

# Presenting a Competitive Advantage-Based Technology Transfer Model Through a Grounded Theory Approach

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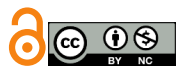
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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** In today's world, the aviation industry has become one of the most significant industries globally due to the ever-increasing global population and the rising demand for air travel. To enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and improve passenger experience, airline companies are seeking to transfer technologies based on competitive advantage and utilize big data to better their processes and decision-making. The current research aims to present a competitive advantage-based technology transfer model grounded in the grounded theory approach.

**Method:** The research methodology employed is qualitative, based on the grounded theory strategy. Deep interview techniques were used for data collection. Through purposive sampling, theoretical saturation was achieved after 11 in-depth interviews.

**Findings:** The grounded theory approach in this study entailed three coding stages: open, axial, and selective, identifying 22 general categories within a paradigm including causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, core categories, strategies, and outcomes.

**Conclusion:** The results indicate that in today's competitive business environment, airline companies are looking for ways to increase efficiency, improve passenger experience, reduce costs, and achieve a competitive advantage. To achieve such goals, the transfer of data-based technologies and competitive advantage is proposed as a significant strategy.

**Keywords:** *Technology Transfer, Competitive Advantage, Grounded Theory.*

## 1 Introduction

Uncertainty and dynamics in competitive markets compel companies to reconsider their approaches to achieving sustainable competitive advantages. The key to attaining and maintaining a sustainable competitive

advantage lies in possessing and developing state-of-the-art technologies that are difficult for other companies to imitate. These resources are primarily embedded within the internal structure of companies and are founded on skills, knowledge, expertise, and various capacities (Parsakia et al., 2023). However, given the rapid and extensive technological

changes across different industry sectors, we can anticipate a future that is vastly different from what we have known so far. The technological changes resulting from the Fourth Industrial Revolution are much more diverse and extend beyond the previous three phases, which, if businesses do not quickly adapt to these changes, could lead to serious and irreparable problems. Large businesses, even if they are not familiar with the technologies emerging from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, need continuous and ongoing knowledge transfer to survive, or startups that inevitably need to offer innovation at the technology forefront to succeed. Over the past decades, we have witnessed a shift in knowledge transfer models from a closed and internal business space to models that maximize efficiency and collaboration with various external environments. Companies must adapt their ideas to align with the knowledge transfer of other companies and commercialize them as necessary, always looking for ways to offer their internal capabilities to the market even beyond their current field of activity (Meskinnavaz et al., 2017; Myat et al., 2023). Based on advanced technologies, technology-oriented companies are more sensitive to changes in their environment and, on the other hand, lay the groundwork for the technological advancement of other organizations and must respond more seriously to survive. Researchers have found evidence that knowledge transfer in one dimension, such as the value proposition, leads to changes in other factors of business models as well. Therefore, it can be concluded that knowledge transfer in a single element of the business model can lead to complete changes in companies' competitive advantages (Bienhaus & Haddud, 2018; Busca & Bertrandias, 2020; Hollebeck & Macky, 2019).

Knowledge transfer-based ecosystems, due to their distinct nature, including interdependence and value creation, have emerged as a more suitable configuration for technology development and procurement than the linear approach (Asemannasab & ghadami, 2021; Biranvand et al., 2022). The growing expectations and insights into the role of knowledge transfer open new areas for extensive scientific and political discussions about knowledge transfer. In the era of globalization, businesses have faced rapid changes both in customer needs and in the nature of markets. For companies to have a competitive edge and improve their performance, they must introduce new products and strategies based on new technologies. This is why the concept of technology transfer, which propels a company forward, has gained greater importance (Moiri et al., 2022; Rossi et al., 2017; Sweller, 2020). Although technology-

