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THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF THE AVIATION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to determine the effect of strategic leadership on employee performance among employees of aviation companies in Turkey. A questionnaire consisting of 47 questions, excluding demographic variables, was used to test the model. Out of 350 questionnaires distributed, 316 valid responses were analyzed, representing a significant sample of the workforce in the Turkish aviation industry. The data were analyzed using various statistical methods and test techniques, including frequency distribution, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), t-tests, ANOVA, linear regression, and correlation, with a significance level of 0.05. The research concluded that employees' perceptions of strategic leadership have a 43% effect on their performance, signifying a substantial influence. There is a positive moderate relationship between these two concepts, reinforcing the importance of leadership in organizational outcomes. Furthermore, the study found that perceptions of strategic leadership vary according to some demographic variables, such as age and gender, highlighting the diversity in how leadership is perceived across different segments of the workforce. This research contributes to the strategic leadership literature by offering insights specific to the aviation sector, emphasizing the importance of specialized leadership strategies to enhance employee performance in a dynamic and competitive industry.

Keywords: Strategic leadership, Employee performance, Organizational performance, Aviation industry.

INTRODUCTION

Performance evaluation has been a controversial and widely discussed topic in the field of human resources management. It is an essential aspect of organizational success, as employee performance is a fundamental measure of organizational efficiency and effectiveness. The significance of individual employee performance cannot be overstated, as it plays a critical and vital role in determining the overall performance level of an organization. Therefore, employee performance evaluation is a key objective measure for an organization's effectiveness and efficiency (Gülina & Yumuk Günay, 2020).

In this regard, the behavior of leaders is an essential determinant of enhancing employee performance. Leaders play a critical role in directing human resources toward achieving organizational goals, which is critical to overall organizational performance. Effective leadership is, therefore, essential in improving employee performance, as it is the most significant and pivotal variable that affects employee performance in organizations (Cummings & Schwab, 1973). The relationship between leadership characteristics, behaviors, and employee

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performance has been extensively studied, highlighting the importance of strategic leadership in enhancing employee performance. Various studies have shown that leadership style has a positive and significant impact on employee performance, thereby enhancing organizational performance (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Yılmaz & Karahan, 2010).

Despite the abundance of research on the relationship between leadership and employee performance, there are few studies examining the role of strategic leadership on employee performance, particularly in the aviation industry in Turkey. Strategic leadership is a complex and multifaceted concept that is difficult to define and measure (Hancott, 2005). The strategic leader is expected to envision, plan, and implement the organization's long-term goals and objectives, in addition to directing and motivating employees to achieve these goals. Strategic leadership involves the development and implementation of strategies that improve organizational performance and enable the organization to adapt and thrive in a dynamic business environment (Yukl, 2008).

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring the impact of strategic leadership on employee performance among aviation company employees in Turkey. Specifically, the study will investigate the perceptions of strategic leadership among aviation employees and the effect of these perceptions on employee performance. The study will contribute to the strategic leadership literature, particularly in the aviation industry, which has received less attention in the literature on organizational behavior. The findings of this research will be of great significance to aviation organizations in Turkey, as it highlights the need for effective strategic leadership practices to enhance employee performance and improve overall organizational outcomes.



Theoretical Framework

Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership is a critical component in the success of any organization (DuBrin, 2015). It is a leadership approach that focuses on creating and implementing a long-term strategy that aligns with the organization's vision, mission, and values. Strategic leadership is not just about creating a strategic plan but also about developing a strategic mindset that guides decision-making processes (Carpenter *et al.*, 2001). Strategic leadership is crucial for the success of any organization, as it helps the organization achieve its long-term goals and objectives (Tubbs & Schulz, 2006). Strategic leaders are responsible for creating and implementing a strategic plan that guides the organization's actions toward achieving its vision, mission, and values. Strategic leadership is also important in providing direction and focus for the organization, enabling it to adapt to changes in the business environment, and ensuring that resources are allocated effectively. One of the key benefits of strategic leadership is its ability to enhance organizational performance (Liu & Cao, 2020).

According to Liu and Cao (2020), strategic leadership is positively related to organizational performance, as it helps to create a strategic vision, align organizational resources, and enhance organizational learning. Strategic leadership also helps to foster innovation and creativity within the organization, as it encourages employees to think outside the box and develop new and innovative solutions to problems. Strategic leaders possess several key characteristics that enable them to effectively lead their organizations toward achieving their long-term goals and

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objectives. One of the key characteristics of strategic leaders is their ability to think strategically (Carpenter et al., 2001). Strategic leaders have a long-term vision for their organizations and can anticipate future trends and developments. They are also able to analyze complex information and make decisions that align with the organization's strategic goals. Another key characteristic of strategic leaders is their ability to communicate effectively. Strategic leaders are able to communicate their vision and strategic goals clearly and effectively to their employees, stakeholders, and customers. They are also able to build strong relationships with their employees, stakeholders, and customers, which helps to create a positive organizational culture (Tubbs & Schulz, 2006).

