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An Analysis of the Role of Supplier Relationship Management in Enhancing Procurement Performance in the Mining Industry: A Case Study of FQM Trident Zambia

***Anderson Mbewe., and Dr. Peter Lubosi**

Directorate of Distance Education and Open Learning The Copperbelt University

***Corresponding Author**

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the role of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) in enhancing procurement performance at FQM Trident Zambia, a major mining company. Drawing on survey data from 96 procurement professionals, the research identifies the most prevalent SRM practices, assesses their impact on core procurement performance indicators, and explores implementation challenges. The findings show that long-term contracts (100%), strategic partnerships (87.5%), and regular feedback and communication (81.3%) are the most widely adopted SRM practices. Statistical analysis using chi-square tests revealed a significant positive association between SRM integration and cost efficiency ($\chi^2 = 13.12$, $p = 0.041$), as well as delivery timeliness ($\chi^2 = 17.09$, $p = 0.009$). Specifically, 62.5% of respondents rated procurement cost efficiency as "Good," and 56.2% rated delivery timeliness as "Good." Product quality was rated "Good" by 56.2% of respondents, though the association with SRM integration was not statistically significant. The majority (62.5%) believed SRM had "significantly improved" overall procurement performance. Key challenges cited were limited supplier cooperation (37.5%), lack of internal capacity or training (25%), and resistance to change (25%). The study concludes that while SRM has delivered measurable benefits in cost and delivery, further advances in quality and reliability will require greater investment in training, process standardization, and supplier engagement. These findings offer data-driven guidance for mining organizations aiming to achieve procurement excellence through SRM.

Keywords: Supplier Relationship Management, Procurement performance,Cost efficiency, Delivery timeliness, Supplier engagement, Product quality

INTRODUCTION

The mining industry in Zambia is still a very important part of the country's social and economic structure. It adds a lot to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), creates jobs, and brings in money from exports (PwC, 2022; First Quantum Minerals Annual Report, 2024). The sector's effects are most obvious in places like North-Western Province, where projects like First Quantum Minerals (FQM) Trident Project have led to local growth and better infrastructure (Minihan & Philips, 2018; First Quantum Minerals Annual Report, 2024). As the mining industry grows, it becomes more complicated and depends more on efficient procurement systems. This means that the effectiveness of these systems is key to long-term growth in the industry. For mining operations to run smoothly, they need to be able to buy materials and services on time and at the best prices. The success of mining projects depends on being able to keep production going, keep people safe and follow environmental rules. All of these things are closely related to how well procurement works (Chileshe, 2022; Chama & Phiri, 2025). Mining supply chains often depend on specialized suppliers

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for heavy equipment, chemicals, and technical services. To reduce the risks that come with delays, price changes, and inconsistent quality, strong procurement practices are needed (Avornu, 2021).

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) has become a critical strategy for companies around the world that want to improve their supply chains and be ready for changes in the market. According to Sharif et al. (2023) and Al-Abdallah, Abdallah, and Bany Hamdan (2014), SRM is a systematic way to build and manage partnerships with suppliers to create value, encourage innovation, and benefit both parties. Traditional procurement models focus on short-term exchanges, but SRM focuses on long-term, collaborative relationships based on trust, shared goals, and open communication (Tegbee, Ozurumba, & Duru, 2024; Mettler & Rohner, 2009).

Empirical research across various sectors has demonstrated that effective Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) can improve procurement and organisational performance through multiple mechanisms. These are better risk management, shorter lead times, better supplier responsiveness, and better product quality (Mahoro & Dushimimana, 2024; Mettler & Rohner, 2009; Al-Abdallah et al., 2014). Supplier segmentation, regular performance reviews, joint process improvements, and information-sharing initiatives are all examples of SRM practices that help make sure that the capabilities of suppliers match the company's strategic goals (Mitchell, 2025; Rajab, Ngugi & Kiarie, 2021). Companies can then better prepare for changes in the market, encourage innovation from suppliers, and get ahead of their competitors (Sharif et al., 2023).

The mining industry is especially vulnerable to procurement-related risks because of the way it works. The sector relies on a wide range of suppliers for equipment, raw materials, and technical know-how. This means that even small problems can have big effects on operations and finances (Chileshe, 2022; Minihan & Philips, 2018). Also, mining projects are often in far-off places with few roads and other infrastructure, which makes logistical and supply chain problems even worse. So, it is very important to use strong SRM practices not only to save money but also to make sure that the supply is reliable and that the rules and environmental standards are followed.

Companies all over the world have seen the strategic advantages of SRM. For example, studies in the manufacturing and service sectors indicate that entities employing sophisticated SRM systems exhibit enhanced procurement efficiency, fortified supplier collaborations, and superior market performance (Al-Abdallah et al., 2014; Rajab, Ngugi & Kiarie, 2021). These companies often use digital tools, data analytics, and integrated supplier management platforms to make it easier for people to work together and keep an eye on their performance in real time (PwC, 2022). But the situation in sub-Saharan Africa, and Zambia in particular, makes it harder to put SRM into practice and gives it more chances to work.

In the Zambian mining industry, SRM is affected by several contextual factors, such as the capacity of local suppliers, the rules and regulations that govern the industry, and the social and economic expectations of the people who work in it. As part of their license to operate, mining companies are being asked more to support local content goals and community development projects (Dfid, 2013; Minihan & Philips, 2018). This broadens the focus of SRM from just business goals to include social and developmental goals as well. For FQM Trident, it is important to align supplier engagement strategies with both corporate and community goals in order to keep operations going and get stakeholders on board (First Quantum Minerals Annual Report, 2024).

Even though SRM is known to be important, the mining industry in Zambia still faces many problems. These include a fragmented supplier base, limited access to finance and technology among local suppliers, and the need for capacity building to meet stringent quality and timeliness requirements (Tegbee et al., 2024; Avornu, 2021). Procurement inefficiencies, high costs, late deliveries, and inconsistent product quality are still putting project timelines and operational stability at risk (Chileshe, 2022; Mubanga Josephine Chileshe, 2022). These difficulties show how important it is to have customised SRM strategies that take into account

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both the industry's day-to-day operations and its long-term growth goals. There is an increasing amount of research on SRM and its advantages in various sectors and regions, but studies specifically addressing the mining sector in Zambia are still scarce.

Current research predominantly investigates SRM within public procurement, manufacturing, or developed economies, with a scarcity of studies addressing its application and results in African mining contexts (Mahoro & Dushimimana, 2024; Sharif et al., 2023; Mettler & Rohner, 2009; Al-Abdallah et al., 2014). Consequently, there exists insufficient empirical evidence regarding the implementation of SRM by mining companies like FQM Trident, the particular challenges they face, and the quantifiable effects on procurement performance. The mining industry helps Zambia's economy by having good procurement systems and strong relationships with suppliers. SRM provides a means to improve procurement performance, operational efficiency, and sustainable development. Nonetheless, the degree to which these advantages are manifested in the Zambian mining sector, especially at FQM Trident, is inadequately examined in existing literature. This research aims to address this deficiency by examining the function of SRM in improving procurement efficiency in one of Zambia's leading mining companies.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Supplier Relationship Management is often seen as a way to improve procurement performance, but mining companies in Zambia still have a lot of problems, such as rising procurement costs, inconsistent product quality, and delivery delays (Chileshe, 2022; Avornu, 2021). At FQM Trident, these problems can make operations less stable, raise financial risk, and make it harder for the company to meet production goals (Minihan & Philips, 2018; First Quantum Minerals Annual Report, 2024).

Despite the crucial significance of efficient supplier management, there is a paucity of empirical evidence evaluating the implementation of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) practices and their direct influence on procurement performance in Zambia's mining sector, particularly at FQM Trident (Tegbee, Ozurumba, & Duru, 2024; Al-Abdallah et al., 2014). This lack of knowledge makes it hard to come up with strategies for engaging suppliers, reducing risk, and improving performance that are relevant to the situation. Without a clear understanding of how SRM affects procurement outcomes in this context, mining companies may find it hard to use supplier relationships to get an edge over their competitors and grow in a sustainable way (Sharif et al., 2023; Rajab et al., 2021).

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyse the role of Supplier Relationship Management in enhancing procurement performance at FQM Trident Zambia.

Research Questions

1. What are the key SRM practices currently in use at FQM Trident Zambia?
2. How does Supplier Relationship Management impact procurement performance indicators (cost, quality, delivery) at FQM Trident?
3. What challenges are encountered in the implementation of SRM practices in the mining sector?

Specific Objectives

1. To identify key SRM practices adopted at FQM Trident Zambia.
2. To assess the impact of SRM on procurement performance indicators such as cost, quality, and delivery.
3. To examine challenges faced in the implementation of SRM practices in the mining sector.