oriented companies are likely to have greater innovative capabilities than other companies, they often face significant challenges in technology transfer. In this regard, organizational strategic agility has been proposed as a strategic solution to address the challenges faced by organizations (Rossi et al., 2017). Unlike the past, organizations operate in a complex and dynamic environment. Maintaining and sustaining an organization in such an environment is extremely difficult. In such an environment, rapid and significant changes occur, and the greater these changes and complexities, the higher the level of environmental uncertainty. The more uncertainty there is, the more organizations need knowledge and technology transfer from environmental factors to adapt to environmental changes and transformations. Thus, moving towards technology orientation in organizations is considered a new approach essential for developing competitive advantage. Therefore, from the previous empirical study, it appears that there is a research gap and a lack of frameworks and models for identifying the technology transfer pattern, indicating a lack of a holistic view in this field of study. Given that many of these industries have a limited definition of technology transfer, it is possible that airline company managers not only fail in identifying the necessary infrastructures and tools related to technology transfer but also in understanding opportunities for improvement in the implementation process of technology transfer-based projects. Nonetheless, considering the importance of recognizing and correctly managing behavioral barriers in developing technology transfer tools, significant efforts have not yet been made by industry experts in the field of aviation to identify the proposed approach.

Technology transfer is referred to as a process that directly or indirectly creates value for companies and customers, thereby enabling them to outperform competitors (Akbari et al., 2020). Technology transfer represents a new service experience or solution that encompasses one or several dimensions: a new service concept, fresh customer interaction, a new value system, new business partners, a new revenue model, and new technical or organizational service delivery systems. The formation of technology transfer is influenced by a set of factors and activities, and not decided impulsively. Various factors play a role in the success of an innovative product or service in the market, including the timing of market entry, technological level, and even the costs of research and development. In recent decades, in today's complex world, technology transfer has

become essential for organizations (Draghici et al., 2014; Krishna, 2019). The performance of organizations is moderated by their ability to transfer technology and the acceptance of innovative products, services, technologies, and processes by customers. Technology transfer can provide a source of competitive advantage for companies by improving methods and techniques capable of producing new products or services or by enhancing existing methods. Large businesses need continuous and ongoing technology transfer to remain viable, or startups that inevitably need to offer technology transfer at the cutting edge of technology for success. Over the past decades, we have seen a shift from closed and internal business technology transfer models towards open technology transfer models with maximum efficiency and collaboration with various external environments. Companies should adapt and commercialize their ideas in alignment with the technology transfer of other companies and look for ways to market their internal capabilities even beyond their current field of activity (Akbari et al., 2020).

Competitive advantage, as a key concept in the strategic and management fields, refers to an organization or company's ability to surpass other competitors in the market, improving performance and achieving a superior position relative to competitors. Overall, competitive advantage demonstrates an organization's strength and ability to compete with others in the market, referring to relative and sustainable superiority in various fields. This concept is important for strategizing and success in a competitive environment (Wang & Gao, 2021).

Furthermore, considering the limitations of resources and facilities and the necessity of achieving development in airline companies, and given that the importance and role of technology transfer have been proven in numerous studies, the impact of technology based on competitive advantage in airline companies must be examined. This will allow for necessary actions to be taken based on resources and facilities to maintain and establish connections with customers in the digital space. However, it seems that in airline companies, attention to technology transfer for maintaining a competitive position in service industries, including Iranian airlines, is of great significance, and managers, by utilizing this concept in technology-oriented systems, strive to distinguish their products and services from other competitors and develop their relationships with customers. Therefore, given the importance that understanding technology transfer can have in creating differentiation in a competitive environment, studying this

subject is of great significance. This research aims to address the deficiencies of existing models and, with a comprehensive and systemic approach, evaluate the presentation of a competitive advantage-based technology transfer model in airline companies. Identifying such a relationship helps theorists and managers of airline companies to plan useful and effective improvements in service provision to airline companies through awareness of the current state of technology transfer for the development of competitive advantage.

