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Investigation of the role of individual creativity of employees in the relationship of learning organization and business performance

Öğrenen Organizasyon ve İşletme Performansı İlişkisinde Çalışanların Bireysel Yaratıcılık Rolünün İncelenmesi

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of individual creativity of employees in the relationship between the learning organization and business performance.

Quantitative patterned research methods were used in the study. A survey method was used to collect first-hand data. The research sample consists of a group of 301 employees operating in various sectors and working in different positions in the province of Istanbul, Turkey. The questionnaire consists of appropriate scales to measure learning organization characteristics, individual creativity and business performance. Data analysis was carried out using statistical methods and regression analysis via SPSS 2.0 statistical program.

Findings show that learning organization characteristics positively affect the individual creativity role of employees. In addition, it has been revealed that the individual creativity level of the employees has a positive relationship with the business performance. The mediating effect of the individual creativity variable in the relationship between the learning organization and the job performance has also been found.

These findings highlight that the learning organization is an effective strategy in increasing business performance and that the individual creativity of employees is a critical factor in this process.

Keywords: Learning organizations, individual creativity, business performance, mediating effect.

Özet

Bu çalışma, öğrenen organizasyon ve işletme performansı arasındaki ilişkide çalışanların bireysel yaratıcılığının rolünü incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.


Araştırmada nicel desenli araştırma yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Birinci elden veri toplamak için anket yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini İstanbul ilinde çeşitli sektörlerde faaliyet gösteren ve farklı pozisyonlarda çalışan 301 kişilik bir grup oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada öğrenen organizasyon özelliklerini, bireysel yaratıcılığı ve iş performansını ölçmek için uygun ölçeklerden yararlanılmıştır. Verilerin analizi istatistiksel yöntemler ve regresyon analizi ile SPSS 2.0 istatistik programı kullanılarak yapılmıştır.

Bulgular, öğrenen organizasyon özelliklerinin çalışanların bireysel yaratıcılık rolünü olumlu yönde etkilediğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca çalışanların bireysel yaratıcılık düzeylerinin işletme performansı ile pozitif bir ilişkisi olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Öğrenen örgüt ile iş performansı arasındaki ilişkide bireysel yaratıcılık değişkeninin aracılık etkisi de bulunmuştur.

Bu bulgular, öğrenen organizasyonun iş performansını artırmada etkili bir strateji olduğunu ve çalışanların bireysel yaratıcılığının bu süreçte kritik bir faktör olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Öğrenen organizasyonlar, bireysel yaratıcılık, iş performansı, aracılık etkisi

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Introduction

In today's business environment, rapidly changing market conditions and increasing competition have brought along the need for businesses to constantly produce innovative solutions and adopt learning processes. In this context, organizations aim to produce new ideas and solutions by utilizing the creativity potential of their employees, rather than relying only on existing knowledge. Individual creativity of employees is accepted as a critical factor for organizations to achieve innovation and competitive advantage (Parjanen, 2012; Wang & Nickerson, 2017).

The learning organization approach expresses a management approach in which businesses continuously encourage learning and focus on the development of skills such as sharing information, critical thinking and problem solving (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1998; Garavan, 1997). This approach supports the learning processes of employees in order to reveal their creativity potential and enable them to produce innovative solutions. Learning organizations create a culture that encourages the flow of information, helping employees develop new ideas and improve business performance (Mills & Friesen, 1992; Huysman, 2000).

This study aims to understand the relationship between learning organization management and business performance and to examine the role of individual creativity of employees in this relationship. It includes the individual creativity of employees, their ability to generate new and original ideas and their ability to cope with problems. In particular, this study aims to investigate how the learning organization approach affects individual creativity of employees and the effect of this effect on business performance. In this context, it will be investigated how the characteristics of organizations such as learning culture, knowledge sharing, encouraging critical thinking and problem solving skills affect the creative potential of employees. Secondly, it is aimed to evaluate the relationship between the individual creativity level of the employees and the performance of the business. In this way, it will be tried to understand how the learning organization approach affects business performance and how important the individual creativity of employees plays in this relationship. In this context, the analysis of the data collected by the survey method was carried out by using quantitative research methods. It is thought that the findings will contribute to the process of

determining the strategies to increase business performance by encouraging individual creativity.

