

# An Integrated Framework of Lean Cost Reduction, Lean Performance, and Lean Transportation Law Theories on Logistics Practice

\*<sup>1</sup>Zulhilmi Muhammad Nasir, <sup>2</sup>Rohafiz Sabar

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Defence Science & Technology, National Defence University of Malaysia, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Research & Innovation Management Centre, Northern University of Malaysia, Malaysia

\* Email: Zulhilmi.mnasir@gmail.com

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## Abstract

The logistics industry in Malaysia is experiencing rapid growth, which calls for enhanced operational efficiency, cost optimization, and waste minimization. While lean management has seen global success, its application in Malaysia's logistics sector remains relatively underexplored. This qualitative study aims to fill this gap by proposing an integrated framework combining lean cost reduction, performance, and transportation law theories to improve logistics practices. The research examines lean management principles in relation to logistics operation parties, focusing on three core theories: Cost Reduction Theory, Performance Theory, and Lean Transportation Law Theory. Data was collected through interviews with representatives from eight randomly selected logistics companies. The study's findings reveal that logistics operators have implemented various lean practices: Lean Cost Reduction Theory includes Milk-run, Just-in-time, and Waste Tier Elimination; Lean Performance Theory involves Operational Collaboration, Continuous Improvement, and Information Sharing; and Lean Transportation Law Theory is reflected in the Law of Transportation Waste, Law of Transportation Strategy, Law of Daily Event Management, and Law of Lean Transportation Performance. The proposed framework provides a structured methodology to help logistics operators achieve sustainable operational excellence, bridging the gap between theory and practical application in lean logistics management.

**Keywords:** Lean logistics, cost reduction, transportation law, lean practices, waste reduction. lean performance

## Introduction

The logistics industry is integral to supporting global trade and economic growth, facilitating the movement of goods both within countries and across borders. Within the industrial sector, logistics operations are complex and critical, and their efficiency directly impacts overall productivity. As trade volumes increase and global supply chains become more intricate, enhancing logistics operations' efficiency, reducing costs, and improving service quality without compromising customer satisfaction have become paramount. One promising approach to achieving these objectives is the implementation of lean logistics, an extension of lean manufacturing principles that are designed to minimize waste and maximize value creation (Wincel, 2004).

Lean logistics is grounded in the lean manufacturing philosophy, which seeks to eliminate non-value-added activities, such as excess transportation, inventory, and storage (Fengzhu, Shunan, & Sijun, 2014). Lean logistics has demonstrated its ability to drive operational efficiency across a variety of sectors, including manufacturing, healthcare, retail, and construction (Roman, Natalia & Halena, 2013). By applying lean principles to logistics operations, companies can streamline processes, reduce costs, and enhance the overall performance of their supply chains (Womack et al., 2007). At its core, lean logistics focuses on meeting customer needs while eliminating inefficiencies within the logistics system, making it a vital tool for organizations aiming to stay competitive in an increasingly globalized economy (Feng, Lai, & Jiang, 2013).

The concept of lean logistics emerged in Western industrialized countries in the late 20th century, with key works such as Womack and Jones' (1990) *The Machine That Changed the World*, which introduced the principles of lean thinking. Over the years, lean logistics principles have evolved, and a variety of tools have been developed to support its implementation. These include Value Stream Mapping, Process Activity Mapping, and Demand Amplification Mapping (Baudin, 2005). Lean logistics is designed to focus on customer-driven value, ensuring that logistics activities align with customer demands rather than internal processes or systems.

Despite its widespread application in regions such as Europe, China, and Thailand, where lean logistics practices have been successfully implemented to enhance operational efficiency, the adoption of lean logistics in Malaysia remains underexplored. Malaysia's logistics industry plays a crucial role in the country's trade-dependent economy, contributing significantly to economic growth. According to the World Bank (2012), Malaysia ranks 29th in the Logistics Performance Index, highlighting the importance of efficient logistics systems to the country's continued success. However, research on the implementation of lean logistics in Malaysia is sparse, with only limited studies focusing on its application in industries such as automotive manufacturing and healthcare (Amelia, Muriati, & Riza, 2013). Given the rapid growth of Malaysia's logistics sector, understanding the extent to which lean logistics principles have been adopted in this context is essential.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the status of lean logistics implementation in Malaysia's third-party logistics (TPL) companies. Preliminary interviews suggest that while some companies have adopted lean logistics practices, the full implementation of lean principles is still lacking. This study aims to fill existing gaps by introducing a conceptual framework that integrates three key components: Lean Cost Reduction Theory, Performance Theory, and Lean Transportation Law Theory. The framework seeks to bridge theoretical insights with practical applications, providing a comprehensive approach to achieving cost efficiency, improving performance, and reducing waste in logistics operations.

