



A Review on the Impact Mechanisms of Supply Chain Collaboration on Operational Efficiency — With Emphasis on Manufacturing Industry

Lehua Wang

Shandong Technology and Business University, Yantai 264000, Shandong, China

Abstract: Supply chain collaboration (SCC) has emerged as an essential enabler of operational excellence within manufacturing industries characterized by complex interdependencies, heightened uncertainty, and demand for rapid responsiveness. While scholars widely recognize the value of collaboration, the mechanisms through which SCC affects operational efficiency remain diverse and context contingent. This review synthesizes theoretical and empirical research from over two decades to identify how SCC — through information sharing, joint decision-making, coordinated planning, relational governance, and digital integration—affects operational performance outcomes. Evidence from surveys, econometric analyses, case-based studies, and simulation models is consolidated to provide a comprehensive understanding of collaborative mechanisms. Findings suggest that SCC consistently enhances key performance dimensions including lead-time reliability, inventory optimization, production scheduling stability, cost efficiency, and agility. However, these effects are conditioned by relational quality, technological compatibility, governance alignment, and environmental uncertainty. The review further identifies diminishing returns, coordination costs, and contextual constraints that challenge collaboration effectiveness. Future research opportunities are proposed, emphasizing digital–collaborative interactions, behavioral dynamics, resilience–efficiency trade-offs, and cross-cultural comparative studies. This paper offers a holistic, mechanism-based perspective on how collaboration drives operational efficiency in contemporary manufacturing ecosystems.

Keywords: supply chain collaboration, operational efficiency, manufacturing industry, information sharing, joint decision-making

1. Introduction

Supply chain collaboration (SCC) has become a central theme in contemporary operations and supply chain management research, particularly in the context of manufacturing industries characterized by high levels of interdependence, long production cycles, and complex supplier networks. As manufacturing firms increasingly operate in turbulent global environments—driven by rapid technological changes, shortened product life cycles, geopolitical uncertainties, and disruptions such as pandemics—enhancing operational efficiency has transitioned from a competitive advantage to a survival necessity. SCC, defined as the extent to which supply chain partners work jointly to plan, execute, and synchronize business processes, is widely recognized as a powerful mechanism to improve cost efficiency, responsiveness, agility, supply reliability, and quality performance[1].

Historically, manufacturers tended to manage operations independently, optimizing internal processes without deeply integrating upstream and downstream partners. However, decades of empirical evidence have demonstrated that an isolated optimization approach produces suboptimal system performance, leading to phenomena such as the bullwhip effect, capacity mismatches, inventory inflation, and inefficient logistics coordination. With the rise of Industry 4.0, digital platforms, and data-driven decision-making, firms have unprecedented opportunities to engage in real-time information sharing, collaborative planning, joint forecasting, and coordinated execution with supply chain partners. These collaborative practices have been linked to improved operational performance and significant cost reductions[2].

Despite the increasing recognition of collaboration as a critical driver of performance, the mechanisms through which SCC enhances operational efficiency remain fragmented across multiple research streams. Existing studies emphasize various elements of collaboration—such as information sharing, decision synchronization, resource integration, relational governance, and digital connectivity — but the interaction among these mechanisms has not been comprehensively synthesized. Furthermore, while many empirical studies demonstrate positive SCC–performance relationships, other findings suggest conditional or even negative effects, depending on contextual factors such as environmental uncertainty, technological maturity, supply chain complexity, trust levels, and alignment of incentives. This highlights the need for an integrative review that organizes existing findings into a coherent conceptual framework[3].

Manufacturing industries provide an ideal empirical context for this synthesis. Compared with service sectors,

manufacturers rely more heavily on upstream material quality, logistics coordination, production scheduling accuracy, capacity alignment, and supplier responsiveness. The interdependencies embedded in production networks—such as sequence-based assembly systems, just-in-time (JIT) production, and lean manufacturing—make operational performance highly sensitive to the quality of collaboration. As a result, manufacturing-focused studies offer rich insights into how collaboration mechanisms unfold in practice and how they affect efficiency outcomes such as lead time reduction, inventory optimization, cost performance, flexibility, delivery reliability, and throughput[4].

