

## Investigating the Impact of a Learning Organization on Organizational Performance: The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment

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**Abstract:** This research aims to investigate the impact of employees organizational commitment as a mediating variable between a learning organization and organizational performance among insurance companies in Jordan. A simple random sample was taken of employees of the 20 insurance companies in Jordan that are listed in the Amman Stock Exchange (ASE). Of the 327 distributed questionnaires, 302 were returned and analyzed using SPSS. The results show that organizational commitment mediates the relationship between a learning organization and organizational performance. In addition, a learning organization has a critical role in determining organizational commitment and performance. The results suggest that insurance companies that are operating as learning organizations should take organizational commitment into account to improve their performance. Thus, the research provides a basic methodology for further investigations of the relationship between a learning organization and organizational performance and the mediating role of organizational commitment.

**Key words:** Learning organization, organizational commitment, organizational performance, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, systems thinking, affective commitment, normative commitment, continuance commitment

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### INTRODUCTION

Globalization, the evolution of the knowledge-based economy and technological developments have made the environments in which business organizations operate more competitive than ever (Rana *et al.*, 2016). In this context, learning organizations have developed to help organizations remain competitive in their dynamic, high-pressure business environments (Ambula *et al.*, 2016). Organizations have to learn as much as possible about developments in their complex environments to remain effective and they need to learn faster than their rivals if they wish to be innovative (Ratna *et al.*, 2014).

The concept of the learning organization has been applied to innovation and performance within organizations and the capacity for continuous improvement and change to confront the various difficulties in the environments in which organizations operate has been connected to the learning ability of these organizations (Hussein *et al.*, 2014). Organizations are using various strategies to ensure that their employees possess the ability to cope with the changes and challenges that the organizations face (Rana *et al.*, 2016).

Human factors play a critical role in the implementation of the different practices and tactics in

organizations that lead to improvement in organizational performance (Habtoor, 2016). Organizations should always invest in improving the resources, capabilities and competences of their employees and of the organizations as a whole to increase their output and improve their performance (Burke and Hutchins, 2008). Further, learning organizations should maintain and improve their employees organizational commitment to sustain their competitive advantage (Atak and Erturgut, 2010).

The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of organizational commitment as a variable mediating the relationship between insurance companies in Jordan that are learning organizations and their organizational performance in the complex environment of their industry (Torkestani *et al.*, 2014).

### Literature review

**Learning organizations:** Learning organizations came to prominence in 1990 with the release of Peter Senge's research on the "Fifth Discipline" (Pedler and Burgoyne, 2017). Interest has grown in the concept of a learning organization as organization's operating environments have become more complex and the concept has become a basic element of organizations that seek to adapt to a constantly changing research and business environment (Rana *et al.*, 2016).

Generally, the nature of the learning organization involves a foundation of creativity and sustainable improvement through organizational learning (Wen, 2014). According to Senge (2009), the main characteristic of the learning organization is the capability to create a future by continuous development. According to Watkins and Marsick (1993), a learning organization mixes learning and research together in a systematic way to ensure continuous enhancement of the organization and its employees.

A learning organization can be seen as an organization that supports a learning culture in which constant learning takes place at individual, group, organizational and societal levels (Watkins and Marsick, 1993). According to Senge (1990), a learning organization is an organization where individuals continuously improve their capabilities to attain the goals they desire where new thinking types are utilized and individuals discover ways to learn together.

However, although learning organizations have been discussed widely in earlier literature (Santa, 2015), the definition of a learning organization is still debated among researchers (Opengart, 2015). This research measures the dimensions of a learning organization developed by Senge.

According to Senge (2009), a learning organization has five dimensions: personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. Personal mastery is related to the individual's commitment to improve their current capabilities and knowledge (Lenka and Chawla, 2015). Mental models refer to a person's view of reality which provides meaning to a person's sense of the world (Rana *et al.*, 2016). Building shared vision refers to developing a mutual future state by engagement and commitment (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2014). Team learning can be defined as when employees share their own knowledge and experience with their peers (Lenka and Chawla, 2015). Systems thinking is the discipline that permits organizations to recognize the challenges that they have to overcome to proceed from the current place to their desired future (Rana *et al.*, 2016).

