

Achieving organizational competitiveness through strategic human resources management practices: the mediating role of psychological empowerment

Thamer Ahmad Al-Awawdeh

*Phd Student. Faculty of Economics and Management,
University of sfax, Tunisia*

Fatma Bouaziz

*Associate Professor, PRISME, Faculty of Economics and Management,
University of sfax, Tunisia*

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify the role of strategic human resources management in its dimensions (training, evaluation, employee participation) in achieving competitive advantage in its dimensions (cost, quality, creativity, flexibility) with the presence of employee empowerment as an intervening variable in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies. To achieve this goal, the study used the descriptive analytical approach, as the researcher developed a questionnaire that was used as a main tool in collecting data, where the study sample amounted to (356) male and female employees who were randomly selected. To process the data, the researcher used appropriate statistical methods for this, relying on

the statistical packages program (SPSS) and the statistical analysis program (AMOS). The study resulted in a set of results, the most important of which were: the presence of a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) for strategic human resources management in its dimensions (training, evaluation, employee participation) in achieving competitive advantage in its four dimensions (cost, quality, creativity, flexibility) in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies, in addition to the presence of partial mediators for employee empowerment (as an intervening variable) on the relationship between strategic human resources management and advantage Competitiveness, as the study

reached a set of recommendations, the most important of which was: the necessity for Jordanian pharmaceutical companies to pay attention to preparing training programs with the aim of supporting employees' capabilities and skills; according to training needs after identifying them through performance evaluation.

Key words: Strategic management, human resources, competitive advantage, employee empowerment, Jordanian pharmaceutical companies.

*** Introduction**

The business landscape is continuously evolving. It is more and more characterized by the occurrence of various changes and disturbances (political, economic, social, health crises, etc.) that are threatening the organizations competitiveness. In this context, to remain competitive, organizations develop innovative policies, implement advanced operational systems, and attempt to strengthen the capabilities of their human resources. In particular, human resources are among the key assets providing organizations with the necessary knowledge, creativity capabilities, innovation and quality; all required to maintain and enhance competitiveness. Therefore, organizations deploy human resources management strategies and

practices to reinforce the required human resources capabilities allowing them to deal with the various environmental challenges and uncertainties (Korman and Mujtaba 2020; Miraj and Khaled, 2021). Indeed, strategic human resources management allows defining work policies, training programs, recruitment plans, evaluation and rewards systems, etc. that can reinforce employees productivity, engagement, and motivation toward the achievement of the organization's competitive goals (Fajar and Soeling 2017; Muslim and Nouf, 2019). The importance of the strategic human resources management arises through setting clear plans and actions that align with the organization's overall strategy. This alignment enables organizations to treat human resources as a critical strategic asset that contributes to value creation and fosters sustainable competitive advantages in the marketplace (Al-Jaradat, 2019; Beresha and Kutllovci, 2015; Dbilo et al., 2020). In this vein, employees' empowerment is considered as a main management tool that promotes speed, flexibility and decision making capacity of an organization (Oliveira et al., 2023); all of them may affect its competitiveness. In fact, to

effectively contribute to the creation of a competitive advantage, human resources may experience a need to be empowered. In other words, they develop the feeling of being in control of their work (Spreitzer, 1995). Besides, employees psychological empowerment is found to play the role of a mediator in the relationship between strategic human resources management and performance outcomes (Zhai et al., 2021).

A review of the extant literature reveals the existence of several studies that have investigated the relationships between psychological empowerment, strategic human resources management practices and organizational competitiveness either jointly or separately (Pradhan&Panda,2021).

However, these relationships remain in the Jordanian context and particularly in the pharmaceutical industry understudied. Thus, this research aims to study the nexus between strategic human resources management practices and competitive advantage through the mediating role of psychological empowerment. The research question is the following: to what extent strategic human resources management practices affect

organizational competitiveness? Is psychological empowerment mediating the nexus between these two variables?

This paper is structured into four sections. The first section will focus on a literature review to define the main research constructs and propose a research model of the nexus between them. The second section will expose methodological choices. The third section will present the main results and discussion. Finally, a conclusion section will contain managerial and theoretical contributions, research limitations and future research avenues.

