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STRATEGIC INTEGRATION AND PERFORMANCE OF FOOD AND BEVERAGE MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya, has been declining in the past few years in terms of Market share. According to the Kenya Association of Manufacturers, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the food and beverage sector only account for 20% of the total market share, with the remaining 80% dominated by larger companies. The study's general objective was to assess the influence of strategic integration and performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. Specifically, this study sought to establish the influence of executive development on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya and to assess the influence of supplier engagement on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. A descriptive research design was utilized for this study. According to the KAM (2022) report, there are 189 manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, out of which 76 are food and beverage manufacturing firms. This study targeted 456 management employees working in the 76 food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County. The study’s sample size was reached using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination formula (Russell, 2019). A representative sample was obtained using this formula. The study’s total population was 456. The study’s primary data was obtained using structured questionnaires. The pilot test helps correct some challenges encountered before undertaking the final study. The pretesting sample comprised 21 respondents, representing 10% of the sample size. Before the data can be analyzed, the researcher ensured the data was checked for completeness, followed by data editing, coding, data entry, and data cleaning. Inferential and descriptive statistics was employed to analyze quantitative data with the assistance of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 25). The study results were presented through the use of figures and tables. The study concludes that executive development has a positive and significant effect on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. The study also concludes that supplier engagement has a positive and significant effect on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the management of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kenya should implement continuous leadership training programs tailored to the local industry's dynamic needs.

Key Words: Strategic Integration, Executive Development, Supplier Engagement, Performance of Food and Beverage Manufacturing Firms

Background of the Study

Food and beverage manufacturing firms produce and process food and drink products for consumption. These firms take raw agricultural materials, such as fruits, vegetables, grains, and livestock, and convert them into finished products that can be consumed directly or used as ingredients in other food products (Karami et al., 2023). Food and beverage manufacturing firms produce vast products, including packaged foods, beverages (alcoholic and non-alcoholic), snacks, frozen foods, dairy products, baked goods, and more. These companies play a crucial role in the global food supply chain, ensuring that food products are produced, processed, packaged, and delivered to consumers (Hendijan & Saei, 2020). Food and beverage manufacturing firms play a vital role in the global economy, ensuring the production, processing, and distribution of essential food products that meet consumers' nutritional and dietary needs worldwide. These firms are central to the food supply chain, converting raw agricultural materials into finished, packaged products widely available in retail outlets, restaurants, and other food service establishments (Ariadi, Sumiati & Rohman, 2020). By transforming raw ingredients into shelf-stable, ready-to-eat, or ready-to-cook foods, they enable the efficient distribution of food to a global population. This ensures access to safe and nutritious products for people of various ages, cultures, and dietary preferences (Habeeb, *et al*, 2020).

One of the key roles of food and beverage manufacturing firms is ensuring food safety and quality. They must adhere to regulations set by governmental bodies and industry standards to maintain consumer confidence and meet legal requirements. Food safety protocols such as Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) are implemented to prevent contamination at every stage of the production process, from sourcing raw materials to packaging finished goods (Nyigaba & Njenga, 2023). These firms also invest in quality control measures to maintain consistent taste, texture, and nutritional content in their products. The capacity to maintain high standards of safety and quality is crucial in building brand trust and ensuring consumer health. Additionally, food and beverage manufacturing firms contribute significantly to the economy by creating jobs and supporting related industries, such as agriculture, logistics, and retail (Akewushola, 2020). The production process requires a wide range of skilled labor, from food scientists and engineers to assembly line workers, quality controllers, and logistics coordinators. This workforce supports local economies and helps stimulate demand for raw materials, contributing to the livelihoods of farmers and suppliers. Furthermore, these companies play a critical role in international trade, as they export food products to various regions, making them an integral part of global commerce (Phiri *et al*, 2024).

Food and beverage manufacturing firms also drive innovation in the food industry. With changing consumer tastes and increased demand for healthier, more sustainable options, these firms invest heavily in research and development (R&D) to create new products, improve existing recipes, and meet consumer expectations (Agyapong & Muntaka, 2022). Trends like plant-based alternatives, organic foods, low-sugar products, and functional beverages (such as those with added health benefits) are areas where manufacturing firms have focused much of their innovation efforts. These firms respond to consumer demand by adapting product offerings, improving the nutritional profiles of their goods, and creating eco-friendly packaging solutions. Moreover, food and beverage manufacturing firms are increasingly addressing environmental and sustainability concerns (Chavunduka, Chimunhu & Sifile, 2020). As the global population grows, these companies face mounting pressure to reduce food waste, lower carbon footprints, and adopt sustainable practices. From sourcing raw materials responsibly to reducing water and energy consumption in production, food manufacturers are making strides toward environmentally conscious operations. Many companies have adopted initiatives such as recycling, using renewable energy, and minimizing packaging waste to meet sustainability goals and appeal to environmentally aware consumers (Simiyu & Kilikam, 2020).

Strategic integration refers to aligning and coordinating different functions, systems, or components within an organization to achieve common strategic goals. It involves ensuring that all elements of the organization, such as operations, marketing, human resources, finance, and technology, are unified to create competitive advantages (Kisimbo & Omondi, 2023). This integration goes beyond just sharing information; it requires creating synergies between different departments, processes, and strategies to improve overall performance, efficiency, and responsiveness to market changes. In a broader context, strategic integration can also involve integrating external partners or business entities, such as suppliers, customers, or even other businesses, to strengthen the organization's position in the market (Momos, 2024). This could include mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, or strategic alliances. The goal is to create a cohesive ecosystem that improves the organization’s internal capabilities and enhances its ability to respond to external opportunities and challenges. Successful strategic integration requires strong leadership, clear communication, and a well-defined roadmap to align efforts toward long-term success (Opere & Mwanzia, 2024).

