

THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICE AND LEARNING ORGANIZATION RELATIONSHIP ON INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

Human life is like swimming against the current. If a person is not making an effort to move forward, the current will undoubtedly drag him further back at any moment. This is true for every area touched by human hands. In business life, institutions have to swim against the current, just like people. Today, digital transformation and its effects emerge as a topic that is discussed extensively in academia and practice and constitutes the business agenda of companies. The digital age changes not only the way of doing business, but also customer relations, service models, product styles and most of all, the perception of "talent". This rapid transformation in business strategies has led to the emergence of digital leaders with new and different skills in the short term. These leaders focus on different points than traditional leaders. The aim of this study is to examine the effects of the digital age on leadership theory, how the new leadership model is defined and the studies carried out in the relevant period in order to reveal its dimensions.

Keywords: *digital leadership; performance; business; learning organization; digital skills.*

JEL Classification: M10

Issue 2/2022

Introduction

Today, the use of digitalization and information technologies is becoming widespread in almost all business processes and applications in businesses. The development of technology directly affects not only business and service processes, but also the company's position in the market, its maneuvers and strategies against its competitors. These systems are extremely important in the processing and storage of information capital, which is one of the scarce resources of enterprises.

Digital tools, information technology solutions, databases and algorithms are used to collect and evaluate significant data and optimize efficiency. This situation paves the way for the inadequacy of existing leadership theories, the change of leadership characteristics, and the emergence of the concept of digital leadership that is compatible with the current era.

Processing, archiving and transferring knowledge capital to potential employees is vital for businesses to survive. Along with the digital transformation, the leadership style expectations and perceptions of the new generation employees have also begun to transform. This situation has recently prompted management consultancy companies, managers and researchers operating globally to conduct deeper research on the concept of digital leadership.

The aim of the research is to investigate whether the relationship between digital leadership practice and learning organization has an effect on individual performance, and if it does, what is its degree. In this study, firstly, the relationship between digital leadership practice and learning organization was revealed and how it affects the individual performance of the employee was investigated. On the other hand, the effects of demographic variables on digital leadership were also examined.

Research methodology

Considering the scope of the research, it was chosen on the employees of different sectors from Turkey, Azerbaijan and Poland. An electronic questionnaire was applied to employees working in public and private bank institutions operating throughout these countries, regardless of department.

The study was carried out with the participation of 234 people working in large-scale domestic and foreign partner banks, based on the banking sector. 193 people who applied the survey completely correspond to approximately 0.1% of the number of bank employees in Turkey. Within the limitations of the research, the survey study was planned on 200 employees and the surveys could be sent to 234 people via electronic communication channels. The majority of the employees

answered the survey questions completely and provided feedback. However, the results of the study could be evaluated on a total of 193 participants, since 41 out of 234 people gave a partial return.

The reason for another limitation is that most of the questionnaires are not given on site by the researcher personally and are sent to the participants via remote communication channels on a voluntary basis. It should not be forgotten that more comprehensive results can be obtained in future research by conducting this study with more institutions and participants in banking, communication, informatics, production or different sectors.

Determined as independent variables in the research; From the network of relations questioning the effect of (a) Digital Leadership Practice, (b) Learning Organization, (c) Age, (d) Education, (e) Status, (f) Seniority factors on the perception of "Individual Performance", which is determined as a dependent variable or outcome variable. has been moved.

Theoretical perspectives of the term of “digital leadership” and “learning organization”

Leaders are people who direct the community they live in, motivate people with their work, and make great contributions by encouraging the community to achieve its goals. The motive of acquiring power generally manifests itself in two ways in society. People either become leaders or follow the leader.

According to Şimşeker and Ünsar (2008), “managers can rely on their past technical experience and local successes, but when it comes to leadership required by global conditions, this constitutes a very different situation” (Şimşeker and Ünsar, 2008). Today, leadership theories are broadly grouped under five main headings: Big Man Theory, Trait Theories, Behavioral Theories, Situational Theories and New Approaches. According to the great man theory, leaders are born with necessary characteristics such as charisma, confidence, intelligence, and social skills that make them natural leaders.