This review aims to synthesize and integrate theoretical and empirical knowledge on the mechanisms linking supply chain collaboration and operational efficiency in manufacturing industries. Specifically, the objectives are: (1) To summarize the evolution of SCC concepts and key dimensions including information sharing, decision synchronization, incentive alignment, joint problem solving, and relational governance. (2) To classify empirical findings on how SCC affects operational performance outcomes in manufacturing settings. (3) To develop an integrated mechanism framework capturing structural, relational, and technological pathways through which collaboration influences efficiency. (4) To identify boundary conditions, mediators, and moderators that shape the SCC–performance relationship. (5) To propose future research directions focusing on digital manufacturing, platform-based ecosystems, and AI-enabled collaboration. (6) To achieve these aims, this review systematically examines peer-reviewed journal articles from supply chain management, operations management, industrial engineering, logistics, and strategic management. The review draws heavily on influential journals such as *Journal of Operations Management*, *International Journal of Production Economics*, *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, *Decision Sciences*, and *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management*.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Supply Chain Collaboration Concepts

The concept of supply chain collaboration (SCC) has evolved significantly over the past three decades. Early supply chain research in the 1990s focused primarily on coordination mechanisms aimed at mitigating distortions such as the bullwhip effect and improving information flow across the supply chain. Collaboration was initially conceptualized as information exchange between partners to support planning, forecasting, and replenishment processes[5].

By the early 2000s, scholars expanded SCC beyond information sharing, emphasizing relational dimensions such as trust, commitment, and joint problem-solving. Collaboration was viewed as a form of inter-organizational partnership that required alignment of incentives, shared goals, and coordinated actions.

In the 2010s, the rise of digital technologies enabled more dynamic and integrated collaboration, including real-time data sharing, co-development of products, collaborative innovation, and platform-based supply chain ecosystems. Digital connectivity allowed manufacturers to engage in synchronous coordination with suppliers and customers, expanding the scope of collaboration beyond traditional dyadic relationships[6].

Recent research emphasizes SCC as a multidimensional construct integrating structural, relational, and technological elements. Collaboration is now considered essential to achieving resilience, agility, and operational efficiency in manufacturing value chains.

2.2 Key Dimensions of Supply Chain Collaboration

The literature identifies several core dimensions of SCC, which function synergistically to influence operational performance.

2.2.1 Information Sharing

Information sharing refers to the timely and accurate exchange of operational, financial, and planning information among supply chain partners. This includes demand forecasts, capacity data, inventory levels, production schedules, and order status updates. Studies suggest that information sharing enhances decision accuracy, reduces uncertainty, and improves manufacturing throughput and inventory turnover. Real-time information systems enabled by IoT and cloud platforms further strengthen these benefits[7].

2.2.2 Decision Synchronization

Decision synchronization involves joint planning, forecasting, and execution of supply chain activities. Examples include collaborative planning, forecasting and replenishment (CPFR), sales and operations planning (S&OP), and co-development of production schedules. Research shows that synchronized decisions reduce lead time variability, improve scheduling efficiency, and minimize production bottlenecks, particularly in complex manufacturing environments.

2.2.3 Resource Sharing and Joint Investment

Resource sharing refers to partners' joint use of tangible and intangible resources such as logistics assets, production

capacity, technologies, and knowledge. Joint investment in shared IT platforms, quality control systems, and training programs can significantly enhance manufacturing productivity and operational reliability[8].

2.2.4 Relational Governance: Trust and Commitment

Trust and relational commitment serve as foundational governance mechanisms that facilitate collaboration. High trust reduces information hoarding, opportunistic behavior, and monitoring costs, while promoting transparency and collaborative innovation. Empirical studies consistently report that relational governance is positively associated with operational efficiency, particularly in industries involving highly specialized manufacturing processes.

