



**THE INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC LEARNING CULTURE CAPABILITY ON
PERFORMANCE OF VENDOR MANAGED RETAIL MEDIUM AND LARGE
SUPERMARKETS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA**

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1: Abstract

The general objective of this study was to determine the influence of strategic management capabilities on the performance of vendor managed retail medium and large supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya. The specific objective was to establish the extent to which strategic learning culture capability as measured by system's thinking and team learning contributes to profitability of the vendor managed retail medium and large supermarkets. Mental models, personal mastery and systems thinking were used as indicators of the specific objective. To achieve this objective the study adopted a descriptive survey. The study population comprised of all senior managers of the medium and large supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya. According to business licensing department at the Nairobi City County, there are forty-three medium and fifteen large supermarkets in Nairobi County and are defined based on the license fee at USD 800 and USD 1200 respectively per annum. A multiple linear regression analysis was used in analysis. Strategic learning culture capability was found to be significant at 95% confidence level and positively affecting performance of retail supermarkets. This study concluded that strategic learning culture capability contributes to performance of the vendor managed retail medium and large supermarkets. The results of this study have shown that strategic learning culture capability had a statistically significant positive effect on vendor managed retail firm performance. The study recommends that future studies should look into the causes for low levels of strategic adoption capabilities by vendor managed retail firms.

Keywords: Strategic learning culture, vendor managed retail

2: Introduction

Debt Retailing, which is responsible for matching the individual demands of consumer with vast quantities of supplies Produced by a huge range of manufacturers and service providers has made a significant Contribution to economic prosperity (Dunne, 2010). It has the potential to create more employment opportunities through establishment of retail outlets to meet the multiple consumer needs. Wal-mart substantially impacted on the American economy in 2004 by raising consumer discretionary income by almost 1% p.a. (Dunne, 2010). Delloite (2012), report on the growth of the Global Retail Sector in 2012, observed that the global retail industry continued to grow with retail revenue rising by 5.1% to US\$4.271 trillion for the world's top 250 retailers in fiscal 2012, building on 2011 growth of 5.3%. More than 80% of the Top 250 retailers (204 companies) posted an increase in retail revenue (Delloite, 2013). Despite this gravitational importance, the sector nevertheless requires an endowment of legible strategic capabilities to be competitive.

Diop and Topping (2008), observed that the modern day realities of business demand for application of creative approaches that guarantee competitive advantage for sustained profitability as opposed to through increase in prices. Writings on boundless sustainable competitive advantage aver that firms can obtain competitive advantage by value creating strategies not simultaneously being implemented by any current competitor. These strategies need to be rare, valuable and non-substitutable. Yuan *et al* (2010) studied Taiwan high-tech industry and established that organizational learning culture significantly affects firm performance and serves as the most important source of competitive advantage.

The dynamic capability perspective focuses on the capacity of an organization facing a rapidly changing environment has to create new resources, to renew or alter its resource mix (Teece et al., 1997). It acknowledges that top management team and its beliefs about organizational evolution may play an important role in developing dynamic capabilities. Even with availability of stock of resources, what matters more are the mechanisms by which firms learn and accumulate new skills and capabilities and the forces that limit the rate and direction of this process. Without dynamic capabilities, a firm's returns may be short lived if the environment exhibits any significant changes. The retail sector is currently taking new shape through monumental change process occasioned by not only deliberate regulatory policy but also intense global competition. Dynamic capabilities allow firms continually to have a competitive advantage and sustain profitability potential even in the face of environmental changes. Teece et al., 1997) observe that the capacity to reconfigure and transform is itself a learned organizational skill- hence the undertaking of this study to establish the influence of strategic learning culture on performance of retail sector in Nairobi county.

3: Problem Statement

The study aimed to establish the influence of strategic learning culture Capability on performance of medium and large supermarkets in the Nairobi County in Kenya. The strategic capabilities construct remains pivotal for a business enterprise to earn sustained competitive advantage. Dunne (2010) observed that retailing, which is responsible for matching the individual demands of consumers with vast quantities

of supplies Produced by a huge range of manufacturers, has made a significant contribution to economic prosperity). Delloite (2012) observed that the global retail industry continued to grow, building on the rebound in growth that started in 2010. More than 80% of the Top 250 retailers (204 companies) posted an increase in retail revenue. However, many other companies experienced decline in profitability and growth.