**Organizational commitment:** Employees organizational commitment has received much attention and interest from academics as research to date has recognized it as a key element in determining the research conduct of employees within organizations (Yahaya and Ebrahim, 2016). Organizational commitment is a critical characteristic of the relationship between employees and their organizations (Lee, 2007).

According to Meyer and Allen (1997), commitment is the factor that connects employees to their organization

and contributes to the organization's success. Committed employees are a critical driver of organizational effectiveness (Sabella *et al.*, 2016). Committed employees in organizations avert the expense of high absenteeism and turnover (Yahaya and Ebrahim, 2016). Organizational commitment also has other positive results such as improved job performance and satisfied employees. Therefore, organizational commitment is critical for organizations and their employees (Cicekli and Kabasakal, 2017).

Organizational commitment has been defined in various ways in previous research (Yahaya and Ebrahim, 2016). For instance, it has been defined as a binding element that motivates employees and connects them to their organization and makes them pursue certain types of behavior that have value to the organization (Meyer *et al.*, 2006). Organizational commitment has also been defined as the need to maintain organizational membership, identification with the company's objectives, organizational success and employee's loyalty and desire to put in extra effort on behalf of the organization (Aydin *et al.*, 2011). Finally, organizational commitment can be considered as a way of measuring an individual's connection to the organization (Mensah *et al.*, 2016).

Meyer and Allen (1991) have classified organizational commitment into three dimensions: affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment. Affective commitment is an employees psychological connection with the organization (English *et al.*, 2010). Normative commitment is an individual's need to stay in the organization due to a feeling of obligation (Farrukh *et al.*, 2017). Continuance commitment is generally defined as an individual's willingness to stay within the organization due to the individual's nontransferable investments such as relationships with colleagues and accrued benefits that make it costly to quit the job and look for research elsewhere (Umoh *et al.*, 2014). These three dimensions of organizational commitment are used in this research. They have been employed extensively in earlier research and are acceptable measurements of organizational commitment (Klein *et al.*, 2009).

**Organizational performance:** Organizational performance is the subject of many studies as it plays a critical role in establishing, applying and overseeing a strategic plan and establishing the future direction of an organization (Teeratsirikool *et al.*, 2013). An organization's potential success relies on its performance (Almatrooshi *et al.*, 2016). Organizational performance is a measure of output that identifies employees knowledge contributions in their organizations (Oyemomi *et al.*, 2016).

In today's complex environment, organizations must have the capacity to appraise their achievements against their goals by using performance measures such as profit and quality of products and by implementing suitable strategies to attain their goals (Mehralian *et al.*, 2017). Organizational performance relies on employees skills and competencies in applying strategies (Almatrooshi *et al.*, 2016).

Organizational performance is defined as the organization's capability to attain the objectives of profitability, competitive advantage, long-run survival and expanding market share by deploying feasible plans and strategies (Oyemomi *et al.*, 2016). Further, organizational performance can be seen as the actual performance of an organization as compared to its planned objectives and goals (Tomal and Jones, 2015).

Organizational performance is measured in different ways for different dimensions (Yousefi *et al.*, 2016). The two primary dimensions are financial and non-financial performance (Abdalkrim, 2013; Akdemir *et al.*, 2010; Waal, 2012; Nzuve and Omolo, 2012). Non-financial performance is measured through scoring customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, product quality, market share, productivity and innovation (Ittner and Larcker, 1996; Jusoh *et al.*, 2008; Shah, 2013).

**Relationship between a learning organization and organizational performance:** Organizations that have the capability to learn enhance their performance because the beneficial knowledge acquired is then employed (Hussein *et al.*, 2014). There is a constant learning environment in a learning organization (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011). A learning organization has the ability to cope with constant environmental change: this ability results in the organization's superior performance and position in the market (Hung *et al.*, 2010).

Becoming a learning organization has been perceived as a panacea for various organizational issues such as performance, empowerment, group found and customers and employees satisfaction (Siddique, 2017). Many researchers have identified that being a learning organization has a strong positive influence on organizational performance (Hussein *et al.*, 2014).

