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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES WITH EXPERIENCED EMPLOYEES IN THE JOURNEY TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE LEAN CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Global economic crises and the lack of proper resources provided opportunities for organizations to think of new concepts and models to enhance their capabilities. The Lean Culture (LC) has been a widely used concept for those requirements as it eliminates waste without additional resource requirements. Introducing the Lean Culture concept is simple, but sustaining the Lean Culture is challenging for any organization. The purpose of this study is to investigate the opportunities and challenges with employee experience for establishing a Sustainable Lean Culture (SLC) in a manufacturing organization. This study was based on a mixed-method research approach, focusing on a structured questionnaire, an interview, and focus groups. Data was collected through the selection of 110 employees, six interviews, and two focus groups within the organization. Relationships were analyzed with correlation analysis and regression analysis using SPSS software. The results showed that nine factors (respect for people, knowledge sharing, motivation, business environment, continuous improvements, value, perfection, empowerment, and engagement) positively correlate with employee experience to the perception of SLC. In addition, five factors (attracting and retaining talent, resistance to change, mentorship, skill utilization, and teamwork) were identified as challenges for the organization toward SLC. Future research is required in more organizations in the same industry to generalize the results, which may be extended to determine different factors influencing SLC with the employee experience. The results provided a useful indication and a better understanding of employee experience and factors towards SLC. This study sheds light on understanding the Lean culture of the organization and its influence on the employee's experience and bridges the gap of research in understanding the impact of an employee experience on SLC in the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry.

Key Words: Lean, Organizational culture, Sustainable Lean culture, Employee experience

1. Introduction

Global economic crises and the lack of proper resources have provided opportunities for organizations to think of new concepts and models to enhance their capabilities. Employee experience is an important factor to sustain the culture of an organization and experience employees are more familiar with the organization's culture, and structure of the organization and understand their job roles and the opportunity to them perform better than any others by providing innovative concepts to the organization (Stephen et al., 2016). However, the relationship between employee experience and organizational performance is positive in general but some studies indicate that individual performance decrease with the increase in working experience in the same organization (Bartłomiejczuk & Jin, 2015).

Lean is a widely used concept in product and service sectors with various definitions among researchers (Bhamu & Singh Sangwan, 2014). The main thrust of Lean concepts is the total elimination of all types of waste in all processes by all organizational members at all levels (Womack et al., 1990). Lean culture (LC) is a philosophy that requires a long-term commitment from all levels of an organization to achieve better outcomes (Hackler et al., 2019).

ABC is a fully Sri Lankan own pharmaceutical manufacturing company with long years of experience as a leader in this industry. More than 500 employees represent different generations and more than 50% of employees have more than six years of experience within the organization. The lean concept is introduced to the organization by focusing to reduce the cost through continuous improvement and eliminating waste in every process to win competitive advantages in the industry.

However, with time organization has faced more difficulties to sustain the LC within the premises. Therefore, this study attempt to bridge and understand the connection between employee long years of experience and sustainable lean culture (SLC). Many previous findings have mentioned the employee factors related to the SLC (Liker, 2004). However, as per the authors' best knowledge, there are no studies available to identify how the employee's long years of experience create opportunities and challenges to implement the SLC. Therefore researcher identifies the research gap as a lack of understanding about the impact of an employee experience on the SLC and the researcher's main focus is to identify employee perception of the factors that indicate SLC whether opportunity or challenge with their experience.

This research study addresses the following research objectives:

- To examine how employees with different years of experience perceive the different factors of SLC.
- To identify how years of experience influence opportunities and challenges to establish the SLC.

2. Literature Review

Organizations can introduce any concept of the organization by focusing the improvement. But sustaining the concept is a challenge for any organization in any environment. 14 principles explain how Toyota sustains the LC and the importance of

each principle to sustain the LC. It should be the objective of an organization that has a balanced plan to improve SLC by focusing on continuous improvement and aligning with corporate goals (Liker, 2004).

