The Effect of Organizational Learning on Job Alienation: A Study in the Tourism Industry

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Abstract

In order to overcome the challenging competitive conditions, information and information personnel that can obtain the information has been one of the indispensable tools for organizations in recent years. Organizations are working hard to ensure that accurate information can be obtained, interpreted, and shared in a timely manner to create such an environment. Thus, an appropriate organizational structure is created such as a learning organization. However, various reasons cause employees to alienate towards work, and their work becomes meaningless for the alienated employee. Especially in classical organizations with a formal structure, the number of alienated employees is quite high. Therefore, this research aims to examine how organizational learning affects job alienation.

According to the results of this study conducted with 363 hotel workers who participated in the study, commitment to learning, shared vision and open-mindedness, which are sub-dimensions of organizational learning, have significantly and negatively affected job alienation.

Keywords: *Commitment to Learning, Shared Vision, Open-Mindedness, Job Alienation.*

Örgütsel Öğrenmenin İşe Yabancılaşmaya Etkisi: Turizm Sektöründe Bir Araştırma

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Öz

Zorlu rekabet şartlarının üstesinden gelebilmek için bilgi en önemli unsur olurken bu bilgiyi elde edebilecek bilgi çalışanı örgütler açısından son yılların vazgeçilmez araçlardan birisi olmuştur. Örgütlere rekabet üstünlüğü sağlayacak şartların oluşturulabilmesi için iyi yöneticiler doğru bilginin zamanında elde edilebilmesi, yorumlanması ve paylaşılması hususunda yoğun çaba harcamaktadır. Bu durum için öğrenen organizasyon gibi uygun bir örgütsel yapı oluşturulması gerekmektedir. Buna karşın çeşitli sebepler çalışanların işe yabancılaşmasına sebep olmakta ve yabancılaşan çalışan için yaptıkları işler anlamsız hale gelmektedir. Özellikle klasik organizasyonlarda bulunan formal yapı içerisinde yabancılaşan personel sayısı oldukça fazladır. Dolayısıyla araştırmada örgütsel öğrenmenin işe yabancılaşmayı nasıl etkilediğini ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda uluslararası literatürde kabul görmüş ölçeklerden yararlanılarak bir anket uygulanmıştır. Araştırmaya katılan 363 otel çalışanı üzerinde gerçekleştirilen ve SPSS paket programında faktör, korelasyon ve regresyon analizleri yapılan bu araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre örgütsel öğrenmenin alt boyutları olan öğrenmeye bağlılık, paylaşılan vizyon ve açık görüşlülük işe yabancılaşmayı anlamlı ve olumsuz olarak etkilemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Öğrenmeye Bağlılık, Paylaşılan Vizyon, Açık Görüşlülük, İşe Yabancılaşma.*

Introduction

The common way to survive for businesses in a complex environment that emerges amid technological advances, rapid changes and the turmoil of fierce competition is to develop their creativity. Moreover, in this information era, the knowledge that will bring creativity can be quickly obsolescence and easily imitated. Therefore, information should be obtained, interpreted, shared and stored at the right time from internal and external environments. In order to achieve this situation, an organizational structure is needed accordingly. Researchers have been working for years to build this organizational structure, and as a result of these efforts, Baker and Sinkula (1999), Senge (2006), Drucker (2002), and many other researchers have introduced the concept of "learning organizations". Conceptually, the goal is to increase the level of organizational level to the highest, and learning is considered as a product of an understanding that is addressed managerially. There are many studies focusing on this concept in the international literature, however, this study focuses on the tourism-hotel management sector in which monopolized competition exists through differentiated products or services. With this aspect, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge. On the other hand, the information worker, who is seen as a capital and can convert the knowledge they obtained with analytical thinking abilities into practical applications for the organization, is a must for learning organizations (Drucker, 2002). However, the challenges these employees face in their professional lives and other reasons lead to alienation to work and counterproductive behaviors. This reduces the productivity of organizations and leads to the loss of sustainable competitive advantages. Therefore, this study aims to measure the impact of organizational learning on alienation. In alignment with this purpose, this study reveals how the sub-dimensions of organizational learning- commitment to learning, shared vision and open-mindedness- affect alienation.