**Relationship between a learning organization and organizational commitment:** Although, there is a connection between a learning organization and organizational commitment, few researchers have examined the relationship between these variables. It is necessary to conduct further research into this

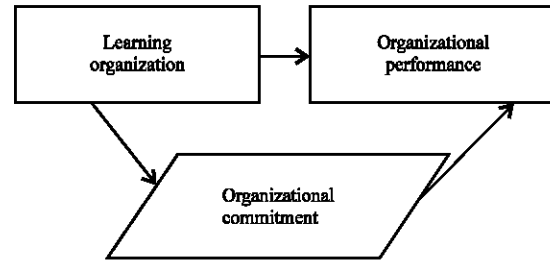


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of the research

connection, because organizational commitment might be enhanced by organizational characteristics (Jo and Joo, 2011; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990).

The needs of organizations in this competitive "knowledge age" are more universal, more elastic, more learning-oriented and more dependent on teams than was previously the case (Atak and Ertugut, 2010). Therefore, organizations need individuals who have high commitment and who employ their emotional and mental capabilities and their physical abilities for the good of the organization (Ulrich, 1998).

Abd Rahman and Awang found that learning organizations have a strong positive impact on organizational commitment. This is based on the employees understanding of their organization's position in relation to competitors an emphasis on delegation on improving employees abilities and on strategies to improve employees autonomy. Taken together, these can incrementally increase employees motivation and their commitment to their organization's objectives (Aghaei *et al.*, 2012).

**Relationship between organizational commitment and organizational performance:** Employees commitment to their organization leads to competitive benefits and financial gains; therefore, employees commitment is perceived as a competitive strategy (Kashefi *et al.*, 2013). Effectively committed employees will try their best to maintain their organization's interests and goal.

As this entails, employees commitment to their organization also positively influences organizational performance (Pinho *et al.*, 2014). Employees with a high degree of organizational commitment will be more involved in the mission of the organization and they will perform their jobs with a sense of ownership (Irefin and Mechanic, 2014).

As shown in Fig. 1, this study argues that organizational commitment mediates the relationship between a learning organization and organizational performance. This leads to the following (null) hypotheses.

- H<sub>1</sub>: there is no statistically significant relationship between a learning organization and organizational performance
- H<sub>2</sub>: there is no statistically significant relationship between a learning organization and organizational commitment
- H<sub>3</sub>: there is no statistically significant relationship between organizational commitment and organizational performance
- H<sub>4</sub>: there is no statistically significant mediating effect of organizational commitment on the relationship between learning organization and organizational performance

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Sample and data collection:** The population for this research consisted of 20 insurance companies in Jordan, listed in the Amman Stock Exchange (ASE). The sample consisted of 327 employees, selected using simple random sampling. Quantitative data were gathered by questionnaire. The 5-point Likert-type scales were used in the questionnaires.

**Learning organization questionnaire:** “Learning organization” was measured using the scale developed by Al-Qutop *et al.* (2011) which contains twenty items; four that measure personal mastery, three that measure mental models, three that measure building shared vision, seven that measure team learning and three that measure systems thinking.

**Organizational performance questionnaire:** “Organizational performance” was measured using a scale developed by Eltinay and Masri (2014). The scale comprises nine items that measure the non-financial performance of an organization. It includes customer and employee satisfaction, product and service quality, market share, productivity and innovation.

**Organizational commitment questionnaire:** “Organizational commitment” was measured using Meyer and Allen’s Model of Organizational Commitment. The model comprises eighteen items: six items that measure affective commitment, six that measure normative commitment and six that measure continuance commitment.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Reliability:** Reliability was investigated for the research variables: learning organization, organizational

Table 1: Reliability results for learning organization, organizational commitment, and organizational performance

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach’s alpha
Learning organization	20	0.929
Organizational commitment	18	0.937
Organizational performance	9	0.926

commitment and organizational performance. Cronbach’s alpha was used as it measures internal consistency. Table 1 presents the results of the reliability tests. It confirms that internal consistency is high; therefore, all the variables are reliable. Table 2 shows the distribution of the research variables and indicates that learning organization, organizational commitment and organizational performance have met the recommended rule-of-thumb standard of  $\alpha \geq 0.70$ .

