick & Mason, 1984).



Source: (Hambrick & Mason, 1984).

From a particular perspective, rather than psychological characteristics, CEOs' observable managerial characteristics such as age, education, career experiences, functional tracks, socioeconomic roots, group characteristics and financial positions, affect organisational performance and strategic decision-making (cognitive base values) (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). From a different perspective, the Carnegie School 1, claims that behavioural factors such as the values and cognitive orientation of the core participants are the root causes of complex decisions (Miner, 2006). This means the decision-making processes and behaviours of managers or executives are influenced by their views, experiences, values, and assumptions. Top executives incorporate previous experiences, dispositions, and preferences into their decision-making and leadership behaviours (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Accordingly, differences in executives' cognitive views and characteristics influence all aspects of the strategic decision-making process, choices, and organisational performance, including information search (Kiss et al., 2020), including issue identification (Dutton & Duncan, 1987), information or message processing (Miner, 2006), stock return and innovation (You et al., 2020), environmental innovation (Zhou et al., 2021), selective specification, chosen methods of work (Herrmann & Datta, 2002); international diversification (Elia et al., 2021), sustainability (Sannino et al., 2020), capital structure (Lin et al., 2020), productivity and firm performance (Edi & Hidayah, 2022; Ghardallou et al., 2020) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Malik et al., 2020), mergers and acquisitions (Edi & Hidayah, 2022), environmental performance (Tran & Pham, 2020), the earnings quality and future development (Cherkasova & Markina, 2021), internationalization (Ramón-Llorens et al., 2017; Saeed & Ziaulhaq, 2019).

Related studies

In the literature, a versatile of CEO characteristics and their role in shaping various organizational outcomes were studied. For example, Tran and Pham (2020) studied the impact of CEOs' demographic characteristics, namely, gender, age, education, political connectedness, and ethnicity on corporate environmental performance (CEP) in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They found that when the CEO in a firm is a female, or better educated, or belongs to an ethnic minority group tends to concern more about environmental-related issues; but firms with an older CEO have relatively lower probability of environment-related performance. Edi and Hidayah (2022) assessed the influence of CEO characteristics on firm performance; after conducting mergers and acquisition; and revealed that CEO who has high experience, knowledge, and capability escalates the firm's performance and reputation. Cherkasova and Markina (2021) examined the impact various CEO characteristics, both CEO power and personality. They included CEO experience, as well as a number of CEO characteristics which have not previously been researched such as number of Board positions held by a CEO or simultaneously acting as a CFO, CEO promoted from within, and the number of times that a CEO changes within a company. The influence of CEO characteristics on the earnings quality by country was noted for companies in America and Europe. The outcomes indicated that managerial characteristics have a very significant effect on the future development and earnings quality. Additionally, characteristics, including, gender, age, seniority, awards, work of the executive director as the chairman of the board of directors) are key for analysis, because they reflect his or her, hard work, professional abilities, and work experience. Saidu (2019) investigated the impact of the CEO's education, ownership and origin, as some of the basic CEO characteristics that are rarely researched, on firm performance. they collected balanced panel data for 6 years from 2011 to 2016 from firms in the financial sector listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. The findings demonstrated that CEO education improves profitability. Similarly, stock performance gets improved when the CEO has prior experience of the firm before being appointment. Further studies need to consider not only the CEO ownership, but also whether the interest in ownership makes them more powerful. Saeed and Ziaulhaq (2019) examined the impact of CEOs' demographic characteristics, including, age, education, CEO political connectedness, and tenure on the SMEs internationalization. Based on UET, resource-based view and information processing theory, it was hypothesized that CEO characteristics such as age, education, tenure, and political connectedness affect SMEs' international performance. Using the panel data analysis of 283 UK SMEs for the period of 2005 to 2015, the study provided a piece of evidence that CEOs' political connections and educational level are positively related to firm internationalization, while age negatively influences firm internationalization. Tenure was found to have a curvilinear relationship with SMEs' internationalization. Ramón-Llorens et al., (2017) surveyed dataset of 187 Spanish family firms to study the demographic characteristics, including, gender and education that may influence family firms in their decision of internationalize their activity. The findings indicated that the CEO education influences the success level internationalization, but gender do not significantly predict the propensity to export.