The Great Man Theory shows that people cannot learn to be strong leaders. Because according to this theory, a great leader is not made, but a great leader is born (Cherry, 2019, par. 7–8).

Trait Theories assume that successful leaders have some innate physical characteristics and certain qualities that distinguish them from non-leaders. However, the difficulty of classifying and validating these traits has led to widespread criticism of the Traits approach, leading to the emergence of Situational and Behavioral leadership approaches. (Obgonna and Harris, 2000)

Issue 2/2022

According to the behavioral theory, the effectiveness of the leader is determined by his behavior as well as his physical characteristics. Behavioral theorists focused mostly on the behavior style of the leader, and basically divided them into two as work-oriented and person-oriented. (Türtgen, Ünsal, and Telman, 2004)

When it comes to the situational theory, unlike the other two theories, the situation variable is also examined to define leadership. According to this theory, leaders are shaped by their personal characteristics and behaviors, as well as by the environment and conditions. According to the theory of new approaches, the coexistence of different cultures as a result of the participation of different generations in business life, globalization and shortening of distances caused the business world, organizations and managerial needs to change. (Kesmili, 2013)

Companies are pushing the boundaries of traditional leadership hierarchies and revealing a new leadership approach that can read rapid change. To make their organizations successful in the digital world, leaders need to think, act and react differently. Therefore, the most critical need for most companies is for leaders to develop digital capabilities (Abbatiello, Philpot, Knight, and Roy, 2017).

Table 1 shows examples of the cognitive, behavioral and emotional abilities that leaders must possess to make their organizations successful in the digital world.

Table 1. Transforming Leadership Capabilities.

Cognitive transformations	Behavioral transformations	Emotional transformations
Conceptualizing possibilities in the virtual world	Adapting to changing power and domains	Ability to tolerate risk and uncertainty
Coping with ever-increasing cognitive complexity	Ability to collaborate with different teams	Flexibility in ever-changing conditions
Thinking different and new ways	Valuing the contribution of new business partners and interest groups	Courage to change business processes
Ability to make practical decisions without all the information	Learning from failures and being able to try again with high energy and motivation	Directing change and leadership self-confidence

Source: Abbatiello, A., Knight, M., Philpot, S., and Roy, I., *Rewriting the rules for the digital age: 2017 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends*. UK, Deloitte University Press., 2017, p. 79.

It is necessary to distinguish between two related but different definitions of leadership. Most inclusive, it stands for "leadership in the digital age", which refers to leadership in the broad organizational structure or industry for a more knowledge-intensive society. It means all leaders, regardless of healthcare, arts, or manufacturing, that leaders need to be aware of and effectively use the new constraints and opportunities that ICTs provide.

The second one refers to the leadership in the basic sectors of the information society, which is called "digital leadership". At the beginning of these sectors, information processing, communication and content producers (broadcasting - printing), in short, multimedia. While the two leadership styles are very close to each other by definition, they emerged in ICT sectors and spread with the use of website portals to connect customers and suppliers (Wilson III, 2004).

An important approach to the issue of changing management styles is to establish a digital transformation strategy that serves as a hub to unify all digital coordination, processes and practices within the firm. The potential benefits of digitization for business vary widely. It includes new areas of interaction between all stakeholders, as well as increases in supply and demand, and innovations in the field of value creation (Matt, Hess, & Benlian, 2015).

New leadership traits will vary from country to country, culture to culture, and sector to sector, most notably in economically developed societies and ICT sectors. New societal conditions reveal new forms of leadership necessary to initiate and sustain transitions towards more knowledge-intensive societies. Leadership in the digital age needs new attitudes, new skills, and new knowledge acquired through unique professional experiences that respond to the above-mentioned societal characteristics (Wilson III, 2004).

By using technology to provide real-time feedback, the digital leader is able to communicate with employees in a consistent, authentic and transparent way. It can foster a culture of knowledge sharing that consistently shares content and stories that are of interest to the team. While this digital environment may pose new challenges for leaders, it can also create an opportunity to leave a digital trace for others to follow (Sniderman, Monahan, McDowell, & Blanton, 2017).