Significance of the Study

This study is set to provide substantial benefits to both industry professionals and the academic community, especially in the Zambian mining sector. The results will help FQM Trident and other mining companies

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that work in similar places learn how to use Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) to improve their procurement performance. The research will systematically examine the connections between SRM practices and procurement outcomes, thereby elucidating effective strategies for fostering mutually beneficial partnerships, enhancing supplier performance, and promoting operational efficiency. The insights produced will be crucial in guiding policy decisions, particularly concerning procurement processes, supplier selection, and risk management. The research will also suggest specific training and development programs that will help procurement professionals improve their SRM skills. This study will significantly enhance academic literature by filling the existing gap concerning the application and outcomes of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) in Zambia's mining sector, in addition to its practical implications. It will enhance academic discourse by offering empirical evidence and context-specific analysis, establishing a standard for subsequent research in supply chain management and procurement within emerging economies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical Review

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is very important for improving procurement performance in all kinds of businesses and areas. This empirical review examined the function of SRM in accordance with the specific aims of this study: to identify essential SRM practices, evaluate their influence on procurement performance indicators, and investigate the challenges encountered during their implementation, emphasising global, regional (African), and local (Zambian) contexts.

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is recognized globally as a structured method for fostering and overseeing partnerships between organizations and their suppliers. The study by Ziraje Kajuja and Dr. Patrick Mulyungi (2018) addresses the gaps in how SRM can be leveraged to enhance procurement outcomes in Rwanda's local government sector, specifically in Kicukiro District. Their research is directed by objectives that include evaluating the impact of supplier selection, quality management, supplier collaboration, and overall supply management on procurement performance in the local government context. The researchers employed a descriptive survey design, involving both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. They targeted a sample of 92 respondents, drawn from a population of 120 management and procurement staff within Kicukiro District, using simple random sampling and Slovin's formula for sample size determination. Data collection was primarily through questionnaires.

SRM, as emphasized in their background review, is about building long-term, value-driven relationships with a select group of key suppliers, founded on trust, effective communication, mutual understanding, and a win-win approach. Non-strategic supplier interactions are typically handled through contractual management and performance ratings. Monczka et al. (2011) succinctly outlined the main objectives of SRM as harnessing supplier capabilities, achieving cost efficiencies, and minimizing supply-related risks. Attaining procurement performance thus requires organizations to balance rapid adaptation of supplier portfolios with nurturing long-term partnerships capable of sharing risks and rewards (Klein Baum, 2008). Procurement itself is a critical and resource-intensive function, encompassing the acquisition of goods and services as well as contracting external support (Hornby, 2005). Procurement performance is measured by effectiveness and efficiency in meeting predefined standards, including cost, quality, speed, flexibility, accuracy, and supplier reliability (Jones & Oliver, 2006). The study by Kajuja and Mulyungi focused specifically on metrics such as price, cost, quality, and time.

Additionally, research shows that companies with unclear procurement performance measurement systems frequently experience poor outcomes, higher customer dissatisfaction, and higher employee turnover (Amaratunga & Baldry, 2002). Effective metrics are essential for assessing procurement success and achieving organizational goals (Arun & Linet, 2005).

In Rwanda, SRM began gaining significant attention in 2015. The successful management of supplier relationships is increasingly seen as essential for aligning customer demands with business profitability, integrating logistics, and driving organizational growth (Ngendahimana, 2014). Local ministries are highly

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dependent on suppliers for timely, quality deliveries. However, frequent delays and inadequate supplier responsiveness can lead to operational inefficiencies, including the need for excess inventory to buffer uncertainties. The study's findings revealed that elements such as financial support, adherence to time frames, and ongoing online training significantly impact procurement performance in Kicukiro District. Statistical analysis indicated a strong positive relationship between supply management practices and improved procurement outcomes, with financial support highlighted as particularly influential. Therefore, all in all, the research concludes that robust SRM practices in Kicukiro District have strengthened procurement performance by improving supplier collaboration, increasing the number of suppliers, and enhancing service quality. The authors recommend further investment in staff training, better supplier evaluation mechanisms, and the establishment of a dedicated SRM unit to address existing weaknesses and foster continuous improvement.

KEY SRM PRACTICES ADOPTED

Global Perspective

Globally, SRM has evolved from a transactional function to a strategic cornerstone in procurement and supply chain management. Al-Abdallah, Abdallah, and Bany Hamdan (2014) show that top manufacturing companies use structured SRM methods like dividing suppliers into groups, evaluating their performance on a regular basis, and developing strategic suppliers. These practices help businesses sort suppliers by how important they are strategically, keep a close eye on their performance, and train and work with key suppliers to help both companies grow and come up with new ideas.

Sharif et al. (2023) also stress how important it is to have mutual trust, open communication, and joint value creation in SRM frameworks. These things help create strong relationships with suppliers, which are important for dealing with market changes, making sure operations continue, and promoting long-term success. Another global trend is technology integration, which is made possible by digital tools that let you monitor things in real time, make decisions based on data, and keep improving performance (PCW, 2022). Mitchell (2025a) says that Italian restaurants in the service industry benefit from working with the same suppliers all the time, having the same business goals, and working together to solve problems. These kinds of practices make service interruptions less likely and make both the quality of the product and the happiness of the customer better. Mettler and Rohner (2009) demonstrate that structured Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) policies enhance supplier partnerships, resource allocation, and the timely delivery of critical supplies within the healthcare sector. These global findings show that, no matter what industry you're in, working together, building trust, and always getting better are all important SRM practices.

Africa from a Regional Perspective (Africa)

In Africa, SRM has become more important as a way to improve procurement and supply chain performance, especially in places where things are very complicated and uncertain. Tegbee, Ozurumba, and Duru (2024) discovered that Nigerian organisations conducting regular supplier audits, maintaining transparent communication, and fostering proactive supplier engagement experienced greater cost savings, reduced delays, and enhanced contract compliance, especially within the public procurement and petroleum sectors.

Rajab, Ngugi, and Kiarie (2021) found that supplier categorisation, strategic alliances, and ongoing evaluation are very important SRM practices for manufacturing companies in Kenya. These efforts help companies effectively target supplier development initiatives, encourage innovation, and meet operational goals. Avornu (2021) looked at how the Ghanaian government buys things and found that it focuses on building trust and long-term partnerships. The goal here is to improve service delivery and broader development outcomes by making relationships stronger, which will lead to more openness, responsibility, and efficiency. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are especially at risk of supply chain problems, but formalised SRM has helped them as well. Chileshe (2022) says that Lusaka's agro-dealers who used

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clear SRM frameworks had fewer problems with buying goods, better quality inputs, and more competition. Rasdien, Pooe, and Munyanyi (2024) contend that innovation and adaptability, promoted by SRM, are essential for the survival of SMEs in unstable markets.

Local Perspective (Zambia)

In Zambia, particularly within the mining sector, SRM practices are intricately associated with both operational and socio-economic results. FQM Trident, a major mining company, shows how to do SRM well by working with suppliers for a long time, helping local suppliers grow, and making sure that its goals are in line with those of the local community (Minihan et al., 2018; First Quantum Minerals Annual Report, 2024). These projects make sure that procurement cycles are reliable, costs are kept low, and community development projects are carried out. Dfid (2013) also stresses the need to align SRM with policies on local content and community involvement. This helps the company keep its social license to operate and promotes economic growth in the area. SRM has also helped other industries, like construction, by making projects go more smoothly and making stakeholders happier (Chama & Phiri, 2025).

IMPACT OF SRM ON PROCUREMENT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Global Perspective

There is a lot of evidence that SRM affects procurement performance in many fields. Al-Abdallah et al. (2014) quantitatively substantiate that proficient SRM correlates with enhanced market responsiveness, adaptability, and profitability in manufacturing. Strong SRM frameworks help companies adapt to changes in the market more quickly, come up with new ideas, and make customers happier. Sharif et al. (2023) contend that organisations possessing robust SRM capabilities not only enhance cost control but also attain superior supply chain agility and sustainability. Digital-enabled SRM makes sure that deliveries are on time and of high quality while lowering operational risks (PCW, 2022). Mettler and Rohner (2009) discovered that hospitals with structured SRM policies in the healthcare sector had better resource management, timely supply deliveries, and stronger supplier partnerships. This had a direct effect on the quality of care and the efficiency of operations. Mitchell (2025a) shows in the restaurant business that SRM makes operations more efficient and customers happier. This is because working with suppliers regularly and solving problems together are key to keeping things running smoothly and making sure quality is high.

Regional Perspective (Africa)

Studies in Africa show that SRM always makes procurement better. Tegbee et al. (2024) say that proactive SRM strategies lead to lower costs, fewer delays, and better contract compliance in Nigeria. In Ghana's public sector procurement, Avornu (2021) makes a similar point: good SRM leads to better service delivery that is more efficient, open, and accountable.