CEO Characteristics

The CEO makes strategic decisions based on his or her own interpretation, which is shaped by his or her characteristics in terms of experiences, values, and personality (Papadakis, 2006). The demographic characteristics include age, education, experience, tenure (Saeed & Ziaulhaq, 2019). The managerial characteristics include leadership, personal, intellectual, motivational, and interpersonal characteristics (Kaplan et al., 2012).

1.1 CEO Age

According to the UET, CEO age is related to risk inclination and open-mindedness, which influence their judgements of foreign and local business growth (Hsu et al., 2013). Open-mindedness, risk-taking and mental strength, tend to boost cognitive functioning, which in turn improves management information processing ability. For example, multinational corporations must adapt their operations in complicated, unfamiliar institutional and cultural situations where executives must deal with a variety of rivals, consumers, and stakeholders (Barkema et al., 1996). As a result, executives must combine disparate bits of information in order to make sound judgements. Older CEOs may be characterized by close-mindedness, and thus are less likely to appropriately arrange information and may be unable to shift their current mindset which makes it They find it challenging to acclimatise in an international context (Saeed & Ziaulhaq, 2019). Age, past executive experience, and network are also crucial in companies' time to initial public offering (IPO) (Shen, 2021). It is suggested that age influences both loyalty to the status quo and openness to accept changes (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Several studies referred to the importance of age from different perspectives. For example, Yang et al. (2011) used a sample of CEOs of companies in the US software industry and observed that younger CEOs, CEOs with prior executive experience and CEOs with a larger social network were observed to take companies public earlier. Rahman and Chen (2022) observed that age is positively related to corporate performance. In a similar study, CEO effects were observed to be larger for younger CEOs (Bennedson et al., 2020; Brahma et al., 2021).

On the contrary, by using a sample of 10,446 observations from listed companies in China, the analysis showed that CEO age has no obvious impact on firm performance, a finding that clearly differs from previous research (Liu & Jiang, 2020).

1.2 CEO Education

Another critical factor is the educational level of CEOs, particularly for companies operating outside of their home markets. Companies need educated CEOs to develop and implement the correct strategies at the right time (Fernández-Ortiz & Lombardo, 2009). Highly educated people have an impact on the level of complexity and administrative sophistication, according to the UET (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Managers' educational levels influence their values and views, as well as their decision-making processes. The educational degrees of managers impact their values and perspectives, as well as their decision-making processes. Because of the varied skill sets and information obtained, executive behaviour differs based on education level. Additionally, corporate social responsibility performance is influenced not just by educational level but also by discipline (Ghardallou, 2022). The dynamic nature of the worldwide economy drives businesses to constantly analyse and rearrange their resources in order to adapt to emerging possibilities and challenges. Companies therefore need educated leaders with higher information processing ability (Fernández-Ortiz & Lombardo, 2009). CEOs with a higher education level are essential for establishing formal strategic decision-making that matches the targeted worldwide expansion strategy with manufacturing technology and marketing tactics (Saeed & Ziaulhaq, 2019). Previous research indicates that CEO education is critical in many organisational decisions, where the decisions' outcomes are reflections of the qualities of the CEOs (Saidu, 2019). The advanced managerial and technical skills are exhibited when a manager attained higher level of education (Bowers & Seashore, 1966). The achievement of particular level of education is one of the prerequisites of improved management performance. Education is a crucial tool to consider when promoting and perhaps remunerating personnel. A high degree of education is important in enhancing the managers' esteem and allowing them to make the best decisions (Saidu, 2019). Various studies demonstrated the importance of the level of education of the CEOs to various organizational aspects. For example, Tran and Pham (2020) found that when the CEOs are better educated, they tend to concern more about environmental-related issues; and Saidu (2019) demonstrated that CEO education improves profitability. Ghardallou (2022) found that, in Saudi Arabia, CEOs with an MBA degree play a favourable moderating influence in the association between firm performance and CSR.