Employee Performance

Employee performance is a critical aspect of organizational behavior, as it directly impacts the success of an organization (Judge et al., 2001). Employee performance is defined as the extent to which an employee performs their job duties effectively (Latham & Pinder, 2005). It is the primary determinant of an employee's value to the organization and is a crucial factor in determining employee satisfaction, retention, and promotion opportunities (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997).

There are several factors that influence employee performance. One of the most important factors is motivation (Judge et al., 2001). Motivated employees are more likely to perform well on the job and strive for excellence in their work. Motivation can be achieved through various means, such as providing recognition and rewards for good performance, setting clear and challenging goals, and providing opportunities for growth and development (Latham & Pinder, 2005). Another factor that influences employee performance is job satisfaction (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to perform well and to be committed to their organization. Job satisfaction can be enhanced by providing employees with challenging and meaningful work, opportunities for professional growth, and a supportive work environment (Judge et al., 2001). Organizational culture is also an important factor that influences job performance (Schein, 2010). A positive organizational culture that values employee contributions and encourages open communication can lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and job performance. On the other hand, a negative organizational culture that fosters mistrust, fear, and conflict can lead to lower levels of job satisfaction and job performance (Judge et al., 2001). In addition, the job itself can also influence employee performance. Job design, including the allocation of tasks and responsibilities, can impact an employee's motivation, job satisfaction, and overall job performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). A job that is designed to be challenging, stimulating, and meaningful is more likely to result in higher levels of job performance than a job that is mundane, repetitive, and unfulfilling. Finally, effective leadership is essential for promoting employee performance in organizations (Judge et al., 2001). Leaders who are able to provide direction, support, and feedback to their employees can help to enhance motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance. Effective leaders also create a positive work environment that encourages collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning (Lam & Gurland, 2018).

Relationship Between Strategic Leadership and Employee Performance

In the 1960s, it was widely believed that business managers had limited ability to make decisions that would significantly impact business performance (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). However, as the value of leaders and leadership practices began to be understood in subsequent years, it became increasingly recognized that leaders play a critical role in issues that directly affect employee performance (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011). Indeed, leadership is a crucial determinant of organizational effectiveness because leaders have the ability to shape the beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and performance of their team members, as well as influence the mission, strategy, and goals of the organization itself (Suar *et al.*, 2006).

In the 1980s, strategic leadership studies gained more prominence over managerial leadership studies, with researchers emphasizing the importance of leadership that focuses on the long-term direction and vision of the organization, rather than just day-to-day management (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Yukl, 2002). According to Ireland and Hitt (1999), effective strategic leadership is essential for businesses to cope with the challenges of the global economy and achieve superior performance (Düzgün & Ataman, 2020). In fact, without strong strategic leadership, the probability of a business achieving sustained success and growth is significantly reduced.

In conclusion, the relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance is a crucial factor that organizations need to consider attentively to succeed in the current competitive and dynamic business environment. Effective strategic leadership can provide a clear direction and vision for the organization, inspire and motivate employees to perform at their best, and ultimately drive superior performance and growth.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Process and Sampling of the Research

To test the hypotheses and the model, a questionnaire with 47 questions was prepared, excluding demographic variables. The population of the research consists of the employees of aviation companies holding the license of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (Turkey). The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and sent to 350 employees via email. The convenience sampling method was used in the research due to the resource and time constraints caused by the difficulty of conducting research in the aviation industry. Of the 337 responses received, 21 were excluded after coding and cleaning. A total of 316 scales were used for analysis. By examining the studies of Bartlett *et al.* (2001) that determined the sample to represent the universe, it was concluded that the number of participants in the study represented the universe and was sufficient for generalizing about the universe.

Data Collection Tools

In addition to the demographic information form, two different scales were used to determine the strategic leadership and performance perceptions of the employees.

Demographic Variables

The survey included demographic information about industry employees such as age, gender, education level, marital status, and work experience.

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Strategic Leadership Scale

To measure the strategic leadership levels of managers in terms of employee perception, the "Strategic Leadership Questionnaire" (SLQ) was used. This scale was developed by Pisapia (2009) and translated into Turkish by Coban (2016). The SLQ consists of five sub-dimensions (managerial leadership, ethical leadership, political leadership, transformational leadership, relational leadership) and 35 items. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate the scale. The answers given to the questions in this scale were evaluated with scores ranging from 1 to 5 and were arranged as (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) partially agree, (4) agree, and (5) completely agree. The reliability of this scale was determined to be 0.95, indicating that the scale is highly reliable.

