

**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ABILITY OF LEADERS AS  
STRATEGIC DECISION MAKERS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY  
ON THE TURKISH MILITARY**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to determine whether the difference between high-level strategic decision-making staff (Group 2) that are major, lieutenant colonel and colonel and lower-level manager (Group 1) in the Turkish Land Forces according to age and educational background factors in terms of levels of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence levels were measured on 213 ranked officers by the Baron Emotional Intelligence Survey.

Under the survey results, when the military rank increases, the level of total EI also raises. Thus, a positive relationship between high-level strategic decision making military personnel and total EI is strengthened. Similarly, military origin is observed to have an impact on the level of emotional intelligence as well. Military academy graduates have lower levels of total emotional intelligence compared to officers with other origins.

**Keywords:** Strategic Decision Making, Emotional Intelligence, Military Leadership

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# STRATEJİK KARAR VERİCİLER OLARAK LİDERLERİN DUYGUSAL ZEKA YETERLİLİĞİ: TÜRK SİLAHLI KUVVETLERİNDE AMPİRİK BİR ÇALIŞMA

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinde stratejik karar verici olarak ifade edilen binbaşı, yarbay ve albay rütbesindeki üst düzey personel (Grup 2) ile alt kademedeki personel (Grup 1) arasında duygusal zeka düzeyleri açısından yaş ve eğitim durumu değişkenlerine göre farklılık olup olmadığını incelenmesini hedeflemektedir. Duygusal zeka, 213 subaya, Bar-on Duygusal Zeka Testinin uygulanması ile ölçülmüştür.

Test sonuçlarına göre, artan rütbe ile toplam duygusal zeka seviyesi artmaktadır. Böylece, stratejik karar veren üst düzey askeri personel ve toplam duygusal zeka arasındaki pozitif ilişki desteklenmektedir. Benzer şekilde, askeri kökenin de, duygusal zeka seviyesi üzerinde etkili olduğu gözlenmektedir. Askeri okul mezunları, farklı kaynaklardan gelen subaylara göre daha düşük duygusal zeka seviyesine sahip olmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Stratejik Karar Verme, Duygusal Zeka, Askeri Liderlik

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence (EI) became a focal subject of many studies in the literature and center of attraction for business organizations in recent period. Limited research in this promising field drew the attention of academicians and positive impact on business results attracted the high level managers. Both parties proposed EI as an attainable skill and a critical ability for a successful leadership. Therefore, literature definitions, models and research on EI primarily involved business world and results utilized for business trainings and seminars for personnel development. However, armed forces, as an institution closely tied to leadership skills, gathered limited attention

of EI researchers. The main purpose of this paper is to explore EI and particularly, its impacts on leaders as strategic decision makers and their skills in the Turkish Land Forces.

In the literature review, the study includes the connections between strategic decision making, military leadership and emotional intelligence as well as fundamental terms like leadership and emotional intelligence. In the other section, the Empirical Study is structured depending on the literature. Within this scope, the objectives of the research, research hypothesis and methodology are put forward. The results and conclusion are also exhibited to provide enlightening information for future research.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Strategic Decision Making and Leadership**

Strategic decision making is an important part of roadmapping includes the expected future conditions (Ioannou, Panagiotopoulos and Stergioulas, 2009: 770). In many organization, the management affects the quality of decisions in the long term. Papadakis and Barwise (2002) suggest that top managers influence the strategic decision making. Especially, decision making at the strategic level is highly depend on the performance of the organization and executive thinking (Khosrowshahi and Howes, 2005: 122). That's why, leaders are known as strategic decision makers possess responsibility and authority, strategic thinking skills and competency, as well as organizational values, standards, and ethics, knowledge, experience. Leaders at the higher levels are responsible for the strategic aims and focus on the plan and forward vision. The leaders should also think more specific than other officers and have knowledge of people with strategic capability in organization, even if they aren't strategic decision makers (Guillot, 2005: 124-125).