1.3 CEO Experience

The term 'work experience' is defined as a period of work that is established to encourage reflection on the experience and to identify the learning that emerges from working (Harvey et al., 1998). Experience and education are two inseparable qualities of a good manager with remarkable entrepreneurial drive (Robinson & Sexton, 1994). CEOs have unique management styles based on their prior experiences, with significant implications for firm performance (Shen, 2021). Several studies referred to the importance of specialized experiences. For example, Saleh et al. (2020) introduced a piece of evidence that CEO experience has a positive effect on corporate performance. Custódio and Metzger (2014) indicated that CEOs with a financial background are able to manage financial policies more actively, engage in more share repurchases, issue more debt, hold less cash, invest less in research and development, raise external financing in times of poor credit conditions, produce less innovation; and they are pay more attention to capital gains and dividend, and employed by more mature and diversified companies. Conyon et al. (2019) argued that CEOs who possess foreign experience provide their companies with a competitive advantage by offering them both human capital (i.e., foreign knowledge) and social capital (i.e., foreign networks) and hiring seasoned international CEOs means more engagement in foreign markets. Foreign experience is valuable as it is both non-inimitable and non-substitutable. Saidu (2019) opined that stock performance gets improved when the CEO has prior experience of the firm. However, general experience that is indicated with the number of different industries, and the number of different firms, within which a CEO has worked before their employment at the current company may have negative influences on the company (Custódio et al., 2013). For example, based on a sample of 16,158 CEO-firm-year observations from 2243 companies, Li and Patel (2019) found a negative relationship between more generalist CEO experience (across different industries or firms) and company performance, but one that is alleviated by lengthier tenure.

1.4 CEO Tenure

CEO tenure is defined as the total number of years a CEO has held the chief executive office (Khan et al., 2020). It is the length of a CEO's employment in a company (Ghardallou, 2022). Several academics believe that CEO tenure is significant because it influences a company's business decisions and success (Khan et al., 2020). Numerous scholars have studied the importance of CEO tenure to various aspects of the organization. However, the results are inconsistent in terms the role of CEO tenure in organization. For example, Saleh et al. (2020) introduced a piece of evidence that CEO tenure, has a positive effect on corporate performance. Rahman and Chen (2022) observed that tenure is positively related to corporate performance.

Ghardallou (2022) observed that CSR efforts are more appealing to CEOs who have worked for the company for a longer period, with a positive effect on financial performance in Saudi Arabian organizations. They studied the relationship between CEO tenure and CSR and argued that long-serving CEOs have stronger social links, and in order to profit from these relationships, they will be motivated to engage in more CSR, ensuring their company's long run existence and prosperity. Moreover, CEOs with longer tenure possess quantities of firm-specific skills, experience, and influence during their tenure at the business, including in-depth understanding of the company's culture, management, and capabilities. As a consequence, those CEOs will have a better connection to the firm, adopting its goals and strategy, and will be best positioned to include stakeholders in order to get access to external prospects (Tran & Adomako, 2021). Moreover, according to Ghardallou (2022) CEOs who have been in charge for a long time may have more authority to make the right choices and can build on earlier decisions and successful tactics, which can help the company perform better. Ghardallou et al. (2020) inferred that executive tenure in Saudi corporations is preferred to expand in order to boost financial performance by avoiding frequent changes in CEOs. Liu and Jiang (2020) noticed that CEO tenure only has a highly significant negative impact on high valuation firms.

On the other side, long CEO tenure may foster a lack of flexibility, which is harmful to handling the interests of various stakeholders and might lead to a reduction in CSR involvement (Oh et al., 2018). Increasing CEO tenure has a detrimental influence on a company's social and environmental performance (Khan et al., 2020). In their study, Khan et al. (2020) discovered that increasing CEO tenure has a negative effect (8.8%) on business social and environmental performance. They also discovered that in the first years of employment, CEOs' corporate social and environmental performance is significantly higher than in subsequent years. This inverse relationship between CEO tenure and corporate social and environmental performance is more prominent in companies with a greater number of independent directors, in companies where CEOs are expected to stay for a longer period of time, and in corporations under state control. They do, however, agree that the influence of CEO tenure on company social and environmental performance has grown in recent years. Helmich (1977) argued that hiring longer tenured insiders represents a non-adaptive response. Hiring those with reduced or no tenure would be considered by Helmich to be an adaptive response to the organizational condition of growth. In addition, growth may also outstrip an organization's ability to develop internal talent, leading to a heightened need to 'raid' executives from competitors (Guthrie, 1997). It was found that CEOs with longer tenure can be assumed to have more invested in the status quo than outsiders (Hambrick et al., 1993) and for this reason might be less inclined to change their organization (Guthrie, 1997).