**Regression analysis:** The impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable was measured through linear regression analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3-6 where R is the coefficient of correlation and measures the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and R<sup>2</sup> is the coefficient of determination, showing the percentage of the variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable. Standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) indicates the unit increase in the dependent variable caused by an increase of one unit in the independent variable. The results of the tests for each of the null hypotheses are discussed in the following study.

**Tests of hypotheses:**

- H<sub>1</sub>: there is no statistically significant relationship between being a learning organization and organizational performance

Table 3 shows that, R = 0.679 which indicates that there is a positive relationship between a learning organization and organizational performance. Being a learning organization explains 48.2% of the variance in organizational performance and predicts a 0.817 increase in organizational performance. The significance level is <0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected:

- H<sub>2</sub>: there is no statistically significant relationship between being a learning organization and organizational commitment

Table 4 shows that, R = 0.716, indicating that a learning organization has a positive relationship with organizational commitment. More than half (51.3%) of the variance in organizational commitment is related to a learning organization and being a learning organization

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics	Statistic					Skewness		Kurtosis	
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Learning organization	302	1.25	4.70	3.3619	0.67894	-0.728	0.140	0.443	0.280
Organizational commitment	302	1.22	4.94	3.5362	0.73824	-0.958	0.140	0.545	0.280
Organizational performance	302	1.22	5.00	3.6542	0.81590	-0.945	0.140	0.227	0.280
Valid N (Listwise)	302								

Table 3: Regression analysis results

Variables	Unstandardized beta	Sig.	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE
Organizational performance	0.817***	0.000	0.679	0.462	0.460	0.59964

\*\*\*Significant <0.01, 0.05; predictors: (constant), learning organization

Table 4: Regression analysis results

Variables	Unstandardized beta	Sig.	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE
Organizational commitment	0.779 ***	0.000	0.716	0.513	0.512	0.51589

\*\*\*Significant <0.01, 0.05; predictors: (constant), learning organization

Table 5: Regression analysis results

Variables	Unstandardized beta	Sig.	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE
Organizational performance	0.841 ***	0.000	0.761	0.579	0.578	0.53003

\*\*\*Significant <0.01, 0.05; predictors: (constant), learning organization

Table 6: Impact of the mediating variable (organizational commitment) on the relationship between the independent variable (learning organization) and dependent variable

Variables	Beta estimate	SE	CR	R <sup>2</sup>	p-values
Organizational commitment–Learning organization	0.779	0.044	17.816	0.513	0.000
Organizational performance–Organizational commitment	0.623	0.057	11.016	0.841	0.000
Organizational performance–Learning organization	0.331	0.061	5.385	0.616	0.000

predicts a 0.841 increase in organizational commitment. The significance level is less than 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected:

- H<sub>3</sub>: there is no statistically significant relationship between organizational commitment and organizational performance

The results in Table 5 show that organizational commitment has a positive relationship with organizational performance. Organizational commitment explains 57.9% of the variance in organizational performance and predicts a 0.841 increase in organizational performance. The significance level is <0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected:

- H<sub>4</sub>: there is no statistically significant mediating effect of organizational commitment on the relationship between a learning organization and organizational performance

The results in Table 6 show that the effect of a learning organization on organization performance is mediated by organizational commitment and that this explains 61.6% of the variance in organizational performance. Organizational commitment predicts a

0.331 increase in organizational performance. Thus, organizational commitment has a mediating role in the relationship between a learning organization and organizational performance; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

### CONCLUSION

This research has found that a learning organization directly impacts organizational performance and further that organizational commitment has a mediating effect on the relationship between a learning organization and organizational performance. Insurance companies in Jordan would benefit from recognizing that being a learning organization can be aligned with organizational commitment and thereby improve the organization's performance.

### LIMITATIONS

This research aimed to investigate the impact of learning organization on organizational performance through organizational commitment among insurance companies in Jordan which are listed on the ASE. However, the results of this research cannot be generalized to sectors other than the insurance sector.

### **SUGGESTION**

Future research should be conducted using a similar model in other sectors.

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