

A Qualitative Exploration of Supplier-Retailer Collaboration in South Africa: A dual
perspective on competitive advantage

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science,
University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Business Administration.

02 November 2025

Abstract

This study examines the role of collaboration between suppliers and retailers in achieving a competitive edge in the South African retail sector. In a highly volatile and competitive market, collaboration has evolved into a strategic essential rather than a routine activity. The study explores how collaboration practices, facilitators, and obstacles impact long-term competitiveness.

A qualitative, interpretivist methodology was used, involving twenty semi-structured interviews with suppliers and retailers. The data were analysed thematically and interpreted using the Resource-Based View and Relational View frameworks, complemented by elements of Dynamic Capabilities theory. These frameworks helped understand how collaboration serves as both a strategic resource and a relational capability.

Results indicate that trust, leadership cohesion, and transparency are vital enablers, while power imbalances, resource limitations, and conflicting incentives present barriers for effective collaboration. When enablers outweigh barriers, collaboration evolves into a strategic capability that enhances adaptability, fosters innovation, and strengthens resilience. This study offers a theoretical contribution by applying these frameworks within an emerging market context and provides practical insights for managers aiming to develop sustainable supplier relationships.

Keywords

Supplier-Retailer Collaboration, Competitive Advantage, Relational Capability, Resource-Based View, and Relational View.

Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

22028839

01 November 2025

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

The following list provides explanations for all acronyms and abbreviations used throughout this research report.

Acronym	Meaning / Definition
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AJG	Academic Journal Guide
Atlas. ti	Qualitative Data Analysis Software used for coding and thematic analysis
DC	Dynamic Capabilities
EDI	Electronic Data Interchange
FMCG	Fast-Moving Consumer Goods
GIBS	Gordon Institute of Business Science
IoT	Internet of Things
JBP	Joint Business Planning
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
RBV	Resource-Based View
RV	Relational View

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction to the Research Problem and Background

Within the highly competitive South African retail landscape (Breytenbach et al., 2020), retailers continually face persistent challenges in implementing supplier collaboration practices, primarily due to operational barriers, misaligned goals, and trust issues, which limit the firm's ability to achieve a sustained competitive advantage (Cooper, 2024). Retailers face business risks when they lack effective collaborative practices. However, there are few qualitative insights into how retailers and suppliers experience these challenges, which represents a theoretical gap. This highlights the need to understand supplier and retailer collaboration as strategic rather than operational (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Barney, 1991). Understanding collaboration of this nature as a strategic tool can be the determinant of competitive advantage in highly competitive markets. If collaboration improves a company's responsiveness, efficiency, and visibility, then its absence can limit its adaptability and long-term performance.

In increasingly volatile and saturated market environments, businesses recognise that achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage is crucial (Farida & Setiawan, 2022). In this context, supplier collaboration has emerged as a strategic tool to enhance supply chain responsiveness, reduce operational costs, increase turnover, and improve visibility (Aditi *et al.*, 2024). By integrating suppliers into joint planning and innovation, firms shift from transactional relationships to relational capabilities (Dyer & Singh, 1998), becoming more agile and innovative.

Duong and Chong (2020) observe that relational and operational challenges hinder implementation and long-term sustainable supplier collaboration initiatives. Poor communication, lack of trust, misaligned targets and shared risks hinder a retailer from gaining a competitive advantage (Sikombe & Phiri, 2019). The challenge arises not from recognising the importance of collaboration, but from achieving alignment, trust, and commitment that make collaboration effective.

Mahmud et al. (2021) contend that addressing these barriers can transform supplier relationships into a strategic advantage, especially in markets that require agility and market responsiveness. Accordingly, a deeper exploration is required to understand how collaboration impacts competitive advantage and to understand challenges in

real-world supply chains (Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2022). The study aims to examine both retailer and supplier perspectives to determine how these practices contribute to a competitive advantage.

The study is situated within the South African retail environment, which is characterised by supply chain complexities and shifting consumer demands (Breytenbach et al., 2020). In a highly competitive environment like South Africa, supplier collaborations are essential; these collaborations take numerous forms, from strategic partnerships (Hultberg & Pal, 2021) to supply chain coordination (Wankmüller & Reiner, 2020). If collaboration helps retailers and suppliers overcome local challenges by building a shared vision and capabilities, then the South African retail sector is an ideal setting to study, especially within a highly competitive market.

1.2 Problem Formulation

Although there is a growing body of knowledge on supplier collaboration through theoretical frameworks (Aditi *et al*, 2024), there remains a significant gap in qualitative research that focuses on experienced practices and implementation within the retail sector. Clarifying this gap is important; without understanding collaboration practices from a dual perspective, companies may continue to apply approaches that do not relate to the South African context.

Existing research tends to emphasise conceptual models rather than direct empirical studies (Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2022), which restricts insight into everyday perceptions and the elements that shape collaboration strategies and results. This limited understanding of implemented complex practices and perceptions restricts academics and practitioners from fully exploiting the knowledge to gain a competitive advantage.

This study will examine collaboration from both retailer and supplier perspectives, which remain underrepresented in current literature. By adopting this dual perspective, the research aims to deliver a comprehensive understanding of collaboration, encompassing supplier and retailer viewpoints on strategy alignment, resource allocation, and potential synergies.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Relational View (RV) will be used to examine this gap, demonstrating how collaboration between suppliers and retailers can lead to a lasting competitive advantage.

Research problem statement: Despite supplier–retailer collaboration being recognised as a strategic resource, there is limited understanding, particularly in South Africa, of the practices, barriers and enablers that determine whether it translates into a competitive advantage.

If collaboration within this network provides an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage, then understanding the conditions that strengthen or weaken this relationship becomes essential. By addressing this gap from a dual perspective, the study aims to generate insights to help managers and scholars within the sector collaborate and build practices that are both strategic and operationally effective.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The primary objective of this study is to examine empirically and understand, from a dual perspective, how supplier collaboration practices influence the attainment of a competitive advantage in the South African retail sector. In this context, influence refers to how collaboration practices shape, enable, or constrain the firm in achieving a sustainable advantage. The study will not assume the influence to be positive or negative but seeks to understand how collaboration practices, barriers and enablers contribute to or hamper the firm's performance and strategic position.

By examining both the supplier and retailer views, the study aims to provide a balanced understanding of how these relational capabilities, such as trust, goals, communication and alignment, can affect competitiveness. This research aligns with the Resource-based View and the Relational View, offering both theoretical insight and practical guidance for improving collaboration practices within the South African retail environment.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

The main objective of the research is to explore and understand, from a dual perspective, how supplier–retailer collaboration practices, barriers and enablers influence competitive advantage within the South African retail sector.

Aligned to the objective, the study seeks to:

1. Explore the current supplier-retailer collaboration practices and the perceptions of these practices within the South African retail environment.
2. Identify and interpret the barriers and enablers that underpin how collaboration is practised and perceived between suppliers and retailers.
3. Examine how collaboration practices and perceptions influence a firm's ability to gain a sustainable competitive advantage.
4. Generate practical insights that assist retail managers, retailers and suppliers in strengthening collaborative relationships that enhance long-term competitiveness.

1.4.1 Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, together with being in line with the research problem and purpose, the study is guided by the following questions:

1. How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and how do their perceptions of enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?
2. How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?

Table 1: Alignment between research objectives and research questions

Research Objective	Corresponding Research Question	Intended Data Source / Evidence
1. Explore current supplier–retailer collaboration practices and the perceptions of these practices within the South African retail environment.	RQ 1: How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practise collaboration, and how do their perceptions of enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?	Semi-structured interviews with supplier and retailer participants; documentary evidence (if available).
2. Identify and interpret the barriers and enablers that underpin how collaboration is practised and perceived between suppliers and retailers.	RQ 1 (sub-theme): What specific barriers and enablers affect collaboration between suppliers and retailers in the South African retail sector?	Interview transcripts; thematic analysis of participant narratives.
3. Examine how collaboration practices and perceptions influence a firm's ability to gain a sustainable competitive advantage.	RQ 2: How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources?	Coded qualitative data comparing retailer and supplier perspectives; interpretation against RBV and RV.
4. Generate practical insights that assist retail managers and suppliers in strengthening collaborative relationships that enhance long-term competitiveness.	Derived question: What practical lessons and relational capabilities can be drawn from these experiences to inform future collaboration strategies?	Synthesis of findings and managerial reflections developed from thematic patterns.

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

1.5 Scope of the Study

1.5.1 Conceptual Scope

As detailed in section 1.1, the South African retail sector demonstrates significant competitiveness (Breytenbach et al., 2020) and volatility (Farida & Setiawan, 2022). In this context, the present study investigates supplier-retailer collaboration by evaluating the practices, enabling factors, and obstacles that affect competitive advantage. Conceptually, collaboration is treated as both a relational capability and a strategic resource, guided by the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Relational View (RV).

These theoretical perspectives guide how shared resources, trust, communication, and alignment may contribute towards a sustainable competitive advantage. The study will focus on collaboration as a strategic and relational process rather than an operational transaction.

1.5.2 Geographical and Conceptual Scope

The research is geographically confined to the highly competitive South African retail sector, characterised by complex supply chains and ever-changing consumer demands. This environment is ideal for examining supplier-retailer collaboration. For companies to remain competitive, they need to coordinate and respond to market changes continuously.

The study focuses solely on collaboration within the retail sector and omits other sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and services. By having these boundaries, the research can focus on how collaboration practices, barriers, and enablers contribute to competitive advantage in the South African retail environment.

1.5.3 Methodological Scope

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews to explore how supplier collaboration practices, barriers, and enablers are implemented and understood within the South African retail sector. This approach enables in-depth research into the lived experiences and perceptions of collaboration among retailers and suppliers.

The study gathers insights from two participant groups, which are retailers and suppliers, to ensure different viewpoints on collaboration are considered. By organising and analysing their responses separately, both common trends within each group and overarching themes between them can be identified. By doing this, the study can understand the alignment, divergence, and shared knowledge across collaboration relationships.

1.5.4 Temporal Scope and Delimitations

This research takes place in the retail landscape after 2020, a time characterised by frequent supply chain challenges, shifting consumer trends, and rapid growth of digital platforms. This timeframe provides the necessary background to understand organisational resilience and adaptability.

This study will not focus on financial outcomes, benchmarking specific firms or extending the findings to other industries. The research aims to gain rich qualitative insights applicable to the South African retail landscape.

These delimitations ensure precision in analytics while supporting the primary goal of understanding how retailer-supplier collaboration contributes to a sustained competitive advantage.

1.6 Business Rationale

This research aims to offer practical insights on how retailers and suppliers can implement sustainable, flexible, and mutually beneficial collaboration. South Africa's market is increasingly volatile and highly competitive (Seamaster, n.d.). Supplier-retailer collaboration is essential to ensure that a firm remains competitive and resilient.

It is essential for organisations to assess the distinct obstacles that impede effective collaboration and to identify the enablers and strategies that can address these challenges (Trofholz & Baker, n.d.). For both retailers and suppliers, understanding the relational factors that facilitate productive partnerships is crucial for strengthening the resilience and sustainability of supply chains.

The study aims to support decision-making by:

- Providing a dual perspective that creates mutual value, rather than a one-sided approach.
- Understanding that consumers want more, and the need for the supply chain to be more responsive and adaptable. This study will provide insights for key stakeholders in the retail environment, helping them make decisions to build agile, responsive supply chains that withstand market disruptions.
- Creating insights grounded in lived experiences and perceptions from retailers and suppliers around collaboration. This will help make the relationship scalable, replicable, and locally relevant across developing markets.

Ultimately, the study will aim to ensure that long-term competitive advantage can be unlocked through supplier collaboration, emphasising the need for businesses to treat collaboration as a strategic relational capability rather than an operational process (GEP, n.d.).

1.7 Theoretical Need

The theoretical need for the study is to add a qualitative, context-specific perspective to the body of knowledge on supply-retailer collaboration in an emerging market environment. Although supplier collaboration has been thoroughly examined through qualitative and quantitative research, there is limited empirical understanding of how collaboration is experienced and practised by both suppliers and retailers in developing markets.

There is potential for South African retailers to gain a sustained competitive advantage through supplier collaboration; however, many of these retailers continue to struggle to implement it due to misalignment, trust issues, and operational barriers. Addressing these challenges theoretically contributes to adding to the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Relational View (RV) by illustrating how collaboration is used as a strategic relational capability rather than an operational process.

The study contributes to the theory by contextualising these frameworks within an emerging economy, offering insights into relational dynamics, enablers and barriers that influence supplier-retailer collaboration and competitive advantage.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter presents the background, research problem, and rationale for examining supplier-retailer collaboration within the South African retail sector. It has been established that collaboration is recognised as a strategic tool for achieving a competitive advantage; however, there is limited research on how these practices are experienced and implemented in the context of a developing economy.

This chapter presents the problem formulation, purpose, objectives, and research questions, followed by the outline of the scope, business rationale, and theoretical need. Together, these components demonstrate that the study contributes practically by providing insights for retailers and suppliers on strengthening collaboration. It also offers theoretical value by extending the Resource-Based View and the Relational View to understand collaboration as a relational capability.

The remainder of the report is organised as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review of supplier–retailer collaboration, examining key barriers, enablers, and theoretical perspectives (RBV and RV). It concludes by developing the conceptual framework that underpins the study.

Chapter 3 presents the research questions and propositions, showing how they were derived from the literature and conceptual framework. The chapter explains how these questions direct the empirical enquiry and link theory to practice.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and methodology, describing the qualitative approach adopted, the sampling strategy, data-collection procedures, thematic-analysis techniques, and ethical considerations used to ensure rigour and credibility.

Chapter 5 presents the empirical findings, structured according to the key themes that emerged from supplier and retailer interviews and aligned with the research objectives.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings, integrating them with existing literature and theoretical perspectives to interpret how collaboration practices shape competitive advantage.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by summarising the main insights, theoretical and managerial contributions, limitations, and recommendations for both future research and practical application.

Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review critically examines current theoretical and empirical perspectives on supplier collaboration and its role in achieving competitive advantage in the South African retail environment. This chapter will build on the introductory problem framing by indicating how supplier-retailer collaboration can evolve into a strategic capability. The review is based on three interrelated constructs: supplier collaboration practices, the effectiveness of the barriers and enablers influencing their efficacy, and the impact these have on competitive advantage. These constructs will be anchored in two strategic management theories, namely the Resource-Based View and the Relational View. The theories will integrate current literature with practical challenges to place supplier collaboration as a strategic resource and a relational capability. This chapter moves beyond descriptive review by integrating how theories of strategic collaboration evolved and where conceptual tensions remain. There is particular attention to Western-centric formulations of RBV and RV performed in volatile, resource-constrained markets such as South Africa.

The literature review not only summarises prior research but also critiques, integrates, and extends it, aligning with the purpose of this study. It examines how collaboration is conceptualised, identifies inconsistencies between theory and practice, and highlights contextual gaps in the South African retail landscape. This chapter will shift from “what is known” to “what remains unresolved” (Booth et al., 2021), moving from description to interpretation.

Before addressing the theoretical perspectives indicated above, it is important to demonstrate that the study is anchored in high-quality journals. Table 2.1 presents the rankings and journal quality of the journals used as the intellectual foundation for this research. These journals were selected based on the number of citations, journal quality rankings in the Academic Journal Guide (2021), and the Scimago SJR index.

Table 2: AJG Ratings of Top-Ranked Scholarly Journals

Source / Journal	Journal Year	Number of Citations	AJG 2021 / SJR Rating	Journal Tier / Ranking
Journal of Management	1991	111 287	Q1	A*
Strategic Management Journal	1997	57 436	Q1	A*
Academy of Management Review	1998	20 231	Q1	A*
Journal of Business Research	2019	11 468	Q1	A
Journal of Operations Management	2023	363	Q1	A*

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

Table 2 highlights the top five scholarly journals used as a theoretical and empirical base for this study. Each journal is ranked as Q1 or in the A or A* category, the highest level of peer-review quality in management research. The Strategic Management Journal and the Journal of Management highlight the theoretical foundations for the Resource-Based View and the Relational View. At the same time, the Journal of Operations Management and Journal of Business Research contribute empirical insights into collaboration and supply chain performance.

2.1.1 Literature Review Roadmap

The remainder of this chapter is structured around five interconnected sections that provide the foundation for the study. The structure follows a logical narrative from theory to practice, integrating both empirical and conceptual insights.

Section 2.2 discusses the two theoretical foundations that will guide this research, namely the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Relational View (RV). These theories explain how internal resources and inter-organisational relationships can create a competitive advantage.

Section 2.3 examines the supplier-retailer collaboration practices, focusing on how companies operationalise these practices in the supply chain through joint planning, shared innovation and information sharing. This section will integrate global market with emerging market studies to facilitate collaboration within the South African context.

Section 2.4 explores the barriers and enablers that influence collaboration success, including trust, communication, alignment, and power balance. This part also highlights the constant constraints and success factors.

Section 2.5 then reviews the link between collaboration and competitive advantage, explaining how strategic partnerships make an organisation agile and responsive and sustain its performance. This section also highlights how these relationships contribute to relational capabilities.

Section 2.6 introduces the dual stakeholder perspective: retailers and suppliers. This section will address the gap in existing literature, which presents a relatively one-sided view, and position collaboration as both a strategic and relational resource.

Section 2.7 concludes the chapter by identifying conceptual gaps in the existing literature and presenting the conceptual framework developed for this study. This framework incorporates the theories of the Resource-Based View and the Relational View and provides a visual representation of the constructs and their relationships.

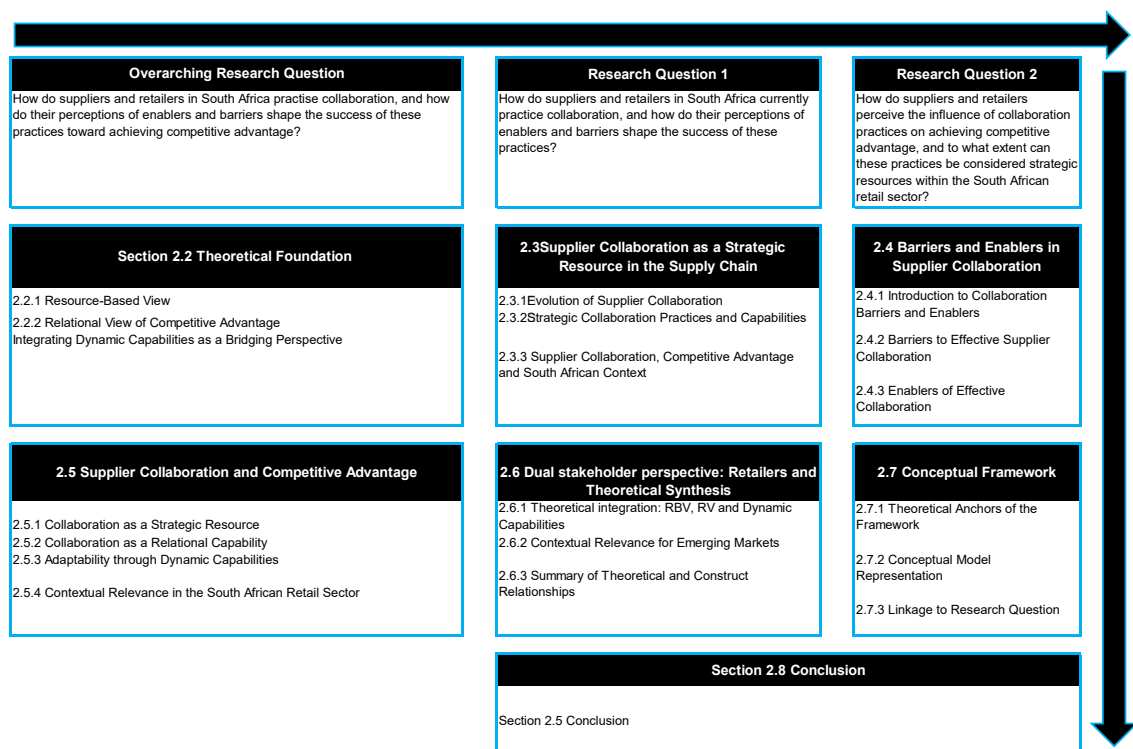


Figure 1: Literature Roadmap

-Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

Together, these sections justify the need to study supplier-retailer collaboration through a qualitative lens as both academically necessary and practically relevant.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

2.2.1 Resource-Based View

The resource-based view (RBV) is a foundational theory in strategic management. This theory was developed by Wernerfelt (1984) and later expanded by Barney (1991), who argued that a company can gain a competitive advantage by effectively utilising resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and embedded in the organisation (Barney, 1991). Knowledge, capabilities, and physical assets are the traditional internal resources that have been focused on.

The theory has been revised to include the significance of relational and network resources, particularly when there is a complex and competitive environment, which, if collaboration is used effectively, can create a competitive advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998). A competitive advantage can be developed between the supplier and the retailer, as supplier collaboration is increasingly viewed as a strategic relational resource which, if done effectively, can be difficult to imitate (Zakrzewska-Bielawska & Lewicka, 2021).

Bakalo and Abegaz (2024) noted that through long-term trusting relationships, retailers and suppliers can share knowledge, streamline processes, and develop new products that respond to market needs quickly. For example, Capital can be optimised by creating long-term relationships, which indicate that the retailer and supplier can invest collaboratively to achieve a common goal or pursue joint innovation (Sheu, Yen, & Chae, 2006). Knowledge sharing can enhance the demand forecasting process, leading to more accurate and responsive forecasts that respond more quickly to market changes (Dubey et al., 2024).

Process integration is another valuable resource, as it can optimise supply chain time by eliminating waste and increasing visibility. Integrated technology tools can assist with measuring and sustaining the performance of the collaboration practices (Tan & Sidhu, 2022).

The Resource-Based View provides the first lens by framing supplier collaboration as a strategic resource; if an organisation can manage collaboration effectively, a sustained competitive advantage can be realised.

2.2.2 Relational View of Competitive Advantage

From the resource-based view, the relational view of competitive advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998) proposes that a firm can gain a competitive advantage by developing relational capabilities within the collaboration between the retailer and supplier. These joint capabilities, such as joint capital, shared knowledge, and concentrated problem-solving, can be difficult to replicate among competitors and can provide these partnerships with a sustained competitive advantage (Zakrzewska-Bielawska & Lewicka, 2021).

For example, a shared facility between the supplier and retailer can alleviate infrastructure costs. Additionally, visibility in the supply chain can reduce wasted time and increase service levels, such as reducing out-of-stock occurrences. Such relational capabilities extend the organisation's resource-based view beyond the firm's boundaries, providing both firms with a strategic advantage.

The Relational View is relevant in supply chain collaboration, where trust, commitment and governance are key in realising aligned incentives and synergy within the chain. By examining collaboration through the relational lens, this approach not only considers the resources an organisation may possess but also how these resources can be shared or leveraged across its internal boundaries to create mutual value.

Integrating Dynamic Capabilities as a Bridging Perspective

Further expanding on these perspectives, the dynamic capabilities framework focuses on a firm's ability to build, adapt, and reconfigure its resources in an ever-changing, competitive market (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). Within the supplier collaboration context, the framework proposes three types of capabilities: sensing, seizing, and transforming (Engelmann, 2024).

The dynamic capability of supplier collaboration practices can sense shifts in demand and disruptions, seize opportunities to create new products, streamline processes

and reconfigure logistics networks or supply chains to respond to disruptions with agility.

The Resource-Based View treats collaboration as a strategic resource; the relational view treats collaboration between firms as a relational capability; and the dynamic capabilities perspective explains how firms use these relational resources to adapt and renew themselves to gain a sustained competitive advantage.

Although these frameworks have been developed over the years, however, there is a limited understanding of how these practices are perceived as strategic resources and dynamic capabilities, particularly within the South African retail sector. By applying these theories, the study will aim to explore the perceived influence of supplier collaboration practices on competitive advantage in the retail environment.

The three perspectives indicated are relevant; however, this study will primarily anchor on the relational view, supported by the resource-based view, as these two perspectives highlight how sustained competitive advantage can be achieved with collaboration. The dynamic capability perspective will be incorporated only when examining how organisations respond to change, innovation, or market turbulence.

The theoretical foundation outlined above establishes how collaboration can be used as a strategic resource and a relational capability that strengthens a firm's competitiveness. The following section reviews key constructs from the literature, beginning with the relationship between supplier collaboration and supply chain performance.

2.3 Supplier Collaboration as a Strategic Resource in the Supply Chain

2.3.1 Evolution of Supplier Collaboration

Supplier collaboration has evolved from being viewed as an operational efficiency to a strategic relational resource that enhances a firm's competitiveness. According to Grant (2025), collaborations are efforts by firms to enhance communication and problem-solving in an integrated manner. Supplier collaboration has significantly changed over the years, with retailers utilising this strategy to gain a competitive advantage and ensure that the supply chain remains sustainable and resilient (Sharma, Luthra et al., 2022).

