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Effects Of Learning Capabilities On Supply Chain Performance Of Manufacturing Firms In Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract
The main purpose of the study was establish the effects of learning capabilities on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya. The study was guided by Resource Based View Theory. The study adopted explanatory research design. The study targeted a population of 750 registered manufacturing firms in Nairobi. The sample size is of the study was 261 procurement managers. The study used questionnaire as the main data collection instruments to collect primary data. Quantitative data collected using the questionnaires for all the objectives were analysed using descriptive statistics that is frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Frequency tables were used to present the findings in relation to the objectives of the study. The inferential statistics used in this study were correlation and regression models. The study findings indicated that learning capabilities and supply chain performance of manufacturing firms had a positive strong and statistically significant correlation ($r= 0.743$; $p<0.05$). This implies that information sharing within departments enhances supply chain performance. The study concluded that leveraging learning capabilities, manufacturing firms can adapt to evolving market dynamics, anticipate changes in customer demands, and optimize their supply chain operations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in the dynamic business landscape. The study recommends that manufacturing firms should ensure there exist proper company policy for sharing information within the company.

Keywords: *Learning Capabilities, Manufacturing Firms & Supply Chain Performance.*

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I. Introduction

Supply chain performance in the manufacturing sector is measured broadly by the extent to which the organization fulfills the customers and consumer demands. The main key performance indicators (KPIs) used include but not limited to production output per shift, cost per unit of output, percentage resource utilization measured in hours, percentage order units fulfilled, percentage orders fulfilled on time, reduction of out of stock, reduced inventory cost and inventory holding in days' cover and value and finally obsolescence stock rate (Cirtita & Glaser-Segura, 2016).

The first step in designing a responsive supply chain performance is to accept that uncertainty is inherent in innovative products and it has been identified that the necessary components are namely the cost, customer responsiveness, resource, output and flexibility. Therefore, manufacturing firms employ several strategies to improve their overall supply chain performance including emphasis on linkages with supply chain and logistic capabilities of the firms (Liu & Luo, 2012).

Learning capabilities encapsulate a broad spectrum of resources, competencies, processes, firm attributes, and information that empower organizations to devise and execute strategies aimed at enhancing business efficiency and effectiveness (Najafizadeh & Kazemi, 2019). Firms engage learning capabilities in supporting production, building firm's effectiveness, and facilitating profitability in the business environment (Durst & Evangelista, 2018). The learning capabilities are unique to each organization and may therefore differentially influence the inclusive performance (Zijm, Klumpp, Heragu and Regattieri, 2019). Thus, supply chain performance and learning capabilities are becoming more popular and relevant today especially in the wake of globalization. Third party service providers are highly specialized and can offer the same service at a

significantly lower cost thus firms can better manage the forces in the macro environment, be competitive and help the firm improve its supply chain performance in relation to customer responsiveness, growth in sales, reduced inventory cost and development of new products (Fernandes, Moori & Filho, 2018).

Globally, several studies have been conducted to determine the relationship between supply chain performance, learning capabilities and performance of firms. For instance, Liu and Luo (2012) did a study in central south, south and central China regions and examined the effects of learning capabilities on manufacturing firm's performance. The study found out that learning capabilities can be conceptualized as a three-dimensional construct: process capability, flexibility capability and information integration capability. Further, Khan (2019) carried a study on the effects of inbound learning capability on firm performance of garment industry in Bangladesh and the results found that inbound learning capabilities are positively associated with tangible firm performance like return on assets, reduced cost and improve productivity whereas negatively associated with intangible firm performance such as customer satisfaction.

Regionally, South Africa companies face an increasingly challenging marketplace with a growing field of competitors, higher customer expectations, and complex supplier relationships. The need to cut cost is driving companies to outsource business operations, minimize inventories, divert underutilized capital equipment and facilities and in general run as close to the edge as possible (Ambira & Kemoni, 2011).

Many manufacturing firms have relocated or restructured their operations, opting to serve the local market through importing from low-cost manufacturing citing turbulent operating environment and high operating costs. Coulson (2016) noted that real growth in the manufacturing sector averaged 4.1% p.a. during 2006-2013, which is lower than the average annual growth in overall real GDP of 4.6%. As a result, the manufacturing sector's share in output has declined in recent years. According to the World Bank (2018), sluggish growth in the manufacturing sector is pulling down economic growth in Kenya and is also losing grip on the East Africa Community market where it was dominant, due to inefficiencies in logistic capabilities and the unpredictable operating environment. The share of manufactured goods imported by EAC from Kenya had also declined from 9 per cent in 2010 to 7 per cent in 2016.