Employees Tenure - Longer-tenured employees are more familiar with the organization's culture and structure of the organization than the shorter-tenured employees as well as understand their job roles. Organizational support and commitment are important to employee performance with their long tenure (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Business Environment - The business environment supports to influence of operations and performance of enterprises in general and the human touch is the most important factor to run the enterprises. Job creation and employment generation are important to any organization in any industry and any economic environment. Some industries attract employees with their financial and non-financial benefits while some organizations attract employees with rapid growth and performance in the business (Titus et al., 2013).

Employee Engagement - The significance of employee work commitment and engagement with an organization for their work is positive relationship is established (Nazir & Islam, 2017). Enhancing employee engagement with talent recognition, creating a career plan, and redesigning their jobs suit to employees, and fair treatment is important and there is a direct effect on employee engagement (Chandani et al., 2016).

Knowledge sharing - Exchange of employees' experience, knowledge, ideas, skills, and information regarding a product or procedure. Sharing existing knowledge among the staff would enjoy better performance (Serrat, 2017). Employee tenure ranges are positively related to knowledge sharing, and creativity and they play a major role in the organization (Gilson et al., 2013).

Mentorship - Transferring their knowledge to train and mentor other employees in the organization to accelerate learning and development skills in individuals. Transformational and transactional leadership behaviors are positively related to employee job satisfaction (Asencio, 2016).

Motivation - Employee motivation is related to their daily job, and it shows the level of energy, creativity, and commitment they bring to their jobs as well as psychological strength and the direction toward the desired goal (Zaki & Norazman, 2019). Each employee has their way of self-motivation and it's important to identify how to motivate each employee to increase employee performance and organizational performance.

Respect for people - One of the key fundamental principles in Lean implementations is respect for people (RFP) and the failure of RFP is one of the main causes of failure in Lean implementations. Successful lean organizations are managing the environment with mutual respect by focusing on SLC (Coetzee et al., 2019). Toyota's successful management philosophy RFP is one of its major principles when an organization needs to change or improve. A lack of respect for people indicates a major reason for the failure of Lean sustainability in any context (Coetzee et al., 2019).

Teamwork - Teamwork helps collaborative and shared activity by creating new development opportunities and increasing individual and team performance while achieving desired objectives (Hanaysha, 2016). In general, some teams are successful, and others are not. To be a successful team, the organization must learn and identify essential factors to create successful teamwork. (Tarricone & Luca, 2002)

Shared vision - A shared vision is a collective goal and indicates the path to a sustainable organization's future. It focused on a common strategic direction to all levels (top to bottom) to avoid deviation from goals and inconsistent viewpoints about organizational management and contributes to improving engagement within the teams, processes, or employees to provide a solution to conflicts related to resource exchange in an organization (Mohd Adnan & Valliappan, 2019).

Empowering - This is one of the main concepts in lean manufacturing is positive influences on employee attitudes and productivity which enhances organizational performance (de Treville & Antonakis, 2006). Empowering is positively affected by quality outcomes, effectiveness, safety, and work efficiency. (Goedhart et al., 2017).

Continuous improvement(Kaizen) - Standardization is one of the powerful tools that can be applied to continuous improvement in an organization. It helps to streamline existing workflows by focusing next level. Improvements can be small, low cost, low-risk involvement, and easy implementation into the existing processes. PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle also called the Deming cycle is important to enhance the existing standard to the next level (Liker, 2004; Míkva et al., 2016).

Generation gap - Employee generation is unique in its behavioral characteristics. This can be a challenge for any organization to manage the generation of employees. Individuals in their age 20s and individuals in age 40s are differentiated by their value systems (Lewis & Wescott, 2017).

Retaining star employees - Talented employees are valuable to the organization and a retention plan is very important with considering the employee impact on an organization. The impact can be affected in several ways and understanding individual value is the key for any organization (Aguinis & Bradley, 2015).

Skill utilization and job crafting - Skills and talent development for employees is one of the most significant retention factors in an organization shown in an international study (Hay, 2002). Lean culture is believed to use multi-skills such as traditional manufacturing concepts or its improvements through management activities which encourages to share their skills in decision-making processes while creating new opportunities (Cullinane et al., 2013).

