

## The Contribution of Organizational Learning and Human Resource to Achieve a Competitive Advantage at the Jordanian Pharmaceutical Companies

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### Abstract:

*The aim of this study is to test the impact of organizational learning and human resources on competitive advantage on the Jordanian pharmaceutical companies. The questionnaire has been used as a tool to collect data base for the study's variables, It was distributed on a convenience sample consisting of 130 employees in the Jordanian pharmaceutical companies. The researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences SPSS to analyze and test study hypothesis.*

*This study found that organizational learning has a positive impact on competitive advantage but human resources have no effect on competitive advantage. According to the study's results, the researcher has suggested many recommendations to the Jordanian pharmaceutical companies.*

**Key words:** Organizational Learning, Human Resources, Competitive Advantage.

**Jel Classification Codes :** M10, M19, M12.

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## 1. Introduction

Today's companies face challenges to provide the needs for their customers, suppliers, and stakeholder. Indeed many companies use their resources and capabilities to create value for customers, suppliers, and stakeholders. This allows resource based view to become a crucial logical consideration in company strategy development.

Despite the fact that the Jordanian Pharmaceutical Industry plays a vital role in the economy of the Jordan, and that products of this sector have the second position in Jordanian export structure, it still faces aggressive competition in the domestic market, and Jordanian people prefer foreign products rather than domestic ones.

Competition and how the companies can achieve competitive advantage in dynamic and complex environments is one of the subjects that attract researchers. Major researches, however, have applied on two sectors; the first is communicational companies and the second is the banks sector. These reasons led the researcher in the present study to choose a different sector. The researcher applies this study on the Jordanian pharmaceutical industry, because this sector is very important for the Jordanian economy, and the products are very sensible.

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Globalization had two effects on companies: it has a positive affect because it opens new foreign markets and allows the exporting of products to different countries, but on the other hand, it creates a negative affect because the companies are divided domestic markets by many companies situated in other countries. This creates an aggressive competition between these companies. The aggressive competition necessitates the need to study this issue in the Jordanian pharmaceutical industry: majorities of customers are oriented to demand foreign pharmaceutical products and the domestic companies have 40% in the Jordanian share market (Ryan, 2004). These problems lead to this question:

**How is competitive advantage sustained in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies through organizational learning and human resources?**

### 1.2. Objectives of the Study

Study objectives can be summarized as follows:

- ✓ To increase understanding of competitive advantage, organizational learning and human resources;
- ✓ To test a descriptive model that postulates the possible relationships between competitive advantage, organizational learning and human resources;

- ✓ To explain how organizational learning and human resources influencing competitive advantage;
- ✓ To give many suggestions to Jordanian pharmaceutical companies to ameliorate the impact of organizational learning and human resources on competitive.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Competitive Advantage**

According to (Kaleka, 2002), a company can achieve competitive advantage through offering or creating more value for its customers in comparison with rival companies. Competitive advantage reflects the degree of realization of the competitive strategy pursued by the company, which also can be viewed as aiming at lower cost and/or differentiation through superior value creation. The researcher sees that cost advantage reflects the company's systematic efforts to increase efficiency, contemporary developments in the field suggest that differentiation advantage can be expressed more finely as product and service advantages. Moreover, many researchers see the need to consider sources of competitive advantage at a level of aggregation that reflects organizational processes. According to this perspective, the company has two types of sources of advantage: resources, representing assets controlled by the company that are used as inputs for organizational processes; and capabilities, concerning the company's ability to combine, develop, and use its resources in order to create competitive advantage.

Flamholtz & Hua, (2003) recognize that it is well competitive advantage that is at the heart of a company's performance in competitive markets. On the other hand, (Weerawardena & O'Cass, 2004) argue that the creation and maintaining of competitive advantage concerning the company is a critical issue, because this environment is very complex. Competitive advantage can be conceptualized as a superior "marketplace position" that captures the provision of superior customer value and/or the achievement of lower relative costs, resulting in market share dominance and superior financial performance.

This view was reinforced by (Li., et al, 2006), where competitive advantage is seen as the extent to which an organization is able to create a defensible position over its competitors. It comprises capabilities that allow an organization to differentiate itself from its competitors and is an outcome of critical management decisions.

