

Exploring the Impact of Life Skills Training on Performance in Supply Chain Management: A Case of Manufacturing Firms in Kenya

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Abstract

This research sought to explore the impact of life skills training on performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firm's supply chains using three indicators; intrapersonal relationships, interpersonal relationships and critical and creative decision making. The above three factors will determine how supply chain management workers relate with each other and their decision making capability during work thus affecting the quality of their output which in turn affects supply chain performance which was measured using the SCPM index model. The study utilized a descriptive study method applying a survey research methodology targeting the Kenyan population. To ensure reliability and validity, questionnaires and interview schedules were pre tested on nine respondents in manufacturing firms in Thika town which is not in the study area. To establish the reliability of the study; Coefficient of variation (Cv) which gives a reliability indicator derived from the standard deviation using the formulae below; $Cv = S/M$, which produced a ratio of 0.9321 which was very close to 1 making the instruments better tools for carrying out the research. A sample of 32 employees was administered with questionnaires and interview schedules that had both open and closed questions with 28 employees (86.67%) responding and 4 employees (13.33%) not responding. The study results revealed that there was a positive relationship between life skills training supply chain performance in manufacturing firms in Kenya. The study recommends that all manufacturing firms should train their employees in life skills training to reduce work related stress and conflicts and promote critical and creative decision making. Additionally the study recommends that general awareness on the importance of life skills training should be made in all manufacturing firms through the media because majority of the employees interviewed had no idea about the existence of life skills.

Keywords

Life Skills Training, Supply Chain Performance, Employee Stress Management, Critical and Creative Thinking, Manufacturing Firms, Kenya Youth Empowerment, Performance

1. Introduction

This section discusses various aspects of the study including; background of the study which gives an in-depth review of the historical development of the research problem globally, regionally, and locally, statement of the problem that tries to give a picture of the real situation and the ideal situation and establishes the gap that the research has to fill, study objectives, significance of the study, scope of the study, hypothesis and also general objectives of the study.

1.1. Background of the Study

In today's ever changing business environment, even manufacturing and processing firms have come to rely on life skills training in order to improve supply chain performance. According to a research paper by Kabinga LK, Iravo A (2013) titled "Role of inventory security practices on organization procurement performance in clearing and forwarding firms in Nairobi County, Kenya" they found out that globalization of the world economy is forcing multinational firms to integrate global manufacturing with international logistics and transport systems. To compete in this dynamic marketplace, clearing and forwarding firms must emphasize their core

competencies and outsource their logistics value-added activities to third-party logistics providers. It is against this background that all manufacturing firms must teach their staff on life skills training in order to compete in this saturated market and remain profitable through customer retention due to high performance of their supply chain functions.

Certainly, there are plenty of small manufacturing firms, SME'S and sole proprietary business that do not value the importance of life skills training. Indeed for most of the local manufacturing firms, like food processors, plastic manufacturers and steel fabricators, investing in life skills training and development might constitute a wasteful use of financial resources. But for most multinational companies and conglomerates, that feature high volume turnover of raw materials, work in progress, semi-finished goods, finished goods and disposal of scrap materials, life skills training has emerged as a key component of supply chain performance strategy aimed at increasing supply chain productivity and maintaining a competitive edge against competitors in the market. Moreover, the recent creation of the East Africa Community Common Markets, bring together key industry players in the manufacturing sector from the five member countries, has also contributed to the growing popularity of life skills training due to the increased competition and customer awareness. Given such developments, it is little wonder that manufacturing firm's executives commonly cite life skills training as a vital element that can spell the difference success and failure today's keenly competitive business.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Manufacturing firms in the country have been facing various challenges related to the following; employees stress, emotions, low self esteem, lack of effective communication skills, peaceful conflict resolution, negotiation, sympathy, empathy, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making and creative thinking in relation to supply chain performance. While every manufacturing organization is without doubt unique in its supply chain performance expectations in terms of; short lead times, quality supply, value for money, uninterrupted manufacturing operations, schedule manufacturing, safety and security of storage and warehousing, effective and efficient distribution, the role played by life skills training cannot be ignored. Using life skills training and development to increase employees output and productivity optimizes efficiency and effectiveness and improves consistency across every aspect of supply chain performance in manufacturing firms.

1.3. Research Objectives

The general objective of the study was to exploring the impact of life skills training on performance in supply chain management: A case of manufacturing firms in Kenya

1.4. Specific Objectives

However, the study will specifically seek to:

- i. To examine the effect of intrapersonal relationship skills on performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firms in Kenya.
- ii. To examine the effect of interpersonal relationship skills on performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firms in Kenya..
- iii. To examine the effect of decision making skills on performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

1.5. Research Questions

- i. What is the effect of intrapersonal relationship skills on performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firms in Kenya.
- ii. What is the effect of interpersonal relationship skills on performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firms in Kenya.
- iii. What is the effect of decision making skills on performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

1.6. Hypothesis

- i. Intrapersonal relationship skills affects performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firms in Kenya.
- ii. Interpersonal relationship skills affects performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firms in Kenya.
- iii. Decision making skills affects on performance in supply chain management in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

1.7. Significance of the Study

The study is significant to the following stakeholders in the manufacturing industry;

- i. Employees will have the knowledge required to balance between achievement of their organizations goals and objectives and their personal life.
- ii. Manufacturing firm's top management will be able to deal with employees day to day challenges and problems when they arise due to personal and family related problems.
- iii. The guidance and counseling department will have a new understanding of employees personal wellbeing thus is able to offer the right advice.