Recent research indicates that a sustainable supply chain has become a primary focus, exploring the integration of climate and social goals while achieving economic goals (Hariram et al., 2023). Organisations recognise that supplier-retailer collaboration is not just an operational or transactional exchange; it has now evolved to shape decisions around innovation, agility, and sustained competitiveness.

Collaboration practices have been studied to implement and achieve the desired efficiencies, such as order fulfilment, resource sharing, joint planning (Duong & Chong, 2020), technology integration (Guggenberge et al., 2020), and transparency regarding information (Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2022), emphasising the need to gain a competitive advantage. These practices are crucial for maintaining sustainable operations, especially in emerging markets, where infrastructure limitations and market volatility are common.

2.3.2 Strategic Collaboration Practices and Capabilities

Supplier collaboration has evolved into a strategic relational resource rather than being viewed merely as a tool for operational efficiency (Zakrzewska-Bielawska & Lewicka, 2021). Firms are utilising this network resource to be agile, differentiate, and become more innovative (Liu & Yang, 2020).

The literature indicates that supplier collaboration practices are being enhanced to include joint innovation, shared risk, integrated goals, and joint demand forecasting, which promote an environment in which the supply chain can be agile and respond to customers' needs timeously. These collaboration practices are crucial in ever-changing environments and globally competitive markets.

Organisations use these practices to operationalise relational capabilities through joint planning, technology integration, and mutual goal alignment, which align with the core principles of the Resource-Based View and Relational View.

2.3.3 Supplier Collaboration, Competitive Advantage and South African Context

Interpreting the resource-based view and the relational view, these supplier collaboration practices can be regarded as relational capabilities that are rare,

inimitable, valuable, and embedded between both the retailer and supplier. These capabilities enable retailers to react to shifts in demand, seizing opportunities to incorporate processes and transform their supply chains in response to disruptions, such as COVID-19 (Shen & Sun, 2023).

These supplier collaboration practices are frequently viewed as operational efficiencies, which results in a limited understanding of how such techniques are categorised as resources within the Resource-Based View and Relational View frameworks in the South African retail sector. This gap highlights the importance of exploring how these practices add value to long-term competitiveness in an emerging market such as South Africa.

In South Africa's volatile retail sector, supplier collaboration functions as a strategic resource and as a relational capability that enhances competitiveness. The following section examines the key barriers and enablers that will shape how collaboration practices are implemented.

2.4 Barriers and Enablers in Supplier Collaboration

2.4.1 Introduction to Collaboration Barriers and Enablers

Disruptions in the supply chain, most notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasised the need to collaborate and ensure visibility, flexibility, and adaptability (Sharma et al., 2021). At the same time, key enablers of effective supplier collaboration include technological advancements such as IoT, AI, and data analytics (Saghiri & Marzabeiki, 2021). Research in sustainable collaboration practices in the retail sector remains limited, especially in real-world applications (Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2022).

The next section identifies the primary barriers that hinder supplier-retailer collaboration and the enablers that facilitate it, and examines how these interact to influence a competitive advantage.

2.4.2 Barriers to Effective Supplier Collaboration

Although there are potential benefits to supplier-retailer collaboration, several obstacles restrict its full implementation and effectiveness. These can be categorised into relational, technological, governance, and dynamic capability-related barriers.

2.4.2.1 Relational Barriers: Communication, Trust and Shared Risk

There is limited research on the barriers, such as communication challenges unique to retail, trust shortfalls, shared risk and misaligned targets (Mahmud et al., 2022). The sharing of information within a buyer-supplier relationship, which can enhance innovation and adaptability, has limited research (Brun et al., 2020).

2.4.2.2 Technological Barriers: Data Security and Integration

Data security (Grant, 2025), misaligned strategies, and silos are barriers for the successful implementation of technological collaboration enablers such as IoT, AI and data analytics (Tan & Sidhu, 2022). Incorporating the relational view theory, these barriers pose challenges for firms seeking to unlock the full potential of supplier collaboration practices. Trust and transparency facilitate the development of relational rents, in which joint value is created through collaboration (Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2022).

2.4.2.3 Governance and Structural Barriers: Power Asymmetry and Conflict Management

Furthermore, Governance rules, conflict management practices, and power asymmetries in market share between the retailer and supplier can hinder the adoption of supplier collaboration practices (Vandchali, Cahoon, & Chen, 2021). These challenges can influence long-term relationships, making the relationship one-sided, which can contribute to the sustainability of the practice. These barriers are not often researched, which makes the practicality, managerial responses and implementation difficult.

2.4.2.4 Dynamic Capability Barriers: Flexibility and Adaptability

From a dynamic capabilities perspective, these barriers make it difficult for a firm to exploit available opportunities. The barriers limit supply chain flexibility and reduce

the ability to respond to volatile demands (Sheu, Yen, & Chae, 2006). The interaction of barriers and how they influence each other in the retail sector has limited research. The performance of supplier collaboration practices and the effectiveness of collaborative configurations have received limited research attention. The management strategies needed to recover from supply chain disruptions remain poorly understood (Chen et al., 2019).

2.4.2.5 Summary of Barrier Insights

Overall, most literature focuses on which practices work but pays little attention to the actual barriers experienced by retailers and suppliers and to how these perceived barriers shape and influence collaboration.

2.4.3 Enablers of Effective Collaboration

Given the numerous barriers identified, several enablers in the literature have been identified to facilitate and sustain supplier-retailer collaboration. These enablers can be grouped into relational, leadership, technological and governance-based factors that strengthen collaboration and increase its effectiveness and competitiveness.

2.4.3.1 Relational Enablers: Trust and Transparency

Trust and Transparency remain the key foundational enablers to foster better communication, reduce opportunistic behaviours, and encourage knowledge sharing of sensitive information. With high levels of relational trust, there is an increased willingness to enter long-term partnerships and pursue initiatives to improve service-level scores and innovation capacity.

2.4.3.2 Leadership Enablers: Commitment and Strategic Alignment

Leader commitment from both parties remains a key decisive enabler. Top Management support highlights the strategic importance of collaboration in the organisation. This involvement will legitimise collaboration initiatives and provide the necessary resources to make these practices sustainable over time. When senior leaders share a vision, employees at the operational level demonstrate greater alignment and coordination, particularly in day-to-day operations.

2.4.3.3 Technological Enablers: AI, IoT and Data Integration

Technological enablers have also been a key enabler in recent years. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), data analysis, and system integration between companies has made data easier to share and process. This enhances visibility and enables these organisations to adapt to market changes and jointly plan inventory levels. These technologies extend organisational relational capabilities beyond trust and transparency, but digital trust, where timelines are shared to evoke confidence amongst the parties.

2.4.3.4 Governance Enablers: Formal and Informal Mechanisms

Governance mechanisms also serve as enablers of effective collaboration. Joint performance metrics, formal contracts and evaluation systems create accountability. There is also informal governance, such as joint planning routines and knowledge-sharing platforms, which strengthen relations and create faster learning across both organisations. The integration of formal and informal governance mechanisms enables firms to maintain balanced control and adapt quickly to markets.

2.4.3.5 Theoretical Integration of Enablers

From a theoretical perspective, these enablers reflect the Resource-Based View's emphasis on unique, valuable, and inimitable capabilities. At the same time, the Relational View highlights how trust, shared knowledge, and joint investments can create relational rents that make it difficult for competitors to replicate (Dyer & Singh, 1998). When these are supported by dynamic capabilities—the ability to sense, seize, and transform opportunities into collaboration practices—these practices become an evolving strategic asset that keeps a firm competitive and resilient (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Engelmann, 2024).

2.4.3.6 Contextual Relevance to South African Retail

These enablers are relevant in the South African retail environment, where supply chain disruptions, infrastructure constraints, and volatile demand require a

relationship-driven, adaptive, and technology-integrated approach to collaboration. Incorporating these enablers transforms these practices from operational coordination tools into a strategic relational capability that provides sustained competitive advantage and agility.

2.5 Supplier Collaboration and Competitive Advantage

2.5.1 Collaboration as a Strategic Resource

In a fast-evolving market, supplier collaboration is being used as a strategic tool to stay competitive. According to the Resource-Based View, collaboration practices such as knowledge sharing, integrated planning, and joint investments are seen as valuable resources. These resources assist companies in outperforming competitors when they are ingrained within organisational routines and culture. However, if these resources are integrated into organisational practices, they are rare and hard to imitate, creating a solid foundation for a sustainable competitive advantage.

2.5.2 Collaboration as a Relational Capability

The relational view (Dyer & Singh, 1998) posits that companies can achieve better results by collaborating rather than working independently. Value is created for suppliers and retailers when there is shared risk and transparent information exchange, and mutual investment. The value created is called relational rent and is difficult for competitors to replicate. These relational capabilities strengthen trust, enhance alignment, and provide these firms with a competitive advantage that goes beyond their individual boundaries.

2.5.3 Adaptability through Dynamic Capabilities

The Dynamic Capabilities framework (Teece et al., 1997) indicates that good collaboration is not enough; the firm's ability to sense, seize and transform in response to change in market conditions will assist in gaining a competitive advantage. In this view, companies that renew strategic partnerships help firms

respond to market changes, adapt more easily, and increase supply chain responsiveness.

2.5.4 Contextual Relevance in the South African Retail Sector

The literature suggests that supplier collaboration can provide a competitive advantage (Huq & Stevenson, 2020); however, the challenge lies in the scarcity of real-world, qualitative research within the South African retail sector (Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2022). This gap highlights the importance of understanding practical experiences and the perceptions of supplier-retailer collaboration in contributing to a retailer's competitive advantage in emerging markets.

In this context, collaboration is not only seen as an operational need but as a strategic relational capability that determines how retailers and suppliers will respond to market changes, supply chain complexity and evolving consumer demands.

2.6 Dual stakeholder perspective: Retailers and Theoretical Synthesis

Most of the current literature adopts a one-sided view, primarily from the retailer's perspective. This narrow focus limits understanding of retailer-supplier collaboration, especially in joint decision-making, shared information, and value creation. Collaboration in nature is a partnership; understanding it from a single perspective limits insight into relational dynamics and the tools that can enable or constrain collaboration (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

There is a gap in the literature regarding supplier perspectives in developing economies such as South Africa, where contextual challenges can shape collaboration strategies. Having a gap in supplier perspectives can give a limited picture of interorganisational trust, goals, and perceived benefits of collaboration.

There is a significant gap in the literature concerning suppliers' perspectives in developing economies such as South Africa. Suppliers often operate in collaboration under reduced bargaining power, logistics inefficiencies and fragmented market access (Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2022). Understanding their perspective on

collaboration can lead to a sustained, effective partnership. Understanding this gap can lead to a balanced view of inter-organisational trust, goal alignment, and perceived benefits.

2.6.1 Theoretical integration: RBV, RV and Dynamic Capabilities

From the Relational View, there is co-creation and the development of relational rents—the joint value created through collaboration. To create relational rents, there needs to be mutual engagement and capacity building (Dyer & Singh, 1998). When these relational rents are built on shared trust and commitment, they are hard to replicate and provide a solid foundation for gaining a competitive advantage.

However, the Resource-Based View emphasises that these relational capabilities must be embedded in their structure and management decisions (Barney, 1991). Firms develop these competencies internally through information sharing, cross-functional coordination among departments, and innovation routines; they generally possess a strong capability to establish successful collaborative relationships externally.

While Dynamic Capabilities is not one of the two theoretical anchors, it provides a lens for understanding how firms can reconfigure their collaboration relationships to respond to market changes (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). It supports the view that these relationships can sense opportunities, seize them through innovation, and transform to remain relevant and sustain competitiveness in a volatile market.

2.6.2 Contextual Relevance for Emerging Markets

In emerging markets such as South Africa, contextual variables—including infrastructure constraints, power asymmetries, and institutional uncertainty—highlight the need for strong internal resources and external relationship synergies (Zakrzewska-Bielawska & Lewicka, 2021). This perspective reinforces the need for collaboration to be a strategic capability rather than merely an operational coordination mechanism.

Understanding collaboration through a dual stakeholder lens will enhance both theoretical and practical insights. This reflects how internal resources (RBV) and inter-firm relationships (RV) interact within a limited-resource environment to create adaptive relational capabilities that sustain a competitive advantage.

2.6.3 Summary of Theoretical and Construct Relationships

The theoretical foundation highlighted above indicates how collaboration can be a strategic and relational resource that enhances a firm's competitiveness. Table 2.1 below will show the relationship between the theories and constructs that underlie this study. These relationships will be the foundation for the conceptual framework discussed in Section 2.7.

Table 3: Summary of Theoretical and Construct Relationships

Theory	Core Concept	Associated Constructs	Key Authors	Implications for the Study
Resource-Based View (RBV)	Firm resources as sources of competitive advantage	Supplier-retailer collaboration practices (e.g., joint planning, knowledge sharing, process integration) as valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources	Wernerfelt (1984); Barney (1991)	Explains how internal and network resources contribute to sustained competitive advantage in retail supply chains.
Relational View (RV)	Inter-firm relationships as sources of relational rents	Enablers and barriers of collaboration (trust, shared vision, governance, risk-sharing, and information transparency)	Dyer & Singh (1998); Zakrzewska-Bielawska & Lewicka (2021)	Highlights how collaboration amongst retailers and suppliers creates joint value, that makes this hard to replicate.
Dynamic Capabilities (supporting lens)	Adapting and reconfiguring resources in dynamic environments	Sensing, seizing, and transforming collaborative relationships in response to market change	Teece, Pisano, & Shuen (1997); Engelmann (2024)	Provides contextual relevance by highlighting the need for collaboration practices to keep evolving to maintain a competitive advantage.

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

In summary, section 2.6 consolidates the theoretical perspectives discussed throughout the chapter and underscores the importance of a dual stakeholder approach in investigating a supplier-retailer collaboration. The integration of the theoretical Views, supported by the Dynamic Capability perspective, lays the groundwork for the conceptual framework in section 2.7. The following section

illustrates these theories in a visual model that will guide the thematic analysis and investigation.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is an intellectual map that integrates the foundational theories, constructs and relationships that will guide this study. This framework provides a visual representation of how supplier-retailer collaboration contributes to competitive advantage in the South African retail environment. This framework also aligns theory with practice by demonstrating how barriers and enablers shape collaboration and organisations' performance.

2.7.1 Theoretical Anchors of the Framework

The Resource-Based View and the Relational View are the core theoretical perspectives, serving as interconnected elements that form the building blocks guiding the study. At the same time, the Dynamic Capabilities will be used to indicate changes in environments and markets. The RBV highlights that supplier collaboration is a valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable strategic resource (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). The RV extends this thought, indicating that inter-firm relationships, through trust, joint planning, and information sharing, create relational rents that benefit both parties and confer a sustained advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998). The DC perspective is not a primary anchor, but it introduces the adaptive process of sensing, seizing, and transforming collaborative relationships to remain competitive and relevant (Teece et al., 1997). These theories will provide a lens as to how supplier collaboration affects a firm's competitive advantage in South African retail.

2.7.2 Conceptual Model Representation

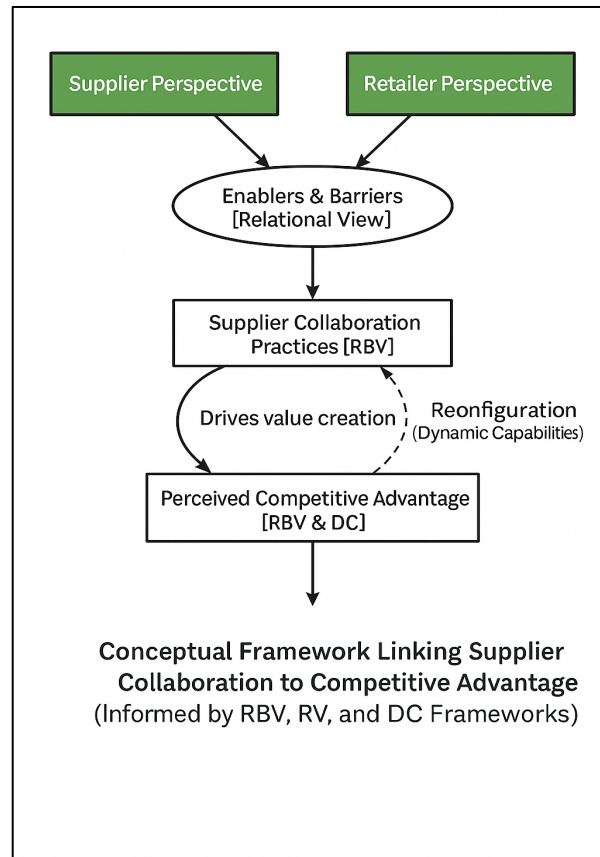


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Linking Supplier Collaboration to Competitive Advantage (Informed by RBV, RV, and DC Frameworks)

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

As indicated in Figure 1, the framework will begin with the perspectives from the retailer and the supplier, which jointly shape the collaboration process. These dual perspectives will shape views on the enablers and barriers affecting the quality and effectiveness of supplier collaboration. This interaction aligns with the Relational View, which holds that for value creation, joint capabilities and trustworthy interactions are necessary (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

The supplier collaboration practices developed are conceptualised as a strategic resource under the Resource-based view. If these practices are rare, hard to replicate, well-integrated and valuable, this can lead to a sustained competitive advantage.

The model also includes a feedback loop that aligns with Dynamic capability (Teece et al., 1997). This loop indicates that firms must continually review and adapt their relationships to sustain a competitive advantage in an ever-changing environment. The process of sensing, seizing, and transforming is illustrated by the feedback loop, which is needed to sustain a competitive advantage.

2.7.3 Linkage to Research Question

This framework will inform data collection and thematic analysis by focusing on how these factors influence perceived influence on competitive advantage. The literature demonstrates that collaboration practices, along with their enablers, barriers, and influence on competitive advantage, remain underexplored in the South African retail context, aligning with the research questions below:

RQ 1: How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practise collaboration, and how do their perceptions of enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?

RQ 2: How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?

2.7.4 Section Conclusion

The conceptual framework consolidates the theoretical perspective of the RBV, RV, and DC to show how supplier-retailer collaboration transitions from an operational coordination to a strategic relational capability. It bridges theory and practice by positioning collaboration as a dynamic process that is shaped by enablers and barriers.

2.8 Conclusion

In Conclusion, there have been numerous studies indicating that supplier-retailer collaboration has been widely discussed through an operational lens; there is limited research on the relational and contextual lens in the South African retail environment. The study addresses a theoretical gap by extending the Resource-Based View and Relational View into an emerging market like South Africa and a practical one, how strategic outcomes are translated from relational mechanisms.

Chapter 3

3.1 Restatement of the Research Problem and Question

In the strategic management literature, supplier collaboration has been widely discussed, with most research focusing on conceptual frameworks and quantitative outcomes. However, there is a notable lack of qualitative insight into how supplier-retail collaboration is implemented and perceived. In emerging markets such as South Africa, collaboration characteristics are shaped by unique contextual factors, with conditions, infrastructure, and dynamics differing from those in developed economies.

The literature has been heavily focused on successful collaboration practices; however, there has been less attention to the barriers that hinder successful and sustained collaboration. Collaboration is a two-sided relationship, yet current literature primarily focuses on a single-sided perspective — specifically the retailer — and overlooks the supplier's voice in the collaborative relationship. This leads to a gap in understanding how collaboration operates and how suppliers and retailers perceive its influence on competitive advantage.

Although the Resource-Based View, the Dynamic capability and the Relational view are strong theories, there is limited empirical research applying them in a real-world setting (Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2022), especially in developing economies such as South Africa.

Therefore, the study will contribute to exploring how perceived collaborating practices influence the attainment of a competitive advantage in the South African retail sector. The study will employ a qualitative method to understand the enablers and barriers from a dual stakeholder perspective, that of retailers and suppliers.

Research Questions

1. How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and how do their perceptions of enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?

2. How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?

Chapter 4

4.1 Choice of research design

In this section, the research design will be discussed by aligning the choices made with the research question to ensure depth, trustworthiness and contextual insight.

4.1.1 Purpose of research design

The research was exploratory. Saunders and Lewis (2018) emphasised that exploratory research aims to uncover information about a topic that has not been well explored, thereby enabling a better understanding. Supplier collaboration practices, challenges, and enablers were explored in the study, as were the perceived effectiveness of collaboration strategies for gaining a competitive advantage. Exploratory design enabled a more profound understanding, grounded in real-world experiences and new insights into the patterns that emerge as key drivers in the South African retail environment.

This approach allowed participants to share rich, context-specific real-life examples, consistent with qualitative interpretivist inquiry. The design was supported using open-ended, semi-structured interviews that captured stakeholder perspectives and subjective meanings. The nature of the study aligned with the purpose, as the goal was to develop experience-based explanations of supplier collaboration rather than to generalise the findings statistically.

Given the limited academic research on supplier-retailer collaboration in emerging economies such as South Africa, this design was ideal for achieving contextual depth and flexibility. The following section discusses this philosophical orientation in detail.

4.1.2 Philosophy

The study adopted an **interpretivist philosophy**. According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020), Interpretivism is a philosophy which emphasises the need to understand human behaviour in certain contexts. The qualitative study focused on uncovering the expectations and perceptions of retail and supplier professionals regarding supplier-retailer collaboration. This approach recognised that both organisational systems and human interaction influence collaboration practices. Accordingly, the

researcher engaged in dialogue with the participants to understand how these suppliers and retailers feel about their collaborative relationships.

A context approach was required as collaboration practices are influenced by both individuals and organisations. Interpretivism aligns with the study's theoretical framing, as the RBV and RV require an understanding of how individuals co-create value in context through relationships and resources. This worldview justified the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to uncover the multiple realities embedded within supplier–retailer interactions.

4.1.3 Approach selected

An **inductive approach** was utilised for the study. According to Lewis and Saunders (2018), this approach involves collecting data, which is then analysed to develop theories and frameworks on patterns and trends. Rather than testing pre-existing hypotheses, the researcher gained insights from participants' lived experiences, which aligns with the exploratory nature and interpretivist foundation.

Inductive logic also guided the analytical process; codes were generated from the transcripts using Atlas. Ti. By doing this, broader themes emerged from participants' perspectives.

4.1.4 Methodological choices

A **mono-method qualitative design** was used. A monomethod qualitative design is defined as the single use of a qualitative methodology (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Semi-structured Interviews allowed for the in-depth collection of data from participants regarding their experiences and perceptions of collaboration practices (Adeoye-olatunde & Olenil, 2021). The use of qualitative methods aligns with Interpretivism and the exploratory nature of the study. `

4.1.5 Strategy

The **phenomenology strategy** was adopted. This strategy focused on participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In this context, the study's central phenomenon was the lived experience of retail professionals experiencing supplier–retailer collaborations in South Africa. This strategy also investigated how these individuals perceive and navigate barriers and enablers to gaining a competitive advantage. This strategy was appropriate because it explored retail professionals' perceptions and experiences of supplier collaboration practices, barriers, and enablers. The phenomenological strategy captures the subjective meanings that both suppliers and retailers attach to collaboration, enabling comparison of lived realities across the relationship.

4.1.6 Time horizon

A **cross-sectional time horizon** was adopted. The Cross sectional time horizon involved data collection at a single point in time, ensuring that current practices and perceptions were explored. This time horizon was suited to the study, as the research seeks to explore current perceptions, barriers, and enablers of supplier collaboration in the present state. Data was collected between August and October 2025, providing a snapshot of collaboration practices and perceptions in the South African retail sector. This approach allowed the research to analyse the current influence on competitive advantage. The time horizon was ideal as the research was relevant to the current retail supplier collaboration environment.

Table 4: Methodological Alignment (Consistency Matrix)

Research Objective	Aligned Research Question	Data Collection Method	Analysis Technique	Expected Outcome / Link to Theory
1. To explore current supplier–retailer collaboration practices and perceptions within the South African retail environment.	RQ 1: How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and what enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?	Semi-structured interviews with retail and supplier participants (n = 20).	Thematic analysis, coding, pattern development, and cross-group comparison (suppliers vs retailers).	Reveals how collaboration is operationalised and perceived in practice; extends the Relational View by showing how interaction routines create relational value.
2. To identify and interpret the barriers and enablers that underpin how collaboration is practised and perceived between suppliers and retailers.	RQ 1 (continued)	Same semi-structured interview data, with probes on trust, leadership alignment, data visibility, power asymmetry, and resource constraints.	Thematic clustering of enablers and barriers across participant groups.	Identifies relational enablers (trust, shared goals, data visibility) and barriers (dependency, misaligned incentives). Links to the Resource-Based View by showing which relational resources are valuable and inimitable.
3. To examine how collaboration practices and perceptions influence a firm's ability to gain and sustain competitive advantage.	RQ 2: How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?	Re-analysis of interview data focused on outcomes related to cost, innovation, agility, and resilience.	Pattern-matching and theme integration against theoretical constructs (RBV and RV).	Demonstrates that collaboration functions as a strategic relational capability, transforming resources into sustained advantage.
4. To generate practical insights that assist retail managers and suppliers in strengthening collaborative relationships that enhance long-term competitiveness.	RQ 2 (applied extension)	Integration of primary data and managerial reflection supported by literature.	Cross-case synthesis and conceptual modelling (Figure 5.1 — Adapted Conceptual Framework).	Produces practitioner-oriented insights on embedding collaboration as a strategic resource; links to RBV by emphasising institutionalisation of relational capabilities.