Literature Review

Learning Organization

A learning organization is an organization that constantly acquires new knowledge and skills, shares this knowledge, applies it, and adapts itself for continuous development and improvement. This type of organization effectively uses internal and external sources of information to adapt to change (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020). When the literature is examined, it is seen that learning organizations are defined in different ways. The concept of learning organization was used for the first time in Peter Senge's book "The Fifth Discipline" published in 1990 (Yoon & Park, 2023). Peter Senge defines this concept as "organizations in which people constantly improve themselves in order to achieve the result they want, and learn collectively by pushing their own limits" and talks about the five basic disciplines that these organizations should have. He stated these 5 disciplines as personal mastery, thinking models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking (Senge, 1990). However, Bowles (1993) defined the concept of learning organization as 'the formation of institutions, the organization of knowledge and activities, and the improvement of individual abilities and job skills of employees'. Gratton (1993: 55) defines this concept as 'an organization capable of creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and changing behavior in order to create new knowledge and this understanding'. The learning organization is the process of developing organizational activities with better knowledge and understanding, and it is an organization that constantly expands its capacity to create the future (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020). Learning organization is also the process of dynamically creating knowledge within the organization for the development of distinctive competencies in order to improve the organization's performance and results (Kumar et al., 2021).

Individual Creativity

Individual creativity is a person's ability to come up with new and valuable ideas, solutions or products. This ability supports to put forward original and innovative ideas based on existing knowledge and experience, to deal with problems

from different perspectives and to produce alternative solutions (Egan, 2005). In addition, individual creativity is based on human imagination, different perspectives, originality, flexibility, problem-solving skills, risk taking, critical thinking and independence (Taggar, 2002). A creative individual overcomes conventional thought patterns, pushes the limits and produces creative solutions (Yu et al., 2019). Individual creativity plays a critical role for innovation, progress and development. Creative thoughts and ideas lead to the emergence of new products, services or business models (Alikaj et al., 2021). Creative individuals can produce new and effective solutions to problems, gain competitive advantage and differentiate. Individuals with individual creativity have more interesting and original ideas than individuals with low creativity (Asif et al., 2019).

Business Performance

Business performance refers to the degree and level of success of a business in achieving the determined goals (Pathirana, 2019). Business performance can be evaluated using various criteria and indicators and is often associated with financial and operational performance (Bourne et al., 2003). Business performance evaluation is a system used to understand the current state of the business, identify weak points and identify opportunities for improvement (Marr & Schiuma, 2003). There are various methods for evaluating performance (Ghoury et al., 2020). Performance evaluation method, evaluation results vary according to the field and nature of the task to be used. Performance measurement is carried out in two ways, financial and non-financial (Beuren et al., 2022). The criteria used to measure an organization's performance are often financial considerations. Considering today's global competitive conditions, non-financial performance criteria such as quality, reputation, satisfaction, etc. we can add criteria, they are important elements used to measure the performance of a workplace (Helmold and Samara, 2019, Lima et al., 2021).

Methodology

This study aims to understand the relationship between learning organization management, business performance and the individual creativity role of employees. In this context, firstly, the basic theoretical framework has been established, and the hypotheses and model of the research are presented below.

It is frequently emphasized in the literature that the learning organization approach has a positive effect on the individual creativity of employees (Purwanto, 2020; Zhao et al., 2021; Parjanen, 2012; Ismail, 2005; Syam et al., 2018). Learning organizations support individual creativity by creating a learning culture and knowledge sharing environment that encourages employees to generate new ideas (Hirst et al., 2009; Huang and Yao, 2017; Tesluk et al., 1997). In this context, factors such as the organization's culture of learning, knowledge sharing, critical thinking and problem-solving skills can affect the creative potential of employees. The learning organization approach is expected to increase the individual creativity level of the employees. In this context, the H1 hypothesis is expressed as follows.