In others studies, (Li & Zhou, 2009) argue that competitive advantage is based on two types of positional superiority: cost and differentiation. The first type is cost advantage, or cost leadership, which arises when the company operates at a lower cost than its competitors but offers a comparable product. The primary drivers of cost include economies of scale, capacity utilization, and process management. The second type of differentiation advantage is achieved when customers consistently perceive a company's offerings as superior to those of its competitors. A company can

differentiate itself in various ways, such as providing superior service, offering innovative features, developing a strong brand name, launching effective promotion, and so on.

## **2.2 Organizational Learning**

Organizational learning emphasizes the development of new insights that have the potential to change the organization's behavior (Hult, 2002). The researcher adds that organizational learning can be defined as the development of new knowledge or insights that have the potential to influence behavior.

(Rhee, et al, 2010) define learning orientation as the development of new knowledge or insights that have the potential to influence behavior through its values and beliefs within the culture of the organization.

(DeNisi., et al, 2004) define organizational learning as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals and groups who are willing to apply it in their jobs in making decisions and influencing others to accomplish tasks that are important for the organization.

## **2.3 Human Resources**

Human resources (HR) are defined as the pool of human capital under the company's control in a direct employment relationship, and HR practices are the organizational activities directed at managing the pool of human capital and ensuring that the capital is employed towards the fulfillment of organizational goals (Elliott, 2003).

Human resources are referred to as workforces who are skillful and experienced in performing tasks, and more importantly building up and maintaining customer relationships (Wong & Karia, 2009).

## **2.4 Hypotheses Development**

### **2.4.1. Organizational Learning and Competitive Advantage**

Hult, (2002) argued that most research focuses on studying the role of organizational learning and innovation in achieving a competitive advantage in the global marketplace. He concluded that innovativeness and learning can each lead to the company achieving a competitive advantage. This view was supported by (Rhee., et al, 2010), suggesting that large company commitment to learning plays a crucial role in updating its assets and capabilities concerning its key activities. If a small company is less learning-oriented than its competitors, it may have substantial difficulties in survival. Moreover, learning orientation is seen as we identify it; "as a sort of organizational culture associated with the potential to affect behaviors".

Learning orientation becomes an important tool to the securing of a competitive advantage. Previous studies admit to the same result of (Hult, et al, 2004), arguing that learning orientation is important to developing competitive advantage. Learning orientation results in new behaviors. The researchers believed that the success of new products relates directly to the organization's focus and improvement of “commitment to learning” and “learning orientation”.

DeNisi, et al, (2004) provided that a company concentrates to imitate continuous organizational learning because it has cumulative effects that are much more difficult to imitate by other companies. Continuous learning is an important source of sustainable competitive advantage.

Jiménez-Jiménez & Cegarra-Navarro, (2007) add that organizational learning is some of the resources used by companies to attain a stronger positional advantage. Organizational learning is a considerable factor influencing the achievement of competitive advantage. Furthermore, they assure that the company adopted organizational learning to achieve better competitive advantage than these competitors.

Basing to study above the researcher purposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Learning has positive impact on the achievement of competitive advantage.

#### **2.4.2 Human Resources and Competitive Advantage**

Werbel & DeMarie, (2005) found that human resources are very important assets providing the company with competitive advantage; since it is difficult for competitors to sustain the same human resource.

Ferris., et al, (2007) suggested that, in order to remain profitable in the long run, organizations must have a sustainable competitive advantage. This is very important to the company in order to sustain its existence in the market. Human resources are more difficult to imitate than other resources. Accordingly, human resources become a very crucial source of competitive advantage.

Stavrou, et al, (2007) suggest that competitive advantage and superior performance are two connected but different ideas: successful human resource management can contribute to superior performance as a source of competitive advantage by making organizations more effective. They explained that in order for the company to remain profitable in the long run, organizations must have a sustainable competitive advantage. Competitive advantages, such as organizational culture, employee morale, and worker loyalty, are more difficult to imitate by other companies. The researchers proved that a number of human resource practices could lead to competitive advantage.

