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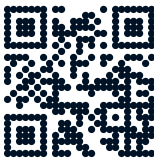
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# Istanbul Management Journal

## Research Article

## Open Access

# Predicting Voice Behavior: Effects of Commitment and Personality



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## Abstract

This study examines the determinants of employee voice behavior, focusing on the critical roles of affective commitment and personality traits, specifically, conscientiousness and openness. It aims to investigate how commitment and specific personality dimensions, such as conscientiousness and openness, can predict employees' inclination to express their perspectives, opinions, and suggestions for organizational improvement. This research applies a comprehensive methodology, using surveys from a diverse group of employees, to investigate how these factors influence the propensity to engage in voice behavior. The analysis, which is based on multiple regression, reveals that affective commitment, conscientiousness, and openness are significant predictors of such behavior. These findings show that fostering a work environment that promotes these qualities can greatly enhance organizational practices and innovation. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of these elements in facilitating a more proactive and engaged workforce, highlighting the practical implications for managers and organizations in encouraging voice behavior. Finally, the study provides a compelling argument for organizations to focus on enhancing these attributes among their employees to promote a more dynamic workplace.

## Keywords

Voice Behavior • Employee Voice • Personality • Openness • Conscientiousness • Commitment

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## Predicting Voice Behavior: Effects of Commitment and Personality

In recent years, organizations have increasingly needed employees who openly voice new suggestions and opinions regarding change to proactively address challenges in a dynamic business environment. Organizations must adapt to change to gain a competitive advantage and ensure survival. From this perspective, they have come to consider employees as a unique source for gaining an advantage. When considering employee voice behavior, defined as the capacity to contribute meaningfully to organizational processes (Budd, 2004; Mori et al., 2022), encouraging individuals to speak up becomes essential. This raises the questions, "What motivates employees to speak up?" and "What triggers voice behavior?" To understand voice behavior in detail, researchers have tried to uncover causes, predictors, or triggers, aligning with these questions. This study identifies predictors of voice behavior based on such questions.

Voice behavior has become a prominent subject of organizational behavior research. The concept of the employee voice has been examined from various perspectives over the years (Wilkinson et al., 2020). A number of studies have identified potential triggers of voice, including organizational culture, leadership styles, psychological empowerment, and organizational learning capability. However, there remains a considerable gap in the understanding of the motivational factors and triggers of voice behavior. While the relationships between voice behavior, commitment, and personality traits have been explored in previous research, this study makes a remarkable contribution to the existing literature by revealing the combined effect of attitude and dispositional factors.

First, this study addresses more context-specific research on organizational behavior by examining the relationships among international organizations operating in Turkey. This cultural context may yield unique insights, given that Turkey's blend of Eastern and Western values could influence how personality and commitment appear in voice behaviors (Johns, 2006; Wasti, 2016). Second, the study responds to the growing recognition of the importance of replication in advancing scientific knowledge (Nosek & Errington, 2020). By reexamining these relationships, this study contributes to the cumulative understanding of voice behavior antecedents and helps establish the robustness and generalizability of previous findings across different contexts. Moreover, it extends previous research by simultaneously examining the effects of both personality traits (openness and conscientiousness) and affective commitment on voice behavior. While these factors have been studied separately (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Tedone & Bruk-Lee, 2022; Krefft et al., 2024), their combined effects and relative importance have received less attention. This approach allows us to provide a more comprehensive model of voice behavior antecedents, which can inform both theory and practice. Lastly, the study integrates the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), bridging motivational and dispositional factors and offering a more holistic comprehension of the antecedents of voice behavior. Through these contributions, this study not only reaffirms existing knowledge but also extends our understanding of voice behavior in ways that are both theoretically insightful and practically relevant for contemporary organizations.

Especially today, as its importance is recognized, organization studies need to further explore the antecedents and motivators of voice. Although existing research has investigated the antecedents of voice behavior, insight into predictive relationships is limited. Therefore, this study aims to elucidate the relations between employee voice behavior and two proposed predictors, commitment and personality. Specifically,

it examines the following research question: “Do employees’ commitment and personality predict voice behavior?”

Based on these questions, the concepts of organizational commitment, personality, and employee voice behavior, including their characteristics, are elaborated within the theoretical framework. Further, the importance of these constructs and the overall study are explained in terms of organizational research. Finally, the findings will be interpreted, and suggestions for further research will be provided.

## Literature Review

Numerous scholars have presented different definitions of employee voice over the years. The concept of voice is often traced back to Hirschman's work in 1970, although its roots as an idea are much older. Rockefeller initially introduced the notion of voice into management discussions, claiming that employees should share their thoughts, suggestions, and complaints—collectively termed “voice”—to facilitate communication between management and workers in American industries. This approach established principles for a fair, healthy, and suitable workplace environment, leading to the development of formal complaint mechanisms as the earliest organized form of “voice” (Ünler, 2015). In his foundational work *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Hirschman (1970) scientifically examined voice, defining it as any effort to initiate change rather than withdraw from an unsatisfactory situation. He described voice as a means of addressing dissatisfaction through actions like direct requests to supervisors, seeking higher-level intervention, or participating in protests and advocacy to gain public support (Hirschman, 1970).

Since then, various researchers have offered more specific definitions. For instance, Detert and Burris (2007) delineated voice as follows:

“the discretionary provision of information intended to improve organizational functioning to someone inside an organization with the perceived authority to act, even though such information may challenge and upset the status quo of the organization and its power holders” (p. 869).

Kassing (2011) also described employee voice as an informal process that involves actively expressing opinions. This can include proposing new ideas, offering constructive feedback, engaging meaningfully with leadership, taking initiative, promoting significant issues, and providing useful suggestions, all of which collectively help shape organizational practices.

Employee voice plays a crucial role in addressing organizational challenges, as it enables proactive problem-solving and adaptive responses (Morrison, 2023). In today's dynamic work environment, fostering employee voice is essential for managing current organizational phenomena and tackling emerging challenges (Cohen & Roeske-Zummer, 2021; Hodge, 2022). For instance, recent trends such as the “great resignation,” where employees voluntarily and collectively leave their jobs (Curtis, 2021), and “quiet quitting,” in which employees perform only the basic requirements of their roles without embracing a “work is life” mentality (Warrick & Cady, 2022), highlight the need for organizations to listen actively to employee concerns and opinions to enhance retention and engagement. Given these recent insights, this study is especially important as it combines personality traits (openness and conscientiousness) with a commitment to examine voice behavior in a culturally unique and international organization context.

While this study centers on employee voice behavior, it is essential to clarify what constitutes extra-role behavior and the different forms it can take. Extra-role behavior is defined as discretionary behavior that goes beyond expected roles and that intends to benefit the organization. On the other hand, in-role

behavior refers to necessary actions or expectations as part of fulfilling the tasks and responsibilities tied to one's specific role (Van Dyne et al., 1995; Xu et al., 2021). Extra-role behaviors differ as they are not pre-defined by the role, not acknowledged by official reward systems, and lack punitive outcomes for not being performed by the job holder, indeed, it is critical to determine the motivational factors that encourage or prompt employees to speak up (Mori et al., 2022).

The importance of extra-role behaviors in benefiting organizations was proposed as a typology based on affiliative versus challenging and promotive versus prohibitive dimensions (Van Dyne et al., 1995). This framework identifies four categories: (a) affiliative-protective, which focuses on maintaining stability in dynamic environments and fosters a protective organizational climate; (b) affiliative-promotive, which enhances positive relationships and efficiency in stable environments through behaviors like organizational citizenship; (c) challenging-prohibitive, which critiques unethical or ineffective practices, such as whistleblowing, acting as checks on harmful behavior but offering limited individual rewards; and (d) challenging-promotive, which drives progress by encouraging innovation and proactive problem-solving. Voice is categorized within challenging/promotive behavior and characterized as distinct from employees merely expressing grievances about management in the workplace. Furthermore, voice is not considered an in-role behavior; indeed, it involves challenging the status quo and putting forth proactive suggestions constructively for change, whereas others may be reluctant to speak up. While the primary inclination of voice behavior is "suggesting ideas," the perspective regarding the situation is "it could be better." Given that, voice is not inclined to solely criticize circumstances or organization members (Krefft et al., 2024).

Management and organizational behavior scholars have shown a growing interest in studying voice as a form of extra-role behavior (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Researchers within the last decade have started to view employee voice more positively, as a type of extra-role behavior with the potential to make a contribution to enhancing organizational efficiency by molding the psychological, social, and organizational environment, which acts as a driving force for processes and tasks (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Knoll & Redman, 2016; Ng et al., 2019). Accordingly, voice has been searched in terms of both dispositional and external factors. As researchers have increasingly searched for external factors affecting voice in organizations, it has been qualitatively examined how leaders shape employee voice perceptions (Fatoki, 2024). A power cognition perspective has also recently been introduced, emphasizing that employees are more likely to engage in voice when they perceive themselves as empowered within the organizational hierarchy (Luo et al., 2024). Depending on the findings, employees' sense of power and agency significantly affect their willingness to speak up. Similarly, Gabriel et al. (2024) highlighted that a supportive workplace climate plays a crucial role in voice behavior, demonstrating that employees exposed to ambient harassment may withhold their opinions due to fears of retaliation or a lack of support. These studies show that voice behavior is not solely about individual initiative; it is also deeply influenced by the surrounding organizational context and perceived empowerment.

In addition to organizational factors, the research has largely focused on examining individual differences as correlates of the tendency to go beyond expectations in voicing one's views (Detert & Burris, 2007; Brooks & Wilkinson, 2022). Hence, research has demonstrated that personality traits and affective commitment are important factors for employee voice (Morrison, 2011; Caliskan et al., 2024). However, personality remains an unexplored area in predicting voice behavior, since mixed results have been found regarding the types of voice concept, such as defensive voice, destructive voice, supportive voice, and constructive voice. For instance, openness to experience was found to be positively related to constructive and supportive voice

while negatively associated with defensive voice. On the contrary, conscientiousness has no significant relationship with any type of voice (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Further, openness and conscientiousness have been shown to encourage voice by fostering qualities like proactivity, curiosity, and reliability, all of which support a willingness to speak up in the workplace (Chamberlin et al., 2017). Particularly, openness is found associated with a promotive voice, where employees suggest new ideas, while conscientiousness aligns with behaviors that contribute to organizational goals. Therefore, the effect of personality traits on employees' voice behavior remains unclear ambiguous. In addition, Nedergaard and Lupyan (2024) explored cognitive aspects by introducing "anendophasia," or the absence of inner speech, which can impact an individual's likelihood of voicing opinions. This insight shows that personality traits such as openness and conscientiousness may play a significant role in shaping whether employees feel comfortable and prepared to speak up.

Similarly, affective commitment is linked to voice, indicating that employees with higher levels of commitment are more inclined to express ideas that benefit the organization. Studies (Ng & Feldman, 2011; Caliskan et al., 2024) have demonstrated that committed employees are more likely to exceed formal role expectations, making voice behavior an expression of their loyalty. However, the predictive effect of affective commitment remains unclear. These results emphasize the importance of examining the relations between dispositional factors, attitudes, and employee voice behavior.

The combined effects of personality and affective commitment on voice behavior are less commonly studied, particularly in specific cultural or organizational contexts. This study contributes uniquely by examining how personality traits and affective commitment jointly influence voice behavior, thereby allowing for a direct comparison of each variable's strength in predicting voice. The analysis in this study will enable a clear assessment of the relative impact of openness, conscientiousness, and affective commitment, providing insight into which factors are most critical in encouraging voice behavior. This comparative approach not only deepens our understanding of voice behavior but also offers practical implications for organizations aiming to foster a proactive and engaged workforce. By investigating how affective commitment interacts with these personality traits to influence voice behavior, this study not only builds upon classic frameworks but also integrates dispositional factors with employee attitudes. Particularly, by examining affective commitment as a motivator for voice, this study aligns with recent organizational needs to reinforce employee engagement and adaptability amid behaviors like great resignation and quiet quitting. Besides, this study provides insight into how specific personality traits influence an individual's likelihood of engaging in voice behavior. With evolving workplace expectations, traits such as openness and conscientiousness may play an increasingly vital role in determining whether employees choose to actively contribute to organizational growth or adopt a more passive approach. The findings of this research will not only contribute to the theoretical literature on employee voice but also offer practical implications for organizations seeking to create an environment that encourages constructive feedback and innovation.

## Organizational Commitment and Voice Behavior

In the field of organizational behavior, organizational commitment has emerged as a critical concept that can be defined and evaluated through various perspectives. Over the years, research interest in employee commitment to organizations has grown significantly across different contexts. Like many constructs in organizational psychology, the concept of commitment has been interpreted and expanded in diverse ways within the academic literature (Mowday et al., 1982; Murray & Holmes, 2021; Lee & Kim, 2023). Despite these varied interpretations, a consistent theme is the strong link between commitment and employee turnover,

with highly committed employees being less likely to leave their organizations (Kwon et al., 2010; Fantahun et al., 2023).

The study of organizational commitment originated from the conceptualization of employees' tendency to remain with their organization, which is characterized by consistently engaging in activities over time (Becker, 1960). Buchanan (1974) expanded this understanding, defining commitment as an emotional and ideological attachment to an organization's goals and principles, coupled with personal identification with one's role in advancing those aims and loyalty that exceeds practical benefits. Porter and colleagues (1974) further refined the concept, describing organizational commitment as the degree of alignment between an individual and their organization, comprising three psychological components: (a) a desire to remain a member of the organization, (b) a willingness to exert extra effort for its benefit, and (c) an acceptance of and belief in its objectives. From this perspective, commitment is based on related behaviors and is seen as an attitude. Since these elements reflect attitudinal commitment, employees may feel each mental state to varying degrees. For instance, employees may feel compelled to stay with their organization out of a sense of necessity, belief, or obligation, even if they lack genuine desire, while others might deeply wish to remain with their organization without experiencing a strong sense of obligation or necessity (Mueller et al., 2023).

Organizational commitment can be described as an employee's attitude toward their organization, reflecting their devotion, recognition, and psychological state of maintaining organizational membership and explaining why employees choose to stay with an organization, serving as an indicator of employee loyalty (Guibin, 2024). It is categorized into normative, continuance, and affective components, which are viewed as components rather than types since employees can exhibit to varying degrees (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Allen & Meyer, 1996). Recent views (Al-Jabari & Ghazzawi, 2019) have also highlighted the multidimensional nature of organizational commitment, emphasizing its foundational role in understanding employee retention and engagement. It is stated that these psychological components not only influence individual behavior but also contribute to the overall stability and success of organizations.

As the current study utilizes part of Meyer and Allen's (1991) model of organizational commitment, it is valuable to specify and clarify the components of the organizational commitment concept. Normative commitment refers to an employee's sense of obligation to remain with their organization, driven by a strong idea of one's liability to the organization, encompassing two key facets, namely, obligation arising and a sense of moral duty (Meyer & Allen, 2001; Meyer & Maltin, 2010). Organizations can enhance this form of commitment by fostering environments where employees feel indebted or proud to be part of the organization, such as through charitable initiatives, showing care for their well-being, and leaving room for self-leading (Colquitt et al., 2010; Inam et al., 2023). This sense of reciprocity obligation binds employees to the organization. Meanwhile, continuance commitment refers to the perceived costs of leaving an organization, representing a logical cost-benefit analysis in which employees weigh their investments, such as tenure, relationships, acquired skills, and pension benefits, against the potential consequences of departure (Cohen, 2007; Jaros & Culpepper, 2014). This form of commitment arises when individuals acknowledge the difficulties of changing their social identity due to the significant consequences of leaving, while lower levels of continuance commitment are often associated with higher turnover and absenteeism (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Caliskan et al., 2024).

Recent research (Hngoi et al., 2023) shows the role of perceived organizational support in strengthening normative commitment, emphasizing that perceived organizational support, through showing care and appreciation, reinforces employees' sense of obligation to stay committed. Further, it has recently been

stated that continuance commitment is primarily driven by external factors, such as organizational investments and the perceived lack of alternatives (Park et al., 2023). Particularly, continuance commitment is aligned with an economic exchange framework, where employees remain out of necessity rather than loyalty. This pragmatic perspective emphasizes the need for organizations to balance practical investments while fostering more intrinsic forms of commitment.