Executive development ensures that leadership is equipped with the skills, knowledge, and strategic vision needed to drive the integration process across all aspects of the business. Technological innovations are critical in facilitating integration by streamlining processes, enhancing data sharing, and enabling more agile decision-making (Bor, 2022). Adopting cutting-edge technologies fosters improved efficiency, collaboration, and innovation, helping organizations stay competitive in a fast-evolving market. Executive leadership and technology form the backbone of an integrated strategy, ensuring that all business functions align with the company's overarching goals. Cultural integration and supplier engagement are also essential to successful strategic integration (Karami, *et al*, 2023). Cultural integration focuses on aligning the values, practices, and behaviors of different teams or merged entities, creating a unified organizational culture that supports the company's strategic vision. It fosters collaboration, trust, and open communication to overcome potential conflicts and ensure seamless cooperation. Supplier engagement, on the other hand, emphasizes creating strong, mutually beneficial relationships with external partners, ensuring that the supply chain operates efficiently and aligns with the company’s strategic objectives (Hendijan & Saei, 2020). This study aimed to assess the influence of strategic integration and performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya.

Food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya, are a significant part of the region's economy, contributing to local employment and the broader Kenyan food industry. Kiambu, located just north of Nairobi, is strategically positioned with access to a large consumer market, mainly due to its proximity to the capital (Simiyu & Kilikam, 2020). This has made it an attractive location for food processing companies, which produce various products, from processed foods and beverages to dairy, fruits, and snacks. One of the key drivers of food and beverage manufacturing in Kiambu is the county's agricultural productivity. Kiambu is known for its fertile land and favorable climate, which supports cultivating crops such as tea, coffee, maize, fruits, and vegetables (Kisimbo & Omondi, 2023). This agricultural base provides raw materials for food processing companies, ensuring a steady supply of inputs for manufacturers. For example, dairy farming is prevalent in the county, leading to the establishment of dairy processing plants that produce milk, yogurt, and other dairy products. Companies like Brookside Dairy, which has a significant presence in the region, can source milk from local farmers in Kiambu and nearby counties (Momos, 2024).

The food processing industry in Kiambu is also supported by the growing demand for packaged and processed foods, both within Kenya and in international markets. As the Kenyan middle class grows, there is an increasing preference for convenient, ready-to-eat meals and snacks, creating a steady demand for processed foods (Opere & Mwanzia, 2024). Beverage manufacturing, especially in the soft drink and juice segments, has also experienced growth. Companies involved in bottling beverages, such as carbonated drinks, bottled water, and fruit juices, have operated in Kiambu due to its favorable location and infrastructure (Bor, 2022). However, the food and beverage manufacturing sector in Kiambu faces particular challenges. One major issue is raw materials' fluctuating cost and availability, particularly for agricultural products. Climate change and unpredictable weather patterns can affect crop yields, which impacts the supply of raw materials for food processing firms. Additionally, competition from larger multinational companies challenges local manufacturers, who must find ways to maintain quality and price competitiveness in an increasingly crowded market (Simiyu & Kilikam, 2020).

Despite these challenges, Kiambu's food and beverage manufacturing industry continues to grow, with the potential for innovation and expansion. Local firms increasingly adopt modern technologies in production processes, quality control, and packaging (Kisimbo & Omondi, 2023). Many manufacturers also invest in sustainability practices, such as sourcing raw materials locally, reducing waste, and improving energy efficiency in their production operations. As Kiambu's infrastructure improves, including roads and energy access, the food and beverage manufacturing sector is poised for continued growth, contributing to local and national economic development (Momos, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Food and beverage manufacturing firms are critical to Kenya's economic development. As one of the country's largest manufacturing industry sectors, these firms contribute significantly to job creation, poverty reduction, and rural development. They also support agriculture by creating a stable market for raw materials like fruits, vegetables, grains, and livestock (Opere & Mwanzia, 2024). In addition to boosting local economies, food and beverage manufacturing firms help improve food security by providing essential products that meet the population's nutritional needs. Furthermore, they drive export growth by meeting international standards and tapping global markets. Their importance is also reflected in their contribution to GDP, strengthening Kenya's industrialization agenda as part of the Vision 2030 development plan (Bor, 2022).

Food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya, face several challenges related to revenue growth, market share, and customer satisfaction, which can significantly impact their overall performance (Simiyu & Kilikam, 2020). Food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County face significant barriers to achieving sustained revenue growth. A major obstacle is the volatility in raw material prices, which impacts the cost of production. For example, in 2023, maize prices, a crucial ingredient for many food products, increased by over 18%, according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) (Kisimbo & Omondi, 2023). The inflation in essential food inputs, such as maize, sugar, and edible oils, compounded by a 13.8% increase in energy costs reported by the Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (EPRA) in the same year, puts substantial pressure on manufacturers' bottom lines. Additionally, a report from the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) indicated that 60% of local firms in the food and beverage sector are struggling to meet their revenue growth targets, mainly because of these rising operational costs. Limited access to financing, with 70% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the manufacturing sector lacking adequate capital, also restricts their ability to invest in innovation and expand their operations, further stifling revenue growth potential (Momos, 2024).