Nevertheless, the wrong leadership decision is possible to cause critical problems strategically for companies (Useem, Cook and Sutton, 2005: 462). So, decision makers need to uncover the possible threats and opportunities. For this reason, they should generate the strategies for long term objectives (Bhushan and Rai, 2004: 3).

## **Leadership and Army**

Through their research, academicians came up with numerous definitions for leadership: Certo (1989) defines the term as a process of channeling actions towards achieving targets, while Hellriegel and Slocum (2006) identifies leadership as a skill of influencing, motivating and guiding members of the organization in order to meet the objectives. According to Arikan (2001), influencing members, a leader ensures achievement of group or organizational targets.

Leadership from military point of view, on the other hand, is defined as commander's action of influencing others through leadership requirements and characteristics and through utilizing techniques and tactics based on discipline and moral factors in order for a troop to complete a mission. Military personnel achieve this mission by fulfilling leadership requirements (beliefs, morality, ethics, character, intelligence and abilities).

Atkinson refers to Marshall Montgomery's leadership definition as "a passion of gathering individuals around a common cause and a character of instilling trust". The main dimension is instilling trust to group members. The commander must be mature enough to control his emotions with intelligence. The commander must be coldblooded to face the sudden instances and dangerous cases without any nervousness, dread or panic. Indeed, he must demonstrate stillness to calm down subordinates' panic and fear. He must be tough to bear with the situation till accomplishment (Atkinson, 1995: 178).

Compared to other fields, leadership gained great importance for military through time; such that World War I and II set off the origins for primary serious studies. Turkish military literature also hosts studies on leadership, as many of the victories are named after commanders (Battle of Inonu, Turkish War of Independence...etc.) and as leadership is placed amongst four main components of the battle.

Military leadership is not just a privilege of command over subordinates. Indeed, it is an ability based on influencing through creating respect, trust and morality. Leader, in the eyes of subordinates, accomplishes the mission and protects them (Berberoglu

and Demiray, 2002: 1-9). The role of military leader as an activator and a creator, possessing larger horizon of ideas, is to set challenging targets and monitoring the organization if necessary actions are taken (Fred and Manske, 1994: 112). Because of these main aspects, leadership in a military context continues to be highly important matter for strategic decision making.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Human as the basic and the most important asset of the modern ages, is a key element for determining the success of any type of organization (Segal and Jaffe, 2008: 7-8). A sophisticated, continuously learning and self-adapting human capital provides the necessary push for growth. However, such capital is hardly created via people with solely high levels of cognitive intelligence. Goleman identifies the completing competence for superior success through a set of specific abilities and skills such as empathy, self-discipline and initiative-taking, called EI. Salovey and Mayer further define the term as a type of social intelligence providing ability of perceiving emotions, differentiating among of various types of emotions and utilizing them to take actions (Goleman and Cherniss, 2001: 13-15).

Even though several researches exist in EI area, social interaction shall be considered as an important coefficient. Positive sensitivity follows a process parallel with socialization (Lopes et al. 2004) Furthermore, as a result of EI affect, ratio of efficient works of teams increase and this process positively affect work performance (Lopes et al. 2006).

Following social scientists' interest, EI also created a buzz in psychobiology and neurobiology fields. Studies indicate that the measures for two types of intelligence, namely, intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional quotient (EQ), represent the activity of distinct parts of the brain. IQ is highly genetic and could be improved up to a degree through the impact of environmental factors (Wall, 2007: 71-72). On the contrary, as EQ consists of attainable skills, it is open to improvement through time (Stein and Book, 2006: 15-17). It is known that as people mature, they are more likely to assess instances clearly,

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and become more harmonious, more restrained and generally better communicators. The studies about improvement of EQ through experience and age also demonstrate this situation.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Military Leadership**

As an attainable intelligence, many organizations consider EI to be one of the most important capabilities of their human capital (Singh, 2006: 176). Many academicians and professionals state that superior skills related with correct perception and assessing of own and others' emotions, distinguishing among these emotions and making use of gathered information on thoughts and actions, provide success for leaders (Cacioppe, 1997: 337).