Lastly, affective commitment was mentioned as an identification and emotional attachment to the organization, whereby strongly committed individuals identify with, participate in, and enjoy organizational membership (Meyer & Allen, 2001). Evidently, employees with affective commitment desire to stay and define themselves according to the organization's identity, feeling integrated within it. The literature delineates two forms of organization-based identification: value congruence and social identity perspectives. While values-based identification emphasizes alignment between organizational and individual goals or values (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), social identity theory stresses identification with the organization as a source of identity. Accordingly, employees with high affective commitment fully embrace the goals and values of the organization and feel personally responsible for its success. This form of commitment is often reflected in behaviors such as prioritizing organizational goals, actively participating in organizational activities, and willingly taking on tasks to ensure organizational success (Hadi & Tentema, 2020).

Literature has revealed that affective commitment is influenced by individual characteristics, work experiences, and structural and job features (Mowday et al., 1982), with research identifying the congruence between employees' expectations and their satisfaction with work experiences as a key predictor (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Furthermore, employees with high affective commitment are not only more motivated to align with organizational goals but also more likely to exert extra effort, including engaging in discretionary behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2010). Given that voice is an extra-role behavior, effectively committed employees are more inclined to speak up, even when voicing their opinions exceeds formal role requirements.

Recent studies have reinforced the importance of affective commitment in driving positive organizational outcomes. For example, perceived organizational support and hope significantly enhance affective commitment, which in turn fosters citizenship behavior (Chernyak-Hai et al., 2024). Similarly, Torlak et al. (2024) found that organizational socialization processes directly strengthen affective commitment, which promotes innovative work behavior. These findings highlight that affective commitment not only binds employees emotionally to the organization but also serves as a critical motivator for discretionary behaviors that benefit organizational performance.

Moreover, affective commitment has been shown to mediate other psychological and behavioral processes. For instance, it was found that psychological empowerment improves job performance through the combined effects of self-efficacy and affective commitment (Ochoa Pacheco et al., 2023). Likewise, strong organizational commitment, including affective commitment, was found to support innovative work behavior, which is essential for enhancing business performance (Muhamad et al., 2023). Furthermore, Soelton (2023) noted that affective commitment positively influences organizational citizenship behavior, encouraging employees to contribute beyond their formal roles. These findings indicate that affective commitment serves as a psychological foundation for discretionary behaviors that benefit organizations. Indeed, it is a critical enabler of behaviors, as it aligns employees' personal motivations with organizational goals.

The relationship between commitment and voice behavior can be explained by the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory argues that individuals strive to acquire, protect, and build resources. Affective commitment, which reflects an emotional bond and identification with an organi-

zation, can be viewed as a psychological resource. Acting as a psychological resource, affective commitment enables employees to engage in voice behavior without the fear of resource depletion. Employees with high affective commitment perceive their alignment with the organization's goals as a valuable asset and are motivated to protect and enhance this resource. Indeed, voice behavior—as the constructive expression of ideas, suggestions, or concerns to improve organizational functioning—requires the investment of resources such as time, energy, and potential social risk. COR theory explains that employees are more likely to engage in voice behavior when they perceive that the benefits of doing so (e.g., improving the organization or strengthening their relationship with it) outweigh the potential resource loss (e.g., conflict or rejection).

Depending on this perspective, employees with strong affective commitment perceive their emotional attachment to the organization as a resource worth protecting and enhancing. As a result, they are more likely to take proactive steps, such as expressing constructive feedback, to contribute to the organization's well-being. Engaging in voice behavior allows them to preserve the alignment between their values and the organization's goals while also reinforcing their role within the organization community. Therefore, strongly committed employees will likely improve situations by voicing suggestions and ideas. Accordingly, the first hypothesis of this study is as follows:

*Hypothesis 1: Affective commitment has a positive effect on employee voice behavior.*

## Personality and Voice Behavior

Voice behavior requires that employees believe change can effectively meet situational demands and feel confident expressing their opinions in interpersonal contexts (Van Dyne & LePine, 2001). It also requires employees to be change-oriented and willing to challenge the status quo, established norms, and relationships, even if doing so may create discomfort (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Thus, such behavior likely varies according to individual characteristics, in addition to organizational and unit-level factors. To illuminate individual-level attributes, the Big Five personality model is utilized.

Theoretically, the Big Five (Digman, 1990) consists of five dimensions: openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and extraversion. However, conscientiousness and openness were specifically chosen for this study due to their theoretical alignment and empirical relevance to predicting voice behavior, as they encompass creativity, responsibility, and a proactive approach, which are central to engaging in voice (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Lika, 2023). Briefly, agreeableness involves being courteous, trusting, cooperative, and forgiving; Neuroticism encompasses anxiety, anger, worry, and insecurity; and extraversion reflects sociability, assertiveness, and activity (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Conscientiousness, due to associations with achievement and volition, is also termed as 'work' or 'will to achieve' (Digman, 1989). Researchers have suggested that conscientiousness reflects dependability through traits such as carefulness, responsibility, organization, and diligence, while also encompassing volitional qualities like hard work, achievement-striving, and perseverance (Hogan, 1983; Botwin & Buss, 1989). Meanwhile, openness, by representing intellect or intelligence, is also called openness to experience. It relates to being curious, cultured, broad-minded, imaginative, and artistically sensitive (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Considering that voice requires expending effort to express ideas and suggestions, achievement-focused conscientious individuals are more willing to speak up. More clearly, openness can be described as a personality trait that reflects curiosity, creativity, and a willingness to engage with new ideas, experiences, and perspectives, highlighting adaptability and imagination. Conscientiousness, in contrast, is characterized by responsibility, dependability, and a focus on goal-directed behavior, emphasizing organization and diligence

in task completion. These traits are instrumental in shaping proactive workplace behaviors, such as voice, where openness promotes innovative thinking, and conscientiousness fosters structured and purposeful action (Cobb-Clark & Schuer, 2012). For instance; as openness to experience fosters constructive interpersonal interactions (Su et al., 2021), it may translate into employees' greater propensity to engage in voice behavior by reducing biases and promoting proactive, prosocial contributions in organizational contexts.

Recent studies have revealed various conclusions regarding personality traits within organizations. For instance, individuals high in openness were found better equipped to handle workplace stress and maintain motivation (Angelini, 2023), while it was emphasized that openness has a positive association with self-efficacy, fostering confidence in addressing organizational challenges (Furnham & Cheng, 2024). Similarly, openness was linked to risk-taking (Liu et al., 2023), which aligns with the proactive and exploratory nature of voice behavior, whereas conscientiousness, which reflects responsibility, organization, and goal orientation, aligns more closely with prohibitive voice behavior. Additionally, since extraversion has been linked to voice behavior due to its association with assertiveness and social confidence (Tedone & Bruk-Lee, 2022), openness may play a distinct role by driving creativity, innovation, and the willingness to challenge the status quo, which are essential for speaking up. Furthermore, as conscientiousness fosters knowledge-sharing behaviors (Obrenovic et al., 2022), it may also drive voice behavior, as both involve proactive contributions to organizational improvement influenced by individual motivation and supportive norms.

The relationship between these personality traits and voice can be explained by social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). This theory highlights the role of cognitive processes in determining behavior, including the influence of individual traits such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal standards. It emphasizes the dynamic interplay of personal factors, behaviors, and environmental influences in shaping behavior. In an organizational context, social cognitive theory can explain how personality traits influence employees' propensity to engage in voice behavior. Since personal factors, environment, and behaviors interact reciprocally, an individual's personality plays a key role in shaping the mutual influence between employees and their behavior toward an organization. Therefore, this study argues that openness to experience and conscientiousness traits are predictors of voice behavior.

Conscientiousness, characterized by responsibility, dependability, and goal orientation, can drive voice behavior through a sense of duty to organizational improvement. Conscientious employees are motivated by their internal standards of achievement and their belief in the value of their contributions. Social Cognitive Theory explains that their strong outcome expectations—such as enhancing efficiency or solving problems—encourage them to engage in voice as a way of meeting their personal and organizational standards. Moreover, their diligence and structured approach to tasks make them more likely to propose practical and goal-oriented solutions. Accordingly, conscientious employees who are diligent, responsible, and achievement-oriented may engage in voice behavior out of a sense of duty and a desire to contribute positively to the organization. Thus, the second hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 2: Conscientiousness, as a personality trait, has a positive effect on voice behavior.*

Furthermore, employees with high levels of openness to experience, characterized by their creativity, curiosity and willingness to explore new ideas, are likely to voice their suggestions and innovations as they seek to improve the organizational environment. Particularly, as openness is associated with creativity, adaptability, and intellectual curiosity, it enhances self-efficacy by equipping employees with the confidence to articulate new ideas and challenge the status quo. In addition, those who are open to experience tend to be exploratory, imaginative, and broad-minded. Employees high in openness are likely to perceive positive

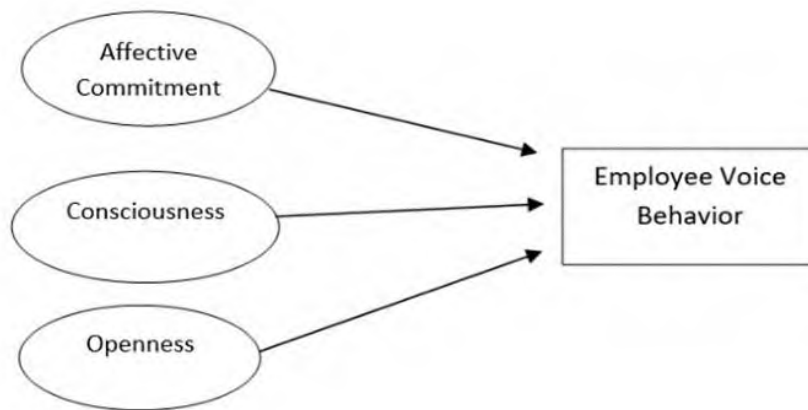


outcome expectations from voicing their opinions, such as fostering innovation or improving organizational processes. Eventually, they view voice behavior as an opportunity to align their creative impulses with organizational goals, thus reinforcing their personal standards for self-expression and growth. Therefore, the third hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 3: Openness, as a personality trait, has a positive effect on voice behavior.*

Accordingly, the proposed model of the study can be seen as below:

**Figure 1**  
Proposed Model



## Method

### Sample and Data Collection

To test the proposed model, data were collected from employees of various private companies, which are international corporations located in Turkey. White-collar workers at these companies were asked to complete an online questionnaire with voluntary participation. At the beginning of the survey, required information regarding participant rights and study was given to the respondents. The information included privacy issues and withdrawal from the survey. Participants who preferred to join the survey mentioned “I approve of participating in the survey” and started the survey.

Initially, 215 surveys were collected from employees using the convenience sampling method, but 7 cases were excluded during assumption checking. Thus, the analysis utilized a sample of 208 (further discussed under regression analysis). This sample size is adequate for multiple regressions given the guidelines of at least 15-20 observations for each independent variable (Hair et al., 2014). Data collection lasted for 10 days, and a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure variables.

### Measures

**Voice:** Employees’ voice behavior was measured with 6-item scale, which was originally established by Van Dyne and LePine (1998) and translated into Turkish by Güven (2017). It was measured from “Never” (1) to “Always” (5) and grouped into one factor.

**Personality:** The Big Five Scale was originally established by Benet-Martinez and John (1998), and it includes 44 items. The Turkish version adapted by Schmitt et al. (2007) across 56 countries was utilized

here. 19 items were selected representing the conscientiousness and openness dimensions, from “Totally Disagree” (1) to “Totally Agree” (5), starting with “I see myself as...”.

**Affective Commitment:** An 18-item organizational commitment scale, which was originally established by Meyer et al. (1993), was adapted into a Turkish version by Wasti (2000) with 8 items reflecting affective commitment. It was measured from “Totally Disagree” (1) to “Totally Agree” (5). The details were examined by factor analysis.

## Analysis

In the current study, SPSS software was employed for analysis. Data was first checked for missing values or anomalies, none being found. During regression assumption testing, 7 outliers were removed, leaving 208 cases (discussed under regression analysis). Factor analysis using principal components to measure factors and reliability. To test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

### Factor Analysis

Principal component analysis determined factors for the voice measure. The KMO was .855, and Bartlett’s test was significant at .000 ( $p < .05$ ), indicating suitability. Examining the component matrix reveals that the measure contains 6 items, all of which are grouped under a single factor. Additionally, the factor loadings for all items were sufficiently high, and the values in the anti-image matrix were also significantly elevated (See Appendix A- Table 1 for factor loadings). This indicates that each item significantly contributes to the overall measure and maintains adequate correlation with the other items. The total variance explained by the factor is 53%, indicating a substantial proportion. To assess the reliability of the measure, a post factor reliability analysis was conducted, using Cronbach’s Alpha as the primary reliability indicator. With a Cronbach’s alpha value of .82, the measure was deemed reliable for further analysis.

Regarding the affective commitment (AC) measure, initial factor analysis identified that the fifth item, AC5, loaded onto two separate factors with values of 0.62 and 0.52, leading to its exclusion. Subsequent analysis without AC5 and with the remaining 7 items resulted in all items being grouped into a single factor, which is consistent with the existing literature (Wasti, 2000; Allen and Meyer, 1993). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure is notably high at .837, and Bartlett’s test indicates significance at the .000 level ( $p < .05$ ). This shows that the factor loadings for all items are sufficiently high, and the anti-image matrix values are significantly elevated, ensuring that each item effectively contributes to the measure and that there is an adequate correlation among the items (See Appendix A-Table 2 for factor loadings). The affective commitment measure demonstrates a 61% explained total variance, indicating a strong level of explanatoriness. Following the identification of factors, a reliability analysis revealed a notably high Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.89. Based on these findings from both factor and reliability analyses, the affective commitment scale was deemed suitable for inclusion in further studies.

Regarding the personality measure, an initial factor analysis incorporating 19 items identified four factors. To address cross-loading and insufficient loading issues, items P3, P12, P14, P17, P18, and P19 were removed, and the analysis was conducted again. Emphasis was placed on the rotated component matrix for optimal factor extraction, revealing a high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of .865 and a significant Bartlett’s test at the .000 level ( $p < .05$ ), indicating that the refined analysis provides a solid foundation for the personality measure’s structure. In alignment with existing literature (Benet-Martinez et al., 2007), two distinct factors were identified. Top of Form Considering the scholarly framework, it is established that items P1, P5, P7, P9, P11, P13, and P15 are associated with the conscientiousness aspect of personality, while items P2, P4, P6, P8,

P10, and P16 correspond to the openness trait (See Appendix A- Table 3 for factor loadings). The total variance explained by the measure stands at 51%, which is sufficiently robust for explanatory purposes. Moreover, the overall reliability test yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of .82, indicating strong reliability. When examining conscientiousness and openness separately, Cronbach's alpha scores were .82 for openness and .74 for conscientiousness, validating the appropriateness of including these personality factors in further analyses. Consequently, voice, conscientiousness, and openness emerged as three independent variables aligned with theoretical expectations. These factors were incorporated into a multiple regression analysis using a summated-scale approach.

## Results

### Multiple Regression Analysis

To conduct a multiple regression analysis effectively, it is necessary to ensure that the dataset adheres to specific prerequisites, including normality, homoscedasticity, linearity, and the independence of error terms, as delineated by Hair et al. (2014). The initial phase involves a thorough examination of these assumptions to guarantee the analysis's integrity and the accuracy of its conclusions.

#### Assumptions

The investigation into the Skewness-Kurtosis values revealed that the distribution of the variable "voice" significantly deviated from what is considered normal due to elevated values. This led to the identification and removal of 7 outliers, thereby reducing the sample size from 215 to 208 observations. The purpose of this adjustment was to lessen the influence of these extreme values on the overall analysis.

After excluding outliers, a reassessment confirmed that the Skewness-Kurtosis values for all variables now fell within the desired range of +1 to -1. This adjustment shows that the data can be regarded as normally distributed despite significant findings from the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests indicating otherwise. Adherence to the acceptable Skewness-Kurtosis thresholds allows for the presumption of a normal distribution in the dataset, thereby satisfying one of the critical assumptions for proceeding with multiple regression analysis.

Upon evaluating the Mahalanobis distance, given the presence of multiple variables, a value of 15.274 was observed, which is suitable for this type of analysis. Additionally, Cook's distance, measured at 0.110, falls well within the acceptable range, being below the threshold of 1. This indicates a good fit and minimal influence of outliers on the regression model. Further examination of the variable histograms alongside the normality curve confirmed that all variables exhibit a normal distribution, albeit with minor deviations from the expected curve.

A crucial aspect of regression analysis is assessing the linearity of the dependent variable. The analysis shows that the dependent variable "voice" exhibits linear behavior, with slight deviations observed. The scatter plot for "voice" further illustrates that the data points are evenly distributed within the range of -3 to +3, affirming the suitability of applying multiple regression analysis.