In order for an organization to be a learning organization, it is necessary to create productive learning, dialogue and inquiry environments within the organization, and support teamwork, vision sharing, delegation of authority and a leader model that motivates learning through open communication channels with the organization and its environment (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

Issue 2/2022

When the concept of learning organization is used alone, it defines an ongoing learning process, while the concept of organizational learning defines the outcome of the process. Organizational learning is considered as a basic tool to achieve the strategic goals of companies and information technology is seen as an important tool in organizational learning processes. Considering the strategic importance of information, many businesses adopt information technologies and information management to support information management and organizational learning activities (Aybas, 2007).

The relationship between digital leadership and learning organizational

Knowledge management is a concept closely related to organizational learning. According to the knowledge-based perspective, knowledge management is defined as a critical capability that provides competitive advantage to businesses. In this case, being able to provide continuous learning is one of the organizational advantages that helps the efficient implementation of knowledge management.

Organizational learning refers to the way companies create, support and organize experience and processes around their activities and cultures. For this reason, the adaptation of information technologies to the business for the recording, sharing and processing of information contributes to the formation of learning organizations (Qi and Chau, 2018).

One of the dimensions mentioned in the scale of learning organizations developed by Marsick and Watkins is the supportive and strategic leadership dimension (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). All efforts to become a learning organization are mediated by leaders and managers who provide strategic leadership for learning. For this reason, organizations led by leaders who adopt and support the strategic role of learning are getting closer to the goal of being a learning organization by making more efficient technological investments.

E-learning focuses on the use of computer and network technologies to create and deliver a rich learning environment with a wide range of teaching, knowledge resources and solutions to enhance individual and organizational performance. Smart learning environments and user-friendly interfaces are supported to adapt existing e-learning applications to organizations. Users generally use, manage and interact with e-learning systems individually (Wang, Vogel, & Ran, 2011).

Previous Studies on Individual Performance

In general terms, individual performance is a concept that determines the point reached individually in line with the plans for a determined purpose and the quality and quantity of what has been achieved. In terms of business, performance measurement is defined as an important process managed by human resources units, in which employees are systematically evaluated in terms of ability, efficiency, adaptability, habit, behavior and potential.

A person's abilities and competencies have a direct impact on that person's individual performance. In this respect, individual performance has characteristics that are open to change and influence. There are three basic elements that make high individual performance possible. These elements are expressed as focus, competence and dedication to work (Büte, 2011).

Performance evaluation is considered necessary in terms of the correct management of human resources within the organization as well as an individual psychological need. Seeing the performance levels of the employees of the institution and learning from their experiences also helps them to organize their next work and increase their motivation. The ultimate goal of performance appraisal is to improve individual and organizational performance (Soran, Serin and Balkan, 2016).

The Relationship between Digital Leadership and Individual Performance

Although the application of digital leadership has not been studied enough in the literature, there are various studies on the effects of digitalization of business processes on individual performance. As a result of digitization of business processes by using information-processing and telecommunication technologies, information flow is facilitated and time is saved. It also increases intra-organizational communication and efficiency. In addition to the features listed above, digitalization ensures that tasks and responsibilities are completed on time and with the least error rate, increasing the motivation, job satisfaction and job quality of the employees and increasing their individual performance (Altınöz, 2008).

Associating teams with digitalized business processes, overlapping personal expectations and goals, and concrete support of the performance evaluation process with feedback, rewarding and career management ensure that employees' individual performance increases and organizational goals are met at certain levels (Ateş, 2017).

Digital transformations that are compatible with business needs and business processes directly affect the individual performance of employees. For this reason,

Issue 2/2022

it is of great importance that leaders follow digital infrastructures and lead the organization in the process of sustainable digital transformation.

Data collection and analysis

Findings on demographic variables

The total number of bank employees participating in the research is 234. The total number of participants who were fully returned and taken into evaluation was determined as 193.

Considering the demographic distribution of the participants evaluated in the study, 30.1% are between the ages of 18 and 30, 50.3% are between the ages of 31 and 40, and 19.7% are between the ages of 41 and over. In terms of education, 10.9% of the participants are high school or below, 66.3% are associate degree or undergraduate, 22.8% graduate.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants.

