

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AS A DETERMINANT OF ORGANIZATIONAL AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT: EVIDENCE FROM ALGERIAN FIRMS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the impact of organizational learning on organizational affective commitment, two constructs that has been extensively studied in literature but rarely linked to each other, especially in the Algerian organizational research context. Using data from a hundred (100) employees and a model of discriminant functions we tried to determine the dimensions of organizational learning that has most influence on organizational affective commitment. Our results indicated that both embedded systems and empowerment are good predictors of organizational affective commitment. Managers are required to reinforce the aspects of organizational learning that predicted best employees' affective commitment

Keywords: organizational learning, organizational affective commitment, discriminate function analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning has been a subject of a heated debate in psychology for decades. However, the debate only took place at the individual level of analysis or in some cases at the same level of

analysis but in an organizational sphere (Rebelo and Gomes, 2008). Thus, the idea that individuals learn in their organization is not new, it's the organization learning as whole that's new. Organizational learning was first introduced by Argyris and Shön (1978) but made popular in the 90s by Senge -a major organization development theorist. According to him the bureaucratic command and control management is no longer able to cope with the new changes imposed by the environment. Moreover, organizations that seek success are now required to transform into a learning-centered organizations. Along the same lines, Denton (1998) explained that the rationale behind the increasing interest in organizational learning can be summarized in six factors that are: first 'the shifting importance of factors of productions away from capital towards intellectual labor'; second ' acceptance of knowledge as a source of competitive advantage'; third 'the rapid pace of change in business environment'; fourth 'the dissatisfaction among managers and employees with traditional management paradigm'; fifth 'the competitive nature of the business environment'; and sixth ' the highly demanding consumer'. According to him the emergence of organizational learning was a relevant response to all of these changes.

The study of organizational commitment has received substantial emphasis in organizational behavior but also in industrial/organizational psychology (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). The reason behind this increasing vogue is the direct and positive link between organizational commitment and other desirable work outcomes. For instance, higher levels of organizational commitment are found to decrease turnover rates, tardiness, and absenteeism and induce higher job performances (Mowday et al., 1979) and organizational citizenship behavior (Shore and Wayne, 1993). Organizational commitment can be seen as 'the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization and can be characterized by a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and a strong desire to maintain membership of the organizations' (Mowday et al., 1982:43). It can be also seen as the individual engagement in a consistent course of action resulting from the recognition of side bets he made in the organization (Becker, 1960). Or even as 'the totality of internalized normative pressures to act in a way that meets organizational goals and interests (Weiner, 1982:421).

Fostering organizational commitment requires better work environment, one way to create that environment is through organizational learning (Islam &Ahmad, 2015). Indeed, there is a general consensus among researchers on the importance of organizational learning in

enhancing employee's organizational commitment (Joo & Lim, 2009; Song et al., 2009; Balay, 2012; Mehrabi, 2013; Lau et al., 2016; Kamali, 2017; Hendri, 2019). This assumption can be explained through the social exchange theory which according to Blau (1964:93) " involves the principle that one person does another a favor and while there is a general expectation of some future return, its exact nature is definitely not stipulated in advance". Therefore, when given something of value; individuals tend to reciprocate with similar thing or more of value. Accordingly when an organization promotes learning and provide it to its employee, they reciprocate with more commitment to their organization (Islam &Ahmad, 2015).

Both of organizational learning and organizational commitment have a legacy worth of forty years and more in academia. Each concept has been studied extensively and linked to various work outcomes. However few researches linked both constructs to each other and even fewer did in the Algerian organizational research context. Therefore the aim of this research is to identify which dimension of organizational learning has the most influence in determining organizational commitment, more specifically organizational affective commitment in the Algerian context. Our research question is the following: which components of organizational learning, if any, are most influential in determining employee' affective commitment?

In order to respond to that research question, we dive this paper into four sections. First, we provide a theoretical framework and discuss research hypotheses. Second, we describe research methods including sample and data collection procedure as well as constructs measures. Third, we summarize the research findings and fourth we discuss implications, limitations and futures research avenues.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

In order to develop the hypothesized model illustrated in Figure 1, an extensive literature review on organizational learning theory and organizational commitment theory was carried out. The following section includes a review of the general concepts relative to both constructs as well as a discussion of the relationship between them.