In Kenya today, increased competition means that companies face a dual challenge of cutting costs while being more responsive to the markets. A study by Kimitei, Chepkwony, Lagat and Bonuke (2019) on the influence of valence of learning information integration capability on firm performance in Kenya showed that each valence of logistic information integration capability has a significant effect on performance. Therefore, whenever firms aim at optimizing information integration capabilities, the firms must pay more attention to each valence.

The history of manufacturing firms in Kenya is characterized by various industrial policies and developments. Kenya's industrial development began before independence in 1963, with a focus on import substitution to achieve rapid industry growth, reduced balance of payment pressure, and increased indigenous participation. However, this strategy did not create the expected employment opportunities. The Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), established in 1959, represents the manufacturing and value-add industries in the country. The manufacturing sector in Kenya is diverse, comprising sub-sectors such as automotive, metal, plastics, and food and beverage, with both large businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) playing a significant role in economic development. The government and private stakeholders are working to increase the manufacturing sector's contribution to the overall GDP, with initiatives such as the Big Four Agenda aiming to raise the sector's GDP contribution to 15%. Despite some recent signs of resurgence, the manufacturing sector in Kenya, has faced challenges and has been performing poorly (Ndung'u, Shimeles & Ngui, 2022).

Despite the benefits of supply chain performance and learning capabilities, according to the World Bank (2016) annual report of firms, customer complaints have increased, there is an increase in operation costs in logistic management and poor efficiency and effectively using resources that has affected the supply chain performance. In addition, within the organizations, logistics is only determined by the significant functions for the company, and do not also consider the functions which have significant and strategic influence on the company. Statistics from World Bank (2016) also showed that Kenyan manufacturing of firms have registered stagnation and declining profits for the last five years due to a turbulent operating environment. It is estimated that large manufacturing companies have lost 70 per cent of their market share in East Africa largely attributed to contingencies arising from among others improper management of logistic capabilities.

According to Mwangi (2019) many manufacturing firms have failed to manage their ever-increasing supply chain costs leading to poor supply chain performance and these costs range from 45-60% in most industries. This amount of money spent represents a significant opportunity for manufacturing firms to realize supply chain performance cost savings/efficiency, customer response and reduction in inventory costs through logistic capabilities. Thus, supply chain performance of the manufacturing sector in Kenya has been affected by use of obsolete practices in logistics. Moreover, most of the companies are not achieving a competitive advantage and better supply chain performance, since their supply chain management strategy are not linked with supply chain linkages and with suppliers and with customers. The study objective was to establish the effects of learning

capabilities on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya. The study was guided by the following research Hypothesis:

H0. Learning capabilities has no significant effect on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya.

II. Literature Review

Learning capabilities is a firm‘s learning, reflected by the ability to create internal knowledge, to acquire external knowledge and to assimilate internal and external knowledge through knowledge sharing (Vera, Crossan, & Apaydin, 2012). Knowledge creation and knowledge acquisition are very important as they build a basis for capability creation. New processes and products mainly result from new combinations of knowledge (Keat, Sam & Kadir, 2018). Firms are expected to possess knowledge-acquisition capability because the capability to create knowledge internally may not be sufficient to cope with the challenges arising from changes in the operating environment (Teece, 2023). Cao, Duan, and Cadden, (2019) used this dimension to refer to the firm‘s ability to attend to products, process or service opportunities, selection of business models and identifying talent to coordinate the firm‘s functional activities.

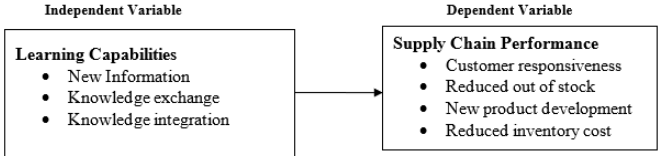
Gomes and Wojahn (2017) conducted a study on Organizational learning capability, innovation and performance: study in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMES) in USA. The research was conducted under the quantitative approach, descriptive and causal, and cross-sectional survey. The sample was composed of 92 enterprises in the textile industry. The data were analyzed through the technique of Structural Equation Modeling. The results show that the organizational learning capability influences the innovative performance of small and medium-sized enterprises; however, the influence of the learning capability in Supply Chain Performance was not significant.