Food and beverage firms in Kiambu County also face substantial difficulties expanding and maintaining market share in an increasingly competitive environment. A key statistic to highlight is that in 2022, the total market shares of locally produced food and beverage products dropped by 5% compared to the previous year, primarily due to the growing influx of imports (Opere & Mwanzia, 2024). In fact, according to a study by the Kenya Association of Manufacturers, 40% of food and beverage products consumed in Kenya in 2023 were imported, which competes directly with local manufacturers. Additionally, 50% of manufacturers in

Kiambu County reported that they are losing ground to multinational corporations that benefit from better access to capital, advanced technology, and extensive distribution networks (Kisimbo & Omondi, 2023). Among local firms, only 45% reported expanding their market share in the last three years, while the remaining 55% struggled to maintain their previous positions in the market. The growing urban middle class, which accounts for 23% of the population in Kiambu County (according to a 2021 demographic survey by KNBS), has shifted consumption habits towards premium products, further intensifying competition for market share (Momos, 2024).

The challenge of customer satisfaction in Kiambu County's food and beverage sector is compounded by rising expectations from consumers, who are increasingly concerned about product quality, health considerations, and environmental impact. According to a 2023 survey by the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS), 32% of food and beverage manufacturers in Kiambu County reported that they fail to meet international food safety standards, such as those set by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), due to inadequate quality control infrastructure and lack of skilled labor (Opere & Mwanzia, 2024). Additionally, 28% of manufacturers admitted to facing challenges in achieving product consistency, a significant issue affecting customer satisfaction. The same survey revealed that 37% of consumers in Kiambu County reported being dissatisfied with local food products due to inconsistent packaging and labeling (Kisimbo & Omondi, 2023). Furthermore, the Consumer Insight Report published by the Kenya Consumer Protection Agency in 2023 found that 46% of consumers in urban areas of Kiambu County are willing to pay a premium for healthier, organic, or environmentally friendly products, yet only 15% of local food manufacturers have embraced sustainable practices such as eco-friendly packaging or product innovation that aligns with these consumer trends. As a result, local manufacturers face lower customer loyalty, and customer retention rates in Kiambu County have dropped by 8% over the past three years (Momos, 2024).

Strategic integration plays a crucial role in enhancing the performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms. By adopting strategic integration, firms can achieve operational efficiencies, improve decision-making, and better allocate resources, directly enhancing productivity and profitability (Opere & Mwanzia, 2024). Various studies have been conducted in different parts of the world on strategy integration and firm performance. Opere and Mwanzia (2024) researched strategic integration and performance of public communication institutions. Simiyu and Kilikam (2020) examined strategic integration and organizational performance, and Kisimbo and Omondi (2023) assessed strategic integration and organizational performance. However, none of these studies focused on executive development, technological innovations, cultural integration, and supplier engagement in the performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. To fill the highlighted gaps, the current study seeks to assess the influence of strategic integration (executive development, technological innovations, cultural integration, and supplier engagement) on the performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya.

General Objective

The general objective of the study was to assess the influence of strategic integration on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya

Specific Objectives

i. To establish executive development on the performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya
ii. To assess supplier engagement on the performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya

Theoretical Review

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory, founded by James V. Downton in 1973, posits that effective leaders can inspire and transform their followers through a visionary approach and motivational influence. This theory emphasizes the leader's capacity to articulate a compelling vision that resonates with their team, igniting passion and commitment toward shared goals (Subramony *et al.*, 2021). Leaders who embody transformational qualities exhibit charisma and serve as role models, instilling trust and respect among followers through their integrity and ethical behavior. This idealized influence establishes a foundation of credibility and fosters a strong sense of purpose within the organization or project team (Bwaya, 2021). Moreover, transformational leaders engage in inspirational motivation by communicating their vision with clarity and enthusiasm. They leverage language that evokes emotion and appeals to the values and aspirations of their followers, motivating them to strive for excellence and surpass conventional performance expectations. This motivational aspect energizes the team and aligns their efforts toward achieving ambitious objectives, such as enhancing water management practices or implementing sustainable infrastructure solutions (Njue, Waiganjo & Kihoro, 2020).

Intellectual stimulation is another crucial element of Transformational Leadership Theory, where leaders stimulate team creativity and innovation. They encourage critical thinking, challenge assumptions, and promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement. By fostering an environment where new ideas are welcomed, and experimentation is encouraged, transformational leaders empower their followers to explore innovative approaches to complex challenges in water projects (Karuu & Mwangi, 2024). This intellectual stimulation contributes to adaptive solutions and enhances the project's responsiveness to evolving environmental, social, and technological factors. Furthermore, transformational leaders demonstrate individualized consideration by prioritizing the development and well-being of each team member (Mwangi, 2020). They provide personalized support, mentorship, and growth opportunities, acknowledging and leveraging their followers' unique strengths and aspirations. This individualized approach enhances team cohesion and morale and builds a resilient and motivated workforce capable of overcoming obstacles and achieving sustainable outcomes in water projects (Subramony *et al.*, 2021). One fundamental assumption of this theory is that leaders possess inherent qualities or characteristics that enable them to inspire and transform their followers effectively. These qualities often include charisma, vision, and the ability to articulate compelling goals. This assumption suggests that transformational leaders are born rather than made, which can limit the theory's applicability in contexts where leadership development and training are critical (Bwaya, 2021). This theory was used to establish the influence of executive development on the performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya.