## Conceptual Framework

The application of lean concepts in production activities has encouraged further research in the logistics sector (Gnich, 2012). Dong and Huang (2013) defined lean logistics as the process of eliminating waste, reducing costs and expenditures, and striving for operational perfection to enhance value transfer and create maximum value for end users.

The adoption of lean concepts in logistics, supply chain, distribution, management, and manufacturing has significantly contributed to minimizing waste throughout operational processes, thereby facilitating cost reduction. According to Sternberg et al. (2012), airline carriers have successfully implemented lean principles in their operations. Meanwhile, Taylor and Martichenko (2006) argued that it is now time to apply the lean approach to motor carrier operations. Based on a comprehensive literature review and previous studies, the researchers have developed the following conceptual research framework.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework for integrating lean cost reduction, performance, and transportation law theories into logistics practice. All tools and techniques under the independent variables are supported by empirical evidence from previous studies. The first variable in this study is cost reduction, which includes elements such as milk-run, just-in-time (JIT), and waste tier strategies. Both the milk-run and JIT concepts contribute similarly to transport operations by enabling transporters to optimize their operations, reduce inventory levels on the customer side, improve performance, and ensure deliveries are made in the correct quantity and at the right time (Daugherty & Spencer, 1990). The waste tier concept, when applied to motor carriers, particularly local haulage companies, can help identify processes considered as waste. Eliminating these wastes can lead to significant cost reductions (Sternberg et al, 2012).

The second variable is performance, which comprises operational collaboration, continuous improvement, information sharing, and zero defects. Operational collaboration enhances performance by fostering effective communication between transporters and customers (Fugate et al, 2009). Additionally, continuous improvement practices such as Total Quality Management (TQM), Total Preventive Maintenance (TPM), and Just-in-Time (JIT). It is to ensure that improvement efforts are sustained over time (Singh & Singh, 2012). These initiatives indirectly support higher quality levels in logistics operations. Moreover, information sharing, supported by advanced information technologies such as Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and Decision Support Systems (DSS), has been shown to significantly improve performance (Sternberg

et al, 2012). The concept of zero defects, also known as "mistake-proofing" or poka-yoke, contributes to performance enhancement in local haulage companies by aligning with quality improvement initiatives. By identifying and addressing errors as they occur, employees and drivers work proactively to prevent future mistakes, thereby continuously improving quality and reducing defects (Mortimer, 1991).