Explanations for the negative relationship between tenure and organizational change may be attributed to the rigidity and commitment to established policies and practices as executives become more wedded with the correctness of their views with the passage of time (Lewis et al., 2014). Long-tenured CEO are committed to the status quo, risk averse, and insulated from fresh, accurate information (Lewis et al., 2014).

1.5 CEO Political Connectedness

The political connectedness is defined as the ability to access and influence government officials through prior relationships (Ridge et al., 2017). Political connectedness is considered one of crucial resources for the firms is political connection (Saeed et al., 2015). Political ideologies of chief executives are reflections of their fundamental principles (Tran & Pham, 2020). Several studies underlined the role of political connectedness to the business performance. For example Cao et al. (2019) emphasised the critical significance of political connectedness in Chinese business performance and competitive advantage. Similarly, Saleh et al. (2020) introduced a piece of evidence that CEO political connections has a positive effect on corporate performance. Wong and Hooy (2018) studied listed companies in Malaysia and concluded that their performance can be improved only when their political connections are stable. Ridge et al. (2017) found that the totality of a firm's political connections is positively related to firm outcomes in the United States. There is a consensus among scholars that politically connected CEOs can help their firms to gain various tangible and intangible advantages (Saeed et al., 2014; Zhang, 2017) such as lower tax rate (Wu et al., 2012), preferential tax treatment (Johnson & Mitton, 2003) preferential bank loans (Faccio, 2006) and the higher ability of assessing government environmental policy (Zhang, 2017). Rahman and Chen (2022) political connections help firms overcome market imperfections in areas with an underdeveloped market and legal system. On the other side, Shaddady and Alnori (2020) found that political connections have a negative impact on firm performance in Saudi Arabia. From the same perspective, Liu and Jiang (2020) noticed that CEO political ties are positively related to low valuation firms, the exact opposite effect is evidenced in relation to high-performance firms

1.6 Managerial characteristics

Kaplan et al. (2012) further demonstrate that general ability, communication, interpersonal skills and execution skills are necessary for effective CEOs.

Several scholars attempted to study and identify the managerial characteristics of CEO. For example, by using a sample of 316 candidates considered for CEO positions in firms from 2000 to 2006, Kaplan et al. (2012) prepared a report that included ratings of 30 specific characteristics and abilities.

Kaplan et al. (2012) classified the thirty specific characteristics in five general areas, namely, leadership, personal, intellectual, motivational, and interpersonal. Leadership is one of the most studied (and arguably the most complicated) management issues. Leaders use numerous types of influence to drive others to accomplish a common vision, purpose, and effect. Exceptional leaders, whether political, social, or business, inspire people and bring out the best in the organizations/societies/countries they lead (Haski-Leventhal, 2022). Leadership is identified as “the art and ability involved in building, cultivating and sustaining trustful relationships to different stakeholders, both inside and outside the organisation, and in coordinating responsible action to achieve a meaningful, commonly shared business vision” (Maak, 2007, p. 331). Adopting such a leadership style should increase CSR and positively impact the organisation and all its stakeholders (Haski-Leventhal, 2022). Leadership characteristics include - hires a players, develops people removes underperformers respect efficiency network flexible (Kaplan et al., 2012).

Personal characteristics are defined as ability, personality, and interests related to learning and development activities in the workplace. Kaplan et al. (2012) underlined a set of personal characteristics, namely, integrity, organization, calm, aggressive, fast, and commitments. Personal characteristics include integrity organization calm aggressive fast commitments (Kaplan et al., 2012). Intellectual characteristic is defined as “part of individual and group activities of individuals with expression of subjective form that changes according to task and hypotheses development. Group of features are inherent for intellectualization as qualitative characteristics of developing information and economic systems based on personalized character of modern society and economy” (Bochulia, 2017, p. 43). Individual motives and intentions take precedence over corporate aims, a distinguishing element of intellectualization that generates knowledge, experience, and skills at the macro level while promoting transformation and change. This increases the development potential of the entire system, not just a single economic actor, by providing new decision-making qualities (Bochulia, 2017). Intellectual characteristics include brainpower, analytical skills, strategic, creative, attention to detail (Kaplan et al., 2012). A motivational trait can be defined as “a stable and distinguishable feature of an individual that is distinct from cognitive ability yet influences the choice of goal-directed activities, the amount of effort expended on tasks, and the duration of time activities are pursued” (Psychology, 2016, p. 1). A motivational trait shows a similar effect on behavior over time and in various situations such as social, work, and recreation. Training results, job performance, and organisational citizenship behaviours have all been demonstrated to be predicted by motivational qualities. Motivational characteristics are thought to influence behaviour primarily through task-specific motivation and self-regulation. Many research have found that motivational qualities influence people's self-efficacy, goal choice, and goal commitment (Psychology, 2016). Motivational characteristics include enthusiasm, persistence, proactive ,work ethic, and high standards (Kaplan et al., 2012). Interpersonal characteristics are traits you rely on when you interact and communicate with others. Applicants with superior interpersonal skills and general ability have a higher chance of being hired (Kaplan & Sorensen, 2021), though interpersonal abilities are unrelated to future performance, showing that boards prioritise interpersonal skills when appointing CEOs. Interpersonal characteristics include listening, open to criticism, written communication, oral communication, teamwork, and persuasion (Kaplan et al., 2012).