Rajab et al. (2021) found a strong positive link between SRM and procurement performance in Kenya, especially when it came to cost, quality, and timely delivery. Companies can reach their operational and strategic goals with the help of SRM-enabled supplier alliances and ongoing evaluations. Chileshe (2022) says that SRM has helped SMEs in Zambia become more competitive by reducing bottlenecks and improving the quality of inputs. Rasdien et al. (2024) also say that having good relationships with suppliers is important for businesses in Africa to be able to adapt and come up with new ideas.

Local Perspective

FQM Trident's SRM approach has had a big effect on procurement performance in the area by making procurement cycles more reliable, cutting costs, and making sure that community development projects are carried out well (Minihan et al., 2018; First Quantum Minerals Annual Report, 2024). These results show that SRM is important not just for running the business, but also for reaching bigger social and economic goals. Chama and Phiri (2025) say that in Zambia's construction industry, public-private partnerships that use SRM practices lead to better project delivery and happier stakeholders. This evidence from different sectors shows once again that SRM is a key factor in the procurement performance of Zambia's economy.

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Challenges in Implementing SRM Practices

Global Perspective

Despite its benefits, several challenges hinder SRM implementation globally. There are several problems that make it hard to implement SRM around the world, even though it has many benefits. Sharif et al. (2023) pinpoint challenges, including the cultivation of mutual trust, the enhancement of effective communication, and the incorporation of advanced technologies within global supplier networks. Variations in organisational culture and opposition to collaborative methodologies can exacerbate the implementation of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM). Emon, Khan, and Siam (2024) point out that in developing economies, SRM may not work as well because there isn't enough digital infrastructure and data analytics capability. This can hurt both performance and supply chain resilience.

Regional Perspective (Africa)

African companies have special SRM problems, such as limited access to technology, inconsistent regulations, and a lack of infrastructure (Tegbee et al., 2024; Rasdien et al., 2024). These problems are especially bad in public procurement and industries that rely a lot on local suppliers. Rajab et al. (2021) and Avornu (2021) say that building capacity and trust are important steps to getting past these problems. Chileshe (2022) says that making SRM structures official can help small and medium-sized businesses get better inputs and avoid procurement problems.

Local Perspective (Zambia)

In Zambia, there are problems with a fragmented supplier base, changing rules, and a lack of supplier capacity (Chileshe, 2022; Grant, 2024). To get the most out of SRM, mining companies like FQM Trident need to put money into developing suppliers, building capacity, and being open with their communications (Minihan et al., 2018; First Quantum Minerals Annual Report, 2024). It is also important for SRM to be in line with local content policies and community development in order to keep a social license to operate (Dfid, 2013). Chama and Phiri (2025) emphasise that effective SRM implementation in Zambia's construction sector necessitates collaborative public-private partnerships and continuous stakeholder engagement. Evidence from around the world, in different regions, and even in the same country, shows that SRM is a key factor in how well an organisation does at buying things and how well it does overall. SRM helps businesses around the world be more efficient, creative, and competitive. In Africa, it helps the supply chain be more resilient and grow despite unique problems. In Zambia, it helps businesses, communities, and operations grow, especially in mining and construction. To get the most out of SRM, though, we need to get past problems with infrastructure, rules, and capacity by using customised, context-specific strategies and keeping stakeholders involved.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in two prominent theoretical frameworks: the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Social Exchange Theory. Both theories offer distinct but complementary perspectives for understanding how Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) influences procurement performance and confers competitive advantage within the mining industry, with a specific focus on FQM Trident in Zambia. By integrating these frameworks, this research provides a multidimensional lens for examining both the strategic and relational facets of SRM, supporting a comprehensive analysis of its impact on organizational success.

The Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV), as articulated by Barney (1991), is a foundational theory in strategic management that emphasizes the importance of internal resources as the principal drivers of sustained competitive advantage. According to RBV, a firm’s ability to achieve and maintain superior performance is largely contingent upon its possession and effective utilization of resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (often abbreviated as the VRIN criteria). These resources can be tangible,

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such as physical assets and technology, or intangible, such as organizational processes, knowledge, and relationships. In the context of procurement and supply chain management, the RBV highlights the critical role of supplier relationships as strategic organizational resources. Within the mining sector, companies like FQM Trident rely heavily on suppliers for essential goods, services, and expertise that underpin their operational efficiency and output quality. However, when these supplier relationships are managed strategically—characterized by collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and mutual commitment—they transcend basic transactional exchanges and evolve into unique, hard-to-replicate assets that provide competitive differentiation.

For FQM Trident, the RBV underscores the importance of investing in the development of robust supplier management systems and processes. By nurturing long-term, value-driven relationships with key suppliers, the company can secure preferential access to high-quality materials, benefit from supplier-led innovations, and enhance the reliability of its supply chain. These advantages not only contribute to lower costs and reduced operational risk but also create barriers for competitors, as replicating such deeply embedded relationships is both difficult and time-consuming. In this way, SRM becomes a strategic lever that transforms routine procurement activities into sustainable sources of value, agility, and organizational resilience for FQM Trident within Zambia's competitive mining landscape.

Social Exchange Theory

While the RBV focuses on the strategic value of resources, Social Exchange Theory, developed by Blau (1964), offers a complementary perspective by emphasizing the relational dynamics that underpin successful SRM. Social Exchange Theory posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process wherein individuals or organizations seek to maximize benefits while minimizing costs. Relationships, according to this theory, are sustained over time when both parties perceive ongoing, reciprocal benefits, which foster mutual trust, commitment, and cooperation.

In the sphere of procurement, Social Exchange Theory suggests that the ongoing success of supplier relationships depends not only on the exchange of goods and services but also on the cultivation of trust, transparency, and mutual respect. When mining firms like FQM Trident and their suppliers engage in open communication, share information willingly, and work collaboratively to solve problems, they lay the groundwork for enduring partnerships that are resilient in the face of challenges. Trust becomes a critical enabler, reducing the likelihood of opportunistic behavior and facilitating conflict resolution. Moreover, mutual commitment motivates both parties to invest in the relationship, innovate together, and adapt to evolving business environments.

For FQM Trident, applying Social Exchange Theory means recognizing that effective SRM is fundamentally relational. The company's ability to develop supplier relationships rooted in trust and reciprocity not only enhances transactional efficiency but also unlocks opportunities for joint value creation and long-term strategic alignment. This approach shifts the focus from mere cost minimization to value maximization, ensuring that both FQM Trident and its suppliers are incentivized to collaborate, share resources, and pursue common goals.

Integrating RBV and Social Exchange Theory

The integration of the Resource-Based View and Social Exchange Theory helps this study to adopt a holistic framework for analyzing SRM practices at FQM Trident. The RBV offers a macro-level perspective, positioning supplier relationships as critical strategic assets that can drive sustained competitive advantage. In parallel, Social Exchange Theory provides a micro-level understanding of how these relationships are formed, maintained, and strengthened through trust, reciprocity, and shared benefit.

This dual-theoretical approach enables a comprehensive understanding of both the structural and relational dimensions of SRM, an important consideration in the complex, high-stakes environment of the mining industry. For FQM Trident, leveraging these theories facilitates a deeper exploration of how well-managed supplier relationships contribute to procurement performance, enhance organizational agility, and support

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the achievement of long-term strategic objectives. The combination of RBV and Social Exchange Theory provides a robust conceptual foundation for this research. It allows for the examination of not only what makes supplier relationships valuable, but also how these relationships are cultivated and sustained to deliver ongoing benefits. This theoretical integration is particularly relevant for FQM Trident as it navigates the competitive and resource-intensive mining sector in Zambia, seeking to optimize procurement outcomes and build enduring competitive advantage through effective Supplier Relationship Management.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the conceptual framework of this study, Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) practices function as an independent variable, denoting the systematic activities and strategies employed by organisations to cultivate and maintain effective supplier relationships, including supplier segmentation, information sharing, and performance evaluation (Cousins et al., 2008; Chen, Paulraj, & Lado, 2004). Implementation challenges serve as the mediating variable, encompassing factors such as resource limitations, resistance to change, constrained supplier capabilities, and regulatory obstacles, all of which can influence the efficacy and outcomes of SRM initiatives (Nyaga, Whipple, & Lynch, 2010; Zhao et al., 2008). The dependent variable, procurement performance, is assessed through key indicators such as cost efficiency, quality enhancement, and delivery reliability, which signify the extent to which SRM practices yield quantifiable advantages for the procurement function (Trent & Monczka, 1999; Krause, Handfield, & Tyler, 2007). Consequently, this framework (Figure 1.1) illustrates that the relationship between SRM practices and procurement performance at FQM Trident Zambia is profoundly influenced by the capacity to tackle and manage implementation challenges.