## 2 Methods and Materials

### 2.1 Study Design and Data Collection

The current research is classified as a qualitative study. Given the theoretical gap, this research has utilized the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998) for grounded theory (GT) conceptualization in the area of competitive advantage-based technology transfer as the primary qualitative research approach. This aims to provide a model for a deep understanding of technology transfer based on competitive advantage in airline companies. Grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that inductively employs a series of systematic procedures to generate a theory about the phenomenon under study.

The population consisted of academic experts and technology specialists, with a sample size of 11 individuals selected based on purposive or snowball sampling methods. Interviewees were asked to recommend other experts in the field, indicating the use of snowball sampling in qualitative research. Purposive sampling in qualitative research means that the researcher selects study participants because they can be particularly informative about the research problem and central phenomenon. For data collection, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used, and prior to the interview, a summary of the research plan, definitions of key terms used in the study, along with the main objectives and questions of the research, were sent to interviewees via email, Telegram, or in-person visits by the researcher. A brief explanation of the conducted work was also provided at the beginning of the interview session.

### 2.2 Data Analysis

Moreover, according to Creswell and Creswell, qualitative researchers should use strategies to validate their research. Validation of the research was conducted through coding by two collaborating researchers and member

checking. Coding was performed separately by two individuals (the researcher and a colleague), and the extracted codes were compared against each other. A Cohen's kappa coefficient of 86.9% and a significance level of 0.001 were achieved, indicating almost perfect agreement between the two codings. Besides, besides the researcher, the categories and model were reviewed by the thesis advisors and one consultant, and their feedback was utilized to enrich and improve the model. For member checking, based on their related education, three interviewees shared the results of the coding process, category development, and modeling, which were then revised and corrected according to their feedback.

In this study, data were documented concurrently with the collection of interviews, based on the Strauss and Corbin

(1998) process, using voice recording and note-taking. The interview content was transcribed into text files, and the analysis and coding of the data were performed using MAXQDA software. Axial coding followed the paradigm model, and the final model of competitive advantage-based technology transfer was developed based on the grounded theory approach.

### 3 Findings and Results

Table 1 presented the indices of competitive advantage-based technology transfer in airline companies comprehensively. Typically, analyses conducted through coding ultimately lead to the discovery of a model or theory.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Qualitative Results*

Main Category	Subcategory	Component
Causes	Understanding and perception of technology	Unknown innovative ideas
		Employees' understanding of new technology
		Technology cost
		Environmental uncertainty
		Financial risk
	Business situation analysis	Long-term activities in technology transfer
		Identifying potential markets based on customer needs
		Competitive environmental capability
		Establishing R&D units
		Diagnostics with environmental changes
		Generational changes
		Technological capabilities
Technology absorption capacity	Acquiring necessary training	
	Identifying creative resources	
	Developing technology infrastructures	
	Technology transfer in business model	
	Identifying new technological opportunities	
Context	Organizational structure	Speed in accessing technology
		Ability to use external resources in innovative services
		Think tank evaluation in assessing foreign technology transfers
		Internal cohesion
		Infrastructure development based on machine learning
	Change management	Organizational intelligence
		Fintech development
		Big data development
		Determining technology's market position
		Determining the nature of competition
	Organizational readiness in technology transfer	Adopting technology culture
		Conceptualizing technology-driven ideas
		Networking
		Change in creativities
		High speed of technology transfer
Company success depends on more think tanks		
More integrated and synchronized converging technologies		
Improvement of parent technologies based on impact factor		
Staff advancement through the adoption of new technologies		