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

Table 4 presents the methodological alignment, demonstrating how each research objective corresponds with its question, methodological choice, and analytic process. This coherence ensures that every design decision was purposefully connected to the study's aim of exploring how supplier–retailer collaboration drives competitive advantage in the South African retail sector.

4.2 Proposed research methodology

Each methodical choice is made to thoroughly explore how supplier collaboration influences the pursuit of a competitive advantage.

4.2.1 Population

The study's population consisted of participants directly involved in supplier collaboration within the South African retail sector. The population consisted of supply chain managers, senior logistics managers and procurement professionals within the retail environment. The population was considered from both supplier and retailer perspectives to ensure a balanced view. This dual perspective was consistent

with the study's interpretivist philosophy, as the participants came from different organisational contexts. These individuals had experience with current collaboration practices. They understood the barriers and enablers that influence supplier collaboration, and its contribution to a competitive advantage in the South African Retail environment.

4.2.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis was individuals in the retail sector who directly influenced supplier collaboration practices. Each participant had unique views on supplier collaboration practices, including perceptions of the influence on gaining a competitive advantage. This focus on the individual aligns with the phenomenological strategy employed in the study, as phenomenology seeks to explore the lived experiences and personal meanings attributed to a phenomenon (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). By analysing individual narratives, the study captured how meanings of collaboration were constructed, shared, and interpreted across supplier and retailer contexts. Collectively, these personal accounts provided the empirical foundation for the inductive thematic analysis presented in Chapter 5.

4.3 Sampling method and size

The process of choosing individuals within a population is called sampling (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The **non-probability sample method** was used. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select individuals with the required expertise to contribute insights on the influence of supplier collaboration on gaining a competitive advantage (Adeoye-olatunde & Olenil, 2021). In qualitative research, a smaller sample size enables the researcher to focus on depth rather than breadth. This approach aligns with phenomenology's emphasis on the depth of experience, which enabled the exploration of participants' lived experiences in supplier-retailer collaboration.

4.3.1 Sampling Criteria

Participants were purposively selected based on specific criteria to ensure alignment with the research objectives.

4.3.1.1 Type of Entity:

Participations formed part of the formal South African retail environment. The participants must also form part of a retail or supplier organisation that actively engages in supplier collaboration practices. The inclusion of suppliers and retailers ensured that the study captures both upstream (suppliers) and downstream (retailers) within the supply chain.

4.3.1.2 Individual Level Exposure:

The participants had at least 5 years of experience in supply chain, logistics, or procurement. Each participant was directly involved in participating, implementing, influencing or contributing to supplier collaboration practices. This ensured participants could provide practical and strategic insights into collaboration processes.

4.3.1.3 Organisational level exposure:

Participants were employed in an organisation engaged in supplier collaboration initiatives to gain a competitive advantage. There was a preference for organisations with processes and measurements in place to manage supplier-retailer collaboration.

4.3.1.4 Access to participants

Access to these participants was obtained through my personal and professional industry network, as well as referrals within the industry. These participants were selected based on their relevance to the research question and ability to provide in-depth data.

The study achieved a balanced sample of 20 participants, comprising both suppliers and retailers, to ensure a comprehensive dual-perspective analysis.

Table 5: Sampling Criteria Summary

Criterion	Description / Requirement
Type of Entity	Must operate in the South African retail sector and engage in supplier collaboration.
Role Level	Supply-chain, logistics, or procurement manager with ≥ 5 years' experience.
Perspective	Include both supplier and retailer representatives.
Access	Gained through professional network and referrals

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

4.3.2 Sample Size

The sample size was deliberately kept small, as qualitative research typically requires in-depth interviews. The techniques used to collect data were designed to ensure it was relevant and specific, thus maintaining good quality. The sample size of 20 participants is sufficient to achieve data saturation. Saturation is reached when no new data is added to the research as more participants are included (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The researcher noted that by interview 18, saturation was reached.

In keeping with the interpretivist principles, participants were grouped according to organisational orientation to have a comparative analysis between suppliers and retailers. The following table summarises each group.

Table 6: Group A: Suppliers

Respondent	Role / Position	Organisation Type	Managerial Level	Years of Experience	Grouping Code
R1	Inbound Supply Chain Manager	Supplier (DC Operations)	Strategic	28	SP01
R2	Senior Customer Collaboration Manager	Supplier (FMCG Food)	Strategic	15	SP02
R3	National Account Manager	Supplier (Beverages)	Tactical	10	SP03
R4	Sales Manager	Supplier (FMCG Production)	Tactical	15	SP04
R5	National Key Account Manager (Private Label)	Supplier (Private Label)	Strategic	12	SP05
R6	Supply Chain Director	Supplier (Manufacturing & Logistics)	Strategic	20	SP06
R7	National KAM (SPA Portfolio)	Supplier	Tactical	12	SP07
R8	National Operations Manager	Supplier	Operational	10	SP08
R9	Account Manager	Supplier (Food Manufacturer)	Tactical	8	SP09
R10	National Account Manager (Poultry)	Supplier (Protein Category)	Strategic	15	SP10

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

Supplier participants represented a diverse range of FMCG and logistics firms, occupying both strategic and operational functions. The group provided rich insights into collaborative mechanisms from an upstream value chain perspective.

Table 7: Group B: Retailers

Respondent	Role / Position	Organisation Type	Managerial Level	Years of Experience	Grouping Code
R11	Procurement Controller	Retailer	Operational	9	RT01
R12	Category Buyer – Dry Goods	Retailer	Tactical	7	RT02
R13	Distribution Centre Supervisor	Retailer	Operational	11	RT03
R14	Retail Operations Manager	Retailer	Strategic	17	RT04
R15	Category Manager – Butchery	Retailer	Tactical	14	RT05
R16	Inbound Manager – Dry Goods	Retailer	Tactical	13	RT06
R17	Cross-Border Manager	Retailer	Strategic	18	RT07
R18	Senior Manager – Perishables Supply Chain	Retailer	Strategic	20	RT08
R19	Perishables Operations Manager	Retailer	Tactical	10	RT09
R20	Financial Accountant (Logistics & Governance)	Retailer	Operational	9	RT10

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

Retail participants held category management, procurement, and logistics roles within the retail network, offering grounded perspectives on downstream collaboration practices and performance linkages.

The following section outlines how data were collected through semi-structured interviews, detailing the interview process, data management, and transcription protocols.

4.4 Measurement Instrument

A **Semi-structured interview guide** was used as the primary data collection instrument. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this interpretivist study as they provided flexibility to explore participants' individual experiences while maintaining consistency across core themes (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The interview guide included open-ended questions relevant to the influence of supplier collaboration on gaining a competitive advantage. Interviews as a tool allowed the interviewer to adjust the line of questioning to obtain the highest-quality data.

The interview guide was developed using the literature review, the theoretical lens and the required objectives, ensuring that all constructs were covered in the research. The questions focused on current supplier collaboration practices, perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies, barriers and enablers to influencing collaboration, and the role of collaboration in gaining a competitive advantage.

The interview guide included introductory, exploratory, and probing questions, allowing the interviewer to adapt the line of questioning to the participant's responses. The guide was also broken down into sections covering barriers, enablers, competitive advantage, and the theoretical aspects of strategic resources.

Data saturation was achieved once no new insights or codes were identified in the final two interviews. At this point, the data showed patterns that were already identified in previous transcripts.

Sample questions included:

- How would you describe the collaboration between your organisation and your key suppliers/retailers?
- What factors help or hinder effective collaboration in your experience?
- In what ways do you believe collaboration contributes to competitive advantage?
- What changes have you observed in collaboration practices over recent years?

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 70 minutes and was conducted online, as the participants were from different regions of South Africa. With consent, all interviews were audio- or video-recorded for accurate transcription and analysis using ATLAS—ti, as well as for personal interpretation of the data.

The interview guide was piloted with two non-participant professionals to test for clarity, understanding and language, after which adjustments were made to improve flow. This process strengthened the instrument's reliability and ensured that the questions captured participants' authentic perspectives without leading or biasing responses.

4.5 Data gathering process

This section outlined how data were collected from primary and secondary sources to ensure methodological rigour, ethical compliance, and alignment with the interpretivist philosophy adopted in the study.

4.5.1 Primary data collection

Primary data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews on an online platform. Interviews were chosen as the primary method because they focus on the lived experiences, allowing the participants to describe and interpret collaboration practices in their own words (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

As indicated above, the interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes, and informed consent was obtained. The interview was audio- or visually recorded. This was then transcribed, along with reflexive notes taken during the interviews, which assist with non-verbal cues.

Data was collected between August and October 2025, consistent with the cross-sectional time horizon discussed earlier. Each participant received an information sheet detailing the purpose, the confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw at any time. Verbal or written consent was obtained before the questions could be asked.

4.5.2 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data were gathered from peer-reviewed journals, industry reports, and prior empirical studies on supplier collaboration. These sources complemented the primary data by situating participants' insights with broader academic reasoning.

4.5.3 Data Management and Storage

All data gathered during the interviews, including transcripts and recordings, were stored on a password-protected device. The data was also stored in the cloud, accessible only via a password, in line with the data privacy policy. To ensure participant confidentiality, their identifying names were replaced with R1-R20.

4.6 Analysis approach

This section explains how qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, which is consistent with the study's interpretivist philosophy and phenomenological design.

An approach centred around themes was utilised. This approach is called the thematic data analysis technique. According to Snyder (2019), this technique identifies themes from interview data. The non-numerical data gathered from interviews were analysed by identifying patterns and then placing them into themes. According to Finley (2021), conducting deductive thematic analysis requires six steps. The starting point was to fully understand the information. The next step was to generate initial codes. The third step involved creating themes by grouping the data, then reviewing them. Step five involved defining and naming these themes, while the final step was to write up or present them. Although primarily deductive—guided by pre-identified constructs from RBV and RV—the analysis remained open to emergent inductive themes that surface from participant narratives.

4.6.1 Use of Atlas.ti Software

Atlas Ti is software used to analyse data. This software was used to analyse non-numerical data and create themes (Urago et al., 2021). This software can analyse data gathered during the interview process, including audio, video, and written materials.

Table 8: Thematic Analysis Steps

Step	Description	Source
1	Familiarisation with data through transcription and immersion	Snyder (2019)
2	Generation of initial codes	Finley (2021)
3	Searching for themes	Finley (2021)
4	Reviewing themes	Finley (2021)
5	Defining and naming themes	Finley (2021)
6	Producing report / write-up	Snyder (2019)

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

4.7 Quality controls

To ensure the research findings were trustworthy and credible, multiple quality and control measures were used in line with qualitative research standards. These measures enhanced the rigour of the study by addressing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

4.7.1 Credibility

Source triangulation was used to gain data from different roles within the supply chain. This was done to compare insights and perceptions to identify common themes. The triangulation across suppliers and retailers strengthened the uniqueness of the findings and ensured the results were reflected from a dual perspective rather than relying on a single stakeholder.

4.7.2 Dependability

The research process was well documented, including sampling, data collection, transcription, and analysis, to ensure a clear audit trail. This can be used for future research or for review to ensure consistency. An Audit trail was maintained in Atlas. A code book is a set of rules that govern how data is organised, coded, and interpreted.

4.7.3 Confirmability

The use of a semi-structured interview guide, together with qualitative data analysis software, reduced researcher bias. A personal journal with personal perspectives was kept during the analysis phase to ensure that these perspectives do not influence interpretation. Reliability and validity were ensured by analysing reports for consistency and replication. This can also be done by getting peers and other experts in the field to explore the applicability of the propositions. These measures collectively strengthened confirmability by ensuring that findings were grounded in participants' narratives rather than the researcher's assumptions.

4.7.4 Transferability

The final report includes a detailed description of participants' contexts and experiences to help readers assess whether the research applies to similar scenarios in the South African retail sector. Providing rich contextual descriptions allows other researchers and practitioners to judge the applicability of the findings to comparable collaborative environments.

Table 9: Quality Assurance Measures

Criterion	Operationalisation in Study	Supporting Reference
Credibility	Source triangulation across suppliers & retailers	Lincoln & Guba (1985)
Dependability	Full audit trail documented	Shenton (2004)
Confirmability	Research journal + ATLAS.ti reduces bias	Urago et al. (2021)
Transferability	Thick description of participant context	Finley (2021)

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

4.8 Ethics and Confidentiality

Approval from the GIBS ethics committee was obtained before data collection. A consent form was provided to participants to indicate data confidentiality, consent to participate in the interview, and the right to withdraw at any time. All data obtained from the interviews were anonymised, and any information that could identify the participant was removed.

4.8.1 Data storage

To ensure data security, a data storage strategy was implemented. The interview recording, consent forms, analysis notes, and transcripts were securely stored on a password-protected device with two-factor authentication and in an encrypted cloud storage service. When the data is no longer required, it will be deleted from all devices and the cloud storage. The printed notes will be shredded and collected by a reputable disposal company. This will ensure that no data is accessed unlawfully and that no data breaches occur.

4.9 Limitations

Qualitative techniques may present numerous limitations when conducting this type of research. The sample size was a limitation because the retail sector is large, and the experiences and perceptions of only a small group of participants cannot capture the entire industry's insights. The research covered only the formal sector, whereas supplier collaboration can also occur in the informal sector. To mitigate this limitation, purposive sampling was conducted to ensure the chosen population had in-depth knowledge, was currently engaged in supplier collaboration, and had experience in the South African context. The selection included a population from both supplier and retailer perspectives, providing insights from a holistic perspective.

There were also limitations on researcher bias. As interviews occur, researchers could identify trends that may influence the line of questioning and guide participants toward a specific outcome. The predetermined themes could also be developed as researchers do additional interviews. The mitigating factor was the use of the interview guide, which was followed consistently across all interviews to ensure fairness and comparability.

Qualitative research can be time-consuming. This can be a limitation, as the researcher will need to understand, analyse, and develop themes from the collected data. If the data interpretation is incorrect, the outcomes could be compromised. There is no correct way to conduct analysis; this is a limitation. This limitation was mitigated by using qualitative analysis software to ensure a consistent theme was developed. The manageable sample size also ensured that the data was analysed thoroughly. Despite these limitations, the rigour in sampling, triangulation, and the use of Atlas. Ti enhanced dependability and the analytic depth required for qualitative validity.

Chapter 5: Presentation Of Findings

5.1 Introduction

The following section presents and interprets the study's findings, drawing on the voices and experiences of 20 participants from the South African retail sector. There were 10 participants from retail organisations, and 10 from the supplier organisation. These insights offered a dual perspective of how collaboration is viewed across the supply chain.

The study indicated an interpretivist philosophy and an inductive design earlier, which is consistent with the absence of predefined categories. Instead, meaning was derived from participants' lived experience through iterative coding, comparison, and theme development. This allowed the data to have a “voice,” capturing how collaboration is experienced, implemented, and challenged in practice.

The analysis was facilitated through Atlas. Ti supported systematic coding, quotation identifying, and clustering ideas into themes. The analytical process enhanced traceability, with clear links between raw data and final thematic outcomes.

To provide a nuanced interpretation, the findings were organised according to two analytical groups:

- Group A (Suppliers) – Participants that supply goods to the retail sector, which are from suppliers, manufacturers and logistics.
- Group B (Retailers) – Participants that work in the retail side of the value chain, which comprises category managers, logistics personnel and buyers within a retail organisation.

The grouping enabled data analysis, cross-group comparisons, and examination from an individual perspective, highlighting challenges and similarities across the supply chain.

Seven major themes and eighteen subthemes emerged, all closely linked to the three research questions.

Table 10: Research Questions, Themes, Sub-themes and Focus of Inquiry

Research Question	Theme	Sub-themes / Focus Areas	Focus of Inquiry / Discussion Orientation
RQ 1: How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and what enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?	Theme 1: Collaboration Practices	Information Sharing Mechanisms	Explores the current collaborative activities shaping day-to-day supplier–retailer relationships.
		Joint Planning and Forecasting	
		Operational Integration and Communication	
	Theme 2: Enablers of Collaboration	Trust and Relational Commitment	Identifies organisational and relational conditions that enhance collaboration effectiveness.
		Leadership Support and Shared Goals	
		Data and Technology Visibility	
	Theme 3: Barriers and Relational Challenges	Power Asymmetry and Dependency	Examines structural and behavioural barriers that weaken partnership outcomes.
		Resource and Capability Constraints	
RQ 2: How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?	Theme 4: Collaboration and Competitive Advantage	Misaligned Incentives and Silo Behaviour	Links collaboration outcomes to tangible competitive benefits.
		Value Creation	
		Relational Rents	
		Operational Efficiency	
	Theme 5: Innovation and Learning	Knowledge Sharing	Shows how collaborative relationships stimulate organisational learning.
		Joint Problem Solving	
		Adaptive Learning	
	Theme 6: Strategic Alignment and Capability	Strategic Goal Integration	Demonstrates how strategic and operational alignment sustains collaboration value.
		Capability Development	
		Cross-functional Cohesion	
	Theme 7: Future Collaboration Outlook	Sustained Partnership Models	Reflects participants' forward-looking perspectives on partnership maturity and adaptability.
		Digital Integration	
		Collaborative Maturity Pathways	

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

The structure allowed for a relational storyline, starting with current collaboration practices, progressing to the factors that hinder and enhance collaboration, and finally to its contribution to competitive advantage. Each Theme includes verbatim quotations from both the supplier and the retailer, providing evidence to support the interpretation. Quotations were not only selected by frequency, but also for meaning and representativeness.

The analysis will be organised in two stages:

1. Group analysis – examining supplier and retailer perspectives separately to identify group-specific themes and contextual insights.
2. Cross-group analysis – this is integrating both perspectives to understand the similar dynamics and relational tension across the value chain.

As a researcher, I remained non-biased, as my professional background is in the retail sector. My personal reflections were documented to ensure there was no bias in interpretation; the interpretation remained in the participant's voice rather than my perceptions or past experiences.

The following section, 5.2, will represent the relative interest in the themes expressed by the participants. These will be grouped qualitatively as High (H), Medium (M) or Low (L). This will be followed by section 5.3, which presents the adapted conceptual framework, incorporating the findings into a holistic understanding of supplier-retailer collaboration in the South African retail environment.

5.2 Relative Intensity of Themes

The analysis showed varying levels of intensity across the seven themes, as highlighted by the participant interviews. The participant's emphasis was on assessing the intensity, the relational significance of the relevant themes, and their recurrence across the interviews. The study adopted a qualitative classification approach, categorising the themes as High (H), Medium (M) and Low (L) intensity. This approach reflects conceptual importance rather than the number of times a participant mentioned it.

5.2.1 Theme Intensity Classification

Theme intensity classification was determined by the theme's importance across participants' narratives. Intensity did not look at the number of times the theme was mentioned, but at the depth, emphasis, and recurrence of the discussion of the theme.

- A High (H) intensity rating indicated that a theme was repeatedly and richly discussed by the majority of the participants across both supplier and retailer groups. This indicates it is central to their lived experiences.
- A Medium (M) intensity indicates that this was moderately present across all participants, with varying degrees of elaboration or emphasis.
- A Low (L) intensity indicates that this was discussed briefly and infrequently, but still added meaningful insight to the overall research.

The classification allowed the researcher to interpret the conceptual weight of each theme by Group A (Suppliers) and Group B (Retailers), while prioritising meaning over count.

Table 11: Relative Intensity of Themes (Qualitative strength classification)

Theme	Intensity (Suppliers)	Intensity (Retailers)	Overall Intensity	Interpretive Summary
1. Collaboration Practices	High	High	High	Core to both groups' narratives; participants described frequent joint forecasting, operational meetings, and data exchanges as the foundation of collaboration.
2. Enablers of Collaboration	High	Medium	High	Trust, leadership alignment, and visibility tools were emphasised as critical enablers; however, suppliers viewed relational commitment as more vital than retailers.
3. Barriers and Relational Challenges	Medium	High	High	Power asymmetry and misaligned incentives were strongly evident in retailers' accounts, while suppliers stressed capacity and communication constraints.
4. Collaboration and Competitive Advantage	Medium	Medium	Medium	Both groups recognised efficiency and service benefits from collaboration but noted these advantages were often undermined by relational inconsistencies.
5. Innovation and Learning	Medium	Medium	Medium	Participants highlighted learning through problem-solving and knowledge sharing, although this was viewed as an indirect rather than primary outcome of collaboration.
6. Strategic Alignment and Capability	Low	Medium	Medium	Retailers emphasised the importance of shared vision and accountability frameworks; suppliers noted a lack of alignment beyond short-term objectives.
7. Future Collaboration Outlook	Low	Low	Low	Both groups reflected cautiously on the future, citing digitalisation and sustainability as emerging priorities but acknowledging uncertainty in implementation readiness.

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

The Intensity highlighted three main themes: collaboration practices, enablers of collaboration, and barriers and relational challenges. These three themes will form the relational core of the study. These themes show how participants believe daily collaboration is, the conditions that sustain it and the tensions that constrain it.

The themes linked to competitive advantage, ranging from four to seven, were comparatively less intense, suggesting that their translation into competitive advantage remains inconsistent. The findings resonate with the relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998), which highlights that relational rents are achieved through effective governance, alignment, and mutual capability, and that not all collaboration will lead to relational rents.

When examined through the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), these results suggest that collaboration does function as a potential capability. For many participants, relational tools, such as trust, information sharing, and leadership

alignment, represent capabilities that can add to a sustained advantage when used correctly.

The following section, 5.3, integrates participants' insights into an adapted conceptual framework, illustrating how the connection between collaboration practices, relational enablers, and strategic alignment drives competitive advantage in South Africa.

5.3 Adapted Conceptual Framework

The purpose of the adapted framework is to integrate the empirical findings from the study with the theoretical foundations, which are the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Relational View (RV). The original framework in the chapter shows that retailer-supplier collaboration is a strategic capability that enables competitive advantage. The findings of this study extend this model to include how collaboration is enacted, enabled, and constrained within the South African Retail context.

Figure 5.1, the Adapted conceptual framework, illustrates how the seven themes and eighteen sub-themes interact through inductive analysis to influence a competitive advantage. The framework shifted from a resource-based understanding to a relational capability model, where trust, technology, and alignment form the foundation of enablers that support collaboration practices.

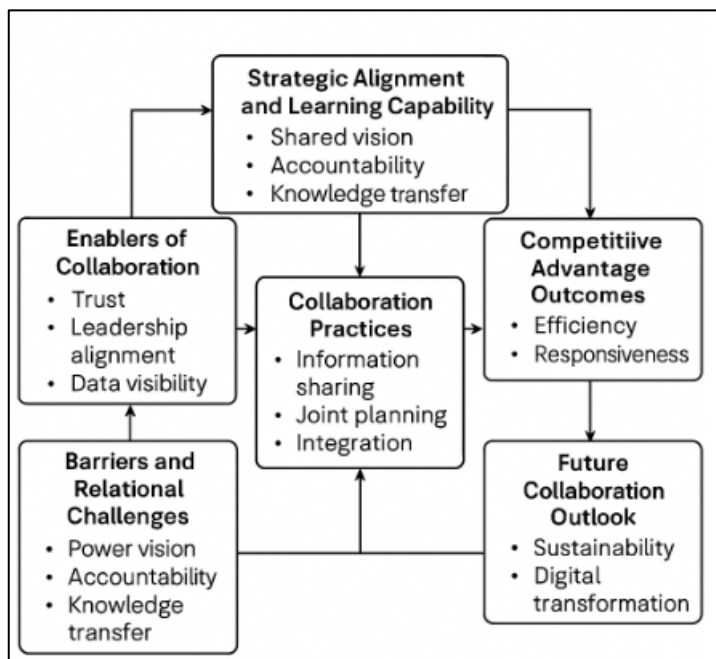
At the centre of the framework are collaboration practices, which represent the daily routines of information sharing, joint planning, and operational coordination that underpin these relationships. Around this, there are two opposing forces: enablers and barriers. Enablers —trust, leadership alignment, and data visibility —strengthen collaboration, while barriers —such as power asymmetry, resource limitations, and misaligned incentives —weaken it.