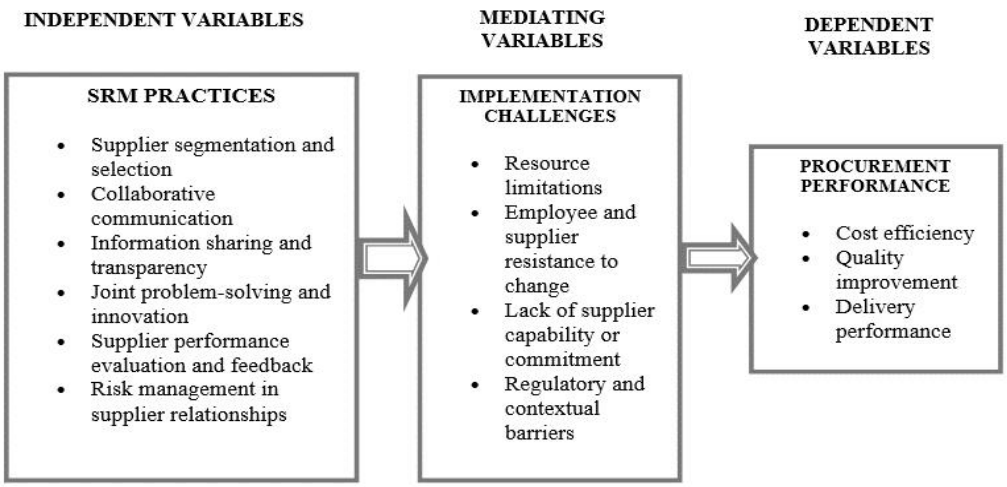


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's Own Design, 2025

Gaps in Research

Although Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is increasingly acknowledged as a vital element in global procurement success, there is a significant lack of empirical evidence investigating SRM's influence on procurement performance in Zambia's mining sector. Current literature predominantly addresses overarching supply chain management concerns or examines different industries, resulting in a deficiency in comprehension regarding the direct impact of SRM practices on procurement outcomes within the distinctive operational and regulatory framework of Zambian mining. Moreover, there is a deficiency of comprehensive, case-based studies examining how mining companies in Zambia formulate, execute, and modify SRM strategies to address context-specific obstacles. Numerous existing studies depend on broad surveys or secondary data, frequently neglecting the intricate, firm-specific processes and adaptive

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strategies crucial for efficient supplier relationship management in a sector marked by significant complexity, risk, and local content mandates.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlined the methodology that was used to examine the role of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) in enhancing procurement performance at FQM Trident Zambia. It presented the research approach, research design, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and anticipated limitations. The methodology was structured to produce objective, reliable, and generalizable findings.

Research Design

This research utilized a case study design grounded in a mixed-methods framework, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to thoroughly investigate SRM at FQM Trident in Zambia. The case study methodology was especially effective for comprehensive, contextual examination of contemporary phenomena in real-world environments (Yin, 2018). Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data for the objective assessment of SRM practices and procurement performance. In contrast, qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and document reviews, offering comprehensive contextual insights into the challenges and dynamics of SRM implementation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Study Population and Sample Size

The study population included procurement superintendents, officers, key suppliers, and senior management who were directly involved in procurement activities at FQM Trident. To guarantee complete representation, a census methodology was employed to encompass all procurement personnel (approximately 135 individuals). For suppliers and senior management, purposive sampling was used to identify individuals with significant involvement in the procurement process. When the total number of important people in the supply chain for Trident Mining Company was not too big, the Yamane (1967) formula was used to determine the sample size for quantitative studies:

n = N/(1 + N(e^2))

Where: Where: n = the size of the sample

N = number of people (135 key suppliers)

e is the margin of error, which is 0.05.

n = 135 / (1 + 135(0.05^2))

n = 135 / (1 + 0.3375)

n = 135 / 1.3375

n = 101 People who answered

For the qualitative component and in line with the principle of data saturation (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006), a purposive sample of 10 key suppliers was chosen, reflecting the exploratory and context-specific focus of the study and prioritizing depth over breadth. Five in-depth interviews were conducted with senior management, as this was typically adequate to obtain strategic insights (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data Collection Methods

The study employed three primary data collection methods: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Questionnaires were distributed to procurement staff and selected suppliers, using validated scales from previous SRM research to gather data on supplier segmentation, collaboration, risk-

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sharing, and procurement outcomes, with responses measured on a five-point Likert scale. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with supply chain personnel, suppliers, and senior management to explore their perceptions, challenges, and experiences with SRM, following established qualitative research guidelines. Additionally, procurement policies, supplier contracts, and performance reports were reviewed to triangulate and validate the primary data collected.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected from the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, summarized SRM practices and procurement performance outcomes. Inferential statistics were employed to investigate correlations between SRM dimensions and procurement performance. Pearson correlation assessed the strength and direction of relationships between essential SRM variables (e.g., collaboration and trust) and procurement performance indicators, while linear regression analysis determined the predictive capacity of SRM practices on procurement performance. The analytical approach provided both an overview and a deeper understanding of the influence of SRM within FQM Trident.

The regression model used was:

$Y = \beta 0 + \beta 1X1 + \beta 2X2 + \ldots + \beta nXn + \varepsilon$

Y = Performance of Procurement X1, X2, …, Xn = SRM Things that can change

$\beta 0$ = The beginning point

βn = Coefficients

Error = ε Word Significance will be assessed at the 0.05 level.

Qualitative data from interview transcripts underwent coding and thematic analysis in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step methodology. This included familiarization with data, initial coding, theme development, theme review and refinement, theme definition and naming, and reporting of findings. NVivo software was used to organize, code, and analyze qualitative data, ensuring systematic and thorough examination of SRM-related patterns and insights.

Ethical Considerations

The study complied rigorously with established ethical standards for research involving human subjects. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was ensured through secure data storage and removal of personal identifiers from transcripts. Participation was entirely voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any stage. Measures were taken to avoid harm or discomfort, uphold anonymity, and ensure non-maleficence throughout the research process. These protocols adhered to established ethical standards, guaranteeing academic integrity and the protection of participants' rights.

RESULTS

Introduction

This section presents the findings collected during the survey. The findings are systematically organized and reported, typically aligned with the research questions or objectives. This chapter prioritizes the objective presentation of results through descriptive statistics, tables, and visual aids, without engaging in interpretation or discussion of their implications.

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Demographic and Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of the 96 respondents showed that the majority were male (69%), while females made up 31%, reflecting traditional gender patterns in the mining sector but also indicating notable female involvement in procurement roles. Most respondents held the position of Procurement Officer (75%), with smaller groups serving as Inventory Controllers, Logistics Coordinators, or in managerial and other unspecified roles, highlighting a strong operational focus. In terms of experience, most participants were early in their careers, with the largest proportion having 2–5 years of procurement or supply chain experience, and only a few possessing more than a decade in the field. Educationally, over half of the respondents held a Bachelor's degree, a significant portion had a Master's, and a minority had Diplomas or Professional Certificates, indicating a well-educated sample. Nearly all respondents (93.8%) were affiliated with the Procurement Department, with limited representation from Logistics, ensuring that the perspectives captured primarily reflected procurement-focused views.

Table 1: Demographic and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Category/Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	66	69.0
	Female	30	31.0
Position/Role	Procurement Officer	72	75.0
	Inventory Controller	5	5.2
	Logistics Coordinator	4	4.2
	Procurement Superintendent	1	1.0
	Other/Not Specified	14	14.6
Years of Experience	Less than 2 years	2	2.1
	2–5 years	18	18.8
	6–10 years	6	6.2
	More than 10 years	5	5.2
Highest Education Level	Diploma	12	12.5
	Bachelor's Degree	51	53.2
	Master's Degree	30	31.2
	Professional Certificate	3	3.1
Department/Unit Affiliation	Procurement Department	90	93.8
	Logistics	6	6.2

Source: Primary data survey, October-November, 2025

SRM Practices and Adoption

Supplier performance reviews were most frequently conducted on a quarterly basis (42, 43.8%), followed by monthly (18, 18.8%) and annually (18, 18.8%). Only 1 respondent (1.0%) reported bi-annual reviews, and 2 (2.1%) indicated reviews were not conducted. The high frequency of quarterly reviews demonstrates a regular commitment to supplier evaluation.