Literature Review

Job Alienation

Philosophically, alienation was first addressed by Hegel in 1808 and it refers to the source of the distance between humans' physical presence and mental

health. There are two worlds according to the soul. The first world is the world of actualism and its alienation to itself. The second world is the world it built for itself by raising itself on the first world (Elma, 2003, p.18; Uysaler, 2010, p.29). Feurbach explained the alienation process based on religion. According to him, religion is nothing but a reflection of man's basic desires and powers. Those attributed to God are actually one's own qualities, and man has distanced himself from himself and eventually got alienated (Fettahlıoğlu, 2006, p.17). From a philosophical perspective, alienation is based on the reflection of the soul itself.

Sociologically, alienation refers to the decrease in the need for workforce with the developments in industry and technology in the modern society, and from this aspect machines are replacing the physical powers and thus the workforce is integrated with technology. With this aspect, workforce is turning into robots that operate machines and monitor them when operating. Workers are under strict monitoring and monotony emerges through standardization which leads to the alienation of workers (Marcuse, 1990, pp.31-33; Büyükyılmaz, 2007, pp.26). Thus, alienation is a concept emerges with societal change from a sociological perspective.

The process of alienation is defined as the negative emotions due to distancing from career goals and not being able to adjust to professional norms, and dissatisfaction that occurs in social relationships with other employees. In other words, alienation is the psychological separation from work as a result of the perception that the employee needs and expectations are not satisfied (Aiken ve Hage, 1966, p.497; Banai, Reisel ve Probst, 2004, p.377). Therefore, alienation to work has important consequences that reduce the productivity of organizations.

According to Seeman (1959), alienation is an individual's weakness, meaninglessness, irregularity, isolation, and self-alienation. Although there are other categorizations of alienation in the literature, Seeman's categorization of alienation is widely accepted. Weakness can generally be evaluated in terms of the individual's control over the events or not having control. It can be said that especially people with external control focus perceive weakness as they think they do not have control over events (Tekin, 2012, p.36). The meaninglessness in the shared definition of psychology and sociology is the fact that the individual does not know what to believe as a result of the uncertainty they encounter in evaluating something, and the inability

of individuals to understand what is happening in their environment (Simsek et al., 2006, p.574). The normlessness refers to rules losing their effect and the belief of rules being not necessary to meet goals (Sullivan and Ott, 2009, pp.84-85). Isolation (social distancing) is defined as the goals and beliefs that are valued highly by the society not having any meaning for individuals (Zuschin, 2003, p.53). Self-alienation is the incompatibility of a particular behavior of a person with their expectations for the future, behaving differently outside the expectations of the person and alienating the person against themselves (Seeman, 1959, pp.789-790). Alienation causes individuals with all these dimensions to feel weakness in their work, to make goals meaningless and feel the need to not follow the rules, to remain indifferent to organizational events, and ultimately alienate even to themselves.

Organizational Learning

Learning, a process in which knowledge is created by transformation of experience, is to change existing behaviors through research and experimentation to gain a long-lasting behavioral change. Therefore, the learning expressed as the process of gaining knowledge and experience is an individual's change of behavior accordingly by learning according to the environmental conditions (Kim, 1993, p.38; Malcolm, 1998, p.124; Hasebrook, 2002, p.4). The change in current or potential behavior in a situation or in a process that repeats is individual learning. Individuals can also learn through cognitively filtering the information they obtained (Schwartz, 1991; Probst and Büchel, 1997, p.17). Individual learning is very important for organizations as it is the key to individuals, teams and organizations. According to Senge, organizations can only learn through learning individuals, however, individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning but without individual learning, organizational learning cannot occur. Therefore, the concept of information workers who can learn individually is important for organizations.

As a system approach, organizations are a subsystem of the industry and human resources are a subsystem of organizations, and this system is the most fundamental element in the fulfillment of organizational activities. Therefore, for organizational learning, individual learning should occur in

the first place. First, individuals pass on what they have learned to organizations and organizations convert new information created over time to individuals (Lundberg, 1995, p.20). In 1959, Drucker used the concept of information workers to define the business roles that should include people capable of gaining analytical knowledge in terms of education, quality, and theory and converting it into practice (Arthur et al., 2008). In addition, Drucker (2002) saw information workers not only as workforce but also as capital. In particular, rapidly changing environmental conditions and the exacerbation of competition in chaotic environments have made it imperative for organizations to be creative. Knowledge is the key to achieving competitive advantage in these turbulent environmental conditions and dealing with uncertainties. For this reason, information workers need to obtain and share information in a coordinated manner and make decisions accordingly. As a result of the organizational function, individuals work as members of a business unit, group or team in organizations. Therefore, at the level of organizational learning, the ability of these groups to learn is also important. Groups that are oriented towards a specific purpose can learn without having to be forced into a specific learning classification through dialogues. Therefore, the level of learning in groups is higher than individual learning through the synergy created by collective learning. The information accumulated by team members helps with making the most accurate decisions that will create a shared organizational memory (Romme and Dillon, 1997, p.67; Salner, 1999, p.489). For this reason, organizations need to create an organizational environment that will enable learning as a group or team.