Demographic variables	Description	N (193)	%
Age	18–30	58	30.1
	31–40	97	50.3
	41 and over	38	19.7
Level of education	high school and below	21	10.9
	college or bachelor degree	128	66.3
	Master degree	44	22.8
Admin status	He/she is not admin	129	66.8
	Lower position	16	8.3
	Middle position	37	19.2
Work experiences	Upper position	11	5.7
	less than 3 years	44	22.8
	3–7 years	73	37.8
	8 years and above	76	39.4

According to the distribution within the managerial status, 8.3% of the participants are low-level managers, 19.2% are middle-level managers, and 5.7% are top-level managers. 22.8% of the participants have a working experience of less than three years, 37.8% have a working seniority of three to seven years, and 39.4% have a working seniority of eight years or more. Demographic distributions of bank employees participating in the research are shown in Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5, respectively.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation Values of Scores for the DL Scale.

Demographic variables	Groups	Mean values	Standard deviation
Age	18–30	3.88	.87
	31–40	3.69	.61
	41 and over	3.73	.85
Level of education	high school and below	3.84	.81
	college or bachelor degree	3.78	.73
	Master degree	3.64	.77
Admin status	He/she is not admin	3.74	.78
	Lower position	4.12	.64
	Middle position	3.74	.68
Work experiences	Upper position	3.66	.72
	0- 3 years	3.95	.81
	3–7 years	3.54	.71
	8 years and above	3.85	.71

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation Values of Scores for the LO (Learning Organization) Scale.

Demographic variables	Groups	Mean values	Standard deviation
Age	18–30	4.06	.82
	31–40	3.90	.65
	41 and over	3.91	.75
Level of education	high school and below	4.17	.67
	college or bachelor degree	3.99	.72
	Master degree	3.75	.74
Admin status	He/she is not admin	3.92	.76
	Lower position	4.32	.57
	Middle position	3.96	.74
Work experiences	Upper position	3.97	.39
	0-3 years	4.10	.78
	3–7 years	3.86	.71
	8 years and above	3.97	.71

When the descriptive statistics on the digital leadership scale are evaluated, it is seen that the average scores of the participants in the 18-30 age group are higher than the participants in the other age groups ($M=3.88$), and that the average scores

Issue 2/2022

of middle-level managers are higher than those of other statuses and non-managers, it is seen that the average scores of those with a higher education level are higher than the other education groups ($M=3.84$), and finally, those with 0-3 years of working experience have higher average scores than other groups ($M=3.95$).

When the descriptive statistics on the learning organization scale are evaluated, it is seen that the average scores of the participants in the 18-30 age group are higher than the participants in the other age groups ($M=4.06$), and the average scores of the lower level managers are higher than those in other statuses and non-managers ($M=4.32$). It is seen that the average scores of those with an education level of or below are higher than the other education groups ($M=4.17$), and finally, those with 0-3 years of working experience have higher average scores than other groups ($M=4.10$).

Table 5. Mean and Standard Deviation Values of Scores Related to the IP (Individual Performance) Scale.

Demographic variables	Groups	Mean values	Standard deviation
Age	18–30	4.26	.62
	31–40	4.24	.53
	41 and over	4.30	.57
Level of education	high school and below	4.30	.46
	college or bachelor degree	4.27	.57
	Master degree	4.21	.58
Admin status	He/she is not admin	4.24	.58
	Lower position	4.46	.34
	Middle position	4.25	.60
Work experiences	Upper position	4.29	.41
	0-3 years	4.20	.58
	3–7 years	4.28	.52
	8 years and above	4.27	.59

When the descriptive statistics on the individual performance scale are evaluated, the average scores of the participants in the 41 and over age group are higher than the participants in the other age groups ($M=4.30$), and the average scores of the lower-level managers are higher than those of other statuses and non-managers ($M=4.46$), and It is seen that the average scores of those who have a high school or lower education level are higher than the other education groups

(M=4.30), and finally, those who have a working experience of 4-7 years have higher average scores than other groups (M=4.28).

Findings on hypothesis tests

The relationship between the digital leadership practice independent variable and the learning organization dependent variable was tested with simple linear regression analysis. The aim is to determine whether the learning organization variable can be predicted by the estimation variable. Before applying the regression analysis, the condition of meeting the prerequisites of the test was examined.