Intervening Factors	Legal infrastructures	Financing and investment Burdensome government regulations Lack of incentives or easy conditions for technology transfer Lack of legal support
	Management factors	Managers' insufficient understanding of conditions Lack of focus on problem-solving Access to dynamic human resources Lack of technology transfer knowledge Personal view of technology transfer Lack of future vision in managers Lack of appropriate strategy Attracting skilled workforce
	Behavioral patterns	Change in patterns of customers/consumers Personalization of technology transfer Change in tastes of customers/consumers High speed of changes in technology transfer
	Environmental factors	Systematic corruption Environmental uncertainty (insecurity) Lack of appropriate strategy for technology transfer in competitive environment Traditional education system Resistance to change Lack of focus on product Lack of focus
	Economic instability	Decrease in investments in technology transfer Economic uncertainty in sanction conditions Lack of access to technology transfer infrastructures Misalignment with economic environment
	Core Factors	Open technology transfer
Technological capabilities		Dynamic technological patterns Needs assessment for technology access Monitoring advanced global technologies Time to access technology Attention to technology maturity level High depth of knowledge in technology Severe changes in the technology field Intellectual property of acquired technology
Optimization of technology transfer processes		Enhancing position in technology transfer processes Evaluating innovative capacity Smart and agile human resources Utilizing small knowledge-based and agile companies Optimizing resource allocation Optimization for maximizing profit Presence of technology transfer culture
Strategies	Safety improvement	Using smart systems for monitoring Integration of smart sales technologies Monitoring flight parameters Advanced navigation systems New technologies in accident and incident prevention
	Strategic planning for technology transfer	Reviewing environmental opportunities and threats Development of capital, skill, and capability Relying on modern tools (robotics) Creating multiple opportunities through conferences and exhibitions

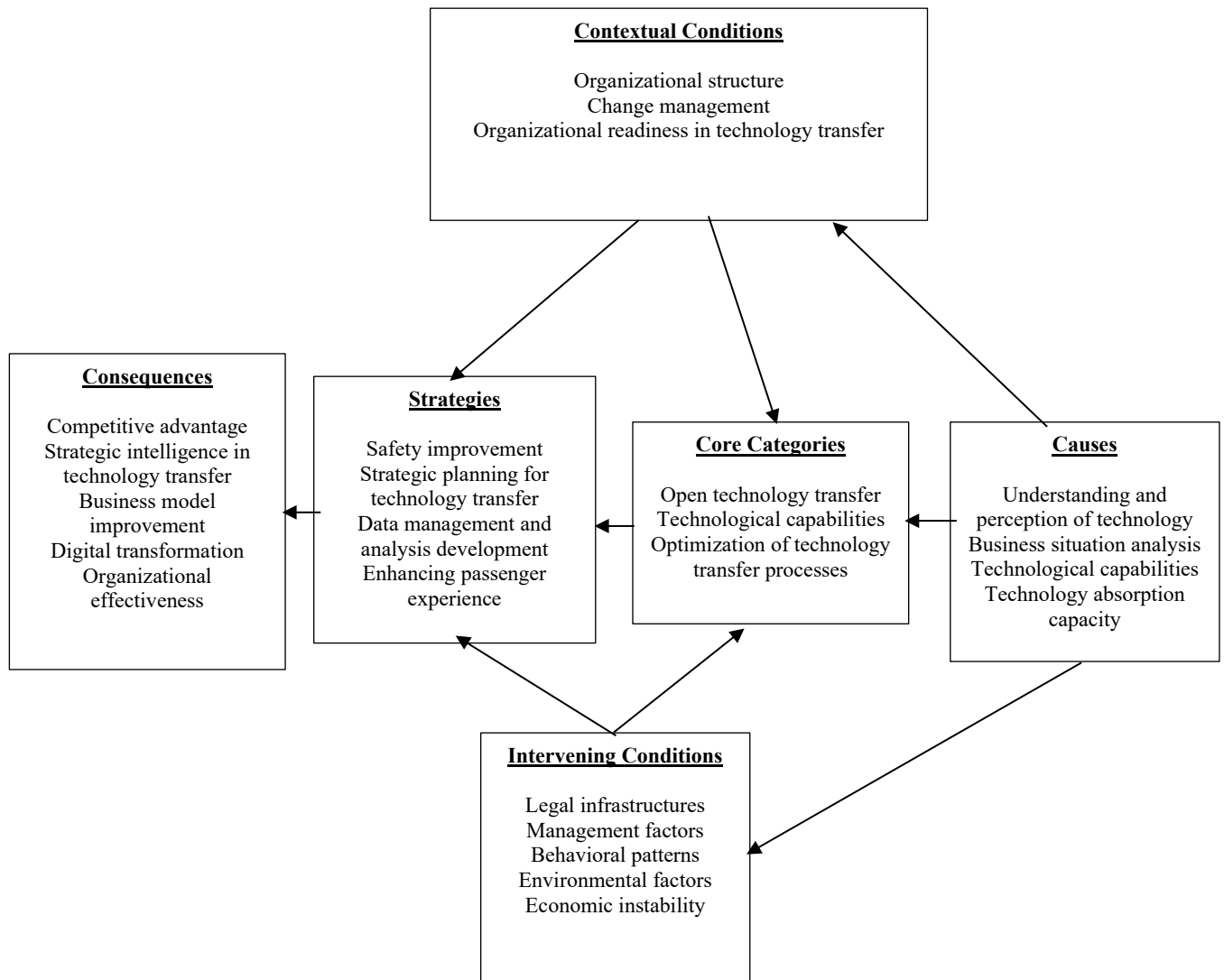
Consequences	Data management and analysis development	Technology dynamism based on scientometrics and new tools
		Joint product development
	Enhancing passenger experience	Information sharing
		Exchanging experiences with technology manufacturers
		Advanced technology and value chain
		Planning flight programs
	Competitive advantage	Fuel management
		Improving repair performance
		Aircraft maintenance
		Developing new technology based on need
		Changing organizational perspective on technology transfer
		Using advanced online reservation systems
		Custom and electronic services for passengers
		Upgrading in-flight entertainment and leisure systems
		Increasing competitive power
		Enhancing long-term position
Strategic intelligence in technology transfer	Increasing market share	
	Quick response to changes	
	Developing competitiveness	
	Detecting signs of technology changes	
Business model improvement	Paying attention to environmental changes and customer needs	
	Better adapting products to rapid changes in customer desires	
	Aligning capabilities with environmental changes	
	Accessing useful knowledge in the shortest time	
	Wise intelligence	
	Commercializing technologies	
Digital transformation	Innovative solutions in business	
	Blockchain-based innovative model	
	AI-based innovative model	
	Designing innovative models with Industry 4.0	
	Creating customer value through technology transfer model	
Organizational effectiveness	Sustainability of business ecosystem	
	Improving customer knowledge	
	Changing organizational processes	
	Changing in technological culture	
	Optimal use of digital tools	
	Customizing technology	
	Creating technology transfer on an AI platform	
Increasing productivity rate		
Reducing operational costs		
Reducing time to access services		
Increasing the speed of technology transfer		
Improving organizational welfare		
Developing human capital		