1.8. Scope of the Study

The study was carried out within Kenya's three major cities namely; Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu. The study focus was a sample of major departments within manufacturing firms that were directly involved in supply chain performance namely; procurement department, operations department, stores department and distribution

department.

1.9. Limitations of the Study

Like all studies carried out by other scientific scholars, the study is not without limitations. These include the following;

- i. Financial constraints.
- ii. Lack of enough time.
- iii. Lack of willingness to cooperation by some of the respondents.
- iv. Limited resource materials.

2. Literature Review

According to a paper by Preet Vihar, (2005), titled “Life skills education and CCE” Life skills have been defined as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (WHO). ‘*Adaptive*’ means that a person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust in different circumstances. ‘*Positive behaviour*’ implies that a person is forward looking and even in difficult situations, can find a ray of hope and opportunities to find solutions. The terms livelihood skills refers to capabilities, resources and opportunities, to pursue individual and household economic goals and relates to income generation. Thus, Life skills are distinct from livelihood skills (WHO, 1993). Life skills go beyond provision of knowledge and information. They provide a way to help employees overcome obstacles, avoid risky behaviour and develop and sustain positive behaviour. Life skills are based on living values which can be defined as principles and beliefs held by people in order to guide them in their behaviour. Living values include the following;

Integrity, Peace, Honesty, Simplicity, Respect, Responsibility, Happiness, Tolerance, Freedom, Cooperation, Humidity, Unity and Love. Life skills are abilities that enable individuals to deal effectively with day to day challenges (Preet Vihar, 2005).

According to a paper by United nations (2003) titled “Life Skills Training Guide for Young People: HIV/AIDS and Substance Use Prevention” learning takes place when: the perceived needs of the learner are satisfied; should be meaningful; is effective when the learners participate actively; is effective when there is repetition of activity; is facilitated when the situations are real and lifelike; is facilitated when the learners are ready to learn – let them know what they are about to learn; is more effective when the facilitator praises, encourages and at times, gives rewards; is affected by the social and physical environment and is gradual, so start from the simple and move to the complex (O.P. Dahama et al, 1991).

Life skills can be divided into three categories- skills of understanding and living with one self; skills of understanding and living with others and those that enable one to make effective, informed and responsible decisions in life. Life skills are supported by a strong value system of living values. Values are guiding principles or beliefs that guide us through life. Life skills and values enable us become better workers, business people and develop a good character. We all need life skills in our personal as well as our places of work in order to enhance output and performance. Additionally, life skills can be categorized as follows; intrapersonal relationships skills, interpersonal relationships skills and critical and creative decision making skills as shown below:

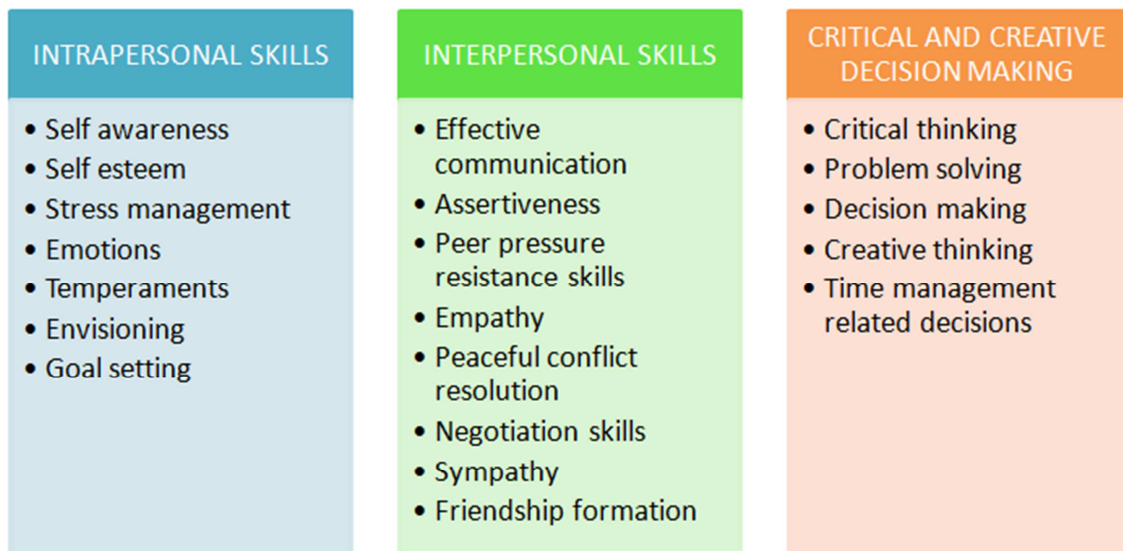


Figure 1. Categories of life skills.