Linearity between dependent and independent variables, normal distribution of errors, independence of errors, and equal variance of errors were examined. Regression analysis results and confidence interval values are given. The condition of meeting the preconditions of the regression analysis was examined under four headings and the following results were obtained.

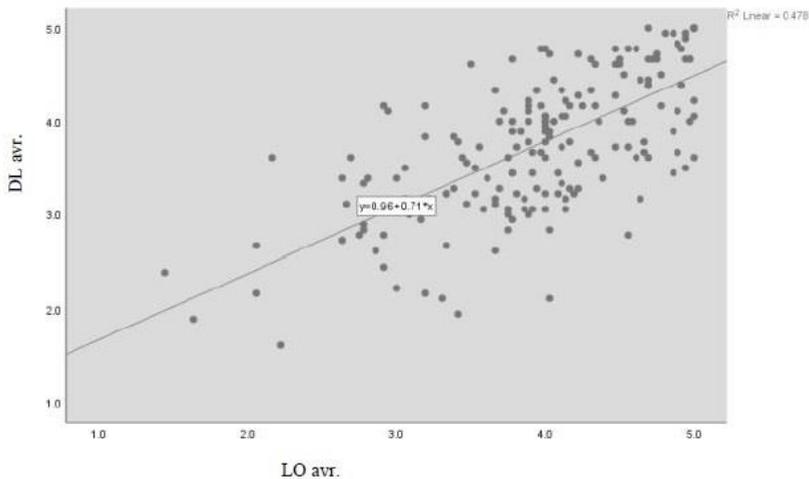


Figure 1. Digital leadership practice and learning organization relationship scatterplot.

Linearity: When the scatter plot of the dependent and independent variables was examined, it was determined that the linearity relationship was “positive and in

Issue 2/2022

appropriate measures”. As seen in Figure 1, as the values of the learning organization variable increase, the values of the digital leadership variable tend to increase to a certain extent.

Normality: P-P graph in SPSS was used to test the "Normality" prerequisite for the relationship between digital leadership and learning organization.

When the P-P graph shown in Figure 2 is examined, it is seen that although the points are not exactly on the line, they follow a close course and the normality assumption is met.

Independence of errors: Durbin - Watson test was used to evaluate the independence of errors in the research and a reasonable value of 1,590 was obtained. The value of DWD between 0 and 4 confirms the assumption of statistical independence of errors.

Homogeneity of variances: It is seen that there is a significance value ($p=0.00$), since $p>0.05$ significance values are deemed appropriate, this value confirms the assumption of covariance (homogeneity of the errors) of the errors.

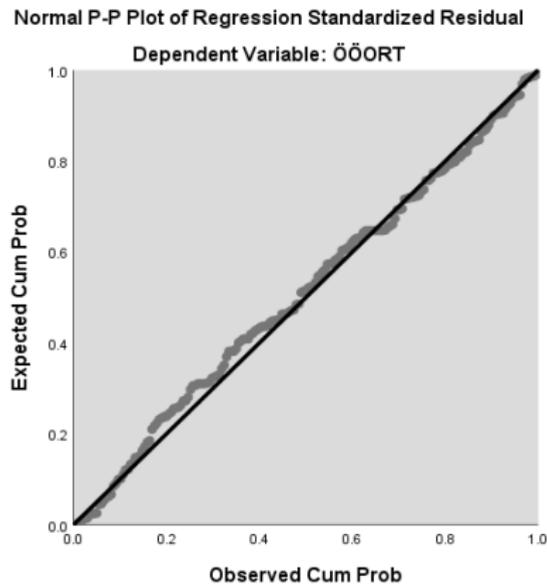


Figure 2. Digital leadership practice and learning organization relationship P-P graph.

In order for the variances to be considered equal, the Levene test result should be greater than 0.05 (sig= $p > 0.05$). As a result of the findings, it is seen that the concurrency assumption of the errors is met. As a result, it was seen that the preconditions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances and independence of errors, which are among the assumptions of the regression analysis, were met. For this reason, it can be said that the results obtained from the regression analysis have the feature of fully reflecting the reality.

