

**The impact of organizational learning on competitive advantage  
Case Study of "Algerie Telecom" of Laghouat**

**أثر التعلم التنظيمي على الميزة التنافسية  
دراسة حالة مؤسسة اتصالات الجزائر بمدينة الاغواط**

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**Abstract:**

The aim of this study is to know the impact of organizational learning on competitive advantage at three levels: individual level learning, group level learning and organizational level learning By conducting a study of a sample of Algeria Telecom's employees, and through questionnaires; the results showed a positive significant relationship between all levels of learning and the competitive advantage. When using the stepwise regression, a positive significant impact had been found between individual level learning, organizational level learning as predictors and competitive advantage on one hand; and rejecting the impact of group level learning on the other hand. Some conclusions and recommendations were suggested.

**Keywords:** Organizational Learning; Individual Level Learning; Group Level Learning; Organizational Level Learning; Competitive Advantage.

**Jel Classification Codes:** E26, C97.

**ملخص**

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة الأثر الذي يوقعه التعلم التنظيمي على الميزة التنافسية وذلك من خلال مستوياته الثلاث والمتمثلة في التعلم الفردي والتعلم الجماعي والتعلم على مستوى المنظمة. أجريت الدراسة على عينة من موظفي مؤسسة اتصالات الجزائر بمدينة الاغواط بلغت 62 إطارا. استعمل استبياننا بغرض جمع البيانات. خلصت هذه الدراسة إلى وجود أثر إيجابي قوي للتعلم التنظيمي بمختلف مستوياته (التعلم الفردي والجماعي والتعلم على مستوى المنظمة) على الميزة التنافسية. كما خلصت الدراسة إلى وجود أثر ذو دلالة لمستوى التعلم الفردي والتعلم على المستوى التنظيمي واستبعاد أثر التعلم الجماعي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التعلم التنظيمي؛ التعلم الفردي؛ التعلم الجماعي؛ التعلم على مستوى المنظمة؛ الميزة التنافسية.

**تصنيف JEL:** E26, C97.

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## **Introduction**

In light of the challenges posed by the environment surrounding the organizations, which are mainly related to high intellectual and technical levels, it is imperative for organizations to keep pace with these developments and conserve their strategic positions.

Maintaining high attentiveness by controlling competitors should not lose sight of its human capital which is the key pillar that enables them to achieve competitive advantages. To find solutions to the various problems, they must focus on the epitome of what is known as organizational (OL) learning .OL is a means of providing opportunities for continuous learning for all members to acquire knowledge and benefit from experiences in a positive way. Then, the ability of the organization, to find the core competencies through learning, offers products of high value to meet the needs of customers and solve their problems, and to be able to satisfy them and gain their loyalty.

In light of what has been just stated, this paper aims to answer the following problematic: Is there an impact of organizational learning with its three levels (individual level learning; group level learning; organizational level learning) on the competitive advantage of “Algerie Telecom” organization of Laghouat?

This study aims to outline organizational learning and to categorize the most important characteristics and levels; and to define the competitive advantage and its most important sources. This study aims also to achieve and verify the existence of an effect between organizational learning and the competitive advantage of Algeria Telecom organization at Laghouat.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study we used descriptive approach by presenting the most important concepts related to organizational learning and competitive advantage, and we used measures to operationalize these concepts, after, and through questionnaires as means to collect data, we had proceed to analyze the content of these tools to get results projecting the relations between the variables of the study.

## **Organizational learning (OL)**

### **Definition of Organizational learning**

In today’s changing world if organization is going to rely on past information, they would not stay stable. The key to solving organization problems is learning, and better learned organizations move faster than the others (Gilaninia, Ganjinia, & Karimi, 2013, p.55). According to Huber (1991) Organizational learning (OL) is “the process of acquiring knowledge and using information to adapt successfully to changing circumstances. For organizations to learn, they must engage in knowledge acquisition,

information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational retention in adapting successfully to changing circumstances” (Huber, 1991, pp.88-115). Another pioneer in this field, Senge (1990) suggested that OL “is a strategy for information management consisting of systematic efforts to relocate knowledge throughout an entire organization”(Makabila, Iravo, Waititugichuhi, AssumptahKagiri, 2017, p.142).