2.1. Impact of Intrapersonal Skills on Supply Chain Performance

Intrapersonal life skills refers to the ability of individuals to know and understand themselves in terms of being able to

control ones emotions and stress so that one achieves self awareness which enhances their self esteem thus one is able to do envisioning and goal setting in the manufacturing firms promoting supply chain performance. This promotes supply chain performance because the employees in manufacturing

firms are able to control their emotions and stress levels while at work places therefore, able to concentrate on achieving the firms set goals objectively.

According to a research paper by Thomas W. Colligan and Eileen M. Higgins (2005) titled Workplace Stress: Etiology and Consequences, workplace stress can be defined as the change in one's physical or mental state in response to workplaces that pose an appraised challenge or threat to that employee. Research has shown that there are a number of factors that contribute to workplace stress. These factors include a toxic work environment, negative workload, isolation, types of hours worked, role conflict, role ambiguity,

lack of autonomy, career development barriers, difficult relationships with administrators and/or coworkers, managerial bullying, harassment, and organizational climate. Should the stressors continue, the employee is at significant risk of developing physiological and psychological disorders that can lead to increased absenteeism, organizational dysfunction, and decreased work productivity? Intervention strategies are discussed to help managers provide support and intervention to employees coping with workplace stress.

The combination of all these elements makes one to have a specific character traits known as temperament as shown by the diagram below;

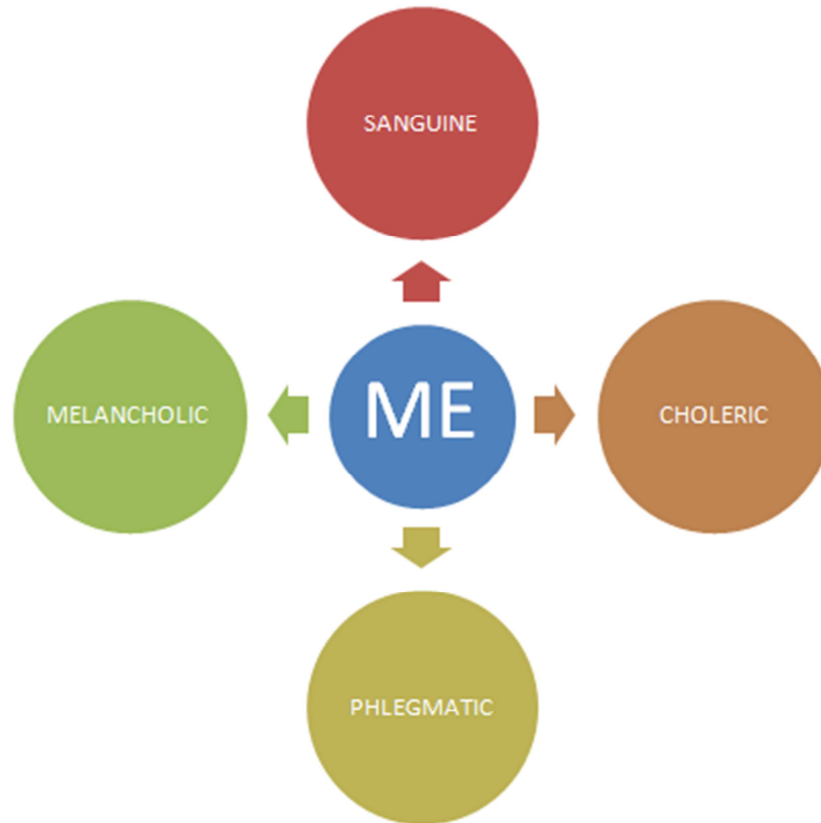


Figure 2. Types of Human Personality.

2.2. Impact of Interpersonal Skills on Supply Chain Performance

Human beings have a need to relate with other human beings i.e. they are called social beings. Interpersonal relationships denote the ability to associate with other people and being able to live with them harmoniously. One has to be

assertive and use effective communication skills at manufacturing firms in order to be able to show empathy and sympathy, peaceful conflict resolution, good negotiation skills, friendship formation and the ability to resist peer pressure enhancing supply chain performance. The communication process is outlined below;

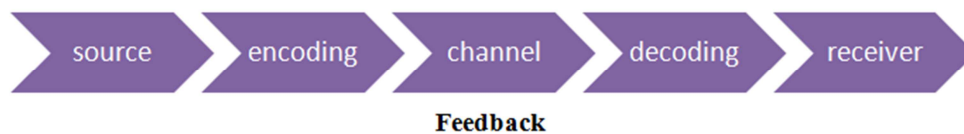


Figure 3. Communication Process.