Results

Exactly 89 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Participants include owners, CEOs, directors, consultants, and managers. Most of the participants are male and almost half of the participants have interviewed a CEO before. Two-fifths of the participants hold Bsc., and two-fifths hold Msc. , while one-fifth hold a Ph.D. or higher, Table 1 shows the distribution of demographic data.

Table 1: Sample description

Question	Category	Count	%
Gender	Male	83	93.26
	Female	6	6.74
Interviewed a CEO ?	Yes	43	48.31
	No	46	51.69
Age	30 +	28	31.46
	40 +	43	48.31
	50 +	12	13.48
	60 +	6	6.74
Education	BSc.	36	40.45
	MSc.	34	38.20
	PhD +	19	21.35
Work Yrs.	5+	49	55.06
	10+	12	13.48
	15+	28	31.46

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of demographic and managerial CEO characteristics. Statistical assumptions were fulfilled to ensure model suitability for subsequent analysis before proceeding with the analysis. Data is normally distributed if normal curves are free of extreme skewness. Sposito et al. (1983) proposed the range ± 2.2 for a normal distribution free of skewness. Table 2 displays skewness values, all skewness values fall within the suggested range and approximately lay between one and zero, falling within the recommended range demonstrating that dataset is free of extreme skewness, therefore normality is not an issue in the collected data and subsequent analysis can be performed on the data.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Managerial Characteristics (n=89)

Characteristic	Mean	SD.	Skew.	imp %	F.imp %	V.imp %	Imp./F.imp/V.imp. %
CEO- Age	3.29	0.88	1.02	68.50	3.40	18.00	89.90
CEO- Edu.	3.89	1.11	-0.33	30.30	13.50	43.80	87.60
CEO- Exp.	4.12	1.00	-0.75	20.20	23.60	48.30	92.10
CEO - PC	3.24	1.23	-0.05	30.30	20.20	20.20	70.70
CEO- Eth.	3.13	1.55	-0.02	27.00	3.40	33.70	64.10
Leadership - Hires A Players	3.51	0.98	-0.05	50.60	21.30	20.20	92.10
Leadership - Develops People	3.94	0.95	-0.38	27.00	31.50	34.80	93.30
Leadership - Removes Underperformers	3.40	1.11	-0.19	27.00	31.50	18.00	76.50
Leadership - Respect	4.12	1.00	-0.89	13.50	30.30	46.10	89.90
Leadership - Efficiency	4.07	0.88	-0.13	34.80	23.60	41.60	100.00
Leadership - Network	4.18	0.87	-0.68	20.20	31.50	44.90	96.60
Leadership - Flexible	4.26	0.82	-0.51	23.60	27.00	49.40	100.00
Leadership	3.93	0.55	-0.94	28.1	28.10	36.43	92.63