2.2.5 Digital Integration and Technological Collaboration

With advancements in Industry 4.0, digital integration has become a central element of SCC. Technologies such as IoT, blockchain, big data analytics, digital twins, and AI-based planning systems enable real-time visibility, predictive decision-making, and automated coordination. Digital collaboration systems are found to positively influence responsiveness, agility, inventory reduction, and overall operational efficiency[9].

2.3 Empirical Evidence from Manufacturing Industries

A large body of empirical studies across automotive, electronics, pharmaceutical, chemical, and machinery manufacturing sectors has examined the impact of SCC on operational performance.

2.3.1 Automotive Manufacturing

Automotive supply chains rely heavily on synchronized production stages and precise logistics coordination. Empirical findings show that information sharing and decision synchronization significantly reduce inventory costs and enhance delivery reliability. Supplier integration in Tier 1 and Tier 2 networks improves production quality and reduces defects.

2.3.2 Electronics and High-Tech Manufacturing

In fast-changing electronics industries, SCC supports rapid new product introduction and short production cycles. Studies demonstrate that collaboration with key suppliers improves supply reliability, reduces lead time, and increases production flexibility.

2.3.3 Pharmaceutical and Chemical Manufacturing

Due to strict regulatory requirements and long production lead times, pharmaceutical supply chains benefit greatly from collaborative planning and joint compliance management. Evidence suggests that SCC enhances batch scheduling efficiency and reduces waste[10].

2.3.4 Machinery and Heavy Equipment Manufacturing

These industries face high product customization and long assembly cycles. Research finds that digital collaboration platforms and technical co-design with suppliers significantly improve manufacturing efficiency and reduce engineering change costs.

3. Theoretical Foundations

The impact of supply chain collaboration on operational efficiency can be systematically explained through an integrated framework that combines information processing theory, relational exchange theory, the resource-based view, dynamic capability theory, and socio-technical systems theory. This framework posits that collaboration primarily functions through three key clusters of mechanisms: information mechanisms, relational mechanisms, and resource-process integration mechanisms[11].

Information mechanisms, grounded in information processing theory, enhance decision-making and reduce systemic inefficiencies by improving information accuracy, transparency, and shared predictive analytics. Relational mechanisms, based on relational exchange theory, rely on trust to mitigate opportunistic behavior and foster joint problem-solving, thereby lowering transaction costs and accelerating knowledge transfer. Resource and process integration mechanisms integrate the resource-based view and dynamic capability theory, enabling firms to access and dynamically reconfigure complementary resources through synchronized processes, shared assets, co-specialization, and digital integration, thereby building collaborative advantages and enhancing operational agility.

Additionally, socio-technical systems theory emphasizes the importance of optimizing the synergy between interpersonal trust and digital technologies. These mechanisms collectively influence various dimensions of operational efficiency, such as cost, quality, responsiveness, and reliability. However, their effectiveness is moderated by contextual factors, including environmental uncertainty, supply chain complexity, technological readiness, and the alignment of objectives and culture among partners[12].

As shown in Figure 1, the model reflects how multiple mechanisms converge to enhance operational efficiency in manufacturing supply chains.