2.3. Impact of Decision Making Skills on Supply Chain Performance

Decision making entails identifying and choosing

alternative solutions that led to a desired state of affairs in manufacturing firms in Kenya. Your decisions should be made critical and creative in a timely manner so that the

desired goal for achieving supply chain performance is achieved immediately (Leanders et al, 1989). Employees in manufacturing firms who have good decision making skills have a higher performance level in supply chain than those who lack them. A typical decision making process will involve the following seven steps;

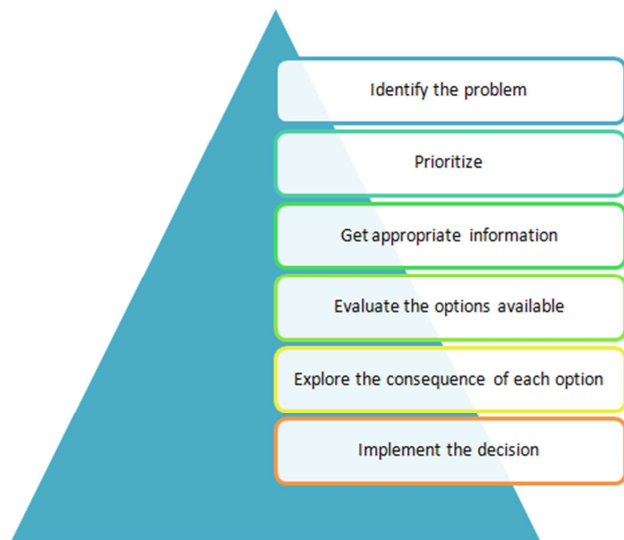


Figure 4. Decision making Process.

2.4. Supply Chain Performance Measurement

The term supply chain in manufacturing firms in Kenya

refers to the flow of raw materials along the factory floor through the production process all the way to the distribution of the finished products to final consumers. Raw materials may include maize, wheat, barley, vegetables and fruits, for agro processing companies. Lyson, K. Farrington, B., (2007) states that the first crucial step in value addition is to get raw materials of the right quality, quantity, price from the right location and at the right time. Hence the need to have workers with the right training not only in supply chain management, but also in life skills training which enhances their ethical background. The workers need to have good communication skills in order to negotiate effectively with potential suppliers and be able to solve conflicts and problems that may arise during the course of the relationship. Additionally factory workers who are not able to manage their emotions and stress will jeopardize supply chain operations causing wastage of money and company resources (Dobler, D W., David N. B 1996).

This is the background on which organization must measure their supply chain performance in order to determine if the organization is achieving its goals objectively (Heinritz, et al, 1986). The measurement models and criteria are very different according to each organization nature of business, size, target market and set goals to be achieved. Therefore each companies supply chain performance measurement (SCPM) index will be unique to each manufacturing firm but a general model is shown below;