Employee Performance Scale

To determine the level of employee performance of the participants, a scale consisting of 12 statements developed by Choo (1986) based on the participants' self-evaluation of their performance was used. A 5-point Likert-type rating was used, with ratings made as "unsatisfactory (1), need improvement (2), adequate (3), good (4), and excellent (5). Choo (1986), while developing this scale, determined that there was a strong positive correlation (r=0.86) between the scores obtained as a result of the self-evaluation of the employees and the scores obtained as a result of the evaluation of their supervisors. In addition, he concluded that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of these two types. Due to the difficulty of evaluating the performance of the employees who were surveyed by reaching their supervisors, the self-evaluation of the employees on this scale was preferred (Gürkanlar, 2010). The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.85 in a study conducted by Ceylan and Ulutürk (2006). This scale was used in studies by Poznanski and Bline (1997), Erkuş and Günlü (2009), Onay et al. (2011), and Hirlak et al. (2017).

Research Model and Hypotheses

After explaining the concepts of strategic leadership and employee performance, the following hypotheses can be developed:

H₁: There is a positive linear relationship between strategic leadership perceptions and employee performance.

H₂: Strategic leadership is an important factor in employee performance.

H₃: Concepts differ in terms of demographic variables.

The following research model has been developed, which shows the relationship between the concepts of strategic leadership and business performance from the hypotheses obtained from the literature (Figure 1).

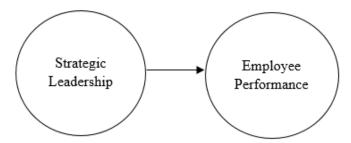


Figure 1. Research Model

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS 20.0, and various statistical methods such as factor analysis (EFA), correlation, regression, t-test, and ANOVA were utilized. The significance level of the study was set at p<0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Information on demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, educational status, and work experience of the 316 participants was given in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Demographic Variables

Topic 1. 2 cine diapric variables								
Variables	Frequency	Per. (%)	Variables	Frequency	Per. (%)			
Gender			Educational Status					
Men	206	65,2	Primary and High School 101		31,9			
Women	110	34,8	Associate Degree	132	41,8			
Age			Undergraduate~ Postgraduate	83	26,3			
18~34	220	69,6	Work Experience					
35~50	69	21,8	Less than 1 year	94	29,7			
51 and over	27	8,5	1~5 years	151	47,8			
Marital Status			6 years and over 71		22,5			
Married	125	39,6	Total	316	100			
Single	191	60,4	TOTAL					

Reliability Analysis

According to **Table 2**, the observations in each scale are suitable for performing exploratory factor analysis.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Groups	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
1. Strategic Leadership	0.947	35
2. Employee Performance	0.855	12



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Factor Analysis Exploratory EFA

According to the KMO and Bartlett test results, the Sig. value was found to be 0.000, which is less than 0.05, and the KMO coefficient was determined to be high (0.843 > 0.5). This suggests that the observed variables are correlated, and the EFA factor analysis is statistically appropriate. Eigenvalues greater than 1 have 2 factors, and the resulting variance was found to be 68.957%, which is statistically appropriate as it is greater than 50%.

Based on the exploratory factor analysis, the variables were combined into 2 factors, which is consistent with the SLQ (35 items) and EP (12 items) groups when compared to the original observed variables.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis results are given below to examine the relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance.

Table 3. Correlation between Strategic Leadership and Employee Performance

		1	2
1. Strategic Leadership	Correlation Coefficient -	1	0,654**
2. Employee Performance	— Correlation Coefficient –		1

Table 3 shows that the relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance was determined as 65%. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H₁) of the research was accepted. As is seen in Table 3, there is a moderate positive linear relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance.

Regression Analysis

According to the research model, the regression analysis was performed between the strategic leadership and employee performance.

Table 4. Regression between Strategic Leadership and Employee Performance

Dependent Variable	\mathbb{R}^2	Independent Variable	В	Beta	t	р
Employee Performance	0,428	Strategic Leadership	0,228	0,654	15,316	0,000

According to the linear regression results in **Table 4**, the independent variables of strategic leadership have a statistically significant (p<0.001) effect on the dependent variable of employee performance. The level of the variables of strategic leadership explaining the variable of employee performance was determined as $(R^2 = 0.428)$.

It is understood from the values in column R² in **Table 4** that strategic leadership explained 43% of the variance of the dependent variable employee performance. In other words, employees' performance perceptions were shaped depending on their strategic leadership perceptions by 43%. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H₂) of the research was also accepted.