### **Levels of Organizational Learning**

In every organization, learning happens in different levels, An organization cannot have intuition and interpret. People have intuition and interpret. The second level of learning is learning in the group level, which explains people who have learned in the individual learning. They share their learning with the group, interpret together and achieve a group assumption. Here, it is important that people use the process of “communication”. Without group learning, organizational learning cannot be discussed. Organizational learning explains common obtained values and assumption in group level, system, method and acceptable instruction for all the organization, expectant behavioural frames and changing them to informational bases, which are accessible to everyone who needs them. Here, which is important is learning by the meaning of organization (Saadat &Saadat, 2016, pp.221-222). Many other researchers (Bontis et al, 2002; Tippins & Sohi, 2003; Bappuji & Crossan, 2004; Yang et al., 2004.) had confirmed the fact that learning happens in three major levels namely: individual level learning, group level learning and organization level learning (Bontis et al, 2002, pp.435-69; Tippins &Sohi, 2003, pp. 745-61; Bappuji &Crossan, 2004, pp.397-417; Yang et al., 2004, pp.31-55). An organization cannot have intuition and interpret; however, individuals have intuition and interpret. In practice, organization should encourage all employees to be involved in the learning process through experimentation, dialogue and interchange of ideas and learning (Azizi, 2017, p.166).

Watkins & Marsick (1996) have originally divided this concept into two main organizational constituents: people and structure. Similarly, they have subdivided and developed a combination of seven dimensions which include the three levels above mentioned (individual level, group level and organization level). Further, Yang, Watkins, & Marsick had indicated this integrative model in research as follows, (Yang, Watkins, & Marsick, 2004, p.34):

1. The first dimension, **continuous learning**, represents an organization’s effort to create continuous learning opportunities for all of its members.
2. The second dimension, **inquiry and dialogue**, refers to an organization’s effort in creating a culture of questioning, feedback, and experimentation.
3. The third dimension, **team learning**, reflects the “spirit of collaboration and the collaborative skills that undergird the effective use of teams” (...).

4. The fourth dimension, **empowerment**, signifies an organization’s process to create and share a collective vision and get feedback from its members about the gap between the current status and the new vision.
5. The fifth dimension, **embedded system**, indicates efforts to establish systems to capture and share learning.
6. The sixth dimension, **system connection**, reflects global thinking and actions to connect the organization to its internal and external environment.
7. The seventh dimension, **strategic leadership**, shows the extent to which leaders “think strategically about how to use learning to create change and to move the organization in new directions or new markets.

Saadat and Saadat (2016) argued that OL explains common obtained values and assumptions in group level, systems, methods and acceptable instructions for all the organization, expectant behavioral frames and changing them to informational bases, which are accessible to everyone who needs them (Saadat, &Saadat, 2016, pp.221-222).

## **Competitive Advantage (CA)**

### **Definition of Competitive Advantage**

McEvily and Chakravarthy (2002) verified that if a firm was able to continually and quickly learn, adapt and provide unique requirements of stakeholders in a manner that could not be immediately imitated then they could outperform competitors (Ouma, Obonyo &Yabs, 2017, p.6187).

Competitiveness may encompass all concepts related to the domain of competitive advantage and more widely to sustainable competitive advantage. It remains well defined and understood even though it is widely accepted and used as a specific objective for firms and countries. Definitions the term competitiveness is about the ability of a firm or industry to constantly outperform their rivals who are active in the same market by creating better customer value (Kamya, MpeeraNtayi &Ahiauzu, 2011, pp.376-377-401).

### **Sources and Business Strategies of Competitive Advantage**

According to Helfat &Peteraf (2003) Competitive advantage, which the firms achieved base on their advantages of resources and capabilities can be only effective in the short term and may be ineffective in the long term due to fast changing and difficult to predict of competitive environment, making advantages of firm’s resources and capabilities no longer be maintained continuously. To maintain a competitive advantage in the long term, many studies mentioned the construction of organizational learning as a vital solution. Consequently, it constitutes a source for the achievement of sustainable competitive advantage (Lei, Ba Le &Nguyen, 2017, p. 73).

