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# Tourism SMEs and organizational learning in a competitive environment: A longitudinal research on organizational learning in travel and tourism agencies located in the city of Ahvaz, Iran

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Abstract:

### Purpose

This paper aims to study the impact of increasing number of competitors on the organisational learning (OL) in tourism small and medium-sized enterprises. The focus of this study is the tourism and travel agencies (TTAs) of the City of Ahvaz where the OL was studied within TTAs insofar as increasing the number of competitors is concerned. The underlying question in this paper is whether or not the increasing number of competitors affects OL in TTAs of the City of Ahvaz.

### Design/methodology/approach

Using a longitudinal survey, OL was studied at individual, group and organisational levels. The research is based upon quantitative and qualitative methods. Owing to the small number of samples, in addition to questionnaire and quantitative analysis, authors made use of in-depth interviews. The first research was conducted in 2012, while the second one was done in 2014.

### Findings

It was found that in 2012, with its limited number of competitors in the market, learning in these organisations was desirable at individual level and not at group or organisational levels. On the other hand, both the quantitative and qualitative methods in 2014, with the increased number of TTAs, suggested that the quality of learning were desirable in all organisational levels in that year.

### Research limitations/implications

Care should be taken in generalising the results of the research to other TTAs because the size of the sample in this study was small. Moreover, structure and performance of TTAs may be different among various regions. In addition to the said limitation, it must be noted that some variables such as experience, education and gender were not consider in analysing the results of the study. Furthermore, OL in the TTAs might be affected by other variables that were not considered in this study.

### Originality/value

Originality of the study is to link “OL” to the “competition”. There is not any study with special focus on OL with approaching to competition, neither in travel and tourism literature nor in OL literature, and this study can be a starting point to raise further and future research and debates.

Keywords:

[Organizational learning \(OL\)](#), [Competition](#), [Small and medium-sized enterprises \(SMEs\)](#), [Travel and tourism agencies](#)