				0			
Personal - Integrity	4.22	0.85	-0.45	27.0 0	23.60	49.40	100.00
Personal - Organization	4.17	0.92	-0.61	24.7 0	23.60	48.30	96.60
Personal - Calm	4.06	0.97	-0.57	23.6 0	27.00	42.70	93.30
Personal - Aggressive	3.74	1.11	-0.68	16.9 0	38.20	28.10	83.20
Personal - Fast	3.92	0.86	-0.18	30.3 0	37.10	29.20	96.60
Personal - Commitments	4.12	0.81	-0.63	16.9 0	43.80	36.00	96.70
Personal	4.04	0.59	-0.24	23.2 3	32.22	38.95	94.40
Intellectual - Brainpower.	4.22	0.77	-0.41	20.2 0	37.10	42.70	100.00
Intellectual - Analytical Skills	3.63	1.00	-0.43	34.8 0	33.70	21.30	89.80
Intellectual - Strategic	4.63	0.61	-1.43	6.70	23.60	69.70	100.00
Intellectual - Creative	3.91	1.00	-0.45	23.6 0	31.50	34.80	89.90
Intellectual - Attention to Detail	3.85	1.06	-0.40	23.6 0	27.00	36.00	86.60
Intellectual	4.05	0.51	0.17	21.7 8	30.58	40.90	93.26
Motivational - Enthusiasm	3.72	0.97	-0.10	33.7 0	30.30	25.80	89.80
Motivational- Persistence	3.72	1.03	-0.55	30.3 0	33.70	25.80	89.80
Motivational - Proactive	3.94	0.87	-0.21	30.3 0	34.80	31.50	96.60
Motivational - Work Ethic	3.89	0.95	-0.26	30.3 0	30.30	32.60	93.20
Motivational - High Standards	4.16	0.82	-0.68	16.9 0	40.40	39.30	96.60
Motivational	3.89	0.61	0.25	28.3 0	33.90	31.00	93.20
Interpersonal - Listening	3.99	1.16	-0.51	27.0 0	6.70	52.80	86.50
Interpersonal - Open to Criticism	3.73	0.91	-0.80	28.1 0	47.20	18.00	93.30
Interpersonal - Written Communication	3.51	1.11	-0.50	20.2 0	40.40	18.00	78.60
Interpersonal - Oral Communication	4.07	0.80	-0.54	18.0 0	47.20	31.50	96.70
Interpersonal - Teamwork	3.78	1.17	-0.65	23.6 0	27.00	34.80	85.40
Interpersonal - Persuasion	4.01	0.83	-0.02	33.7 0	31.50	34.80	100.00
Interpersonal - Holds People Accountable	4.26	0.78	-0.49	20.2 0	33.70	46.10	100.00
Interpersonal	3.91	0.59	0.04	24.4 0	33.39	33.71	91.50

Table 2 also presents mean ratings, standard deviation of the individual characteristics, percentage of number of observations for the first three scores, Very important, Fairly important, and Important, for 89 participants who were asked to rate 35 CEO characteristics. Scores are coded from 1 that represents not important at all to 5 that represents Very Important. Fairly Important is coded as 4, Important is coded as 3, Slightly important is coded as 2.

Table 3 Ordered CEO Characteristics

Characteristic	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skew.	V.imp %	F.im p %	Imp %	Imp./F.imp/V-imp. %
CEO- Exp.	4.12	1.00	-0.75	48.30	23.60	20.20	92.10
Intellectual_T	4.05	0.51	0.17	40.90	30.58	21.78	93.26
Personal_T	4.04	0.59	-0.24	38.95	32.22	23.23	94.40
Leadership_T	3.93	0.55	-0.94	36.43	28.10	28.10	92.63
Interpersonal_T	3.91	0.59	0.04	33.71	33.39	24.40	91.50
CEO- Edu.	3.89	1.11	-0.33	43.80	13.50	30.30	87.60
Motivational_T	3.89	0.61	0.25	31.00	33.90	28.30	93.20
CEO- Age	3.29	0.88	1.02	18.00	3.40	68.50	89.90
CEO - PC	3.24	1.23	-0.05	20.20	20.20	30.30	70.70
CEO- Tenure.	3.13	1.55	-0.02	33.70	3.40	27.00	64.10

Table 3 illustrates the ordered means and standard deviations for the 10 broad characteristics including, age, education, experience, political connectedness, tenure, leadership, intellectual, personal, interpersonal, and motivational characteristics. The data demonstrate a substantial degree of variations in CEO candidate evaluations, with most standard deviations over one. The three characteristics with the highest means and lowest standard deviations are Experience, followed by Intellectual characteristics and Personal characteristics, suggesting that candidates considered for CEO positions are perceived to have long years of work experience, high intellectual and strong personal characteristics. The least important characteristics of CEO in Saudi Arabia are tenure, political connectedness and age.