In the year 2006, the focus of Kenya`s development blueprint however shifted to a long term highly ambitious Vision 2030 in which the Wholesale and Retail Trade sector was tasked at moving towards a formal sector that is efficient, multi-tiered, diversified in product range, and innovative (GOK, 2013). The medium term goal of the sector is to stimulate additional Ksh 50 billion increase in GDP by; Creating 10 district based wholesale hubs, establishing 1,000-1,500 producer business groups (PBGs); building at least 10 formal ‘Tier 1’ district based retail market places, Increasing formal market (supermarkets) share from 5 percent to 30 percent, attracting at least 3 new retailers with 10 or more stores each and creating 1 free trade port in Mombasa in a strategy dubbed ‘bringing Dubai to Kenya’. (GOK, 2013). It is therefore imperative that the sector possesses the requisite capabilities to be able to deliver.

The objective of the Kenya Vision 2030 is to create at least 10 wholesale hubs to improve the supply chain of small operator retail market and expand formal market outreach. The rationale being to establish a world class retail sector in Kenya. This can only happen when individual Medium and Large Supermarkets which are significant stakeholders in the retail sector grow individually and their growth contributes to

that of the market. But with new market and government policy changes, it necessitates employment of non-ordinary measures to assume superior performance. There exists a gap in literature as to whether strategic learning culture, which breeds innovativeness and superior performance amidst odds is practiced in the retail sector. Do we have suitable infrastructural systems in place to facilitate dissemination of knowledge and skill to promote agility through innovations? Further the Kenyan sector continues being vulnerable to global competitors that are more formal, agile and with more efficient supply chains. What can the sector do to become competitive and sustain the same over a longer period? This study therefore sought to address these gaps by answering the research question; what is the relationship of strategic learning culture capability with the performance of vendor managed retail medium and large supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya?

4: Research Objective

To establish the extent to which strategic learning culture capability contributes to performance of the vendor managed retail medium and large supermarkets in Nairobi County in Kenya.

5: Research Hypothesis

H0: $\beta_j = 0$: Strategic learning culture capability does not significantly contribute to performance of the vendor managed medium and large retail supermarkets in Nairobi County in Kenya.

6: Empirical Review: Strategic Learning Culture

Before embarking on the study, a review of previous studies in relation to strategic learning culture was conducted. Nevertheless it was observed that no author

had conclusively answered the research objective in this article. Nabong (2015) defines learning culture as a collection of organizational conventions, values, practices and processes which enable employees and organizations develop knowledge and competence. According to Nabong, the benefits of organizational learning culture include; increasing efficiency and productivity, increases employee satisfaction, creates culture of knowledge inquiry and sharing, enhance ability of workers to adapt to change. The suitability of a learning culture therefore promotes knowledge and skill acquisition which facilitates innovativeness potentially leading to long term profitability and performance (Hussan et al, 2014).

In their study on the effects of culture on knowledge management practice, Gan, Ryan & Gururajan (2006) found collaboration, mutual trust, learning, leadership, incentives and rewards to be significant facilitators to knowledge management practice in MSC status companies in Malaysia. After investigating 3,089 companies in Slovenia, Croatia, Rasula, Vuksic & Stemberger (2012), they suggested that organizational change helps an organization to optimize processes and defines process oriented structure as these would help knowledge management to be adopted correctly within the organization. Furthermore, effective knowledge management cannot be implemented without a significant behavioral and cultural change. There should therefore be a strong culture, trust and transparency in all areas of the organization.

Stevens (2010) did an exploratory study to examine knowledge transfer strategies within the framework of a multi-

generational workforce. He compared differences in workforce generations and examined different methods to pass on knowledge cross-generationally. He concluded that companies must design knowledge transfer strategies conducive to multi-generational workforce dynamics keeping in mind the generational diversity that exists in the workplace.

A joint study conducted by International Business Machines Corporation and the American Society of Training and Development revealed that 60% of respondents utilize mentoring as a method of passing on knowledge, while approximately one-half still use document/heavy repositories as tools for capturing knowledge (Lesser & Rivera, 2006). The study also noted that mentoring is most effective in learn-while-doing scenarios where mentors offer guidance to students in realistic situations they may be encountering. Thus, the one-on-one relationship between the mentor and the mentee helps facilitate the transfer of experiential and tacit knowledge. However, mentoring, a valid experiential and tacit knowledge transfer method is time consuming. Furthermore, the pairing of mentor and mentee is of concern. The mentoring relationship must bridge the generational gap. If the mentoring relationship cannot be established, then knowledge transfer will not occur.