H1: Learning organization management affects the individual creativity level of employees.

The relationship between individual creativity and business performance is also an important area of research. The ability of employees to think creatively, solve problems and innovate is a critical factor for businesses to gain competitive advantage. Studies in the literature show that individual creativity of employees has a positive effect on business performance (Barrett et al., 2005; Zhao et al., 2021; Moulang, 2015; Frare & Beuren, 2021; Hahn et al., 2015). Employees with high individual creativity can produce innovative solutions, increase productivity, ensure customer satisfaction and gain competitive advantage.

The H2 hypothesis developed in this direction can be expressed as follows:

H2: There is a significant relationship between individual creativity and business performance.

Considering that the learning organization reveals and supports the creative potentials of the employees, it is predicted that this approach may have an increasing effect on business performance. Developing creative thinking skills of employees, producing innovative solutions to problems and using their innovation skills can contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage for the business. In this context, the H3 hypothesis developed can be expressed as follows:

H₃: Individual creativity variable has a mediating effect on the relationship between learning organization and business performance

The universe of the study consists of employees participating in the employment network in Istanbul, Turkey. Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan (2004) and De Winter et al., (2009) state that with a sampling error of 0.05, a sample size of 384 is sufficient for the population size of 1 million and above in the calculation of sample sizes that should be drawn from different universe sizes. In this context, 301 data from the questionnaires sent to 4800 employees with convenience sampling method and included in the analysis constitute the sample of this study.

This research is limited to the perceptions of the learning organization, individual creativity and business performance variables of 301 insured employees in the employment network in Istanbul, Turkey, between June 2022 and January 2023. As in all academic studies, time and cost constraints are other important limitations in this study, such as the prejudices developed by the employees against the survey method.

The Learning Organization scale developed by Basım et al., (2009) was used to measure the perceptions of the employees towards the Learning Organization. The scale developed by Özer (2011) was used to measure business performance. The creativity scale developed by Pıçakçı (2013) was used to measure the individual creativity variable. In order to get information about demographic data in the research, employees were asked to answer open-ended questions about age, gender, marital status, educational status, field of activity of the institution, working time in the institution, position in the institution and the number of personnel in the institution.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the statistical analyzes used in the analysis of the data and the findings related to the data are given.

Normality Analysis

The skewness and kurtosis coefficients were checked in order to determine the compatibility of the scale parameters with the normal distribution. Accordingly, since the skewness and kurtosis coefficients were in the range of ± 2 , it was accepted that the parameters met the assumption of conformity to the normal distribution.

Findings Regarding the Characteristics of the Participants

58% of the participants included in the study were female and 42% were male. 45% of the participants are in the 21-30 age range, 42% are in the 31-40 age range, and 13% are 41.

47% are married and 52% are single. 57% of the participants are undergraduate and 43% graduate. Looking at the position, it was seen that 72% of the participants were employees, 25% were mid-level managers, and 3% were senior managers. Considering the working period, 33% of the participants have 0-2 years, 24% 3- 5 years, 30% 6-10 years, and 13% 11 years and more.

Findings Regarding Validity and Reliability Analysis

In order to measure the reliability of the scales, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated. The interpretation of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient values is given in the table above. Accordingly, as a result of the reliability analysis applied to the scale items, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the individual creativity scale was calculated as 0.869, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the work performance scale was calculated as 0.888. The learning organization variable is divided into 4 sub-dimensions. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the continuous learning sub-dimension, which is one of the learning organization sub-dimensions, was calculated as 0.824, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the supportive leadership sub-dimension was 0.935, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the innovative approaches sub-dimension was 0.691, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the open-mindedness sub-dimension was 0.926, and all scales were found to be reliable.