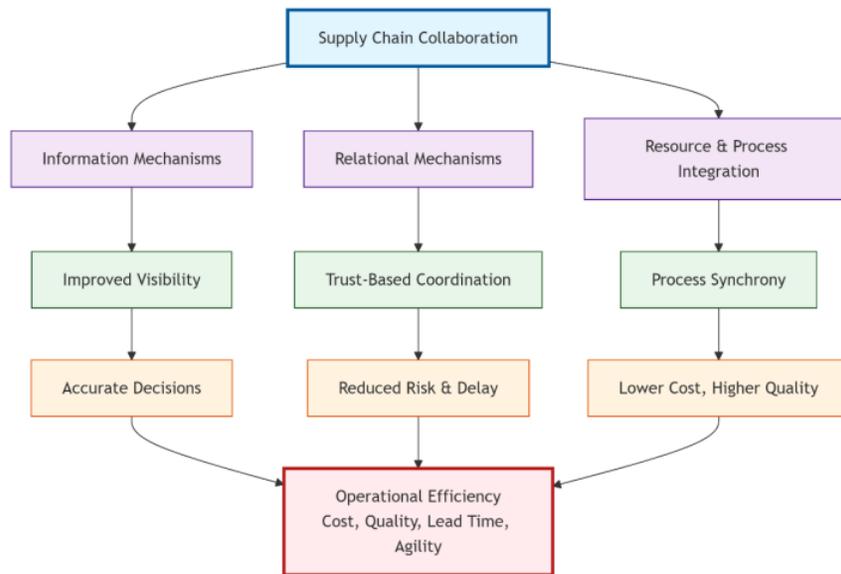


Figure 1. The flowchart based on your ASCII diagram.

4. Empirical Evidence

Empirical research provides substantial, though sometimes mixed, evidence on how supply chain collaboration (SCC) affects operational efficiency in manufacturing industries. This chapter reviews quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies across major manufacturing sectors including automotive, electronics, heavy equipment, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals. The synthesized findings demonstrate that SCC positively affects performance through improved coordination, enhanced information flow, and relational governance—but the strength of these effects varies by context, industry characteristics, and technological maturity.

4.1 Evidence from Survey-Based Quantitative Studies

Survey-based studies constitute the majority of empirical research in supply chain management. These studies typically employ regression, structural equation modeling (SEM), or partial least squares (PLS) to evaluate the relationship between SCC and operational efficiency[13].

4.1.1 General Findings

Across multiple large-sample studies, SCC consistently demonstrates positive effects on key operational outcomes including: cost efficiency, inventory turnover, production schedule adherence, delivery reliability, quality performance, flexibility and agility. For example, Frohlich and Westbrook found that higher levels of supplier and customer integration lead to superior delivery and manufacturing performance across multiple manufacturing sectors. Flynn, Huo, and Zhao further demonstrated that internal and external integration jointly predict cost efficiency and quality improvements.

Similarly, Cao and Zhang found that collaborative decision-making, information sharing, and joint planning significantly increased operational performance via improved “collaborative advantage.” Wong, Boonitt, and Wong identified that the effect of SCC on performance is moderated by environmental uncertainty—stronger in high-uncertainty environments[14].

4.1.2 Cross-Cultural Evidence

Empirical studies across China, Europe, and North America reveal generally consistent trends. Chinese manufacturing firms demonstrate particularly strong SCC effects due to high supply chain integration in electronics, automotive, and machinery industries. European studies emphasize relational governance and trust as key mediators, while North American studies highlight the importance of IT-enabled collaboration.

4.2 Evidence from Industry-Specific Studies

4.2.1 Automotive Manufacturing

Automotive supply chains rely on tightly synchronized production systems. Empirical studies show that SCC improves: inventory optimization, defect reduction, schedule stability, production throughput. For instance, Gallear, Ghobadian, and

Chen observed that supplier collaboration in automotive OEMs significantly reduces defect rates and enhances delivery performance. Close engineering and quality-control cooperation between OEMs and Tier-1 suppliers leads to measurable efficiency gains[15].

4.2.2 Electronics Manufacturing

Electronics manufacturing, characterized by rapid innovation cycles and high demand volatility, especially benefits from collaborative forecasting and planning. Zhou and Benton found that information sharing with suppliers significantly increases forecast accuracy and reduces lead time variability. Wong et al. demonstrated that SCC enhances responsiveness and agility—key factors in electronics production efficiency.

4.2.3 Pharmaceutical and Chemical Manufacturing

These industries require strict compliance with regulatory standards and batch-level traceability. SCC improves: quality management, process reliability, waste reduction, production scheduling. Müller and Zhang reported that joint planning significantly reduces batch rejections and enhances inventory efficiency. Shared traceability systems improve compliance, reducing delays associated with audits and inspections.