Furthermore, some researchers pointed out that Competitive advantage could be occurred when an organization gains or progresses some qualities or combinations that allow it to outpace its competitors. These qualities can include high grade of raw material or low-cost power, or access to highly trained and skilled human resources (Wen-Cheng, Chein-Hung & Ying-Chien, 2011, p.100).

Discussing researcher’s viewpoints in chronological order, the first resources for competitive advantage is going for low cost. Though, this does not mean compromising on the quality rather achieving economies of scale or first mover advantage to serve cost leadership business strategy. In this context, researchers had distinguished two different business strategies namely (Porter, 1998, pp. 12-14):

1. **Cost -Leadership competitive advantage:** focuses primarily on minimizing costs and gaining advantages over the competitors and rivals in the market.
2. **Differentiation:** this strategy refers to be unique in the industry along some dimensions are widely valued by buyers. Firms select some qualities or attributes that many buyers perceive as important and attempt to meet these requirements.

Through organizational learning, a firm can develop hard to imitate knowledge resources and capabilities that create value which in turn leads to high performance (Ouma et al., 2017, pp.6187-6188).

### **The investigation of the relationship in practice (some previous studies)**

From this angle, regarding OL as strategy for organizations to improve their capabilities and performance, so as to outpace rivals; OL could constitute a strategic orientation for organizations to be positioned in competitive environment. Several authors have stressed on the existence of such relationship between OL and competitive advantage. To illustrate, we referred to the works of Edmondson and Moingeon (1996) when they stated that: “organizational learning is a source of competitive advantage”. Moreover, Senge (2006) argued that one of the reasons to build a learning organization is to achieve competitive advantage (Edmondson and Moingeon, 1996, p.17).

According to Karach (2002), OL viewed as a resource-oriented approach; it is based on the ability of the organization to turn standard resources that are available to all into competences that are unique and non-imitable by competitors (Makabila et al., 2017, p.142).

According to this approach, Kocoglu, Imamoglu and Ince stated that: “organizations use organizational learning as a source of heterogeneity and of sustainable competitive advantage to manage it efficiently, to utilize it effectively and to acquire it continuously for the aim of distinctively meeting customer requirements and seeking market needs” (Kocoglu, Imamoglu & Ince, 2011, p. 73).

Many studies have conducted the research of the relationship between OL and CA. Here, we cite a small sample of this research to clarify the trends of research in this field.

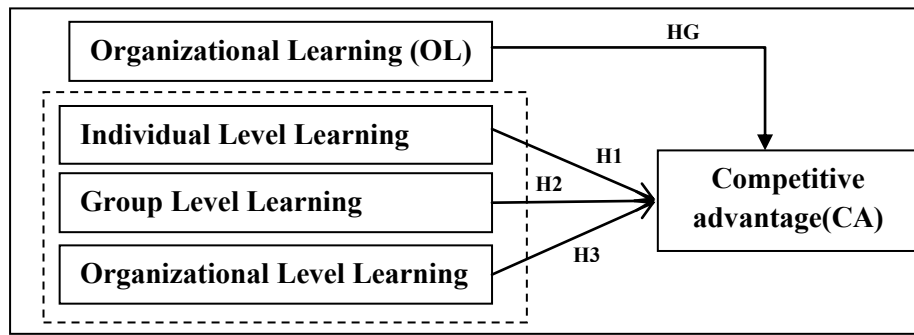
In the study of Kamya et al. (2011): “Organisational learning and competitive advantage: testing for the interacting influence of knowledge management and innovation”: they explored empirically the relationship between organizational learning and competitive advantage with the mediating influence of knowledge management and innovation in Uganda. They concluded in a positive relationship between organizational learning and competitive advantage and that the interactive influence of knowledge management and innovation increases the predictive power of the relationship ( Kamya et al, 2011, pp. 376-401).

From other perspective, Weihong, Shu Caitao, and Ye Dan (2008) carried out a study on the relationships between organizational culture, organizational learning, technological innovation and sustainable competitive advantage. This research makes an empirical investigation based on the 204 large and medium-sized manufactures in the Pearl River Delta. The results show that the openness of the organizational culture and the organizational learning capability have a significant impact on the enterprise sustainable competitive advantage. Besides, technological innovation capability is also an important source of sustainable competitive advantage (Weihong, Caitao, and Dan, 2008).