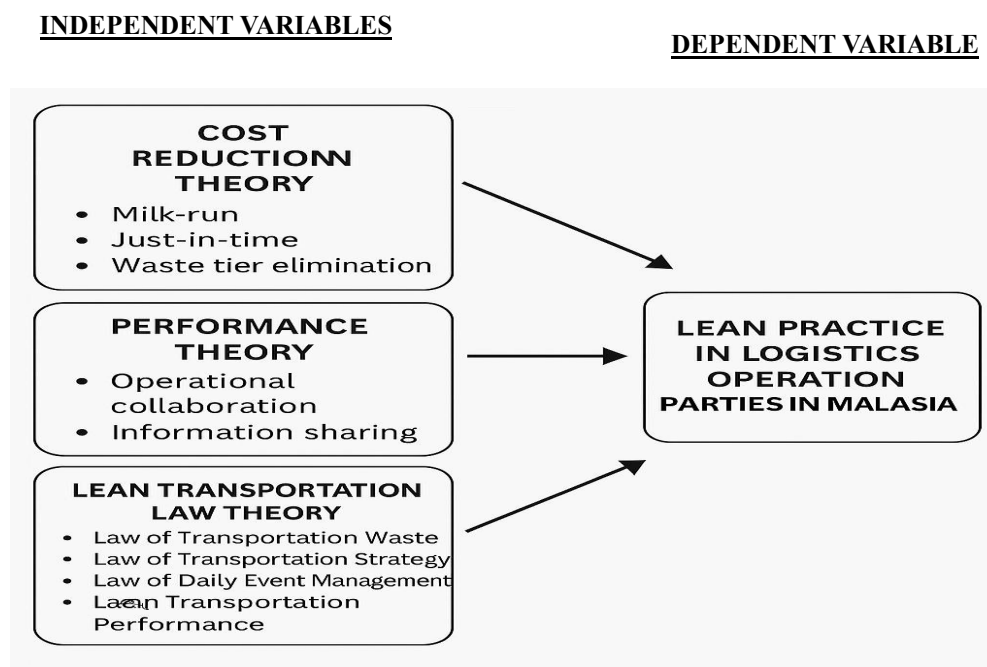


Figure 1. A Conceptual Framework

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The third variable is the lean transportation law theory, which highlights four core principles that guide transportation optimization in lean systems: the Law of Transportation Waste, the Law of Transportation Strategy, the Law of Daily Event Management, and the Law of Transportation Performance (Taylor & Martichenko, 2006). Each principle contributes to the overarching goal of creating efficient, value-driven transportation processes. The Law of Transportation Waste emphasizes the identification and elimination of waste within transportation activities, aligning with a key tenet of lean methodology (Ohno, 1988). Waste in transportation includes unnecessary movements, inefficient routing, and delays that do not add value to the supply chain (Hines & Rich, 1997). The primary objective of this principle is to reduce inefficiencies and costs by ensuring transportation activities generate value. The Law of Transportation Strategy ensures that transportation efforts align with an organization's strategic goals, including cost-efficiency, sustainability, and customer satisfaction. Strategic planning in transportation guarantees that operational priorities support long-term business objectives (Chopra & Meindl, 2019). The aim is to balance service quality, cost management, and environmental sustainability. The Law of Daily Event Management addresses the dynamic nature of transportation by promoting real-time monitoring and rapid decision-making. Effective daily

event management helps ensure that operational disruptions are resolved promptly, minimizing their impact on logistics operations (Mentzer & Konrad, 1991). The objective is to proactively manage transportation events to maintain operational continuity. Finally, the Law of Transportation Performance underscores the importance of measuring and managing transportation outcomes for continuous improvement. This involves defining and tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) such as on-time delivery rates, cost efficiency, and environmental impact (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). The goal is to optimize transportation performance through ongoing evaluation and corrective actions.

## Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews and observations as primary methods of data collection. Given the limited existing literature and research on lean practices in Malaysia, the study was exploratory in nature. In addition, secondary data were collected from various sources, including electronic databases, academic journals, books, online newspapers, magazines, reports, and statistical publications. These secondary sources provided supplementary insights to support the research findings. Among them, academic journals served as the primary source of secondary data, while online newspapers, magazines, and reports offered additional contextual information to enrich the study. The researcher selected eight companies providing logistics services as respondents for interview-based data collection. The participants were company representatives holding executive or managerial positions, each with more than seven years of professional experience in the field. The principle of theoretical saturation was applied, whereby data collection was concluded once additional interviews no longer yielded new insights or themes (Seale, 1999).

For data analysis, the researcher employed thematic analysis, a qualitative method used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns or themes within interview transcripts. Coding was applied to organize the data and extract key points relevant to the research objectives. Thematic analysis is particularly well-suited for qualitative research, as it enables researchers to systematically examine recurring themes and gain deeper insights into the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Results and Discussion

The results indicate that logistics companies in Malaysia are gradually incorporating lean practices into their operational strategies, though the level of adoption varies depending on the organization's size, resources, and strategic orientation. The integrated framework developed in this study (see Figure 2) combines the three theories to address key operational challenges such as high transportation costs, inefficiencies, performance gaps, and waste.

### Integration of Lean Theories into Logistics Practice

The results indicate that logistics companies in Malaysia are gradually incorporating lean practices into their operational strategies, though the level of adoption varies depending on the organization's size, resources, and strategic orientation. The integrated framework developed in this study as shown at Figure 2 combines the three theories to address key operational challenges such as high transportation costs, inefficiencies, performance gaps, and waste.

### Cost Reduction Theory

The analysis highlights that cost reduction remains a central concern for logistics providers. Practices such as milk-run deliveries and Just-In-Time (JIT) systems have been adopted to reduce inventory holding costs and improve transportation efficiency. Milk-run strategies promote efficient route planning and stock forecasting, while JIT focuses on reducing delays and risks associated with overproduction and storage. Furthermore, waste-tier elimination methods such as performance audits, effective truck allocation, and advanced monitoring systems help minimize non-value-adding activities, ultimately reducing operational costs.

### Performance Theory

Performance enhancement was found to be another critical dimension among the companies interviewed. The concept of operational collaboration, including outsourcing, mutual agreements, and shared resources, contributes significantly to improving communication and long-term partnerships within supply chain networks. Continuous improvement initiatives such as Kaizen, First-In-First-Out (FIFO), and technology integration (e.g., barcode and MassCloud systems) were also prevalent, reflecting a commitment to sustainable performance upgrades. Additionally, effective information sharing and

striving for zero defects were emphasized. The use of Warehouse Management Systems (WMS), Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), GPS tracking, and real-time communication tools (e.g., WhatsApp, email) has enabled seamless data exchange and minimized operational errors.

### Lean Transportation Law Theory

The application of the Lean Transportation Law Theory within the logistics context of Malaysia is relatively new but gaining traction. The Law of Transportation Waste focuses on waste elimination through centralized logistics, WMS integration, and improved driver guidance. The Law of Transportation Strategy emphasizes aligning transportation practices with core business goals, particularly through the prioritization of JIT principles and efficient delivery practices. Daily event management covering areas such as delivery scheduling, documentation accuracy, and operational flexibility was found to be essential in maintaining real-time responsiveness. Lastly, the Law of Transportation Performance is supported through regular audits, KPI tracking, and employee performance evaluations, ensuring a continuous feedback loop for process enhancement.