*** Literature review**

*** Strategic human resources management practices**

Strategic human resources management deals with drawing up and implementing strategies and practices which aim to attract, select, and train employees. In fact, with the evolution of the environmental landscape, organizations are more and more focusing on information and knowledge detained by their employees, who are considered as a strategic asset that enable the firm to achieve competitive advantage (Rizk Allah and Amina, 2017).

Strategic human resources management has evolved from the point of view of strategic

management literature, and particularly the resource-based view theory. This theory posits that an organization's ability to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage relies on the possession of unique resources and capabilities which are called strategic resources. In this perspective, employees are to consider as valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable resources. In addition, they must be organized to capture value, so that the organization can have the capability to effectively deploy these resources according to appropriate systems, processes and structures. Human resources play proactive and interactive roles in solving the organization's problems, and promoting its competitiveness. So, strategic human resources management ensures to provide organizations with the required skilled employees (Wuen et al., 2021).

Al-Khawaldeh (2020) emphasizes that strategic human resources management involves the alignment of human resource strategies, practices, and activities with the business strategy. This ensures that human resource managers actively enhance and develop the employees' capabilities necessary to achieve and sustain organization's goals and performance

over time (Amara and Ammar, 2019). Furthermore, strategic human resources management is defined as a process that encompasses activities such as attracting, evaluating, and compensating employees, as well as providing continuous managerial support to ensure human resources commitment to the organization's strategic objectives (Al-Jedaiah and Albdareen, 2020).

The human resource, with its different levels and classifications, constitutes a supporting force for the organization after acquiring qualifications and enabling it with the necessary skills to accomplish and implement work requirements. What increases the importance of strategic human resources management is its primary goal of building organizational capacity, which requires the availability of dedicated, qualified workers who are able to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage for the organization (Armstrong and Taylor, 2023). Strategic human resources management is characterized by a set of characteristics, including, according to (Ahmed, 2009): focusing on and caring for human resources management from a strategic perspective, dealing with human resources as a strategic resource, emphasizing the link and

integration between strategic human resources management on the one hand and the organization's main strategy on the other hand, the necessity of taking into account the organization's external environment and the opportunities and threats it carries, and the internal environment of human resources management and the strengths and weaknesses it contains, which is a means of developing organizational culture and a tool for developing organizational performance.

*** Employee empowerment**

Employee empowerment means giving employees confidence, freedom, and independence at work and involving them in organizational decision-making (Pradhan and Panda, 2021). Moreover, it refers to giving employees a degree of flexibility and more freedom to make decisions related to work; so that they can improve the ways according to which they perform their jobs and achieve organizational goals (Al-Majali and Bani Hamdan, 2022). Pradhan and Panda (2021) recognize three approaches of employee empowerment. The first is the structural approach. According to this approach, empowerment means giving authority and decision-making power. Decision-making power is transferred to the lower levels of the

organizational hierarchy to arm employees with the required authority to influence the organization's performance. The second is the leadership approach. Here, the focus is on the relationships between the leader and individuals, as leaders motivate and enhance their followers, thus enabling them to act successfully to achieve organizational goals. The third is the motivational approach. This approach focuses on encouraging employees in the organization to feel self-efficacy. In line with this approach, Thomas and Philothus (1990) defined empowerment as a basic, growing motivation through four types of knowledge represented by meaning, competence, self-determination, and influence. Together, these four types of knowledge constitute psychological empowerment

According to Al-Madi and Al-Shanifi (2021), psychological empowerment has many benefits such as increasing employees' participation in the decision-making process, promoting self-managed work teams, improving and developing total quality management, and creating an atmosphere for experiences and knowledge exchange.