Resistant to change - Long-tenured employees are more familiar with existing processes and procedures as well as follow the norms and beliefs. Adjustment to change is a common difficulty faced by long-tenured employees at the workplace. In addition, lack of trust in new concepts, inability to see its work performance, lack of understanding of new technologies, and lack of applying new tools are some other indicators to resist change (Cullinane et al., 2013). The Decision-making process without employee participation, lack of understanding between employees and managers, and lack of formal training lead the employee to resistance to change (R. Jadhav et al., 2014).

2.1. Hypotheses

Human behavior is the main factor to create a culture in the organization and the researcher has focused on how those factors are connected to the SLC. Employee perception of the SLC is the dependent variable in this study while employee years of service are presented as the independent variable in this study. Hypotheses were developed to test the data analysis and measure the validity and reliability of the research question as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Details of hypotheses

Factor	Null hypotheses (H_0)	Alternative hypotheses (H_1)
Respect to people	H1₀ : There is no significant effect on the 'respect to people' of lean sustainability by the employee experience.	H1₁ : There is a significant effect on the 'respect to people' of lean sustainability by the employee experience.
Knowledge sharing	H2₀ : There is no significant effect on 'knowledge sharing' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H2₀ : There is a significant effect on 'knowledge sharing' of lean sustainability by employee experience.
Continuous improvements	H3₀ : There is no significant effect on 'continuous improvements' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H3₀ : There is a significant effect on 'continuous improvements' of lean sustainability by employee experience.
Engagement'	H4₀ : There is no significant effect on 'engagement' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H4₀ : There is no significant effect on 'engagement' of lean sustainability by employee experience.
Motivation	H5₀ : There is no significant effect on 'motivation' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H5₀ : There is a significant effect on 'motivation' of lean sustainability by employee experience.
Business environment	H6₀ : There is no significant effect on the 'business environment' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H6₀ : There is a significant effect on the 'business environment' of lean sustainability by employee experience.
Value	H7₀ : There is no significant effect on the 'value' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H7₀ : There is a significant effect on the 'value' of lean sustainability by employee experience.
Perfection	H8₀ : There is no significant effect on the 'perfection' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H8₀ : There is a significant effect on the 'perfection' of lean sustainability by employee experience.

Empowerment	H9₀ : There is no significant effect on the 'empowerment' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H9₀ : There is a significant effect on the 'empowerment' of lean sustainability by employee experience.
Mentorship	H10₀ : There is no significant effect on 'mentorship' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H10₀ : There is a significant effect on 'mentorship' of lean sustainability by employee experience.
Teamwork	H11₀ : There is no significant effect on the 'teamwork' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H11₀ : There is no significant effect on the 'teamwork' of lean sustainability by employee experience.
Resistant to change	H12₀ : There is no significant effect on the 'resistant to change' of lean sustainability by employee experience.	H12₀ : There is a significant effect on the 'resistant to change' of lean sustainability by employee experience.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

The researcher has constructed a conceptual framework for continuing the research as indicated in Figure 1. Considering the context of the concerned organization, the researcher has selected 13 factors that indicate employees' perceptions of the SLC.