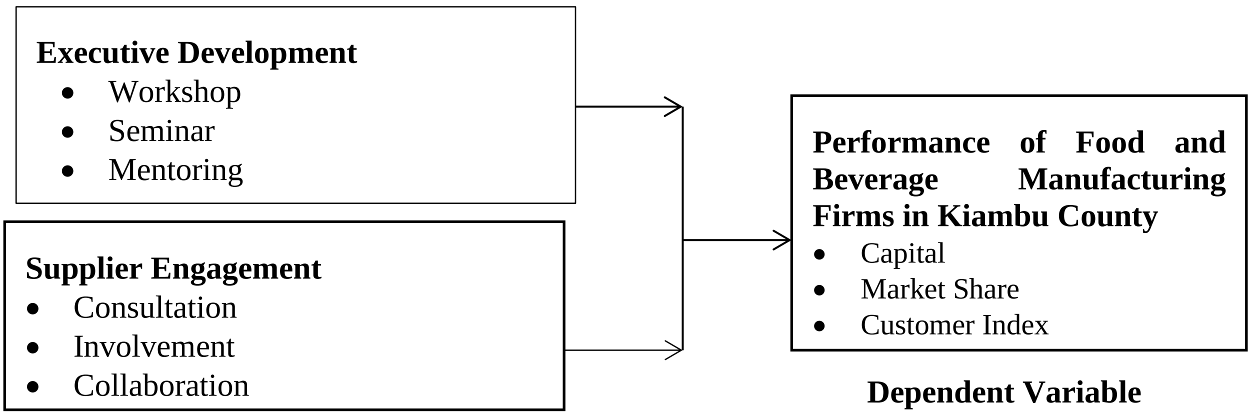
Resource Dependence Theory (RDT)

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), founded by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), is a theoretical framework in organizational studies that examines how organizations strategically manage and depend on external resources to achieve their goals and sustain their operations. RDT argues that organizations exist within an environment where they must interact with external entities such as suppliers, customers, competitors, government agencies, and other stakeholders. These external entities possess resources crucial for the organization's survival and success (Mudasser, Nawaz & Muhammad, 2022). Central to RDT is resource dependency, which suggests that organizations depend on external resources that they cannot fully control. These resources include financial capital, technology, information, expertise, raw materials, market access, and political support. The theory posits that an organization's ability to secure and

manage these external resources effectively influences its organizational behavior, decision-making processes, and strategic actions (Mushi, Mwaiseje & Changalima, 2021).
Organizations employ various strategies to manage resource dependencies, including forming strategic alliances, diversifying suppliers, lobbying for favorable regulations, investing in technology, and engaging in networking activities. These strategies aim to reduce uncertainty, ensure access to critical resources, and enhance organizational resilience in a competitive environment. RDT also emphasizes power dynamics in resource exchanges between organizations and their external environment (Kigen & Ndeto, 2024). Organizations with more outstanding resource dependencies may be vulnerable if they lack alternatives or substitutes for essential resources. Conversely, organizations that successfully manage and diversify their resource dependencies can strengthen their competitive position and influence within their industry or market. Moreover, RDT highlights the role of inter-organizational relationships and networks in resource acquisition and management. Organizations often engage in strategic interactions with external stakeholders to negotiate resource exchanges, build trust-based partnerships, and gain access to complementary resources that contribute to their strategic objectives (Otieno & Odero, 2023). This theory was used to assess the influence of supplier engagement on the performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is defined as a structure that provides a coherent model of the relationships among the main variables of a study, offering a basis for interpreting the findings (Ravitch & Riggan, 2019). In this study, the conceptual framework in Figure 2.1, illustrated how the independent variables— Executive Development, and supplier engagement—collectively enhance firm performance in Kenya, which is the dependent variable.



Independent Variables

Figure 2. 1: Conceptual Framework

Executive Development

Executive development refers to enhancing senior leaders' and managers' skills, knowledge, and competencies to improve their effectiveness and leadership capabilities (Subramony *et al.*, 2021). This development involves formal training, mentoring, coaching, and experiential learning to help executives navigate complex business challenges, make strategic decisions, and lead organizations through change. A workshop is a hands-on, interactive learning environment where participants engage directly with the content and each other. Workshops often focus on building specific skills or solving practical problems. The facilitator provides a framework, but participants are expected to actively contribute, experiment, and collaborate (Bwaya, 2021). Workshops are generally more participatory, involving group discussions, role-playing, or exercises designed to reinforce concepts. This format is well-suited to individuals who learn by doing and can benefit from immediate feedback and peer support. Workshops may be shorter, often lasting a few hours or a day, and tend to have a more dynamic and informal atmosphere (Njue, Waiganjo & Kihoro, 2020).

A seminar, on the other hand, is typically a more structured, lecture-based format. It is a gathering where experts or professionals share knowledge on a specific topic with an audience, who may have the opportunity to ask questions or engage in brief discussions afterward. Seminars are usually informative and may involve presentations, panel discussions, or formal Q&A sessions (Karuu & Mwangi, 2024). Unlike workshops, seminars are often less interactive and focus on providing in-depth insights or research findings. They can be a powerful tool for those who wish to gain a broad understanding of a subject but may not have the same hands-on learning experiences as a workshop.

Mentoring is a more personalized form of development, typically involving a one-on-one relationship between a more experienced individual (the mentor) and someone seeking guidance (the mentee) (Mwangi, 2020). Mentoring is a long-term process where the mentor provides advice, feedback, and support tailored to the mentee's specific needs and goals. Unlike workshops and seminars, mentoring is less about structured learning and more about personal growth, career development, and navigating challenges in a particular field. It allows for in-depth discussions and personalized advice, often leading to profound insights and deeper professional confidence (Bwaya, 2021).