Other forms of knowledge transfer include classroom training led by older workers, fostering learning communities to encourage sharing of learning and experiences between young and older workers, and leveraging multimedia tools, such as audio/video interviewing and storytelling to preserve significant learning from aging employees (Lesser & Rivera, 2006). These knowledge transfer strategies assume training and

development resources. Additionally, organizational culture must be examined since the use of a storytelling and contextually based transfer design may create discomfort. One of the challenges to instructional designers who consider using storytelling and contextually based design techniques is the issue of whether such approaches will be accepted within the culture of the organization. Another

challenge in storytelling is credibility. In some instances, workers may feel that they are inappropriate as an approach to knowledge transfer.

Conceptual frame work

Based on the study's objectives, a conceptual framework has been developed as indicated in figure 1 below.

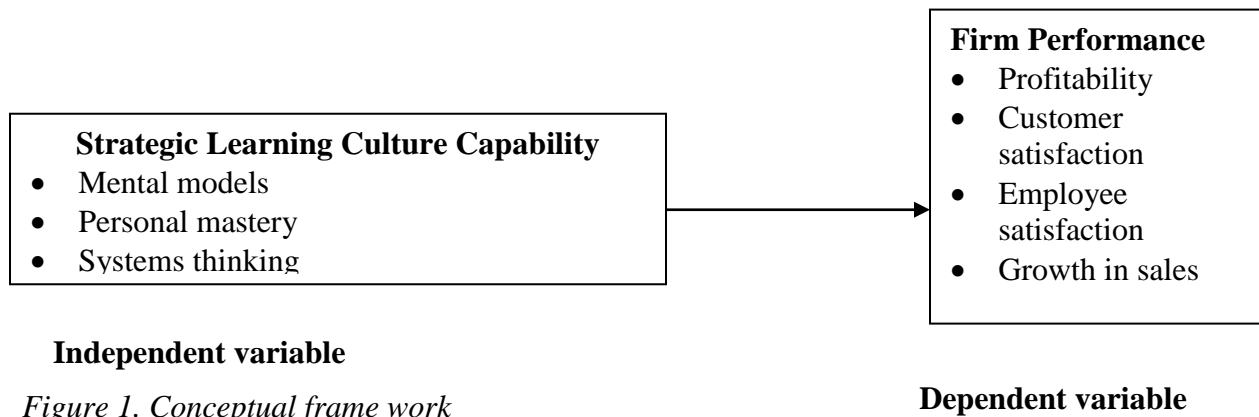


Figure 1. Conceptual frame work

7: Methodology

This study utilized a mixed research design that included qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative and quantitative research methods complemented each other in this study in the sense that while quantitative research method included multiple linear regression model whose coefficients were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for overall model significance qualitative research method involved content analysis where issues emerging from the key open ended questions were clustered into thematic areas upon which interpretation and conclusions were drawn.

The study population comprised the vendor managed retail medium and large supermarkets in located in Nairobi County. According to business licensing department at the Nairobi City County, there are 58 medium and large supermarkets in Nairobi

County. The target population included five senior managers in each of the 58 medium and large supermarkets. Simple random sampling technique was used to select two of the management staff from the medium and large supermarkets of Nairobi County making a sample size of 116.

Data collection methods for primary data comprised structured questionnaires while Secondary data was obtained from firm records, reports, publications (magazines and books). A Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach coefficient alpha), which is based on internal consistency was calculated using SPSS to establish the reliability of the survey instrument. The pilot results revealed Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.810 hence proving the instrument reliable. The data was purely quantitative and it was analyzed by descriptive statistics that included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20 was used to aid in data analysis.

Tables were used to summarize responses for further analysis and facilitate comparison. The findings were presented using tables and charts. A multiple linear regression analysis was done using the following formula:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where

Y= vendor managed retail firms performance

X₁= Strategic Innovations Capability

β₁ = Beta coefficient for corresponding variable

ε= Stochastic term

8: Results of the Study

8.1: Response Rate

Out of the 116 respondents surveyed, 91 administered questionnaires were filled and returned. This translates into a response rate of 78.4%. According to Babbie (2002), a response rate of 50% and above is adequate for analysis and reporting hence a response rate of 78.4% was considered excellent for analysis and reporting in this study.