2.1 Organizational learning

According to Denton (1998) the earliest reference to the term organizational learning is found in Argyris and schön's (1987) book 'organizational learning: a theory of action perspective. The construct became popular in the 90's after the publication of Seng's book 'the fifth discipline: the art and the practice of the learning organization' (Rebelo and Gomes, 2008). Both of the

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authors are considered huge contributors to the organizational learning theory along with many others, although they come from two distinct schools. Denton (1998) classified authors in this field into two schools, the consultancy school and the academic one. In the first school we find management consultants such as Tobin (1993) or senior managers such as Stata (1989) or even a small number of academics such as Garvin (1993), whereas authors from the second school are all academics such as Huber (1991). Denton (1998) explained that the main differences between the two schools are first the target audience (authors from the first school target managers while authors from the second school target academics and students) and second the terminology (first school use the term learning organization while the second school use the term organizational learning. Still, this distinction is not true in all cases). Other differences are summarized in Figure 2. Busch (2008) argued that scholars from the first school emphasizes on learning process such as the single, double, and deuto loop learning process of Argyris and Shön (1978), whereas scholars from the second school use the findings of the former as a prescription for how firms can consistently learn. In general organizational learning and learning organization are used interchangeably in literature, though 'the former refers to the process or activities of learning while the latter emphasizes the outcomes of learning process' (Lau et al., 2016:4). Tsang (1997) argued that a learning organization is an organization that is skilled at organizational learning hence once the later is established the former will follow.

TABLE 1. CONSULTANCY VS ACADEMIC

Characteristic	Consultancy school	Academic school
Types of authors	Consultants Senior managers Some academics	Academics
Key writers	Calhoun Wick C. Lu Stanton Leon Michael Marquardt Angus Reynolds David Garvin Michael Pearn Daniel Tobin	Marlene Fiol George Huber Marjorie Lyles Victoria Marsick Peter Vaill Karen Watkins
Target audience	Managers	Academics

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	Consultants	Students
Perspective	Best practice Seek to make recommendations	Analytical Theoretical
View of organizational learning	Positive	Neutral
Terminology	Learning organization	Organizational learning
Source of information	Case studies	Empirical research Case studies
Type of publication	Books Harvard Business Review Training and personal journals	Academic journals Some books

Source: Denton (1998), p.38

The integrative learning organization model of Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) serves as a theoretical base for the current study. It combines two central organizational constituents which are people and structure (Yang et al, 2004). According to them the learning organization is "one that learns continuously and can transform itself" (Marsick and Watkins, 1994:354). They identified seven dimensions of a learning organization at individual, group, and organizational levels (Yang et al., 2004). The first level includes two dimensions which are 'creating continuous learning opportunities' and 'promoting dialogue and inquiry'. The second level includes one dimension which is 'encouraging collaboration and team learning'. The third level include four dimensions which are 'creating systems to capture and share learning', 'empowering people toward a collective vision', 'connecting the organizations to its environment', and 'providing strategic leadership for learning' (Marsick and Watkins, 2003).

2.2 Organizational commitment

The concept of commitment is not native to the organizational behaviour sciences. It was first introduced in psychology (Festinger, 1957; Kiesler, 1971) and sociology (Becker, 1960; Kanter, 1968). Meyer et al., (2008) argued that early research on commitment in the organizational behavioral field found its roots in human relations movement of the mid- 20th as well as in psychology and sociology. And while psychologist focused mainly on decisions or cognitions

that bind individuals to a behavioral disposition, sociologists focused mostly on social factors that bind individuals to a certain course of action (Pritchard, 1999). The concept of commitment started to gain more popularity in the organizational behavior literature after the publications of Porter and colleagues' seminal work in the 1970s (Meyer et al., 2008). Despite the increasing vogue that the concept enjoyed, it continued to be perceived as a construct that lacked a common theoretical basis. According to Meyer and Allen (1991:61) the concept of commitment was a subject of many critical reviews in several occasions and 'among the issues of a major concern in these reviews has been the lack of consensus in construct definition'. In an attempt to clear this confusion they integrated three different conceptualizations of commitment in one construct which they called the three-component model. Powell and Meyer (2004) explained that Meyer and Allen (1991) noticed that the core assumption of the different conceptualization of commitment is similar and reflects the idea that commitment is what attaches the individual to a consistent line of activity, however the mindset behind it differs; for instance, Mowday et al., (1982) emphasized on the emotional attachment as the reason behind the maintenance of the relationship with the organization while Becker (1960) emphasized on side bets and Weiner (1982) on the sense of moral obligation. These conceptualizations formed together the famous three component model of organizational commitment and took the names affective, continuance, and normative commitment respectively.