Apart from these assumptions, an overview of the dataset's composition reveals a balanced gender distribution, with females accounting for 49% and males for 51%, ensuring no gender bias. A significant portion of the employees (41%) fell within the 26-35 age group, and the majority (72%) held a bachelor's degree, followed by 21% with a master's degree. Employment duration within the company shows a varied distribution, with 32% of employees having 1-5 years of service and 27% boasting at least 16 years. The

distribution is relatively even among those with 6-10 and 11-15 years of service, at 17% and 13%, respectively, facilitating comparability across different tenure groups. Additionally, 44% of the employees work in the finance department, while the HR and marketing/sales departments each comprise 20% of the workforce.

For hypothesis testing, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was employed to elaborate on the individual contributions of each variable to the model. Descriptive statistics (mean of each variable) highlight that employees generally exhibit high levels of voice (4,29), conscientiousness (4,31), openness (4,11), and affective commitment (3,99), setting the stage for a detailed examination of the hypotheses through regression analysis.

The multicollinearity among independent variables must be addressed in multiple regression analysis. To ensure the validity of the analysis, collinearity among the independent variables must be maintained at a moderate level—not too high to suggest redundancy, nor too low or zero, which could indicate a lack of relationship (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, examining collinearity is a preliminary step.

Upon reviewing the correlations between independent variables (Table 1), it is observed that they are all within acceptable bounds, with each correlation coefficient falling below 0.50. This indicates a moderate level of interdependence that does not compromise the integrity of the analysis. Although the correlation between commitment and voice is on the lower side, it is still deemed significant enough to warrant inclusion in the analysis, thus ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of all potential factors.

**Table 1**  
*Correlations Between Variables*

Correlations		Voice	Conscientiousness	Openness	Commitment
Voice	Pearson Correlation	1	<b>,452**</b>	<b>,435**</b>	<b>,292**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,000
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	<b>,452**</b>	1	<b>,423**</b>	<b>,313**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000	,000
Openness	Pearson Correlation	<b>,435**</b>	<b>,423**</b>	1	<b>,199**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000		,004
Commitment	Pearson Correlation	<b>,292**</b>	<b>,313**</b>	<b>,199**</b>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,004	

**\*\*.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N=208

In addition to addressing multicollinearity, it is also crucial to establish correlations among independent variables to determine their order of entry in predictive modeling for voice behavior. In the stepwise regression analysis, the variable with the highest correlation with the dependent variable is selected as the first entry to the model. In this instance, conscientiousness emerges as the most correlated with voice, boasting a correlation coefficient of .452. Consequently, the analysis unfolds in three sequential steps, beginning with the conscientiousness variable.

The procedural steps first incorporated conscientiousness, followed by openness, and finally affective commitment. Examination of the ANOVA results (Table 2) revealed that all three models achieved statistical significance, indicating that each step contributed meaningfully to the model. To delve into the specifics and understand the impact of each variable on the model, a closer analysis of the model summary is essential.

This summary provides insights into the incremental contribution of each variable, reflected through changes in  $R^2$ , and thereby assesses the overall predictive power of the model in each successive step.

**Table 2**

ANOVA Results

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12,806	1	12,806	52,792	<b>,000<sup>b</sup></b>
	Residual	49,971	206	,243		
	Total	62,777	207			
2	Regression	17,346	2	8,673	39,135	<b>,000<sup>c</sup></b>
	Residual	45,431	205	,222		
	Total	62,777	207			
3	Regression	18,558	3	6,186	28,538	<b>,000<sup>d</sup></b>
	Residual	44,220	204	,217		
	Total	62,777	207			

a. Dependent Variable: Voice

b. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness

c. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness, Openness

d. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness, Openness, Commitment

The stepwise regression analysis unfolds structured to predict employees' voice behavior, starting with the inclusion of individual variables based on the correlation strength. Initially, the model incorporates conscientiousness as the sole predictor, achieving an  $R^2$  value of .204 (Table 3). This indicates that conscientiousness alone accounts for 20.4% of the variance in voice behavior among employees. Upon integrating openness into the analysis as the second variable, the  $R^2$  value experiences an uplift to .276. This enhancement suggests that when conscientiousness and openness are considered together, they explain 27.6% of the variance in voice behavior, marking a significant improvement in the model's explanatory power.

Third, the final model introduces affective commitment alongside conscientiousness and openness, further increasing the  $R^2$  to .296. This progression demonstrates that the collective inclusion of openness, conscientiousness, and affective commitment offers the most comprehensive explanation for variations in voice behavior, accounting for 29.6% of the variance. Based on these results model hypotheses, H1, H2, and H3, are accepted. To dissect the individual contributions of these three independent variables to the predictive equation, it is imperative to examine the coefficient table. This detailed analysis highlights the specific impact each variable has on voice behavior, providing insights into their relative importance and strength of association with the dependent variable.

**Table 3**

Model Summary

Model Summary <sup>d</sup>									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	,452 <sup>a</sup>	<b>,204</b>	,200	,49252	,204	52,792	1	206	<b>,000</b>
2	,526 <sup>b</sup>	<b>,276</b>	,269	,47076	,072	20,485	1	205	<b>,000</b>

Model Summary <sup>d</sup>									
3	,544 <sup>c</sup>	<b>,296</b>	,285	,46558	,019	5,591	1	204	<b>,019</b>
a. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness									
b. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness, Openness									
c. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness, Openness, Commitment									
d. Dependent Variable: Voice									

The examination of the coefficients (Table 4) provides conclusive evidence regarding the significance of each variable in the model. This evidence firmly supports all three hypotheses, leading to the conclusion that conscientiousness and openness (as facets of personality) along with affective commitment exert a significantly positive impact on voice behavior among employees.

More precisely, the model elucidates that affective commitment, along with the personality traits of openness and conscientiousness, serve as key predictors of employee voice behavior. Collectively, these variables account for approximately 30% ( $R^2$ ) of the variance in employees' voice behavior. This level of explanatory power underscores the critical role that both personality characteristics and the level of affective commitment play in influencing how employees choose to express their opinions, suggestions, and concerns within the organizational context.

**Table 4**  
Coefficient Results

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>												
Model		Unstd. Coeff.		Std. Coeff.	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Err.				Beta	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zeroorder	Partial	Tolerance
1	(Constant)	2,200	,290		7,585	<b>,000</b>	1,628	2,772				
	Conscientious.	,485	,067	,452	7,266	<b>,000</b>	,354	,617	,452	,452	1,000	1,000
2	(Constant)	1,535	,314		4,892	<b>,000</b>	,916	2,154				
	Conscientious.	,350	,070	,326	4,972	<b>,000</b>	,211	,489	,452	,328	,821	1,218
	Openness	,303	,067	,297	4,526	<b>,000</b>	,171	,436	,435	,301	,821	1,218
3	(Constant)	1,386	,317		4,377	<b>,000</b>	,762	2,010				
	Conscientious.	<b>,307</b>	,072	<b>,285</b>	4,249	<b>,000</b>	,164	,449	,452	,285	<b>,766</b>	1,305
	Openness	<b>,291</b>	,066	<b>,285</b>	4,381	<b>,000</b>	,160	,422	,435	<b>,293</b>	<b>,816</b>	1,225
	Commitment	<b>,097</b>	,041	<b>,147</b>	2,365	<b>,019</b>	,016	,178	,292	,163	<b>,897</b>	1,115

a. Dependent Variable: Voice

The analysis of beta coefficients and their corresponding confidence intervals confirm the significance of conscientiousness, openness, and affective commitment as predictors of voice behavior. The broad range of lower and upper bond values associated with each variable substantiates their reliability in forecasting voice behavior. Moreover, the high tolerance values indicate a low degree of multicollinearity among these predictors, affirming their ability to influence voice behavior independently.

The partial correlations further revealed that openness exerts the strongest influence on voice behavior, with the highest correlation value (.293). This highlights the importance of considering standardized regres-

sion coefficients (Beta) for direct comparisons among variables, whereas unstandardized B coefficients are integral to the formulation of the regression equation.

Conscientiousness emerges as a critical predictor of voice behavior, with a standardized Beta coefficient of .285 and an unstandardized B coefficient of .307, underscoring its significant impact. Similarly, openness, with an identical Beta coefficient of .285, plays a pivotal role, as evidenced by a B coefficient of .291. In comparison, affective commitment, although influential, is identified as the least significant predictor among the three, with a Beta of .147 and a B coefficient of .097. These findings collectively present that higher levels of conscientiousness, openness, and affective commitment are positively correlated with increased employee voice behavior. In essence, employees who exhibit higher degrees of commitment to the organization, along with traits of conscientiousness and openness, are more likely to present voice behavior, expressing their opinions, concerns, and suggestions more freely.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In a highly competitive environment, organizations view their employees as essential for success and maintaining their competitive edge. Active employee engagement in company activities and groups is deemed a competitive advantage that is critical for organizational success. Conceptualizing voice behavior as an extra-role rather than an in-role activity underscores the significance of individual traits when forecasting voice behavior.

The current study makes significant contributions to the understanding of voice behavior by providing context-specific insights, examining combined variables, advancing replication efforts, and integrating complementary theories. First, this study explores voice behavior within the unique context of international organizations in Turkey, offering novel insights into how the cultural blend of Eastern and Western values shapes the influence of personality traits and affective commitment on proactive employee behaviors. Additionally, it investigates the combined effects of personality traits (openness and conscientiousness) and affective commitment on voice behavior, addressing their joint and relative impacts to fill a critical gap in the literature. By reexamining these relationships, this study advances replication efforts in the social sciences, enhancing the robustness and generalizability of findings across diverse cultural and organizational contexts. Lastly, it integrates conservation of resources theory and social cognitive theory, which together offer a comprehensive framework to understand the antecedents of voice behavior. The integration of these two theories bridges dispositional and motivational perspectives, allowing for a deeper examination of affective commitment and personality traits as drivers of voice behavior. COR theory provides a resource-based lens, emphasizing the role of affective commitment as a psychological resource that motivates voice behavior, while Social Cognitive Theory highlights the cognitive and behavioral processes underlying personality traits like openness and conscientiousness, explaining how these traits influence self-efficacy and proactive actions. Combining these perspectives not only advances theoretical understanding but also provides a richer and more nuanced framework for organizations seeking to foster voice behavior, addressing both the emotional and cognitive dimensions of employee motivation. This integrative approach enhances the explanatory power of existing theories while providing practical insights for fostering a proactive and resourceful workforce.

The identification of affective commitment, conscientiousness, and openness as predictors of voice behavior enriches the discourse on voice literature. Individuals characterized by openness and conscientiousness are likely to propose novel and constructive ideas aimed at enhancing work processes. Similarly,



employees with a strong sense of affective commitment are predicted to exert additional effort to improve workplace conditions by introducing innovative ideas. The results of the current study align with and extend the existing literature on the antecedents of employee voice behavior.

Janssen and Gao (2015) emphasized the importance of fair and responsive treatment from supervisors in enhancing employees' self-perceived status and subsequent voice behavior. This study highlights the role of specific personality traits—such as extraversion and agreeableness—in influencing different forms of voice. Both studies underscore the significance of individual differences and the social context in shaping voice behavior, suggesting that a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon requires considering both personal characteristics and situational factors like supervisory behavior. In addition, it was revealed that even when employees engage in voice behaviors, silence can persist, potentially threatening performance and well-being (Knoll & Redman, 2016). Notably, the need was emphasized to consider individuals' job engagement and affective attachment when studying voice because these variables can impact whether employees choose to remain silent or speak up. The current study contributes to this gap and argues the importance of affective commitment in fostering voice behavior. Both studies underscored that emotional bonds to the organization play a crucial role in encouraging employees to speak up. Furthermore, a meta-analysis concluded that personality traits, particularly openness to experience and extraversion, were consistent predictors of both promotive and prohibitive forms of voice behavior (Chamberlin et al., 2017). This corroborates the significant role of openness identified in the study, while also suggesting that other traits, such as extraversion, may warrant further investigation. Hence, Ng and colleagues (2019) found that, in addition to personality traits, employees' proactive motivation and perspective-taking ability were key predictors of their voice behavior. This shows that cognitive and motivational factors may play an equally essential role alongside the dispositional traits examined in this study.

Furthermore, Barron (2022) suggested that when employees feel a strong attachment to their organization, they are more likely to express their ideas and concerns, which in turn positively impacts their mental health. These results align with and support the current study's findings, which stated the role of affective commitment in fostering voice behavior. Indeed, Morrison's (2023) comprehensive review of employee voice and silence provided a foundational context for this study's findings. The critical role of individual differences, such as personality traits and affective commitment, in influencing voice behavior was emphasized. This finding aligns with this study's results, identifying openness and conscientiousness as significant predictors of voice behavior, underscoring the importance of dispositional factors.

More recently, Luo et al. (2024) focused on situational and contextual factors, such as power dynamics within an organization. This research contributes by showing that intrinsic personality traits can independently motivate employees to engage in voice, regardless of their perceived power or the risk-taking environment. Both studies underline the complexity of employee voice behavior, showing that it is influenced by a combination of personal traits and organizational context. This demonstrates that organizations aiming to encourage voice behavior should consider both the personal characteristics of their employees and the broader power dynamics at play. The findings of this study also align with the work of Krefft and colleagues (2024), who emphasized the multifaceted nature of constructive voice behavior across functional (e.g., suggesting opportunities versus highlighting harm), substantive (e.g., offering specific suggestions versus pointing out problems), and temporal (e.g., addressing present versus future issues) dimensions and linked these aspects with commitment. By examining the combined effects of affective commitment and personality traits, such as conscientiousness and openness, this study extends their typology by providing



empirical evidence on how individual differences and emotional attachment to the organization predict voice behavior.

Furthermore, Zhong, Ren, and Wang (2024) found that openness promotes risk-taking through exploratory thinking, which is consistent with this study's finding that openness positively predicts voice behavior by fostering innovation and proactive suggestions. However, their observation that conscientiousness negatively relates to risk-taking contrasts with this study, in which conscientiousness predicts voice behavior. This raises an interesting point: while limiting risk-taking, conscientiousness supports constructive and responsible actions like voicing concerns and maintaining organizational standards, emphasizing its positive role in workplace contributions. These insights show that although this study provides valuable confirmatory evidence, the field would benefit from a more integrative, multi-faceted approach to understanding employee voice. Future research should explore the interplay between individual dispositions, cognitive-motivational states, and organizational-level characteristics as moderators in shaping employees' extra-role behavior.

Apart from that, as organizations strive to navigate fast-paced changes in technology and the economy that require flexibility, the significance of employees' extra-role behaviors and contextual performance becomes increasingly pronounced. Thus, managers should engage in discussions about organizational challenges and changes to foster an environment in which new and creative ideas can flourish. Recognizing the link between employee commitment and voice behavior can empower managers to foster organizational commitment, thereby facilitating the emergence of constructive suggestions. Additionally, the prevalent practice among companies of administering personality inventories during recruitment processes could be enhanced by focusing on conscientiousness and openness traits and identifying candidates who are more likely to exhibit voice behavior. Organizations may consider integrating mechanisms that reinforce affective commitment, such as flexible work arrangements, inclusive decision-making processes, and initiatives that align employee values with organizational goals. Such measures not only encourage employees to remain engaged but also foster a sense of ownership and loyalty, which are essential for promoting proactive voice behavior.

Finally, although the hypotheses were accepted regarding the analysis, this study is not without limitations. Reliance on self-reported questionnaires may introduce bias in measuring constructs. Moreover, focusing solely on individual traits while overlooking organizational factors, such as culture, climate, and support may limit the understanding of voice behavior's drivers. Hence, other personality traits, including extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness, could be examined together in future studies to provide a more comprehensive picture of personality's role in voice behavior. Similarly, individuals' commitment may also be investigated as a predictor of their attachment styles, such as normative and continuance commitment. Further, although regression analysis allows us to examine predictive relationships, it is acknowledged that our cross-sectional design limits the ability to present causal relations definitively. Future longitudinal studies should explore the causal nature of these relationships. For instance, a daily-diary design can be conducted to examine the functionality of voice behavior on a daily basis. This may provide more detailed insights into when and under which exact circumstances individuals show voice behavior during the work. Despite these constraints, the study brings valuable insights to the literature by presenting significant and coherent findings.