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Frequency of Supplier Performance Reviews

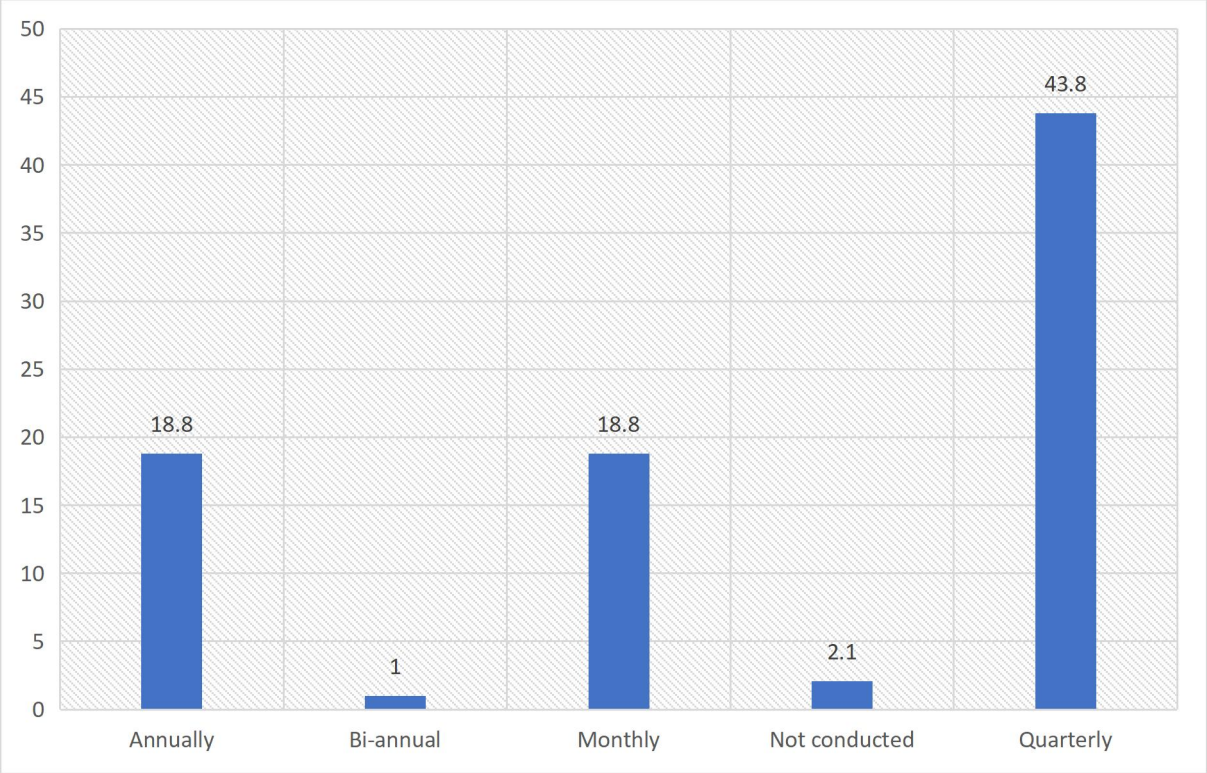


Figure 2: Bar-chat distribution of the respondents Response on the Frequency of Supplier Performance Reviews

Source: Primary data survey, October-November, 2025

Level of SRM Integration in Procurement Processes

SRM integration levels varied: 30 respondents (31.2%) reported no integration, 24 (25.0%) indicated minimal integration, 18 (18.8%) reported partial integration, and 24 (25.0%) stated full integration. This demonstrates inconsistency in the adoption of SRM across the organization, with only a quarter reporting full integration.

Table 2: Level of SRM Integration in Procurement Processes

SRM Integration	Frequency	Percent
Partially integrated	18	18.8
Minimally integrated	24	25
Not integrated	30	31.2
Fully integrated	24	25
Total	96	100

Source: Primary data survey, October-November, 2025

SRM Practices Adoption Frequency

The most widely adopted SRM practice is long-term contracts (96, 100%), followed by strategic partnerships (84, 87.5%), and regular feedback and communication (78, 81.3%). Other notable practices include supplier audits and evaluations (60, 62.5%), technology-enabled collaboration (56, 58.3%), and less

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frequent adoption of segmentation (6, 6.3%) and risk-sharing mechanisms (36, 37.5%). These figures indicate a strong emphasis on partnership and contract stability within SRM at FQM Trident.

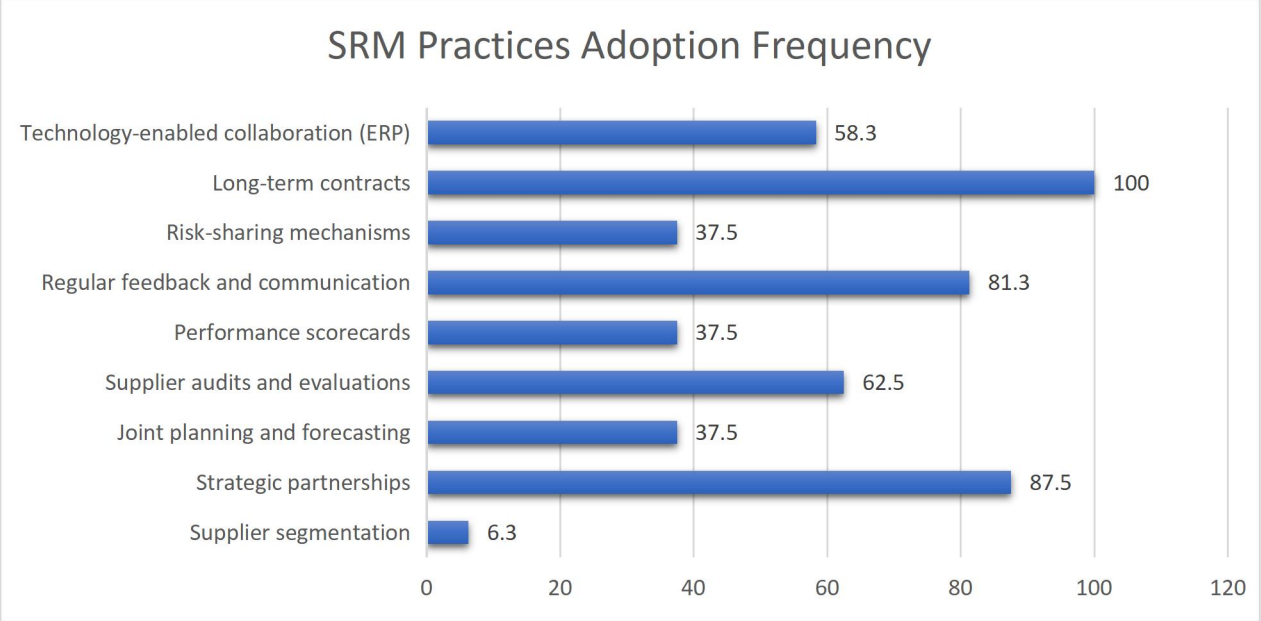


Figure 3: Bar-chat distribution of the respondents perception on SRM Practices Adoption.

Source: Primary data survey, October-November, 2025

Perceptions and Application of SRM

A total of 66 respondents (68.8%) agreed that SRM practices are clearly defined and documented, while 2 (2.1%) were neutral and 3 (3.1%) strongly agreed. This high level of agreement highlights an established SRM policy framework.

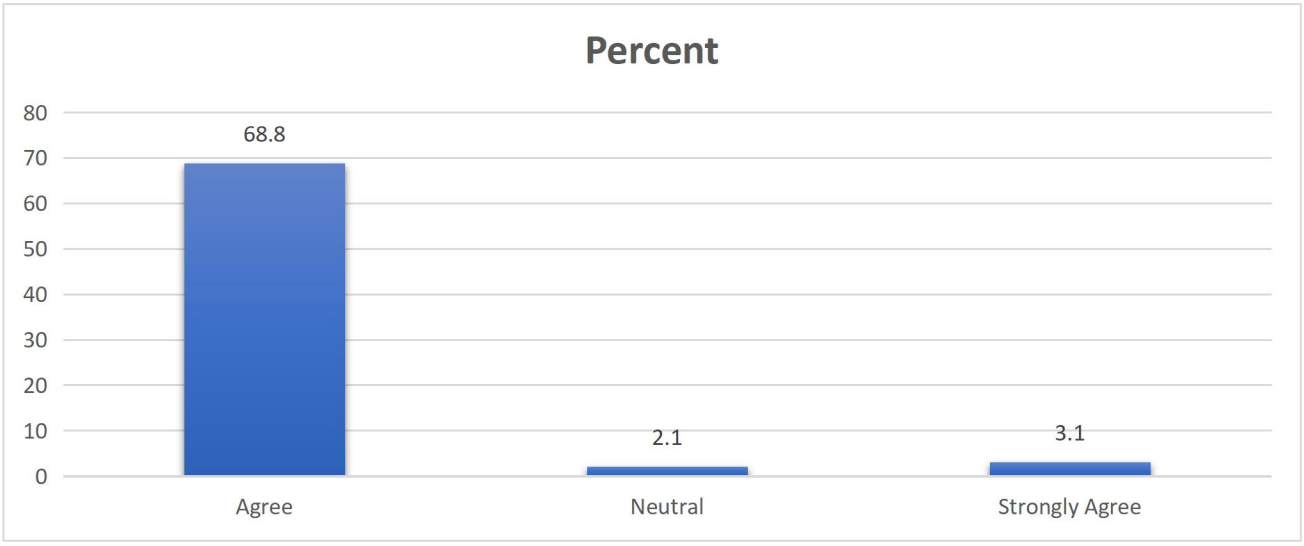


Figure 4: Bar-chat distribution of the respondent's Perceptions and Application of SRM.