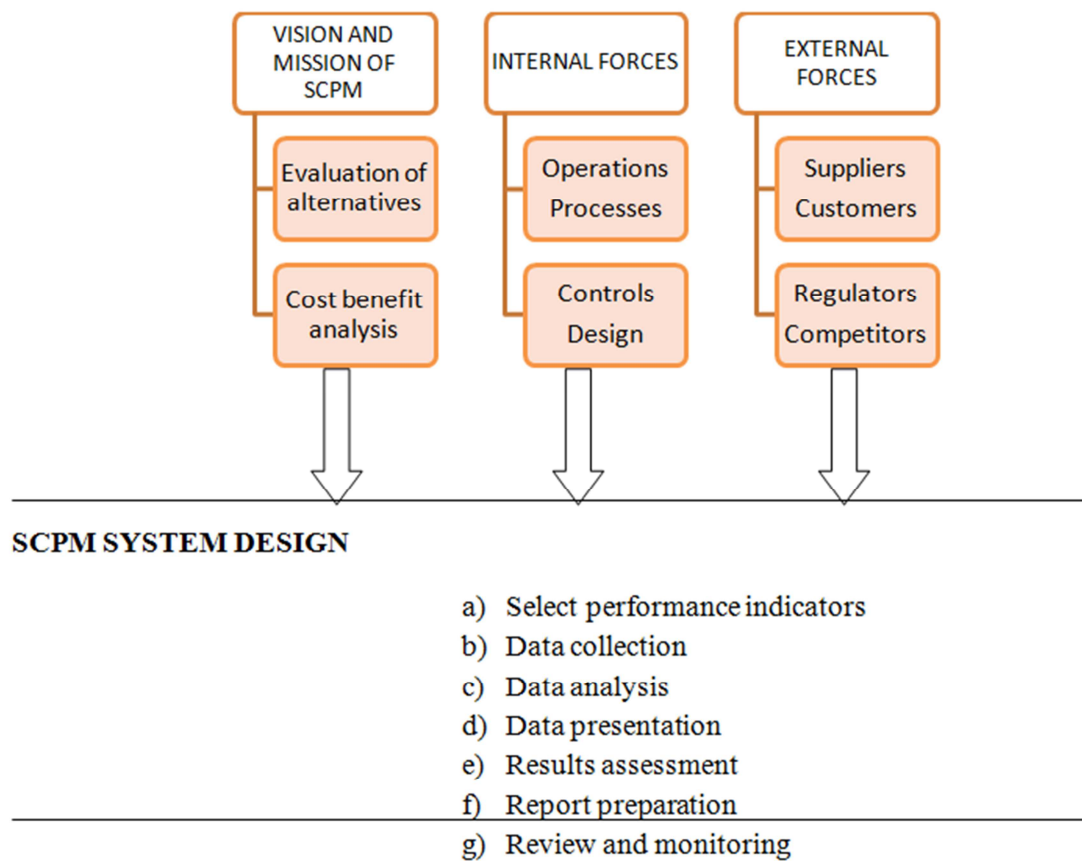


Figure 5. SCPM Model.

The SCPM indicators can generally be measured by use of the following;

- 1) Lead time.
- 2) Cost.
- 3) Capacity.
- 4) Quality.
- 5) Delivery.
- 6) Flexibility.

3. Conceptual Framework

The overall conceptual model for this study is presented below (Figure 6.0), it emphasizes the impact of intrapersonal relationship skills, interpersonal relationship skills and decision making skills on performance of supply chains in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

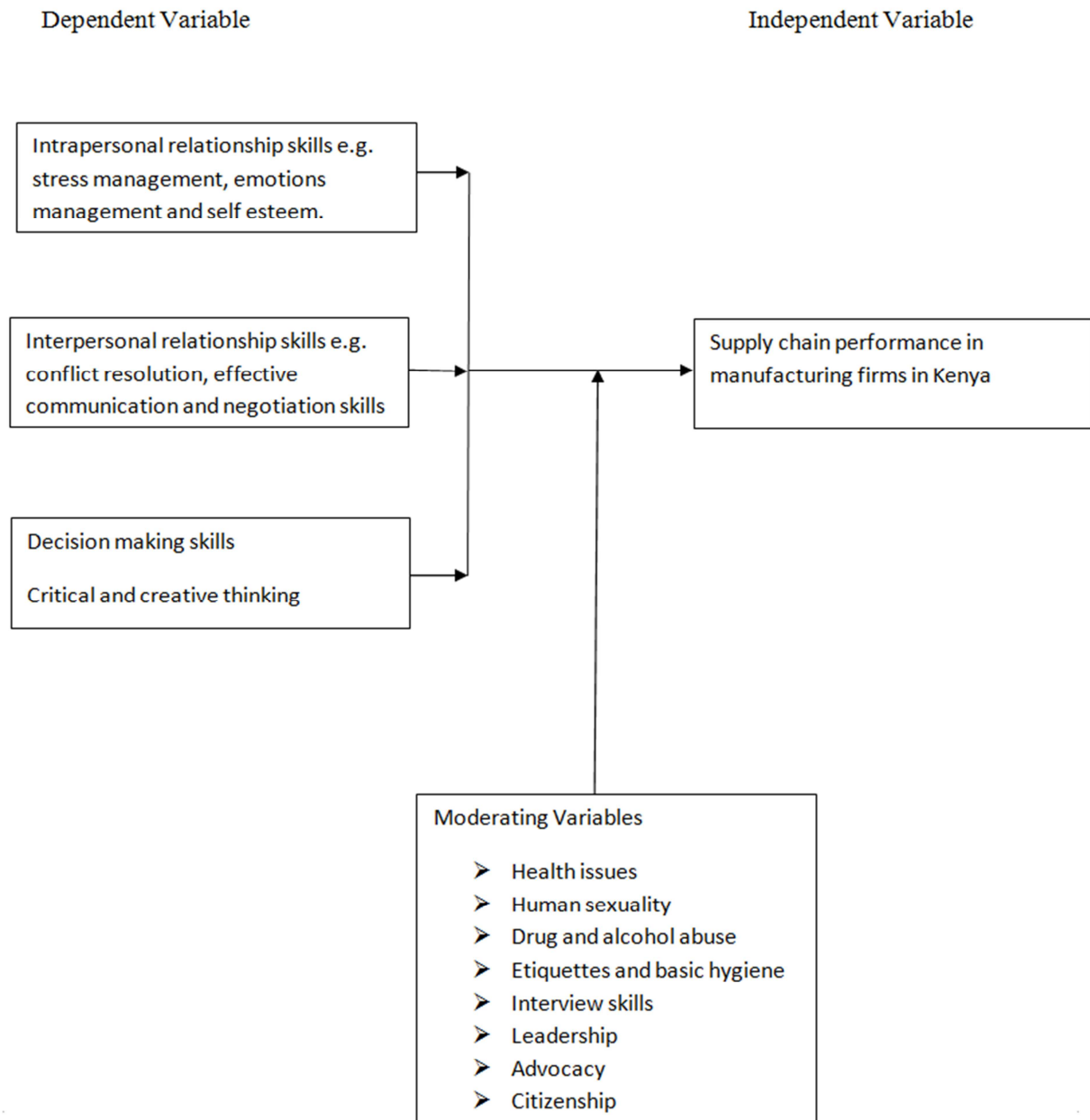


Figure 6. Conceptual Framework.