Armed forces are not an exception about this matter, even the military has transformed its management style during the past time. Using the authority in military system historically, was based on the rigid rule is known as blind obedience. By the civil war, armies with more systematic firepower and technology forced to be more participatory leadership. In the modern military system, leaders begin to have more responsibility to subordinates. That's why, emotional intelligence ability of leaders is an important issue for success in military service (Ryback, 1998: 9-10). But a number of studies connecting these fields in the literature is insufficient. Among few research on this subject, Abrahams states in his article that selection of military leaders with poor EI skills result in "lost unit effectiveness and junior leader disenchantment" (Abrahams, 2007: 90). Supporting his point, Sewell comments on U.S. Army, promoting self-aware, flexible and adaptive leaders, which are some of competencies of EI and he concludes on successful teams to be created by army leaders who study and utilize EI. (Sewell, 2009: 95-98). Focusing specifically on officers in Turkish Navy, Topuz (2005) raises a similar point that within military context, EI is required by all leaders.

Such studies combining emotional intelligence and its impact on army leadership are among few researches on the subject. However, studies further analyzing the influences of variables, such as age and educational origin on emotional intelligence for army leaders

are missing, for which this article aims to contribute. Furthermore scope of this study includes the effects of EI to military order at peace. EI's impact especially on administrative sense, classification of personnel due to their abilities and native features, continuation of military routine, training activities is considered. Warfare is not considered as well.

### **3. THE EMPIRICAL STUDY**

The primary objective of this study is to explore the correlation between cumulative EI with its main dimensions; and variables which have impact on army leaders' EI levels (Table 1). Variables inspected are,

1. Military rank (as a substitute for age)
2. Military origin (as a substitute for educational background)

**Table 1: Emotional Intelligence Main and Sub-dimensions**

<b>Main Dimensions</b>	<b>Sub-dimensions</b>
Intrapersonal Intelligence	Self-awareness
	Assertiveness
	Self-regard
	Self-actualization
	Independence
Interpersonal intelligence	Empathy
	Interpersonal relationship
	Social responsibility
Adaptability	Problem solving
	Reality testing
	Flexibility
Stress management	Stress tolerance
	Impulse control
General mood	Happiness
	Optimism

**Source:** Gerald Matthews, Moshe Zeidner and D.Richard Roberts: Emotional Intelligence, Science and Myth, The MIT Press, England, 2002, 207.

### **Research Hypothesis**

Specifically the null and alternative hypotheses tested are,

H<sub>0</sub>: Military officers with other origins do not demonstrate higher emotional intelligence levels compared to graduates of Military Academy.

H<sub>1</sub>: Military officers with other origins demonstrate higher emotional intelligence levels compared to graduates of Military Academy.

H<sub>0</sub>: Increasing rank does not lead to higher level of emotional intelligence.

H<sub>2</sub>: Increasing rank leads to higher level of emotional intelligence.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Population and Sample**

The study contains officers of the Turkish Land Forces. Sample set of 225 military officers are randomly selected from the universe, among which 213 came up with valid questionnaires.

Officers used in the sample are grouped under two categories: According to military origin, two sub-categories; graduates of Military Academy, enlisting right after secondary school and officers with other origins succeeding over entrance exams after completing any high school. According to military ranks, two sub-categories; “Group 1 Officers” (Second Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, and Captain) and “Group 2” *Officers* (Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel). Groups of officers were formed with the purpose of a cumulative analysis of the rank variable. Additionally, these groups were formed according to Code of Internal Service’s consideration of majors, lieutenant colonels and colonels as higher officers. Sub-lieutenants (with undergraduate degrees) are excluded from the study; since they enlist in order to complete the mandatory military service and their assignments are temporary. Moreover, generals are also excluded, as their intense work-schedule would not allow completing necessary sample size.