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## Appendix

**Table 1**  
*Component Matrix of Voice*

Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>	
	Component
	1
V1	,756
V2	,799
V3	,781
V4	,553
V5	,712
V6	,775

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**a. 1 components extracted.**

**Table 2**  
*Component Matrix of Affective Commitment*

Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>	
	Component
	1
AC1	,756
AC2	,736
AC3	,774
AC4	,84
AC6	,709
AC7	,842
AC8	,808

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**a. 1 components extracted.**

**Table 3**  
*Component Matrix of Personality (Openness and Conscientiousness)*

Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>		
	Component	
	1 (Openn.)	2 (Consc.)
P1		.600
P5		.603
P7		.679
P9		.682
P11		.587
P13		.638
P15		.607

Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>	
<b>P2</b>	.710
<b>P4</b>	.617
<b>P6</b>	.587
<b>P8</b>	.751
<b>P10</b>	.843
<b>P16</b>	.693

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
**a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.**





## Istanbul Management Journal

### Research Article

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# A Research On Digital Transformation Awareness: An Examination of Enterprises Operating in BIST 100



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### Abstract

Because of rapid changes in technology, the rules of competition are changing; thus, paradigm shifts are occurring, and global competitive players are undergoing rapid change. The digital transformation phenomenon is seen as a transformation movement and a revolutionary process. Digital transformation is one of the most fundamental elements that reveal the existence of paradigm shifts and new platforms. In this context, digital transformation is seen as an application applied by those who want to become global players or participate in global competitions. The study was conducted on the BIST 100 enterprises, which pioneered the vision of the Turkish economy. The annual reports of Borsa Istanbul 100 companies between 2018 and 2022 constitute the sample of the study. This study was conducted to measure the digital transformation awareness of the BIST 100 enterprises. The method of the study is content analysis technique, one of the qualitative analysis method, on the annual reports of the BIST 100 enterprises between 2018 and 2022. The analysis of the study was carried out in the Maxqda24 program. The tendency of the BIST 100 enterprises towards digital transformation has increased between 2018 and 2022.

### Keywords

Digital Transformation • BIST 100 enterprises • Strategic Management • Competition • Content Analysis.

### Jel Codes

M1, M15, M19

### Author Note

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## A Research On Digital Transformation Awareness: An Examination of Enterprises Operating in BIST 100

With the implementation of digital transformation, all sectors and many disciplines around the world are experiencing radical change (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2017). With digital transformation, businesses gain the ability to act independently from time and space by utilising smart applications, systems, products, and factories (Shamim et al., 2016; Zawadzki & Żywicki, 2016). With this gain, businesses gain new value and opportunities to be at the forefront of the competitive race (Westerman et al., 2015). The phenomenon of digital transformation overturns all the rules of the game with paradigm shifts, and businesses are thus forced to compete in unfamiliar areas (Lu, 2017; Götz & Jankowska, 2017). As a matter of fact, it is not possible for businesses that cannot keep up with paradigmatic change to survive (Calp & Doğan, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate digital transformation opportunities into businesses (Gruia et al., 2020).

Because of the literature review, the lack of distinction between digitalisation/digital technology/digital transformation phenomena has drawn attention. In addition to conceptual disagreements, digital transformation is not fully understood. Because of scientific research, different perspectives on digital transformation emerge. While one part views the digital transformation phenomenon as a transformation and revolutionary dimension, the other part expresses it as a new ERP study. This study aims to analyse semantic confusion and measure the awareness of digital transformation through the annual reports of 100 Borsa Istanbul companies operating in Turkey. Borsa 100 enterprises shed light on the vision of Turkey's economy. In other words, Turkey's leading businesses are listed among the BIST 100 and are among the businesses that use high levels of technology. Therefore, this research is initiated with the question of what is the awareness of the digital transformation phenomenon in Turkey. First, concepts/codings were revealed through a literature review. Then, activity reports from the last 5 years are compiled. The method of the research is qualitative research method. The study was conducted using content analysis and findings are obtained using Maxqda24 programme.

### Conceptual Framework

In the literature on digital transformation and digitalisation, definitions are often used interchangeably and cause confusion of meaning. When digital transformation is expressed, digital technology and digitalisation have the same meaning and are described as similar concepts. However, the concepts of digitalisation and digital transformation have different meanings. Digitalisation is the automation of processes using information technology tools (Horvath and Szabo, 2019; Ismail et al., 2017). Digital transformation is defined as the use of digital technologies and data to create new and more revenue, improve business positively, and change or transform business processes (Verina & Titko, 2019). Digitalisation essentially means taking analogue information and encoding it into zeros and ones so that computers can store, process and transmit such information (Lozic, 2019). Digital transformations are more advanced than digitalisation and are categorised at the next level associated with the term 'digitisation'. It is well known that digital transformation is not a new concept, but it has its roots in digitalisation (Henriette et al., 2015). Digital transformation, like digitalisation, has its roots in analogue and digital variants but is expressed as a more comprehensive transformation than digitalisation (Veldhoven & Vanthienen, 2022). Digital transformation is the digitalisation of all work within a business, the interconnectedness of all departments and the creation of value for customers by offering new products. (McGrath & Maiye, 2010; Vial, 2019).

There is no common approach to the question of what digital transformation is. Although some researchers consider digital transformation as a radical and evolutionary process that is necessary, another side is accepted as a new ERP study (Wang et al., 2016; Morakanyane et al., 2017). In general terms, digital transformation makes human, machine, and technology components dynamic and continuous by creating new opportunities and values in both technical and social fields using digital technologies (Teichert, 2019). Digital transformation changes expectations and the usual situation in economic life thanks to digital technologies. It focuses on data rather than physical products in the economy and creates new business models, new working conditions, and new employee status (Schwab, 2020). The industrial world is becoming digitalised and digital transformation is becoming necessary to meet the needs and expectations of people rather than being a technological opportunity (Kraus et al., 2022). To examine the definitions of digital transformation in the literature;

**Table 1***Digital Transformation of Definitions*

Authors	Digital Transformation of Definitions
Liu et al. 2011	Digital technologies affect enterprises' business execution processes.
Westerman et al., 2011	In digital transformation, businesses increase business efficiency and effectiveness by using the latest technology.
PWC, 2013	To achieve positive improvements in society and the economy by using new and modern technologies.
Piccinini et al., 2015	It is characterised by the use of new digital technologies to deliver business improvements. All economic sectors form a common network.
Bondar et al., 2017	Technological inventions that obtain data with human-machine interaction, establish connections with machine-device sensor applications, and provide associations over virtual networks
Hoffman and Rüşch, 2017	Using digital technologies allows integration across geographical borders by creating changes in the functions of products.
Sebastian, et al. 2017	Thanks to digital transformation, it is defined as the steps taken to progress faster, moving towards better and becoming more efficient.
Klein, 2019	The application of new technologies involves creating a network of all value-adding actors.
Schallmo et al. (2019)	This process aims to improve an asset by triggering significant changes through combinations of information, communication, and connectivity technologies.
Vial, 2019	Digital transformation is to become more efficient with the automation of all processes and to become interconnected with the digitalisation of all jobs.
Rof et al. (2020)	Creating value by using digital technologies.

Digital technologies affect daily work, ways of working, communication and consumer behaviour (Aral et al., 2013). Digital technologies do even more and meet personalised needs by connecting the virtual world with the real world. As a result, businesses experience the differentiation of rapidly changing demands (Henfridsson et al. 2014; Piccinini et al., 2015). New opportunities and values arise for businesses, society, and the economy following digital transformation. Thus, more innovative and modern technological advances have been achieved (Sanders et al., 2016). Businesses that benefit from the opportunities offered by digitalisation make great gains in determining the reasons for their existence and the place they dream of in the future (Shamim et al., 2016). Digital transformations easily reach the opportunities that businesses desire by offering opportunities to be faster, more efficient, and more effective (Lezzi et al., 2018).

Digital transformation has positive effects on businesses. These are; digital profitability, revenue increase, customer satisfaction, increased efficiency, convenience, faster speed, and the same high-quality technical standard, increased business agility, increased employee productivity, and a competitive advantage (Ezeokoli et al. 2016). Digital transformation creates new attitudes in leadership understanding, cultural situations, and ways of thinking about enterprises. With new technology, new working methods emerge, and the necessity of change is emphasised with the willingness to accept continuous change (Kane et al., 2015). According to the information obtained because of the research, businesses make progress at the point of working with higher performance and efficiency after implementing digital transformation (Mubarek et al., 2019). Businesses that implement digital transformation adapt to change faster, meet customer expectations more appropriately, and are better positioned to compete (Zaki, 2019). In order to survive and grow in the digital world, it is crucial for businesses to adopt and implement digital transformation (Joel et al., 2024). Digital transformation enables challenges between technology and management, new managerial problems and new tools that change the way in which businesses operate (Bresciani et al., 2018). Thanks to digital transformation, businesses gain new value by getting the chance to cooperate with customers and suppliers (Aithal, 2023). Digital transformation applications achieve innovative products and services by using Industry 4.0 technologies (Chandrasekaran et al., 2019). Digital transformation facilitates professionalisation and provides more guarantees through fully or partially automated processes; it also offers opportunities for greater business intelligence and customer-centric approaches (Rof et al., 2020). Digital transformation enables businesses to experience radical and disruptive developments in their operations (Demirel et al., 2018; Hoffman & Rüşch, 2017).

## Research Method

The importance, purpose, sample, and method of the research are analysed under this heading.

### Purpose of the Research

This study was carried out in order to evaluate the digital transformation phenomenon, which has caused significant transformations on a global scale, at the scale of Turkey. This study investigates the digital transformation phenomenon through the annual reports of 100 companies operating in Borsa, Istanbul.

### Sample of the Study

The annual reports of the BIST 100 enterprises, which shape the future of the Turkish economy and endeavour to create a vision, constitute the sample of the study. The annual reports provide information about the vision to be carried out by the enterprises. BIST enterprises with complete annual reports for the last 5 years (2018-2019-2020-2021-2022) constitute the sample.

### Method of the Research

The research was conducted using the qualitative research method. The content analysis method technique was used among qualitative research methods. The research starts with the formation of codings after a literature review of digital transformation. The five-year (2018-2022) annual reports of the BIST 100 enterprises were analysed through the 30 codings obtained. The literature support for the codings obtained because of the literature review is presented below:

With the emergence of Industry 4.0 application and smart factory concepts bring about radical transformations in the functioning of industries and are used together with digital transformation concepts (Dal

Mas et al., 2022). Digital transformation occurs with the use of information and communication technologies by creating new capabilities thanks to digital technologies (Kraus et al., 2021). Digital transformation is also referred to as the latest, disruptive, advanced, high, and modern technology in the literature (Rojko, 2017; Mubarek et al., 2019; Schwab, 2020). Digital transformation occurs with the integration of digital technologies such as cloud computing, big data analytics, artificial intelligence, cyber security, simulation, horizontal-vertical integration, cyber physical systems, three-dimensional printers, augmented reality, and the Internet of things (Ivančić et al., 2019; Kotler et al., 2019). Digital transformation is a process in which new processes emerge with the power of advanced technologies, and innovations are characterised by smart systems and smart businesses (OECD, 2018). Thanks to robotic processes, work within an organisation becomes faster and more efficient and is seen as the paradigm of digital transformation (Frank et al., 2019). With the advent of the Internet of Things, machine-device-sensor interaction occurs and human-machine interaction and human-robot interaction emerge (Lu, 2017). Virtualisation is seen as an important output of digitalisation and is included as the last coding (Görçün, 2017).

Table 2 presents a tabular representation of the literature support of thirty codings is presented:

**Table 2**

*Codings and literature Support*

Encodings	Literatur Support	Encodings	Literatur Support
<b>Smart Apps</b>	(Shamim et al., 2016)	<b>Virtual Reality</b>	(Tiwari and Khan, 2020)
<b>Digital Technology</b>	(Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2015)	<b>Augmented Reality</b>	(Ivančić et al., 2019)
<b>Cloud</b>	(Frank et al., 2019)	<b>Three-dimensional Printers</b>	(Machado, 2020)
<b>Robot</b>	(Tiwari and Khan, 2020)	<b>Big Data</b>	(McAfee and Brynjolfsson, 2018)
<b>Robotic Processes</b>	(Pereira and Romero, 2017)	<b>Industry 4.0 Application</b>	(Rojko, 2017; Dal Mas et al., 2022)
<b>Cyber Security</b>	(Kagerman et al., 2013)	<b>Artificial Intelligence</b>	(Davenport, 2018)
<b>Modern Technology</b>	(Schwab, 2020)	<b>Digital Transformation</b>	(Westerman et al., 2015)
<b>Latest Technology</b>	(Schwab, 2020)	<b>Digitalisation</b>	(Verina and Titko, 2019)
<b>Simulation</b>	(Roblek et al., 2016)	<b>Virtualisation</b>	(Görçün, 2017)
<b>Cyberphysical Systems</b>	(Saldivar et al., 2015)	<b>Intelligent Systems</b>	(Sanders et al., 2016)
<b>Internet of Things</b>	(Lu, 2017)	<b>Smart production applications</b>	(Lin et., 2018)
<b>Human Robot Communication</b>	(Lee and Lee, 2015)	<b>Smart Factory</b>	(Dal Mas et al., 2022)
<b>Human-Machine Interaction</b>	(Schwab and Davis, 2019)	<b>Smart Business</b>	(Shamim et al., 2016)
<b>Disruptive Technology</b>	(Schwab, 2020)	<b>Advanced Technology</b>	(Tiwari and Khan, 2020)
<b>High Technology</b>	(Mubarek et al., 2019)	<b>Reality</b>	(Ivančić et al., 2019)
<b>Advanced Technology</b>	(Mubarek et al., 2019)	<b>Virtual Reality</b>	(Machado, 2020)

## Findings and Discussion

The research analysed 30 codings on digital transformation in the 2018-2019-2020-2021-2022 annual reports of the BIST 100 companies. While analysing the study, Maxqda24 Analytics Pro programme was used. The findings of the analysis are presented below. The findings of the 2018 annual report content analysis are presented in Table 3:

**Table 3***Content Analysis in Annual Reports (Year 2018)*

	Frequency	Percentage
Digital Transformation	252	15,50
Digitalisation	238	14,64
Robotics Applications	146	8,98
Industry 4.0 Application	129	7,93
Smart Apps	118	7,26
Cyber Security	103	6,33
Cloud Computing	78	4,80
Artificial Intelligence	76	4,67
Simulation	56	3,44
High Technology	55	3,38

**Table 3** presents the 10 most frequently emphasised codings in the 2018 content analysis. According to the table, the most frequently repeated codes were digital transformation (252), digitalisation (238), and robotic applications (146). When the 2018 annual reports are analysed, it is concluded that Industry 4.0 applications and smart applications are the second most frequently repeated codings. Cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing coding are also frequently emphasised in the annual reports of the BIST 100 companies. The findings of the 2019 annual report content analysis are presented in **Table 4**:

**Table 4***Content Analysis in Annual Reports (Year 2019)*

	Frequency	Percentage
Smart Apps	278	16
Digitalisation	259	14,9
Digital Transformation	258	14,84
Robotics Applications	173	9,95
Cyber Security	142	8,17
Artificial Intelligence	91	5,24
Industry 4.0 Application	66	3,8
Simulation	60	3,45
Advanced Technology	57	3,28
Virtualisation	49	2,82

**Table 4** presents the most frequently emphasised codings in the content analysis of the BIST 100 enterprises in 2019. *Smart applications* (278) are the most emphasised coding. This was followed by *digitalisation* (259). In the third place is *digital transformation* (258). *Robotic applications* (173), *cyber security* (142), *simulation* (60), and *artificial intelligence* (91) codings are emphasised more frequently than in 2018, and their awareness is increasing further. Unlike 2018, *advanced technology* (57) and *virtualisation* (49) codings were emphasised more frequently. The findings of the content analysis of the 2020 annual reports are presented in **Table 5**:

**Table 5***Content Analysis in Annual Reports (Year 2020)*

	Frequency	Percentage
Smart Apps	531	19,8
Digitalisation	458	17,08
Digital Transformation	365	13,61
Cyber Security	240	8,95
Robot Applications	230	8,58
Cloud Computing	145	5,41
Artificial Intelligence	100	3,73
Big Data	91	3,39
Industry 4.0 Application	89	3,32
Simulation	63	2,35

In [Table 5](#), the coding with the highest increase was *smart applications* (531). This is a significant increase compared to the other two years. It was followed by *digitalisation* (458) and digital transformation (365). The most important feature that draws attention is that the frequencies of the first ten codings in the table are on the rise and the momentum of *artificial intelligence*, *cybersecuritysecurity* and *robotic applications* is on the rise. Another noteworthy point is that *big data* (91) coding was included for the first time. When we look at the 2020 annual reports of the BIST 100 enterprises, it is understood from both the number of frequencies and the percentage rates that there has been an increase in the total number of frequencies. The findings obtained because of the content analysis of 2021 annual reports are presented in [Table 6](#):

**Table 6***Content Analysis in Annual Reports (Year 2021)*

	Frequency	Percentage
Digitalization	608	21,41
Digital Transformation	459	16,16
Artificial Intelligence	287	10,11
Robot Applications	282	9,93
Augmented Reality	230	8,1
Cyber Security	222	7,82
Cloud Computing	144	5,07
Advanced Technology	79	2,78
Big Data	73	2,57
Industry 4.0 Application	67	2,36

[Table 6](#) presents the results of the content analysis of the annual reports of the BIST 100 companies for 2021. The most emphasised codings are shown in the table. *Digitalisation* ranks first with 608 codings. *Virtual reality* coding (230), which was not encountered in 2018-2019 and 2020, was encountered for the first time in this year. The frequencies of *digital transformation*, *artificial intelligence*, *robotic applications*, and *cybersecurity* coding are on the rise. The findings of the 2022 annual report content analysis are presented in [Table 7](#):

**Table 7***Content Analysis in Annual Reports (Year 2022)*

	Frequency	Percentage
Digitalisation	834	22,5
Smart Apps	557	15,03
Digital Transformation	460	12,41
Artificial Intelligence	302	8,15
Robotics Applications	272	7,34
Cyber Security	256	6,91
Virtualisation	225	6,07
Cloud Computing	177	4,78
Simulation	101	2,73
Digital Technology	80	2,16
High Technology	60	1,62

Table 7 presents the results of the content analysis of the annual reports of the BIST 100 companies for 2022. Because of the content analysis, the most emphasised coding terms are given in the table. The most emphasised coding was digitalisation coding with 834. Smart application coding ranks second. Because of the 2022 content analysis, digital technology coding was found to be among the most emphasised codings.

