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THE PERCEIVED PROACTIVITY LEVEL OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS AGAINST POTENTIAL CRISES: A PRACTICAL STUDY

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OLASI KRİZLERE KARŞI SANAYİ İŞLETMELERİNİN ALGILANAN PROAKTİFLİK DÜZEYİ: UYGULAMALI BİR ÇALIŞMA

ÖZET

Günümüzde işletmelerin faaliyette bulundukları küresel rekabet ortamındaki pek çok unsur, onları beklenmedik tehdit ve firsatlarla karşı karşıya bırakmaktadır. İşletmelerin varlıklarını devam ettirebilmeleri de söz konusu tehditlerden korunmalarına bağlıdır. İşletmelerin karşılaşabildiği ve varlıklarını tehdit eden beklenmedik gelişmeler (krizler), onları değişime zorlamakta, değişime uyum sağlayamayanlar ise yok olma tehlikesiyle yüzleşmektedirler. Gerek teknolojik gelişmeler ve pazarda oluşan belirsizlikler, gerekse küreselleşmeyle gelen yoğun rekabet, işletmelerin krizle karşılaşma ihtimalini her geçen gün artırmaktadır. Dolayısıyla proaktif davranarak krizi öngörmek, kriz sinyallerini algılamak ve buna bağlı olarak gerekli önlemleri alarak krize hazırlıklı olmak, işletmeler için büyük önem arz etmektedir. Bu bağlamda bu araştırmada, işletmelerin pratik yaşamda kriz sinyallerini ne düzeyde algıladıkları ve olası krizlere karşı gerçekte ne düzeyde hazırlıklı olduklarının ortaya konulması amaçlanmıştır.

Araştırma, ülkemizin büyük organize sanayi bölgelerinden biri olan Konya Organize Sanayi Bölgesi'nde (KOS) faaliyet gösteren 222 firmanın yöneticileri üzerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bulgular tanımlayıcı istatistiksel yöntemlerle analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen sonuçlar, işletmelerin kriz sinyallerini yeterince algılayamadıklarını ve potansiyel krizlere karşı hazırlıklı olmadıklarını göstermektedir. Bu bir ön çalışmadır. Konuyla ilgili araştırma ve analizler geliştirilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Krize Hazırlık, Kriz Sinyalleri, Sanayi İşletmeleri, Proaktiflik.

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ABSTRACT

Many elements of the globally competitive environment in which businesses operate today leave them faced with unexpected threats and opportunities. One of the major threats is business crisis. The crisis is a state of affairs in a business wherein the executives must take urgent and unprecedented action to try to save the business from failure. In order to survive in the business environment, organizations should be prepared for the potential crises. Technological developments, uncertainty in the market and the intense competition increase the probability of encountering a crisis for organizations. Therefore, by acting proactively to predict crisis, to detect signals of crisis and be prepared for a crisis by taking necessary precautions accordingly, is of great importance for businesses. In this context, the objective of this study is to reveal that to what extent organizations are proactive and can predict the future crises and investigate to what level they are prepared for potential crises.

The research was conducted on 222 business executives in one of the major industrial zones of Turkey, Konya Organized Industrial Zone (KOS). The findings are analyzed through descriptive statistics. According to the results, it has been observed that organizations cannot predict the crisis signals adequately and are not well-prepared for potential crises. This is a preliminary study. Further research and analysis will be realized.

Keywords: Crisis Preparedness, Crisis Signals, Industrial Organizations, Proactivity.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a natural result of structural changes in the business life made by the globalization process, organizations have been continuing their activities in an environment consisting of a more intense competition and uncertainty. For the organizations not reconciling with the facts of the change and is unprepared against the uncertain conditions of competition, the changes in the environment in which they operate turn into potential crises. In this context, it is possible to define crisis as the situations that organizations should be prepared for at any moment.

Crisis is an inevitable fact of economic life. The management of the crisis which has both potential threats and opportunities in it is vital for organizations. In this context, the crisis for some businesses means the end of their economic life, while for some it means success by turning it into opportunity.

Crises take root from from various reasons and their common feature is that it contains threats for the organizations pertaining to continuation of their activities and sustaining their existence. These threats may result from either their own mistakes or external conditions. To survive in the crisis organizations should determine the threats as risk

factors before the crisis happens, get the crisis signals on time and take the necessary precautions.

For organizations to prepare for any possibility of a crisis will increase the likelihood of their success in another crisis. Despite the measures taken if an organization is still experiencing a crisis, it will be easier to overcome it than that of an organization which is totally unprepared for the crisis.