Basis for rank increase in Turkish Armed Forces is explained in Table 2.

**Table 2: Officer Ranks**

Officer Ranks	Waiting Period	Category	Study Group
Sub Lieutenant	11 months		<i>Excluded from the study</i>
Second Lieutenant	3 years		Group 1 Officers
First Lieutenant	6 years		
Captain	6 years		
Major	5 years	Higher Officers	Group 2 Officers
Lieutenant Colonel	3 years		
Colonel	5 years		
Brigadier General	4 years	Generals	<i>Excluded from the study</i>
Major General	4 years		
Lieutenant General	4 years		
General	4 years		
Marshal	-		<i>Excluded from the study</i>

**Source:** İsmet Polatcan, TSK İç Hizmet Kanun ve Yönetmeliği, Personel Kanunu, Bayrak Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2000, 548.

This study grounds upon military ranks, as a substitute for age factor. The reason is that a rank corresponds to specified years of service which is applicable for all personnel. Therefore, increasing rank is linked to increasing age. (Table 2)

### **Research Instruments**

The data used in the study is gathered through questionnaires from officers employed at Military Land Forces in 2004.

The questionnaire is based on Acar's version of Bar-On's survey, it is corrected via comparisons, and reliability and validity tests applied. Acar adapted the questionnaire to Turkish population in her doctorate dissertation regarding the impact of EI on the leadership skills of banking sector managers. (Acar, 2001)

### **Data Analysis**

Responses are analyzed with SPSS. For the reliability of the EI test, Acar's results of alpha coefficient method of Cronbach is utilized. Questionnaire cumulative coefficient of 0.9212; among basic dimensions, personal abilities coefficient of 0.8373, interpersonal abilities coefficient of 0.7787, coherence coefficient of 0.6542, coping with stress coefficient of 0.7314 and state-of-mind coefficient of 0.7506 are all at acceptable levels. (Acar, 2001: 128)

Cumulative EI was calculated through taking the averages of the responses for basic and main dimensions of EI.

Mean deviations for parametric variables are measured via t-test and Anova test. Necessary correlation analyses are performed with Pearson Correlation Matrix.

## **5. RESULTS**

### **Demographic characteristics**

There exist 5 statements assessing demographic characteristics of the subjects in the questionnaire. The distribution of personal variables, military origin, rank, marital status, parental status, employment of the spouse are included in Table 3.

**Table 3: Demographic characteristics of the officers**

<b>Demographic characteristics</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Military Origin	Military Academy	170	79.8
	Other	43	20.2
Rank	Group 1 Officers	165	77.5
	Group 2 Officers	48	22.5
Marital status	Married	141	66.2
	Single	72	33.8
Parental status	With children	119	84.3
	No children	22	15.7
Employment of the spouse	Employed	90	44.6
	Unemployed	51	23.9
	N/A	72	31.5

### **Military Rank and EI**

Military rank taken as the variable, higher rank officers constituting Group 2 demonstrate higher level of EI compared to Group 1 officers. Results indicate that with increasing rank (and age in parallel), total EI increases. (Table 4)

**Table 4: Relationship with rank and cumulative EI and its main dimensions**

<b>Group variables</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>P Value</b>
<b>Cumulative EI</b>	<b>Group 1 Officers</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>3.84</b>	<b>0.001</b>
	<b>Group 2 Officers</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>4.03</b>	
Personal abilities	Group 1 Officers	165	3.93	0.025
	Group 2 Officers	48	4.11	
Interpersonal abilities	Group 1 Officers	165	4.05	0.003
	Group 2 Officers	48	4.13	
Coherence	Group 1 Officers	165	3.77	0.001
	Group 2 Officers	48	3.99	
Coping with stress	Group 1 Officers	165	3.49	0.113
	Group 2 Officers	48	3.65	
State of mind	Group 1 Officers	165	3.96	0.002
	Group 2 Officers	48	4.10	

There exists relationship between rank and all main dimensions of EI, except for “coping with stress”. (Table 4) Group 2 officers provided better responses for personal abilities, interpersonal abilities, coherence and state of mind, leading to higher EI levels for specified dimensions.