Findings for Correlation between Variables and Regression Analysis

First of all, correlation and regression analyzes were used to test the hypotheses in the research model. The larger the absolute value of the correlation coefficient, the stronger the relationship between the variables (Newbold, 2013, 321). The regression models obtained, on the other hand, show the direction and effect level of the relationship for the variables (Durmuş et al., 2013, 154). The correlation coefficients and descriptive statistics between the research variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Findings on Correlation Coefficients Between Variables.

	Individual Creativity	Continuous Learning	Supportive Leadership	Innovative Approaches	Open Minded	Business Performance	Learning Organization
Individual Creativity	1	,403**	,318**	,312**	,374**	,449**	,409**
Continuous Learning		1	,581**	,559**	,566**	,545**	,740**
Supportive Leadership			1	,657**	,760**	,548**	,893**
Innovative Approaches				1	,635**	,418**	,793**
Open Minded					1	,611**	,931**
Business Performance						1	,637**
Learning Organization							1

Source: Prepared by the authors.

According to Table 1, individual creativity and continuous learning ($r=0.403; p<0.01$), supportive leadership ($r=0.318; p<0.01$), innovative approaches ($r=0.312; p<0.01$), A positive and moderate relationship between open-mindedness ($r=0.374; p<0.01$) job performance ($r=0.449; p<0.01$) and learning organization general scores ($r=0.409; p<0.01$) has. There is a positive and strong relationship between job performance and learning organization ($r=0.637; p<0.01$).

After the correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis was performed to understand the role of the individual creativity variable in the relationship between learning organization management and business performance and to determine the effect of the variables in this model numerically. Table 2 shows the Regression Analysis Results for the Research Model.

Table 2.
Findings for Regression Analysis.

		B	S.E.	β	t	p
1	Constant	1,479	0,332		4,46	0
	Individual Creativity	0,557	0,079	0,449	7,06	0
R²=0,202, F=49,841, p<0,001						
2	Constant	0,548	0,294		1,863	0,064
	Individual Creativity	0,258	0,072	0,208	3,57	0
	Continuous Learning	0,223	0,067	0,232	3,314	0,001
	Supportive Leadership	0,115	0,073	0,136	1,561	0,12
	Innovative Approaches	-0,092	0,073	-0,094	-1,263	0,208
	Open Minded	0,323	0,077	0,358	4,176	0
R²=0,474, F=34,780, p<0,001						

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Hierarchical regression analysis was applied to determine the predictive effect of individual creativity and learning organization sub-dimensions on job performance. Two models were created based on the hierarchical regression analysis. In the first model, only the individual creativity parameter was included in the model as an independent variable, and the established model was found to be significant ($F=49.841; p<0.001$). Accordingly, individual creativity has a positive effect on job performance ($B=0.557; p<0.001$). Considering the R2 value depending

on the model, it was seen that individual creativity significantly explained 20.2% of the change in job performance. In the second step, the parameters of continuous learning, supportive leadership, innovative approaches and open-mindedness were added to the model along with individual creativity, and it was seen that this model was also significant ($F=0.474; p<0.001$). In the second model, individual creativity ($B=0.258; p<0.001$), continuous learning ($B=0.223; p=0.001$) and open-mindedness ($B=0.323; p<0.001$) variables were

found to have predictive effects on job performance. These parameters explain 47.4% of

the change in job performance significantly ($R^2=0.474, p<0.001$).

Table 3.
3-Step Regression Analysis

Predictor	Model 1: Individual Creativity			Model 2: Business Performance			Model 3: Business Performance		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Constant	2,868	0,207	<0,001	1,324	0,217	<0,001	0,518	0,294	<0,001
Learning Organization	0,364	0,055	0,001	0,668	0,057	<0,001	0,571	0,061	<0,001
Individual Creativity							0,281	0,072	<0,001
F	39,598			134,592			79,750		
p	0,001			<0,001			<001		
R2	0,167			0,405			0,448		

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In Model 1, the effect of learning organization on individual creativity was analyzed. Accordingly, the effect of the learning organization on individual creativity is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.364, p = 0.001$). In Model 2, the effect of learning organization on individual creativity was analyzed. Accordingly, the effect of learning organization on individual creativity is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.668, p < 0.001$). In Model 3, the effect of learning

organization and individual creativity on job performance is analyzed. Accordingly, the effect of individual creativity on job performance was found to be positive and significant ($\beta = 0.281, p = 0.309$), and the effect of learning organization on job performance was found to be positive and significant ($\beta = 0.571, <0.001$). Therefore, the structural model hypotheses required for the implementation of the mediation analysis were provided.