Supplier Engagement

Supplier engagement refers to building and maintaining strong, collaborative relationships with suppliers to ensure mutual success and long-term value creation (Mudasser, Nawaz & Muhammad, 2022). It involves open communication, trust, and active participation in decision-making and problem-solving. Supplier engagement goes beyond transactional exchanges and focuses on strategic partnerships where suppliers are considered integral stakeholders in the business. Consultation refers to seeking advice, opinions, or feedback from others, typically experts, stakeholders, or individuals with relevant knowledge (Mushi, Mwaiseje & Changalima, 2021). It is often a one-way communication where the primary goal is to gather input or insights to inform decision-making.

In many cases, consultation is formalized, such as in public policy discussions or business strategy development, where experts or affected parties are asked to provide their perspectives on a particular issue. Although consultation can involve discussion, decision-making usually rests with the leader or organization seeking input (Kigen & Ndeto, 2024). For example, a company might consult with employees or customers about a product improvement before deciding on design or features. Consultation is valuable for obtaining diverse opinions, identifying potential problems, and ensuring that decisions are well-informed. However, it does not necessarily mean that the consultees will have a direct role in decision-making (Otieno & Odero, 2023).

Involvement goes further than consultation by actively engaging individuals or groups in decision-making or planning. In an involved process, participants are not merely asked for their opinions but are encouraged to take part in the formulation of ideas, strategies, or actions. Involvement often creates a sense of ownership and responsibility among those who contribute directly to the decisions or projects (Wachiuri, Waiganjo & Oballah, 2022). This involves employees in decision-making through team meetings, focus groups, or workshops in organizations. Involvement can increase motivation, as people feel their contributions are valued, and it can improve outcomes by incorporating the perspectives of those whom the decisions will directly impact. It is a more inclusive approach than consultation because it implies a deeper level of engagement and an opportunity for participants to shape the outcomes (Mudasser, Nawaz & Muhammad, 2022).

Collaboration is the most integrated and dynamic approach, involving active, ongoing cooperation between individuals or groups with shared goals. Unlike consultation and involvement, collaboration is a two-way process where all participants work together, share knowledge and resources, and jointly contribute to decision-making, problem-solving, or project execution (Mushi, Mwaiseje & Changalima, 2021). Collaboration requires high communication, trust, and coordination, typically involving multiple parties working toward a common objective. For example, in a business environment, collaboration might involve cross-functional teams working together on product development, where each department (marketing, design, sales) contributes its expertise and feedback. Collaboration fosters a sense of teamwork, as it encourages collective responsibility and the pooling of ideas and skills (Kigen & Ndeto, 2024). It often leads to more innovative solutions and stronger relationships because it builds upon the strengths of diverse contributors.

Empirical Review

Executive Development and Firm Performance

Subramony *et al.* (2021) examined the executive development practice bundles and organizational performance in India: the mediating role of human and social capital. To solve the gap, the study proposed and tested a model examining the influence of two LDP bundles on organizational performance, with human and social capital as mediators. Differentiation LDPs are aimed primarily at building leaders' intrapersonal knowledge, skills, and abilities, while integration LDPs help build their interpersonal knowledge, skills, and abilities. Utilizing a sample of 223 organizations in a growing economy (India), the study found that differentiation LDPs were positively associated with human capital, while integration LDPs positively influenced social capital. Further, human capital fully mediated the relationship between differentiation LDP and sales growth. The study highlighted the economic impact of investing in leadership development and the mechanisms underlying the relationship between LDPs and organizational performance.

Bwaya (2021) examined executive performance: a framework for executive development in Uganda. The study used a qualitative research design and case study approach and gathered data from 69 middle and top corporate executives in 22 organizations and 10 coaching practitioners. The study employed purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling techniques. Semistructured interviews, client and coach records, and literature reviews informed this study. The thesis also draws on my 18 years of experience as a corporate executive at different levels, nine as an executive coach, and 4 years of scientific research. The study revealed that Ugandan executives perform under the 'right' conditions. Performance primarily depends on the leaders' background, experience, ethos, mindset, and motivation. The study concluded that The significant obstacles to performance are typically poor work ethics and socio-cultural factors such as disabling beliefs, executives' perceptions about self, their leaders, and performance, and lack of urgency.

Njue, Waiganjo, and Kihoro (2020) researched the influence of coaching as a leadership development practice on the performance of microfinance institutions in Kenya. This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design that focused on the influence of leadership development on the performance of microfinance institutions. The study targeted the chief executive offices of the microfinance institutions. Regression analysis was done to test the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The study found no significant influence of coaching as executive development practice on the performance of microfinance institutions in Kenya. The study found sufficient evidence to suggest that coaching as executive development practice influences the performance of microfinance institutions in Kenya. Based on the results of this study, coaching as an executive development practice influences the performance of microfinance institutions in Kenya.

Karuu and Mwangi (2024) examined the effect of executive development on organizational performance: a survey of listed companies at the Nairobi Securities Exchange, Kenya. Addressing a gap in the literature, it explores financial and non-financial performance indicators while also considering the moderating effects of company size and age on leadership-performance relationships. Data from 60 listed companies as of June 2022 were analyzed using a census approach. Results revealed a significant positive effect of corporate leadership on performance. The study concluded by emphasizing the importance of corporate leadership in driving performance improvement.

Mwangi (2020) assessed the influence of leadership development training determinants on the performance of police service in Kenya. The study reviewed related studies and explored the determinants of leadership development training in the Kenya National Police Service. The study targeted officers in the Kenya National Police Service to provide vital and valuable opinions regarding the determinants of leadership development training to enhance uptake and mainstream requisite leadership development training in the middle-level officer's career progression. The study also explored leadership development training related to gender, knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The study's results revealed that knowledge gaps, a training appraisal system, and retained knowledge positively influenced the performance of the National Police Service. From the findings, the study concluded that the training curriculum had no significant impact on the performance of the National Police Service in Kenya.