The relationship between the independent variable obtained from the average of the digital leadership application and the learning organization relationship scores and the individual performance dependent variable was tested with simple linear regression analysis. The aim is to determine whether the individual performance variable can be predicted by the estimation variable. Before applying the regression analysis, the condition of meeting the prerequisites of the test was examined. Between dependent and independent variables; The preconditions of linearity, normal distribution of errors, independence of errors, and equal variance of errors were examined. Regression analysis results and confidence interval values are given. The condition of meeting the preconditions of the regression analysis was examined under four headings and the following results were obtained.

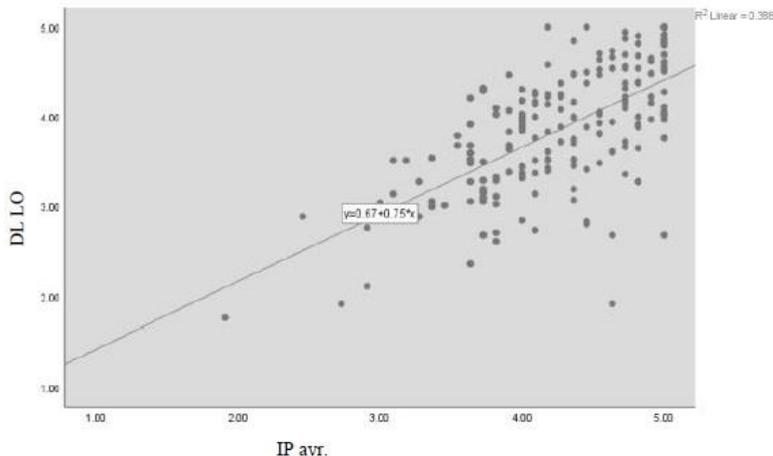


Figure 3. Scatter plot of the relationship between DL and LO scores and individual performance.

Issue 2/2022

Linearity: When the scatter plot of the dependent and independent variables was examined, it was determined that the linearity relationship was “positive and in appropriate measures”. As seen in Figure 3, as the values of the learning organization variable increase, the values of the digital leadership variable tend to increase to a certain extent.

Normality: P-P graph in SPSS was used to test the "Normality" prerequisite for the individual performance relationship between digital leadership and learning organization average scores. When the P-P graph shown in Figure 4 is examined, it is seen that although the points are not exactly on the line, they follow a close course and the normality assumption is met.

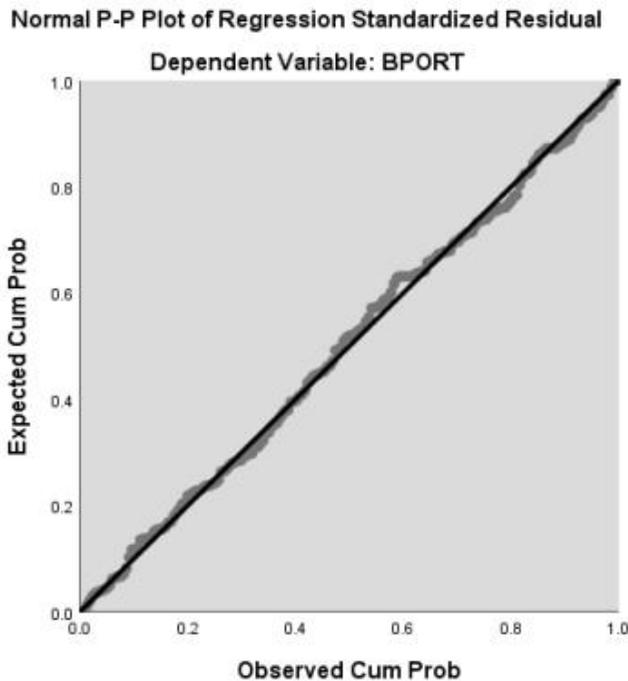


Figure 4. P-P graph of the relationship between DL and LO mean scores in individual performance.

Independence of errors: Durbin - Watson test was used to evaluate the independence of errors in the research and a reasonable value of 1.870 was obtained. The value of DWD between 0 and 4 confirms the assumption of statistical independence of errors.