Mugenda (2008) classified response rate into three categories; 50% as adequate; 60% as good; and 70% and over as excellent.

8.2: Vendor Managed Medium and large supermarkets Performance

Organizational performance is a business processes outcome within an organization and a symbol of company success (Zhang & McCullough, 2005). In this regard, the study first sought to find out the performance of vendor managed medium and large retail supermarkets in Kenya, a five point likert scale containing seven performance measuring statements was used. The scale ranged from 1-5, with 1 denoting strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree. The midpoint of the scale was a score of 3. Therefore, any score above 3 denoted that respondents agreed with the statement while scores below 3 signified that respondents disagreed with the statement. Table 1 below illustrates means and standard deviations obtained on the scale measuring firm performance.

Table 1: Vendor managed medium and large supermarkets performance

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std
	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %		Dev.
We are more efficient in service delivery	52	44.8	7	5.9	1	0.8	0.47
We have increased number of customers	35	30.2	20	17.2	1	0.8	0.14
We have increased the number of products and services offered in this supermarket	15	13.0	12	10.3	0	0.0	0.03
We have improved our sales	16	13.8	16	13.8	0	0.0	0.00
We have better profits	15	13.0	31	26.7	0	0.0	0.82
We have increased the number of employees	4	3.4	40	34.4	7	6.0	0.45

We have opened new branches

1617.62628.6 12 13.2 3134.166.63.16 1.258

Key: SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, N-Neutral, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree f-frequency

As shown in the table above, the mean scores obtained by the respondents on the statements measuring firm performance ranged from 3.16 to 4.47. The highest ranked statements were; “we are more efficient in service delivery (4.47)” and “we have increased number of customers (4.14).” On the other hand, the lowest ranked statements were; “we have opened new branches (3.16)” and “we have increased the number of employees (3.45)”. Based on these findings, it emerged that all the

statements on the scale measuring firm performance of medium and large supermarkets obtained mean scores above 3.00, meaning majority of the respondents agreed with the statements.

Based on the ratings given on the scale, an overall score for the firm performance was computed, with the highest possible score being 35 and the lowest possible score being 7. The midpoint on the scale was 21. The figure and table below illustrates results of this analysis.

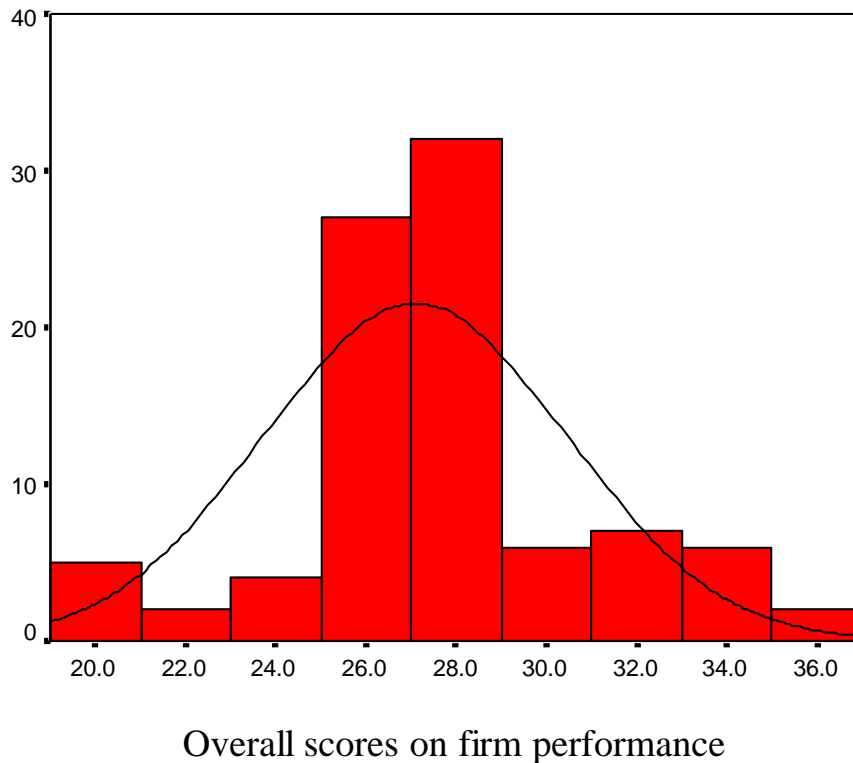


Fig 2: Respondents' overall scores on performance

Table 2: Overall statistical scores on firm performance

Descriptive statistics on Firm performance	
N	91
Mean	27.0879
Std. Deviation	3.36864
Variance	11.34774
Skewness	.079
Std. Error of Skewness	.253
Kurtosis	.562
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.500

