

Gender Roles Stir the Recipe: How Learning Orientation Fuels Innovativeness in Tanzania's Food-Processing Firms

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Abstract

Purpose: Food processing firms are of great benefit. Despite their importance in the economy, they have not grown enough to ensure survival and growth, which demand them to be innovative. Thus, this paper analyses the relationship between learning orientation (LO) and innovativeness in food processing firms taking into account the moderation effect of gender roles in Tanzania. Specifically, the relationship between LO and innovativeness was determined, and the moderation effect of gender roles on the LO-innovativeness relationship was tested. **Methodology:** The study employed 224 owner-managers of food processing firms. A questionnaire with Likert scale type items was used to gather data. Analysis was done by Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). **Findings:** The findings revealed that Commitment to Learn ($\beta = 0.247$, $p < 0.001$), Open Mindedness ($\beta = 0.275$, $p < 0.001$), Shared Vision ($\beta = 0.216$, $p < 0.001$), and Gender Roles ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.001$) significantly enhanced innovativeness in food processing. There was no moderation effect of gender roles on the relationship between learning orientation and innovativeness. **Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice:** The study supports the Organisational Learning Theory by demonstrating that a firm which focuses on continuous learning and unlearning is in a better position of being innovative and being a market leader as learning orientation is a resource that is not easily imitable. Gender roles showed no moderating effect implying that when owners/managers have multiple gender roles that are pulling them away from the business, it draws back their innovative capability. Thus, societies should advocate against all kinds of gender-related drawbacks that unlevel the ground of innovation. **Policy makers** to formulate and implement a policy which would support food processing firms to learn from various external and internal stakeholders.

Keywords: Gender, Food processing firms, Tanzania, Learning orientation.