Homogeneity of variances: It is seen that there is a significance value ($p=0.00$), since $p>0.05$ significance values are considered appropriate, this value does not confirm the concurrency assumption of the errors. In order for the variances to be considered equal, the Levene test result should be greater than 0.05 ($\text{sig}= p>0.05$). In line with the findings, it is seen that the assumption of covariance of errors is met.

As a result, it was seen that the preconditions of normality, linearity and independence of errors, which are among the assumptions of the regression analysis, were met. For this reason, it can be said that the results obtained from the regression analyzes fully reflect the reality.

The relationship between digital leadership and learning organization variables and individual performance dependent variable was tested with multiple regression analysis method. It was seen that the estimation variable explained 0.434 of the variance, and it was determined that the relationship between digital leadership and learning organization provided the opportunity to explain the effect of the individual performance significantly ($R^2 = 0.434$; $F = 74.618$; $p = 0.000$) ($p = 0.000$; $p < 0.001$).

In this case, the relationship between the three conceptual structures was found to be statistically significant. In other words, the increase in the degree of interaction between the digital leadership practice and learning organization perceptions of the employees in the enterprise will positively increase the individual performance perception scores of the employees. As a result, the null hypothesis was successfully rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H1) was accepted.

Conclusion and Discussion

Throughout history, data has never been more important and the need to use data at this speed has never arisen. In this context, businesses need leaders who will believe in the necessity of digitalization and can realize the transformation from start to finish in all processes and applications. In this context, the formation of the idea of transformation, its adoption by the entire organization and its determined implementation are seen as the success of the leader. The effort to establish a culture of digitalization and continuous learning is possible with the strategy, foresight and determination of the digital leader. The concept of digital leadership practice and its relationship with learning organizations and individual performance

Issue 2/2022

are examined in detail in this study. In this study, which examines the effect of digital leadership practice and learning organization relationship on individual performance, the relationship of demographic variables (age, education, status, seniority) with individual performance is also included.

In this study, the issue of whether individual performance perception differs significantly, based on demographic variables as well as digital leadership and learning organizations variables, was examined. The study is an electronic survey study and is based on those working in the banking sector throughout Turkey. Of the 234 people included in the study, 193 returned. The response rate of the questionnaires was calculated as 78.86%. This ratio was deemed sufficient to represent the mass.

In order to collect data in the research, the Information Leadership scale developed by Ulutaş and Arslan (2018) and consisting of 18 items to measure the perception of digital leadership, the Learning Organization Profile scale consisting of 36 items and adapted into Turkish by Şahin et al. (2014) to determine the perception of the learning organization, In order to determine the perception of individual performance, the Individual Performance Evaluation Scale consisting of 11 items and adapted into Turkish by Karakurum (2005) was used.

As a result of the pilot studies, the sub-dimensions of the scales were rearranged, but the number of statements was not reduced. The expressions in the measurement tools were made more understandable and the participant was provided with healthier answers while filling out the scale.

After the preliminary analyzes were made in the main study, some findings were obtained. The relationships between the average scores of the digital leadership scale and the learning organizations scale and the scores of the individual performance scale were examined by multiple linear regression analysis, and the first basic hypothesis of the study was confirmed. In other words, it has been concluded that the increase in the degree of interaction of the employees' digital leadership practice and learning organization perceptions will increase the individual performance perception scores of the employees in a positive way.

Within the scope of the research, four hypotheses were established to test whether the employees show a significant difference in their individual performance perception levels under the influence of demographic variables. As a result of the study, no statistically significant difference was found between the individual performance perceptions of the employees and the variables of age, education level, status and seniority. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis was

rejected. The information and findings obtained as a result of this study are insufficient to make generalizations. However, it is possible to argue that the said study enriches the conceptual structure of digital leadership practice for other studies.

In the literature review, very limited resources and information about the application of digital leadership have been found. In addition, no study has been found in which the subject is discussed together with the learning organization and individual performance.

From this point of view, more studies are needed to better define and investigate the concept of digital leadership, based on the criteria set forth in the research. If done so, it would be more acceptable for social science research.

With the implementation of digital applications in different sectors, it is necessary to determine in which subjects the sector differs from each other, taking into account the unique dynamics of the sector. Examining the subject together with different disciplines is important both for determining the areas of influence in the process and for other studies to be carried out.

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Issue 2/2022

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