The interaction between these enablers and barriers indicates the maturity of collaboration and indicates its strength to evolve into a strategic capability. Firms tend to develop strategic alignment and learning capabilities when enablers outweigh limited barriers, serving as the bridge between operational collaboration and competitive advantage. This capability will enable the firm to adapt, co-create, and respond to market shifts.

The relational and strategic capabilities translate into a competitive advantage, as evidenced by the cost savings, service reliability and innovation. The outer layer of the framework, representing the future collaboration outlook, captures participants' views on sustainability and digital transformation, as well as their long-term perspective on what is needed to maintain a competitive advantage.

The relational capability aligns with the Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998), which states that relational rents can be created through joint resource and governance mechanisms. This also resonates with the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), which holds that enablers are unique, valuable, and inimitable resources that enhance a firm's competitiveness.

Figure 3: Adapted Conceptual Framework of Supplier-Retailer Collaboration for Competitive Advantage



Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

Imperative Summary

This adapted conceptual framework advances the understanding of collaboration by highlighting its dual nature as both a relational mechanism and a strategic capability. The model demonstrates that competitive advantage in the South African market is

not merely dependent on access to resources but on how relationships are governed and transformed through continuous learning, trust building and shared vision.

The model also offers an evolutionary perspective: collaboration evolves from an operational necessity into a relational capability through enablers, ultimately yielding a competitive advantage when strategically aligned. The dynamic movement highlights that collaboration is not stagnant; it must adapt to the context and be co-created by suppliers and retailers.

Having established the adapted contextual framework, we can see how relational and strategic capabilities emerge from collaboration practices. The following section is the empirical analysis. Section 5.4 shows how the theoretical constructs materialise in practice from the supplier and retailer groups. Drawing on participants' quotations and a thematic interpretation, the following discussion will explore lived experiences in relation to the seven themes.

5.4 Research Question 1: How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and how do their perceptions of enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?

5.4.1 Main Theme 1: Collaboration Practices

Supplier–retailer collaboration in South Africa revolves around three sub-themes:

- 1) Information Sharing Mechanisms
- 2) Joint Planning and forecasting, and
- 3) Operational Integration and Routines

These dimensions indicate a shift from tactical coordination to strategic integration, demonstrating the maturity of the relational capability within the retail supply chain.

5.4.1.1 Sub Theme 1: Information Sharing Mechanisms

Supplier Quotations

Supplier 1 07:48–09:15

“There are two main elements from a central-office perspective. The first is a weekly report distributed to suppliers that provides a detailed view of all purchase orders placed the prior week... Every month, you receive a distribution of supply-chain factors that includes both a month-by-month and a year-to-date view of those KPIs. So, it is the order that’s full, on time, and the value of cases not received in that month. Collaboration then starts from there.”

Supplier 5 | 05:31–05:44

Currently, we hold quarterly top meetings where decision-makers on product innovation and market trends often bring our marketing team. That is where it all starts... Our marketing, logistics, and finance teams share presentations and reports with the retailers so they can see the same data we are seeing.”

Supplier 6 | 07:15–07:55

“We have got a live shared dashboard that pulls weekly sales, stock levels, and delivery performance. Everyone—retail and supply—logs into the same dashboard, so there is no argument about whose numbers are right. It is transparent and helps us act faster when something is off.”

Retailer Quotations

Retailer 6 | 06:05–06:40

“We have got an EDI ... electronic data interchange ... which gives us the data that we need to see from both ends. You know, from the supplier we can tell you about the turnaround time, ETA, and out-of-stock status. ... The retailers also have the same information ... so they can plan and do their forecasting and replenishment on time.”

Retailer 8 | 07:10–08:12

“There’s definitely a high level of collaboration ... in terms of the mix of products and services from the supplier into our supply chain and ultimately within the retailer space ... The retailer creates the demand and the wholesaler sources the best price and quality.”

Retailer 9 | 09:49–10:15

“We rely very much on shared demand planning ... constant supplier visits ... so that we can sit down and revisit some of the agreements we had. This provides visibility on orders and deliveries.”

If so, then so what?

Inter-firm alignment and trust are strengthened when effective communication is transformed into strategic learning. This indicates that the retail supply chain is mature when this evolution occurs.

While information sharing is important and effective, it has greater strategic value when it leads to joint planning and forecasting that turns into action.

5.4.1.2 Sub Theme 2: Joint Planning and Forecasting

Supplier Perspectives

Supplier 2 | 16:04–16:57

“Yeah. I think they are formalised. We have also got collaborative forecasting, right, which is a step even higher, saying that our customer tells us they forecast and have the insights. This is why they gave us a forecast ... but they also allow us to say, OK, this is what we see. These are the trends that we are seeing. Let us come up jointly with a number ... and let us check that we are both accountable because we want to strip out waste, right?”

Supplier 3 | 07:07–07:31

“OK. I mean ... we try to be as collaborative as possible. I think a lot of retailers do what they call JBP, which is joint business planning. So from that perspective we set out, often it is done at the beginning of the year, where you set up a joint business planning session to discuss our strategies and how we see our respective categories playing out not only in the short term but maybe in the long term ... and try and get alignment with you guys in terms of your strategies and goals.”

Supplier 3 | 14:10–15:18

“I suppose my perception is that there could be greater benefits in terms of joint forecasting. I think there is room for improvement there because, for the most part, retailers ... do a lot of the forecasting based on history. While that is accurate, we could be better if retailers knew about different issues in their business ... if you do an unplanned promotion ...the supplier does not know about it ... and then we battle to service them because we did not plan for that stock. So for me, you know, getting to a place where there is joint forecasting is key.”

Retailers Perspectives

Retailer 6 03:55–04:21
“As an inbound manager, you are bound to be actively involved in supplier–retailer collaboration ... participating in planning ... forecasting how you replenish your warehouse.”
Retailer 7 08:21–09:21
“We basically sit every Monday and every Friday ... we agreed to have standard meetings ... to determine the requirements and possible planning processes needed to ensure we have enough vehicles.”
Retailer 9 07:04–08:16
“I have been involved in initiatives like joint forecasting, where the supplier plays a vital role ... ensuring that, whenever I meet, everything is coordinated effectively ... to get the quantities that I am looking for.”

If so, Then so what?

Joint Planning is the shift from information exchange to strategic collaboration. Suppliers focus on forecasting, while retailers seek shared risk management and co-creation. Through Dynamic Capabilities (Teece et al., 1997), which was mentioned in Chapter 2, partners that sense and seize together enable market adaptation. A dynamic capability can be reached by merging analytical and contextual knowledge through joint forecasting.

As joint planning becomes second nature, operational integrity and structured collaboration strengthen the relationship.

5.4.1.3 Sub Theme 3: Operational integration and communication

Supplier Perspectives

Supplier 1 07:08–09:15
“Within my organisation context, it is very much one-on-one meetings. There are either in-person meetings where suppliers come to the central office for a sit-down, which is generally done quarterly, or monthly online meetings ... on the operational side ... we start looking at special projects like backhauling full truckloads and

efficiencies in that regard ... and then from a strategic perspective we start looking at how we can do one-source-location distribution as opposed to multi-source.”
Supplier 3 13:09–13:54 “Yeah ... I think both businesses have very similar measures ... something that we track daily. Supply chain engagements are pivotal to the success of both businesses. From that perspective, yes, I think both businesses are measuring these things daily, if not in every order, so that we can pick up where we can get efficiencies and then chat to make sure we can get the best out of it.”
Supplier 9 07:56–08:45 “Yeah, definitely. They formalise your trading terms through contracts ... through your trading term contracts, joint business plans, and regular performance reviews. You see them once a month to go through your stats and see what is working and what is not ... So you are definitely focused on your reviews and your business planning.”

Retailers Perspectives

Retailer 6 05:04–05:56 “We need to prioritise communication ... Without communication, I think we break loose ... we align objectives so that we can improve our supply-chain efficiency throughout ... from the supplier ... to the end user.”
Retailer 7 07:19–08:12 “We try to collaborate as much as possible with suppliers ... ensuring there is a good understanding of our requirements ... if there is an issue with stock delivery, we collaborate ... see how we can work together to address issues.”
Retailer 7 07:19–08:12 “We try to collaborate as much as possible with suppliers ... ensuring there is a good understanding of our requirements ... if there is an issue with stock delivery, we collaborate ... see how we can work together to address issues.”

Operational integration is when collaboration becomes habitual and routine. Suppliers contribute shared processes that bring structured efficiencies, while the retailer provides feedback loops and adaptability.

If so, Then so what? By integrating relational trust into routine discipline, organisations can increase performance and competitive edge.

5.4.1.4 In Group Analysis

Suppliers exhibit formalised collaboration through systems and routines, where retailers demonstrate collaboration through flexibility and communication. Both recognise the need to co-evolve to maintain a sustained advantage, reflecting the reciprocal nature of relational capability highlighted in Chapter 2

5.4.1.5 Cross-group Analysis

Cross-analysis shows that they are complementary. Suppliers bring forecast disciplines and process, retailers bring adaptability, market agility and contextual knowledge. When these intersect, relational rents are created (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

5.4.1.6 Conclusion for RQ1

Supplier-retailer collaboration in South Africa is anchored on information sharing, joint planning, and operational integration. The activities build relational capital and dynamic capabilities, translating into trust and alignment that lead to a tangible competitive advantage. This validates the conceptual framework in Chapter 2, which suggests that collaboration is not just transactional but a strategic capability.

5.4.2 Main Theme 2: Enablers of Collaboration

The three sub-themes for enablers of collaboration:

1. Trust and relational commitment
2. Leadership support and Shared goals
3. Data and technology visibility

These factors shape how collaborative relationships create the social and structural conditions required for success.

5.4.2.1 Trust and Relational Commitment

Supplier Perspectives

Supplier 2 29:46–30:05
“There is so much honesty and transparency that you are not fearful. I do not think there is any fear that I have to pick up the phone or send an email to say, “Guys, I know I promised this ... there is a hiccup ... what do we do?” What does it mean? Do you know? What impact does it have? How long do we extend it by?”
Supplier 2 20:37–21:35
“Trust your supplier to have your best interest at heart and work together to achieve success. What is possible ... being open and innovative and coming up with really cool stuff. Some retailers even provided us with the equipment because we did not have the type needed to load ... I am just trying to show you the level of maturity.”
Supplier 7 13:50–14:25
“It is very reliant on being aligned and mutual trust again ... the confidentiality behind it could potentially be a bit of a risk ... and it might also lead to becoming dependent on one partner ... so if you are putting all your eggs into one basket and something breaks down in that partnership ... it can definitely affect the relationship and the collaboration too.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 4 20:08–20:57
“Trust is a major factor in any collaboration that we do because ... we sit together with suppliers and we have a plan on how we are going to drive business forward ... You get promised exclusivity ... and when it comes time for execution, it has been broken ... So it is making sure we have an open conversation. Communication is so important.”
Retailer 7 22:44–23:23
“Communication is very crucial, and I also believe that trust is the ultimate thing ... Once you start communicating and commit to something, it should lead to trust ... That trust should be mutual ... so that you are going to deliver on those requirements.”
Retailer 10 24:00–24:45

“When it comes to new suppliers, I would not use the word trust, but when it comes to older suppliers, I would ... we trust that the supplier will deliver our stock ... on time and in good condition ... because you have built that relationship and earned that trust.”

Trust and relational commitment emerged as the strongest enabler of collaboration. Retailers connected to communication and consistency, while suppliers linked trust to transparency and reliability. This was discussed in Chapter 2, how mutual dependence reflects the relational capital.

If so, then so what?

When trust is translated into partnerships, it lowers relational risks, increases openness, and enables co-creation. This creates the psychological safety needed to have a sustained collaborative relationship.

Leadership support and shared goals translate the trust gained into strategic alignment and organisational energy.

5.4.2.2 Leadership Support and Shared Goals

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 6 | 19:26–21:29

“So if it is a top conversation, and then it says, listen, I am sold on this because I see value in it. Your three key people that need to be convinced are your CEO, your supply chain director and your sales director ... once you have sold them at a top level, it filters down into the organisation ... it is going to be an efficiency conversation for both our businesses so that we both benefit.”

Supplier 7 | 11:30–11:48

“Yes, absolutely ... because you know we are chasing a common goal. The main challenge is if the two do not align ... if they do not have the same goals or objectives ... or a communication breakdown.”

Supplier 10 | 21:37–22:24

“I think it is about honesty ... it is about being consistent in your message and what you are committing to. Then own up to it ... things go wrong; however, you cannot let that stop you ... you should not say one thing and then turn around the next day

and say something opposite ... honesty and consistency are enormous enablers from a collaboration perspective.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 5 | 15:46–16:22

“Collaboration works best when both parties are partners, not just buyer and seller ... You need to look at it as building mutual trust and alignment ... If your company and your supplier’s company share the same joint mindset and growth plan ... then you can only move forward.”

Retailer 6 | 15:34–15:55

“Transparency is key ... If you play your open cards, you share your goals and vision, showing your partner that you trust them completely ... and the support from your senior management is also essential ... You can execute and be successful as a division or as a retail support system.”

Retailer 2 | 16:20–17:28

“Sometimes suppliers push their agenda ... but I think it is how you handle it ... At some point they need to pause and realise that the goal needs to be the same ... When new people join the business ... you have to restart the process ... the trust and the understanding of the goals.”

Both recognise that momentum is created with leadership endorsement. Suppliers associated leadership support with resource commitment and top-level buy-in, while retailers viewed this as transparency and alignment of purpose. This was explained in Chapter 2, where a shared strategic intent enables relational capability.

If so, then so what?

Leadership support is important for collaboration. When these shared goals are communicated from the top, it creates a sense of purpose.

5.4.2.3 Data and Technology Visibility

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 1 (16:18 – 17:52) “We had to make the fundamental shift from qualitative and emotive discussions to quantifiable ones. We need database discussions ... one of my suppliers has created an online collaboration platform ... an interactive tool that gives me a full view of how they have performed over the last week ... while we are sitting in the meeting ... there is no need to make exceptions when prepping presentations.”
Supplier 2 (35:33 – 36:13) “Technology has really helped ... it tells him where to pick it ... it tells him the shelf life ... it says I have got the shelf life with this customer; you cannot pick this because it will not let him ... apparently, you did not even order it ... but technology is making that a thing of the past ... because everything is programmed.”
Supplier 8 (29:17 – 29:41) “Data is brilliant, and people actually use it ... you cannot function without a factual discussion these days ... data gives you an informed decision ... data gives you something to plan ... it also gives you a set to say, this is what I need to focus on and this is how we need to do it.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 3 (18:29 – 20:33) “Technology is huge ... there is a lot more we can do to assist with many things ... By forecasting the service levels ... the store manager receives that data immediately ... allowing them to know precisely what they need to buy the following day ... So technology is a big thing.”
Retailer 8 (32:31 – 35:40) “Technology comes into play ... raw data is converted into dashboards that give insight into deliverables ... A clear deliverable is out-of-stock, another is on-time delivery ... Dashboards and raw data tie into this information to measure ... reliability, agility, and responsiveness.”
Retailer 10 (25:39 – 26:00) “Technology ... enhances collaboration ... you can now have visibility of your trucks ... whether they are en route or delayed ... it helps with scheduling ... it is good because your supplier can tell the retailer exactly where the truck is ... and that enhances the collaboration.”

Both suppliers and retailers feel that technology enables real-time communication and visibility. Suppliers stressed the data accuracy and analytical control, while retailers valued transparency and responsiveness. This reflects the capability for knowledge sharing discussed in Chapter 2.

If so, then so what

When partners share data, it becomes easier to move from assumptions to evidence-based decisions. Technology acts as a connection between operational action and relational intent.

5.4.2.4 In Group Analysis

Suppliers see enablers as formal mechanisms that include leadership endorsement, structured trust, and digital systems. Retailers stress behavioural and cultural enablers such as communication, transparency and shared purpose.

5.4.2.5 Cross-Group Analysis

The cross-group analysis shows they are complementary. Suppliers contribute leadership and commitment, while retailers contribute trust and adaptability. When these characteristics merge, they create relational synergy, which accounts for dynamic capability —learning and adaptation.

5.4.2.6 Conclusion

The enablers of collaboration act as interdependent pillars. Trust builds a relational base, Leadership converts trust into shared strategic purpose, and technology provides the infrastructure for transparency and execution. Together, they form a system that enables supplier-retailer partnerships to compete in South Africa.

5.4.3 Main Theme 3: Barriers and Relational Challenges

The three sub-themes for Barriers and Relational Challenges:

1. Power Asymmetry and Dependency
2. Resource and Capability Constraints
3. Misaligned Incentives and Silo Behaviour

These barriers indicate how fragile things become when trust, capability, or alignment is broken.

5.4.3.1 Power Asymmetry and Dependency

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 2 (26:24 – 26:45) “You do not have a choice if you want to be successful. Yeah, I think in the past, relationships worked when retailers just bogged down at suppliers; that game is over. Hey, like, if you are still playing that game, you are short-changing yourself.”
Supplier 4 (17 : 26 – 17 : 47) “Your commitment is also based on your deals with them, ensuring they give you the deals and don’t keep giving them to your opposition for some unknown reason.”
Supplier 7 (13 : 50 – 14 : 17) “It’s very reliant on being aligned and mutual trust again. Yeah, as I mentioned, the confidentiality behind it could potentially be a bit of a risk, and it might also lead to becoming dependent on one partner.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 3 (14:26 – 16:42) “No, not always. I will say it is 60/40 sometimes, or you really have to be a villain to get what you want ... They do not look at us as a group; they look at us as individuals, not as a SPAR group. So I have got huge trust issues because, I mean, we are standing together as a SPAR, but then I come and say, listen, it is only N-Red, and you have only got so many stores, so you are not going to buy the amount you are supposed to.”
Retailer 4 (18:32 – 18:39) “Our opposition — that is corporate — they can dictate to their stores, and we cannot dictate to ours. We can only recommend, and that is where we are a little bit handicapped, in that we put the proposal through to our retailers, and they choose if they want to execute or not.”
Retailer 2 (15:04 – 16:20) “Sometimes, I also get the perception that suppliers are just trying to push their agenda ... they want to drive their business, and it is not going to work together ... They need to pause and realise that the goal needs to be the same.”

Power asymmetry occurs when one party has the power to dominate decision-making and resources. Suppliers highlighted the risks of trading with large retailers, while retailers stressed the frustration of suppliers who only support and negotiate with certain parties.

If so, then so what?

When a partner is more powerful, this creates an imbalance. With that imbalance, it pushes a partner to be more reactive than to be innovative and strategic.

5.4.3.2 Resource and Capability Constraints

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 2 (28 : 11 – 28 : 22) “I can only make so much. I can run the machines 24/7... but the total output is this much. If your promotions are going well ... I can only give you this much. This is what I can contract to.”

Supplier 6 (25 : 15 – 25 : 47) “So ... having a dedicated resource for this is almost always needed. Unilever invested heavily ... two full-time managers ... so from a retail perspective ... I would at least expect one dedicated manager ... that would enable this to work.”

Supplier 9 (13 : 16 – 14 : 20) “Resource constraints. If I cannot pull sales, I will not know what is happening ... customer demand ... and the potential misalignment in planning between the two.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 9 (16:26 – 17:25) “Some of the challenges that we can experience are obviously the investment we can make. For example, we can heavily invest in technology because we have the capabilities, whereas our suppliers may not ... They do want to, but the investment is a concern. We are not on the same footing when it comes to such investments.”

Retailer 5 (9:30 – 10:09) “It brings to mind inconsistency in supply, late deliveries, pricing volatility due to market fluctuations, and the limited capacity of smaller suppliers to scale ... these are misalignments where we will find those gaps.”

Retailer 10 (21:42 – 23:40) “Because we work for a big company, we are forced to use triple BEE suppliers, and there come points where it is not always the best choice ... sometimes when you are too aggressive on price, other risks are involved ... you trust that the supplier will complete what they need to do, but not all have that capability.”

Both retailers and suppliers acknowledge that capacity constraints are a barrier. Suppliers pointed to human resources and production barriers, while retailers highlighted technological investment and scalability gaps.

If so, then so what?

When resources and capabilities are uneven, then the collaboration is not working at its optimum. The plan could go faster than the actual capacity to deliver; this can be mitigated by closing the resource and knowledge gap through shared investment and learning.

5.4.3.3 Misaligned Incentives and Silo Behaviour

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 4 (18 : 52 – 19 : 35) “You get a type of buyer that is driven by various factors ... they have obviously got targets ... and they are driven to reach specific targets ... if a buyer is only driven by that and not forging an excellent relationship with the vendor, that’s when the trust is not there.”

Supplier 5 (14 : 19 – 15 : 38) “When you deal with a buyer, they move around ... someone else takes their place with a very different goal ... so you could be halfway through a project, and someone new comes in ... and says, ‘No, that does not form part of my KPIs.’ ”

Supplier 10 (20 : 05 – 20 : 26) “It is more from the retailer side ... barrier to bridge ... a lot more focused on their own KPIs ... just focusing on what they need to achieve rather than a dual approach ... or even understanding what is happening on the other side of the fence.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 6 (13:26 – 14:57) “Suppliers deliver in bulk most of the time, and as a division you cannot unpack every pallet ... you trust what they say ... but if misaligned goals creep in, like when suppliers poke holes, it is no longer 164 cases as claimed ... That is where you start having misaligned goals.”

Retailer 5 (9:30 – 10:09) “Short-term versus long-term — sometimes we have a set place we want to reach by year-end, and suppliers have their own ... those may be misalignments where we will find those gaps.”

Retailer 8 (40:46 – 43:32) “The main challenges right now are within our supply chain ... disruption, product defects ... but trust is embedded into a relationship, and when that reliability is questioned — what you say you will produce versus what you deliver — that is where collaboration breaks down.”

These barriers occur when the company rewards individual targets rather than shared targets. Suppliers highlighted buyer turnover and shifting KPI's, while retailers highlighted short-term performance pressures.

If so, then so what?

Without aligned incentives, collaboration becomes transactional and short-term. Partners focus on their own objectives, rather than shared value.

5.4.3.4 In Group Analysis

Suppliers view barriers as structural — such as contractual leverage, capacity limits, and systematic KPIs — while retailers view them as behavioural — such as trust deficits, communication breakdowns, and unequal authority. Both parties understand that, with collaboration, these characteristics can create relational vulnerability.

5.4.3.5 Cross-Group Analysis

The same challenge is viewed differently by suppliers and retailers: control versus dependence. Power asymmetry limits information flow, resource constraints limit adaptability, and silo behaviour prevents collective problem solving. These barriers are interconnected, which decreases dynamic capability and reduces relational rents.

5.4.3.6 Conclusion

Barriers to collaboration arise from structural imbalances and behavioural disconnects. Power asymmetry, resource limitations, and misaligned incentives collectively make it difficult to gain a relational advantage.

5.5 Research Question 2: How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?

5.5.1 Main Theme 4: Collaboration and Competitive Advantage

The three sub-themes for Collaboration and Competitive Advantage:

1. Value Creation
2. Relational Rents
3. Operational Efficiency

These dimensions show how collaborative resources evolve into strategic resources that strengthen competitiveness and sustainable supply chains.

5.5.1.1 Value Creation

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 2 (45 : 37 – 46 : 33) “Business continuity guys, business continuity because businesses are closing. Shops are closing in 10 years. You want to still be here ... you want people to be still able to afford to buy food ... and if that is not the most compelling thing ... we are in a business to make money. However, you get a point where you start outpricing yourself ... so, you have got to think, how do I create an organisation that’s sustainable and profitable enough that it still delivers quality food at the cheapest price?”

Supplier 4 (42 : 45 – 43 : 37) “You have got to make the other party aware of your values ... your aim and your target ... tell them that you are there for a two-sided relationship ... you have got to say to them from the start that it will work if they are on board ... you have got to be transparent and cannot use any tricks.”

Supplier 1 (31 : 19 – 32 : 27) “You mentioned the collaborative practice we are currently doing ... yes, within my organisation ... I definitely believe they can replicate it ... but when you look at value creation, it is not just the KPIs — it is about support, technical knowledge, training ... that is where collaboration creates value.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 5 (14:13 – 14:31) “So shared growth through higher sales volume, improved product quality and innovation, I think more efficient supply chain operation, and better value, better value delivered to the shopper, could ultimately be all about the function.”

Retailer 7 (32:15 – 33:29) “If we can get a higher quality and standard of product from our supplier by exploring technology and innovative ideas ... there is a win-win situation right down the chain, because at the end of the day, your customer that goes into your retail store is happy. He is likely going to buy more of this quality product. As the retailer, you benefit from higher sales and, obviously, from ordering more products from your supplier due to the high quality they deliver.