The theoretical validity of the theory was assessed based on the criteria of fit and applicability. Interviewees' opinions on this matter were also examined. Discussions on the fit of research findings with the empirical world were held with three interviewees, and some categories were renamed or revised accordingly. Moreover, continuous comparison of

data with the research's theoretical background and literature helped to ensure the research's applicability. Formulating semi-structured questions at each interview stage and addressing any issues helped to enhance the practicality of the research.

Figure 1

Paradigm Model



#### 4 Discussion and Conclusion

The final model demonstrates that in airline companies, a holistic view and attention to various aspects of technology transfer, considering causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, are essential. This research aimed to present a model of technology transfer based on competitive advantage through a grounded theory approach, incorporating causal, contextual, intervening factors, core categories, outcomes, and strategies for technology transfer based on competitive advantage in a paradigmatic model aligned with grounded theory. Most studies in the field of competitive advantage-based technology transfer are theoretical rather than empirical and field-based. However,

this research not only reviews a relatively extensive range of domestic and international studies on the subject phenomenon but also conducts a study on practical evidence from experts' viewpoints and various perspectives on the phenomenon. Furthermore, among previous studies, no research was found that primarily aimed to identify a comprehensive set of competitive advantage-based technology transfer, its outcomes, and present it as a theory, model, or extracted pattern (Asemannasab & ghadami, 2021). In other words, previous research has only discussed (not explained) a limited number of factors either theoretically or empirically. Nonetheless, this research extensively and profoundly identifies, describes, and explains the phenomenon of competitive advantage-based

technology transfer and presents a comprehensive model for its successful implementation, including some concepts and articles not considered in previous studies. Therefore, this research can introduce more details that can assist airline companies in the model of technology transfer based on competitive advantage (Heydarzadeh et al., 2016).