Crisis is a concept that includes uncertainty, risk and the possibility of suffering damage. A crisis situation may be occurred slowly or suddenly and may cover a narrow or wide time period. The important point in the crisis management is not to escape from the crisis or to solve it, but it is to avoid further crisis before it happens or to turn it into opportunity and then success. Many times the prerequisites that triggered the crisis are ready in advance. One of the main features of modern management concept is to predict the occurrence of possible problems and get the crisis signals by being proactive and in this way avoid the crisis.

Proactivity is a management approach directed to eliminate the threats by predicting them. In this context, being proactive is very important in crisis management. By being proactive, potential crisis arising from internal conditions can be prevented and the crisis caused by external conditions can be overcome by less damage.

The proactive organizations are the ones always follow the competitive conditions in the business environment, predict changes in the future and determine business strategies accordingly. Because there is the belief that the organization seeks to control and manage the environment on the basis of proactive behavior. In this sense, proactivity is to follow the opportunities in the market for the organization and includes the ability to shape the environment by taking a leading role in the industry in areas such as production, technology using, management strategies and organizational restructuring.

Proactive organizations can be succeeded through employees exhibiting proactive behavior. Organizations should encourage their employees to exhibit proactive behavior and ensure to improve the corporate culture in a way to increase proactivity. Because crisis preparedness will be well achieved through more proactive employees.

The objective of this study in the light of the above description is to measure the proactivity level of industrial organizations against potential crises. In this context, the subjects of crisis signals, crisis preparedness and proactivity will be elaborated. In our research we tried to examine the practices about detecting crisis signals and crisis preparedness in order to measure the proactivity level of the industrial organizations against potential crises.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Behavioral structure of the organizations in the market is generally discussed in two categories, including proactive and reactive. Reactivity and proactivity are frequently used but rarely defined concepts. Reactive behavior which is also defined as emerged behavior means taking position after the changes occur in the environment. However, proactive behavior means predicting the opportunities and threats in the environment and acting accordingly (Sandberg, 2002).

2.1. Proactivity

According to Crant (2000: 436), proactive behavior is about developing existing conditions or creating the new conditions by taking initiative. In other words, it is about challenging the status quo instead of adapting the conditions in a passive manner. In other words, proactive behavior, instead of adapting to the current situation in the organization involves making changes and improvements (Belschak and Den Hartog, 2010: 476). The extent of proactive behavior for organizations is related to be able to anticipate the pressure from environmental factors and be able to take position against them (Berry ve Rondinelli, 1998: 40). It means that organizations act first in order to take the necessary measures to control the changing conditions which may affect their organizational structure and processes (Grant and Ashforth, 2008: 8-9).

Predictability and certainty is reduced in the conditions of severe competition. When competition become intense organizations have to adapt to changing conditions as soon as possible. Organizations need to learn, take risk and act proactively in order to prevail in the competitive market. Bateman and Crant (1999: 64-65) as a result of their research among entrepreneurs and managers summarized the real proactivity behaviors as follows: to watch opportunities continuously in exchange for the change, put effective and change-oriented targets, predict and prevent the potential problems, take action, and be determined. Real proactive

behavior is not only to make efforts but also to get results by developing a different way.

Being proactive as an organization can be succeeded through the employees exhibiting proactive behavior. In most of the researches about proactive behaviors in the literature, employees taking initiative, seeking feedback from managers on their performance, being helpful against colleagues, informing and guiding managers, undertaking extra responsibility, being creative and innovative, developing social relations, expressing clearly their thoughts and reporting the problems about work are considered as proactive behaviors providing the organization positive outputs (Saks et al., 2011: 2; Bolino et al., 2010: 326; Grant et al., 2009: 33). A proactive organization is the first company to introduce new products and services to the market, is quick on the market in offering new technologies and management techniques, and is ahead of competitors in the detection and assessment of opportunities (Miller ve Friesen, 1978: 923, Miller, 1983: 771, Venkatraman, 1989: 949).

2.2. Crisis Signals and Crisis Preparedness

The crisis is defined as unpredictable events with potentially negative consequences (Reid, 2000: 1). In a more detailed definition, crisis is defined as a situation having destructive impact on the organization or the system which requires immediate and often new decisions and creates permanent damage on the each member of the system (Santana, 1997: 148).

Crisis management is the process of evaluating the crisis signals and taking and implementing necessary measures in order to cope with potential crises with least loss. The basic aim of crisis management is to prepare the organization against potential crisis (Can, 1999: 318).

The concept of crisis preparedness has been first introduced by Mitroff et al. (1987: 285). It was in the Mitroff et al.'s (1987: 285) crisis preparedness model which is composed of the design and implementation of key plans, procedures and mechanisms to prepare for crises, detect and contain them when they arise, and later lead the organisation to full recovery and enable it to learn from the experience (Carmeli and Schaubroeck, 2008: 179).