As shown in table 2 above, the overall scores obtained by the respondents on the scale measuring firm performance ranged from 20.0 to 36.0 with a mean score of 27.0879 and standard deviation of 3.36864. Majority of the respondents obtained mean scores above 21 meaning their firms had recorded improved performance in terms of number of customers, profits earned, sales made, products and services offered and also the numbers of employees within the firm. The numeric value for skewness (0.079) denoted that the distribution of the scores on the scale was positively skewed.

8.3: Assessment of Strategic Learning Culture Capability

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of strategic learning culture capability on the performance of the vendor managed medium and large retail supermarkets. To address this objective, respondents were presented with 5 items on a five point likert scale. The scale ranged from 1-5, with 1 denoting strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree. The midpoint of the scale was a score of 3. Therefore, mean score below 3 denoted that respondents disagreed with the statement while mean score above 3 denoted that respondents agreed with the statement. Table 3 below depicts means and standard deviations obtained.

Table 3 : Strategic learning culture capability

Statements	SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	Std. Dev.
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
We have shared mental models on how the firm should operate	55	60.427	29	29.79	9	9.9	0	0	0	0	4.51	.673

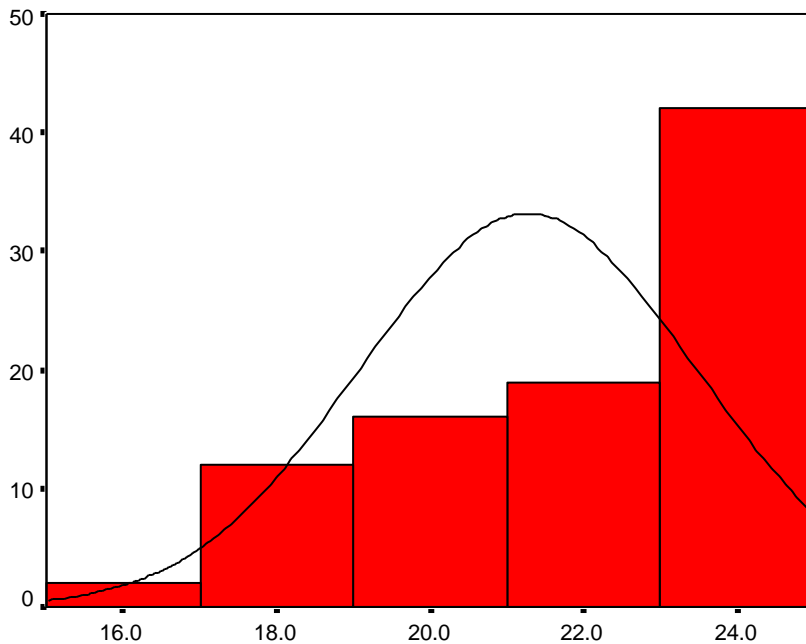
There is team learning in this firm	49	53.834	37.48	8.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.45	.654
We have shared vision on where we want to be as an organization	41	45.143	47.37	7.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.37	.626
We have encouraged personal mastery in this supermarket	26	28.656	61.59	9.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.19	.595
We have systems thinking in this supermarket	6	6.6	57	62.628	30.80	0.0	0	0.0	3.76	.565

Key: SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, N-Neutral, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree, f-frequency

As shown in Table 3 above, the mean scores obtained by the respondents on the scale measuring strategic learning culture capability ranged from 3.76 to 4.51. The highly scored statements were; “We have shared mental models on how the firm should operate (4.51)” and “there is team learning in this firm (4.45)”. On the other hand, the lowly scored statements were; “we have systems thinking in this supermarket (3.76)” and “We have encouraged personal mastery in this supermarket (4.19)”. This shows that most of the supermarkets that

were sampled had laid down proper channels of communication within the organization in relation to their operations, goals and vision. The study also established that most of top managers had accorded all individuals within the organization an opportunity to independent learning initiative.

Figure 3 illustrates the overall scores obtained by the respondents on statements measuring the influence of strategic learning culture capability on firm performance.