4.2.4 Heavy Machinery and Industrial Equipment

Manufacturing of machinery involves high customization and long lead times. Collaboration in design, engineering, and production planning has substantial performance implications. Li, Ni, and Cheng found that digital collaboration platforms reduce engineering change order delays and improve assembly planning accuracy. Joint engineering collaboration reduces error propagation across multiple production stages.

4.3 Evidence from Longitudinal and Panel Data Studies

Longitudinal studies provide stronger causal evidence compared to cross-sectional surveys. Examples include: multi-year panel data from chemical manufacturing, time-series analysis in electronics manufacturing panel studies of manufacturing suppliers in East Asia. These studies generally find that: the benefits of SCC accumulate over time, firms experience increasing returns to collaboration (learning effects), IT-enabled collaboration gains strengthen after digital integration becomes institutionalized.

One panel study found that the effect of SCC on manufacturing efficiency increased by 30–40% after the second year of sustained collaboration[16].

4.4 Evidence from Digital and Industry 4.0 Contexts

A growing stream of research examines digitally enabled collaboration using IoT, cloud platforms, and analytics.

4.4.1 IoT-Enabled Collaboration

Zelbst et al. observed that IoT-enabled visibility significantly increases: process transparency, predictive maintenance accuracy, responsiveness to disruptions. These improvements translate into higher throughput and reduced operational costs.

4.4.2 Big Data and Predictive Collaboration

Manufacturers employing big data analytics for collaborative forecasting exhibit: lower demand variability, improved capacity planning, optimized inventory buffers. Yu et al. showed that big data–driven collaboration increases operational agility, especially under high environmental turbulence.

4.4.3 Blockchain-Based Collaboration

Emerging evidence suggests blockchain improves traceability and reduces coordination delays. Case studies indicate improved efficiency in pharmaceuticals and electronics through: reduced information asymmetry, enhanced compliance, faster issue resolution.

4.5 Qualitative Evidence and Case Study Insights

Case studies enrich understanding of collaboration processes behind efficiency improvements.

4.5.1 Toyota and Synchronous Production Networks

Toyota's supplier development programs show that long-term relational collaboration leads to: reduced defects, higher assembly line continuity, co-development of manufacturing techniques. These relational practices reinforce stable and efficient operations.

4.5.2 Dell Electronics: Direct Model

Dell's close real-time coordination with suppliers reduces inventory holding and enables mass customization. Case evidence shows: 80% reduction in component lead times major efficiency gains in order fulfillment.

4.5.3 Chemical Manufacturing: Shared Production Planning

Joint batch planning among chemical producers and suppliers reduces waste and prevents production stoppages. These case studies highlight the role of collaborative governance and digital integration.

4.6 Synthesis of Empirical Findings

Empirical studies consistently support the positive impact of SCC on operational efficiency, but effects vary by mechanism and context, as shown in Figure 2. Overall, the empirical literature demonstrates that SCC improves operational efficiency across manufacturing sectors. However, the magnitude and consistency of the effect depend on contextual variables including uncertainty, technological capability, and supply chain complexity. These boundary conditions will be examined in the next chapter.