Another study of Makabila, Iravo, Gichuhi, and Kagiri, (2017) intitled: “does organizational learning lead to competitive advantage? An evaluation of state corporations in Kenya?” It examined the role of organizational learning in achieving competitive advantage of state corporations in Kenya with a focus on organization’s learning culture, learning processes, systems thinking and their role in achieving competitive advantage of state corporations. The study employed cross-sectional designs utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data from 198 staff from 35 state corporations comprising of senior managers, middle manager and non-management staff. Results from both simple and multiple linear regression revealed that each of independent variables was positively and significantly associated with competitive advantage. Rate of learning partially mediated the relationship between learning process and competitive and systems thinking and competitive advantage (Makabila et al., 2017, pp.141-158).

## Conceptual model and hypotheses

Figure 1. the model of the study



Source: prepared by researchers in the light of precedent studies

### Study Hypotheses

Founding on the studies aforementioned: Makabila *et al.* (2017); Kanya *et al.* (2011); Wiehong *et al.* (2008); Kocoglu *et al.* (2011); Edmondson and Moingeon; Baumard; Spender; Nanda; Andreu and Cibbora; Collis (1996). This is a short list of hundreds of studies that are still debating this theme regarding its importance and richness. We formulate this battery of hypotheses to find answers to our main problematic as the following:

**The main hypothesis (GH):** There is a significant positive impact of organizational learning on competitive advantage of “Algerie Telecom” Organization of Laghouat.

### Sub-Hypotheses

**H1:** There is a significant positive effect caused by the individual level learning on the competitive advantage of “Algérie Telecom” Organization of Laghouat.

**H2:** There is a significant positive impact caused by group level learning on competitive advantage of “Algerie Telecom” Organization of Laghouat.

**H3:** There is a significant positive impact caused by organizational level learning on the competitive advantage of “Algerie Telecom” Organization of Laghouat.

The study population is composed of all middle managers of “Algerie Telecom” organization of Laghouat, 62 managers have participated in this study, and they have been randomly taken off. In order to carry out the study and to test hypotheses, a questionnaire consisting of 49 items divided on two measures. The former one consists of organizational learning levels (individual level learning, group level learning, and organizational level learning), have been taken from the scale developed by Marsick and Watkins (1996). The latter was made up of the competitive advantage; have been taken from FARHATI Louiza study (FARHATI. L, 2016).

## Reliability

Reliability is referred to the stability of results if the measure will be used for a twice or more in the same conditions (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Statistical package in social sciences offers multiple choices for measuring reliability, among these tests; there is internal consistency by using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The following table (1) shows the results obtained:

**Table N° 1**  
**Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the study instrument**

Variables	Items	The Value of the Cronbach-Alpha Coefficient
Individual level learning	9	0.901
Group level learning	5	0.878
organizational level Learning	9	0.901
Organizational learning	37	0.967
Competitive advantage	12	0.954
All	49	0,974

**Source:** prepared by researchers in the light of SPSS19 outputs

The above table (1) shows that the Cronbach-alpha coefficient of the study variables is consistently stable and its values range from (**0.878** to **0.967**) and the total Cronbach-alpha factor is (**0.974**). An alpha value above (0.7) was taken as an acceptable measure of reliability (Nunnally. J.C., 1978). The measuring value of this study was in this instrument higher than the estimation; the scale, therefore is consistently good; and the instrument of measurement for the sample of the employees of the «Algerie Telecom» organization of Laghouat shows good credibility and high degree of internal consistency.

## Result and discussion

### Attitudes of respondents toward OL and CA

The results of the study are presented through the table (2) below of the components of the questionnaire by calculating the average arithmetic of the sample responses of the items using a five-point Lickert scale format in order to know the attitudes of the respondents. Results are shown in the table (2):



**Table N° 2**

<b>Means and Standard Deviations of Respondents' Answers</b>		
<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>standard deviation (SD)</b>
Individual level learning	3.046	0.831
Group level learning	2.874	0.885
organizational level Learning	2.908	0.785
Organizational learning	2.943	0.735
Competitive advantage	3.375	0.856