Overall scores on strategic learning culture capability

Fig 3: Respondents Overall scores on strategic learning culture

Table 4: Overall descriptive statistics on strategic learning culture capability

Overall descriptive statistics on strategic learning culture capability

N	91
Mean	21.2747
Std. Deviation	2.18615
Variance	4.77924
Skewness	-1.019
Std. Error of Skewness	.253
Kurtosis	.136
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.500

As reflected in Figure 2 and table 4, the scores obtained by 91 respondents on the scale measuring the influence of strategic learning culture capability on firm performance ranged from 16.0 to 24.0. The

overall mean score was 21.2747 with a standard deviation of 2.18615. The numeric value, -1.019, for skewness denoted that the distribution of the scores on the scale was negatively skewed.

To find out whether strategic culture capability had any influence on firm performance, the null hypothesis of the study was tested. This hypothesis stated that:-

H0: $\beta_j = 0$: Strategic learning culture capability does not significantly contribute to performance of the vendor managed medium and large retail supermarkets.

To test this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted with the independent variable being strategic learning culture and the dependent variable being firm performance. Results of this analysis are demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Relationship between strategic learning culture capability and firm performance

Variables	Pearson Moment Correlation	ProductStrategic learning culture capability	learningFirm performance
Strategic learning culture capability	Pearson Correlation	1	.383**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	91	91
Firm performance	Pearson Correlation	.383**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	91	91

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

As shown in Table 5 above, the correlation analysis results revealed that there was a significant relationship between strategic learning culture capability and firm performance, ($r=0.383$, $p<0.05$ level of significance). This means that strategic learning culture capability had a positive impact on firm performance. The null hypothesis of the study $H_0 : \beta_j = 0$ was therefore rejected and its alternate form $H_1 : \beta_j \neq 0$ accepted. These findings are corroborative with the results of the study by Hussein, Omar, Noordin & Ishak (2015) who established that there was a significant positive relationship between organization learning culture, organizational innovativeness and organizational

performance among academics in a Public Institution of Higher Education (PIHE) in Malaysia.

8.4 Regression line fitting

In order to establish the relative contribution of strategic learning culture capability on firm performance, the following linear regression model was applied with the firm performance as the dependent variable.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

Where Y= vendor managed medium and large supermarkets performance

X_1 = Strategic Learning Culture Capability

ϵ =stochastic term

Table 5: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	RStd. Error of the Estimate
1	.383	.147	.137	3.12931

a Predictors: (Constant), Strategic learning culture capability

Table 5 shows an R square value of 0.147 meaning the independent variable (strategic learning culture capability) explained 14.7% of the variation in firm performance. Table 6 shows regression coefficients for the model.

Table 6: Correlation coefficients for the model

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	14.535	3.227	4.504	.000
Strategic learning culture capability	.590	.151	.383	.000

a Dependent Variable: Firm performance

As presented in Table 6 the estimated regression model is as follows:-

$$Y = 14.535 + 0.590X_1 + \varepsilon$$

This means that firm performance is predicted to improve by 0.590 when strategic learning culture capability goes up by one unit. The regression analysis model clearly shows that strategic learning culture capability had a positive impact on firm performance.

9: Conclusion

Based on the research findings, this study concluded that strategic learning culture capability contributes to performance of the vendor managed retail medium and large supermarkets. The results of this study have shown that strategic learning culture capability had a statistically significant positive effect on vendor managed retail firm performance and therefore a unit increase application of strategic learning

culture capability will lead to increase in vendor managed retail firm performance. The null hypothesis that $\beta=0$ was rejected and alternative hypothesis therefore $\beta \neq 0$ was accepted. It consequently emerged that more emphasis on strategic learning culture capability within a firm leads to improved firm performance.

10: Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the author recommends that since strategic learning culture practices in vendor managed retail firms are still low, they should be amplified to have a bigger positive impact on firm performance over a longer time span. Further this study recommends that managers of vendor managed retail firms should receive

requisite training on strategic learning culture capabilities which their firms can employ to remain competitive amidst growing market changes. The study also recommends that policy makers should adopt stakeholder management approach in developing far reaching policies to develop the sectors without losing out on some areas.

11: Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies should look into the causes for low levels of strategic adoption capabilities by vendor managed retail firms. They should also examine the drivers of strategic capabilities adoption among the vendor managed retail firms and enlarge scope to look into adoption of strategic capabilities in different sectors and by different firm sizes.

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