4. Methodology

After getting grounded in a problem area/subject or topic of interest, the next thing is to explore the various alternatives in research methodology and to select a strategy

of conducting research that will adequately achieve research objectives, answer research questions and produce data to be used in testing a research hypothesis. This chapter highlights the alternatives and reasons for choice of research design, methods, sampling strategies, data collection instruments and data analysis methods (KIM, 2009).

4.1. Research Design

According to KIM 2009, research design is the plan, structure of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions and to control variance (Kerlinger, 1973). A descriptive research design was used in this study. In descriptive study design, the researcher describes or presents a picture of a phenomenon under investigation. It involves measuring a variable or set of variables as they exist naturally. It is not concerned with relationship between variables but rather with description of individual variables. The aim is to describe a single variable or obtain separate description for each variable when several are involved (KIM, 2009). Survey research design was used applying questionnaires and interview schedules extensively to collect data showing the impact of life skills training on supply chain performance in manufacturing firms in Kenya.

4.2. Target Population

The target population was 320 employees of manufacturing firms in Kenya who are directly engaged in supply chain performance management practices. The study covered manufacturing firms in the food industry, metal industry, plastics industry, chemical and vehicle assembly lines in Nairobi County, Mombasa County and Kisumu County.

Table 1. Target population in manufacturing firms in Kenya (employees).

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Top managers	30	9.4%
Mid-level managers	50	15.6%
Junior level managers	90	28.1%
Subordinates staff	150	46.9%
Total	320	100%

Source: Researcher 2015

4.3. Sampling Design

It may not be possible nor is it actually necessary to include all subjects of a population in a research study. However, selecting a few subjects to represent the population needs to be carefully done through a systematic sampling procedure as part of the strategies in controlling variance (KIM, 2009). A sample is a set of individuals selected from the target population and usually is intended to represent the population in a research study (Neuman, 2000). In any case:

“We can’t study every case of whatever we are interested in, nor should we want to. Every scientific enterprise tries to find out something that will apply to everything of a certain kind by studying a few examples, the results of the study being as we say, “generalizable.” (Neuman, 2000 pp195)

Therefore, the goal of a research is to examine a sample and then generalize the results to the population. Therefore according to Kerlinger (1973), a sample size, 10% of the target population is large enough so long as it allows for

reliable data analysis by cross tabulation, provides desired level of accuracy in estimates of the large population and allows for testing for significance of differences between estimates. In this case stratified random sampling was used where the population was divided into several sub-groups that were individually more homogeneous than the total population and then we select items from each stratum to constitute a sample. Since the target population was 320, we shall only use 10% which gives us a sample size of 32 employees as shown by the table below;

Table 2. Sample Size (Employees).

Category	Target population (100%)	Sample size (10%)
Top managers	30	3
Mid-level managers	50	5
Junior level managers	90	9
Subordinates staff	150	15
Total	320	32

Sources: Researcher 2015

4.4. Data Collection Instruments

The researcher used the following procedures to collect data; questionnaires which were distributed to the respondents and time were given to them to complete them and interview schedules which were administered to the top level managers. Questionnaires are of two types, open ended questions and closed ended and pictorial questions. Questionnaires are a set of carefully selected and ordered questions used in survey studies. They have the advantage of been inexpensive and anonymous while there disadvantage is that they can have a low response rate and there is no assurance that the questions were understood. On the other hand interview schedules are a formal meeting or communication framework between two parties whose primary objective is the procurement of factual information. They have the advantage of encouraging face to face contact and the respondents can seek clarification if a question is not clear while the disadvantages is that an unstructured interview often yield data which is difficult to summarize or evaluate and finally they can be costly in terms of money and time.

4.5. Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

It is a mandatory requirement that all research instruments must be valid and reliable for them to measure and meet their intended purpose accurately. Validity means that the instrument should measure what claims to measure. The instrument must be relevant with respect to the content as expressed by the research objectives. There are three types of validity; content validity, predictive (construct) validity and predictable (concurrent) validity. Reliability means that the instruments must stable, consistent, accurate, dependable and predictable. The reliability of the research instruments was measured using a pilot study done at Thika town using the coefficient of variation (Cv) which gives a reliability

indicator derived from the standard deviation using the formulae below;

$$Cv = S/M$$

Where Cv =coefficient of variation

S= standard deviation of the scores in the instrument

M= mean of the scores per instrument

This gives a ratio and the closer it is to 1 the better the instruments.

The pilot study produced a ratio of 0.9321 which was very close to 1 making the instruments better tools for carrying out the research.

4.6. Data Analysis Procedure

All data collected will be checked for completeness, coded and tabulated. It will then be analyzed using ms excel to generate descriptive statistics which enable the researcher to draw conclusions and inferences drawn from the sample results to the population. Quantitative data will be used to represent the results in the form of graphs, charts and tables

according to the objectives and research questions of the study.