According to Islam and Ahmad (2015) research that explore the relationship between organizational learning and organizational affective commitment are very little and need further investigation in different geographical sectors. Thus, the focus on the current paper is on organizational affective commitment, we draw on definition advanced by Meyer and Allen (1991: 67) in which affective commitment refers to 'the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment with the organization because they want to do so'.

2.3 The relationship between organizational learning and organizational affective commitment

According to Joo and colleagues (2009; 2010) few researches have examined the relationship between organizational learning and organizational commitment despite the extensive discussion on the possible association between the two constructs in literature. For the few studies that did, results indicated often a positive relationship. For instance Joo and colleagues

(2009; 2010) found that employees who perceive that their organization grants them with continuous learning, promotes dialogue and inquiry as well as team learning among them, establishes systems that capture knowledge, empowers them constantly, and provides them with system connections and strategic leadership are more likely to develop a strong psychological attachment (i.e. affective commitment) to the organization and desire to maintain their membership in it. Similarly, Lau et al., (2016) found that each dimension of learning organization had a positive correlation with affective commitment; the strongest association was found between empowerment and the latter. Islam and Ahmad (2015) found a positive significant association between organizational learning culture and affective commitment. Accordingly, Naim and Lenka's (2018) findings supported the direct impact of organizational learning on affective commitment. Dirani (2009) found that affective commitment is significantly predicted by four dimensions of the learning culture which are providing leadership, empowering people, promoting inquiry and dialogue, and system connectedness. Balay (2012) found that team learning and shared systems had a significant impact on identification commitment (similar to affective commitment). Therefore we suggest that an organization that provides continuous learning, promotes inquiry and dialogues, encourages team learning, empowers its employees and provides systems connection and strategic leadership is more likely to have psychologically attached employees who desire to maintain their membership in it:

Hypothesis 1(H1): each dimension of organizational learning successfully predicts employee's affective commitment.

Figure 1 summarizes the hypothesized model of this research.

3. METHODS

The following section comprises a description of sample and data collection procedure as well as construct measures. A brief discussion of the analytical strategy will be also included.

3.1 Sample and data collection procedure

Data was collected from Algerian employees working in five geographical sectors (manufacturing (59%), agriculture (1%), services (18%), construction & hydraulics and hydrocarbons (20%), energy & mining related services (2%). Enterprises were randomly selected from across the country and an online self administered survey was mailed to them. The survey was also posted on different employees' forum on social media sites. A sample of

a hundred (100) employees was obtained. Demographic variables included gender, age, education level and years of experience. 77% of the respondents were males while 23% were females. 46 % of the respondents are between the ages of thirty (30) to forty (40). More than half of the participants (68%) completed their university degree. 37% of the participants have five (5) to ten (10) years of experience.