Source: Primary data survey, October-November, 2025

The impact of SRM on procurement performance indicators

The survey revealed that while a majority of respondents perceived SRM practices as being consistently applied across departments, there was less widespread agreement about SRM's contribution to long-term supplier development, indicating some uncertainty regarding its developmental benefits. Supplier

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performance indicators were generally rated positively, with most respondents marking cost efficiency, product quality, delivery timeliness, reliability, and contract compliance as "Good," though few rated these dimensions as "Excellent." Areas such as supplier reliability and contract compliance also saw a notable proportion of "Average" or "Poor" ratings, suggesting there is still room for improvement in achieving consistently high performance across all indicators.

Table 3: Perceptions of SRM Outcomes, Consistency and Supplier Performance

Statement / Performance Indicator	Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
SRM contributes to long-term supplier development	Agree	30	31.2
	Strongly Agree	11	11.5
SRM is applied consistently across departments	Agree	54	56.2
	Neutral	18	18.8
	Strongly Agree	4	4.2
Cost Efficiency	Good	60	62.5
	Average	24	25.0
	Poor	12	12.5
Product Quality	Excellent	2	2.1
	Good	54	56.2
	Average	32	33.3
	Poor	8	8.4
Delivery Timeliness	Good	54	56.2
	Average	7	7.3
	Poor	3	3.1
Supplier Reliability	Good	48	50.0
	Average	6	6.2
	Poor	6	6.2
Contract Compliance	Excellent	2	2.1
	Good	48	50.0
	Average	36	37.5
	Poor	10	10.4

Source: Primary data survey, October-November, 2025

Overall SRM Influence and Procurement Areas Benefited

The majority of respondents believed that SRM had improved procurement performance, with 62.5% reporting significant improvement and 37.5% reporting slight improvement, and none indicating no improvement. When asked which procurement areas benefited most from SRM, many respondents identified multiple areas, with the most common combination (31.25%) being improvements across cost control, quality assurance, timely delivery, supplier innovation, risk mitigation, and strategic alignment.

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This indicates that SRM is perceived as having a broad and multifaceted positive impact on procurement performance, rather than delivering benefits in just one or two isolated areas.

Table 4: Overall SRM Influence and Procurement Areas Benefits

SRM Influence / Procurement Areas Benefited	**Frequency**	**Percent (%)**	**Cumulative Percent (%)**
Overall Influence of SRM:			
Significantly improved	60	62.5	
Slightly improved	36	37.5	
Procurement Areas Benefited:			
Cost control, Quality assurance, Supplier innovation, Risk mitigation, Strategic alignment	6	6.25	6.25
Cost control, Quality assurance, Timely delivery	6	6.25	12.5
Cost control, Quality assurance, Timely delivery, Risk mitigation, Strategic alignment	6	6.25	18.8
Cost control, Quality assurance, Timely delivery, Strategic alignment	6	6.25	25.0
Cost control, Quality assurance, Timely delivery, Supplier innovation, Risk mitigation, Strategic alignment	30	31.25	56.2
Cost control, Timely delivery	6	6.25	62.5
Cost control, Timely delivery, Risk mitigation	6	6.25	68.8
Cost control, Timely delivery, Risk mitigation, Strategic alignment	12	12.5	81.2
Quality assurance, Timely delivery, Strategic alignment	6	6.25	87.5
Quality assurance, Timely delivery, Supplier innovation, Risk mitigation, Strategic alignment	6	6.25	93.8
Supplier innovation, Risk mitigation, Strategic alignment	6	6.25	100.0
Total	96	100.0	100.0

Source: Primary data survey, October-November, 2025

Relationship Between SRM Integration and Performance Dimensions

SRM Integration and Cost Efficiency

Spearman's rank correlation was used to examine the direction and strength of the relationship between SRM integration and each procurement performance indicator. A positive coefficient indicates that higher SRM integration is associated with better performance. The analysis shows a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation between SRM integration and both cost efficiency ($\rho = 0.34$, $p = 0.008$) and delivery timeliness ($\rho = 0.41$, $p = 0.003$). This reinforces the chi-square findings, confirming that as SRM integration improves, so do cost and delivery outcomes. For other indicators, the correlations are positive but not statistically significant, suggesting only a weak association.

Table 5: Spearman's Rank Correlation: SRM and Procurement Performance

Indicator	Spearman's ρ	p-value
Cost Efficiency	0.34	0.008
Product Quality	0.23	0.065

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Delivery Timeliness	0.41	0.003
Supplier Reliability	0.19	0.102
Contract Compliance	0.21	0.082

Challenges in Implementing SRM Practices

The main challenge reported was limited supplier cooperation (36, 37.5%), followed by lack of internal capacity/training (24, 25.0%) and resistance to change (24, 25.0%). Budget constraints were cited by 12 respondents (12.5%).

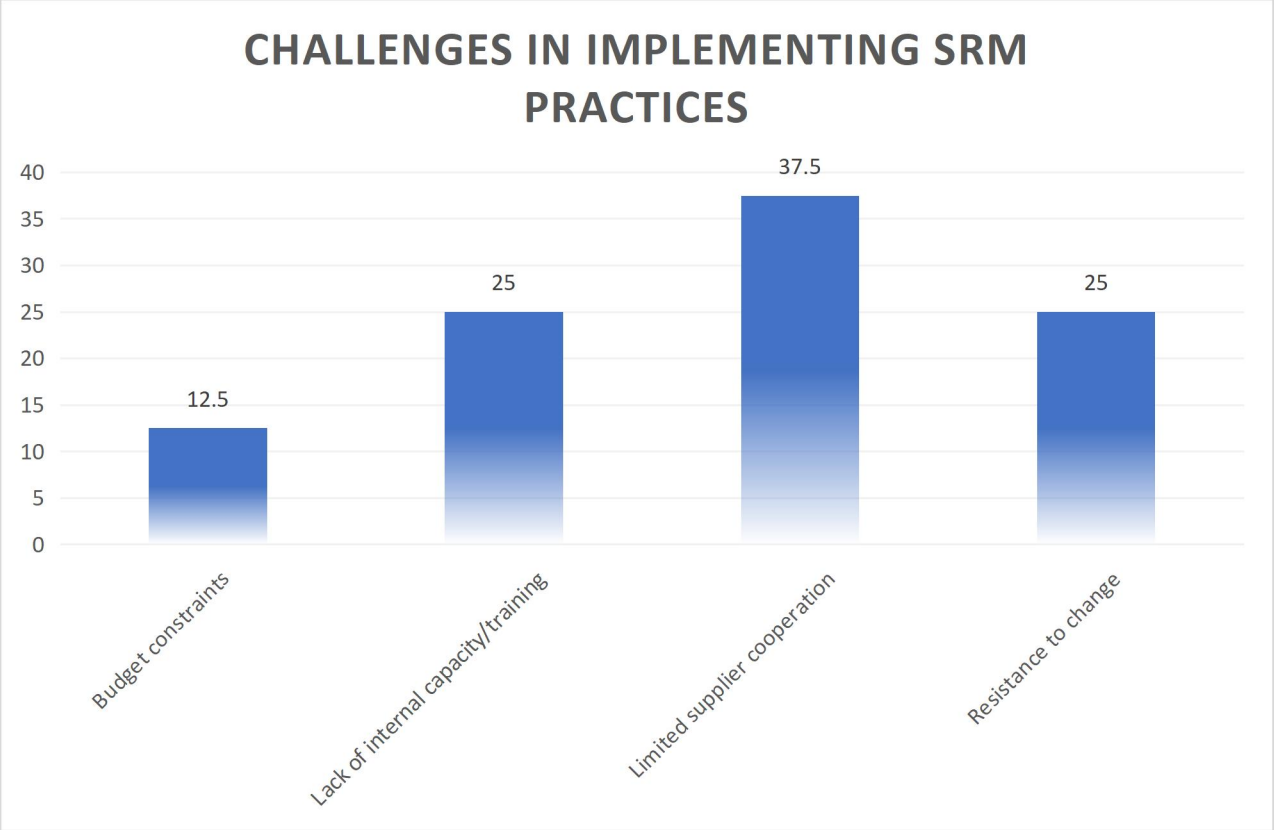


Figure 5: Bar-chat distribution of the respondent's perception of Challenges in Implementing SRM Practices

Source: Primary data survey, October-November, 2025

Qualitative Results

Introduction

This section presents the qualitative findings from in-depth interviews conducted with, supply chain executives, and procurement superintendents at FQM Trident Zambia. The interviews explored participants' experiences and perspectives on Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) and its role in enhancing procurement performance within the organization. The results are organized according to the study's three main objectives: (1) to identify key SRM practices adopted at FQM Trident Zambia; (2) to assess the impact of SRM on procurement performance indicators such as cost, quality, and delivery; and (3) to examine challenges faced in the implementation of SRM practices in the mining sector. The findings are supported by direct quotations and consolidated insights, providing an authentic account of current practices, perceived impacts, and implementation barriers.