Discussion

The results indicate the importance of a CEO's overall demographic and managerial characteristics. Demographic characteristics of a CEO, namely, experience, education, age, tenure, and political connectedness are all important. The highest important demographic characteristic is the CEO experience ($m= 4.12$, $S.D.= 1.00$), reflecting a Fairly important score, almost 92% of the participants considered experience as Very important, Fairly important, or Important. This result is consistent with several studies that referred to the importance of CEO experience. For example, Saleh et al. (2020) related CEO experience to corporate performance. Custódio and Metzger (2014) indicated that CEOs with a financial background are able to manage financial aspects more effectively and they are usually employed by more mature and diversified companies. Conyon et al. (2019) argued that CEOs who possess foreign experience provide their companies with a competitive advantage. The second important characteristic is education ($m= 3.89$, $SD = 1.11$), 87% of participants agree that education is very important, Fairly important, or Important. The following demographic characteristics show scores that revolve around the 'Important' score; they are age ($m= 3.29$, $SD = 0.88$), political connectedness ($m= 3.24$, $SD= 1.23$), and tenure ($m= 3.13$, $SD= 1.55$). These results are consistent with several studies. Several scholars have referred to the importance of education (e.g., Fernández-Ortiz & Lombardo, 2009; Hambrick & Mason, 1984) and in Saudi Arabia (e.g., Ghardallou et al., 2020). Highly educated people have an impact on the level of complexity and administrative sophistication (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Managers' educational levels influence their values and views, as well as their decision-making processes (Ghardallou, 2022). The following demographic characteristic is age. Several studies underlined the role of age in business performance. For example, Hambrick and Mason (1984) pointed out that age influences both loyalty to the status quo and openness to accept changes. Additionally, Yang et al. (2011) showed that younger CEOs were capable to take companies public earlier. Rahman and Chen (2022) showed the importance of age in corporate performance. Numerous studies underlined the role of political connectedness to business performance. For example, Cao et al. (2019) emphasized the critical significance role of political connectedness in Chinese business, Saleh et al. (2020) argued that CEO political connections have a positive effect on corporate performance, Wong and Hooy (2018) related political connections to the stability of the Malaysian firms, and Ridge et al. (2017) connected political connections to firm outcomes in the United States.

In terms of managerial characteristics, the results emphasize the importance of all qualities. Each managerial characteristic shows a particular score of importance. This characteristic is comparable to the generic measure of management competence and ability suggested by theorists such as Rosen (1981) and researchers such as (Kaplan et al., 2012; Kaplan & Sorensen, 2021). According to Table 3, intellectual characteristics registered the highest score ($m = 4.05$, $SD = 0.51$), followed by personal characteristics ($m = 4.04$, $SD = 0.59$), and leadership characteristics ($m = 3.93$, $SD = 0.55$), almost reflecting the 'Fairly Important' score. The least important is the interpersonal characteristics ($m = 3.91$, $SD = 0.59$), and motivational characteristics ($m = 3.89$, $SD = 0.61$), almost less than the 'Fairly important' score. These results suggest hiring CEOs who possess greater overall qualities. The importance of CEOs with greater overall talent is consistent with the theories of Rosen (1981) and Gabaix and Landier (2008), as well as studies of Kaplan et al. (2012), and Kaplan and Sorensen (2021).

Conclusion and Future work

CEOs are key players that influence organizational outcomes. CEO is one of the prominent factors that improve a firm's ability to achieve economic goals and enhanced performance. The CEO of an organization frequently interacts with the BOD and is responsible for increasing the company's profitability and making strategic decisions based on his or her own interpretation, which is shaped by his or her experiences, values, and personality. Therefore, it is essential for the BODs to have a checklist of the most important CEO characteristics. The demographic characteristics include age, education, experience, and tenure, whereas the managerial characteristics include leadership, personal, intellectual, motivational, and interpersonal characteristics. Based on analyzing data from 89 participants who hold various management positions in various Saudi Arabia organizations, a substantial degree of variations in the importance of different CEO candidate characteristics were observed, with most standard deviations over one. The three characteristics with the highest means and lowest standard deviations are Experience, followed by Intellectual characteristics, and Personal characteristics. The least important characteristics of a CEO in Saudi Arabia are tenure, political connectedness, and age. Accordingly, to hire the perfect CEO to manage the organization, it is recommended to consider candidates with higher overall qualities, longer years of work experience, and higher intellectual and stronger personal characteristics. For future work, this study can be developed further to examine the influence of each characteristic on the organization's performance.

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