Organizational learning as a concept above individual or group learning is the process of solving problems and increasing mobility based on organizational knowledge and value change (Probst and Büchel, 1997). Learning at an organizational level is defined as the organization's ability to gain perspective and understanding as a result of various experiences and as the willingness to evaluate the mistakes and achievements made based on the information collected from the environment through observations, experiments or analyses (Mcgill, Slocum and Leı, 1992, p.6). Learning at an organizational level refers to the transformation of the common understanding and values into systems, methods, procedures, policies, expected behavioral patterns for the entire organization and common databases that all

those in need can easily obtain. While learning in organizations is a process in which learning event occurs at various levels, and a learning organization is the structure that occurs as a result of this process (Koçel, 2011, p.427). A learning organization is defined as the final stage of the process. Organizations that regulate their relationships through the information obtained from the environment are called "knowing organizations" while organizations saying that different good people can be found is an understanding organization. Organizations that organize disruptive aspects of organizations through management techniques are "thinking organizations" and those that ultimately promote learning, sharing knowledge through open communication and create a constructive environment are called "learning organizations" (Mcgill and Slocum, 1993). Each organization learns within its organizational activities, but when it addresses it as a managerial structure, it can be a learning organization.

Senge (2006) found in his study focusing on the differences of learning organizations from traditional organizations that learning organizations must master certain basic disciplines. According to Senge, learning organizations that should consist of five disciplines that are shared vision, individual competence, mental models, system thinking and group learning reveal common values for the future with shared vision and employees provide the necessary motivation and focus for learning. With individual competence as the second discipline, individuals reach to the level of making efforts for life-long learning in order to reach the shared vision. Deep-rooted thoughts, symbols, and images formed in the mind of individuals form mind models that affect people's thoughts (Crandall, 2010, p.180). In the third discipline of mental models, creating an open direction for learning through freeing individuals from dominating certain patterns is planned. Mental models are a situation that affects our behaviors and understanding of the world through assumptions, generalizations, symbols, and images that have taken place in our minds. Not only does it make sense of the world, it also determines the way it transitions to action (Senge, 2006, p.47-48). The fourth discipline is the idea of a system where situations that occur in a cycle can be perceived as a whole. Through systems thinking, how the parts that make up a whole move together is understood. Finally, the fifth discipline is the discipline of acting in a team. Solving problems that arise

within such a complex system can be made possible with the common intelligence and shared information of teams made up of people with the ability (Yazici, 2001, p.163). Accordingly, employees gain the capacity to think and learn together by moving as a team while achieving the goals.

Relationships Between the Concepts

According to Senge's (2000) research, individual mastery is expressed as the cornerstone and spiritual basis of a learning organization. In addition, according to Schuman's (2005) approach, knowledge workers with a high level of individual competency are capable of consistently fulfilling the results that are important to them. The desire and capacity of an organization to learn cannot be more in the human resources that naturally make it. Therefore, a true learning organization tries to improve the individual level of mastery of its members (McCall, 1994). An organization that constantly learns how to shape its future is expected to consist of individuals who learn how to develop on issues that are important to them in their lives (Timuroğlu et., 2016). As a result of this expectation, the number of employees who are alienated from work will decrease and productivity will increase in learning organizations.

Method

In this section, the hypotheses, models, population, sample, and measurement tools of the research study are explained.

Hypotheses and Model of the Research

The following hypotheses were developed based on the literature review conducted on the concepts.

- H_1: Commitment to learning negatively affects alienation.
- H_2: Shared vision negatively affects alienation.
- H_3: Open-mindedness negatively affects alienation.