A study was done by Chiva, Ghauri and Alegre (2014) on organizational learning, innovation and internationalization on Spanish firms. The study on complex systems sought to highlight and bring a better understanding on the way in which organizational learning, innovation and internationalization interact and evolve. They conducted case studies from two different Spanish clothing companies and collected data through triangulation research for a period of two years. The results of their study indicated that organizational learning, innovation and internationalization are key elements in the dynamics of an organization.

Sun, Hou and Hailekiros (2021) study on the effect of organizational Learning Capability on firm performance in supply chains, mediated by technological innovation capability using a survey data from 243 small and medium manufacturing firms in Ethiopia indicated that organizational learning capabilities are key for building sustainable competitive advantages and improving firm supply chain performance in the vibrant business arena. The study result discovered that organizational learning capability has strong positive effect on both technological innovation capability and firm supply chain performance.

Abiodun and Kida (2016) studied the impact of strategic learning orientation, entrepreneurial orientation and reconfiguring capabilities on export performance of SME’S in Nigeria. He collected data from a sample of 230 SME’s in Nigeria. From this study results, it concluded that the managerial implication of learning orientation impact on export performance implies that export growth is optimal at very high levels of response to export information which is promoted by commitment to learning, open-mindedness, shared vision, acquisition and distribution of export information and management of mental model. Further, learning orientation -export performance implication represents area of building a cumulative body of relevant knowledge about entrepreneurship and stresses the fact that exporting SMEs are likely to benefit from pursuing learning orientation. Also, the importance of openness and interacting with the environment in organizational learning was identified as one of the important parameters in the organizational learning capability.

Wachira (2021) conducted a study on the relationship between dynamic capabilities and firm performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi County and one of the objectives was to determine how learning capabilities affects performance. A cross-sectional survey was undertaken using explanatory research design. Data was collected from 271 firms, out of a sample of 369. From each of the sampled firms, the CEO and three of his/her direct reports were the respondents. Validity was determined by the use of factor analysis. Reliability test showed that the instrument can be used in future to replicate the study results. Multiple regression analysis was applied to examine the relationship between dynamic capabilities and firm performance. The results of the study revealed that learning capabilities which is a dimension of dynamic capabilities, have significant direct effects on firm performance.



Resource Based View Theory

The study was guided by the Resource Based View Theory proposed by Wernerfelt (1984) and expanded by Barney in (1991), which asserts that firms can gain and sustain competitive advantages which results to superior performance of supply chain by developing and positioning valuable resources and capabilities or through acquiring and controlling the resources. In the context of RBV, organizations are viewed on how their assets, systems and capabilities are used in creating value. In most cases, the firms that gain advantage are those capable of accumulating resources and capabilities that are rare, valuable, non-substitutable and difficult to imitate. Capabilities of the firms take diverse forms such as innovation, organizational learning, business processes and stakeholder integration (Butollo & Schneidemesser, 2022).

Therefore, this theory is important to the study since it focuses logistic capabilities such as process capabilities, logistics information capabilities and learning capabilities contained within the manufacturing firms and influences their supply chain performance. Thus, firm resources and capabilities determine firm supply chain performance and sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, firms should develop learning capabilities in order to reduce costs and maximize their value offer, improve customer service, increase sales growth and be efficient. Therefore, RBV presented a theoretical foundation for this study to examine the relationships between learning capabilities and supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya.

III. Research Methodology And Instrumentation

The study adopted explanatory research design. According to Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2014) explanatory was used to ensure a clear and well stated questions that are investigative which sought to find why and cause-effect relationship. The explanatory research states the relationship that exists between variables and also gives the effect of one variable on others hence investigating the causal effect among the variables in a study.

The study targeted a population of 750 registered manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya. Within these companies, procurement managers were targeted since they have relevant information of logistic capabilities and how it affects supply chain performance within the companies and also understand the background of the operations within the firms.