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Key SRM Practices Adopted at FQM Trident Zambia

Overview of SRM Strategies

Interview participants consistently emphasized that SRM is viewed as a strategic function at FQM Trident Zambia, integral to the company's supply chain resilience and operational excellence. The organization has formalized SRM as a core component of its procurement strategy, aligning it with both local and global best practices. A procurement superintendent described SRM at FQM Trident as,

"a blend of structured processes, relationship-building, and continuous performance monitoring."

Participants noted that the company's SRM approach is multi-layered. At the foundation, FQM Trident has established clear supplier onboarding processes, standardized contract management procedures, and robust performance evaluation mechanisms. Beyond transactional interactions, the company places significant emphasis on developing long-term, value-driven partnerships with key suppliers. As one supply chain executive explained,

"We do not view our suppliers as mere vendors, but as strategic partners who are vital to our success and continuity."

Supplier Segmentation and Categorization

Supplier segmentation emerged as a critical pillar of SRM at FQM Trident. Respondents indicated that suppliers are systematically categorized based on strategic importance, risk profile, and the criticality of supplied materials to core mining operations. The categorization process typically involves a multi-criteria assessment, considering factors such as spend volume, technical complexity, market availability, and supply risk.

A supply chain executives stated, "We segment our suppliers into critical, strategic, and transactional categories. Critical suppliers provide inputs that directly impact production uptime, while strategic suppliers support our innovation and long-term growth. Transactional suppliers are important, but typically engaged for less complex or non-core products and services."

This segmentation guides the allocation of management attention and resources, with high-value and high-risk suppliers receiving more intensive relationship management and monitoring.

Performance Monitoring Tools and Systems

Participants detailed a range of tools and systems used to monitor supplier performance. FQM Trident employs a digital supplier management platform that integrates with its enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, allowing for real-time tracking of supplier metrics such as on-time delivery, quality performance, compliance, and responsiveness.

Regular supplier scorecards are used as a benchmarking tool, shared quarterly with both internal stakeholders and the suppliers themselves. This transparency fosters a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. As one Senior Procurement Specialist described,

"The supplier scorecard is our compass. It gives us clear visibility into how our suppliers are performing and helps us have fact-based conversations about areas for improvement."

Additionally, periodic supplier audits and joint review meetings are conducted, particularly for critical and strategic suppliers, to discuss performance trends, address issues, and set future objectives.

Fostering Long-Term Partnerships

Participants highlighted several initiatives aimed at nurturing long-term supplier relationships. These include multi-year framework agreements, joint capability development programs, and supplier recognition awards. FQM Trident often co-invests in supplier training, technology upgrades, and process improvements, especially when these investments can yield mutual *benefits and ensure business continuity.*

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"We believe in growing together with our suppliers," a supply chain executive noted. "On several occasions, we have worked closely with key suppliers to help them meet our evolving quality standards or environmental requirements. This partnership approach ensures we are aligned and can manage challenges collaboratively."

Impact of SRM on Procurement Performance Indicators

Cost Efficiency

Interviewees confirmed that effective SRM has had a measurable impact on cost efficiency. The procurement superintendent cited examples where strategic sourcing and long-term agreements resulted in more favourable pricing, reduced transaction costs, and better terms.

"Through SRM, we can negotiate bulk discounts, consolidate orders, and reduce administrative overhead," explained one sourcing officer. "We have shifted from spot buying to strategic sourcing, which gives us stronger bargaining power and cost predictability."

Participants also noted that transparent communication and joint problem-solving with suppliers help identify waste and inefficiency, further driving down costs. For instance, collaborative demand planning has reduced the incidence of emergency orders and associated premiums.

Product Quality and Delivery Timelines

Respondents shared multiple examples where SRM practices led to noticeable improvements in product quality and delivery reliability. One supply chain executive recounted a recent collaboration with a critical supplier of spare parts: "In the past, we struggled with frequent defects and delayed shipments. By working closely with the supplier, sharing technical feedback, and aligning on quality expectations, we saw a significant drop in quality issues and a marked improvement in their delivery performance."

Continuous engagement, joint root cause analysis, and supplier training were frequently mentioned as key drivers behind these improvements. Performance monitoring tools such as scorecards and audits ensure that quality lapses are promptly detected and addressed.

Furthermore, framework agreements and shared production schedules enable suppliers to anticipate demand fluctuations, thereby improving their readiness and reducing lead times. "Our fill rates have improved, and we have fewer stockouts," noted one procurement officer.

Supplier Responsiveness and Innovation

Participants agreed that SRM is a catalyst for greater supplier responsiveness and innovation. Open channels of communication, regular meetings, and constructive feedback loops have fostered a culture where suppliers proactively address issues and propose new solutions.

A Sourcing Specialist illustrated this with an example: "During the COVID-19 pandemic, several of our suppliers' faced disruptions. Thanks to our strong relationships and frequent communication, they kept us informed, adjusted their production schedules, and prioritized our orders. This responsiveness was crucial to maintaining our operations."

Innovation is encouraged through joint workshops and pilot projects. For instance, FQM Trident and a strategic supplier recently collaborated on a new eco-friendly packaging solution, which not only met regulatory requirements but also reduced transportation costs. "Our suppliers see us as a partner willing to experiment and invest in new ideas," said one executive.

Overall Procurement Performance

The cumulative effect of these SRM practices, participants reported, is a more resilient, agile, and high-performing procurement function. Procurement Superintendents consistently cited improved supplier reliability, reduced total cost of ownership, and enhanced organizational reputation as key outcomes. "Our

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SRM approach is not just about compliance or cost savings. It has elevated our procurement function to a strategic level, where we contribute to business growth and sustainability," summarized one Procurement Superintendent

Challenges Faced in the Implementation of SRM Practices

Internal Barriers: Skills, Systems, and Leadership

Despite the progress made, interviewees acknowledged several internal barriers that hinder the full realization of SRM's potential. The key points that stood out among these are the variability in internal capacity specifically, the availability of skills, effective systems, and supportive leadership.

Several procurement professionals noted that not all staff have received adequate training in advanced SRM concepts or relationship management techniques. One of the superintendents observed, "There's a learning curve when it comes to moving from transactional procurement to strategic SRM. We need more structured training programs and mentorship."

System limitations were also highlighted. While FQM Trident has invested in digital platforms, some processes remain partially manual, leading to inefficiencies and inconsistent data quality. Leadership support, while generally strong, can fluctuate with changes in management or shifting strategic priorities. Participants emphasized the importance of consistent senior leadership buy-in for SRM initiatives to gain traction and resources.

External Barriers: Market Volatility and Regulatory Constraints

The mining sector in Zambia is subject to significant external pressures, including market volatility, fluctuating commodity prices, and regulatory uncertainties. These factors pose distinct challenges to effective SRM.

Procurement Superintendents reported that sudden market shifts often disrupt supplier relationships or necessitate rapid changes in sourcing strategies. "When copper prices drop or export regulations change, we have to renegotiate contracts or find alternate suppliers quickly. This can strain even the strongest partnerships," explained one senior procurement specialist.

Regulatory compliance was another recurring theme. Evolving environmental, safety, and local content regulations require frequent adaptation not only by FQM Trident but also by its suppliers. "Our suppliers sometimes struggle to keep up with changing regulations, and this affects their ability to deliver consistently," noted a sourcing officer.

Cultural and Relational Challenges

Interviewees highlighted that building trust and alignment with suppliers from diverse backgrounds can be challenging. Differences in corporate culture, communication styles, and expectations sometimes lead to misunderstandings or slow progress.

"As a multinational, we work with both local and international suppliers. Bridging cultural differences and aligning expectations takes time and effort," said one executive. Participants stressed the importance of regular face-to-face meetings, site visits, and transparent communication in overcoming these cultural BARRIERS.

Technology Adoption

While technology is recognized as a key enabler of effective SRM, participants noted that not all suppliers have the capacity or willingness to adopt new digital tools. *"Some of our local suppliers are not yet fully digitalized. This makes it harder to integrate them into our systems and slows down data sharing,"* explained one supply executive.

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The need for user-friendly solutions and ongoing technical support was emphasized. Respondents suggested that FQM Trident could play a more active role in supporting suppliers' digital transformation, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of SRM.