Supplier Engagement and Firm Performance

Mudasser, Nawaz, and Muhammad (2022) assessed the effect of uncertainty, supplier involvement, supplier performance, and partnership quality on buyer-supplier relationships. The target population for this study includes procurement personnel working in the manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors across the city of Karachi, Pakistan. The study used a purposeful sampling technique as we wanted to target the experts in the field. The researchers collected a sample of 228 from the suppliers of Karachi. The study used a close-ended questionnaire to collect the data. The study found that partnership quality is a significant predictor of dependency on suppliers. It undermines an organization's core competencies and increases reliance on suppliers. Buyers who are dependent on suppliers may not perform optimally. Thus, it is necessary to have an adequate balance in the buyer and supplier relationship. The study concluded that uncertainty, earlier supplier involvement, supplier performance, and partnership quality significantly affect buyers' dependence.

Mushi, Mwaiseje, and Changalima (2021) examined the impact of buyer-supplier relationships on organizational performance: experience from grapes processing industries in the Dodoma region, Tanzania. This study analyzed the impact of the buyer-supplier relationships on organizational performance among grapes processing industries in Dodoma, Tanzania. The buyer-supplier relationships in terms of sharing information, sharing of knowledge, supplier base reduction, and joint problem solving were regressed on the organizational performance to determine the impact of buyer-supplier relationships on organizational performance. A cross-sectional research design was adopted, and data from 100 participants were collected through a questionnaire. Results indicated that information sharing, knowledge sharing, and joint problem solving were positively and significantly related to organizational performance. However, supplier base reduction was positive but not statistically significant related to organizational performance. Hence, the study concludes that buyer-supplier relationships determined the organizational performance of surveyed wine manufacturers in the Dodoma region.

Kigen and Ndeto (2024) assessed retail firms' supplier engagement management and performance in Nairobi City County, Kenya. For this study, a descriptive cross-sectional research design was used. The study targeted 232 respondents, two from each of the 116 registered retail outlets in Nairobi City County, Kenya, that comprise hypermarkets/ supermarkets/ superstores, convenience stores, grocery stores, and clothing outlets. The study used Yamane's (1967) formula to calculate the sample size of 147 respondents. A simple random sampling method selected 150 respondents from the target population. This research used a questionnaire to collect primary data. The study found that supplier engagement has a positive and strong relationship with the performance of retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study concludes that there is a strong relationship between supplier alignment and the performance of retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya

Otieno and Odero (2023) researched supplier engagement management practices, procurement ethics, and supply chain performance in County Governments. This study utilized a descriptive survey research design and targeted 112 procurement staff. Stratified and simple random techniques were used. Structured questionnaires were employed for data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized for data analysis. Findings revealed that Procurement ethics significantly moderated the association between supplier relationship management practices and supply chain performance of Kenyan Selected County Governments. The study concludes that Procurement ethics moderates the association between supplier relationship management practices and supply chain performance. This indicated that Procurement ethics moderates the relationship through integrity, accountability, and transparency and increases supply chain performance in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, quality improvement, and customer satisfaction.

In the case of East Africa Breweries Limited, Wachiuri, Waiganjo, and Oballah (2022) examined supplier engagement's role in the manufacturing industry's organizational performance in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive case study design to justify the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The target population was the manufacturing industry in Kenya. The stratified sampling method is appropriate as all existing subgroups are represented and preferred to be easily applied to large populations. Out of a target population of 150, a sample size of 50 respondents was selected from 4 categories: Senior managers, Middle managers, junior managers, and procurement officers. The sampling technique used in this study was a stratified random technique. The researcher used open and closed questionnaires as research instruments for this study. The study deduced that, indeed, supplier development plays a vital role in organization performance where most respondents agreed that most of the elements of supplier engagement strongly influenced the performance of the organization more so financial support, direct firm involvement, and rewards, but supplier training not so much but it is also an important element. The study concluded that supplier engagement improves supplier and organization performance. The study established a significant positive relationship between three elements of supplier engagement**:** financial support, rewards, and firm involvement and organization performance; therefore, manufacturing firms should engage more in activities that help improve their suppliers' operations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was a descriptive research design. Mugenda and Mugenda (2018) explained that descriptive design is a process of collecting data to test a hypothesis or answer questions about the current status of the subject under study. Its advantage is that it is used extensively to describe behavior, values, attitudes, and character. The description research design aspect attempted to provide more details and insights from the respondents on how the dependent variables impact the independent variable. It also enabled the researcher to analyze the findings and draw informed conclusions.

Target Population

According to Orodho (2017), a target population is a well-defined or specified set of people, groups of things, households, firms, services, elements, or events being investigated. The target population should suit a certain specification, which the research is studying, and the population should be homogenous. Mugenda and Mugenda (2020) explain that the target population should have some observable characteristics, so the research intends to generalize the study results. According to the KAM (2022) report, there are 189 manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, out of which 76 are food and beverage manufacturing firms. This study, therefore, targeted 456 management employees working in the 76 food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County. In this study, the unit of analysis was 76 food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County. In contrast, the unit of observation was 456 management employees working in the food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study's sample size was reached at using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination formula (Russell, 2019). Using this formula a representative sample was obtained. The study's total population was 456.