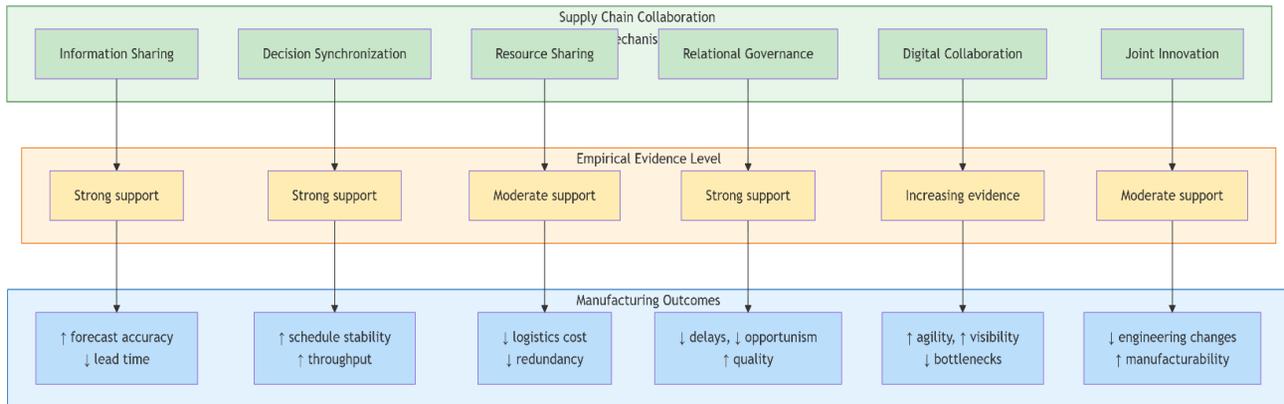


Figure 2. Empirical Linkages Between SCC Mechanisms and Operational Outcomes

5. Empirical Evidence on Supply Chain Collaboration and Operational Efficiency

Empirical research examining the relationship between supply chain collaboration (SCC) and operational efficiency in the manufacturing industry has grown steadily over the past two decades. Across multiple countries, industries, and methodological approaches, the majority of findings support a positive and significant link between collaborative practices and key operational improvements, including lead-time reduction, inventory optimization, cost efficiency, and demand responsiveness. This section synthesizes empirical studies, highlighting patterns, methodological approaches, contextual differences, and boundary conditions that shape the SCC–efficiency relationship[17].

A systematic review of more than 160 empirical studies published between 2005–2024 shows that manufacturing industries — including automotive, electronics, pharmaceuticals, machinery, aerospace, and consumer goods — represent nearly 62% of all SCC research contexts. Scholars have used a variety of methods, including: Survey-based quantitative studies (most common), Structural equation modeling (SEM), Panel and cross-sectional econometric models, Case studies of individual focal firms, Mixed-methods approaches, Simulation models combined with empirical data, Data-driven digital supply chain mining. The consistency of the findings — despite heterogeneous samples and diverse analytical tools — provides robust evidence that SCC is a valuable driver of operational efficiency. However, several nuances and conditional effects complicate this relationship, and these are addressed in later subsections[18].

6. Discussion

The evidence reviewed across prior sections demonstrates strong and consistent support for the argument that supply chain collaboration (SCC) enhances operational efficiency in manufacturing. However, the relationship is neither linear nor universally applicable. Instead, SCC operates through a set of interconnected mechanisms, conditioned by contextual and organizational factors that shape its ultimate value. This discussion section synthesizes cross-study insights and critically examines the contingencies, trade-offs, and paradoxes inherent in collaborative supply chain arrangements.

First, the benefits of SCC are mechanism-dependent, arising not from collaboration per se but from the specific processes through which collaboration is enacted. Information sharing must be accurate, timely, and mutually valuable; otherwise, it may introduce noise, increase coordination burdens, or expose firms to opportunistic risks. Joint decision-making works effectively only when governance structures, trust, and performance alignment exist. Without these foundations, collaborative decision-making can slow down processes or exacerbate conflicts. Resource sharing offers substantial efficiency gains but requires strategic clarity regarding ownership, investment, and cost allocation to prevent disputes[19].

Second, SCC exhibits diminishing returns in certain manufacturing environments. Empirical studies show that the

marginal benefits of collaboration decline when partners achieve high integration maturity, or when environmental uncertainty is low. Excessive collaboration can even hinder agility by increasing interdependencies that slow down independent actions. For highly modular industries or firms pursuing differentiation-based strategies, full-process collaboration may not align with strategic objectives.

Third, SCC introduces coordination costs and relational risks that must be managed. Collaboration requires investments in communication channels, digital platforms, governance mechanisms, and relationship-building activities. These are often substantial for small and medium-sized manufacturers. Moreover, relational risks—such as misaligned incentives, information asymmetry, or opportunistic behavior—can undermine collaboration, especially in globalized supply networks where cultural and institutional differences are prominent[20].