### **Military Origin and EI**

Officers with other military origin, on the other hand, are much more EI driven people, scoring higher EI levels compared to Military Academy graduates. (Table 5)

**Table 5: Relationship with military origin and cumulative EI and its main dimensions**

<b>Group variables</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>P value</b>
<b>Cumulative EI</b>	<b>Military academy</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>0.025</b>
	<b>Other</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>3.99</b>	
Personal abilities	Military academy	170	3.92	0.004
	Other	43	4.16	
Interpersonal abilities	Military academy	170	4.03	0.006
	Other	43	4.21	
Coherence	Military academy	170	3.80	0.296
	Other	43	3.89	
Coping with stress	Military academy	170	3.50	0.432
	Other	43	3.60	
State of mind	Military academy	170	3.95	0.027
	Other	43	4.13	

Research results indicate that military origin and all main dimensions of EI are related, except for coherence and coping with stress. For these two dimensions of EI, changing military origin has no statistically meaningful impact. Besides, for the rest of the dimensions, officers with other military origins have higher EI levels.

As a summary, empirical results suggest that:

1. H1 can be accepted, but H1(0) has to be rejected. Military officers from other origins demonstrate higher levels of EI.

2. H2 can be accepted, while H2(0) has to be rejected. Increasing rank leads to higher levels of emotional intelligence.

## 6. CONCLUSION

An outcome of the study is the positive correlation between EI and variables affecting army leaders' EI levels. Specifically, rank and military origin factors are taken as the variables and both of them are proved for their impact of officers' EI levels in the Turkish Land Forces.

Since higher rank signifies higher age, the key finding that higher rank officers are found to have higher levels of EI indicates the attainability of EI through age. This outcome is in line with the literature in favor of development of EI: Ratnesar points out EI increase through experience and maturing (1997). Dulewicz and Higgs also state EI as a developable trait or competency (2004). Additionally, Schachter places a lot of emphasize on practicing for EI development (2009). Likewise, as the officers get experienced while they rise in rank and age at the same time, they attain more on EI skills compared to younger officers.

The other outcome indicating Military Academy graduates' lower levels of EI is a field without any previous literature study exercised. However, considering military origin to be associated with the amount of time spent in the army, it is inferred that Military Academy education affects EI development of the officers. Intense discipline environment limiting performing of personal abilities, narrow social environment hindering variety of interpersonal communications and pressure on the state of mind are some of the factors that might influence stated dimensions of EI.

Since leadership is regarded as a crucial component of army, and research results indicate its relationship with EI, further improvement of army leadership through EI development must be closely considered. Higher officers transferring work or life experiences, or EI advancement trainings at Military Academy could contribute to EI levels of younger, inexperienced officers.

It seems very difficult to use higher officers to transfer their EI because of their continually changing assignment forces and places. Results of this study show that EI increases with age and military rank, so that it is an inevitable inference that military leaders are

strategic decision makers have higher levels of EI according to the results of survey. Taking advantage of employing retired military leaders to transfer their EI and experiences to lower officers may be an innovative remedy. EI and related trainings regularly given by a consultative committee composed of higher officers will be quite favorable for Military forces' EI level. This implementation will resolve the problems related to currently working officers. There will be no time waste and additional work load for them, and an extra productive power for Military forces will be created by the employment of the consultative committee.

Keeping this approach limited just with military forces shall be a mistake. This approach can be adapted to different business sectors. To strengthen leadership conception and increase the level of EI development in totally institutionalized companies, consultative committees composed of working military leaders as strategic decision makers, retired high level and ex-managers can be extremely effective and productive for developing organizations.

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