Retailer 9 (28:13 – 29:47) “In the short term, I’d say collaboration does improve performance. It obviously out-thinks the competition by reducing waste ... improving availability... and controlling logistics costs. In the long term, it builds supplier loyalty, strengthens supply chain resilience, and creates more sustainable practices.”

Both suppliers and retailers view value creation as the primary output of collaboration. Suppliers stressed sustainability, transparency and knowledge sharing, while retailers emphasised product quality, customer satisfaction and long-term growth. This view was highlighted in Chapter 2 as relational logic, in which collaboration converts into relational effort.

If so, then so what?

Collaboration moves beyond operational alignment to strategic co-creation. A renewed competitive resource can be created when firms jointly create value, thereby improving efficiency and enhancing a shared purpose.

5.5.5.2 Relational Rents

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 2 (16 : 01 – 16 : 13) “So it was joint value creation with the retailers that were mature enough and wanted to go on that journey with us ... there has to be

mutual benefit ... you are putting so much time and resources — what is the mutual benefit? ... we moved from a dictatorial relationship to a partnership.”
Supplier 9 (27 : 59 – 29 : 13) “We try to be transparent and give everybody the same price and the same fighting chance ... even if it is not at the same time ... for example, give Macro a month on tricky bacon and then give it to Checkers ... if everyone does it at the same time, we will run into production issues ... so yeah, collaboration creates that trust and understanding.
Supplier 10 (25 : 17 – 26 : 49) “Definitely ... it is about forming partnerships ... that is what collaboration does, right? ... from a supply perspective, if there is a collaborative approach with common goals, then there is trust ... especially in a commodity environment where you need volume ... the system works when you share and understand the same objectives.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 1 (29:21 – 30:33) “Some aspects of our collaboration, such as basic data sharing or joint promotions, could definitely be replicated by competitors. However, the strengths of our relationships ... include the trust built over time, a deep understanding of consumer preferences, and the ability to imitate effectively. These factors obviously give us a competitive edge that goes beyond the standard collaboration practices.”
Retailer 10 (33:24 – 34:58) “Collaboration is essential ... when you talk about suppliers within your community, you talk about last-mile delivery. It is beneficial to your supplier through collaboration and to the retailer, as they have more reliable stock. There is long-term sustainability when you start talking about your environment ... business ethics go beyond just profits. It is about the reputation of your business and what you are doing for your community.”
Retailer 5 (13:09 – 13:36) “The most successful promotional campaign increased customer satisfaction and strengthened the supply relationship ... that is where collaboration contributes — strengthening the relationship, building loyalty and shared returns.”

Both suppliers and retailers described relational rents as benefits arising from relationships, not just from transactions. These relationships that coinhabit trust, loyalty, and shared knowledge. Suppliers highlighted mutual benefit and

transparency, while retailers highlighted loyalty, social responsibility and long-term resilience.

If so, then so what?

Relational rents transform collaboration into a strategic resource. A differentiated advantage is gained when these relations are hard to imitate and go beyond price competition.

5.5.5.3 Operational Efficiency

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 6 (26 : 30 – 26 : 46) “You’ll see some short-term wins in some areas ... like credit note management, turnaround times, and quicker settlement of payments ... but the critical element is that there has been shared investment and shared benefit — that is what makes it efficient.”

Supplier 4 (41 : 43 – 42 : 06) “I get asked that every day ... why don’t you do yoghurt, butter, energy drinks ... but I think we’re incredibly efficient because we are so focused, and we do not waste one minute in the factory ... everything is worked out pretty well.”

Supplier 1 (8 09 – 9 04) “The key measures ... ensure that out-of-stocks are at a minimal value ... collaboration then starts from there ... and from a tactical side, we look at short-term projects like backhauling and full pallets ... those efficiencies drive long-term value.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 8 (28:55 – 31:33) “Centralised distribution ... has given my organisation the best possible opportunity because of buying power ... to source from suppliers, ensure stock availability, and collaborate with other networks. We share transport capacity to a centralised location ... The shared space automatically impacts the cost per case at the distribution centre ... bringing cost and efficiency into play.”

Retailer 3 (24:38 – 25:24) “For me, it was definitely an improvement in service levels. We actually did weekly and daily tracking ... and are now sitting at a 96% service level. Just that communication and putting a simple spreadsheet on the computer helped us track and improve efficiency.”

Retailer 10 (30:14 – 32:26) “Different retailers, same supplier ... give this retailer, which is a retailer, a better competitive advantage. Centralised buying would allow us to get better rates ... better buying power from suppliers, offering better rates to customers, boosting competitive advantage.”

Operational efficiency was the most immediate gain. Suppliers highlighted productivity, reduced waste and faster turnaround, while retailers emphasised cost savings and improved service levels. These practices highlight the dynamic capabilities concept in Chapter 2.

If so, then what?

When operational processors are co-managed, collaboration enhances performance, allowing both partners to realise benefits such as cost efficiency, customer satisfaction, and reliability, key elements of sustained competitive advantage.

5.5.5.4 In-group Analysis

Suppliers viewed collaboration as a way to achieve long-term sustainability through knowledge sharing, efficiency, and shared benefits. Retailers viewed this as a strategic mechanism to create value for customers, enhance quality, and build reputation. Both perspectives believe that trust, continuous learning and not one-time initiatives gain the firm a competitive advantage.

5.5.2 Main Theme 5: Innovation and Learning

The three sub-themes for innovation and Learning:

1. Knowledge sharing
2. Joint Problem Solving
3. Adaptive Learning

These mechanisms indicate how learning becomes a dynamic outcome of collaboration.

5.5.2.1 Knowledge sharing

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 5 (3 : 55 – 4 : 33)
“So yeah, because we’re not corporate, we’re privately owned. Our business is much more agile in terms of innovation and market reading. We might not always have access to all the data platforms, but we have access to many of them through these customers. And because of the way we work with them, we often get roped in when there is a seasonal trend ... we attend many overseas trade shows and bring some of that back and share it with retailers in those meetings.”
Supplier 9 (2526 – 2547)
“So we take them there to have some coffee and drinks afterwards, show them what is going on, what products they are buying, how the products look, and how they are produced. So I definitely think escorting from our perspective does a lot ... to collaborate with the buyers and the retailers.”
Supplier 3 (32: 16 – 32: 31)
“I think the advent of this, what they call joint business planning ... that is sort of the first time I have seen proper collaboration across supply chain and promotions. We cover all the metrics ... where can we jointly get wins, and what do we need from each other to make that happen.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 7 30:36–31:14 “...the methods they use to integrate data are shared. When we work together, it makes everybody’s life easier... If we start using this [finger scanner] as a retailer... then share it with the supplier... The same with them... If they have got something... innovative, share it with us.”
Retailer 8 32:31–33:14 “Raw data is converted into dashboards that give insight into deliverables... A clear deliverable will be out of stock... on-time delivery... dashboards and raw data all tie into this... measurements for reliability would include on-time delivery and order fulfilment...”
Retailer 3 19:31–20:21 “By forecasting the service levels, the store owner or the store manager receives that data immediately... allowing them to know precisely what they need to buy the following day... So technology is a big thing.”

Both suppliers and retailers viewed knowledge sharing as an important mechanism for innovation. Suppliers highlighted the learning through international markets and sharing best practices, whilst retailers focused on digital data exchange, which enables transparency and insight.

If so, then so what?

Knowledge sharing converts collaboration from information into collective intelligence. These knowledge-sharing processes create learning loops and insight that can be used to innovate across the supply chain.

5.5.2.2 Joint Problem Solving

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 2 (13:31–14:03) “The workshops have held us accountable ... we had 20 great ideas, we contracted these three, and the cadence can be either weekly or quarterly ... the CEO meets quarterly and customer collaboration is an agenda item. It is that serious that our CEOs are talking about ensuring a seamless supply chain across both our organisations.”

Supplier 6 (16 57 – 17 18) “It is tough to break that conversation, saying, What are you going to do with my data? ... But once you have gotten through it, the other dominoes start to fall into place. The single biggest stumbling block I have noticed is the sharing of data ... but once that is overcome, collaboration becomes easier.”

Supplier 3 (30:51 – 31:13) “I think really it is just in terms of service levels ... instead of having out-of-stocks, those are key wins. From a collaboration perspective, you never jeopardise your out-of-stock rate; your info rates are always high. So you essentially use your KPIs ... achieved through greater collaboration.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 7 | 14:57–15:09 “...if anything does happen—let us say we agree on something during the meeting, and by the next delivery, the process is not being applied—we should address it immediately. ... there is usually communication going back to the supplier to say, ‘But according to our meeting on this... day... this is what the agreement was... It is not happening. Can we please have a discussion or correct it, or even do both?’”

Retailer 6 | 11:09–12:12 “...we always sit around the table... have meetings and try to iron out all those nitty-gritties in terms of the service level agreements and order fulfilment... if we are coming short, we always look at the suppliers and then engage deeply to find out what the challenges are and how we can assist... to make sure... it is a win-win.”

Retailer 9 | 8:25–9:40 “The approach seeks to prioritise transparent communication... it makes it easier and quicker to ensure that any problems... are solved quickly... This collaborative approach ensures that these challenges are communicated... so that we stay ahead.”

Both suppliers viewed joint problem-solving as an operational benefit of collaboration. Suppliers described joint planning as workshops and performance reviews, whilst retailers stressed continuous dialogue to maintain accountability.

If so, then so what?

When joint decision-making occurs, this indicates joint accountability for outcomes. When both sides address challenges, they turn them into learning opportunities, which build trust and resilience.

5.5.2.3 Adaptive Learning

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 7 (22 01 – 22 22) “I think they are a lot more strategic and data-driven. Years ago, you had to make assumptions based on your own perspective. However, now data helps us make those correct decisions ... it is also a lot more focused on sustainability and the environment.”

Supplier 5 (32: 55 – 33: 47) “I think with the changes in the retailer landscape and things happening faster, you cannot work like that anymore ... there is a much further view into the future ... there is a lot more data now. We are very picky when it comes to data, but it allows us to lead our customers more into collaboration.”

Supplier 1 (6 39 – 7 04) “Absolutely. You have a framework now to refer to. Previously, everything was people-dependent ... now we are becoming more process-oriented, process-dependent rather than people-dependent ... that is a big learning shift for us.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 3 34:36–34:48 “It is a learning... a learning experience every single day. So I think with technology, we are behind as a group because we wait too long to implement things.”
Retailer 7 35:03–36:22 & 37:36–38:30 “The more you can collaborate, the more innovative ideas can be put in... Innovative technologies can be used... In the long term, the more you collaborate, the better it is... putting new technology into the process... so the result is your customers being happy... everyone stays in business.”
Retailer 10 37:25–38:07 “I definitely believe that the collaboration techniques I used now have a name: partnership. Before, everybody used to work in isolation... over time, they’ve realised the benefits of collaboration... If we collaborate, we can be a success story together.”

Both retailers and suppliers viewed adaptive learning as a continuous process. Suppliers noted a shift from reactive to data-driven decision-making, whilst retailers highlighted the need to experiment and adopt technology gradually. These findings align with the dynamic capabilities model, highlighted in Chapter 2.

If so, then so what?

Adaptive learning leads to innovation. Suppliers noted that a one-time solution can lead to a sustained evolution, which allows suppliers and retailers to make processes lean, embed a new system and change retail landscapes.

5.5.2.4 In-group Analysis

Suppliers described innovation and learning as deliberate and structured, driven by data, workshops and frameworks. Whilst retailers experienced it as an emergent and experimental process shaped by reflection and practice. Both parties agreed that learning encourages experimentation without fear of failure.

5.5.2.5 Cross-group analysis

The cross-group analysis reveals that while suppliers often initiate learning through technical expertise, retailers enhance it through contextual understanding and market feedback. When these perspectives are integrated, this indicates how shared learning becomes a relational capability. This creates adaptability, innovation and responsiveness in the supply chain.

5.5.2.6 Conclusion

Innovation and learning are core in supplier-retailer collaboration. Through knowledge sharing, joint problem-solving, and adaptive learning, parties co-create new ways of operating that lead to strategic capability. The conceptual framework in Chapter 2 shows that learning is an enabler and outcome of collaboration.

5.5.3 Main Theme 6: Strategic Alignment and Capability

The three sub-themes for innovation and Learning:

1. Strategic Goal Integration
2. Capability Development
3. Cross-Functional Cohesion

These dimensions show how collaboration can become a capability within an organisation.

5.5.3.1 Strategic Goal Integration

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 6 (28 45 – 29 27) “It’s 100% easier because if you align at a purpose and value level, you are already off to a winning start, right? Because, let us call it, at the heart of the conversation, there is an alignment. So if you are saying that, you know, we want to do the best for the consumer, and yes, we have obviously got to make some money along the way ... it will stem from aligning a set of values and then articulating exactly what we want to pursue as a consumer base.”

Supplier 7 (3 45 – 4 21) “It is a strategic partnership. So we have quite a few common goals —if I can call them that —and we are quite aligned on our
--

objectives. So every second year, we have a retailer-specific conference ... we will present our strategy to the retailer and attend the SPAR Convention every year.”

Supplier 10 (3:44 – 4:21) “I think it is essential ... having a collaborative approach in the sense of aiming for the same goals, and the goals within our commodity industry are supply and deliver on that demand from that display of that supply ... without collaboration, it is going to be a swing and a miss.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 5 | 16:22 – 16:34 “If you did the joint alignment, any two things that are moving in the same direction are definitely going to grow. If your company and your supplier’s company share the same joint mindset and growth plan ... both of you are trying to accomplish the same thing ... you can only move forward.”

Retailer 8 | 21:45 – 22:04 → 23:52 – 25:00 “From a tactical or strategic point of view, there has to be a three- to five-year outlook ... that is definitely sourced from the customer ... the suppliers and other stakeholders would be onboarded with tactical and strategic thinking ... through collaboration ... it is crucial to sustain the market.”

Retailer 1 | 7:09 – 7:55 “One of the most effective ones is definitely to create a precise alignment between ... the company we’re working with ... to improve planning accuracy, create retail partnerships, and ultimately drive sales.”

Strategic goal integration positions collaboration as a shared intent system. Suppliers highlight value level alignment and long-term planning, whilst retailers emphasise growth coherence.

If so, then so what?

When goals and timelines are aligned, collaboration shifts from opportunistic to operational execution, reinforcing the capability logic in Chapter 2.

5.5.3.2 Capability Development

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 1 (29:10 – 29:57) “Without a doubt, especially in the retail hotels, wholesale space ... everybody has visibility into your sales price. But a concept

you might consider is servitization—what other services are added to that same? ... it's like if you sell a motor car, you get a service plan and you get a warranty.”
Supplier 1 (30 : 22 – 30 : 38) “Absolutely. You know, things like support, technical knowledge, training on those kinds of things. So, let’s say I’m a chocolate supplier and you need to buy from me ... to make the right purchase, you need to understand my processes, my product, and other related aspects.”
Supplier 6 (33 : 24 – 34 : 13) “From both a retail and supplier perspective, we’re doing this to ensure there’s a resource from both sides ... because if I tell you I’ve reduced 100 pallets worth of stock, everyone will. But if I say I’ve taken 10 million Rand worth of stock in the network, everyone understands. If you’re clear about your resource plan and aligned with your top strategies, there will be success.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 6 19: 18 – 20: 24 “It improves efficiency, reduces costs, and provides a faster response. It gives you the flexibility to make informed decisions ... the collaboration is strong and it’s yielding results ... higher customer satisfaction.
Retailer 2 4: 50 – 5: 47 “Specifically ... it’s about creating that strategy ... I take my plan ... have an insight into where I want to go and what I’m looking for from the supplier ... we put together a well-grounded plan.”
Retailer 8 37: 02 – 38: 40 “Key supply-chain partners must have the ability to influence decisions ... If there are no partnerships ... to secure produce for today and the future, challenges will arise ... it is in the supplier’s interest to partner with the strategies ... to enhance their resilience.”

Capability development occurs at two levels: the first in service argument offerings, and the second in resourcing and decision rights across the firm.

If so, then so what?

Collaboration becomes a capability factory that co-creates knowledge, resources, and decision-making authority.

5.5.3.3 Cross-Functional Cohesion

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 4 (6 : 13 – 6 : 47) “My job is to actually adapt that view for whatever retailer I am talking to. I have got to consider that. So I have to adjust my thinking with every retailer. Moreover, your company values you because you work for the company, right? Do you say it is best to collaborate when your company's values and the other company's values are somewhat aligned? Yes.”
Supplier 3 (7 : 07 – 7 : 32) “I mean, yeah, we try to be as collaborative as possible. I think a lot of retailers do what they call JBP, which is joint business planning ... it is done at the beginning of the year, where you set up to discuss what our strategies are... and the way we see our respective categories playing out not only in the short term but maybe in the long term.”
Supplier 7 (23 32 – 23 36) “I would say that they need to make sure that these strategies are aligned because if they do not have the same goals, one of the two is going to miss ... the goalposts are there; trust that you need to work with somebody that you can trust.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 9 7: 04 – 8: 25 “Our alignment involves ... managing the risks and planning for demand ... I have been involved in joint forecasting ... the supplier plays a vital role ... everything is coordinated effectively ... frequent engagement and exposure.”
Retailer 8 39: 08 – 40: 02 “Collaboration could even be viewed as the lubricant between the tiers of the economy ... if it is not aligned, it is not going to work ... the result is a disruption ... collaboration is essential.”
Retailer 5 14: 13 – 14: 46 → 15: 46 – 16: 04 “Shared growth through higher sales volume ... more efficient supply-chain operation ... and better value delivered to the shopper ... collaboration works best when both parties are partners ... not just buyer and seller ... building mutual trust and alignment.”

Cross-functional cohesion serves as the coordination mechanism connecting strategy and capability: suppliers focus on JBP and value alignment, while retailers emphasise joint forecasting, risk management, and continuous engagement.

If so, then so what?

Cohesion enables system-level execution by making decision-making easier, as decisions are coherent across departments.

5.5.3.4 In Group Analysis

Suppliers emphasise alignment at the values and strategic level, operationalised through service, JBP, and resourcing. Retailers stress demand-led strategies and risk-aligned planning. Both highlight the need for clear decision rights, shared resources and continuous engagement.

5.5.3.5 Cross-group Analysis

Strategic alignment becomes valuable when there is direction, means, and coordination. Thus, its goal is to develop capabilities and foster cross-functional cohesion. The different perspectives are complementary, which creates relational capability.

5.5.3.6 Conclusion

Collaboration is scaled by strategic alignment and the ability to expand. Shared goals set direction, co-developed capabilities provide the means, and cross-functional cohesion ensures coordinated execution. Combined, these form a strategic capability that supports performance, enhances adaptability, and gains a sustained competitive advantage.

5.5.4 Main Theme 7: Future Collaboration Outlook

The three sub-themes for innovation and Learning:

1. Sustained Partnership Models
2. Digital Integration
3. Collaborative Maturity Pathways

Together, these themes show how collaboration moves from a transactional coordination towards an institutionalised technology-enabled partnership.

5.5.4.1 Sustained Partnership Models

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 2 (47 : 33 – 47 : 58) “I think the future of collaboration lies in being partners beyond transactions ... it’s got to be a longer-term mindset, where we are both vested in each other’s growth ... not just trading goods, but building systems that work together.”
Supplier 6 (37 : 25 – 37 : 44) “The more sustainable route is when both sides look at value beyond price ... where the retailer sees the supplier not just as a vendor but as part of their business model.”
Supplier 9 (30 : 44 – 31 : 02) “I think going forward, we will see more exclusivity-type partnerships ... where certain ranges or innovations are developed together and stay unique to that retailer for a period.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 1 4: 49 – 5: 45 “Our organisation’s approach is definitely based on long-term goals ... we like to build partnerships with our buyers and the retailers. I would definitely say we have a very long-term approach ... trust and mutual growth — that is a big thing ... both parties grow, not just one party getting all the advantages ... mutual growth and long-term partnerships are the two biggest things that stand out for me.”
Retailer 5 15: 46 – 16: 04 “Collaboration works best when both parties are partners, not just buyer and seller. You need to look at it as building mutual trust and alignment. The long-term goal is key ... that’s the main point in a nutshell.”
Retailer 10 19: 39 – 20: 34 “I don’t think there’s any partnership ... if there wasn’t collaboration. They fully commit to success because the more successful the retailer is, the more successful the supplier would be ... I’ve never experienced a collaboration that was a bad partnership ... we both understand the importance ... it works because it’s beneficial to both parties.”

Both groups see enduring partnerships as the foundation for future collaboration. Suppliers highlight co-invested relationships with exclusive innovation rights, whilst retailers aim for mutual growth and trust.

If so, then so what?

Collaboration transforms from being merely contractual to a strategic vision of co-creation and shared value.

5.5.4.2 Digital Integration

Retailer Perspective

Supplier 1 (18 : 45 – 19 : 13) “I believe digital is the next big thing ... having live dashboards between us and the retailer, where we can both see the same numbers in real time ... no more back and forth on data accuracy.”
Supplier 4 (29 : 32 – 29 : 55) “We have started sharing some of our internal analytics with key customers ... it is a new form of transparency that helps them forecast better ... and it builds trust because the data speaks for itself.”
Supplier 7 (26 47 27 15) “If you can have one shared platform, it will make a huge difference ... a joint forecasting and planning tool would reduce duplication and make both sides more agile.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 1 32: 44 – 33: 15 “When you look at the digital side of collaboration, it definitely has evolved ... since COVID, it is gotten a lot more digital and online ... the way collaboration has changed in technique ... you are still making the same plans, you are just not sitting in front of the person. The method has changed ... the content is basically the same.”
Retailer 7 41: 27 – 42: 26 “If you look back at history and how people used to communicate ... face-to-face meetings ... now, with technology ... you can collaborate globally ... through Teams. With AI becoming more of a role-player ... if you are not going to start thinking faster ... you are going to fall behind. Part of your entire chain, in collaboration with suppliers and retailers, should focus on how significant a role AI is playing ... and how you use AI to your advantage in your supply chain.”
Retailer 8 25: 00 – 26: 07 → 27: 33 – 28: 09 “More recently, we have been collaborating with suppliers ... exporting to about 60 retail outlets in Namibia using our own transport network ... collaborated with third-party carriers ... to move product at half the price ... we managed to reduce the landed cost by 15 % ... so

the retailer now has the opportunity to expand its offerings ... it is those types of opportunities ... that demonstrate how collaboration works.”

Digital Integration is viewed as a core ingredient for future collaboration. Suppliers focus on data visibility and platform connectivity, while retailers highlight AI-enabled forecasting, remote coordination and cost efficiency.

If so, then so what?

Real-time innovation and market responsiveness are driven by turning data into a strategic asset; however, digital tools become the infrastructure for relational advantage.

5.5.5.3 Collaborative Maturity Pathways

Supplier Perspective

Supplier 3 (33 21 33 46) “It is still maturing ... I would say we are maybe halfway there ... there are pockets of brilliance, but we are still learning how to trust the process and share information freely.”

Supplier 5 (28 41 – 28 59) “I think we will reach true maturity when collaboration is not a project but a culture ... when it is embedded into how we think, not just when something goes wrong.”

Supplier 10 (30 22 – 30 37) “There is definitely progress ... the conversations are different now ... they are more about how we improve together rather than who is to blame.”

Retailer Perspective

Retailer 5 | 14: 46 – 15: 40 “Over the years, collaboration has become more data-driven and strategic ... previously it was more transactional ... now there is more emphasis on joint planning, sustainability and technology integration ... the consumer integration programme aims to understand the routine of a consumer ... collaboration has now become a key focus.”

Retailer 10 | 37: 25 – 38: 15 “I definitely believe the collaboration techniques I use now have a name — partnership. Before, everyone used to work in isolation ... but

over time they've realised the benefits ... if we collaborate, we can be a success story together ... collaboration needs to be long-term and sustainable... and be customer-centric for it to work.

Retailer 7 | 36: 20 – 36: 35 → 38: 30 – 38: 35 “If you are not going to collaborate and stay behind with everything ... it will lead to a point where neither we nor the customer will be satisfied. It means you will start looking for an alternative supply ... the guy is going to go out of business because you are not going to buy from them ... so collaboration keeps everyone in business ... otherwise everybody is going to go out of business.”

Both groups emphasise that collaboration moves from being a project into a culture. Suppliers speak of trust and process discipline, whilst retailers highlight customer-centric learning and sustainability.

If so, then so what?

Collaborative maturity is the transition from doing to being collaborative. This competence is required for future collaborations.

5.5.4.4 In group analysis

Suppliers view the future with a structural and technological lens, whilst retailers see it as an evolving mindset with mutual growth, innovation and customer focus. Both agreed on more data-driven, routine and transparent collaboration in the future.