The researcher obtained sample size using Yamane formulae (1967) (Asenahabi, & Ikoha, 2023).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size required
N is the population size =750
e is the level of precision =0.05

$n=\frac{750}{1+750(0.05)2}$

n=261

The study used questionnaire as the main data collection instruments to collect primary data. A questionnaire consisted of a list of un-structured questions, structured questions and Likert rating scales relating to the field of inquiry with space provided for respondents' explanatory answers and selection of choices. The Likert scale included 5=SA, 4=A, 3=N, 2=D and 1=SD.

Data analysis involved cleaning, sorting, and coding relevant data from the respondents. Data analysis was carried out using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Data was coded using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24.0) program. Quantitative data collected using the questionnaires for all the objectives were analysed using descriptive statistics that is frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Frequency tables were used to present the findings in relation to the objectives of the study. The inferential statistics used in this study were correlation and regression models. The study conducted a correlation analysis to establish the strength of the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable for all the study objectives. This was carried out in order to know if there exists a correlation between the study variables with dependent variable as well as the moderating variable.

IV. Findings

The study findings are presented in Table 1 to table 5. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of effects of learning capabilities on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya.

Table 1 Descriptive Analysis for Learning Capabilities and Supply Chain Performance

Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. New information is shared within the departments to enhance supply chain performance	3.84	1.16	-1.179	0.588

2. The level of knowledge exchange is high in sharing information to enhance customer satisfaction and responsiveness.	3.97	1.05	-1.352	1.39
3. The firm ensures that knowledge is managed through information sharing to enhance supply chain performance	4.08	0.95	-1.61	2.895
4. Exchange of information within the organization takes place frequently, formally and timely	4.06	1.21	-1.052	-0.299
5. The company has frequent communication with suppliers	3.92	1.1	-1.147	0.592
6. The suppliers and customers are provided with any information that might help them to enhance customer satisfaction	4.03	0.83	-1.299	2.145
Valid N	**212**			

Source: Field data, 2023

The study findings from Table 1 revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that new information is shared within the departments to enhance supply chain performance. (Mean=3.84, Standard deviation=1.16). On top of that the study findings revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that the level of knowledge exchange is high in sharing information to enhance customer satisfaction and responsiveness (Mean=3.97, Standard deviation=1.05). Further, the study results showed that majority of respondents agreed that the firm ensures that knowledge is managed through information sharing to enhance supply chain performance (Mean=4.08, Standard deviation=0.95). Further, the results also showed in terms of mean and standard deviation that exchange of information within the organization takes place frequently, formally and timely (Mean=4.06, Standard deviation=1.21).

Further, the study results also showed in terms of mean and standard deviation that the company has frequent communication with suppliers (Mean=3.92, Standard deviation=1.10). Finally, the results also showed in terms of mean and standard deviation that the respondents agree that the suppliers and customers are provided with any information that might help them to enhance customer satisfaction (Mean=4.03, Standard deviation=0.83). The study shows that majority agree that learning capabilities has influence on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya. This implies that information sharing within departments enhances supply chain performance. In addition level of knowledge exchange is crucial to enhance customer satisfaction and responsiveness. Further more information exchange in the firms should be done frequently, formally and timely. Additionally suppliers and customers should be provided with any information that might help them to enhance customer satisfaction. Also manufacturing companies should ensure that they have frequent communication with suppliers. The study results concurred with Gomes and Wojahn (2017) whose results showed that the organizational learning capability influences the innovative performance of small and medium-sized enterprises; however, the influence of the learning capability in Supply Chain Performance was not significant

Correlation Analysis Results

Correlation analysis was done to achieve the strength of an association between independent and dependent variables of the study. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis Results

		Learning Capabilities	**Supply Chain Performance**
Learning Capabilities	Pearson	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Supply Chain Performance	Pearson	.743**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
****. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**			

The goal of the study was to evaluate effects of learning capabilities on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya. The study findings in Table 2 indicated that learning capabilities and supply chain performance of manufacturing firms had a positive strong and statistically significant correlation ($r= 0.743$; $p<0.05$). The findings suggest that as firms enhance their learning capabilities; their supply chain performance tends to improve significantly. This finding concur with Pradabwong et al., (2017) that continuous learning and knowledge management within manufacturing organizations is integral components for achieving better supply chain outcomes, potentially leading to enhanced competitiveness and operational efficiency.