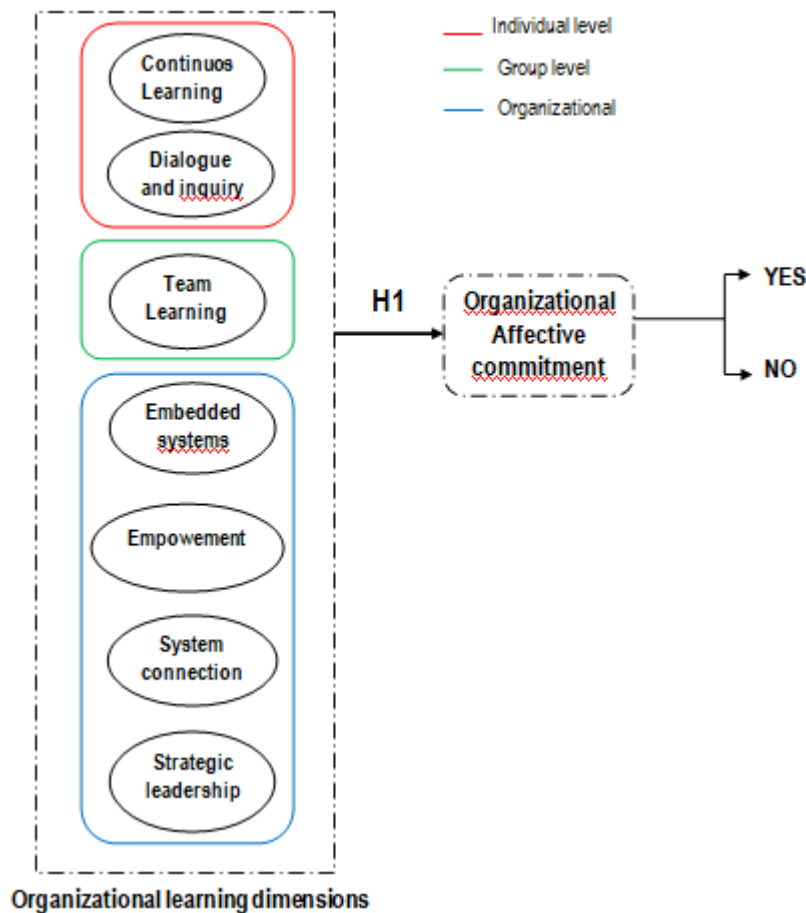


FIGURE1. HYPOTHESIZED MODEL

Source: by authors based on literature review

3.2 Measures

The questionnaire consisted of two parts the first part is dedicated to organizational learning and the second part is dedicated to affective organizational commitment. For the first part a 5 points Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was used, and for the second part we used a nominal scale (yes/no scale).

The organizational learning construct was measured through a bilingual (French and Arabic) form of the shortened version of the DLOQ (dimensions of learning organization questionnaire) developed by Yang et al., (2004) who argued that the shortened versions commonly known as 21-item version would be better than 43-item original version for an organizational study because of the superior psychometric properties of the 21-item version. This instrument was used worldwide and was translated to different languages; we relied in this study on the Arabic version of this questionnaire developed essentially by Dirani (2009). For the French version of the instrument we followed the forward-then-back translation technique (Chen and Bates, 2005). A sample item is 'in my organization, people are given control over resources'

The organizational affective commitment construct is measured by one item 'I feel emotionally attached to this organization and as part of the family in it' inspired by Allen and Meyer's (1991) organizational commitment questionnaire. For this instrument also a forward-then-back translation technique was used.

3.3 Analytical strategy

In the current study the discriminate function analysis technique is applied to analyze data. It is used to determine which continuous variable discriminate between two or more naturally occurring groups. Thereby, in the context of our research it will allow us to determine the dimensions of organizational learning that discriminate between employees who are emotionally committed (affective commitment) and those who are not. In other words, discriminate function analysis is used here to determine the dimensions of organizational learning that are the best predictors of whether an employee is emotionally committed to his organization or not.

4. RESULTS

Discriminant function analysis consist of two steps, in the first step a multivariate test is performed, if statistically significant, the second step takes place to determine which of the variables have significantly different means across the groups.

Below (Table 1) are reported results of both steps and the model equation.

TABLE1. RESULTS OF DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION ANALYSIS

	Eigenvalues	The Canonical Correlation	Wilk's Lambda	Cut score	Sensitivity
Step 1	0,660	0,631	0,602	-0, 97908	86,8%
Step 2	0,430	0,548	0,699	-0,7902	86,8%
Model Equation	$Y_1 = 0,443X_1 + 0,711X_2$				

Source: by Authors based on the data obtained in the study

4.1 Interpretation of step 1

The larger the eigenvalue =0,660, the more of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the discriminant function. The dependent variable has two categories (emotional attachment to the organization: yes or no), thus there is only one discriminant function. The canonical correlation= 0,631 is the measure of association between the discriminant function and the dependent variable.

Smaller values of Wilks' lambda= 0,602 indicate greater discriminatory ability of the discriminant function. Accordingly, we have one good discriminant function since the significance test is smaller than 0,005 (see table 4 in appendix)

Centroids are the mean discriminant scores for each group. They are used to establish the cutting point for classifying cases (emotionally committed, yes= 0,452 and no =-1,431). If the two groups are of equal size, the best cutting score will be halfway between the values of the functions at group centroids (that is the average). If the group sizes are unequal, (This research's case, yes= 76, no=24) the optimal cutting point is the weighted average of the two values. Thus, to distinguish between employees who are emotionally committed to their organizations and those who are not, we use the formula below in calculation:

$$\text{Cut score} = 76(-1,431) + 24(0,452) / (76+24) = -0, 97908 \quad (1)$$

The analysis will then classify (after substituting the values of the independent variables) any employee with a variate of less than -0, 97908 as a non-committed (i.e. affectively committed) employee and any employee with a variate of more than -0, 97908 as an affectively committed employee.