5.5.4.5 Cross-Group Analysis

Cross-group analysis shows that they come together in three areas: trust—the foundation for collaboration; digital integration—the enabler of transparency; and cultural maturity—the destination.

5.5.4.6 Conclusion

Sustained partnerships, digital integration and a mature collaborative culture define the future outlook of collaboration. The findings suggest that the more embedded collaboration is within the company's architecture, the greater the competitive advantage can be realised.

If so, then so what?

Collaboration is no longer an operational function. Nevertheless, a strategic choice determines who thrives or survives in the South African Retail landscape.

5.6 Overall Synthesis of Findings

The findings indicate that supplier-retailer collaboration in South Africa has shifted from basic operational coordination to a more advanced, capability-driven partnership model. Collaboration practices (Theme 1) demonstrate how information sharing, joint planning, and integration routines create a foundation for trust. Enablers of collaboration (Theme 2) reveal that trust, leadership commitment, and technological transparency enable coordination to become strategic coherence. Barriers and relational challenges (Theme 3) underscore structural inequalities, capability gaps, and misaligned incentives that impede progress. However, ongoing collaboration can create a competitive edge (Theme 4) by generating value, relational rents, and operational efficiencies, demonstrating how partnerships evolve into strategic assets. Innovation and learning (Theme 5) encompass knowledge sharing, joint problem-solving, and adaptive learning, promoting continuous renewal. These interactions result in strategic alignment and capability development (Theme 6), where shared goals, cross-functional cohesion, and core capabilities embed collaboration into the company's strategy. Finally, the future outlook (Theme 7) points to a shift from transactional dependence to a digitally enabled, trust-based, and culturally mature collaboration environment.

From these findings, collaboration is not just a tool used to relieve operational pressure; it has become a strategic identity that integrates people, processes, and technology across organisational boundaries. These findings resonate with the conceptual model identified in Chapter 2, especially around the resource-based view and the relational View, and to some extent with the dynamic capabilities perspective as well. If so, then so what? Collaboration is an outcome of a renewed strategy—a capability that enables resilience, adaptability, and sustained competitive advantage in South Africa's volatile retail landscape.

Chapter 6

6.1 Introduction to the Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the empirical findings found in Chapter 5 through the conceptual and theoretical lens identified in Chapters 2 and 3. At the same time, the previous chapter integrated perspectives from retailers and suppliers on the barriers, enablers, outcomes and practices of collaboration; this chapter moves from what was found to why it matters. This chapter will also discuss the patterns that are theoretically grounded in the Resource-Based view and the Relational View, with some selected relevance to the Dynamic Capability framework.

The core of the discussion will be to highlight how inter-organisational collaboration evolves from operational into a strategic resource within South Africa's retail sector. The Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) proposes that when resources are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable, a competitive advantage can be sustainable. However, these resources can move outside the firm's boundaries, complementing Trust, joint routines and shared information between partners. The relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998) highlights that relational rents can arise through this cooperation and joint planning. The findings from this study reveal that collaboration is not just transactional coordination, but an emergent capability derived from shared values and co-investment between suppliers and retailers.

The discussion will interpret the seven themes mentioned in Chapter 5: Collaboration Practices, Enablers of Collaboration, Barriers and Relational Challenges, Collaboration and Competitive Advantage, Innovation and Learning, Strategic Alignment and Capability, and Future Collaboration Outlook. All the themes and sub-themes mentioned in Chapter 5 will be examined to understand how relational mechanisms translate into strategic capability. Supplier and retail insights will be integrated to understand what can enhance or distress the ecosystem and expose alignment and tension.

This chapter will also revisit the adapted conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 5, which highlighted that collaboration is a multi-layered capability that links micro-level practices, such as information sharing, joint planning, and operational integration, to macro-level outcomes, such as competitive advantage and innovation. The discussion will test and refine the framework by identifying feedback loops,

moderating factors and enabling conditions uncovered in the collected data. This process will ensure that the model does not merely add to theoretical data but is anchored in the lived experiences of South African retail sector actors.

Philosophically, this chapter entails the interpretivist's stance on the study. Meaning is derived from the understanding of the subjective reasoning that shapes collaborative behaviour. The participants' voices, suppliers' and retailers' voices are not treated as individual voices, but as co-constructed realities that reveal how knowledge, trust and shared purpose can be a relational asset. The analysis recognises that collaboration is not only a strategic resource but also a relational capability, which is dynamically rebalanced through continuous interaction (Teece et al., 1997).

Finally, the discussion aligns directly with the research objectives and questions, highlighted in Chapter 1:

- How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and how do their perceptions of enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?
- How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?

The following sections will extend the discussions into a layered examination of how collaboration, when strategically positioned and managed, becomes both a source and manifestation of competitive advantage within South Africa's retail landscape.

6.2 Theme 1: Collaboration Practices

Linked Research Question (RQ1):

RQ 1: How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and how do their perceptions of enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?

Collaboration between retailers and suppliers in the South African retail environment revolves around three interconnected practices: information sharing, joint planning and forecasting, and operational integration and communication. The collective practices transform operational coordination into a strategic relational capability that embodies the Resource-Based View, the Relational View, and the Dynamic Capabilities framework.

6.2.1 Recap of Findings on Collaboration Practices

Participants from both groups emphasised that transparent, consistent and honest information sharing forms the foundation of collaboration.

Retailers viewed communication as both a moral and operational obligation:

“Trust is a major factor in any collaboration that we do because ... we sit together with suppliers, and we have a plan on how we are going to drive business forward ... You get promised exclusivity ... and when it comes time for execution, it has been broken ... So, it is making sure we have an open conversation. Communication is so important.” (Retailer 4, 20:08 – 20:57)

Suppliers, by contrast, highlighted collaboration through the lens of digital infrastructure and data visibility:

“We have got a live shared dashboard that pulls weekly sales, stock levels, and delivery performance. Everyone—retail and supply—logs into the same dashboard, so there is no argument about whose numbers are right. It’s transparent and helps us act faster when something is off.” (Supplier 6, 07:15 – 07:55)

Joint planning and forecasting emerged as the next layer of maturity, where collaboration transitions from information sharing to decision sharing:

“We rely very much on shared demand planning ... constant supplier visits ... so that we can sit down and revisit some of the agreements we had. This provides visibility on orders and deliveries.” (Retailer 9, 09:49 – 10:15)

“Currently, we hold quarterly top meetings where decision-makers on product innovation and market trends often bring our marketing team. That is where it all starts ... Our marketing, logistics, and finance teams share presentations and reports

with the retailers so they can see the same data we are seeing.” (Supplier 5, 05:31 – 05:44)

Both groups emphasised that operational integrations transform information and planning into executional discipline. The insight gained is that collaboration becomes valuable when routines, techniques and relationships are aligned to build shared accountability.

6.2.2 Recap of Literature on Collaboration Practices

The Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) and Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998) highlight that interfirm practices, such as information sharing and joint planning, are complex resources that gain a sustained competitive advantage when they are hard to replicate and rare. Empirical studies support this: Breytenbach et al. (2020) found that information transparency in retail partnerships builds resilience through relational trust, while Brun et al. (2020) showed that transparency-driven collaboration enhances traceability and strategic alignment in supply chains. Recent reviews by Bakalo and Bogale (2024) extend this to digital platforms that facilitate shared forecasting and reduce relational ambiguity. In dynamic environments, Teece (2018) argues that firms co-evolve through sensing and re-configuring capabilities, as reflected in how participants use shared dashboards and real-time data to jointly adapt to market shifts.

6.2.3 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature on Collaboration Practices

The findings emphasised the shift in collaboration in South Africa's retail supply chain, from transactional coordination to a relational capability. Information is not only a tool that is used in collaboration but also a sign of integrity and trust. Retailers associate transparency with morality and integrity, whilst suppliers equate this to data-driven visibility and agility. These views align with the Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998), in which relational rents are generated through mutual leaning rather than contractual control.

The joint planning process is the evolution of information as an input to collaboration as a capability. When both parties co-plan and co-forecast, they develop inter-organisational dynamic capabilities that enable real-time adjustment (Teece et al.,

1997; Dubey et al., 2024). The findings also echo those of Breytenbach et al. (2020) and Chen et al. (2019), who found that transparency and joint response mechanisms are crucial for resilience after disruptions.

The shift towards operational integration reflects the learning Loop: data sharing, joint planning, and execution, culminating in strategic trust. This loop demonstrates collaborative maturity and lays a strong foundation for innovation and value creation.

6.2.4 Conclusion of the discussion of findings for collaboration Practices

Theme 1 findings indicate a transformation of Collaboration in South African retail environments from operational coordination to strategic integration. A relational infrastructure is created through information sharing and joint planning, fostering trust and accountability. The findings affirm that when the supplier and retailers share information, are transparent, and use joint forecasting to co-learn, collaboration evolves into a capability rather than a process. Collectively, these findings address RQ 1 by showing that transparent information sharing and joint planning transform coordination into a relational capability that sustains trust.

6.3 Theme 2: Enablers of Collaboration

Linked Research Question (RQ1)

RQ1: How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and how do their perceptions of enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?

The following enablers strengthen collaboration in South Africa: trust and relational commitment, leadership support, shared goals, and visibility into data and technology. Together, these enablers transform collaboration into a strategic partnership.

6.3.1 Recap of Findings

Participants across both suppliers and retailers consistently identified trust as the moral and structural foundation for collaboration. Retailers also emphasised that trust and communication are complementary components of relational continuity:

“Trust is a major factor in any collaboration that we do because ... we sit together with suppliers, and we have a plan on how we are going to drive business forward ... You get promised exclusivity ... and when it comes time for execution, it has been broken ... So, it is making sure we have an open conversation. Communication is so important.” (Retailer 4, 20:08–20:57)

Retailers also noted that trust develops progressively through reliability and consistency of performance:

“When it comes to new suppliers, I would not use the word trust, but when it comes to older suppliers, I would ... we trust that the supplier will deliver our stock ... on time and in good condition ... because you have built that relationship and earned that trust.” (Retailer 10, 24:00–24:45)

From the supplier perspective, trust was tied to openness and transparency in problem-solving:

“There is so much honesty and transparency that you are not fearful. I do not think there is any fear that I have to pick up the phone or send an email to say, ‘Guys, I know I promised this ... there is a hiccup ... what do we do?’” (Supplier 2, 29:46–30:05)

Leadership support and goal alignment were also described as essential for sustaining collaboration beyond interpersonal goodwill. Suppliers reflected that when executives visibly endorse collaborative initiatives, it filters down into operational behaviour:

“So if it is a top conversation, and then it says, listen, I am sold on this because I see value in it. Your three key people that need to be convinced are your CEO, your supply chain director, and your sales director ... once you have sold them at a top level, it filters down into the organisation ... it is going to be an efficiency conversation for both our businesses so that we both benefit.” (Supplier 6, 19:26–21:29)

Retailers echoed this sentiment, noting that alignment of goals and leadership intent reduces friction:

“Collaboration works best when both parties are partners, not just buyer and seller ... You need to look at it as building mutual trust and alignment ... If your company and your supplier’s company share the same joint mindset and growth plan ... then you can only move forward.” (Retailer 5, 15:46–16:22)

Lastly, both suppliers and retailers stressed that data visibility and digital transparency are becoming central to sustaining collaboration:

“Transparency is key ... If you play your open cards, you share your goals and vision, showing your partner that you trust them completely ... and the support from your senior management is also essential ... You can execute and be successful as a division or as a retail support system.” (Retailer 6, 15:34–15:55)

“We have dashboards that show us stock, orders, and performance. It is the same data viewed by both parties ... so that means no one can hide or make excuses — it becomes about solutions.” (Supplier 8, 10:18–10:39)

6.3.2 Recap of Literature on Enablers of Collaboration

The literature highlights that enablers of collaboration rest on the foundation of relational capital and aligned purpose. The Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998) highlights that trust and relational commitment are a source of relational rents; it also suggests that mutually aligned goals and confidence generate value beyond what the company can achieve individually. Similarly, Barney (1991), under the Resource-Based View, contends that resources such as trust and joint planning become rare and inimitable when integrated.

Teece (2018) extends this through the Dynamic Capabilities lens, which suggests that leadership support and shared goals are capabilities that a firm can use to adapt collaboratively. Cao and Zhang (2011) further indicate that trust, shared goals, and communication shape collaborative advantage through joint decision-making and aligned measures. Contemporary supply chain studies (Breytenbach et al., 2020; Brun et al., 2020) confirm that technology transparency and shared data systems support trust and alignment, especially in volatile markets.

Collectively, these enablers are not static but dynamic, co-evolving mechanisms that enhance collaboration and human relationships.

6.3.3 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature on Enablers of Collaboration

These finding reinforces the theoretical lens that trust is both a moral and strategic currency. Retailers' view that trust is integral and dependable corresponds to the Relational View's (Dyer & Singh, 1998) view that relational rents are derived from goodwill, reputation and joint problem solving. Suppliers emphasise transparency and openness, indicating they view this as a risk-mitigation capability.

Leadership support and shared goals serve as organisational enablers that translate relational goodwill into structured collaboration. When top management agrees to collaborate and share goals, it creates legitimacy across the business. This reflects Teece's (2018) view that leadership provides the necessary dimensions for coordinated execution.

Furthermore, data and technology visibility act as infrastructure enablers, linking human trust to system reliability. The presence of shared dashboards, real-time data visibility, and EDI systems echoes Breytenbach et al. (2020) and Brun et al. (2020), who argue that digital transparency transforms information asymmetry into joint accountability.

The intersection of these enablers — trust, leadership alignment, and digital visibility — forms the foundation for sustained collaboration in the South African retail context. These factors collectively establish collaboration as a dynamic capability that enhances reliance, efficiency and innovation.

6.3.4 Conclusion of the Discussion of Findings for Enablers of Collaboration

Theme 2 demonstrates that collaboration enablers in South Africa's retail sector transcend functional efficiency; they represent a relational infrastructure of strategic capability. Trust ensures continuity, leadership provides direction, and digital visibility provides transparency and coherence. The Relational Views notion that sustainable advantage arises not from firm-specific assets but from interconnected linkages that are difficult to imitate is reinforced by the findings that collaboration enablers are relationally constructed and strategically enacted.

If so, Then so what?

The implication is that effective collaboration is a deliberate, multi-layered capability, not just a product of goodwill; it integrates moral, managerial, and digital coherence. Within the adapted conceptual framework, this becomes a binding layer that connects practices from theme 1 to outcomes in theme 4, making these enablers key to achieving competitive advantage in South Africa's evolving retail environment. These enablers clarify how leadership alignment and data visibility strengthen the relational routines that underpin effective collaboration (RQ1). They also reveal the strategic mechanisms through which collaboration enhances competitiveness (RQ2).

6.4 Theme 3: Barriers and Relational Challenges

Linked Research Question (RQ1)

How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and how do their perceptions of enablers and barriers shape the success of these practices?

Collaboration does not unfold because of goodwill. Both retailers and suppliers acknowledge that relational and organisational barriers dilute collaboration. The three interrelated barriers are power asymmetry and dependency, resource and capability constraints and misaligned incentives and silo behaviour. These barriers restrict the development of collaborative maturity in the South African retail supply chain.

6.4.1 Recap of Findings on Barriers and Relational Challenges

Participants across both groups described enduring power imbalances that distort relational equality and decision-making:

“You do not have a choice if you want to be successful ... In the past, relationships worked when retailers just bogged down suppliers; that game is over.” (Supplier 2, 26:24 – 26:45)

“Our opposition....that is corporate....they can dictate to their stores, and we cannot dictate to ours ... We can only recommend, and that is where we are a little handicapped.” (Retailer 4, 18:32 – 18:39)

Resource and capability disparities further constrained progress:

“We can heavily invest in technology because we have the capabilities, whereas our suppliers may not ... We are not on the same footing when it comes to such investments.” (Retailer 9, 16:26 – 17:25)

Finally, misaligned incentives and departmental silos eroded joint focus:

“When you deal with a buyer ... someone new comes in and says, ‘That does not form part of my KPIs.’ Then you lose momentum.” (Supplier 5, 14:19 – 15:38)

Collectively, these insights show that collaboration falters when trust, capability, and goal alignment are unevenly distributed across partners.

6.4.2 Recap of Literature on Barriers and Relational Challenges

The literature confirms that asymmetry, constraint, and misalignment are systemic barriers to collaborative performance. Dyer and Singh (1998) argue that unbalanced dependence encourages opportunism and rent dissipation, while Barney (1991) sees asymmetric resource control as a barrier to replication and sustained advantage. Huo et al. (2021) and Nyaga et al. (2010) found that unequal power structures weaken transparency and relational satisfaction.

From a capabilities perspective, Teece (2018) and Brun et al. (2020) emphasise that dynamic alignment requires parity in technological and organisational capacity; otherwise, the sensing–seizing–transforming cycle is disrupted.

Behavioural misalignment is equally destructive: Cao and Zhang (2011) and Simatupang and Sridharan (2005) demonstrate that inconsistent KPIs and siloed communication reduce joint performance, while Christopher and Holweg (2017) warn that lean efficiency without mutual resilience can lead to fragility.

Together, these scholars underscore that collaboration demands equity, capability coherence, and goal congruence across inter-firm boundaries.

6.4.3 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature on Barriers and Relational Challenges

The findings extend relational view theory by revealing that in the South African retail context, power asymmetry remains the most persistent barrier to strategic collaboration. When one partner controls most of the resources and markets, the relationship becomes more contractual than co-creating, reinforcing Dyer and Singh's (1998) finding that opportunism erodes relational rents.

Resource and capability limitations highlight uneven development of dynamic capabilities. While retailers boast advanced digital infrastructure, suppliers often have limited automation, supporting Teece's (2018) view that sensing and seizing opportunities depend on mutual investment. Brun et al. (2020) also note that digital asymmetry can hinder co-innovation, and Christopher and Holweg (2017) warn that lean cost pressures may weaken resilience. These insights suggest that unless these resource gaps are bridged, collaboration remains operationally viable but strategically hollow.

Misaligned Incentives can turn cooperation into a disjointed process. When staff turnover occurs or departmental KPIs change focus, partnerships tend to lose continuity. This aligns with Cao and Zhang (2011) and Simatupang and Sridharan (2005), who suggest that aligned goals and shared performance metrics are essential for achieving true synergy. These alignment challenges also undermine adaptive learning, as Teece (1997) indicates that continuous learning occurs when there is feedback between parties.

Overall, these barriers are interlinked: power shapes access to capability, capability gaps reinforce dependency, and misaligned incentives promote silos. Solving only one barrier will redistribute the imbalance rather than removing it.

6.4.4 Conclusion of the Discussion of Findings for Barriers and Relational Challenges

Theme 3 demonstrates that collaboration failure is not solely due to goodwill, but also to structural and fragmented intent. Power imbalance promotes dependence; capability gaps limit joint, coherent action; and misaligned incentives make learning difficult. These findings strengthen the idea that true collaboration requires a

balanced influence, equal capability, and aligned goals between retailers and suppliers.

If so, then so what?

Unless both suppliers and retailers invest in shared technology capabilities to balance power and align incentives, collaboration will remain transactional rather than transformative. Within the adapted conceptual framework, these barriers represent counterforces that test collaboration.

Table 12 : Synthesis of Findings and Theoretical Alignment for Research Question 1

Theme	Key Empirical Insights (Retailer & Supplier)	Theoretical Interpretation	If so, then so what?
Theme 1: Collaboration Practices	Transparent data sharing and joint planning transformed coordination into strategic trust.	Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998): Joint information sharing creates relational rents. RBV (Barney, 1991): Shared routines are inimitable resources.	Information visibility and co-planning form the foundational capability for competitive advantage.
Theme 2: Enablers of Collaboration	Trust, alignment of leadership, and data visibility empower continuous collaboration.	Dynamic Capabilities (Teece, 2018): leadership and learning mechanisms enable sensing and seizing.	When leadership and systems align, collaboration becomes institutionalised and resilient.
Theme 3: Barriers and Relational Challenges	Power asymmetry, resource gaps, and misaligned KPIs fragment partnerships.	Relational View: Opportunism and dependency reduce relational rents. DC: Capability gaps interrupt joint renewal.	Collaboration must be rebalanced through equity, resource parity, and shared incentives.

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

Table 6.1 shows how RQ1 is addressed across the first three themes. Together, these findings reveal how collaboration in the South African retail sector evolves from operational coordination to relational resistance. The adapted conceptual framework

is supported by these dynamics, showing that collaboration matures through alignment of practices, enablers and barriers.

6.5 Theme 4: Collaboration and Competitive Advantage

Linked to Research Question 2 (RQ2)

How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?

Collaboration was viewed as a strategic capability that creates shared value, builds relational rents, and strengthens supply chain efficiency, and is not viewed as operational coordination. Retailers and Suppliers viewed collaboration as a mechanism for achieving and sustaining a competitive advantage.

6.5.1 Recap of Findings on Collaboration and Competitive Advantage

Participants consistently described collaboration as the source of value, mutual gain, and long-term differentiation.

“So shared growth through higher sales volume, improved product quality and innovation ... more efficient supply-chain operation and better value delivered to the shopper ... that is ultimately what the function is about.” (Retailer 5, 14:13 – 14:31)

“If we can get a higher quality and standard of product from our supplier by exploring technology and innovative ideas ... there is a win-win situation right down the chain because at the end of the day, your customer that goes into your retail store is happy. He is likely going to buy more of this quality product ... as the retailer, you benefit from better sales and obviously from ordering more products from your supplier due to the high quality they deliver.” (Retailer 7, 32:15 – 33:29)

“When we collaborate, we pick up speed ... decisions are faster, products move quicker, and both sides win — you see it in sales and in less waste.” (Supplier 3, 17:21 – 17:42)

These statements reflect how collaboration enhances value creation through improved quality, responsiveness, and mutual profitability.

6.5.2 Recap of Literature on Collaboration and Competitive Advantage

The Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) holds that valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources are the main characteristics for gaining a competitive advantage. Collaboration meets that criteria when it incorporates trust, joint routines and shared knowledge.

The Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998) extends this by showing that relational rents emerge when resources are shared and joint governance prevails. From the Dynamic Capabilities perspective (Teece, 2018), it advises firms on how to seize, sense, and transform their capabilities through learning and coordinated change.

6.5.3 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature on Collaboration and Competitive Advantage

The findings show that inter-organisational collaboration evolves into a strategic resource, consistent with the Resource-Based View and the Relational View. Retailers focused on Speed, quality and efficiency through joint planning, shared data, and execution that generates value that is hard to imitate by a competitor. Suppliers' focus on joint action to reduce waste and accelerate decision-making reflects the relational rents gained.

Critically, the South African context indicates that a competitive advantage is conditional; it depends on theme two enablers, such as trust, leadership, and data visibility, and on mitigating theme three barriers, such as power asymmetry, capability gaps, and misaligned KPIs.

6.5.4 Conclusion of the Discussion of Findings for Collaboration and Competitive Advantage

Theme four shows that collaboration matures from an operational coordination to a strategic, value-creating capability. Retailers and suppliers create an advantage by co-creating through a shared system, data, and innovation, rather than working independently. These joint routines and trust are path-dependent and complex,

making them difficult to replicate, which aligns with the Resource-Based View and Relational View criteria for gaining a competitive advantage.

If so, then so what?

Theme is the evidence and engine for a competitive advantage. Within the adapted conceptual framework, theme four anchors the outcome layer. It demonstrates how operational and relational mechanisms are used to create market performance, resilience and innovation that is hard to imitate. This theme directly addresses RQ2 by demonstrating that when collaboration routines become inimitable relational resources, firms achieve superior market responsiveness and efficiency.

6.6 Theme 5: Innovation and Learning

Linked Research Question (RQ2)

How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?

Collaboration between suppliers and retailers is increasingly characterised by knowledge sharing, joint problem-solving, and adaptive learning. Learning is not only an outcome of learning but also a dynamic capability that renews relationships and enhances competitiveness.

6.6.1 Recap of Findings on Innovation and Learning

Participants described innovation and learning as the living outcomes of collaboration, a cycle in which shared knowledge drives improvement and experimentation becomes routine.

“We attend many overseas trade shows and bring some of that back and share it with retailers.” (Supplier 5, 3:55 – 4:33)

“The more you can collaborate, the more innovative ideas can be put in ... putting new technology into the process ... so the result is your customers being happy.” (Retailer 7, 35:03 – 36:22)

“Absolutely. You have a framework now to refer to ... becoming more process-oriented rather than people-dependent.” (Supplier 1, 6:39 – 7:04)

Suppliers focused on external learning, whereas retailers emphasised internal reflection and formalising processes.

6.6.2 Recap of Literature on Innovation and learning

Innovation and learning are central to Dynamic Capabilities (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997; Teece, 2007): organisations must sense, seize, and reconfigure opportunities through continuous learning.

The Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998) adds that joint learning across partners yields relational rents that are socially complex and hard to imitate.

Absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) further clarifies how firms internalise external knowledge to promote innovation. Empirical research by Breytenbach et al. (2020) and Brun et al. (2020) supports that technology-enabled transparency speeds up co-innovation and resilience.

6.6.3 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature

The findings show that collaboration is transformed into a joint learning system.

Knowledge sharing allows the partners to sense environmental change together. Supplier five indicates that exposure to global trends mirrors the absorptive capacity process, where this is then conceptualised locally. Joint Problem Solving becomes the seizing mechanism. Supplier two indicates that cross-functional workshops institutionalise experimentation and collective decision-making consistent with the relational rent theory. Adaptive learning represents reconfiguration, as retailers move from people to process dependence.

Collectively, this indicates that learning is relational and integrative. Collaboration provides the psychological safety, information visibility, and shared accountability required for double-loop learning. When it is reciprocated between partners, this strengthens reliance and promotes innovation.

6.6.4 Conclusion of the Discussion of Findings for Innovation and Learning

Theme five demonstrates that learning is a continuing capability that renews collaboration. Learning and innovation build a sensing and adapting infrastructure for retailers and suppliers.

If so, then so what?

Learning ensures that the competitive advantage identified in theme four is not static but ever evolving. Through experimentation and digital integration, collaboration becomes a strategic asset that enables alignment. Findings show that co-learning within collaborations acts as an adaptive process linking everyday coordination (RQ1) with long-term strategic renewal (RQ2).

6.7 Theme 6: Strategic Alignment and Capability

Linked Research Question (RQ 2):

How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?

6.7.1 Recap of Findings on Strategic Alignment and Capability

Participants highlighted that strategic alignment and capability development are stages where collaboration moves from ad hoc coordination to a structured strategy.

Both retailers and suppliers highlighted the importance of shared goals, leadership continuity and capability integration.

“You cannot have collaboration without alignment ... the moment strategies differ, everything collapses ... our goals must be identical; if they are not, we are pulling in different directions.” (Supplier 3, 22:41 – 22:53)

“Leadership plays a major role. You can have all the systems, but if the leadership does not buy in, you will never have sustained collaboration.” (Retailer 6, 20:12 – 20:28)

“We are developing internal capability now ... training planners, logisticians, and analysts to understand supplier data and systems ... that is what makes it sustainable.... when it becomes skill, not project.” (Retailer 9, 19:14 – 19:48)

These insights above reveal that strategic alignment is both relational and capability based.

6.7.2 Recap of Literature on Strategic Alignment and Capability

Strategic alignment refers to the integration of inter-firm goals and resources to pursue mutual advantage (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1993).

Within the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), alignment and capability development represent higher-order resources that are socially complex and embedded in culture and routines.

The Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998) explains that joint investment in governance and capability creation yields relational rents that are rare and difficult to imitate.

Meanwhile, the Dynamic Capabilities framework (Teece, 2018) positions capability alignment as a process of sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring both internal and inter-firm systems.

Empirical evidence from Cao & Zhang (2011) and Breytenbach et al. (2020) shows that alignment and cross-functional cohesion foster adaptability, innovation, and sustained competitive advantage.

6.7.3 Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature on Strategic Alignment and Capability

The findings show that strategic alignment functions as a capstone capability of collaboration. It consolidates all relational mechanisms into a coherent strategy.

Suppliers' three reflections on goal congruence echo Cao & Zhang (2011), who advise that shared vision transforms collaboration into a collective purpose. This alignment aligns on a shared strategic intent that prevents a term used by Cao & Zhang (2011): capability drift. Retailers' sixth emphasis on leadership correlates with

Teece's (2007) argument that dynamic capabilities rely on leadership cognition. This is supported by retailers' focus on training planners and analysis, which demonstrates how collaboration becomes embedded within the organisation. This aligns with Dyer & Singh's (1998) assertion that learning investments generate relational rents and with Breytenbach et al.'s (2020) findings that human capability serves as the link between collaboration and performance.

Together, these data reveal that alignment is multidimensional, comprising strategic, cognitive, and operational dimensions. It is through alignment that this becomes a dynamic capability. This is a safeguard for theme three, when power, incentives and misalignment, leadership and shared purpose become the mechanism to bring back balance.

6.7.4 Conclusion of the Discussion of Findings for Strategic Alignment and Capability

Theme six indicated that alignment is at the maturity stage of collaboration. At this point, collaboration is no longer dependent on an individual level but becomes part of the company's DNA.

If so, then so what?

At this stage, strategic alignment converts collaboration into practice. It becomes a dynamic capability that is resilient even amid market shocks and beyond leadership changes. In the adapted conceptual framework, it represents a capability-integration layer, in which collaboration sustains a competitive advantage. The evidence highlights that strategic alignment between retailers and suppliers enables collaboration to evolve from an operational activity into a strategic capability (RQ2).

6.8 Theme 7: Future Collaboration Outlook

Linked Research Question (RQ2):

How do suppliers and retailers perceive the influence of collaboration practices on achieving competitive advantage, and to what extent can these practices be considered strategic resources within the South African retail sector?

6.8.1 Recap of Findings on Future Collaboration Outlook

Participants across both groups recognised that the future of collaboration lies in digital integration, strategic maturity, and sustained partnership models.

Many respondents viewed technology as the next frontier for relational transparency and operational efficiency.

“The future is in visibility ... live dashboards, shared platforms, and automation between our systems ... you will never have collaboration if information lags.” (Supplier 6, 07:11 – 07:45)

“We are getting there, but I think the next step is predictive rather than reactive ... that is when you start seeing real collaboration maturity.” (Retailer 7, 31:12 – 31:37)

Several suppliers also stressed the importance of data-driven joint decision-making and long-term sustainability models:

“The goal is not just trading; it is partnership ... if we can sustain the collaboration digitally and culturally, then we will always win together.” (Supplier 4, 22:08 – 22:22)

Retailers added that actual progress requires cultural and behavioural change, not just technological adoption:

“You can bring in all the technology, but if your people do not buy into collaboration as a way of working, it will not last.” (Retailer 6, 21:40 – 21:59)

The collective narrative suggests that collaboration maturity depends on integrating digital systems, aligning humans, and demonstrating strategic foresight.

6.8.2 Recap of Literature on Future Collaboration Outlook

Research on collaborative maturity and digital integration highlights that the future of inter-organisational collaboration is both digitally enabled and strategically flexible. Teece (2018) explains that dynamic capabilities develop through ongoing sensing, seizing opportunities, and reconfiguring resources, with technology serving as the infrastructure that speeds up this adaptation.

Dyer and Singh (1998) highlight that lasting relational rents depend on institutionalised mechanisms for continuous coordination. Similarly, Cao and Zhang (2011) note that collaboration maturity is developed through ongoing joint learning and technological interdependence.

Recent studies by Breytenbach et al. (2020) and Bakalo and Bogale (2024) confirm that digital transparency enhances resilience and future preparedness in the supply chains of emerging markets. Meanwhile, Dubey et al. (2024) further explore this by emphasising the importance of collaborative analytics and predictive alignment.

The literature thus positions digitalisation and relational continuity as the dual anchors of future collaboration ecosystems.

6.8.3 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature on Future Outlook Collaboration Outlook

The findings demonstrate that supplier-retailer collaboration in South Africa is evolving toward a digitally enabled, strategically adaptive phase. Both suppliers and retailers are recognising the importance of technology in the architecture of trust through automation, visibility and predictive integration. Supplier 6's focus on live dashboards and shared platforms illustrates this shift, echoing Teece's (2018) perspective that dynamic capabilities rely on a firm's collective ability to sense and respond through digital reconfiguration.

This aligns with Dyer and Singh's (1998) relational rent model, which suggests that transparency, shared systems, and joint investments create performance benefits that competitors struggle to imitate. Supplier 4's remark that "the goal is not just trading; it is partnership" highlights the move from short-term transactions to long-term collaboration, aligning with Cao and Zhang's (2011) view that relational maturity develops through ongoing governance and shared learning routines. Retailer 6's warning that "technology without buy-in will not last" supports Teece's (2007) assertion that the foundational elements of dynamic capabilities are grounded in leadership and organisational culture.

Without behavioural alignment, these digital tools can become transactional mechanisms rather than being used for transformation. Collectively, these findings reveal that the future of collaboration depends on digital integration, visibility, and human intent, where trust, leadership, and transparency intersect.

6.8.4 Conclusion of the Discussion of Findings for Future Collaboration Outlook

Theme seven establishes that the future of supplier-retailer collaboration in South Africa is digitally enabled, relationally sustained and strategically adaptive. Digital integration will enhance collaboration and accuracy. The interplay between trust and technology is the foundation for mature collaborative practices, which have evolved into an ecosystem of shared intelligence and a sustained competitive advantage.

If so, then so what?

Organisations that implement continuous learning cultures and integrated digital collaboration will move beyond short-term efficiency to long-term resilience and innovation. The adapted conceptual framework will close the loop between practice and capability, validating that collaboration is a strategic asset.

Table 13: Synthesis of Findings and Theoretical Alignment for Research Question 2

Theme	Key Empirical Insights (Retailer & Supplier)	Theoretical Interpretation	If so, then so what?
Theme 4: Collaboration and Competitive Advantage	Collaboration enhances joint efficiency, mutual value creation, and competitiveness through shared effort rather than rivalry.	Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998): Cooperative investment generates relational rents. RBV (Barney, 1991): Joint processes become valuable, rare, and inimitable resources.	Collaboration evolves from transactional coordination to a shared strategic asset, driving cost and differentiation advantage.
Theme 5: Innovation and Learning	Knowledge exchange and joint problem-solving drive adaptive learning and innovation across both partners.	Dynamic Capabilities (Teece, 2018): Learning and reconfiguration enable continuous renewal.	Ongoing co-learning transforms collaboration into an adaptive capability that sustains innovation and resilience.
Theme 6: Strategic Alignment and Capability	Leadership support, shared goals, and skill development align collaboration with long-term strategy.	RBV (Barney, 1991); Cao & Zhang (2011): Alignment embeds unique, inimitable routines and strategic cohesion.	Alignment institutionalises collaboration, embedding capability into the organisation's strategic DNA.

Theme 7: Future Collaboration Outlook	Digital integration and cultural maturity define the next phase of collaboration.	Dynamic Capabilities (Teece, 2018); Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998): Digital visibility amplifies trust and responsiveness.	The future advantage lies in the fusion of technology and trust — enabling sustained, predictive, and resilient partnerships.
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Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

6.9 Conclusion

Table 6.4 integrates the study's seven themes into three constructs: supplier collaboration practices, enablers and barriers of collaboration, and collaboration and competitive advantage. It synthesises the retailer and supplier perspectives, highlighting similarities, nuances of difference, and how each finding adds to existing knowledge or refines the literature. Further analyses were conducted to determine whether the sub-theme needed a name change, as this would be reflected in the revised conceptual framework.

Table 14: Summary of the outcomes of the discussion of the findings with the literature

(Condensed version presented here – full table in Appendix)

Construct	Key Themes & Sub-themes (examples)	Similarity / Difference	Adds to Existing Knowledge / Refines Literature	Renamed Sub-theme
Supplier Collaboration Practices (<i>Relational View</i>)	Collaboration Practices – Information Sharing, Agile–Committed Forecasting, Operational Integration	Similarity: visibility essential; Difference: agile vs stable planning cycles	Adds to existing knowledge by showing that forecast rhythm alignment converts coordination into relational rent	Agile–Committed Forecasting
Enablers and Barriers of Collaboration (<i>RBV</i>)	Enablers – Trust-as-Throughput, Triadic Leadership Alignment, Data Visibility	Similarity: trust and leadership enable stability; Difference: execution vs strategic intent	Refines literature by framing trust and leadership triads as tangible resources that govern collaboration continuity	Trust-as-Throughput, Triadic Leadership Alignment
Collaboration and Competitive Advantage (<i>DCV</i>)	Competitive Advantage – Value Creation, Relational Rents, Operational Efficiency + Strategic Alignment, Innovation, Digital Integration	Similarity: both link collaboration to performance; Difference: retailer = market value, supplier = stability	Adds to existing knowledge by positioning collaboration routines as micro-foundations of dynamic capability	(No new labels)

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

6.9.1 Revised Conceptual Framework

Figure 6 presents the revised conceptual framework, integrating insights from the table above and the literature. Most themes were already reflected in the literature.

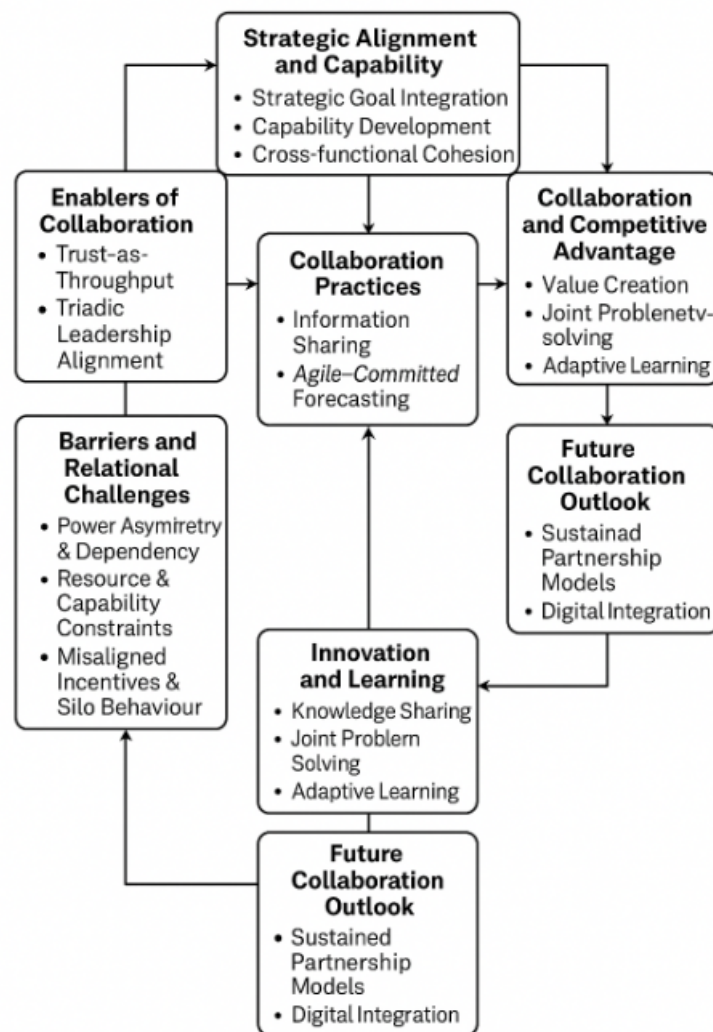


Figure 4: Revised Conceptual Framework: Supplier- Retailer Collaboration

Note. Source: Researcher's own compilation (2025).

This revised framework demonstrates how collaboration develops via an integrated capability cycle. It places Collaboration Practices at the centre, shaped by Enablers and limited by Barriers, leading to Competitive Advantage outcomes. These are continually refreshed through Innovation and Learning, supported by Strategic

Alignment and Capability, and maintained through the Future Collaboration Outlook. The circular flow emphasises that competitive advantage in the retail environment is not static but needs to be continuously reconfigured through adaptive learning and alignment.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter consolidates the study's findings, demonstrating how each research question and objective was addressed through the empirical evidence and theoretical interpretation.

The research investigated how supplier collaboration practices influence competitive advantage in the South African retail environment, drawing upon the Relational View (Dyer & Singh, 1998), the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), and the Dynamic Capabilities View (Teece, 2018).

The chapter continues by aligning the research objectives and questions with the key findings, then presents a synthesis of the principal theoretical conclusions. It then presents the research contributions, managerial implications, limitations, and future research opportunities.

7.2 Summary of the Study and Context

Table 7.1 summarises how each research objective and question was met through the empirical findings and theoretical integration presented in the previous chapters.

Table 15 : Summary of Key Findings Aligned to Research Objectives

Research Objective	Research Question	Key Findings / Themes	Theoretical Interpretation	Outcome
1. To explore current collaboration practices between retailers and suppliers in South Africa.	RQ 1: How do suppliers and retailers in South Africa currently practice collaboration, and what enablers and barriers shape the	Theme 1: Collaboration Practices – Information Sharing, Agile–Committed Forecasting, and Operational	Relational View: Collaboration practices produce relational rents through coordinated routines and	Objective achieved: Collaboration manifests through structured information exchange and shared planning,

	success of these practices?	Integration & Communication.	trust-based visibility.	supported by trust.
2. To examine the enablers and barriers that influence collaboration effectiveness.	RQ 1 (continued)	Themes 2–3: Enablers of Collaboration and Barriers & Relational Challenges. Enablers: Trust-as-Throughput, Triadic Leadership Alignment, Data Visibility. Barriers: Power Asymmetry, Resource Constraints, Misaligned Incentives.	Resource-Based View: Collaboration effectiveness depends on orchestrating relational resources (trust, leadership, visibility) and managing structural imbalances.	Objective achieved: Enablers and barriers were identified and conceptually mapped, confirming that relational governance determines capability stability.
3. To determine how supplier–retailer collaboration contributes to competitive advantage.	RQ 2: How does supplier–retailer collaboration influence the achievement of competitive advantage in the retail environment?	Themes 4–6: Collaboration & Competitive Advantage; Innovation & Learning; Strategic Alignment & Capability.	Dynamic Capabilities View: Collaboration evolves into a sensing–seizing–reconfiguring capability that creates sustained value and learning.	Objective achieved: Collaboration becomes a strategic capability through adaptive learning, alignment, and digital integration.
4. To propose mechanisms and pathways	RQ 2 (continued)	Theme 7: Future Collaboration Outlook –	Integrated Theory: Future competitiveness	Objective achieved: Mechanisms for

to enhance future supplier–retailer collaboration.		Sustained Partnerships, Digital Integration, Collaborative Maturity Pathways.	depends on digitally enabled, mature collaboration pathways built on shared trust and alignment.	advancing collaborative maturity and digital integration were identified, informing the revised conceptual framework.
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Note. Source: Researcher’s own compilation (2025).

7.3 Principal Theoretical Conclusions

The theoretical conclusions affirm that supplier-retailer collaboration is a multi-layered capability system which incorporates relational, resource-based, and dynamic dimensions. The integration of the constructs explains how collaboration moves from a cooperative practice to a strategic capability.

7.3.1 Extension of the Relational View

The study extends the relational view by adding Agile-Committed forecasting, a new mechanism that shows how collaboration depends on the temporal alignment of planning. Retailers require agility, while suppliers rely on stability to gain production efficiency. This dual rhythm shows that relational rents are generated not only by trust and knowledge, but also by this synchronised cadence —an underexploited relational resource.

7.3.2 Refinement of the Resource-Based View

The Resource-Based View was refined by redefining trust and leadership alignment as governable, renewable resources. The construct emphasises trust as throughput transforms visibility into performance, while leadership alignment serves as a governance mechanism that aligns strategic, commercial, and operational leadership

roles. This refines the Resource-Based View, as intangible resources can gain an advantage when used in conjunction with governance and relational integration.

7.3.3 Refinement of the Dynamic Capabilities View

The findings refine the dynamic Capabilities View by demonstrating that it operates as a bridging mechanism between relational resources and competitive advantage. Dynamic Capabilities serve as a conversion layer that transforms relational trust, leadership alignment and information visibility into organisational agility and renewal.

Empirically, themes such as innovation and learning, strategic alignment, Capability, and Future Collaboration Outlook revealed that these partnerships develop maturity pathways that enable continuous adaptation. These pathways include sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring activities that enable the partners to respond to market changes, consumer demand, market disruptions, and supply chain vulnerabilities.

7.3.4 Integrative Theoretical Synthesis

Across the three constructs, the study confirms that:

- Relational Routines (RV), such as trust, information sharing, and cadence, enable operational continuity.
- Resource Orchestration (RBV) structures collaboration and governs collaboration through leadership alignment and data-driven visibility.
- Dynamic Capabilities (Bridge), converting relational and resource strength into a sustained competitive advantage, which can adapt to changing market conditions.

The integrated model demonstrates that competitive advantage is not the end of collaboration but an outcome of the ongoing capability renewal.

7.4 Theoretical and Scholarly Contributions

The study contributes to the theory, methodology and context as follows:

a) Theoretical Contributions

- Extends the relational View by incorporating temporal alignment into collaboration theory.

- Refines the Resource-Based View by defining trust and leadership alignment as tangible, governable resources.
- Refines the Dynamic Capability by framing it as a bridging mechanism that is continuously evolving.

b) Methodological Contributions

- Demonstrates rigorous qualitative thematic analysis linked to an auditable coding framework, intensity mapping, and cross-group analysis.
- Illustrates how interpretivist research reveals hidden relational and behavioural dynamics often missed in quantitative studies.
- Establishes a replicable qualitative audit trail integrating verbatim quotes, coding matrices, and theoretical synthesis.

c) Contextual Contributions

- Provides an Integrated South African retail collaboration model connecting RBV, RV and DC.
- Highlights how trust, leadership, and digital integration interact within an emerging market retail supply chain.

7.5 Managerial and Practical Implications

The recommendations in the table below will guide the retail sector and stakeholders in building resilient, collaborative systems.

Table 16 : Recommendations for management and stakeholders

Strategic Focus Area	Recommendation	Intended Outcome
Information Visibility	Develop integrated dashboards and shared forecasting systems linking retailers and suppliers.	Improves data symmetry and decision transparency.
Forecast Alignment	Institutionalise Agile–Committed Forecasting sessions balancing short-term agility and long-term commitment.	Reduces stock variance and enhances operational trust.
Leadership Governance	Formalise Triadic Leadership Alignment structures across supply chain, sales, and executive functions.	Ensures consistency and accountability in collaboration.
Trust and Measurement	Introduce dual KPIs measuring both service and relational performance.	Converts trust into measurable capability.
Capability Development	Establish joint capability academies for category management and analytics.	Enhances shared learning and performance visibility.
Collaborative Maturity	Apply the Collaborative Maturity Pathway as an annual benchmarking tool.	Drives continuous improvement and partnership evolution.

Note. Source: Researcher’s own compilation (2025).

If collaborative capabilities gain the leadership commitment and transparent data is shared, then firms can transform transactional relationships into sustained sources of competitive advantage.

7.6 Limitations of the Study

While the study achieved its objectives, certain limitations are acknowledged:

- The sample size of 20 participants limits generalisability.
- The formal retail sector may not reflect collaboration in the informal and manufacturing sectors.
- The cross-sectional design captures collaboration at a specific period of time; however, longitudinal studies may reflect a deeper evolution.
- Because the studies are being done qualitatively, there is no statistical validation towards the relationship.

These limitations can provide direction for future exploration rather than validation constraints.

7.7 Suggestions for Future Research

- (1) Longitudinal studies to examine collaboration maturity over time.
- (2) Studies in different sectors across the pharmaceutical, automotive and the FMCG sectors.
- (3) Digital Transformational research, exploring how AI and predictive analysis in forecasting and trust building.

7.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter demonstrated that the research questions and research objectives were comprehensively addressed. By applying interpretivist inquiry and thematic analysis, the research extended the Relational, Resource-Based, and Dynamic Capabilities frameworks to create a context-specific, evidence-based model of collaboration between suppliers and retailers. By incorporating trust, leadership and digital

alignment, the study showed that collaboration evolves from operational coordination into a strategic resource capability that sustains a competitive advantage.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol

Introductory

1. Can you describe your role in the organisation?
2. Would you describe your company as a supplier or retailer?
3. How would you describe your exposure to supplier–retailer collaboration?
4. Can you describe your organisation's approach to supplier-retailer collaboration?

Collaboration Practices

1. What are the current collaboration practices being used in your organisation?
2. Do you believe these practices are effective? And why? And what are the most effective?
3. Are the collaboration practices formalised? How?
4. What is your perception of the role the partner (Supplier or retailer) plays in collaboration, and does the other party fully commit?
5. Can you provide an example of this, and what was the effect?

Barriers and Enablers

1. What are some of the main challenges experienced with collaboration?
Possible probe on Trust, goals and risks?
2. What do you think are the enablers of collaboration?
3. How do you think technology enhanced or hindered collaboration? Possible probe on data, procurement tools and IoT?
4. What can the other party do better to enhance collaboration?
5. Is there any other information omitted above to be added regarding alignment or misunderstanding with the other party?

Strategic Impact and Competitive Advantage

1. In your opinion, does collaboration increase competitiveness?
2. How do you feel that collaboration affects the long-term sustainability and short-term performance?
3. What outcomes have been achieved because of collaboration?