The content analysis findings of the annual reports for 2018-2019-2020-2021-2022 are presented. Because of these findings, it was deemed appropriate to make a comparison based on the total frequency. The question of whether there has been an increase in the total frequency of the BIST 100 enterprises from 2018 to 2022 is answered. In Figure 1, the total frequency of five years is evaluated:

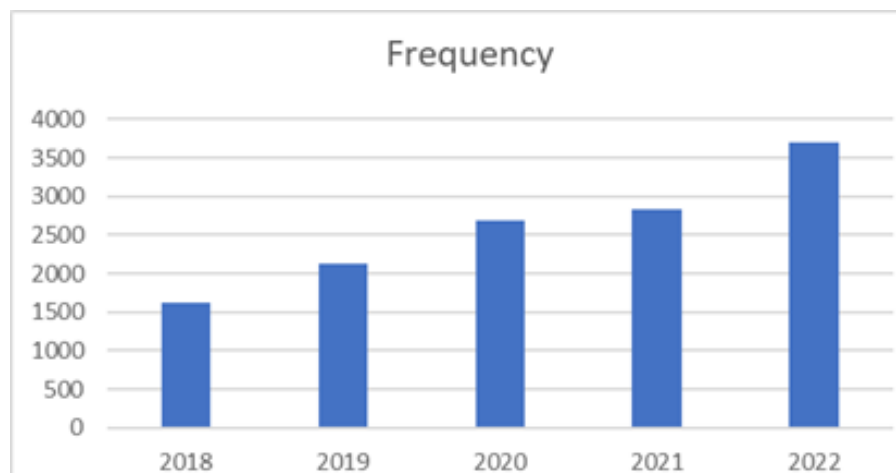
**Figure 1***Comparison Between Years*

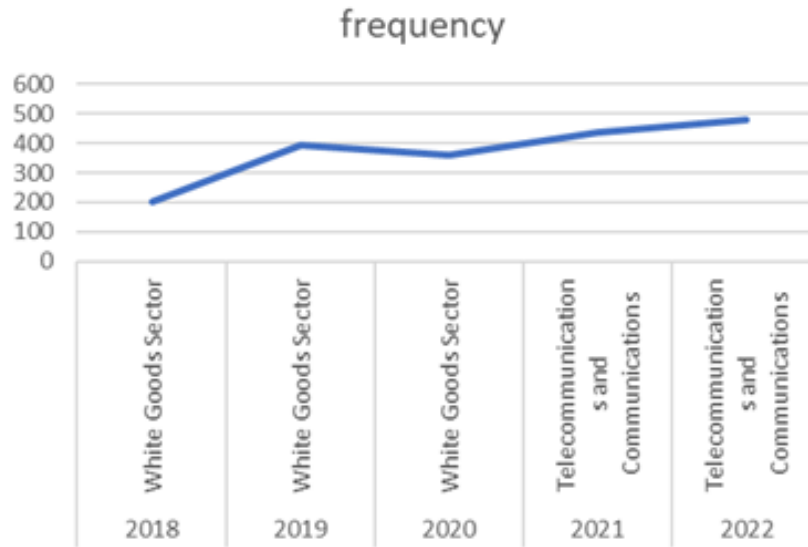
Figure 1 shows how often digital transformation codings are expressed in total in BIST 100 enterprises. In 2018, the total frequency of digital transformation codings of BIST 100 enterprises is 1626. In 2019, the total frequency of digital transformation codings of BIST 100 enterprises is 2130. In 2020, the total frequency of digital transformation coding of BIST 100 enterprises is 2682, in 2021, the frequency value of digital transformation coding of BIST 100 enterprises is 2840, and in 2022, the total frequency value of digital



transformation coding of BIST 100 enterprises is 3706. From 2018 to 2022, there is a vertical increase in total frequency. The frequency distribution of BIST 100 enterprises on digital transformation and digitalisation on sectoral basis between 2018-2022 is shown in Figure 2:

**Figure 2**

*Sectors with the Most Intensive Coding*



In Figure 2, an analysis was made on how often digital transformation codings were expressed in the 2018 annual reports of the BIST 100 enterprises. According to the result of this analysis, it was concluded that the sector in which digital transformation codings were expressed the most was the white goods sector. This is because it has the highest frequency value of 204. An analysis was made to determine how often digital transformation codings were expressed in the 2019 annual reports of BIST 100 enterprises. According to the result of this analysis, enterprises in the white goods sector were the most common, and the frequency value for 2019 was determined as 392. There was a significant increase in the frequency value compared to the previous year. An analysis was made to determine how often digital transformation codings were expressed in the 2020 annual reports of BIST 100 enterprises. According to the result of this analysis, enterprises in the white goods sector were the most common, and the frequency value for 2020 was determined as 362. An analysis was made to determine how often digital transformation codifications were mentioned in the annual reports of the BIST 100 enterprises in 2021. According to the result of this analysis, enterprises in the telecommunications and communication sector were the most common, and the frequency value was determined as 435. An analysis was made to determine how often digital transformation codings were mentioned in the annual reports of the BIST 100 enterprises in 2022. According to the result of this analysis, enterprises in the telecommunications and communication sector were the most common, and the frequency value was determined as 477.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

In the Third Wave, he discusses the revolutionary changes that societies have undergone: agricultural, industrial, and information societies. He states that there is a transition from agricultural society to industrial society and from industrial society to information society. In an information society, with increasingly strong information, the idea that more data provides more return is emphasised. The acceleration of tech-



nology and communication, which are among the important achievements of the last period, the increase in the amount of information and the possibility of producing value with more information have gained momentum with digital transformation applications. With the emergence of Industry 4.0 technologies—one of the important applications of the last period—the phenomenon of digital transformation emerges. Digital transformation contributes to enterprises' survival, competitiveness, and efficient activities. Rogers (2017) stated in his study that the rules of the game have changed in the competition race and that the way to keep up with this change is through digital transformation. Using digital transformation inventions in business activities is an essential strategy that provides many advantages when applied. Digital transformation awareness was measured by the BIST 100 enterprises that contribute to Turkey's economy and business vision. This study analyzes the five-year annual reports of the BIST 100 companies between 2018 and 2022.

Because of the findings obtained, one of the important outputs that attracted attention in 2018 is the information that there are studies on the digital transformation phenomenon in Turkey. Smart applications, Industry 4.0 applications, cyber security, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence coding are frequently expressed. Another output obtained in 2018 is its evaluation as a high technology. Because of the 2019 content analysis, coding for cyber security, simulation, artificial intelligence, and robotic applications codings are emphasised more frequently than in 2018. At the same time, advanced technology coding has emerged through virtualisation in 2019. Because of the 2020 content analysis, smart applications coding received the highest frequency, and big data coding received a high frequency for the first time as a result of this analysis. The most frequently emphasised codings are considered to be those with more awareness. Because of 2021 content analysis, digitalisation coding has the highest frequency percentage. Digital transformation and artificial intelligence coding are also frequently emphasised. Finally, when the content analysis results of 2022 are examined, the coding of digitalisation is the most emphasised. In this year, digital technology is being intensively emphasised for the first time. When the results of the analysis are evaluated from a general perspective, the coding of digitalisation is expressed intensively within five years. Subsequently, digital transformation coding is among the most frequently emphasised types of coding.


Considering the awareness of digital transformation, artificial intelligence, robotic coding, and cybersecurity technological inventions are intensely expressed. In this case, it is possible to highlight the awareness of the digital transformation phenomenon in Turkey. It is understood that there is a tendency towards artificial intelligence, robotic applications, and cybersecurity technological inventions in Turkey, and necessary training and studies on these technological inventions are important for the future.

The total frequency was obtained from the frequency values received by the codings determined via digital transformation. In terms of the results obtained, there was an increase in the frequency of digital transformation coding in the 100 Borsa Istanbul enterprises from 2018 to 2022. The concepts of digital transformation are being increasingly expressed in annual reports. Regarding the sectoral distribution, the digital transformation tendency is higher in the white good and telecommunications-communications sectors. The results of the analyses show that the telecommunications and communications sector has been on the rise in recent periods.

Finally, a study on the concepts of digital transformation through annual reports was conducted. This study is important in terms of filling the gap in the literature. The limitation of this study is that all enterprises in Turkey cannot be included in the sample. The study can be supported by a quantitative study and an in-depth exploration can be conducted by interviewing the managers of the BIST 100 enterprises.



Ethics Committee Approval	Ethics committee approval is not required for the study.
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### Research Article

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# The Effect of Climate on Quiet Quitting Behavior: A Study of Academics



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### Abstract

The concept of quiet quitting, which has recently been included in the organizational behavior literature, is defined as employees focusing on their work during legal working hours as determined by their employers and, not spending time on work-related issues outside of working hours. It is noteworthy that the phenomenon of “quiet quitting” considered an undesirable behavior in organizational settings, is observed among academicians. In this study, we investigate the prevalence of quiet quitting in academia. We determine the reasons that push academics to quiet their quitting behavior. We are also assessing the impact of psychological climate on quiet quitting behavior. Using data obtained from academics working in Turkey, we determine that the leading reasons that push academics to exhibit quiet quitting behavior are manager's attitudes and behaviors, organizational injustice, lack of time for academic publications, lack of motivation, and insufficient salary/additional benefits. We reveal a negative relationship between academics' psychological climate perceptions and quiet quitting behavior. We state that as psychological climate perceptions increase, academics' levels of quiet quitting behavior decrease. It was concluded that all subdimensions of psychological climate perceptions were negatively related to Quiet Quitting Behavior (QQB).

**Keywords** Quiet Quitting • Psychological Climate • Academics

**Jel Codes** M10, M12, M19



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## The Effect of Climate on Quiet Quitting Behavior: A Study of Academics

The COVID-19 pandemic, which originated in China in December 2019 and has affected the global community, has posed significant challenges in various areas, including the workplace. During the aforementioned period, there were disruptions in the activities carried out in many areas, and all sectors where goods and services were produced faced the negative effects of the pandemic. This situation has had negative effects on all employees, whose workload has increased and who are trying to fulfill their duties in uncertainty. Unfortunately, remote working has discouraged employees for some reasons, such as the inability to achieve work-life balance, inadequate infrastructure, and physical conditions (Ratel & Rietvelt, 2023). It is noteworthy that job dissatisfaction continues and becomes even more widespread among employees who return to their workplaces after the pandemic (Formica & Sfodera, 2022). It has also been observed that some employees do not refrain from expressing dissatisfaction with their jobs. The 17-second post of a user named Zaid Khan (2022) was watched by 3.6 million people on TikTok, a social media application. Khan's quiet quitting; He expressed it for the first time as follows: "You don't quit your job, you give up the idea of going further and further at work." Khan: "You still fulfill your duties, but you no longer have the hustle culture mentality that says work should be your life. The truth is that; your value as an individual is not determined by your labor." continued as follows. Therefore, it resulted in the emergence of the concept of "quiet quitting," (QQ), previously recognized in the field of business administration (Yıldız & Özmenekşe, 2022), but formally named for the first time. According to Mahand and Caldwell (2023), QQ is the name given to a behavior that was first used by Mark Boldger (Temel, 2022) to describe employees' lowest level of commitment to their jobs and has existed in work environments for a long time, although it is not labeled with this name.

Although the concept of "quitting" refers to employees leaving their jobs, it is seen that "QQ" does not mean employees leaving their jobs but, is defined as focusing on their work during the legal working hours determined by their employers and, not spending time on work-related issues outside of working hours (Yıkılmaz, 2022; Yıldız & Özmenekşe, 2022). QQ refers to the situation where employees only fulfill the duties assigned to them and do not undertake any duties that are not specified in their job descriptions, in other words, they do not consider going beyond their duties (Formica & Sfodera, 2022).

When the literature is examined, it is seen that quiet quitting behavior (QQB) in an organization depends on several factors. Arar et al., (2023) investigated the theoretical structure of QQB. Accordingly, QQ occurs for managerial/organizational and employee-related reasons. Saygılı & Avcı (2023) examined the relationship between leadership styles and QQ in their research. It has been concluded that overly task-oriented leaders who give employees excessive workload causes QQB in the organization. Avcı (2023), in his research, including 250 people from a local government enterprise; concluded that employees' perceptions of cynicism and quietness are related to QQB. Some studies have found relationships between QQ and generation differences. Hamilton et. al., (2023) investigated whether the tendency for 'quiet quitting' differs across generations. Accordingly, Generations Y and Z tend to show QQB more than others, many sectors have reduced working hours, and QQB levels increase as education levels increase. In their study in which they developed a scale on QQ, Anand et al., (2023) found that it is becoming increasingly common, especially among the new generation of employees, due to reasons such as burnout, worthlessness, and lack of motivation. In this context, it also reveals managerial behaviors that lead to QQ in the organization and draws attention to preventive activities. Karavelioğlu et al., (2023) found in their research that QQ is related to issues such as generation difference, burnout, mobbing, job satisfaction, commitment, and organizational

culture. Karayaman (2023) discussed QQ in the context of generation theory. According to the results of the research conducted with 1071 employees, significant relationships were found between generational differences and QQB.

Especially with the pandemic; factors such as remote working, the inability to maintain work-life balance, inadequate infrastructure-technology, and physical disabilities have changed employees' perceptions about their jobs (Ratel & Rietvelt, 2023). In other words, the perception of work-related psychological climate has changed, and it can be thought to trigger QQ, a negative behavior in the workplace. Because employees' individual perceptions of dissatisfaction with their jobs and workplaces are related to the psychological climate (Barkhi & Kao, 2011). QQ does not mean leaving the job for a job with better opportunities. It is a solution developed by employees to combat work-related burnout. Thus, the employee does not spare time for work-related issues (e-mails, phone calls, developing ideas for new projects, etc.) outside of working hours, does not see work as the center of their lives (Zenger & Folkman, 2022), and leaves the job as soon as the working hours end (Zhang & Rodrigue, 2023). Situations such as not valuing oneself in the workplace and not supporting participation; prevent the employee from interacting with the organization. Situations such as a lack of clear roles in the workplace, employment in tasks below their potential, and lack of career opportunities create insecurity. Employees who cannot express themselves may prefer to quietly quit a work environment that is not adequately supported by management (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Kahn, 1990; Katari et al., 2013). QQB can be observed in different professional groups. Teachers and academics are also included in these professional groups (Yılmaz et. al., 2024; Yücedağlar et. al., 2024). Studies have assumed that teachers and academics quietly quit their jobs because they cannot maintain a balance between their work and private lives (Memiş & Tabancalı, 2024). Lawless (2024) stated that the neoliberalization of HE and the imposition of a "do more with less mentality" have pushed academic staff to QQB.

It is now difficult to be an academic. In addition to the duties specified in their role descriptions, academics must simultaneously undertake many studies that will help them advance their careers. To meet the performance expectations of academics, they must work at a high level. This situation may cause academics to quit their jobs silently because they feel that they are losing their personal and family lives (Xueyun et al. 2024). Academics who participate in QQ exhibit behaviors such as not going beyond faculty services in their work, using educational materials without updating them, meeting with students only during working hours, and only dealing with the students they advise (Anderson, 2022; Vidra, 2022). This will lead to academic failure. Considering the extensive impact of the field of education on society, examining the impact of quiet quitting on higher education workers is of critical importance.