According to (Royer., et al, 2008) human resources are very important when it comes to realizing the competitive advantage, if the managers can link valuable human resources to company activity. This study is supported by the study of (Wong & Karia, 2009), where they

argue that human resources play important roles in the achievement of competitive advantage, like physical, financial and intangible resources.

Al-Rfou & Trawneh, (2009) suggested that human resources are a key source of competitive advantage, because of causal ambiguity and systematic information that make them inimitable.

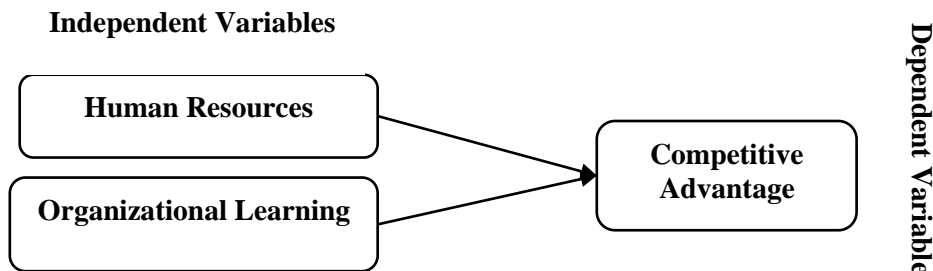
The researcher is, thus lead to propose the following hypothesis concerning the effect of human resources on the achievement of competitive advantage:

H2: Human resources have positive impact on the achievement of competitive advantage.

## 2.5 The Research Model

To study the important variables influencing achievement of competitive advantage, the researcher relied on several previous studies in building the model below, and used the resource-based view to select these variables. The model is divided into two types of variables. The first is the independent variables, including organizational learning and human resources. The second concerns the dependent variable is competitive advantage.

**Figure. 1. The Research Model**



## 3. Design Methodology

### 3.1 Sampling Design

The sample was used to generalize the results because the researcher cannot cover all the population. The researcher distributed 170 questionnaires and has collected 130 questionnaires; these questionnaires were distributed in all pharmaceutical companies. The sample consists of 130 employees, 67.4% (88 employees) of respondents were males, and females were represents 32.6% (42 employees). The large percentages of respondents were males.

The majority of employees' age in the pharmaceutical companies was between 30 and 39 years. The respondents to the questionnaire, according to their age, were; 36.9% of respondents between

18 and 29 years old, 42.5% of respondents were between 30 and 39 years, 16.6% of respondents were between 40 and 49 years old, 3.5% of respondents were between 50 and 59 years old, 0.5% of respondent between 60 and more than 60 years old.

According to the income, that 3.5% of respondents have income less than 200 JD, 34.2% of respondents have income between 200 and 400JD, 24.9% of respondents have income between 401and 600JD, lastly 37.4% of respondents have the income more than 600JD.

According to the job position, 0.5% of respondents were general managers, 20.1% of respondents were chief department, and 6.4% of respondents were chief executive. Finally 73.0% of respondents were employees.

According to the level of education, 7.0% of respondents have high school, 11.8% of respondents have diploma, 66.6% of respondents have B.A, 13.6% of respondents have master degree, and 1.1% of respondents have D.P.H.

According to the experience, 17.6% of respondents have less than 3 years' experience, 25.9% of respondents have between 3 and 5years experience, 26.7% of respondents have between 6 and 9 years' experience and 29.7% of respondents have between 10 and more than10 years' experience.

### 3.2 Variables Measurements

The table below represents the operational definitions and measurement items of study's variables.

**Table. 1 Constructs Operational Definitions and Measurement Items**

Variables	Operational Definition	Sources	Items
<b>Organizational Learning</b>	Development of new knowledge or insights that have the potential to influence behavior.	Hult, 2002; Nybakk., et al, 2009	1-4
<b>Human Resource</b>	Includes general business skills, education, expertise, training, experience, judgment, intelligence, relationships, etc. of individual employees.	Newbert., et al, 2008; Griffith., et al, 2009	5-7
<b>Competitive Advantage</b>	Is an outcome of resources and capabilities residing within the organization.	Kaleka, 2002; Sven, 2004	8-15

### 3.3 Instrument Reliability and Validation

#### 3.3.1 Reliability

Reliability was evaluated by assessing the internal consistency of the items representing each factor using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (O'zgener & I'raz, 2006). Table (2) represents the results of Cronbach's Alpha for the scales.