The analysis results of some demographic variables are presented below:

• When the differences in the perceptions of the employees on the variables according to their age were examined, it was found that the Anova test values for the perception of strategic leadership were F=5.021, p<0.05 and for the perception of employee performance was F=2.281, p<0.05.

Accordingly, it was determined that there was a statistically significant (at the significance level of 0.05) difference between employees' strategic leadership perceptions and the age variable. It is seen that the age range in which the average of employees' strategic leadership perceptions is the highest in the age of 51 years and above. It is seen that the age range in which the average of employees' strategic leadership perceptions is the lowest is between the ages of 35~50.

- When the differences in the perceptions of the employees on the variables according to their gender were examined, it was found that the t-test values for the perception of strategic leadership were t=4.402, p>0.05, and for the perception of employee performance was t=2.732, p>0.05.
 - Accordingly, a statistically significant (at the significance level of 0.05) difference was observed between employees' strategic leadership and employee performance perceptions and the gender variable. It was seen that the average of male employees' strategic leadership perceptions was higher than the average of female employees.
- When the differences in the perceptions of the employees on the variables according to their marital status were examined, it was found that the t-test values for the perception of strategic leadership were t=2.598, p>0.05, and for the perception of employee performance was t=1.596, p>0.05.
 - Accordingly, while a statistically significant difference was seen between employees' strategic leadership perceptions and their marital status, no statistically significant (at the significance level of 0.05) difference was seen between their employee performance perceptions and their marital status. It is seen that the strategic leadership levels of single employees were higher than the levels of married employees.
- When the differences in the perceptions of the employees on the variables according to their educational level were examined, it was found that the Anova test values for the perception of strategic leadership were F=3.483, p<0.05 and for the perception of employee performance was F=1.710, p<0.05.
 - Accordingly, while a statistically significant difference was seen between employees' strategic leadership perceptions and their educational status, no statistically significant (at the significance level of 0.05) difference was seen between their employee performance perceptions and their educational status. It is seen that the average strategic leadership levels of those with undergraduate and postgraduate were higher than the average of other graduates and primary-high school graduate levels were lower average than other graduates.
- When the differences in the perceptions of the employees on the variables according to their work experience were examined, it was found that the Anova test values for the perception of strategic leadership were F=0.018, p<0.05 and for the perception of employee performance, the Anova test values were F=0.383, p<0.05.
 - However, there was no statistically significant difference between employees' strategic leadership and employee performance perceptions and their work experiences. These



findings suggest that work experience alone may not have a significant impact on how employees perceive strategic leadership and their performance.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance among aviation company employees in Turkey. The results showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance. The moderate degree of correlation indicated that strategic leadership had a significant effect on employee performance. The first and second hypotheses of the study were accepted, while the third hypothesis was partially accepted, as only strategic leadership perceptions were found to differ based on demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, and educational levels. The findings of this study are consistent with the results of previous studies, which have also shown the positive impact of strategic leadership on employee performance. For example, Ziaud-Din et al. (2017) in their study on the impact of strategic leadership on employee performance found that strategic leadership is important for creating a unique relationship between management and employees to improve employee performance. The results of the study by Setiawan and Yuniarsih (2018), which examined strategic leadership and employee performance, show that strategic leaders influence by setting direction, motivation, and communication so that employee performance increases. In a similar study, Akça (2020) examined the impact of strategic leadership on employee performance and found that the perception of strategic leadership is significant and important in enhancing employee performance. Alvi et al. (2020) conducted their research to investigate the role of strategic leadership on employee performance and indicated that strategic leadership has a positive impact on employee productivity.

In conclusion, this study has contributed to the strategic leadership literature by examining the impact of strategic leadership on employee performance in the aviation industry in Turkey. The results suggest that organizations need to strengthen their strategic leadership practices to improve employee performance. The findings of this research will be of great significance to aviation organizations in Turkey, as they highlight the importance of effective strategic leadership practices in enhancing employee performance and improving overall organizational outcomes.

Limitations of the Research

This study has some limitations, which are common in other studies. These include resource and time limitations, the hesitant approach of employees in aviation companies, the limited sample size, the non-random selection of the institution chosen as the sample for the research, and the inability to reach all employees. Furthermore, the subjectivity of individual performance evaluation is also a limitation of this research. Finally, the lack of consensus in the literature on strategic leadership concepts is another limitation.

Future Research Directions

Based on the results of the analysis, several suggestions can be made for further research. Future studies can examine the sub-dimensions of strategic leadership and their effects on employee performance. Additionally, research can focus on senior employees to investigate the impact of strategic leadership on their performance. To improve the accuracy of the results, future studies can also increase the sample size and conduct research within the same industry. Furthermore, similar research frameworks can be applied to different areas, such as banking, manufacturing, transportation, tourism, health, and education, among others.

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