Based on this idea, this research tried to determine whether the psychological climate affects QQB. In the study, first, it was attempted to determine the perception of QQ in the academy. The aim was to reveal the effect of academics' psychological climate perceptions regarding working conditions on QQB. It is extremely important to reveal the factors affecting QQ as a concept in the literature, particularly to support its application in various fields. It is expected that evaluations made in terms of cause-effect relationships with more concrete reasons will contribute to the development of the concept at a greater level. Therefore, it can be considered an appropriate choice to investigate QQ in the scientific world because the perspective of the concept will be made more conscious. The results to be revealed in light of the findings obtained will make significant contributions to the literature. Thus, it is likely that various contributions will be made to the fields of organization development, strategic management, and organizational behavior to prevent QQ from being undesirable.

## Conceptual Framework, present study, model, and hypothesis

### Quiet Quitting

QQ develops as a reaction to the hustle culture (Temel, 2022). Employees who cannot leave their jobs for different reasons simply perform the jobs they expect. Thus, his reaction is to quietly quit the job and develop an alternative solution (Schayett, 2022; Morrison-Beedy, 2022). Do not complete a task that is not clearly stated in the job description and performs minimal effort for the job (Loewy & Spintge, 2022).

When the literature is examined, employees feel material, information, and emotional support positively (Suan et al., 2012; Zhang & Rodrigue, 2023). In their study on QQ, which Zhang and Rodrigue (2023) explained based on social exchange theory, the most important reasons that lead employees to QQ are; stating that they do not receive the support they expect from their managers and colleagues. In addition, failure to establish a meaningful relationship with their manager, their manager's prejudiced or inappropriate behavior, not being valued or appreciated by their manager (Zenger & Folkman, 2022), not supporting employees' career development or injustice in their career development, not being able to ensure employees' organizational commitment and organizational belonging, employees' reasons such as decreased trust in the organization and inability to provide employees with autonomy in matters related to their work (Mahand & Caldwell, 2023) can be listed as reasons that lead employees to QQ. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, employees who are forced to work at home due to the pandemic spend more time with their loved ones at home, and increased deaths lead employees to adopt the view that life is short and their work is not at the center of their lives, and that work-life balance is important; it has been a pioneer in their QQB (Loewy & Spintge, 2022).

Employees with QQ lose the motivation to do their best and the high level of performance that their organizations expect from them, and they tend to avoid working on projects beyond their role descriptions without reward incentives (Aydın & Azizoğlu, 2022). Employees who are reluctant to perform beyond their roles also limit their efforts at work to maintain work/life balance and protect their health in a busy work schedule (Mahand & Caldwell, 2023; Zhang & Rodrigue, 2023).

It is seen that healthcare workers, whose burnout and psychological distress increased, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, are considering quitting their jobs due to the dangerous working environment created by the pandemic and the fear of infection and infecting their families. It is predicted that the QQB of healthcare workers who have to work in the field may lead to medical errors and a decrease in the quality of patient care (Zhang & Rodrigue, 2023) due to legal reasons, such as rejection of these requests of employees (cancellation of leave, refusal to accept resignation, etc.) (Yılmaz & Işık, 2021). QQ, poor performance, and related loss of productivity exhibited by employees in almost all sectors (Mahand & Caldwell, 2023), preventing organizational sustainability, causing workplace laziness by spreading to other employees (Zhang & Rodrigue, 2023), new it can create negative effects such as failure to develop ideas. It is believed that these negative effects may have irreparable consequences in all business areas.

### Psychological Climate

Psychological climate includes employees' thoughts and perceptions about the work environment (Kataria, Garg & Rastogi, 2013). Psychological climate is sometimes confused with organizational climate, or one is used interchangeably. Essentially, these two concepts express different atmospheres in an organization. The concept of organizational climate describes the general climate observed and felt by all



employees of an organization (James & Jones, 1974). An organizational climate is distinguished from others by its culture and is spread interactively among employees (Hoy, 1990). Psychological climate refers to each employee's perceptions and evaluations of the organization (James & Jones, 1974). Therefore, while organizational climate describes the organizational climate adopted by a group of employees, psychological climate refers to the climate adopted individually (Argon & Limon, 2017). The perceived psychological climate in the organization reflects employee job satisfaction and satisfaction. In a sense, organizational climate affects psychological climate (Barkhi & Kao, 2011).

The psychological climate is based on Lewin's (1936) concept of "living space", which is based on individual motivations and feelings to make sense of individuals' reactions to change (Parker et. al.\*, 2003). However, the concept of psychological climate is grounded in cognitive social learning theory and interactional psychology (James et al., 1978). At the same time, climate theory prioritizes individuality (Barkhi & Kao, 2011). For this reason, James argued that a stronger perception climate can emerge when individual perceptions and thoughts come together (James, 1982; Barkhi & Kao, 2011). In other words, if the psychological climate converges, it creates an organizational climate. In line with the theories in question, psychological climate reflects the following characteristics (James et al., 1978).

- It reflects individual perceptions and evaluations rather than the effects of situations in the organizational climate on other employees.
- It emerges depending on the individual experiences of the employees.
- It is as subjective as an individual.
- As employee experience increases, their learning about the organization increases and they adapt more.
- Therefore, it is related to organizational behavior, feelings, and perceptions.

Jones and James (1979) discuss the psychological climate in 6 factors: Conflict and Uncertainty, Job Difficulty, Leader Support, Collaboration, Professional and Organizational Spirit, Friendship, and Sincerity. James and James (1989) study, psychological climate; was examined in four lower dimensions "role stress and incompatibility", "job difficulty and autonomy", "facilitation and support of the leader", "workgroup cooperation, friendship and sincerity". Koys and Decotiis (1991) defined psychological climate as; it was examined in 8 factors: "autonomy", "trust", "commitment", "pressure", "support", "recognition", "justice" and "innovation". These studies shed light on Brown and Leigh's (1996) research and revealed the psychological climate in 6 factors: "contribution", "recognition", "challenge", "role clarity", "supportive management" and "self-expression". The psychological climate deals with employees' integration with or isolation from the organization (Kahn, 1990).

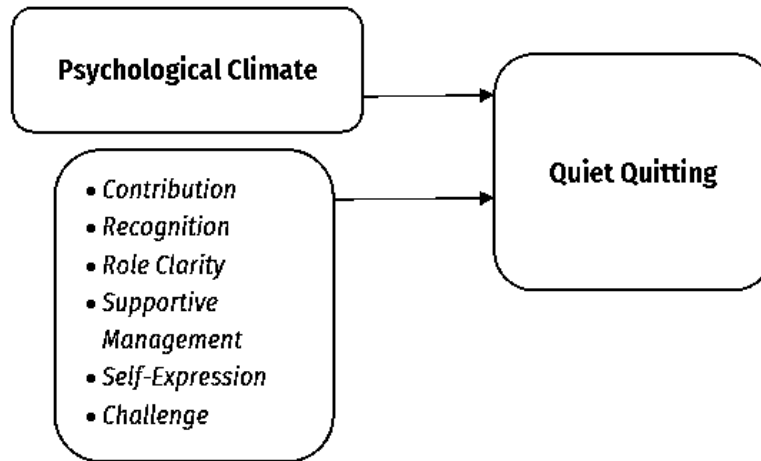
The contribution factor denotes the interaction of employees with organizational activities and their impact on them (Brown and Leigh, 1996). The employee feels psychologically positive due to the contributions he or she makes to the organization. The recognition factor refers to the recognition and acceptance of the employee's character and professional abilities. This also ensures that the employee efforts and contributions are appreciated. The challenge is to take risks in tasks without fear of the manager's reaction, despite the difficulty of the job. The role clarity factor pertains to an employee's capability to define his/her job responsibilities within the scope of his/her abilities. It is welcome to assign employees to an organization according to their abilities (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Supportive management requires providing the necessary working conditions to employee despite difficulties. Therefore, it is important to improve the working environment, provide physical conditions, and support the creative work environment. Self-express-

sion means that, under these positive conditions, an employee feels safe at work and can use opportunities for personal and professional development (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Kahn, 1990; Katari et al., 2013).

### The present study, model, and hypothesis

Following the literature review, a model hypothesizing the relationship between psychological climate and QQ behavior (QQB) among academicians was developed and presented in Figure 1, assuming that psychological climate influences QQB.

**Figure 1**  
Relationship between QQ and psychological climate.



In line with the hypothetical model in Figure 1, the following research question was addressed, and then hypotheses\* were proposed:

*Research Question 1:* How and in what direction is the relationship between psychological climate perception and QQB?

- H<sub>1</sub>: Psychological climate perception will be related to QQB.
- H<sub>1a</sub>: Contribution will be related to QQB.
- H<sub>1b</sub>: Recognition is related to QQB.
- H<sub>1c</sub>: Role Clarity is related to QQB.
- H<sub>1d</sub>: Supportive management is related to QQB.
- H<sub>1e</sub>: Self-expression is related to QQB.
- H<sub>1f</sub>: The challenge is related to QQB.

*Research Question 2:* What are the reasons that push academics toward QQB?

## Method

### Data Set, Procedure, and Ethics

The research population comprises academics from both public and private universities in Türkiye. Data were collected using a survey method. The survey link was created through Google Forms and, distributed to academics via email and social media networks. Data collection occurred between March and April 2024, yielding responses from 216 academics, which were subsequently analyzed. According to the Council of

Higher Education, there will be a total of 184.021 academics in Türkiye as of 2024 (YOK, 2024). The research population comprises academics from both public and private universities in Türkiye. Data were collected using a survey method. The survey link was created through Google Forms and, distributed to academics via email and social media networks. Data collection occurred between March and April 2024, yielding responses from 216 academics, which were subsequently analyzed.

In the study, 53.7% (n=116) of the participants were women and 46.3% (n=100) were men; 56.9% (n=123) were between the ages of 22-41, 43.1% (n=93) were between the ages of 42-57; 81% (n=175) were doctoral graduates; 19% (n=41) had a master's degree. 91.2% (n=197) work at a state university and 8.8% (n=19) work at a private university.

In addition, ethical permission was obtained for the study with the decision of \*Artvin \*Çoruh\* \*University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board dated 20.02.2024 and numbered E-126514.

## Measures

**Psychological Climate:** To measure academics' psychological climate perceptions, the psychological climate scale developed by Brown and Leigh (1996) was used, consisting of 21 items and six dimensions (contribution, recognition, role clarity, supportive management, and self-expression). Cronbach's alpha values of the scale are contribution .78-.71; recognition .76-.70; role clarity .78-.76; supportive management .83-.85, and self-expression .83-.73. Because of the literature review, the five-point Likert scale was widely used. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Özek (2014). It has been observed that in many studies where the scale was used, it was generally used as a single dimension (Biswas, 2010; Balogun et al., 2013; Güler & Taşlıyan, 2022). Argon and Limon (2017) translated the four dimensions into Turkish as 19 expressions in their study. In the Turkish adaptation of the scale and the research conducted, it was seen that it was used as structures with different factors (single factor or four factors), independent of the original. To eliminate inconsistencies in the factor structure of the scale, exploratory factor analysis was performed. The analysis results before factor analysis (*Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic* = 0.853; *Bartlett test*  $\chi^2 = 1912.999$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) revealed that our data were suitable for factor analysis. According to the Kaiser (1960) criterion, the analysis results showed five factors explaining 48% of the variances (see Table 1). After removing the statements in the original scale but with a factor loading below .30 and the statements in more than one factor, the research hypotheses were analyzed based on the structure consisting of 15 statements and five factors in the final case.

**Table 1**

*Factor Analysis: Five-Factor Outcome*

Variables and Items	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue
<b>Self-Expression</b>		<b>6.567</b>
I feel free to be completely myself at work.	1.026	
The feelings I Express at work are my true feelings.	.624	
It is okay to express my true feelings in this job.	.485	
<b>Role Clarity</b>		<b>2.064</b>
Management makes it perfectly clear how my job is to be done.	.764	
The amount of responsibility and effort expected in my job is clearly defined.	.743	
The norms of performance in my department are well understood and communicated.	.697	
<b>Contribution</b>		<b>1.668</b>

Variables and Items	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue
Doing my job really makes a difference.	.806	
The work I do is very valuable to the organization.	.575	
I feel very useful in my job.	.474	
<b>Supportive Management</b>		<b>1.333</b>
My boss gives me the authority to do my job as I see fit.	.771	
My manager supports my ideas and ways of getting things done.	.719	
My boss is flexible in how I accomplish my job objectives.	.710	
I can trust my boss to support me in making decisions in the field.	.653	
<b>Recognition</b>		<b>1.172</b>
My superiors generally appreciate the way I do my job.	.568	
The organization recognizes the significance of my contributions.	.403	
<i>The eigenvalues, scree plots, and maximum-likelihood estimation results (available upon request) all supported a five-factor model.</i>		

**Quiet Quitting:** The scale developed by Anand et. al., (2023) was used to determine academicians' QQ levels. The scale consists of 7 statements and a single dimension. The Cronbach's alpha reliability value of the scale, which is rated using a 5-point Likert scale, was .829. The scale was used as a single factor in its original form. Because of the reliability analysis performed on the data, the Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale was found to be .822.

Five-point Likert-type scaling was used for all scales. Based on the formula  $4/5=0.80$ , 1.00-1.79 is considered quite low, 1.80-2.59 is considered low, 2.60 - 3.39 is medium, 3.40-4.19 is high and 4.20-5.00 is considered quite high.

"Why do academics exhibit QQB?" To find an answer to the problem, an open-ended question (*for example motivation, mobbing, organizational injustice, insufficient salary/additional rights, inadequate career opportunities, injustice in career development, lack of motivation, low job satisfaction, perceived job stress, etc. (Arar, 2023)*) was asked, which included statements obtained as a result of the literature review and allowed people to choose more than one option.

**Control variables:** We controlled for employee characteristics, including gender, age, and education.

Before analyzing the research hypotheses, normality and reliability analyses of the data were conducted. SPSS software was used for the analyses. The skewness value of QQB is .057, the kurtosis value is .504, Cronbach's Alpha value is .822; The skewness value of the psychological climate is .295, the kurtosis value is .161, and the Cronbach's alpha value is .780. The results demonstrate that the data are distributed normally and are reliable (See [Table 2](#)).

Multiple response analysis was carried out on the data that appeared to have a normal distribution to determine the reasons that pushed academicians to QQB. Frequency analysis was carried out on academic QQ levels and psychological climate perceptions. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between academics' QQB and their psychological climate perceptions. A simple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the effect level of the relationship between variables.

## Results

### Descriptive statistics and correlations

Descriptive statistics and correlation values related to quiet quitting, psychological climate, contribution, recognition, role clarity, supportive management, and self-expression are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Summary Statistics And Correlation Analysis (N=216)*

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. QQ ( $\alpha=.822$ )	2.83	.844	-.057	-.504							
2. Psych. Clim. ( $\alpha=.780$ )	3.05	.558	-.295	-.161	-.372**						
3. Contribution ( $\alpha=.672$ )	2.41	.956	.441	-.327	-.501**	-.063					
4. Recognition ( $\alpha=.618$ )	3.54	.893	-.545	.324	-.387**	.502**	-.342**				
5. Role Clarity ( $\alpha=.862$ )	3.07	.988	-.241	-.544	-.301**	.759**	-.224**	.311**			
6. Supportive Man. ( $\alpha=.883$ )	3.16	.956	-.494	-.329	-.458**	.851**	-.355**	.430**	.574**		
7. Self-Exp. ( $\alpha=.801$ )	3.22	.938	-.450	-.363	-.434**	.768**	-.272**	.296**	.458**	.658**	

\*\* $p<.001$

As shown in Table 2, academics QQB and psychological climate perception levels are at medium levels. Because of the correlation analysis, it is seen that academicians' psychological climate perceptions are negatively significantly related to QQB ( $r=-.372$ ;  $p<.01$ ). In addition, it was concluded that all subdimensions of psychological climate perceptions were negative and significantly related to QQB. According to the correlation analysis results, hypotheses  $H_{1, 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e}$  were accepted.

As a result of the correlation analysis, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the level of effect of psychological climate on QQB in the negative and statistically significant relationship between academics' psychological climate perceptions and QQB.