*** Organizational competitive advantage**

Achieving and maintaining competitive advantage is a concern for organizations. In fact, every organization strives to achieve the best performance, maintain a good reputation with customers, and provide more innovative and advanced products and services. Competitive advantage is an important tool to achieve the organization's goals and mission. Al-Mawadhiyah and Abu Qaoud (2022) defines competitive advantage as the organization's possession of the advantage that helps it increase profits through its superior performance, its ability to reduce costs, and gain the largest share in the markets compared to other organizations in the same sector. Competitive advantage provides an organization the superiority among its competitors. It results from its ability to deal with its environment and to carefully respond to the requirements of customers and desires. According to Inyang (2010), it is the optimal exploitation of both the organization's material and human resources that allow increasing its competitive ability in the face of its competitors.

Three types of generic strategies contribute to provide

competitive advantages so that an organization may outperform its rivals in the marketplace (Fauvy, 2009; Porter, 1982). The first type is based on a cost control strategy by reducing costs. The second type is the differentiation strategy, i.e. offering products with distinctive quality, and pushing customers to buy them despite their higher price than others. The third type is the focus/ niche strategy which results from a combination of the previous two types with the need to create a balance between them. It targets a specific market segment, and tailors products or services to meet the unique needs of that segment. Alia (2021) highlights the characteristics of competitive advantage that depends on innovation and seeks to offer unique products to customers. Further, it must be inimitable by rivals, sustainable and applicable for long time-periods. It is also adaptable so that it evolves in response to changing market conditions, consumer preferences and technological advances.

The relationship between strategic human resources management, employee empowerment and competitive advantage

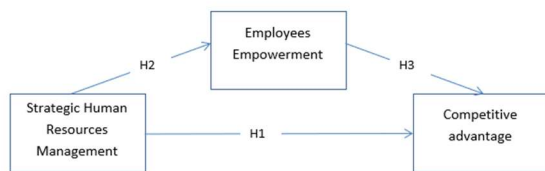
Many researchers have emphasized the role of strategic

human resources management in achieving competitive advantage. This role manifests through focusing on human resources and giving them full importance, by motivation and capabilities enhancement to perform the required work. Moreover, it can be achieved through raising the level of employees' participation in the decision-making process, and enabling them to find appropriate solutions to the obstacles they face in improving performance. This role also involves enhancing competitive advantage by aligning human resources objectives with the organization's strategic goals. It covers actively participating in the formulation and implementation of human resources strategies that are integrated with the organization's competitive strategies (Samlali, 2018; Radwan and Boumediene, 2020). Further, the strategic human resources management may allow organizations to develop a sustainable competitive advantage. This is due to the fact that benefits gained from human resources management are difficult to imitate by rival organizations and require lot of time and effort to allow achieving similar results (Rizk Allah and Amina, 2017).

Strategic human resource management plays a pivotal role in

enhancing the competitive advantage of organizations by investing in human capital as a strategic factor to achieve sustainable excellence. It is not limited to attracting talent, but extends to designing effective performance management policies, developing leadership capabilities, and enhancing innovation. On the other hand, empowering employees is a key element in this equation, as it is done by giving them the confidence and authority to make decisions, providing training and development opportunities, and building a culture that encourages initiative and responsibility. This empowerment not only increases the level of job satisfaction, but also enhances creativity and commitment, which is positively reflected in the organization's productivity and its ability to adapt to market challenges. Therefore, strategic human resource management and employee empowerment constitute a fundamental pillar for achieving competitive excellence and maintaining the organization's leadership in a changing and dynamic market.

Based on the previous developments, we propose the research model as shown in (Figure 1): -



H1- There is a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) of strategic human resources management in its dimensions (training, evaluation, employee participation) in achieving competitive advantage in its dimensions (cost, quality, creativity, flexibility) in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies.

H2- There is a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) of strategic human resources management in its dimensions (training, evaluation, employee participation) in empowering employees in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies.

H3- There is a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) to enable employees to achieve competitive advantage in its dimensions (cost, quality, creativity, flexibility) in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies.

H4- There is a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) for employee empowerment as an intervening variable on the relationship between strategic human resources management and competitive

advantage in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies.

* Methodology

Sample and data collection method

The study used the descriptive analytical approach to investigate the role of strategic human resources management in achieving competitive advantage with the presence of employee empowerment as a mediating variable. To collect data a questionnaire was elaborated based on previous works and measurement tools. The strategic human resources management was operationalized through the variables of training (6 items), performance appraisal (5 items) and participation (5 items). These variables were measured based on the works of (Aydinli &Talaat,2015) ,(ORJI et al,2022) , (Chen & Huang, 2009) , (Bouaziz and Hachicha 2018); (Moussa and Sraira ,2021) and (Mokli, 2023).