There should be an effective management to succeed in preparing the crisis. When the crisis signals appears a management system

overcoming the crisis is not needed. On the contrary, a management predicting the crisis and turning it into an opportunity is needed.

Scheaffer and Mano-Negrin (2003: 575), defines crisis preparedness as being aware of the inevitable nature of the crisis, anticipating the internal or external conditions leading to potential crisis, and implementing the necessary precautions in order to prevent the crisis situation by preparing in a proactive way for the time of crisis appearance. The basic aim of crisis preparedness is to strengthen the organization for external threats and internal challenges against the risk of future crises (Janosik, 1984: 16).

Crisis-prepared organisations, according to Weick and Sutcliffe, exhibit a different mindset from those that are crisis-prone. Crisis-prepared organisations conduct ongoing analyses of their operations and management structures and proactively monitor potential difficulties. Crisis-prone organisations tend to overlook or ignore warning signals (Carmeli and Schaubroeck, 2008: 180).

The phase of crisis preparedness requires a systematic planning to prepare the organization for the crisis conditions, collecting the crisis-related data, informing the key personnel and making the necessary regulations for the effective and efficient use of the resources (Hutchins and Wang, 2008: 316).

In the context of pre-crisis management approach, an early warning system is necessary for the organizations. An early warning system can be explained as a mechanism predicting the crisis through detecting the crisis signals (Edison, 2002: 13). The fundamental step of crisis preparedness is collecting data pertaining to potential crisis (Coombs, 1999: 59). The data collected through the early warning system should be analyzed effectively in order to predict the potential crisis. The data analysis should be realized by taking the different viewpoints into account (Coombs, 1999: 20).

2.3. Literature Review

When we look at the traditional crisis management literature, it is easily seen that when organizations prepare for crisis and implement proactive crisis management, the damage of a crisis can be lessened (Penrose, 2000; Marra, 1998). However, a longitudinal study of Fortune 500 companies conducted by the University of Southern California's

Center for Crisis Management found that 95 per cent were completely unprepared (Mitroff and Alpaslan, 2003).

According to Nudell and Antokol (1988), when organizations merely respond to crisis without a proactive posture, more damage seems to prevail. Hoggarth et al. (2005) asserted that a weak business system will lead to unpreparedness and finally crisis will be inevitable for the organizations. Diamond et al. (2001) stated that one of the main reasons of banking crises is the rigid and vulnerable organizational structure of the banks and the most important way of preparing for crises is to assure the organizational stability. Pearson and Clair argued that leaders' perceptions of risk are a critical indicator of crisis-preparedness. When leaders' perceptions of risk are characterised by ambivalence or disregard for crisis preparation, the organisation is unlikely to adopt organisational crisis management practices. Conversely, when leaders demonstrate concern about the risk of future crises, an organisation is likely to foster crisis management programmes (Carmeli and Schaubroeck, 2008: 180). Starbuck et al.'s (1978) review of past organisational crisis events led them to paint a negative picture. Many of the organisations they surveyed were ill-prepared for critical situations, and most responded in ways that made these crisis events worse. Smits and Ally (2003) also concluded that when behavioral readiness is absent, crisis management effectiveness becomes a matter of chance.

Carmeli and Schaubroeck (2008) found a positive association between learning behaviour from failures and preparedness for potential crisis. McConell (2011: 70) suggest that the main determinant of the success or failure in the crisis management is the adaptation of appropriate processes and policies to the crisis. According to Ariccia et al. (2008), strong control mechanisms can reduce the impact of the crisis by various interventions to the system but it will be difficult to apply these mechanisms as a way of preparing for crisis. The main role in implementing these mechanisms falls to top and middle level managers. In another research, according to Fowler et al. (2006), top level and middle level managers have a higher level of crisis preparedness perception than employees and the highest perception of preparedness was exhibited by organizations employing more than 500 employees. Similarly, Spillan and Crandall (2002) point out that small nonprofit organizations are less sophisticated in their crisis management

preparations than larger nonprofits. They also concluded that the presence of a crisis management team in an organization does not necessarily mean that concern for all types of crisis events exists.

3. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study in the light of the above description is to measure the proactivity level of industrial organizations against potential crises. The research was conducted on 222 owners or top and middle level managers of the industrial organizations in one of the major industrial zones of Turkey, Konya Organized Industrial Zone (KOS). Survey method was used to collect data in the research.

In the survey a scale developed by Tüz (2009) was used in order to measure the level of proactivity in the industrial organizations. The scale is composed of two parts. First one is about "detecting crisis signals" and the second one is about "crisis preparedness". 5 point Likert system is used in the scale. In the second part there are some questions to determine demographic information.