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the results on supplier relationship management (SRM) and its role in enhancing procurement performance at FQM Trident Zambia. The aim of the study was to examine how SRM practices are adopted within the organization, evaluate their impact on procurement outcomes such as cost efficiency, quality, and delivery, and explore the key challenges faced in implementing SRM in the mining sector. In this chapter, the findings are interpreted in light of the study's objectives, connected to existing literature, and considered for their practical implications. The discussion also acknowledges the limitations of the research and suggests recommendations for practice and directions for future study.

Role of Supplier Relationship Management in Enhancing Procurement Performance at FQM Trident Zambia

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) has emerged as a pivotal driver of procurement performance and overall supply chain competitiveness in various industries, including mining (Al-Abdallah et al., 2014; Ali Rajab et al., 2021). At FQM Trident Zambia, an enterprise operating in one of Africa's most resource-intensive sectors, SRM is not merely an administrative function but a strategic imperative. This study sets out to analyse the role of SRM in enhancing procurement performance within FQM Trident, drawing on both empirical survey data and insights from the contemporary literature. The mining sector, characterized by high-value procurement and complex supplier networks, demands robust SRM practices to ensure efficiency, risk mitigation, and sustainable value creation (Dfid, 2013; Chama & Phiri, 2025). As the findings below demonstrate, FQM Trident Zambia's approach to SRM reflects both best practices and sector-specific adaptations, with tangible impacts on procurement outcomes and unique contextual challenges.

The Key SRM Practices Adopted at FQM Trident Zambia

The study found that FQM Trident has implemented a range of SRM practices, aligning with recommendations from both academic literature and industry benchmarks (Mettler & Rohner, 2009; PCW, 2022). The most prevalent practices identified among respondents include long-term contracts (100%), strategic partnerships (87.5%), and regular feedback and communication (81.3%). Supplier audits and evaluations (62.5%) and technology-enabled collaboration (58.3%) are also significant, while segmentation and risk-sharing mechanisms are less common (6.3% and 37.5%, respectively). These results mirror findings by Al-Abdallah et al. (2014) and Emon et al. (2024), who argue that long-term contracts and strategic partnerships foster trust, continuity, and mutual investment, which are essential for supply chain resilience. Regular communication and feedback loops are highlighted by Rasdien et al. (2024) and Sharif et al. (2023) as critical enablers of responsiveness and continuous improvement. The adoption of technology-enabled platforms, such as ERP systems, is particularly notable in enhancing data visibility and collaborative planning (Grant, 2024). Furthermore, the frequency of supplier performance reviews—most commonly quarterly (43.8%) or monthly/annually (each 18.8%)—reinforces FQM Trident's commitment to ongoing supplier monitoring and quality assurance (Mettler & Rohner, 2009). However, only 25% of respondents indicated full SRM integration within procurement processes, with 31.2% reporting no integration. This suggests that while key SRM practices are present, their application is not yet fully institutionalized across the organisation, reflecting findings by Isabelle Mahoro & Dushimimana (2024) on the uneven adoption of SRM in African industries.

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The Impact of SRM on Procurement Performance Indicators

The link between SRM and procurement performance is well-established in the literature, with positive associations found in manufacturing, services, and extractive industries (Ali Rajab et al., 2021; Mubanga Josephine Chileshe, 2022; Emon et al., 2024). At FQM Trident Zambia, the empirical evidence supports these broader trends. A substantial majority (62.5%) rated procurement cost efficiency as "Good," with only 12.5% indicating "Poor." Statistical analysis revealed a significant association between SRM integration and cost efficiency, echoing the findings of Al-Abdallah et al. (2014) and Avornu (2021), who document how robust SRM practices lower transaction costs, enable volume discounts, and improve negotiation leverage. Just over half (56.2%) rated product quality as “Good,” but only 2.1% selected “Excellent.” Although the association between SRM integration and quality was not statistically significant in this study, the trend aligns with the literature suggesting that closer supplier relationships improve quality through clearer expectations and joint problem-solving (Sharif et al., 2023; Isabelle Mahoro & Dushimimana, 2024).

Delivery timeliness received the strongest ratings, with 56.2% indicating “Good.” The chi-square test confirmed a significant association between SRM integration and on-time delivery. This supports Chama & Phiri (2025) and Rasdien et al. (2024), who highlight that collaborative SRM mechanisms enhance logistical coordination and reduce lead times. Supplier reliability and contract compliance were rated as “Good” by 50% of respondents each. While correlations to SRM integration were positive but not statistically significant, the qualitative feedback suggests that ongoing SRM efforts have fostered greater dependability among key suppliers, consistent with findings from PCW (2022) and Tegbee et al. (2024). Notably, 62.5% of respondents reported that SRM had “significantly improved” procurement performance, and 31.2% saw broad benefits across cost control, quality assurance, timely delivery, innovation, and risk mitigation. These perceptions are aligned with the arguments of Mettler & Rohner (2009), who note that SRM’s holistic impact goes beyond transactional efficiencies to strategic value creation.

The Challenges in Implementing SRM Practices in the Mining Sector

Despite these successes, FQM Trident faces several challenges in SRM implementation, reflecting broader regional and sectoral dynamics (Dfid, 2013; Sinkala, 2025). The most frequently cited challenge was limited supplier cooperation (37.5%), followed by lack of internal capacity or training (25%) and resistance to change (25%). These obstacles mirror those reported by Ali Rajab et al. (2021) and Avornu (2021), who found that supplier buy-in and internal skill gaps are persistent barriers to effective SRM in emerging markets. Rasdien et al. (2024) further emphasize that building trust and shared values with local suppliers remains a complex, long-term endeavor in the African context. Budgetary constraints were cited by 12.5% of respondents, highlighting the resource-intensive nature of SRM systems whether in technology adoption, training, or relationship-building (Sinkala, 2025). A plurality of respondents (43.8%) rated FQM Trident as only “minimally ready” to adopt advanced SRM, while only 25% felt the organization was “very ready.” This finding is consistent with Mettler & Rohner (2009), who argue that organizational readiness—encompassing leadership commitment, cross-departmental coordination, and robust processes—is critical for successful SRM transformation.

All in all, the findings demonstrate that FQM Trident Zambia has adopted a suite of best-practice SRM mechanisms, with long-term contracts, strategic partnerships, and regular engagement at the core. The positive impact of SRM on cost efficiency and delivery timeliness is clear, and there are indications of broader benefits for quality and supplier reliability. However, challenges persist, particularly in supplier engagement, internal capacity, and organizational readiness for advanced SRM. Addressing these gaps through targeted investment, process standardization, and training will be essential for FQM Trident to fully realize the transformative potential of SRM in mining sector procurement (Mettler & Rohner, 2009; Ali Rajab et al., 2021; Rasdien et al., 2024).

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study set out to analyse the role of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) in enhancing procurement performance at FQM Trident Zambia. The findings demonstrate that SRM is a critical enabler of procurement excellence in the mining sector. The most widely adopted SRM practices at FQM Trident include long-term contracts (100%), strategic partnerships (87.5%), and regular feedback and communication (81.3%). Statistical analyses revealed significant positive associations between SRM integration and procurement cost efficiency ($\chi^2 = 13.12$, $p = 0.041$) as well as delivery timeliness ($\chi^2 = 17.09$, $p = 0.009$), with 62.5% and 56.2% of respondents respectively rating these performance dimensions as "Good." Although the relationship between SRM and product quality was positive, it was not statistically significant.

Despite these benefits, challenges persist: limited supplier cooperation (37.5%), lack of internal capacity or training (25%), and resistance to change (25%) were the most frequently reported obstacles. Furthermore, only 25% of respondents considered SRM to be "fully integrated" within procurement processes, indicating room for further institutionalization and maturity. Overall, the study confirms that SRM delivers tangible improvements to procurement performance, but achieving its full potential at FQM Trident will require addressing both organizational and supplier-side barriers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance SRM Integration Across the Organization, With only 25% of respondents reporting full SRM integration, FQM Trident should prioritize standardizing SRM processes across all procurement units.
- Invest in Capacity Building and Training, regular training programs and professional development initiatives will equip staff with the skills needed to manage supplier relationships effectively.
- FQM Trident should implement supplier development programs, joint workshops, and clear channels for two-way communication. Building mutual trust and alignment can improve cooperation and performance.
- FQM Trident should continue to monitor SRM outcomes using key performance indicators (KPIs) and feedback loops, allowing for continuous improvement and agile response to challenges.
- FQM Trident should ensure that resource allocation for SRM be it in technology, training, or personnel, is aligned with the strategic importance of supplier relationships.

Recommendations For Further Research

1. Conduct a longitudinal study to track the evolution and long-term impact of SRM practices on procurement performance over time.
2. Investigate supplier perspectives on SRM to identify alignment opportunities, trust-building strategies, and areas for mutual improvement.
3. Evaluate the role of digital tools and analytics (e.g., ERP systems, performance dashboards) in enhancing SRM effectiveness and procurement outcomes.

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