In this model, unlike previously identified models, it is not limited to technology transfer alone but also encompasses attitudes associated with competitive advantage-based technology transfer. Furthermore, the research model does not impose any specific limitations on the inclusion of various types of technology transfers that may be identified in future research. However, methodological reviews indicate that technology transfer researchers should pay attention to methods of identifying dimensions and indices of the model, as well as to model validation methods. Also, given the application of the science design strategy in the development of technology transfer models, they should fully follow its steps and use appropriate tools in the development and evaluation of the model. Research results in the examination of the paradigm model resulting from the grounded theory approach show efforts in simultaneously addressing technical and non-technical dimensions in the development of information technology transfer. Paying attention to various dimensions of technology transfer allows for more precise evaluation and better efforts to improve the situation. Attention to new technological trends in airline companies, as well as the specific complexities of this field, are other identified trends in technology transfer development that should receive more attention. Since the presented paradigm model is intended to assess smart capabilities, analysis, and technology transfer based on competitive advantage with the aim of planning for subsequent actions and comparing the organization's level of progress in each of these dimensions, precision in development and considering the involved processes are very important. Consequently, technology transfer to airline companies can bring significant competitive advantages. This includes improving performance and efficiency, increasing safety, enhancing passenger experience, accessing new markets, reducing costs, and competing with rival companies. By using advanced technologies and smart systems, companies can improve their ability to manage operations, enhance safety, and create a better passenger experience. These advantages can help companies to have a stronger competition in the airline industry and secure the market for themselves. The following recommendations are made to managers:

- **Increase Operational Efficiency:** Advanced technology transfer to airline companies can improve operational efficiency. For example, improvements in air traffic management, fuel consumption optimization, accuracy in fleet and maintenance can lead to better performance and cost reduction.
- **Enhance Passenger Experience:** With the transfer of innovative technologies, airline companies can improve the passenger experience. From upgrading in-flight entertainment and communication systems to easing ticket purchases and boarding processes, all these factors can attract more passengers and increase company revenues.
- **Strengthen Security and Safety:** Transferring security and surveillance technologies to airline companies can ensure flight safety and passenger experience. Using detection systems and prevention of incidents, improving crisis management methods, and upgrading safety processes can maintain passenger trust and enhance company reputation.
- **Facilitate Management of Defects and Repairs:** New technologies can help detect technical faults and issues in airplanes, leading to reduced repair times, improved maintenance planning, and consequently, enhanced operational capabilities.
- **Increase Competitive Ability:** By using advanced technologies, airline companies can demonstrate enhanced capabilities and perform better against competitors. This increased competitive ability can lead to attracting new passengers, increasing market share, and boosting revenue.
- **Compliance with Standards:** Technology transfer can help airline companies align with new industry standards. This can facilitate enhancing the companies' international standing and increase trust among customers and partners.
- **Increase International Collaborations:** New technologies can play a role in creating international collaborations with other airline companies. Sharing experiences and technologies with other companies can help increase capabilities and improve the performance of the airline industry.

For future researchers, it is recommended to consider quantitative development methods for generalizability of this model. This aspect could be theoretically efficient and



greatly assist in testing the theoretical infrastructure of the model. Given the nature of qualitative research, the most significant limitation of the current research is the generalizability of the results and findings to other contexts; therefore, it is not easy to generalize the results of the current research to other areas. To increase the generalizability of this research, future researchers are suggested to examine the current research findings using quantitative methods in technology transfer.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### Authors Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

### Ethics principles

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.