The formula used for arriving at the sample size was;

$$n = \frac{x^2NP(1-P)}{\left(ME^2(N-1)\right) + (x^2P(1-P))}$$

Where:

n=sample size

x^2=Chi-square for the specified confidence level at 1 degree of freedom

N=Population size (456)

P = the proportion of the target population estimated to have the characteristics being studied. As the proportion was unknown, 0.5 was used.

Chuan and Penyelidikan (2016) indicate that using 0.5 provides the maximum sample size and was the most preferable. 437.9424/2.1004

ME=desired margin of Error (Expressed as a proportion)

$$\frac{1.96^2 456 * 0.5 * 0.5}{(0.05^2 * 456) + (1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5)}$$

$$n = 209$$

Table 1: Sample Size

Category	Target Population	Sample Size
Top Managers	76	35
Middle Managers	152	70
Lower Level Managers	228	105
Total	**456**	**209**

Data Collection Instruments

This study used primary data. Greener (2018) indicates that primary data is made up of first-hand information that has not been processed or analyzed. A questionnaire, a quantitative data collection tool, was used to collect primary data. The study's primary data was obtained using structured questionnaires. The structured questions were helpful as they enable easy data analysis and reduce the time and resources needed for data collection. The unstructured questionnaires helped the researcher get in-depth responses from the respondents as they gave a chance to provide views and suggestions on the various issues. Kultar (2017) points out that a questionnaire is a cheap tool for data collection and is very effective in collecting information from a large population. Further, the data would not be biased as the questionnaire guarantees anonymity. The questionnaire had three sections, with the first part requesting the respondent's socio-demographic data. Part two was composed of five sections and had data on the independent variable and independent variables.

Pilot Test Study

A pilot study, or pilot test or pretest, is defined as a small-scale preliminary research conducted to evaluate time, cost, and feasibility to improve on the design of a particular study before conducting the actual one or full-scale research project (Kultar, 2018). The researcher conducted a pilot study to ensure that the data collection tool was reliable and valid. The pilot test helped correct some challenges encountered before undertaking the final study. The pretesting sample comprised 21 respondents, representing 10% of the sample size. The results from the pilot test were not used in the main study. In addition, the respondents used in the pilot test were excluded from the final study.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Before the data could be analyzed, the researcher ensured the data was checked for completeness, followed by data editing, coding, data entry, and data cleaning. Inferential and descriptive statistics was employed to analyze quantitative data with the assistance of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 25). To summarize the respondent's responses concerning their views on the various aspects of the variables, the respondents' demographic information analysis was undertaken using descriptive statistics (Bhattacherjee, 2016).

Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean (measure of dispersion), standard deviation, and percentages were used. Descriptive statistics, therefore, enables researchers to present the data more meaningfully, allowingmore meaningfully, allowing simpler and easier interpretation (Singpurwalla, 2017). Inferential data analysis was conducted using the Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis. The inferential statistic was used to make judgments about the probability that an observation was dependable or one that happened by chance in the study. The relationship between the study variables was tested using multivariate regression model.

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Executive Development and Firm Performance

The first specific objective of the study was to establish executive development on the performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on statements relating to executive development and performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 2.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the workshops have contributed to improving the overall performance of their team (M=3.867, SD=0.587). In addition, the respondents agreed that skills gained from workshops have positively impacted their work and the firm's outcomes (M=3.848, SD=0.823). Further, the respondents agreed that seminars have equipped them with insights that drive improved firm performance (M=3.830, SD=0.756).

From the results, the respondents agreed that the seminars have helped increase their understanding of market trends, benefiting the company (M=3.747, SD=0.761). Further, the respondents agreed that the mentoring program has improved their ability to contribute to the company's success (M=3.739, SD= 0.911). In addition, the respondents agreed that mentorship has increased their effectiveness in achieving firm objectives and improving results (M=3.649, SD=0.776).

Table 2: Executive Development and Firm Performance

	Mean	**Std. Deviation**
The workshops have contributed to improving the overall performance of our team.	3.867	0.587
Skills gained from workshops have positively impacted my work and the firm's outcomes.	3.848	0.823
Seminars have equipped me with insights that drive improved firm performance.	3.830	0.756
The seminars have helped increase my understanding of market trends, benefiting the company.	3.747	0.761
The mentoring program has improved my ability to contribute to the company's success.	3.739	0.911
Mentorship has increased my effectiveness in achieving firm objectives and improving results.	3.649	0.776
Aggregate	**3.780**	**0.769**

Supplier Engagement and Firm Performance

The second specific objective of the study was to assess supplier engagement on the performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating supplier engagement and performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 3.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the consultation with suppliers helps in identifying cost-saving opportunities, contributing to better firm performance (M=3.877, SD= 0.918). In addition, the respondents agreed that regular consultations with suppliers ensure that they are aware of industry trends, which helps them improve their competitive edge (M=3.876, SD=0.758). Further, the respondents agreed that supplier consultation helps them identify areas of improvement in their processes, contributing to increased efficiency (M=3.813, SD= 0.567).

From the results, the respondents agreed that the feedback they receive from suppliers is essential in improving their product quality and customer satisfaction, which drives firm performance (M=3.785, SD=0.718). In addition, the respondents agreed that the involvement of suppliers in their operations helps them reduce risks and improve their supply chain resilience (M=3.724, SD=0.656). Further, the respondents agreed that they involve their suppliers in product development, which leads to better quality and performance outcomes for the firm (M=3.669, SD=0.592).