**Source:** prepared by researchers in the light of SPSS19 outputs

From the table (2) above, it is clear that the respondents' answers to the items of the independent variable indicate a tendency of organizational learning that organization has followed. Where individual level learning is the variable that has the highest agreement with an average of (3.046), which means that the opportunities for continuous learning and dialogue and inquiry for staff is one of the most important pillars that allow the development of human skills, abilities and competencies. Organizational level learning has an estimated average of (2.908) attempts to establish enabling concepts, communication systems, embedded systems and strategic leadership that also lead human resources to accept change and new strategic orientations. SD of (0.785) shows homogeneity of variances of organizational level learning; while, the less homogenous variable is group level learning with a mean of (2.874) and SD of (0.885) value. Competitive advantage as dependent variable has a mean of (3.375) and a standard deviation equals (0.856) which means that employees generally understand that the organization seeks to achieve the quality of its products; and it also attempts to ensure the response of its customers.

### **Testing hypotheses**

In the test of the main hypothesis and its sub- hypotheses, we rely on stepwise linear regression to determine which of the three independent dimensions (individual, group, and organizational level learning) has added a fundamental explanation of the dependent variable's variance. The results obtained are given in the table below:

**Table N° 3**  
**Test of the main hypothesis**

<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Dependent variables</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Result</b>
Organizational learning	Competitive advantage	0.676	0.457	0.000	24.852	Accept HG

**Source:** prepared by researchers in the light of SPSS19 outputs

Statistically, note from the table (3) that F (24.852) and the value Sig (0.000), since the significance value Sig (0.000) is less than the significance level  $\alpha$  (0.05); (Sig.= 0.000 < 0.05), so we accept the main hypothesis HG which states that: “there is a

significant effect of organizational learning on competitive advantage at the “Algerie Telecom” organization of Laghouat. Where this result indicates that the three levels of individual learning, group and learning at the level of the organization has an impact on the achievement of organization competitive advantage, this result agrees with Xie Weihong and al and Hui Lei and al studies. Furthermore, we notice from the table above that:

R: correlation coefficient between dependent variable competitive advantage (CA) and independent variable organizational learning (OL) is **(0.676)**. Besides,  $R^2(0.457)$  values (the coefficient of determination) which predict the effect of (OL) on (CA) to be (45.7%). That is (45.7) of (CA) obtained “Algerie Telecom” can be accounted for by organizational learning. The remaining effect (54.3%) is due to other factors.

### Using stepwise regression test to verify the main hypothesis

We have proceeded to a stepwise regression test in order to isolate the dimensions that have a significant and positive effect from those who have not. Typically, this kind of test follow a normal distribution and can better clarify the stratification of dimensions that could affect more the relationship between predictors and independent variables.

**Table N° 4**  
**Test of the sub- hypotheses**

Independent dimensions	T	Sig.	B	Dependent variable	Results
Organizational level Learning	2.741	0.008	0.404	Competitive advantage	Accept H <sub>3</sub>
Individual level learning	2.677	0.000	0.373	Competitive advantage	Accept H <sub>1</sub>
Group level learning	0.571	0.570	/	Competitive advantage	Reject H <sub>2</sub>

**Source:** prepared by researchers in the light of SPSS19 outputs

**The first sub-hypothesis H1:** Note from the table (4) that the significant value Sig(0.008) is less than the significance level  $\alpha$  (0.05); (Sig.= 0.008 <0.05).As a result we accept the first sub- hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> which states that: “there is a significant effect of individual level learning on competitive advantage at “the Algerie Telecom” organization of Laghouat.” This is an indication of the efforts exerted by organization staff in building the learning in the organization, and therefore the establishment of the organizational learning standards, which lead after to achieve a competitive advantage. this study notes that many previous studies have found a similar finding which confirm a relationship and an effect of individual learning level on competitive advantage such as Kamyat *al.* (2011); Makabilaet *al.*

**The second sub-hypothesis H2:** Note from the table (4) that the significant value Sig (0.570) is bigger than  $\alpha$  (0.05); (Sig.= 0.570 <0.05), so we reject the second sub-hypothesis H<sub>2</sub>. which states that: There is a significant positive impact caused by group level learning on competitive advantage of “Algerie Telecom” Organization of Laghouat. This finding indicates that although there is a link between group learning and competitive advantage, organization, as a social and collective entity, is based on a set of services in which each service has specific responsibilities that differ from one to another, and they work separately. Despite the integration occurs between these services to achieve organizational goals; Therefore, reliance on the teamwork in the organization as a whole is an exception, unless some collective tasks that emerged from time to time usually imposed in some circumstances; this explains the no significant effect of group level learning on competitive advantage.