Competitive advantage was operationalized through the variables of cost (6 items), quality (5 items), creativity (5 items), and flexibility (7 items). These measurement items were extracted from the works of ElBaz (2022; Alia, 2020; Mohamed and Othman, 2020). Finally, employee empowerment was measured with seven items as

proposed by EL Majali and Bni Hamdane (2022). A first version of the questionnaire was pre-tested using a pilot study aimed at assessing the clarity of the questions and their suitability for the research objectives. A limited number of respondents from the target sample participated in this study, and the initial data were analyzed to determine any necessary modifications to improve the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire. Based on the results, the necessary modifications were made to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument before using it in the main study. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of (356) employees working in eight pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Demographic characteristics of respondents are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents demographic characteristics

Percentage %	number	Level	variable
61.8	220	male	Gender
38.2	136	feminine	
100.0	356	the total	
25.6	91	Under 25 years	Age group
36.8	131	25- less than 35 years	
21.9	78	35 - less than 45 years	
-	-	from 45 - Less than 55 years	
15.7	56	Over 55 years	
100.0	356	the total	Educational level
21.3	76	Intermediate diploma or less	
62.4	222	Bachelor's	
12.4	44	Master	
3.9	14	PhD	
100.0	356	the total	Career level
15.4	55	boss	
14.9	53	Head of Department	
35.1	125	supervisor	
34.6	123	employee	
100.0	356	the total	Number of years of experience in the company
24.7	88	Less than (5) years	
27.2	97	From (5) to less than (10) years	
15.4	55	From (10) to less than (15) years	
27.5	98	From (15) to less than (20) years	
5.1	18	20 years and above	
100.0	356	the total	

* Data analysis method

To analyze the data, SPSS and AMOS programs were used, where the analysis relied on the simple and multiple regression method to understand the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. In addition, path analysis was used to study the direct and indirect relationships between the different variables, which allowed for a more detailed evaluation of the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable. These methods contributed to providing an integrated view of the data, relying on statistical indicators such as regression coefficients, the coefficient of determination (R^2), and path coefficients to interpret the results and evaluate the hypotheses.

To verify the stability of the study tool, the values of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the field of (strategic human resources management) as a whole reached (0.957), and the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the field of (employee empowerment) reached (0.894), and for the field of (competitive advantage) (0.958), which is a good percentage as it is greater than (0.70) (Gliem and Gliem, 2003).

*** Results and discussion**

Results related to the validity and reliability of the study tool: -

1- Reliability: The researcher was able to test the reliability of the tools used in the study by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the field of strategic human resources management as a whole was 0.957, for the field of employee empowerment 0.894, and for the field of competitive advantage 0.958. These values are considered high and very good because they exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Gliem and Gliem, 2003), indicating that the tools used have high reliability.

2- Validity: To determine the apparent validity of the tools used in the study, the researcher presented the tool to a group of experts and specialists in the field to ensure its compatibility with the study objectives and its suitability for measuring the targeted concepts. In addition, the structural validity was verified using the Pearson correlation coefficient, where the correlation between each paragraph of the questionnaire with the dimension to which this paragraph belongs and the field as a whole was calculated. The results showed strong and significant correlations between the paragraphs and their dimensions, indicating the

validity of the tool in measuring the studied variables and enhancing the credibility of the extracted results.

"The Level of Strategic Human Resources Management, Employee Empowerment, and Competitive Advantage in Jordanian Pharmaceutical Companies: Analysis of Results and Comparison with Previous Studies"

The results show that the level of strategic human resources management in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies is high; as the arithmetic mean of the study sample members' answers about the field of strategic human resources management as a whole was (4.14) with a high evaluation level and relative importance (82.8%), and the arithmetic means of the study sample members' estimates of the dimensions of the field of strategic human resources management ranged between (3.92 -4.32). This result is consistent with the studies of Al-Baz (2022), Kavar and Al-Eidani (2022), Maraj and Khaled (2021), and Ziani and Bouglita (2020). All these studies are conducted in distinct Arabic countries contexts showing an increase in the firms interest to applying strategic human resources management practices.