**Table. 2 Cronbach's Alpha for the Scales**

The Variables	No. of Cases	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Organizational Learning</b>	130	4	.788
<b>Human Resource</b>	130	3	.827
<b>Competitive Advantage</b>	130	8	.873

(Navarro., et al, 2010) assured that Carmines and Zeller (1979) establish that the standardized loading should be greater than or equal to 0.707 to accept an indicator as part of a construct.

Table (2) listed Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the constructs, and showed that Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of organizational learning was 0.788; and that of human resource was 0.827; that of competitive advantage was 0.873. Because the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients of all constructs were more than 0.7, the measurement of this study was acceptable in reliability.

### 3.3.2 Validity

The researcher used the construct validity by calculated correlation of item-to-total. The result of testing the validity showed in table (3).

**Table. 3 Test of Construct Validity**

Factor	Item	Sig. (2-tailed)	Correlation of item-to-total
<b>Organizational Learning</b>	OL1	.000	<b>0.753 **</b>
	OL2	.000	<b>0.800 **</b>
	OL3	.000	<b>0.820 **</b>
	OL4	.000	<b>0.758 **</b>
<b>Human Resources</b>	HR1	.000	<b>0.890 **</b>
	HR2	.000	<b>0.913 **</b>
	HR3	.000	<b>0.777 **</b>
<b>Competitive Advantage</b>	CA1	.000	<b>0.635 **</b>
	CA2	.000	<b>0.748 **</b>
	CA3	.000	<b>0.773 **</b>
	CA4	.000	<b>0.785 **</b>
	CA5	.000	<b>0.803 **</b>
	CA6	.000	<b>0.745 **</b>
	CA7	.000	<b>0.800 **</b>
	CA8	.000	<b>0.808 **</b>

\*\*: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The item-to-total correlations in this study all exceed 0.5 (Tseng & Lee., et al, 2009; Chen., et al, 2009), and all items were significant because ( $\text{sig} = .000 < 0.01$ ); with each dimension demonstrating properties of good validity, the fit of these models can now be assessed.



## 4. Data Analysis and Research Findings

### 4.1 Normal Distribution of the Data

Skewness and kurtosis are two ways that can evaluate a distribution of data and can detect non normal distribution. (Cao & Dowlatsahi, 2005) considered scores to be moderately non-normal if they demonstrated skewness index values ranging from 2.0 to 3.0 and kurtosis values ranging from 7.0 to 21.0.

**Table. 4 Skewness and Kurtosis Coefficients**

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
Organizational Learning	1.682	3.855
Human Resources	.768	.410
Competitive Advantage	1.519	3.287

In the current study, skewness ranged from 0.768 to 1.682, and kurtosis ranged between 0.410 and 3.855 as shown in table (4). According to the previous studies, the results of skewness and kurtosis of the current data indicate a normal distribution of the data.

### 4.2 Hypotheses Testing

The Durbin–Watson covariance of this regression mode is 1.906(shown in table (5)), the value of Durbin-Watson is close to 2 if the errors are uncorrelated. This indicates no serious autocorrelation (Carroll., et al, 2002).

**Table. 5 Fitness of the model for regression analysis (independent variables: Organizational Learning & Human Resources)**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson	F	Sig.
1	.768	.590	.581		.48016	1.906	65.768	.000

Fitness of the model: as shown in table (5) at the multiple regression analysis, R-square is equal to 0.590, this signifies that 59.0% of the variance in dependent variable (competitive advantage) explained by the (independent variables) organizational learning and human resources. The p-value of the model is 0.000 and it is < 0.05, the consequence is that the model is statistically significant. This led to the fitness of the original model in explaining the achievement of competitive advantage.

**Table. 6 T-value and significance level ( $\alpha$ ) (independent variables: organizational learning and human resources)**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.344	.093		3.683	.000
Organizational Learning	.199	.053	.193	3.782	.000
Human Resources	-.032	.043	-.035	-.752	.452

Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage

According to the results shown in table (6), organizational learning has significant direct effect on achievement of competitive advantage in pharmaceutical companies ( $t = 3.782$ ;  $\text{sig} = 0.000$ ).