**Table 3**

*Regression Model of the Effect of Psychological Climate on QQB*

Model Summary						
Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error in Estimate		
1	.372 <sup>a</sup>	.138	.134	.78511		
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model	Sum of Squa.	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Regression	21.206	1	21.206	34.402	.000 <sup>b</sup>	
Residual	131.909	214	.616			
Total	153.114	215				
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model	Unstd. Coefficients		Std. Coefficients		t	Sig.

	$\beta$	Std. Error	Beta		
1 Constant	4.548	.298		15.279	.000
Psychological Climate	-.562	.096	-.372	-5.865	.000
a. Dependent Variable: QQ					

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, the  $R^2$  value is .138, which indicates the strength of the relationship found in the correlation analysis. The table indicates that psychological climate perception explains approximately 14% of the variance of QQB. The significance columns in the ANOVA and coefficients section indicate, that the model and the independent variable, psychological climate, are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level. When we look at the coefficient part, we see that the constant value of the equation is 4.548, and the coefficient of psychological climate perception is -.562. In other words, each unit increase in psychological climate perception leads to a.562 decrease in quiet quitting.

Academics were asked, "What are the factors that lead you to engage in QQB?" We asked a question with multiple options. The percentage of multiple answers to the question is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Reasons for Pushing Academics to QQB*

	N	Percentage (%)
My manager's attitude and behavior	91	<b>8,6%</b>
Characteristic features of my manager	48	4,5%
Mobbing	52	4,9%
Micro/biased management approach	52	4,9%
Not enough time for academic publications	79	<b>7,4%</b>
No time for career development	58	5,5%
Organizational injustice	87	<b>8,2%</b>
Insufficient salary or additional rights	75	<b>7,0%</b>
Insufficient career opportunities	50	4,7%
Injustices in career development	72	<b>6,8%</b>
Lack of motivation	78	<b>7,3%</b>
My colleagues who exhibit this behavior	24	2,3%
Low job satisfaction	56	5,3%
Perceived job stress	46	4,3%
High-course load	53	5,0%
Unfair course distribution	37	3,5%
Person-job fit	14	1,3%
Inability to establish work-life balance	28	2,6%
This situation does not define me	64	6,0%
	<b>1064</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

Note: Since more than one option can be selected in this question, the number N exceeds the sample size.

As shown in Table 4, the leading reasons that push academics to exhibit QQB are the manager's attitudes and behaviors, organizational injustices, injustices in career development, lack of time for academic publications, lack of motivation, and insufficient salary/additional benefits.

## Conclusion and Discussion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, negative effects have emerged in business life in many areas. During the pandemic, it has been observed that the work-life balance of employees has been disrupted, and working conditions (especially in areas where the fight against the pandemic is most closely exhibited, such as the health sector) have become increasingly difficult (Boy & Sürmeli, 2023). Although the pandemic has made working conditions difficult, it involves a critical process that changes the perspective on work. This study aims to contribute to the under-researched field of the causes and effects of the concept by supporting it with quantitative research, examining the existence of QQ as an undesirable behavior in the organization in the academy, its reasons, the antecedents and consequences of quiet quitting, and whether the findings overlap with the literature.

Because of this research, it was determined that there is a negative relationship between academics' psychological climate perceptions and QQB. At the same time, it was concluded that all subdimensions of psychological climate perceptions were negatively related to QQB.

According to the research results, the perception of psychological climate affects QQB. Each unit's increase in psychological climate perception decreases quiet quitting. It is supported in the relevant literature that factors related to negative psychological climate affect quiet quitting. In his study, Lawless (2023) discussed QQB in academia. He stated that insufficient wages, staff insecurities, and failure to protect various rights against intense labor in the academy caused QQB. In the academy, breaking resistance to neoliberalization and improving unionization are seen as solutions. In another study, Soren and Ryff (2023) discussed the concept of decent working conditions and QQ. Negative feelings toward the workplace; it affects QQB by increasing insecurity, worthlessness, and work stress. Therefore, he argued that a decent work environment for employees plays a critical role in employee positive behavior in the workplace. Atalay and Dağıstan (2023) revealed that QQB is related to phenomena such as motivation, commitment, and citizenship that affect organizational climate.

According to the research results, the most obvious reasons that push academics to QQB are; the manager's attitude and behavior, organizational injustice, injustices in career development, lack of time for academic publications, lack of motivation, and insufficient salary/additional benefits. When the literature on the subject is examined, the factors that cause QQ are observed to be similar. Batista et al. (2024) identified, lack of career advancement, organizational commitment deterioration, and burnout as the main reasons for quitting. In their study, Formica and Sfodera (2022) emphasized that employees' perspectives on work and life have changed, especially after the global pandemic, and stated that working conditions, lack of work-life balance, and insufficient wages affect negative behaviors in the workplace. In the "Global Workforce of the Future" report of Adecco Group (2022), research conducted in 25 countries on quiet quitting; He stated that situations such as low wages, lack of career opportunities, and insufficient organizational support cause quiet quitting. Ulep (2023) interviewed 418 employees from different sectors. The study revealed that more than half of the participants' QQ were due to reasons such as insufficient salary, excessive workload, social security problems, poor communication, lack of career opportunities, and burnout. In his research, Johnson (2023) revealed that a lack of education, job dissatisfaction, and communication problems cause QQB in an organization. In his research, Serenko (2023) concluded that low motivation levels and burnout among employees affect QQB.

## Contribution to research

It is thought that the fact that the research was conducted among academics made an important contribution. The evaluation of scientists' perspectives on the issue increases the level of contribution to the solving the problem.

Lu et al., (2023) found in their study of academics that the global pandemic increased insecurity and dissatisfaction at work, and that situations such as burnout, excessive workload, and insufficient wages affected quiet quitting. Lawless (2023) stated that insufficient wages, staff insecurity, and failure to protect various rights lead to academics' QQB. Similar results were obtained in other studies conducted in the academy.

Two important factors that lead employees to QQ in an organization are identified. The first is the inability to maintain a work-life balance after the pandemic. Second Generation Z starts their business life (Öztürk et al., 2023). Serenko (2024) stated that quiet quitting, which is increasingly spreading in business life after the COVID-19 pandemic, has emerged as an issue that cannot be ignored. It is emphasized that it is expressed more particularly concerning the increasing role of Generation Z in business life (Serenko, 2024; Mirviz, 2023). Pevac (2023), in his literature review on the reasons for QQ in the organization; states that factors such as poor communication, job dissatisfaction, inadequacy in career opportunities, and failure to create a strong organizational culture increase employee turnover by reducing productivity and job quality. In parallel with this, Formica and Sfodera (2022) stated that dissatisfaction with working conditions causes negative feelings toward work. As can be seen, negative communication, job dissatisfaction, inadequate job opportunities, economic dissatisfaction, and the inability to establish a work-life balance create a negative organizational climate.

Our research results overlap with previous studies on the subject. Supporting the psychological climate in an organization prevent undesirable employee behaviors. Therefore, ways to improve the psychological climate in the organization should be sought.

## Practical Implications

By understanding the concept of QQ, which is a new concept in the organizational behavior literature, and obtaining more solid data on its antecedents and consequences, valuable suggestions are offered for employers to combat QQ problems in organizations.

Hamouche et al., (2023) stated on the tourism sector that QQ can be observed after behaviors such as cynicism and quiet. Therefore, QQ signals in an organization can be prevented by anticipating them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed business life, causing mental and psychological stress, especially for those who have difficulty managing work-life balance due to working from home (Liu, 2023). This process shows that the awareness of responsibility in business culture and employment contracts needs to be reviewed in detail once again (Yıldız & Özmenekşe, 2022; McPhail et al., 2024; Rowley, 2023). Because the existence or failure to prevent undesirable behaviors in an organization prevents achievement of goals. It has been stated that employees with negative job perceptions also negatively affect the emotions of other employees (Demirkaya et al., 2023). Boy and Sürmeli (2023) found that the incidence of QQB was higher among healthcare workers than among other sectors. It is observed that employees exhibit QQB for reasons such as excessive workload, inability to socialize, failure to meet wage expectations, anxiety, and burnout. Çimen & Yılmaz (2023) drew attention to preventive activities regarding QQ in their study. For this purpose, it



recommends measuring employee expectations and developing activities to increase job satisfaction. The study also emphasizes that QQ and its precursors change organizational culture. Galanis et al. (2023) found that burnout affected quiet quitting among nurses. In addition, job satisfaction reduces QQB. Therefore, different measures and suggestions should be developed for different sectors.

Healthy and safe work environments need to be created so that employees can re-motivate and focus on their work. It is important to direct employees' time outside of work to various activities so that they can have fun and socialize. In this way, employees can avoid stress and regulate their work-life balance. An employee who feels psychologically comfortable can be prevented from turning to QQB (Çalışkan, 2023). In their research to determine the relationship between employee commitment and quiet quitting, Nordgren and Björs (2023) found that there are significant relationships between low organizational commitment and quiet quitting. Boz et al., (2023) developed a scale; it was determined that the issues of lack of communication, commitment, organizational citizenship, and distrust were associated with quiet quitting. In their research on working mothers, Zhang and Rodrugie (2023) revealed that employees who had problems with maternity leave or could not get enough leave were more likely to exhibit QQB. The research emphasized that it is possible to prevent QQB in an organization thanks to a positive psychological climate in every sector and job.

## Limitations

There are some limitations to this research. The restrictions in question are the conduct of the research in Türkiye, the time limit, the statements of the participants in the research, and the area where it was conducted. For this reason, researchers are advised to conduct research in different countries.

Additionally, in the field of organizational behavior, studies can be conducted to determine whether employees engage in QQB and how their motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance are affected by QQB.



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### Research Article

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# Effect of the Glass Ceiling on Women Academicians in Public Relations Education to Managerial Positions



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### Abstract

Public relations assume a managerial role in communication between institutions and their target audiences and are increasingly valued daily. Women play an important role in the formation of this value. In the literature review, studies were found that have investigated the status of women in the public relations profession and have observed that the number of women working in this field is higher than that of men; however, this number is not the same ratio for women in senior management. The present study aims to determine the ratio of female to male academics working in the public relations and publicity and public relations advertising departments of state and foundation universities in Turkey and determine their roles and ratios in management. The numerical data used in the present study was obtained from the academic staff information on the “YÖK (CoHE) Atlas” and university websites in January 2025 and evaluated using content analysis. There are undergraduate public relations departments in 43 state and 34 foundation universities in Turkey in which 293 male and 451 female academics work. Of the female academics, 11 were appointed as rectors, 57 as vice-rectors, 32 as deans, and 56 as vice-deans. The research and these data show that female academics have an important role in public relations education, although they do not equally share senior management positions with men, and that the glass ceiling syndrome continues to affect their career advancement in public relations education. This study can provide guidance for universities to develop policies on gender equality in academic leadership roles and reflect these policies in institutional practices.

### Keywords


Public relations • female academics in public relations education • women’s place in management in public relations education • glass ceiling • glass ceiling in public relations

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## Effect of the Glass Ceiling on Women Academicians in Public Relations Education to Managerial Positions

Individuals have a profession based on various factors, such as ensuring their livelihood, realising themselves in line with their goals, and benefiting society. Studies have often reported that biological sex also has an impact on selecting a profession (Hoştut, 2020, p. 252).

In all societies around the world, there are different social roles assigned to men and women. These roles have the ability to shape, direct and control the behavior of individuals. These roles, which indicate the responsibilities of women and men in society and how they should behave with various sociocultural elements, are defined by society and expect individuals to behave in accordance with the gender role. Gender roles, which begin to be learned in the womb, continue to develop within the socialization process of the individual (Saraç, 2013: 27). According to this role definition, women are defined as sensitive, emotional and compassionate, helpful, altruistic and dependent, while men are expected to be competitive, success-oriented, individualistic, rational and independent. Although there are different approaches to this expectation, women and men exhibit personality traits that accept these roles over time. In the context of gender, non-administrative tasks in the service sector such as care services, housework, nursing, teaching, public relations are considered appropriate for women and these professions are characterized as women's professions (Elmasoğlu, 2015: 59).

Thus, women are commonly involved in the teaching profession and academics in business life as well (Poyraz, 2013, p. 1; Kaplan et al., 2020, p. 43); however, the maternal responsibilities of women play an important role in career planning and recruitment. Having to choose between their jobs and plans to start a family lead to a variety of emotional conflicts and, as a result, it is very common for women to become unmotivated in and unsatisfied with their careers. Another issue for women is the expectation that women should focus on family life instead of balancing work and family (Akbulut, 2011, p. 54; Poyraz, 2013, p. 2; Şahin & Acar Şentürk, 2020, pp. 356–357). Several studies have examined the work and private lives of female academics and shown that they have great difficulty that is generally the result of family responsibilities, especially during their doctoral studies and, accordingly, they are prevented from taking higher positions. In contrast, the issues that male academics have are generally due to the institutions they work for, in other words, outside of family responsibilities (Kaplan et al., 2020, p. 44; Suğur & Cangöz, 2016, p. 97; Yıldız et al., 2022, p. 318).

The number of women academics working at universities in Turkey is increasing day by day. However, women academics face inequality based on gender roles in finding a place in administrative positions (Yerlikaya Yaran, 2024: 560–561; Halifeoğlu, 2020: 175; Öztan & Doğan, 2015: 214–215). This is also true for women academics working in public relations (Öksüz & Görpe, 2014: 137).

Turkey has a dynamic socio-cultural structure where traditional gender roles are intertwined with academic structures. The structural barriers that women academics face in their career development provide a unique context for understanding the glass ceiling phenomenon in Turkey. In addition, although the representation of women in higher education has increased in recent years in Turkey, the fact that this increase is not reflected in senior management positions creates a remarkable area of inequality.



Considering the data within the scope of the present study, the number of female academics working in the field of public relations is quite high; however, there are more men than women in this field, especially in higher managerial positions. This ratio stems from the various missions and responsibilities imposed on women by professional environments and society. This approach makes Turkey an important place to research gender inequalities in academia. This is one of the main reasons why Turkey was chosen as the sample for this study.

The literature review has shown that although various studies have been conducted on the presence of female employees in the public relations profession, few have examined the status of female academics in management positions in public relations education. This gap in the literature indicates that despite the high number of women working as academics in that field, the proportion of them in high management positions, such as rector, vice-rector, dean, and vice-dean, is lower than that of men. The present study was conducted to provide information on the “glass ceiling” that has been perceived for many years and to draw attention to the discrepancies to help provide suggestions to resolve the issues presented.

### **Female Academics in Public Relations and Management**

After the Industrial Revolution, the concepts of production and employment gained different meanings in society, which has led to a change in social structure. Accordingly, societal changes have occurred in the perception of institutions and individuals, and it has become necessary for institutions to establish a means by which communication with individuals and society can be effective based on mutual good will, benefit, and understanding and can benefit from public relations practices.

Public relations is defined as the process by which a programmed activity is strategically prepared and implemented for various purposes, such as managing the communication between an institution and its target audiences within the framework of good will and mutual understanding, resolving existing or potential issues, informing the public and soliciting their opinions and suggesting and supporting new ideas, determining the trends in society regarding the institution in advance, and informing the managers of the institution about these trends (Healy, 1995, p. 17; Grunig, 2005, 15; Asna, 2012, p. 17; Okay & Okay, 2013, p. 10; Geçikli, 2019, p. 3; Ergin Çağatay, 2024, p. 109). Public interest, ethics, and two-way communication are the foundations of public relations.

Public relations, which some consider a science and some an art, has become an exclusive profession. Although this profession attracts both men and women, the majority of those working in this field are women. Studies conducted at different times in different countries, such as the United States, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada, and Germany, have reported that women outnumber men in public relations jobs (Aldoory & Toth, 2002, p. 104; Hon et al., 2005, p. 442; Verhoeven & Aarts, 2010, p. 1; Tanyıldızı, 2011, pp. 76–77; Deren van Het Hof & Hoştut, 2016, p. 102).

The number of women working in public relations in Turkey and around the world is high and continues to increase. Various assumptions have been put forward about the high number of women working in public relations. Among these assumptions; women's need for positive discrimination, women's way of thinking being different from men, being detailed, friendly and hospitable, hardworking and meticulous, and the creation of new commercial policies for women (Aldoory & Toth, 2002: 105; Tanyıldızı, 2011: 77; Öksüz & Görpe, 2014: 137; Elmasoğlu, 2015: 62 Ertem Eray & Aslan, 2019: 161). In addition, as a result of the decrease in the wages of those working in the field of public relations in the 1970s-1980s, the number of female employees in the field of public relations increased as men working in the sector preferred different managerial positions

where they could earn higher wages. In addition, flexible working hours in the field of public relations, facing less sexist obstacles compared to other fields of work, and women being more successful in jobs that require social skills and persuasion are seen as effective factors in women's orientation towards public relations (Elmasoğlu, 2015: 62; Ertem Eray & Aslan, 2019: 155; Shahrul et al. 2021: 174). According to another study, women working in the field of public relations in Turkey.