Multiple Regression Analysis

The study used multiple linear regression analysis to determine the combined linear relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables. Table 3 show results of model summary.

Table 3: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.815	.664	.659	.44422

The study results in Table 3 revealed that the model summary which provides the coefficient of determination (R2) which revealed proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that is predictable from the independent variable and correlation coefficient (R) of 0.664 which revealed that there was 66.4% degree of association between the supply chain performance and learning capabilities.

This is supported by coefficient of determination also known as the R square of 0.659. This means that learning capabilities explain 65.9% of the variations in the dependent variable which is supply chain performance. The results further imply that the model applied to link the relationship of the variables was satisfactory.

Multiple Regression Model Fitness Results

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if the simple regression model was fit for the data. The results were as shown in table 4.

Table 4: ANOVA Correlation Analysis Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	81.030	3	27.010	136.876	.000b
Residual	41.045	208	.197		
Total	**122.075**	**211**			

a. *Dependent Variable: Supply Chain Performance;* **b**. *Predictors: (Constant), Learning Capabilities.*

The study findings revealed that the F test value was 136.876. Further the study result revealed the significance value was less than 0.05 thus the model was fit to be fitted in regression model. This implies the independent variable is good predictor of supply chain performance. This further implies that the supply chain performance of manufacturing firms can be regressed against learning capabilities.

Regression Coefficients

The T-test of statistical significance of each regression coefficient was conducted in order to determine the beta (β) which shows how strongly each independent variable influences the dependent variable. Table 5 shows the regression analysis results.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	.582	.171		3.413	0.01
	Learning Capabilities	.458	.043	.519	10.677	.000

The study findings in table 5 shows the regression coefficients results whereby Learning Capabilities had a positive and statistically significant effect on Supply Chain Performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya (β=0.458, p<0.05). This gave an implication that a unit increase in learning capabilities caused 0.458 unit increase in supply chain performance. Therefore, the regression model equation was developed from the coefficient as shown in equation 1;

$Y_i = 0.582 + 0.458X_1$**……..Equation 1**

Hypotheses Testing

The research hypothesis for the study stated H0: Learning capabilities has no significant effect on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya. The regression results in Table 5 indicate that there is significant relationship between Learning capabilities and supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya and with a beta coefficient of 0.458 and significance of (p= 0.000). The study rejected the null hypothesis. The study findings agreed with Kariuki et al. (2019) findings which indicated that an effective company is a knowledge-creating company, and one which is able reliably to create new knowledge and distribute

it throughout the company. The study therefore concludes that the creation and transfer of new knowledge in an organization is a critical factor in an organization's success, competitiveness and its overall performance. The study findings also revealed that the transfer of supply chain created knowledge improves the performance of state corporations as an increase in generation of new ideas, and proper defined methodology in operations increases performance.

V. Discussion Of Findings

Learning capabilities has influence on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya. Information sharing within departments enhances supply chain performance. In addition level of knowledge exchange is crucial to enhance customer satisfaction and responsiveness. Further more information exchange in the firms should be done frequently, formally and timely. Additionally suppliers and customers should be provided with any information that might help them to enhance customer satisfaction. Also manufacturing companies should ensure that they have frequent communication with suppliers

VI. Conclusions And Recommendations

The study concluded that learning capabilities has influence on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms. Learning capabilities encapsulate a broad spectrum of resources, competencies, processes, firm attributes, and information that empower organizations to devise and execute strategies aimed at enhancing business efficiency and effectiveness. These encompass not only tangible assets but also intangible elements such as knowledge, skills, and organizational culture, all of which play pivotal roles in driving continuous improvement and innovation within firms. Leveraging these learning capabilities, manufacturing organizations can adapt to evolving market dynamics, anticipate changes in customer demands, and optimize their supply chain operations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in the dynamic business landscape.

The study recommends that manufacturing firms should ensure there exist proper company policy for sharing information within the company. Additionally suppliers and customers should be provided with any information that might help them to enhance customer satisfaction. Manufacturing firms should focus on improving their learning capabilities to enhance supply chain performance. This can be achieved through promoting a culture of knowledge sharing and continuous learning within the organization.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

The study established the effects of learning capabilities on supply chain performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya. Further research should focus on exploring the effectiveness of implementing the latest technological advancements and innovations in supply chain management recommendations in different manufacturing firms and industries.

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