Moreover, the results show that there is a high level of employee

empowerment in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies. The arithmetic means of the study sample members' estimates of the paragraphs of the "Employee Empowerment" field ranged between (4.04-4.44). Our result is coherent with the findings of Al-Majali and Bani Hamdan (2022), Al-Madi and Al-Shanifi (2021), Bouzoureen (2020), and Hamed et al. (2022).

For the level of competitive advantage in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies, it was also high; as the arithmetic mean of the study sample members' answers about the field of competitive advantage as a whole was (4.24) with a high evaluation level and relative importance (84.8%), and the arithmetic means of the study sample members' estimates of the dimensions of the field of competitive advantage ranged between (4.11-4.37). This result is consistent with previous researches findings, such as the study of Al-Rawashdeh and Al-Lafi (2022), the study of Samah (2022), the study of Hajem et al. (2021), and the study of (Hayat and Boubaker, 2020).

*** Hypotheses testing results**

In this section, the results of testing the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the study will be presented. Appropriate statistical

methods were used to test the validity of the hypotheses and their compatibility with the data collected. The results are presented based on calculated values such as correlation and regression coefficients, in addition to analyzing the results obtained through data analysis using appropriate statistical tools. In the following table, the results of the hypothesis tests are explained in detail.

Testing the study hypotheses: -

Table (2): Regression Test Summary

Hypotheses	Error	R ² Average	R ²	R
H1	0.369	0.604	0.607	0.779
H1-1	0.424	0.385	0.390	0.625
H1-2	0.475	0.418	0.423	0.651
H1-3	0.454	0.516	0.520	0.721
H1-4	0.525	0.562	0.565	0.752
H2	0.492	0.391	0.396	0.629

Table (3): Results of applying the simple regression equation to verify the validity of the third main hypothesis: The impact of employee empowerment on achieving competitive advantage in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies: -

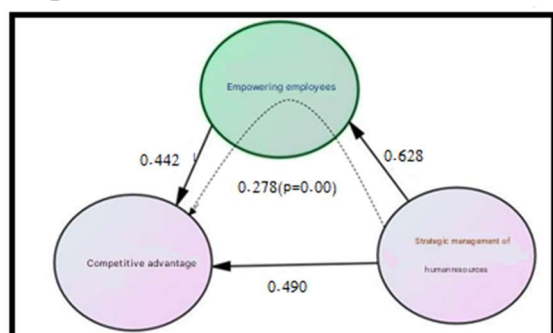
Statistical significance	F	R ² Average	R ²	R	T	β	
0.000	*456.010	0.562	0.563	0.750	21.354	1.291	slope stability
						0.698	Empowering employees

Table No. (4): Values of the direct and indirect effects of the relationship of the mediating variable (employee empowerment) on the relationship between strategic human resource management and competitive advantage: -

Coefficients of the direct and indirect effect of the fourth main hypothesis: -

Regression Weights			Estimates			
P	C.R.	S.E.	Total effect	Indirect effect	Direct effect	
***	13.308	0.031	0.768	0.278	0.490	Independent on dependent
***	15.215	0.038	0.628	-	0.628	Independent on mediator
***	12.008	0.034	0.442	-	0.442	Mediator on dependent

(Figure 2) illustrates the impact of strategic human resource management on competitive advantage through employee empowerment:



The previous figure was extracted through the statistical analysis program (AMOS).

* Discussion

Discussion of the results related to the study hypotheses: -

There is a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) of strategic human resources management in its dimensions (training, evaluation, employee participation) on achieving competitive advantage in its dimensions (cost, quality, creativity, flexibility) in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies.