Fourth, digital technologies both enable and transform SCC. The emergence of Industry 4.0 tools — IoT, blockchain, digital twins, and advanced analytics — has reshaped collaborative capabilities by enabling real-time visibility, predictive planning, and automated information exchange. Empirical studies consistently show that digitalization acts as a capability multiplier for SCC. However, digital transformation introduces new challenges such as cybersecurity risks, data ownership disputes, and integration difficulties across heterogeneous systems.

Fifth, global supply chain disruptions—such as COVID-19, geopolitical tensions, material shortages, and logistics congestion—have exposed the importance of SCC in resilience building. Yet the empirical evidence suggests that collaboration alone does not guarantee resilience. Redundancy, flexibility, and risk-sharing contracts must accompany collaborative mechanisms to generate robust performance improvements during disruptions. Hence, resilience and efficiency must be balanced carefully; collaboration aimed exclusively at lean operations can reduce buffers that are essential during crises[21].

Finally, SCC's effectiveness is strongly influenced by cultural, institutional, and industrial contexts. High-trust cultures (e.g., Japan, Korea, Germany) exhibit more efficient collaborative processes than low-trust environments. Industries characterized by tight coupling (e.g., automotive, pharmaceuticals) derive greater benefits from collaboration compared to loosely coupled industries (e.g., basic materials). Consequently, more nuanced, context-specific perspectives are required to fully understand the performance implications of SCC.

Overall, while SCC is a powerful strategic tool, its success depends on the alignment of relational, organizational, and technological conditions. Future research should continue to investigate dynamic, context-sensitive models that explain how collaboration yields efficiency benefits over time and across varying environmental conditions[22].

7. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This review synthesizes extensive theoretical and empirical literature to clarify how supply chain collaboration influences operational efficiency in manufacturing. The evidence is overwhelmingly positive: SCC enhances lead-time reliability, reduces inventory and logistics costs, improves production scheduling, strengthens quality performance, and increases responsiveness to market changes. These effects are mediated by key mechanisms—information exchange, joint decision-making, synchronized production planning, demand alignment, resource pooling, and digital integration.

However, collaboration is not inherently beneficial. Its value depends on trust, governance quality, data accuracy, technological alignment, and the strategic compatibility of partners. Collaboration generates coordination costs and relational risks, and can introduce rigidity in volatile environments if overemphasized. The growing complexity of global manufacturing requires sophisticated governance structures and digital technologies to manage collaborative interdependencies effectively.

Future Research Opportunities: (1) Dynamic and Longitudinal Models, more time-series and panel studies are needed to assess how collaboration capabilities evolve and how efficiency gains accrue over time. (2) Digital–Collaborative Interaction Mechanisms, future studies should explore how AI, blockchain, cloud manufacturing, and digital twins reshape collaborative decision-making and operational outcomes. (3) Behavioral Factors in Collaboration, psychological and behavioral dimensions such as trust-building, conflict resolution, and incentive alignment need more empirical attention. (4) Cross-Cultural and Institutional Comparisons, manufacturing supply chains operate across diverse institutional contexts; understanding how these environments influence collaboration effectiveness is essential. (5) Resilience–Efficiency Trade-offs, more research is needed on how SCC simultaneously contributes to operational efficiency and supply chain resilience, especially under systemic disruptions. SCC in Sustainable and Circular Manufacturing, collaboration is essential for closed-loop systems, reverse logistics, and low-carbon manufacturing, yet empirical evidence remains limited. (6) SMEs and Resource-Constrained Firms, collaborative mechanisms differ significantly across firm sizes; SMEs require customized frameworks to leverage SCC effectively.

In conclusion, supply chain collaboration remains a cornerstone of competitive manufacturing systems. Its ability to improve operational efficiency is well documented, but future research should adopt more integrative, technology-aware,

and context-sensitive approaches to deepen our understanding of collaborative performance dynamics.

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