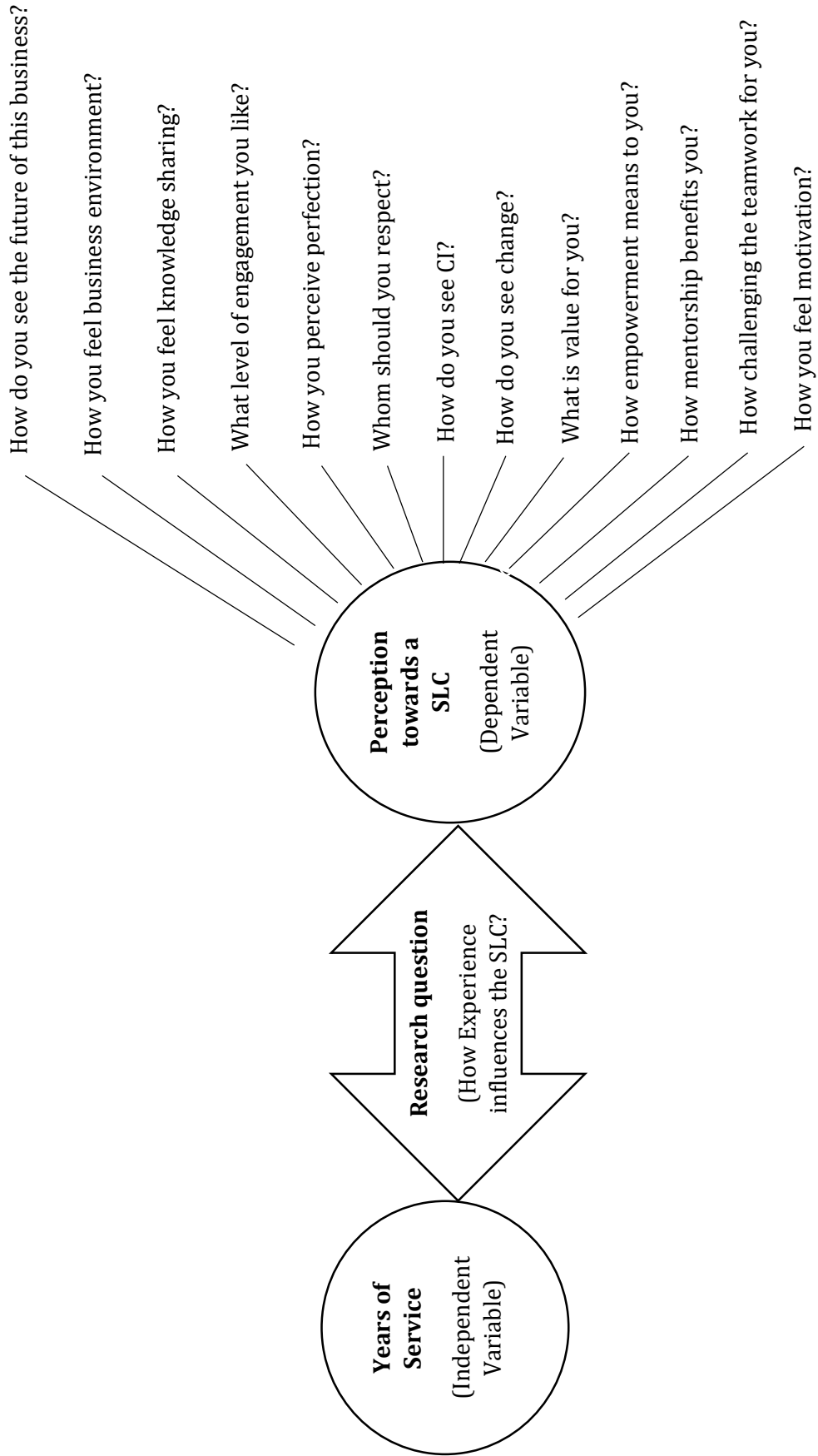


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

The researchers used mix method research approach to conduct this research. The target population for this study includes all the departments in the organization without marketing and sales with includes 250 employees. Reports from MIS were used to select the 110 sample employees in each department in the organization. A stratified random sampling technique was used in this study to select employees in each department. Ten percent (10%) or more employees were selected from all the departments of the organization covering all managers, executives, supervisors, and the general staff in the organization. The questionnaire includes 50 Likert scale items. A Likert-type scale was used and the respondents select one of five options: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, or Strongly agree.

In addition, there are seven semi-structured interviews are conducted. The selection of participants is done as a convenience Sample. The sample was targeted at six employees within the organization and one former employee with more than ten years of experience in the organization.

The researcher conducted the focus group study and the selection of participants is done as a convenience sample representing two generations as Baby Boomers and Millennials. Internal system reports were used to identify the generation of each employee. Four employees are selected for Baby Boomers and five employees are selected for millennial groups.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data improves and strengthen the rigor and enrich the finding of any research. In addition, the triangulation of methods enhances the results by testing with alternative interpretations of the data.