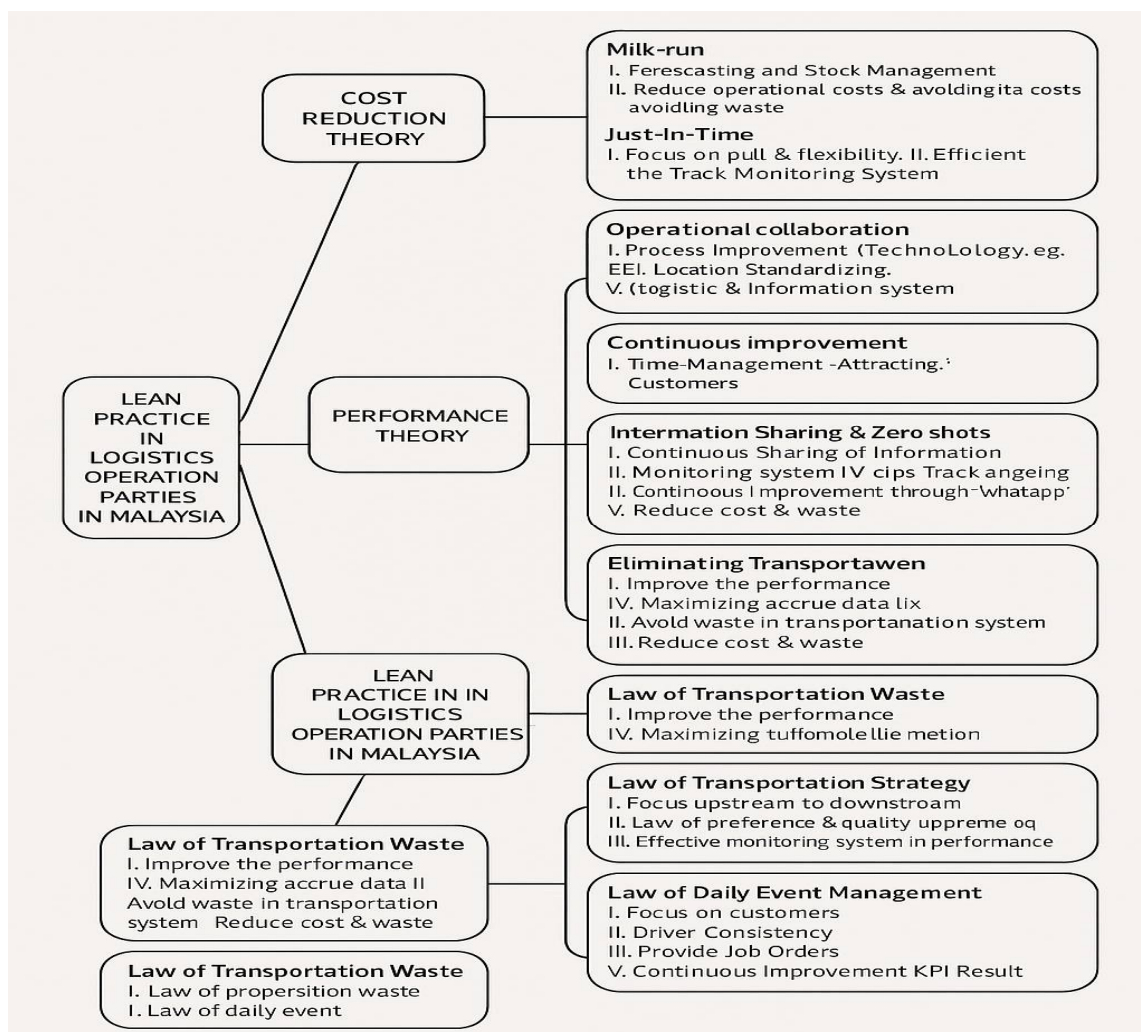


Figure 2. An Integration of conceptual framework on Lean Theories and Practice

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, an integrated conceptual framework combining Cost Reduction Theory, Performance Theory, and Lean Transportation Law Theory has been successfully developed to enhance logistics operations in Malaysia. The framework addresses critical areas such as waste minimization, cost efficiency, performance improvement, and transportation optimization through the strategic application of lean principles. By synthesizing empirical data from interviews and thematic analysis, the study demonstrates how lean tools such as milk-run, Just-In-Time, Kaizen, and electronic information systems can be effectively implemented to streamline logistics processes. The integration of lean transportation laws further supports real-time operational responsiveness and performance monitoring, contributing to a more agile and resilient logistics system. Overall, the proposed framework serves as both a theoretical contribution to lean logistics literature and a practical guide for stakeholders aiming to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and gain competitive advantage in the Malaysian logistics industry.

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