Sensitivity and specificity test: Overall, 82% of the original grouped cases are correctly classified. High sensitivity (86, 8%) indicates that there are few false negative results.

4.2 Interpretation of step 2

There are about 42 ideal steps to select independent variables that have the most influence on the predictor model that is adopted for this research, and that is with values ranging between 3, 84 and 2, 71. Thus, two independent variables are considered to be best fitted for the predictor model, namely “gives employees control over resources” with a lambda value estimated at 0,733 and “makes its lessons learned available” with a lambda value estimated at 0,699.

The larger the eigenvalue = 0,430, the more of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the discriminant function. The dependent variable has two categories (emotional attachment to the organization: yes or no), thus there is only one discriminant function.

The canonical correlation= 0,548 is the measure of association between the discriminant function and the dependent variable.

Smaller values of Wilks' lambda= 0,699 indicate greater discriminatory ability of the discriminant function. Accordingly, we have one good discriminant function since the significance test is smaller than 0,005 (see table 10 in appendix)

Thus, the equation of this research's predictor model is:

$$Y_1 = 0,443X_1 + 0,711X_2 \quad (2)$$

X_1 : makes its lessons learned available

X_2 : gives employees control over resources

Y_1 : Affective commitment

For coefficients (see table.10 in appendix).

Centroids are the mean discriminant scores for each group. They are used to establish the cutting point for classifying cases (emotionally committed, yes= 0,365 and no =-1,155). The group sizes are unequal, (yes= 76, no=24), hence we'll need to use the weighted average to calculate the cutting score. Thus, to distinguish between employees who are emotionally committed to their organizations and those who are not, we use the formula below in calculation:

$$\text{Cut score} = 76(-1,155) + 24(0,365) / (76+24) = -0,7902 \quad (3)$$

The analysis will then classify (after substituting the values of the independent variables) any employee with a variate of less than -0,7902 as a non-committed (i.e. affectively committed)

employee and any employee with a variate of more than -0, 7902 as an affectively committed employee.

Sensitivity and specificity test: Overall, 81 % of the original grouped cases are correctly classified. High sensitivity (86, 8%) indicates that there are few false negative results.

Thus, the impact of organizational learning on organizational affective commitment can be expressed as follows:

$$Y_1 = 0,443X_1 + 0,711X_2 \quad (4)$$

The two predictor variables above are included in two dimensions of organizational learning:

The first dimension is embedded systems which include the variable (makes its lessons learned available, with a discriminant coefficient estimated at 0,443. This supports partially our research hypothesis.

The second dimension is empowerment which includes the variable (gives employees control over resources, with a discriminant coefficient estimated at 0,711. This supports partially our research hypothesis.

5. DISCUSSION

In this section the findings of this research will be discussed on the basis of the hypothesized model and compared to other research. Moreover implications and limitations of this study as well as recommendation for future research will be discussed.

We aimed through this study to link two constructs that has been extensively studied in literature; both constructs-organizational learning and affective organizational commitment- are rarely associated; despite the close link between the two. We focused in our research on identify components of organizational learning that are most influential in determining affective organizational commitment, thus we created a discriminant model that classifies Algerian employees into one of two predefined 'affective commitment' groups based on seven dimensions of organizational learning extracted from previous literature on the topic.

Only two dimensions of the seven (i.e. embedded systems and empowerment) predicted best employees effective commitment. Our findings are consisted with those of Joo and colleagues (2009; 2010) who found that empowerment and embedded systems along with other dimensions have a significant influence on organizational affective commitment, our results are also consisted with Lau's et al., (2016) results in which empowerment has the strongest correlation with affective commitment and Dinari's (2009) results in which empowerment is one of the four dimensions that significantly predicted affective commitment.