In this study, the researcher used various tools to analyze statistical data. Microsoft XL Software is used to visualize data such as bar charts and graphs. SPSS software version 21 is used for correlation analysis and multivariate regression with one-way multivariate analysis of variance (one-way MANOVA) to identify relations among the variables. Hypotheses are evaluated using the above tests to determine whether the hypotheses in this research are supported. Content analysis is used to analyze the interview data and focus group data in this research.

4. Results and Discussion

The results are presented addressing the objectives of the research. Descriptive analysis and inferential statistics have been used in this analysis. The researcher used one independent variable and multiple dependent variables to conduct the research. The intensity and direction of two variables in a dataset are determined via correlation analysis. Through this analysis, the researcher expected to evaluate the correlation coefficient that how it impacts to change of one variable and how changes the other one.

The reliability of the hypotheses is very important, and the researcher used a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (one-way MANOVA) in this research. Multivariate regression analysis is a technique that helps to measure the degree to which independent variables and various dependent variables are linearly related to each

other. The multivariate Tests table 2 and Tests of Between-Subjects Effects table 3 was also used to measure the reliability of the hypotheses in this study.

Table 2: Multivariate Tests

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Service	Pillai's Trace	.632	1.956	36.000	264.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.478	2.009	36.000	254.824	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	.876	2.060	36.000	254.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	.550	4.032 ^c	12.000	88.000	.000

As a result, the test **Multivariate Tests** table 2 described the significant value as .000, which means $p < .05$. Therefore, the researcher can conclude that factors of employee perception towards SLC were significantly dependent on years of experience ($p < .05$). Table 3 shows the equality of means from all the responses and describes the significance level of each factor. The sum of squares measures the deviation of data points around the mean value and the higher sum of squares indicates a large variability within the data set. P-value ≤ 0.05 indicates the differences between the means are statistically significant. If the P-value > 0.05 then the differences between the means are not statistically significant.

Table 3: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Service	Motivation	.360	3	.120	.776	.000	.334
	Respect to people	.632	3	.411	1.417	.000	.525
	Value	.378	3	.126	.553	.000	.467
	Perfection	.322	3	.107	.563	.000	.427
	Business Environment	.851	3	.617	2.908	.000	.393
	Empowerment	1.609	3	.536	2.136	.000	.362
	Engagement	1.121	3	.707	3.307	.000	.393
	Continues Improvement	.770	3	.457	1.684	.000	.450
	Teamwork	1.217	3	.072	.310	.073	.010
	Knowledge Sharing	1.049	3	.350	1.343	.000	.340
	Mentorship	2.012	3	.671	2.792	.087	.079
	Readiness to change	1.591	3	.197	1.242	.121	.037

Content analysis is used to analyze the interview data and focus group data to enhance the findings of this research.

4.1. Hypotheses test results

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Respect to people' was 0.549 which is a significant positive moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.000 which is < 0.05

Significance level	p -value = 0.000	0.01	>	p -value	Reject the H1₀
$\alpha = 0.01$				(0.000)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Knowledge sharing' was 0.389 which is a significant positive moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.000 which is < 0.05

Significance level	p -value = 0.000	0.01	>	p -value	Reject the H2₀
$\alpha = 0.01$				(0.000)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Continuous improvements' was 0.418 which is a significant positive moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.000 which is < 0.05

Significance level	p -value = 0.000	0.01	>	p -value	Reject the H3₀
$\alpha = 0.01$				(0.000)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Engagement' was 0.269 which is a significant positive moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.000 which is < 0.05

Significance level	p -value = 0.008	0.05	>	p -value	Reject the H4₀
$\alpha = 0.05$				(0.008)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Motivation' was .373 which is a significant positive low correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.000 which is < 0.05

Significance level	p -value = 0.008	0.05	>	p -value	Reject the H5₀
$\alpha = 0.05$				(0.008)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Business environment' was .537 which is a significant positive moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.000 which is < 0.05

Significance level	p -value = 0.000	0.05	>	p -value	Reject the H6₀
$\alpha = 0.05$				(0.000)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Value' was .327 which is a significant positive moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.000 which is < 0.05

Significance level	p -value = 0.009	0.05	>	p -value	Reject the H7₀
$\alpha = 0.05$				(0.009)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Perfection' was .379 which is a significant positive moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.000 which is < 0.05