Table 4.
Findings on the Relationship Between Learning Organization and Job Performance

Mediation Effect Values Created by Adding Continuous Learning to the Model	β	SS	Lower limit 95% Confidence Interval	Upper Limit 95% Confidence Interval
The Total Impact of the Learning Organization on Business Performance	0,668	0,057	0,555	0,782
Direct Impact of Learning Organization on Business Performance	0,571	0,061	0,451	0,691
Indirect Impact of Learning Organization on Business Performance	0,097	0,035	0,036	0,178
Learning Organization--> Individual Creativity --> Job Performance				

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The total, direct and indirect effect values and bootstrap confidence intervals regarding the mediating effect of the individual creativity variable on the relationship between the learning organization and job performance are given in the table above. As seen in the table, the direct effect value was 0.571, the indirect effect value was 0.097 and the total effect value was 0.668. Accordingly, the mediation effect of individual creativity is statistically significant ($\gamma = 0.097, SD = 0.035, 95\% CI [0.036, 0.178]$), as can be seen from the table showing the mediation analysis, and that the confidence intervals do not contain zero.

The findings highlight the importance of businesses supporting their learning processes and employees' creativity potential. Developing and sustaining the learning organization is important for the development of innovation, problem-solving skills and innovation capabilities. These processes are critical to increase and maintain the competitive advantage of businesses (Davis & Daley, 2008).

Current research shows that learning organization management has a positive effect on business performance. Learning organizations encourage employees to constantly acquire new

knowledge and skills, support knowledge sharing, and improve their ability to adapt to change (Weldy, 2009). The findings we have obtained in line with this information show that learning organizations exhibit higher business performance. (Galer & Van Der Heijden, 1992) In this context, it can be said that companies with a learning organizational culture gain competitive advantage and meet customer expectations better by adopting innovation and continuous improvement processes. (Ellinge et al., 2003).

In addition, we observed that the individual creativity of employees has a significant effect on business performance. Creative thinking, different perspectives, the ability to produce innovative ideas and solutions are critical factors for businesses to gain competitive advantage (Subiyakto et al., 2020). Our findings reveal that individual creativity is associated with higher business performance. Creative workers can approach problems from different perspectives, develop innovative products or services, and increase productivity by improving business processes (Hussein et al., 2014).

Another important finding is that we observed that individual creativity of employees has a mediating role in the relationship between learning organization management and business performance. It is supported by our findings that learning organizations provide an environment where employees encourage creative thinking and share new knowledge and experiences (Raj & Srivastava, 2016). While this environment enables employees to reveal and develop their individual creativity, it also plays an important role on the performance of the business (Hsu, 2007).

Conclusions

The results of the analyzes showed that the positive effect between individual creativity and continuous learning, supportive leadership, innovative approaches, open-mindedness, business performance and learning organization management are the factors that directly affect the performance of businesses. Creative individuals will have the desire to discover and apply new information, new methods, thanks to continuous learning, and they will have the opportunity to turn this desire into reality thanks to supportive leaders. Having a supportive leader is an indication that open-mindedness is dominant in the organization. In this way, this behavior of creative people will be noticed within the organization and will set a good example by

other personnel and ultimately play an important role in the development of the organization.

It has been revealed that learning organizations increase business performance, individual creativity has a positive effect on business performance, and there is a relationship between learning organization management and individual creativity with this study. These results highlight the importance of businesses adopting a learning organization approach in order to develop a learning culture, encourage the creative potential of employees and increase business performance.

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