5.1 Implication

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the fact that it links two constructs that have been talked about a lot in literature but rarely associated, another theoretical contribution is the continuation of the discourse on organizational learning and organizational commitment. The practical implications are the following : in order to create an affective commitment in their employees, managers are first required to create and integrate high-and-low technology systems with work, give employees access to data related to the organization's past experiences, and make the organizations' lessons learned available for every employee. Second involve employees in setting, owning, and implementing the organization's vision, distribute their responsibility close to decision making so that they have total control of resources that they need to accomplish their tasks.

5.2 Limitation

This study encountered some theoretical and methodological limitations namely, the time constraint, the small size of the sample, and the lack of literature on the relationship between organizational learning and organizational commitment.

5.3 Avenues of research

The limitations of this research may lead to the following research avenues: first, a research with a larger sample that would help generalizing the findings, second, it would be interesting to see a comparative study on the relationship between organizational learning and organizational commitment in public and private sector (especially in the Algerian context due to the big differences between the two sectors). Third, another interesting study can be conducted to see the effect of organizational learning on all three types of commitment or on different commitment profiles since it has been recognized that an individual may experience all three forms of commitment at varying degrees.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to identify dimensions of organizational learning that are most influential in determining affective organizational commitment. Therefore, we tried to create a discriminant model that classified employees into one of two predefined affective commitment

groups, based on seven dimensions of organizational learning. Two dimensions appeared to discriminate best between employees who are affectively committed and those who are not, namely embedded systems and empowerment.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 2. CASE PROCESSING SUMMARY

Analysis Case Processing Summary			
Unweighted Cases		N	Percent
Valid		100	100,0
Excluded	Missing or out-of-range group codes	0	,0
	At least one missing discriminating variable	0	,0
	Both missing or out-of-range group codes and at least one missing discriminating variable	0	,0
	Total	0	,0
Total		100	100,0

Source: SPSS

TABLE 3. CANONICAL CORRELATION

Eigenvalues				
Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation
1	,660 ^a	100,0	100,0	,631

Source: SPSS

TABLE 4. WILK'S LAMBDA

Wilk's Lambda				
Test of Function(s)	Wilk's Lambda	Chi-Square	df	Sig
1	,602	44,350	21	,002

Source: SPSS

TABLE 5. GROUP CENTROIDS

Functions at Group Centroids	
Affective Commitment	Function 1
NO	-1,431
YES	,452

Source: SPSS

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TABLE 6. CLASSIFICATION RESULTS

Affective Commitment			Predicted Group Membership		Total
			No	Yes	
Original	Count	no	16	8	24
		yes	10	66	76
	%	no	66,7	33,3	100,0
		yes	13,2	86,8	100,0

a. 82,0% of original grouped cases correctly classified

Source: SPSS

TABLE 7. VARIABLES ENTERED/REMOVED

Step	Entered	Wilk's lambda							
		Statistic	df1	df2	df3	Exact F			
						Statistic	df1	df2	Sig
1	Gives employees control over resources	,733	1	1	98,000	35,687	1	98,000	,000
2	Makes its lessons learned available	,699	2	1	98,000	20,841	2	97,000	,000

At each step, the variable that minimizes the overall Wilks' Lambda is entered.

- a. Maximum number of steps is 42.
- b. Minimum partial F to enter is 3.84.
- c. Maximum partial F to remove is 2.71.
- d. F level, tolerance, or VIN insufficient for further computation.

Source: SPSS

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TABLE 8. CANONICAL CORRELATION

Eigenvalues				
Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation
1	,430 ^a	100,0	100,0	,548

Source: SPSS

TABLE 9. WILK'S LAMBDA

Wilk's Lambda				
Test of Function(s)	Wilk's Lambda	Chi-Square	df	Sig
1	,699	34,675	2	,000

Source: SPSS

TABLE10. STANDARDIZED CANONICAL DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION COEFFICIENTS

	Function
	1
Makes its lessons learned available	,443
Gives employees control over resources	,711

Source: SPSS

TABLE 11. GROUP CENTROIDS

Functions at Group Centroids	
Affective Commitment	Function
	1
NO	-1,155
YES	,365

Source: SPSS

TABLE12. CLASSIFICATION RESULTS

Affective Commitment			Predicted Group Membership		Total
			No	Yes	
Original	Count	no	15	9	24
		yes	10	66	76
	%	no	62,5	37,5	100,0
		yes	13,2	86,8	100,0

a. 81,0% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

Source: SPSS