**The third sub-hypothesis H3:** Note from the table (4) that the significant value Sig (0.000) is less than the significance level  $\alpha$ (0.05): (Sig.= 0.000 <0.05), so we accept the third sub-hypothesis H<sub>3</sub>, which states: “There is a significant effect of organizational level learning on competitive advantage at the «Algerie Telecom» organization of Laghouat.” This result indicates that individuals are continuously learning and asking about each ability and skill that make them perform their tasks in the best way. Consequently, individual level learning is a key factor to optimize the organization’s competitive advantage. This finding explains that by achieving the previous two levels, individual and group level learning is achieved at organizational level learning that means organization under study works in the sense of empowering employees by providing the information and resources they need and supporting them when they bear the potential risks they take upon themselves to perform their duties. In addition to the existence of systems and programs that provide them with information and provide opportunities for learning and enable them to contact the internal and external environment, also there is a strategic leadership which works to identify the best strategic orientations, which in turn leads to acquire a competitive advantage.

After using stepwise regression, the model that represents the effect of organizational learning (OL) on competitive advantage (CA) is as follows:

$$Y (\text{competitive advantage}) = 1.064 + (0.404)\text{individual level learning} + (0.373)\text{organizational level learning}.$$

Then we can conclude that Individual level learning and organizational level learning are the most prominent in achieving the competitive advantage at «Algerie Telecom» organization of Laghouat. Similarly, the results showed no significant effect of group level learning on competitive advantage.

The results previously found show disparate arrangements of thoughts relative to the linkage between learning and competitive advantage at least inside the

organization of “Telecom Algeria” to avoid generalizing these findings. So, on one hand, the most prominent result is the fact that individual learning level and organizational level learning were more influent on competitive advantage; and the rejection of the effect of group learning level on the other hand. This result shows that the organization recognizes the value of providing to their individuals opportunities to learn at different levels, as a consequence strengthening the organizational competitive advantage compared to its peers in the same sector.

## **Conclusion**

According to what have been earlier discussed, it can be said that organizational learning at its three levels of individual level learning, group level learning and organizational level learning have a positive significant effect on competitive advantage, particularly individual level learning and organizational level learning. Through a case study of a sample of the employees of “AlgerieTelecom” organization of Laghouat, the study showed that there is recognition of the value of organizational learning in achieving competitive advantage over the training of the staff and rehabilitation along side of their involvement. It also becomes clear that their leaders are acute to take advantage of the learning opportunities and go along with their employees. It indicates a stability of the organization values; and transfers it more consistent with its activities. Subsequently, this enables them to achieve competitive advantages, even though the group level learning had no impact in view of the organization nature.

In the light of the previous results, a set of points can be summarized as suggestions and recommendations that would contribute to enhancing organizational learning and competitive advantage in the organization under study:

- Try to identify the most modern administrative concepts related to organizational learning and competitive advantage for different administrative levels and the extent of the relationship between them to strengthen the perception and work ;
- Individual level learning in organization is a powerful building block for organizational learning, Therefore, the organization must support the opportunities for continuous learning through their system and to recognize these efforts of its employees by reward to encourage more to take risks, then benefit of their potential;
- The leaders in organization are a strong basis in increasing efficiency and effectiveness, the organization must take care of their development because they are those who affect negatively or positively on the results of the organization and they are making loyalty to it, by its employees and customers;
- Trying to achieve opportunities for group level learning If the nature of the organization does not allow, this Because of the friction through the collective work has an impact in increasing the efficiency of staff and provide them experiences and tasks they may need in performance so Strengthening the organization successes;
- Pay attention to marketing research which has an impact on meeting the actual needs of customers and increasing their loyalty;

- Develop systems that facilitate learning opportunities, as well as communication systems, which that enable employees to communicate with the internal and external organization environment.

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