5. Results and Discussion

KIM 2009, one of the biggest challenges in research is designing a study with known and specified variables whose measures are obtained in data collection, using an appropriate research instrument. The data collected should be analyzed either qualitatively or quantitatively. This section looks at how data is analyzed and presented. It will enable a researcher choose a data analysis method to be employed in his/her study and thus design the study instruments to collect the data as required.

Table 3. Response Rate.

Target sample	Achieved sample	Response rate (%)
32	28	86.67

Source: Researcher 2015

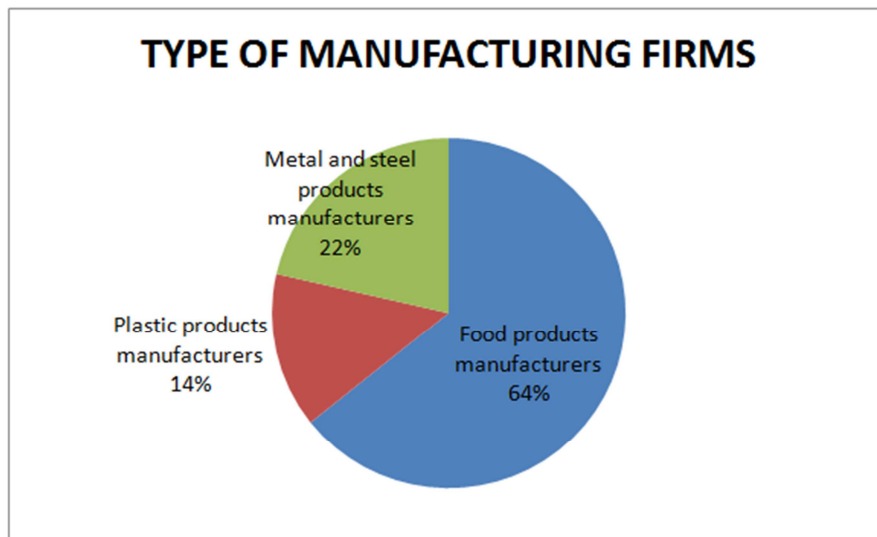


Figure 7. Types of manufacturing firms.

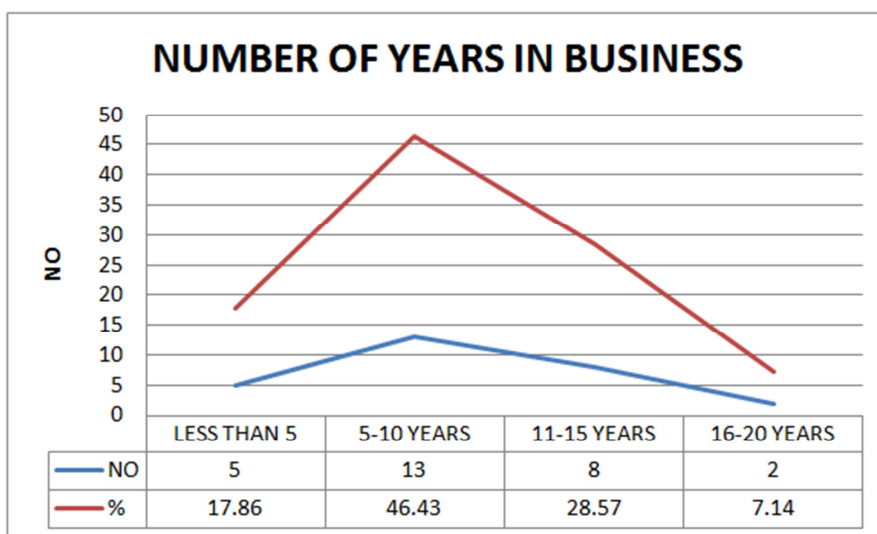


Figure 8. Years in business.