Theoretical Reflection

1. The current collaboration practices, do you think competitors can replicate?
Why or why not?
2. What value is jointly created through collaboration with your supplier/retailer?
3. Have collaboration techniques evolved over the years? How and Why

Closing

1. Based on your experience or perception of collaboration, is there anything else you would like to add?
2. What advice would you give to a company that is just starting to implement collaboration?

Would like to thank you for the time taken to answer my questions. Please feel free to ask for the transcript if you require it. A copy of the completed research can be made available.

Thanks again

APPENDIX B: Interview Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am a master's Student, and I am completing my MBA at the University of Pretoria, specifically Gordon's Institute of Business. I am gathering research on the following Topic:

Title: A qualitative exploration of Supplier-Retailer Collaboration in South Africa: A Dual Perspective on Competitive Advantage

Thank you for taking the time to answer the following questions. The interview will take between 45-60 minutes. We can take a break when required; however, we will take a break after 30 minutes to have a 3-minute leg stretch. You're probably asking the reason why you were chosen and what the purpose of the study is.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to gain insight from a dual stakeholder perspective on supplier–retailer collaboration, such as enablers, barriers, and current practices that influence a competitive advantage in the South African retail environment.

Why are you invited to participate?

You are invited to participate, whether you are currently involved in or have previously been exposed to supplier-retailer collaboration. This would have equipped you with the necessary knowledge and understanding that is important for this research.

Informed Consent

I _____ give my consent to partake in the study truthfully and honestly to the best of my ability. My participation is confidential and voluntary.

Note: You can withdraw from the study anytime. The data interpretation will be conducted anonymously, without including your name. The data will be stored in a password-protected device. The interviews will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of interpretation.

Researcher Name:

Supervisor Name:

Email: 22028839@mygibs.co.za

Email:

Phone:

Signature of Participant.....

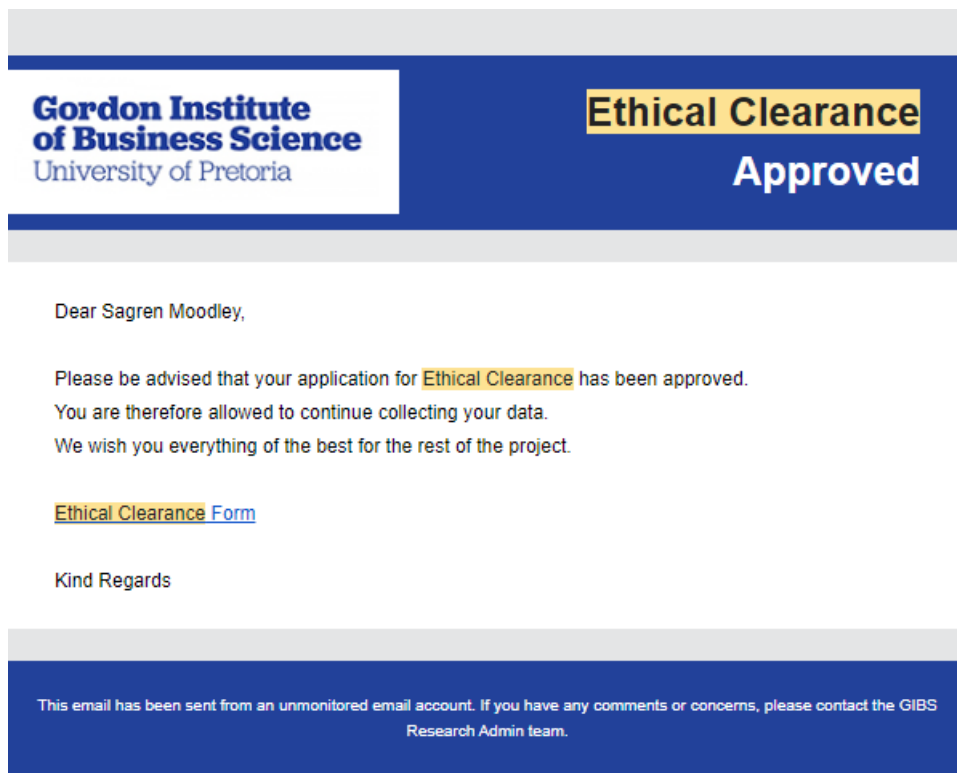
Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

There are 6 sections to the interview. Specifically, Introduction, Collaboration practices, Barriers and enablers, Strategic impact on competitive advantage, Theoretical reflection, and Closing. Take your time and answer truthfully. Can I begin?

Appendix C: Ethical Clearance Approval



APPENDIX D: Important Sources and Journal Quality

<i>Source/Journal</i>	<i>Journal Year</i>	<i>Number of Citations</i>	<i>AJG OR SJR rating</i>	<i>Journal Ranking</i>
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Journal of the American college of clinical pharmacy	2021	1063	Q2	
Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences	2020	1388	n/a	
Supply chain collaboration for transparency	2020	141	Q1	
International Journal of Information Management	2019	192	Q1	A*
International Journal of Production Research	2020	227	Q1	A
Journal of Open Innovation	2022	0	Q2	
European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy	2021	206	n/a	
Journal of Cleaner Production	2024	25	Q1	A
Improving interorganizational information sharing for vendor-managed inventory	2020	126	Q1	
An integrated socio-economic-environmental model to address sustainable development and sustainability	2023	233	Q1	
A systematic review of empirical tests	2022	4162	Q1	
Evaluating supply chain collaboration barriers in small-and medium-sized enterprises	2021	61	Q1	
Triangulation in research, with examples. Evidence-based nursing	2019	1624	Q1	
International journal of operations & production management	2021	54	Q1	A
Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project	2018	n/a	n/a	
Journal of Enterprise Information Management	2021	147	Q1	A
A literature review. Cogent Business & Management	2019	98	Q2	
Journal of Business Research	2019	11468	Q1	A

Journal of Management	1991	111287	Q1	A*
Strategic Management Journal	1984	48230	Q1	A*
Academy of Management Review	1998	20231	Q1	A*
A company's relational strategy: Linkage between strategic choices, attributes, and outcomes	2021	16	Q1	
International Journal of Operations & Production Management	2006	725	Q1	A
International Journal of Production Economics	2024	56	Q1	A
Strategic Management Journal	1997	57436	Q1	A*
Journal of Operations Management	2023	363	Q1	A*

APPENDIX E: Alignment of Research Design Choices with the Research Question

Research design and methodology	Choice Made	Reason
Research Purpose	Exploratory	Wanting to uncover unexplored insights into perceived supplier collaboration have on competitive advantage
Philosophy	Interpretivism	Understanding meaning and context from a dual perspective
Approach	Inductive	Build themes from participant insights, especially in real world experiences
Method	Mono-method Qualitative	Rich, in-depth insights regarding collaboration practices through semi-structured interviews
Strategy	Phenomenology	These are lived experiences from stakeholders that influence the collaboration practices
Time Horizon	Cross-sectional	Capture the current state of supplier collaboration practices in the current environment

Appendix F: Construct, theme and sub-theme synthesis

Construct	Theme	Sub-theme	Similarity / Nuance of Difference (Retailer vs Supplier)	Outcome (Adds to Existing Knowledge / Refines Literature)	Renamed Sub-theme and Rationale for Change
Construct 1: Supplier Collaboration Practices (Relational View)	Theme 1: Collaboration Practices	Information Sharing Mechanisms	Similarity: Both emphasise transparent, timely data sharing as a trust foundation. Difference: Retailers prefer real-time POS data; suppliers prefer accurate trend-based reporting.	Adds to existing knowledge by demonstrating that information granularity and timing shape mutual value capture.	(No change) – consistent with narrative framing.
		Joint Planning & Forecasting	Similarity: Both value joint forecasting for operational alignment. Difference: Retailers pursue short-term agile adjustments; suppliers prefer longer planning stability.	Adds to existing knowledge by revealing that coordination success depends on balancing flexibility (retailers) and commitment (suppliers).	Renamed to Agile-Committed Forecasting – reflects empirical evidence of dual temporal rhythms found in the data and theory narrative.
		Operational Integration & Communication	Similarity: Both describe cross-functional communication as vital to efficiency. Difference: Retailers highlight delivery schedules; suppliers focus on production synchronisation.	Adds to existing knowledge by showing that coordination routines bridge organisational boundaries to reduce friction.	(No change) – accurately represents coded findings.
	Theme 5: Innovation & Learning	Knowledge Sharing	Similarity: Both share insights to inform planning. Difference: Retailers emphasise shopper data; suppliers focus on category trends.	Adds to existing knowledge by showing knowledge exchange as a bidirectional process enhancing mutual learning.	(No change) – consistent with theme definition in narrative.
		Joint Problem Solving	Similarity: Both use structured collaboration forums to resolve supply challenges. Difference: Retailers focus on rapid pilots; suppliers prefer process reviews.	Adds to existing knowledge by positioning problem-solving as a mechanism that builds adaptive capacity.	(No change) – aligned with findings section.
Construct 2: Enablers and Barriers of Collaboration (Resource-Based View)	Theme 2: Enablers of Collaboration	Adaptive Learning	Similarity: Both engage in reflection cycles post-promotions. Difference: Retailers prefer short cycles; suppliers document learnings across markets.	Adds to existing knowledge by linking learning cadence to continuous improvement capability.	(No change) – conceptually clear and validated.
		Trust & Relational Commitment	Similarity: Both view trust as the glue of partnership. Difference: Retailers link it to delivery reliability; suppliers link it to consistent strategic intent.	Adds to existing knowledge by defining trust as an operational resource that enables data to translate into performance.	Renamed to Trust-as-Throughput – reflects the empirical insight that trust actively channels collaboration into results.
		Leadership Support & Shared Goals	Similarity: Both highlight senior leadership as decisive in sustaining collaboration. Difference: Retailers expect executive escalation; suppliers advocate triadic alignment.	Adds to existing knowledge by conceptualising leadership alignment as a structured governance capability.	Renamed to Triadic Leadership Alignment – mirrors empirical pattern of three-tier executive collaboration seen in transcripts.
	Theme 3: Barriers & Relational Challenges	Data & Technology Visibility	Similarity: Both rely on dashboards to monitor progress. Difference: Retailers want openness; suppliers seek data governance.	Adds to existing knowledge by framing digital transparency as a shared organisational enabler.	(No change) – terminology supported by data.
		Power Asymmetry & Dependency	Similarity: Power imbalance undermines equity. Difference: Retailers cite supplier control over pricing; suppliers cite listing fees and penalties.	Adds to existing knowledge by introducing equity mechanisms that sustain collaboration under asymmetry.	(No change) – empirically accurate.
		Resource & Capability Constraints	Similarity: Both acknowledge capacity limitations. Difference: Retailers struggle with staffing; suppliers lack analytics resources.	Adds to existing knowledge by highlighting shared constraints as joint barriers to capability execution.	(No change)
		Misaligned Incentives & Silo Behaviour	Similarity: Both face conflicting KPIs. Difference: Retailers prioritise service; suppliers focus on margin.	Adds to existing knowledge by recognising incentive misalignment as a root structural issue.	(No change)
Construct 3: Collaboration and Competitive Advantage (Dynamic Capabilities View)	Theme 4: Collaboration & Competitive Advantage	Value Creation	Similarity: Both perceive collaboration as key to efficiency and category growth. Difference: Retailers emphasise shopper value; suppliers focus on operational stability.	Adds to existing knowledge by conceptualising co-created routines as mechanisms of dual value generation.	(No change)
		Relational Rents	Similarity: Both agree shared assets and information yield advantage. Difference: Retailers stress responsiveness; suppliers stress forecast stability.	Adds to existing knowledge by extending the concept of co-specialisation to retail-supply interfaces.	(No change)
		Operational Efficiency	Similarity: Both focus on OTIF and waste reduction. Difference: Retailers prioritise dock precision; suppliers prioritise load optimisation.	Adds to existing knowledge by linking continuous improvement to cross-firm integration.	(No change)
	Theme 6: Strategic Alignment & Capability	Strategic Goal Integration	Similarity: Both value strategic alignment as a success condition. Difference: Retailers tie it to customer experience; suppliers to profitability.	Adds to existing knowledge by confirming that shared strategic objectives drive sustained collaboration.	(No change)
		Capability Development	Similarity: Both recognise skill-building as key. Difference: Retailers build operational planning; suppliers build analytics and forecasting skills.	Adds to existing knowledge by highlighting joint capability enhancement as a mutual growth process.	(No change)
		Cross-functional Cohesion	Similarity: Both highlight cross-firm communication. Difference: Retailers mention store-DC coordination; suppliers Sales-Supply alignment.	Adds to existing knowledge by identifying cross-functional cohesion as a structural enabler of alignment.	(No change)
	Theme 7: Future Collaboration Outlook	Sustained Partnership Models	Similarity: Both prefer long-term collaboration frameworks. Difference: Retailers seek contractual certainty; suppliers seek adaptable terms.	Adds to existing knowledge by presenting partnership continuity as a strategic safeguard.	(No change)
		Digital Integration	Similarity: Both see technology integration as essential. Difference: Retailers emphasise live dashboards; suppliers stress data stability.	Adds to existing knowledge by confirming digital interoperability as a foundation for dynamic capability.	(No change)
		Collaborative Maturity Pathways	Similarity: Both acknowledge that collaboration evolves in stages. Difference: Retailers use milestone gates; suppliers use capability tiers.	Adds to existing knowledge by defining maturity as an evolutionary process in inter-firm capability development.	(No change)

Appendix G: Code Book: Worked from Atlas.ti

Code
Ret: Long-term vs Short-term Collaboration: Long-term Strategy
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Cross-Functional Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Retailer-Supplier Relationship
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supplier-Retailer Relationship
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supplier-Retailer Interaction
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Dual Stakeholder Perspective
Ret: Long-term vs Short-term Collaboration: Sustainability
Ret: Perception of Collaboration: Collaboration Perception
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Effectiveness
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Competitive Differentiation
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Importance of Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Transactional Relationships
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Appreciation
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Shortcomings
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Key Performance Indicators
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Manufacturer Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Operational Inefficiencies
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Short-term Competitiveness
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Understanding Requirements
Ret: Perception Differences: Collaboration Understanding
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Barriers to Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Enhancement
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Limitations
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Recognition
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Interpersonal Connections
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Proactive Problem-Solving
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Promotional Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Promotional Effectiveness
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supply Chain Optimisation
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Support for Small Players
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Transparent Communication
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Transportation Efficiency
Ret: Improvement Strategies: Actionable Recommendations
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Centralised Distribution
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Challenges
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Importance
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Strategies
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Techniques
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Communication Challenges
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Environmental Challenges
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Face-to-Face Discussions

Ret: Collaboration Practices: Face-to-Face Interaction
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Long-term Sustainability
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Organisational Alignment
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Organisational Practices
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Relationship Enhancement
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Service Level Agreements
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Structured Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Structured Communication
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supply Chain Interaction
Ret: Competitive Advantage: Collaboration Significance
Ret: Improvement Strategies: Collaboration Enhancement
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Business Sustainability
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Awareness
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Potential
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Practices
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Structure
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaborative Practices
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Competitive Environment
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Continuous Connectivity
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Effective Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: In-country Distribution
Ret: Collaboration Practices: International Expansion
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Joint Business Planning
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Long-term Relationships
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Out-of-Stock Management
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Performance Measurement
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Proactive Communication
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Product Discontinuation
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Real-World Applications
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supply Chain Disruption
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supply Chain Efficiency
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supply Chain Importance
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supply Chain Management
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supply Chain Visibility
Ret: Competitive Advantage: Technology Implementation
Ret: Long-term vs Short-term Collaboration: Execution
Ret: Perception Differences: Collaboration Challenges
Ret: Perception of Collaboration Roles: Collaboration
Ret: Perception of Collaboration: Supplier Commitment
Ret: Specific Practices: Cross-Functional Departments
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Approach
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Barriers
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Benefits
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Dynamics
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Enablers
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Examples

Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Insights
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Strategy
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Communication Channels
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Consumer Understanding
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Cross-Border Logistics
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Customer Understanding
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Expectation Management
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Focus on Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Holistic Understanding
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Informal Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Informal Communication
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Information Protection
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Integration Challenges
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Logistical Partnership
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Logistics Coordination
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Long-term Partnerships
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Market Competitiveness
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Operational Challenges
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Operational Efficiency
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Partnership Importance
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Perception Differences
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Performance Assessment
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Performance Evaluation
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Psychological Contract
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Replication Challenges
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Short-term Performance
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Stakeholder Engagement
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Strategic Partnerships
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supplier Relationships
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supply Risk Management
Ret: Collaboration Practices: System Incompatibility
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Technology Improvement
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Technology Integration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Wholesaler Interaction
Ret: Improvement Strategies: Collaboration Practices
Ret: Improvement Strategies: Communication Protocols
Ret: Improvement Strategies: Overlooked Improvements
Ret: Improvement Strategies: Proactive Communication
Ret: Perception Differences: Supply Chain Efficiency
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Barriers to Imitation
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Business Contribution
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Balance
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Efforts
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Failure
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Methods
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Success

Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaborative Mindset
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collective Investment
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Competitive Advantage
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Competitive Landscape
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Competitor Comparison
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Complex Relationships
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Compliance Challenges
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Consumer Satisfaction
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Customer Relationship
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Customer Satisfaction
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Digital Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Digital Communication
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Ease of Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Expectation Alignment
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Face-to-Face Meetings
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Improvement Potential
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Independent Retailing
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Information Disparity
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Information Integrity
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Internal Coordination
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Lack of Formalisation
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Logistical Challenges
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Merchandising Changes
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Multiple Perspectives
Ret: Collaboration Practices: One-way Collaboration
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Operational Alignment
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Process Understanding
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Promotional Frequency
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Regular Communication
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Regulatory Compliance
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Relationship Building
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Relationship Dynamics
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Responsible Retailing
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Retailer Relationship
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Shared Responsibility
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Strategic Consistency
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Supplier Alternatives
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Technology Adaptation
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Virtual Communication
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Willingness to Change
Ret: Competitive Advantage: Collaboration Influence
Ret: Competitive Advantage: Competitive Limitations
Ret: Competitive Advantage: Performance Measurement
Ret: Competitive Advantage: Strategic Collaboration
Ret: Competitive Advantage: Strategic Consideration
Ret: Competitive Advantage: Unarticulated Influence

Ret: Improvement Strategies: Enhanced Communication
Ret: Improvement Strategies: Improvement Strategies
Ret: Perception Differences: Collaboration Dynamics
Ret: Perception Differences: Collaboration Strength
Ret: Perception Differences: Differing Perspectives
Ret: Perception Differences: Perception Differences
Ret: Perception Differences: Perception Variability
Ret: Specific Practices: Supply Chain Communication
Ret: Collaboration Outcomes: Personal Achievements
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Approach Development
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Impact
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Issues
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Status
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Communication Issues
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Competitive Dynamics
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Consumer Preferences
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Cooperative Approach
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Data-Driven Insights
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Data-driven Planning
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Demand Understanding
Ret: Collaboration Practices: Differing Priorities
Supp: Barriers: Barri
Supp: Barriers to Collaboration: Challenge
Supp: Barriers to Collaboration: Understand
Supp: Barriers: Affordability
Supp: Barriers: AI Limitation
Supp: Barriers: Challenge Recognition
Supp: Barriers: Cold Chain Integrity
Supp: Barriers: Collaboration Barriers
Supp: Barriers: Collaboration Hindrance
Supp: Barriers: Collaboration Issue
Supp: Barriers: Collective Effort
Supp: Barriers: Communication Barriers
Supp: Barriers: Communication Issue
Supp: Barriers: Competition
Supp: Barriers: Competitive Environment
Supp: Barriers: Conflict
Supp: Barriers: Coordination Challenge
Supp: Barriers: Cultural Difference
Supp: Barriers: Custom Dissatisfaction
Supp: Barriers: Custom Understand
Supp: Barriers: Data Accessibility
Supp: Barriers: Data Concern
Supp: Barriers: Data Overload
Supp: Barriers: Data Reliability
Supp: Barriers: Data Sharing Issue

Supp: Barriers: Data Trust
Supp: Barriers: Delay
Supp: Barriers: Dependency
Supp: Barriers: Differ Value
Supp: Barriers: Documentation Challenge
Supp: Barriers: Economic Challenge
Supp: Barriers: Environmental Barriers
Supp: Barriers: External Challenge
Supp: Barriers: Financial Barriers
Supp: Barriers: Focus Issue
Supp: Barriers: Goal Alignment
Supp: Barriers: High Rebate
Supp: Barriers: Implied Barriers
Supp: Barriers: Incentive
Supp: Barriers: Ineffectiveness
Supp: Barriers: Inflation
Supp: Barriers: Information Delay
Supp: Barriers: Interpretation Barriers
Supp: Barriers: Issue
Supp: Barriers: Kpi Rigidity
Supp: Barriers: Lack Of Clarity
Supp: Barriers: Lack Of Commitment
Supp: Barriers: Lack Of Control
Supp: Barriers: Lack Of Effectiveness
Supp: Barriers: Lack Of Formality
Supp: Barriers: Lack Of Transparency
Supp: Barriers: Limited Collaboration
Supp: Barriers: Limited Flexibility
Supp: Barriers: Logistical Issue
Supp: Barriers: Loss of Interest
Supp: Barriers: Loyalty Challenge
Supp: Barriers: Market Disruption
Supp: Barriers: Merchandise Issue
Supp: Barriers: Misalignment
Supp: Barriers: Mismanagement
Supp: Barriers: Narrow Focus
Supp: Barriers: One-Sided Expectation
Supp: Barriers: Operational Disruption
Supp: Barriers: Ord Management
Supp: Barriers: Perception Of Improvement
Supp: Barriers: Personnel Change
Supp: Barriers: Physical Barriers
Supp: Barriers: Poor Decision
Supp: Barriers: Potential Barriers
Supp: Barriers: Price Increase
Supp: Barriers: Priorit

Supp: Barriers: Priority Conflict
Supp: Barriers: Product Availability
Supp: Barriers: Product Shortage
Supp: Barriers: Promotion Concern
Supp: Barriers: Resistance To Change
Supp: Barriers: Resource Issue
Supp: Barriers: Retail Size
Supp: Barriers: Rigidity
Supp: Barriers: Risk Management
Supp: Barriers: Sale Discrepancy
Supp: Barriers: Self Interest
Supp: Barriers: Shelf Space
Supp: Barriers: Shop Closure
Supp: Barriers: Scepticism
Supp: Barriers: Superficial Engagement
Supp: Barriers: Supply Chain Barriers
Supp: Barriers: Target Coherence
Supp: Barriers: Technical Issue
Supp: Barriers: Technology
Supp: Barriers: Theft
Supp: Barriers: Time Constraint
Supp: Barriers: Transparency
Supp: Barriers: Trust
Supp: Barriers: Trust Issue
Supp: Barriers: Unspecified Barriers
Supp: Barriers: Vendor Approval Delay
Supp: Barriers: Wi Fi Reliability
Supp: Collaboration Outcomes: Forecast
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Absence Of Practice
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Accountability
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Action
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Active Involvement
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Adaptation
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Advice
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Affordability
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Agility
Supp: Collaboration Practices: AI
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Alignment Issue
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Apprehension
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Approval Process
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Aspiration
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Authenticity
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Automation
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Awareness
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Barriers to Collaboration
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Basic Interaction

Supp: Collaboration Practices: Benefit Presentation
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Boundaries
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Brand Awareness
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Brand Recognition
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Brand Strength
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Breakdown
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Broad Understand
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Business Collaboration
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Business Objective
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Business Reality
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Capacity Constraint
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Cash Flow
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Cautious Approach
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Challenge
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Channel Collaboration
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Clarity
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Appetite
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Awareness
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Benefit
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Channel
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Context
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Desire
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Effectiveness
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Element
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Enhancement
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Exploration
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Facilitation
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Focus
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Hindrance
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Hurdle
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Importance
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Influence
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Interest
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Limitation
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Necessity
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Network
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Potential
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Promotion
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Quality
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Requirement
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Shortcomings
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Success
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Tool
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaboration Variability
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collaborative Approach
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Collective Effort

Supp: Collaboration Practices: Commitment
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Commitment Level
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Common Ground
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Communication Barrier
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Communication Challenge
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Community Focus
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Competency
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Competitive Advantage
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Competitive Edge
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Competitive Pricing
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Competitor Awareness
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Competitor
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Compliance
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Conference
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Confidentiality
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Confusion
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Consideration
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Constraint
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Consumer Awareness
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Consumer Consideration
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Cost
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Discussion
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Dual Perspective
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Enabl
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Insight
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Long-Term Relationship
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Negative Experience
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Partnership
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Positive Perception
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Relationship
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Retail Relationship
Supp: Collaboration Practices: Role
Supp: Competitive: Other
Supp: Competitive Advantage: Strategic Resource
Supp: Impact on Advantage: Other
Supp: Improvement: Other
Supp: Improvement Strategies: Mutual Benefit