The results related to the first main hypothesis showed a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) for strategic human resources management in its dimensions (training, evaluation, employee engagement) in achieving competitive advantage in its dimensions (cost, quality, creativity, flexibility) in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies. This result is consistent with the study of Amara and Amar (2019), the study of Samlali (2018), the study of (Wuen et al, 2021), the study of (Widyanty et al, 2020), the study of Bouaziz and Hachicha 2018), the study of (Lechuga Sanchoo et al, 2018), and the study of (Al-Ghanimat et al, 2019).

As for the second main hypothesis (H2): There is a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) for strategic human resources management with its dimensions (training, evaluation, employee participation) in empowering employees in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies. The results related to this hypothesis showed a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) for strategic human resources management with its dimensions

(training, evaluation, employee participation) on empowering employees in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies.

The results related to the third main hypothesis (H3) according to which there is a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) to Empowerment to achieve competitive advantage in its dimensions (cost, quality, creativity, flexibility) in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies, show that there is a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) to enable employees to achieve competitive advantage.

The fourth main hypothesis (H4): There is a statistically significant effect at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) of employee empowerment as mediating variable between strategic human resources management and competitive advantage in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies, the results show that a statistically significant effect.

*** Conclusion**

This paper aims to study the nexus between strategic human resources management practices and competitive advantage through the mediating effect of employees' empowerment. To achieve this aim, a literature review was firstly made. It

allows us to propose a research model establishing the links between these variables. Then, data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to a random sample of 365 employees at Jordanian pharmaceutical companies. Results show that these companies pay high attention to strategic human resources management; the "training" dimension came in first place, followed by the "performance evaluation", and the "employee participation". Moreover, findings reveal that Jordanian pharmaceutical companies practice employee empowerment to a high degree; this is done by training employees to bear responsibilities in return for the mandate granted to them, and enhancing their sense of importance within the company. Jordanian pharmaceutical companies achieve a high level of competitive advantage; the "cost" dimension came in first place, followed by the "quality" dimension in second place, the "creativity" dimension came in third place, and finally the "flexibility" dimension came in fourth place.

Interest given to strategic human resources management contributes to raising the level of competitive advantage in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies, and improving the level of employee empowerment. Moreover, interest to

employee empowerment contributes to achieving competitive advantage in its dimensions (cost, quality, creativity, flexibility). This variable has an effect on the relationship between strategic human resources management and competitive advantage in Jordanian pharmaceutical companies as a mediating variable.

This study has theoretical and managerial contributions. At a theoretical level, it is among the rare studies that focus on strategic human resources management, employee empowerment and competitive advantage in the context of Arabic countries and in Jordan in particular. As such, it offers the possibility to extend existent researches in the field and tests their applicability in this context.

At a managerial level, based on the above results, the study recommends that Jordanian pharmaceutical companies should focus on preparing training programs to support employees' capabilities and skills; according to training needs after identifying them through adequate performance appraisal systems. Jordanian pharmaceutical companies should focus on evaluating employees' performance on an ongoing basis by identifying strengths and weaknesses. They

should rely on a results-based employee evaluation system and focus on involving employees at different levels in drawing up future plans and enabling them to participate in making long-term decisions. Moreover, they should focus on research and development to update their production processes in order to achieve better performance at a lower cost. Providing products and services with specifications that meet international quality standards, designing new processes for the purpose of producing new products, and introducing new ideas and methods become a require to remain competitive. All of these may be possible through strategic human resources management and employee empowerment.

Despite these contributions, our research suffers from some limitations that the researcher faced while preparing the study. The most prominent of these limitations was the lack of cooperation of most of the surveyed companies with the researcher and their refusal to distribute the questionnaire, which made it difficult to collect data. There was also a delay by the study sample in filling out the questionnaire due to their preoccupation with their job duties. In addition, the researcher faced difficulty in reaching the study

sample due to some policies imposed by the companies, which prevent the researcher from entering their departments to distribute the questionnaire except after making prior arrangements and long routine procedures. The study was also limited to those occupying leadership and supervisory positions, employees and supervisors working in pharmaceutical companies in Jordan who hold the following job titles: (manager, department head, supervisor, employee), and did not include workers in the factories affiliated with these companies, due to the researcher's inability to reach them despite the importance of this category in achieving a competitive advantage within companies.

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