Table 3: Supplier Engagement and Firm Performance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The consultation with suppliers helps in identifying cost-saving opportunities, contributing to better firm performance.	3.877	0.918
Regular consultations with suppliers ensure that we are aware of industry trends, which helps us improve our competitive edge.	3.876	0.758
Supplier consultation helps us identify areas of improvement in our processes, contributing to increased efficiency.	3.813	0.567
The feedback we receive from suppliers is essential in improving our product quality and customer satisfaction, which drives firm performance.	3.785	0.718
The involvement of suppliers in our operations helps us reduce risks and improve our supply chain resilience.	3.724	0.656
We involve our suppliers in product development, which leads to better quality and performance outcomes for the firm.	3.669	0.592
Aggregate	**3.791**	**0.702**

Firm Performance

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 4.

From the results, the respondents agreed that they have introduced new products/services that have positively impacted their revenue growth (M=3.885, SD= 0.778). In addition, the respondents agreed that the company has successfully expanded into new markets, contributing to revenue growth (M=3.812, SD=0.574). Further, the respondents agreed that their company's market share has increased relative to competitors over the past year (M=3.787, SD= 0.836).

From the results, the respondents agreed that their brand recognition and reputation have contributed to an increase in market share (M=3.725, SD=0.837). In addition, the respondents agreed that their customers are highly satisfied with the quality of their products/services (M=3.662, SD=0.576). Further, the respondents agreed that the company effectively addresses customer concerns and feedback in a timely manner (M=3.659, SD=0.849).

Table 4: Firm Performance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
We have introduced new products/services that have positively impacted our revenue growth.	3.885	0.778
The company has successfully expanded into new markets, contributing to revenue growth.	3.812	0.574
Our company's market share has increased relative to competitors over the past year.	3.787	0.836
Our brand recognition and reputation have contributed to an increase in market share	3.725	0.837
Our customers are highly satisfied with the quality of our products/services.	3.662	0.576
The company effectively addresses customer concerns and feedback in a timely manner.	3.659	0.849
Aggregate	**3.755**	**0.742**

Correlation Analysis

The present study used Pearson correlation analysis to determine the strength of association between independent variables (executive development and supplier engagement) and the dependent variable (performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya) dependent variable. Pearson correlation coefficient range between zero and one, where by the strength of association increase with increase in the value of the correlation coefficients.

Table 5: Correlation Coefficients

		Firm Performance	Executive Development	Supplier Engagement
Firm Performance	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	187		
Executive Development	Pearson Correlation	.870**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	187	187	
Supplier Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.845**	.188	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.019	
	N	187	187	187

From the results, there was a very strong relationship between executive development and performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya ($r = 0.870$, p value =0.000). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings are in line with the findings of Bwaya (2021) who indicated that there is a very strong relationship between executive development and firm performance.

The results also revealed that there was a very strong relationship supplier engagement and performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya ($r = 0.845$, p value =0.002). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.002 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings are in line with the results of Kigen and Ndeto (2024) who revealed that there is a very strong relationship between supplier engagement and firm performance

Regression Analysis

Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between independent variables (executive development and supplier engagement) and the dependent variable (performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya)

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.867	.752	.751	.10129

a. Predictors: (Constant), executive development and supplier engagement

The model summary was used to explain the variation in the dependent variable that could be explained by the independent variables. The r-squared for the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was 0.752. This implied that 75.2% of the variation in the dependent variable (performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya) could be explained by independent variables (executive development and supplier engagement).

Table 7: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	118.018	2	59.01	590.1	.000[b]
1	Residual	9.157	184	.050		
	Total	127.175	186			

a. Dependent Variable: performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya
b. Predictors: (Constant), executive development and supplier engagement

The ANOVA was used to determine whether the model was a good fit for the data. F calculated was 590.1 while the F critical was 2.421. The p value was 0.000. Since the F-calculated was greater than the F-critical and the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05, the model was considered as a good fit for the data. Therefore, the model can be used to predict the influence of executive development and supplier engagement on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya.

Table 8: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	**(Constant)**	0.224	0.058		3.862	0.000
	executive development	0.387	0.098	0.388	3.949	0.000
	supplier engagement	0.367	0.097	0.366	3.784	0.001

a Dependent Variable: performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya

The regression model was as follows:

$$\mathbf{Y = 0.224 + 0.387X_1 + 0.367X_2 + \varepsilon}$$

According to the results, executive development has a significant effect on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya β_1=0.387, p value= 0.000). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.000 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings are in line with the findings of Bwaya (2021) who indicated that there is a very strong relationship between executive development and firm performance

In addition, the results revealed that supplier engagement has significant effect on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya $\beta 1$=0.367, p value= 0.001). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.001 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings are in line with the results of Kigen and Ndeto (2024) who revealed that there is a very strong relationship between supplier engagement and firm performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study concludes that executive development has a positive and significant effect on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. Findings revealed that workshop, seminar and mentoring influences performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya.

The study also concludes that supplier engagement has a positive and significant effect on performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya. Findings revealed that consultation, involvement and collaboration influences performance of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kiambu County, Kenya.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the management of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kenya should implement continuous leadership training programs tailored to the local industry's dynamic needs. These programs should focus on strategic decision-making, innovation management, and supply chain optimization, which are critical in the competitive and fast-evolving food and beverage sector.

The study also recommends that that the management of food and beverage manufacturing firms in Kenya should establish long-term, collaborative partnerships with their suppliers based on trust, transparency, and mutual benefit. By engaging suppliers through regular communication, joint planning, and shared quality standards, firms can enhance supply chain reliability, reduce delays, and ensure consistent access to high-quality raw materials.

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