The sample of the research consisted of owners or top and middle level managers of companies operating in Konya Organized Industrial Zone (KOS). The number of surveys taken into consideration is 222. The statistical package SPSS 21.0 was used to analyze the data.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To measure the reliability of the research Cronbach's Alpha was used. The Cronbach's Alpha values for detecting crisis signals and crisis preparedness are 0.96 and 0.95 respectively.

The arithmetic averages and standard deviations according to the answers to the statements regarding detecting crisis signals are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Statements About Detecting Crisis Signals	Std. Dev.	Art. Avr.
A mechanism for detecting crisis signals for the most common crisis and thus to predict these crisis	1,2761	2,64
A mechanism for detecting crisis signals for the most of potential crisis and thus to predict these crisis	1,2300	2,59
A mechanism for detecting crisis signals and thus to predict these crisis according to the existing data base	1,2949	2,56
A mechanism for detecting crisis signals for any potential crisis and thus to predict these crisis	1,2061	2,50
A support team within the company to test the processes for predicting the crisis	1,3519	2,46
An informing process about the key points of detecting crisis signals	1,2440	2,42
An effective reporting system for the reports submitted to the crisis center	1,2387	2,31
Creating statistical data about the crisis and prospective crisis	1,2626	2,28
A rewarding system for the managers using a system for detecting crisis signals and predicting the crisis	1,3089	2,27
A support mechanism for constituting a corporate culture which encourages to detect crisis signals	1,2324	2,24
Official job descriptions including a detecting mechanism for predicting the crisis	1,3087	2,23

When analyzing the table above; the averages of first four statements are above 2.50 which is the the average of the scale (1 = We have no program,, 5 = We have an excellent program). But the other practices about a support team, an informing process, a reporting system, creating statistical data, a rewarding system, a support mechanism and official job descriptions are below the average. Therefore we can say that these types of practices are less accomplished.

The arithmetic averages and standard deviations according to the answers to the statements regarding crisis preparedness are reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2

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Statements About Crisis Preparedness	St d. D	rt. A	
Checking the operators' workload in the context of preparing for potential crisis	1,2887	2,53	
Regularly examining all organizational units about the measures to be taken against any crisis and maintaining the systems	1,2378	2,51	
An effective training process for learning the organization as a system	1,2958	2,47	
Management of complexity for an effective crisis management	1,2366	2,41	
An obligatory review process for potential crisis	1,2755	2,40	
The analysis of critical equipment and resources for potential crisis	1,2482	2,40	
Official manuals and procedures for managing potential crises	1,2298	2,09	

When analyzing the table above; the averages of first two statements are above 2.50 which is the the average of the scale (1 = We

have no program,, 5 = We have an excellent program). These two statements are about the control mechanism of crisis preparedness applications. But the other practices about a training process, the management of complexity, an obligatory review process, the analysis of critical equipments and resources ant official manuals and procedures are below the average. Therefore we can say that these types of practices are less accomplished. But for an effective crisis preparedness system, these practices should be applied much more than the current situation.

5. CONCLUSION

According to these findings, we can state that the perceived proactivity level of the industrial organizations surveyed is relatively low. Most of the organizations in the research are SMEs which are generally family-owned businesses. Since they are family-owned SMEs, most of which are managed by unprofessional managers which are generally the relatives of the owner of the business. They have a weak business system and vulnerable organizational structure and cannot assure the organizational stability and this situation leads to unpreparedness against potential crises.

As Pearson and Clair argued, leaders' perceptions of risk are a critical indicator of crisis-preparedness. When we look at the specific results of the research we can say that the owners or the top and middle level managers' of industrial enterprises operating in Konya Organized Industrial Zone (KOS) succeeded to a very limited extent to think proactively for potential crises. Their perceptions about crisis preparedness can be explained by ambivalence or disregard. Therefore, the organizations in our research do not have a high level of proactivity and seem unlikely to adopt crisis preparedness practices for potential crises.

These results are in line with the results of studies conducted in the past. Like Mitroff and Alpaslan's study, it can be said that most of the organizations are almost completely unprepared. When we examine the findings in detail, we can argue that a few bigger industrial organizations (not SMEs) including in the research have a high level of proactivity compared to SMEs. And this result is in line with the results of some other researches in the literature such as Fowler et al.'s (2006) and Spillan and Crandall's (2002) researches.

In today's business environment the likelihood of facing with a crisis for an organization increases significantly compared to the past due to intense competition. About 95 % of the all enterprises in the world are SMEs and researches show that they are much more unprepared than bigger enterprises for potential crises.

The crucial way of improving the proactivity level of the organization is to ensure that employees internalize proactive thinking. To achieve this aim owners and managers' perception of crisis signals and crisis preparedness should be strengthened. In this way, the proactivity level of both employees and organizations can be enhanced.

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