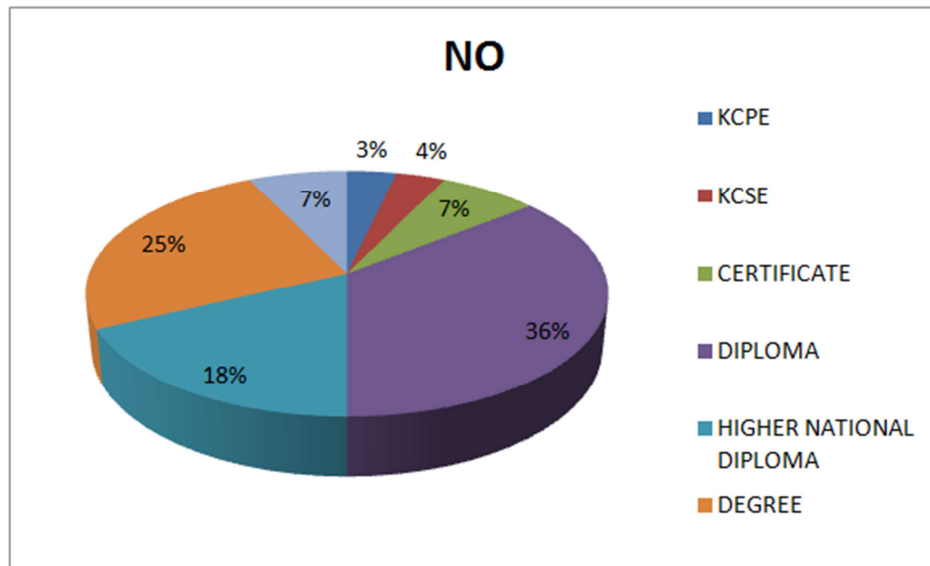


Figure 9. Education level.

Table 4. Comparative analysis of variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Intrapersonal skills	4.17	0.576	0.12
Interpersonal skills	4.23	0.479	0.03
Decision making skills	4.89	0.512	0.09
Influence on supply chain performance	4.51	0.786	0.23

Source: Researcher 2015

These means, standard deviations and variances are based on the data captured through a six point likert type scale running from 0 to 5, representing “no effect at all and effect to very large extent” respectively as a result of impact of life skills training on supply chain performance.

5.1. Response Rate

A total of 32 questionnaires were issued to employees in manufacturing firms who were directly involved in supply chain management. 28 employees returned the questionnaires representing a response rate of 86.67% which was adequate enough for the study according to table 3.0.

5.2. Types of Manufacturing Firms

According to figure 7.0, majority of the manufacturing firms dealt with food products at 64%, while 22% and 14% dealt with metal and plastics manufacturing respectively. This represented a lot of supply chain management activities hence the need for life skills training to enhance performance.

5.3. Number of Years in Business

Majority of the respondents indicated that their manufacturing firms had been in business for 5-10 years at 46.43%, 28.57% indicated they had operated for 11-15 years, 17.86% for 5 years and 7.14% for 16-20 years. This is proof that most of the firms have extensive experience in supply

chain management hence able to state life skills have long term effects on a manufacturing firm.

5.4. Education Level

36% of the respondents had diplomas, 25% had university degrees, 18% had higher national diplomas and the rest had certificates, KCSE and KCPE qualifications. This proved that at least those employed had some basic education to university education hence were able to implement company policies effectively and efficiently.

5.5. Research Variables

The variable which was outstanding was decision making skills with a mean of 4.89, standard deviation of 0.512 and variance of 0.09, influence on supply chain performance with a mean of 4.51, standard deviation of 0.786, and a variance of 0.23, interpersonal skills with a mean of 4.23, standard deviation of 0.479 and variance of 0.03 and intrapersonal skills with a mean of 4.17, standard deviation of 0.576 and a variance of 0.12. Therefore, the mean of ≥ 4 meant that the respondents were in agreement that the variables indeed negatively or positively affected supply chain performance (Kabinga LK, Iravo A, 2013). This meant that all the variables greatly affected supply chain performance hence the need for manufacturing firms to introduce life skills training programs for all employees.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

From the findings it can be concluded that with regard to intrapersonal skills, the most important factors which affected supply chain performance was stress and emotions management. Although the other factors are equally important, most employees were able to cope with them. Majority of employees bring to the office their domestic problems in form of stress which is expressed in form of

negative emotions thus poor work performance due to lack of concentration, low morale and general fatigue and tiredness thus undermining supply chain performance.

It is recommended that all manufacturing firms should have a guidance and counseling department with experiences counselors able to handle stressed employees. This way organization will be able to handle stressed employees better without the need to keep on firing and hiring new staff so often. This will increase supply chain performance.

With regard to interpersonal skills, lack of effective communication proved to be the most headaches for most manufacturing firms. This becomes worse if employees were not assertive enough to express their intentions. This meant that anger built up in them when misunderstandings occurred leading to explosive situations when one couldn't handle it any more. Such employees were not able to form relations with follower workers, retain such friendships and thus not able to work as part of a team. This undermined supply chain performance.

It is recommended that organizations should strongly identify ways of teaching employees interpersonal skills though group activities. Organizations must test the basic communication skills of employees during interview stage to ensure that only highly social employees with good interpersonal skills are selected and continuous training carried out to improve and maintain the performance of current employees.

With regard to critical and creative thinking, it was noted that most employees lacked the ability to think creatively and critically while making supply chain management decisions. Most employees could not solve simple supply chain management challenges on time thus undermining its performance.

It is recommended that manufacturing firms should work hard to teach their employees how to make informed decisions on time by doing extensive consultation and deliberation making any major decision. Employees should think out of the box in order to be creative and critical for manufacturing firms to remain competitive in the market full of vigorous competitors. Finally according to a research paper by Kabinga LK (2014), titled "Factors affecting supplier performance in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kirinyaga County, Kenya." it is also recommended that the County Governments should be involved and provide better needed support to enable firms carryout training and development and international conferences to enhance skills of employees

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