So, this hypothesis was accepted: H1: organizational learning has positive impact on the achievement of competitive advantage, accepted.

Human resource has no significant direct effect on achievement of competitive advantage in pharmaceutical companies ( $t = -0.752$ ;  $\text{sig} = 0.452$ ).

So, this hypothesis was rejected: H2: The human resources have positive impact on the achievement of competitive advantage, rejected.

## 4.2. Discussion of Findings

Companies want to achieve competitive advantage to assure many benefits such as, to attract high numbers of loyalty customers, and increase market shares in the long term.

In this study the researcher relied on the resource- based view to explain the factors influencing the achievement of competitive advantage. If the resources are valuable, rare, inimitable, and not substitutable, then they are considered to have the potential to contribute to competitive success.

### 4.2.1. The Effect of Organizational Learning on Competitive Advantage

Through examining the first hypothesis, the researcher found that learning plays a positive role in the achievement of competitive advantage in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies. We have concluded that learning has a positive effect on competitive advantage. Learning facilitates the exploitation of the information concerning the customers, the market position, competitors and the activities. This result is similar to the results of many studies.

Hult, (2002) found that learning or building knowledge is a very important factor that must be applied. Learning forms a strong indicator of sustainable competitive advantage. In addition, learning processes (e.g., information generation, information dissemination, and shared interpretation) most likely mediate the relationship between sustainable competitive advantage and performance.

Learning is more effective in generating competitive advantage, because of the benefits that it provides to companies in turbulent environments. The companies that are market and learning oriented will tend to be more in touch with buyers and understand their markets better, advantages that in turn should translate into innovative activities that give rise to superior products, processes, and administrative approaches (Hult., et al, 2004). Other studies suggest that companies could always learn and respond to the information generated and disseminated, and responsiveness to customer needs and changing market conditions become more important for the success of companies. This suggests that learning is very important in sustaining market positions and achieving competitive advantage (Jiménez-Jiménez & Cegarra-Navarro, 2007).

#### **4.2.2. The No Effect of Human Resources on Competitive Advantage**

The researcher found that human resources have no effect on the achievement of competitive advantage. The researcher believe that this result is due to the complexity of human behavior characteristics, the fact that companies cannot adopt those human resources to achieve the competitive advantage and the fact that companies require greater capital to develop those human resources. Furthermore, it could be the case that the responders to the questionnaires do not have sufficient knowledge concerning human resources. To interpret this result, the researcher relied on many studies.

Boxall, (2003) suggests that to sustain and exploit a source of human resource advantage, management will need to foster barriers to imitation, particularly those associated with path dependence: astute targeting and timing, and ongoing systemic learning. The company will also need to effectively manage the politics of appropriation. In addition, the company needs greater financial capital to fund human resource.

Knowledge resources may be originated from human resources and they are also embedded in the organizational routines; they are inherently casually ambiguous (Wong & Karia, 2009). It could also be the case that the companies cannot access those pieces of knowledge and cannot exploit those human resources to achieve a competitive advantage.

### **5. Recommendations**

Several issues embarked on by the present research have been of great relevance to competitive advantage, thus, leading the researcher to site many recommendations concerning the achievement of competitive advantage in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies. These recommendations are:

- ✓ It should be that the companies enjoy resources and appropriately manage them in such a way so as to increase marketplace success and achieve competitive advantage;

- ✓ Jordanian pharmaceutical companies have alliances by many countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and the USA (Jordanian Association of Manufacturers of Pharmaceuticals and Medical Appliances, 2010). These companies can increase competitive advantage by the reinforcement of product development and innovativeness, through alliances. The alliance provides companies with better innovations, rapid development, and lower risks;
- ✓ The pharmaceutical companies have many important resources and capabilities; these variables should be further investigated by a more integrated and compositional approach;
- ✓ The pharmaceutical companies can conclude these strengths and weaknesses through analyzing the effect of human resources and organizational learning on the achievement of competitive advantage;
- ✓ These companies can improve their human resources by training and impacting their behavior through motivation, because human resources are considered to be the motor of the company, and it can succeed with this resource especially in building the relationships between the suppliers and the customers.

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