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$	$p\text{-value} = 0.008$	$0.05 >$	$p\text{-value}$	Reject the H8₀
			(0.008)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Empowerment' was .325 which is a significant positive moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.000 which is < 0.05

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$	$p\text{-value} = 0.008$	$0.05 >$	$p\text{-value}$	Reject the H9₀
			(0.008)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Mentorship' was -.065 which is a negative low correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.087 which is > 0.05

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$	$p\text{-value} = 0.179$	$0.05 <$	$p\text{-value}$	Accept the H9₀
			(0.179)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Teamwork' was -.149 which is a significant negative moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.073 which is > 0.05

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$	$p\text{-value} = 0.163$	$0.05 <$	$p\text{-value}$	Accept the H11₀
			(0.163)	

The correlation value between employee experience and 'Readiness to change' was -.314 which is a significant negative moderate correlation.

The multivariate regression analysis shows a significant value of 0.121 which is > 0.05

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$	$p\text{-value} = 0.137$	$0.05 <$	$p\text{-value}$	Accept the H12₀
			(0.137)	

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The researcher has examined how employee experience influence opportunities and challenges to establish an SLC. The researcher has found 14 main factors that influence the employee perception of SLC through the literature reviews. This study analyzed employee perception of all the factors that indicate the SLC and how they connect with the employee experience. There are nine factors identified as opportunities for the organization and five factors identified as challenges for the organization. The highest positive correlation represents respect for people with the employee experience in the organization. The results of the study show that knowledge sharing, motivation, business environment, continuous improvements, value, perfection, empowerment, and engagement are positively correlated with the employee's years of experience.

In addition, the results show the areas of opportunity for further improvement for the employees at the next level. Employee experiences are made up of a specific set of environments and variables, and the organization should have invested considerable time and resources to fulfill the existing gap to enhance performance by focusing on converting employees to become an experienced pool of talented employees.

5.2. Limitation

There are a few limitations that the researcher has experienced during this study.

Firstly, the study is limited to one organization in the Sri Lankan pharmaceutical industry.

Secondly, the study was collecting data from each department apart from the marketing and sales departments.

5.3. Recommendations

This organization has satisfaction levels of employee motivation and still has opportunities to improve employee motivation. The researcher recommends having a safe and friendly environment for employees to perform their work. The organization should have a plan to increase engagement with the employee and it helps to increase employee loyalty to the organization. HR department engagement is essential to individual development and a development plan should discuss with individuals with regular monitoring and evaluation plan is essential for continuous enhancement. Individual talent is different from each other, and the researcher is recommended to have a proper process for identifying talented employees in the organization.

In addition, a long year of service shows their loyalty to both the organization and position. When employers understand and recognize this, they may feel more comfortable keeping employees around. Furthermore, employees understand the stability of the job and they don't have much worry about their career or position in the organization with employer commitment. Long years of service also have a set of disadvantages for the organization. Employees may lose interest in the job and they may only do what's on the list and not go above and beyond. Therefore, The researcher is recommended to offer cross-functional training opportunities where an employee has the opportunity to learn new skills to help them to advance in their career.

The researcher recommends participating with all stakeholders when the organization introduces a new concept, new process, technology transfer, or any other improvements and it will be a good process to share knowledge among them. It will help employees to understand the process and create communication flow from top to bottom and employee participation in the decision-making process. The researcher recommends regular training, job rotation, and regular updates to avoid unexpected resistant issues and add value and improve opportunities by focusing on a long-term plan.

5.4. Opportunities for further research

The researcher is offering several recommendations for future research based on the results obtained from this study and its limitations. This study is based on one manufacturing organization in the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry in Sri Lanka. Pharmaceutical manufacturing is a rapidly growing industry in the country and there are a lot of new manufacturers focusing on the business. Future research can be conducted in several pharmaceutical manufacturing organizations in different geographic locations in the country. In addition, this study used a few factors to identify a relationship with a sustainable lean culture where further research can use more factors to conduct the same study to enhance existing findings in SLC.

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