The research model summarizing the relationship between concepts is given in Figure 1.
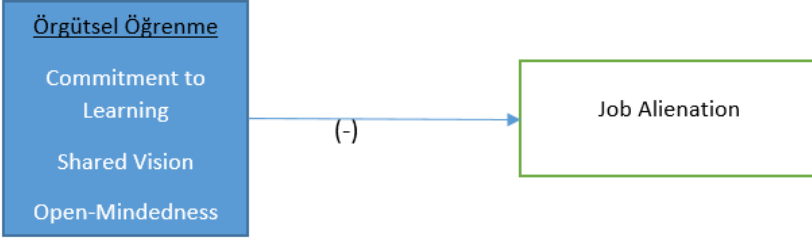
Figure 1. Research Model

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of hotel employees at the Erzurum Palandöken Tourism Center operating in the city of Erzurum. The sample size for the 750 employees working in hotels in the beginning of the 2018-2019 winter season was found as 254 within a 95% confidence interval (https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm.). According to the simple random sampling, 500 surveys were distributed to employees and 390 employees responded to the surveys. 363 surveys were analyzed after excluding the surveys with incorrect and incomplete information.

Measurement Tool

The survey method was used in the study and the scales from previous research that tested validity and reliability were used. The scales used in the study consist of three sections. In the first section, employees were asked about their gender, age, education, and employment duration in order to determine the overall profile of the participants in the study.

In the second section of the scale, the scale developed by Baker and Sinkula in 1999 was used to identify the organizational learning independent variable. Timuroğlu et. used the scale in Turkey in 2016 and achieved high validity and reliability. In this study, the sub-dimensions of organizational learning were measured with 5 items on commitment to learning, 3 items on shared vision, and 4 items on open-mindedness.

In the third section, the alienation to work scale developed by Hirschfeld and Field (2000) was used. The scale consisting of 6 items had a high validity

and reliability. Both sections consist of 5-Likert point items (1: Strongly disagree - 5: Strongly agree).

RESULTS

Demographic Data

In order to better interpret the participant profile in the study, the data obtained for demographic variables such asgender, age, level ofeducation, and employment duration are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Data for Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	161	44.35
	Male	202	55.65
Age	20 and under	73	20.11
	21-30	126	34.71
	31-40	103	28.37
	41 and above	61	16.81
Education Level	High school and below	86	23.69
	Associate degree	151	41.60
	Undergraduate	125	34.44
	Graduate	1	0.27
Employment Duration	Less than 1 year	52	14.33
	1-2 years	55	15.15
	3-4 years	98	26.99
	5 years and more	158	43.53
Total		**363**	**100**

According to Table 1, 44.35% of the participants were female and 55.65% were male. 20.11% were under the age of 20, 34.71% were between the ages of 21 and 30, 28.37% were between the ages of 31-40 and 16.81% were over the age of 41. 23.69% of the participants were graduates of high school and below, 41.60% had associate degrees, 34.44% had undergraduate and 0.27% had graduate degrees. 14.33% have been working for less than 1 year, 15.15% between 1-2 years, 26.99% between 3-4 years and 43.53% have been in the hotel for 5 years or more.

Findings on the Scale

The results of the exploratory factor analyses and reliability coefficients of the study are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis on the Organizational Learning Scale

Factors	Factor Loads	Variance Described	Total Variance	Cronbach Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.Dimension		**23.038**	**23.038**	**0.783**	**3.1174**	**0.83036**
Commitment to Learning1	0.727				2.98	1.179
Commitment to Learning2	0.833				2.99	1.136
Commitment to Learning3	0.785				2.99	1.160
Commitment to Learning4	0.649				3.29	1.098
Commitment to Learning5	0.575				3.34	1.099
2. Dimension		**15.865**	**38.903**	**0.731**	**3.0083**	**0.88240**
Shared Vision1	0.694				2.99	1.303
Shared Vision2	0.761				2.94	1.230
Shared Vision3	0.608				3.09	1.147
3. Dimension		**13.126**	**52.029**	**0.703**	**3.4690**	**0.70923**
Open-Mindedness1	0.658				3.80	1.066
Open-Mindedness2	0.556				3.04	1.141
Open-Mindedness3	0.682				3.28	1.086
Open Mindedness4	0.664				3.75	0.936

According to Table 2, the validity and reliability of organizational learning are provided. In addition, the KMO value is 0.784 and the Cronbach Alpha of all items is 0.743. In Table 3, the results of the exploratory factor analysis of alienation work are given.

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis on the Organizational Learning Scale

Factors	Factor Loads	Variance Described	Total Variance	Cronbach Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.Dimension		**76.540**	**76.540**	**0.938**	**2.7084**	**1.03173**
Job Alienation 1	0.847				2.99	1.210
Job Alienation 2	0.891				2.72	1.220
Job Alienation 3	0.899				2.75	1.203
Job Alienation 4	0.913				2.69	1.146
Job Alienation 5	0.842				2.39	1.118
Job Alienation 6	0.854				2.71	1.182

According to Table 3, the validity and reliability of alienation has been achieved. In addition, the KMO value is 0.924 and the total Cronbach Alpha value is 0.938.

Inter-Variable Relationships

First, the correlation analysis results showing the relationship between variables are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients for Variables

Variable	Mean.	St.Dev.	1	2	3	4
Commitment to Learning	3.1174	0.83036	1			
Shared Vision	3.0083	0.88240	0.186**	1		
Open-Mindedness	3.4690	0.70923	0.309**	0.322**	1	
Alienation to Work	2.7084	1.03173	-0.204**	-0.112**	-0.232**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to Table 4, there is a significant relationship between all variables. While there was a positive relationship between the sub-dimensions of commitment to learning, shared vision, and open-mindedness, there was a negative relationship between alienation to work and the other sub-dimensions.

Following the identification of relationships between the concepts, the hypotheses were tested with a regression analysis and the results are provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results

Independent Variable: Organizational Learning	Dependent Variable: Job Alienation		
Factors	β	t	p
Commitment to Learning	-0.253	-3.951	0.000**
Shared Vision	-0.131	-2.148	0.032*
Open-Mindedness	-0.337	-4.528	0.000**
R²	0.074		
Adjusted R²	0.066		
F	0.525**		
Durbin Watson	1.949		

**$p<0{,}01$, * $p<0{,}05$

According to the results of the regression analysis provided in Table 5, commitment to learning (β=-0.253; p<0.01), shared vision (β=-0.131; p<0.05), and open-mindedness (β=-0.337; p<0.01) significantly affect alienation negatively. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was supported.

Results and Discussion

According to the results of the survey conducted with 363 hotel workers in order to determine the impact of organizational learning on alienation, the mean of learning directionality was 3.11, the mean of shared vision was 3.46, and the mean of alienation to work was 2.70. Correlation analysis showed a negative relationship between these three subdimensions of organizational learning and alienation towork. Accordingly, as learning increases, alienation decreases.

According to the results of the regression analysis, commitment to learning affects alienation in a significantly negative way. This is an indication that the employee who knows how to develop is moving away from alienating work. According to Schuman's (2005) study, employees who can improve their quality and skills consistently work for the results that are important to them. An organizational culture built specifically on the continuity of learning ensures their development by keeping employees away from monotony and preventing their work from becoming meaningless.

Another result from the research is that the shared vision has a significant and negative effect on alienation. Accordingly, the common vision shared in organizations prevents alienation of employees from their work. Sarros and others (2002), found that classical and bureaucratic structures increase alienation, and yet in organizations where transformative leadership is applied, the conditions of alienation are reduced through the leaders' efforts on creating a common vision. As the motivation for the organization is revealed, the effects of bureaucratic work structures and the level of alienation decrease (Barling et al., 1996; Kelloway et al., 2000; Sarros et al., 2002, p.298). Therefore, a shared vision gives employees the idea of a system that will enable them to act as a whole and makes things meaningful.

Open-mindedness sub-dimension of organizational learning has significantly and negatively impacted alienation. According to Shepard and Metzler (1971), meaninglessness occurs when employees don't understand

the relationship between organizational purposes and their own work which brings alienation. On the other hand, the levels of meaninglessness, irregularity and alienation will decrease within the organization through open-mindedness created by information sharing and development. The effort to obtain information provided with organizational learning, participation in decisions and the unity of purpose created by teamwork prevents the work from becoming meaningless.

When Senge's (2006) five disciplines of shared vision, individual competence, mental models, systems thinking and team learning are evaluated, the fundamentals of the results are understood. With individual competence, employees make meaning of their work, with systems thinking and shared vision they create the unity of purpose, participate in decisions through team work, and feel as part of the achieved success, and they take action as with an open mind through symbols and values formed with mental models. Thus, the wok becomes meaningful and alienation decreases.

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