A 1980 study conducted by Broom, who is considered to be the pioneer of the studies on the subject, determined the roles of men and women working in public relations and reported that men have more managerial positions than women. Previous studies have emphasized that women working in public relations generally assume the role of technicians (Sha & Toth, 2005; Tanyıldızı, 2011, p. 75), and according to Gersh, this is mainly because women are characterized by some as ineffective managers by their nature (Hon et al., 2005, p. 445).

Scrimger (1985) conducted a study to determine the salaries of women working in the field of public relations in Canada. The study has also evaluated the perceptions and experiences of men and women working as public relations practitioners from different studies conducted in the field, as well as the job opportunities of men and women in public relations and how public relations practitioners would be evaluated in the coming years in terms of biological sex and profession (Hon et al., 2005, p. 444; Sha & Toth, 2005; Tanyıldızı, 2011, p. 75).

In 1986, the International Association of Business Communication prepared a research report entitled *The Velvet Ghetto: The Impact of the Increasing Percentage of Women in Public Relations and Business Communication (Velvet Ghetto)*, which brought the place and role of women in public relations to the table and examined it in detail for the first time. The report revealed the changes and transformations that took place in the field of public relations and business communication in the United States between the 1970s and mid-1980s (Deren von Het Hof & Hoştut, 2016, p. 102). According to the report, the field of public relations and business communication was on its way to becoming a low-paid and low-prestige profession because of the high number of women working in this field, despite that women and men are similar in terms of education and skills in the fields of teaching, nursing, and librarianship. When the *Velvet Ghetto* was published, 80% of the employees working in public relations and business communications were women. Toth, who prepared the report, stated that this rapid increase in the number of women working in public relations and communication would lead to a situation in which salaries would rapidly decrease, men would leave the profession for better positions, and the work area would shift away from the managerial positions believed to be required in the organisation to technical positions (Mall, 1986; Hon et al., 2005, pp. 444–445; Deren von Het Hof & Hoştut, 2016, p. 102).

The study entitled *Beyond the Velvet Ghetto* (1989), which was conducted following the *Velvet Ghetto*, also found that inequality between men and women in the field of public relations continues to exist in terms of salary differences, recruitment, and promotions (Hon et al. 2005, p. 446; Deren von Het Hof & Hoştut, 2016, p. 102).

As Tanyıldızı (2011) has pointed out, there are few studies that have examined the place of women in the public relations profession in Turkey. Although various studies have been conducted on the subject after 2011, it can be argued that these are insufficient when considering the persistence of the glass ceiling problem in managerial positions for women. Specifically, there are few studies that have investigated the role of female academics in public relations education and management. Based on the literature review,



the main studies on women in the public relations profession and women in public relations education not only in Turkey but throughout the world are presented below.

In the study entitled *Gender Discrepancies in a Gendered Profession: A Developing Theory for Public Relations*, Aldoory and Toth (2002) debated on some of the theories that explain the persistent sex differences in recruitment, salary, and wage perceptions, and promotions in the field of public relations through literature review and various studies. Tanyıldızı (2011) examined similar issues and concluded that the majority of women working in public relations in Turkey are satisfied with their jobs and do not believe that men have better conditions in terms of salary or career.

Sha and Toth (2005) have investigated how future public relations practitioners would be perceived in terms of work and sex issues in their study entitled *Future Professionals' Perceptions of Work, Life, and Gender Issues in Public Relations*. They have emphasized the importance of providing public relations students with the necessary equipment to deal with such issues during the education process.

Alsager (2008) has examined the experiences of Bahraini women working in public relations using a qualitative approach and found the existence of various challenges when working in that field, including cultural marginalization, collegiality, social pressure, and marginalization of public relations. The study recommends that Bahraini women use their personality traits, communication behaviors, and management styles; combined liberal and radical feminist strategies; and social and organisational reforms to improve their roles in public relations.

Verhoeven and Aarts (2010) have investigated the influence and perceptions of men and women working in public relations in European countries and found that the profession is practiced mostly by women. Deren von Het Hof & Hoştut (2016) have conducted a similar study entitled *Pink Ghetto: Corporate Communication Managers in Turkey* in which they examined sex-based discrimination and the feminization of the profession in Turkey. Based on their research on BIST10 companies and LinkedIn, they have found that 69% of those working in public relations in Turkey are women.

In a master's thesis entitled *Attitudes of University Students Studying Public Relations Toward Women Being Managers in the Field of Public Relations: The Effects of Gender and Gender Role Orientation*, Turan (2014) found that male students, specifically those who were studying at state universities, had a negative view of women becoming managers in the field of public relations.

Öksüz & Görpe (2014) have conducted interviews with female academics, practitioners, and representatives of professional organisations working in the field of public relations in Turkey. Based on numerical data, they have assessed the role of women in this profession and how they have been treated in this regard.

In their qualitative study, Şahin and Acar Şentürk (2020) addressed the sex-related issues experienced by women working in the field of public relations and advertising and found that women were often exposed to sex discrimination. Kaplan et al. (2020) have conducted a similar study and evaluated the impact of male and female identities on the academic environment and studies and offered various solutions on the subject.

In recent years, various studies investigating the problems experienced by women working in the field of public relations have obtained various results regarding the problems women face in issues such as gender inequality, promotion, and wages.

Mirela P. & Mirela H. (2020), *Women in Public Relations in Croatia*, in their study on the problems faced by women working in the field of public relations in Croatia, stated that women mostly complained about long working hours, having to work intensively both at home and at work, and the glass ceiling obstacle in

reaching management positions. In a similar study conducted by Meng & Neill (2021), it is explained that women in public relations are exposed to gender inequality in leadership positions and which questions should be answered to solve this problem. The study emphasizes that mentoring and support networks are vital for women public relations professionals to reach leadership positions.

Martínez-Fierro & Lechuga Sancho (2021), in their study titled *Descriptive Elements and Conceptual Structure of Glass Ceiling Research*, state that women are generally exposed to sexist discrimination in business life and public relations, as well as experiencing various negativities when they reach managerial positions, and that the reason for these negativities is the stereotype that disproportionately affects women.

Topic &Tench (2021), *Women in Public Relations: A Thematic Analysis of ECM Data (2009-2019)*, in their bibliometric analysis, found that although women outnumber men in the communication and public relations sector, they are still disadvantaged in various issues such as glass ceiling, wage gap, sexism and discrimination. In a similar study, Jiménez-Marín et al. (2022), *Advertising and Public Relations Degrees: Profiles and The Glass Ceiling in The Spanish Labour Market*, Jiménez-Marín et al. (2022), who conducted a similar study, stated that although the number of women working in public relations and advertising in Spain is higher than men, 90% of management positions are occupied by men and women are subjected to gender discrimination in this regard.

Grabowski (2023) examined the book *The Future of Feminism in Public Relations and Strategic Communication: A Socio-Ecological Model of Influences* (2021), written by Aldoory & Toth, and stated that it is a study that examines research on public relations and strategic communication from a feminist perspective and that this book can be a good guide to better understand the obstacles faced by women working in this field. In this book, Aldoory and Toth state that the number of women working in the field of public relations is high, but they are subjected to various discriminations in terms of salary, promotion, and the balance between family and work life.

Shahrul et al. (2021), *Women Influence Practical Role of Public Relations in Iskandar Malasia Region*, in their study conducted in Alexandria Malaysia, stated that women working in the public relations sector are not subjected to sexist discrimination, but generally work in the role of technicians rather than managers, while Wright (2021), *Re-examining the Existence of the "Velvet Ghetto" and the "Glass Ceiling" Examining the Status of American Women in Public Relations A Generation Later*, reviewed the studies investigating the problems of women working in public relations and stated that although the situation of women working in public relations has not been perfect in recent years, there has been an improvement compared to the past, but there is still work to be done on this issue. Cueto & Pedrosa (2024), in their study *Public Relations and Startups in Andalusia: Analysis of Their Activity with a Gender Perspective*, found a similar situation in their research on women entrepreneurship in the provinces of Malaga and Seville in Spain. The researchers found that while women working in public relations are not subject to gender inequality as much as they used to be, encouraging women who have achieved significant success in entrepreneurship and public relations to take on communication leadership and managerial roles would increase entrepreneurship and diversity.

Even when considering that >40 years have passed, women still have various issues in being assigned to senior management within this field. The literature review conducted within the scope of the present study yielded similar results.

Based on the literature review, no study has been identified that examined the proportion of female academics working in public relations education in Turkey in positions such as rector, vice-rector, dean, and vice-dean. Within this context, the present study was conducted to fill this gap. The aim of the study is to

determine with concrete data how women academics working in the field of public relations have gained a place in management positions and to put forward various suggestions to eliminate gender inequality.

### **Glass Ceiling Syndrome in the Management of Public Relations Education**

Women experience some difficulties such as sex inequality, stereotyped cultural and moral values within society, inequalities in education, and inability to rise to higher management positions in their professions while they meet both their domestic and professional responsibilities (White & Özkanlı, 2010, p. 4; Poyraz, 2013, p. 4, pp. 14–15; Adak, 2018, p. 32; Oğan & Wolff, 2020, p. 220; Çubuk & Erol, 2023, p. 186). This is a worldwide issue that has been widely discussed. One of the main obstacles for women to participate in senior management within their organisations is the perception of the glass ceiling (Tahtaloğlu, 2016, p. 91; Suğur & Cangöz, 2016, p. 94; Korkmaz, 2016, p. 97; Babic & Hansez, 2021, p. 8; Çubuk & Erol, 2023, p. 186).

The concept of the glass ceiling, which emerged in the 1970s throughout literature on management in the USA, is defined as invisible and artificial barriers created by organisational prejudices and stereotypes that prevent women from reaching top management positions (White & Özkanlı, 2011; Özyer & Azizoğlu, 2014, p. 96; Korkmaz, 2016, p. 104; Öztürk, 2017, p. 9; van Veelen & Derks, 2022, p. 3; Çubuk & Erol, 2023, p. 186). The glass ceiling metaphor refers to a barrier that is difficult to detect and limits the opportunities to climb the career ladder, especially for women (van Veelen & Derks, 2022, p. 3; Javarof & Kamiloğlu, 2022, p. 1495, Tekindal et al., 2023, p. 152).

Studies have found a direct relationship between the glass ceiling and job satisfaction and the intent to leave the job. Female managers who discover the presence of the glass ceiling at work are less satisfied with their jobs and more likely to quit. The glass ceiling also undermines an individual's personal attributes such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism, as well as their energies (e.g., knowledge and money). Women who face such discrimination are disadvantaged in terms of job choice, salary, and prestige. The perception of the glass ceiling prevents women from seeking and achieving promotions and reduces their ability to form bonds and support structures for their own careers. In addition, women internalize the negative evaluations and stereotypes of those in the majority, causing them to limit themselves and reject opportunities for career advancement for fear that they will not succeed (Ilgen & Youtz, 1986; Babic & Hansez, 2021, pp. 8–9).

According to Kelly and Young (1993, p. 23–29), the causes of the glass ceiling syndrome are as follows:

- women's working life is interrupted from time to time, especially during motherhood.
- women are employed in areas such as public relations and human resources where they have less chance of promotion.
- higher management applies discrimination policy in hiring and promoting women; and
- women are given missions at the social level (Korkmaz, 2016, p. 97; Babic & Hansez, 2021, p. 3–4).

There are 181.498 academic staff who work at universities in Turkey. 97.291 are male, and 84.207 are female, in other words, female academics make up 46.40%. Of the female academics working at universities in Turkey, 12.296 are professors (34.30%), 9.947 are associate professors (41.80%), and 20.728 are faculty members with a PhD (47.40%). The number of female research assistants and female lecturers is higher than that of men, with 42.350 research assistants at the universities. Of these, 22.792 are women (53.80%). Likewise, among 35.776 lecturers, 18.444 are women (51.60%). ([www.yok.gov.tr/](http://www.yok.gov.tr/) 2024, Access date: January 30, 2025).



The number of female academics working in universities is high; however, this does not mean they do not face the glass ceiling obstacle. The representative rate of female academics, especially in university administration, is quite low (Suğur & Cangöz, 2016, p. 9; Hoştut, 2020, p. 264).

The number of women working in the fields of public relations and publicity, public relations, and advertising is higher than that of men; however, men are given priority in management positions and promotions (Şahin & Acar Şentürk, 2020, p. 329, 344; Kaplan et al., 2020, p. 57–58). This approach can give the perception that the glass ceiling culture continues within the dimension of female academics working in public relations education.

## Methods and Material

### Aim and Importance of the Study

The aim of the present study is to examine the number of female academics working in high management positions, such as rector, vice-rector, dean, and vice-dean in universities, and faculties that provide undergraduate education in public relations and publicity, public relations, and advertising majors in state and foundation universities and to determine how the glass ceiling syndrome affects this number. The study is authentic because it compared the number of female academics working in the field of public relations in senior management positions compared with that of men. According to a literature search, a similar study has not been conducted; therefore, the present study is important in terms of being the basis for future studies on this subject.

### Methods

The present study is conducted based on a literature review and analyses of secondary data. Academic staff lists published on the websites of the faculties and universities that have public relations and publicity, public relations, and advertising undergraduate departments in the state and public universities included in the 2024 “YÖK (CoHE) Atlas” preference guide were examined in January 2025. Higher Education Program Atlas, starting from the preparation phase of YKS (Higher Education Institutions Examination), aims to support candidates to make more “informed decisions” while making university and profession choices. It is a system developed by YÖK. Thanks to this system, it is possible to have information on various subjects such as the scores of those who are placed in undergraduate and associate degree programs of universities, their success ranks, YKS scores, the high schools they come from, the regions they come from; lecturers in the program, foreign students, Erasmus programs of universities ([www.osym.gov.tr](http://www.osym.gov.tr), Access Date: 29.03.2025). The number of female academics and administrators working in these faculties was then determined, and tables were created and evaluated using content analysis (CA). CA is used to transform into numerical data of what is said by people on a subject in scientific studies, written in printed media, or as digital media, and is one of the prominent techniques among research methods within the scope of the social sciences. It is a flexible method that combines both qualitative and quantitative analyses that allow the systematic examination of data obtained from mass media (Alanka, 2024, pp. 69–70; Kaplan et al., 2020, p. 46).

Content analysis technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods and frequently used in the fields of social sciences such as communication, media, history, psychology, sociology, etc., provides the opportunity to analyze the content of visual, audio and written sources in a systematic way and thus to obtain in-depth information about the subjects. Content analysis, which offers an important perspective in better understanding media content and determining its impact on society, also provides the opportunity to

evaluate the quality of media content. With content analysis, it is easier to evaluate which topics are covered more in the media, how the topics are handled, and what the effects of the topics are (Alanka, 2024: 78-79).

In this study, the content analysis method was preferred because it allows for the systematic identification of implicit meanings, themes and discourses in written texts. While methods such as surveys and qualitative interviews provide data based on individual experiences, content analysis makes it possible to reach a broader structural pattern through existing literature and documents. In this way, social and institutional patterns regarding the representation of women academics in public relations management can be analyzed more comprehensively. Considering all these features, it was thought that using the content analysis technique in this study would be more effective in understanding the study.

The data obtained within the scope of the present study are subjected to comprehensive and systematic analyses. Frequency distributions of the data and percentage values related to these distributions were calculated using Microsoft Excel. When calculating the percentages of management roles, the number of female managers was multiplied by 100 in Excel and divided by the total number of managers, and the exact results were written as they were, while the incomplete results were indicated as only two digits after the comma.

## Research Questions

RQ1. What is the number and ratio of female and male academics working in the field of public relations in universities?

RQ2. What is the ratio of female academics working in the field of public relations in universities to those working in senior management positions such as deanship and vice-deanship, rectorate and vice-rectorate?

RQ3. What is the most important problem faced by women academics working at universities in Turkey?

## Study Population and Sample

The population of the study was the universities in Turkey with public relations and publicity, public relations, and advertising departments that provide undergraduate education, which were included in the 2024 “YÖK Atlas” preference guide. There were 77 state and foundation universities with these departments, which is why a separate sample was not taken, and the entire population was used.

## Limitations of the Study

This research was conducted within the framework of the current personnel information on the YÖK Atlas and the websites of universities. However, there is a possibility that additions or deletions may be made in the YÖK Atlas regarding the presence of public relations and publicity, public relations and advertising departments in the preference list in the coming years and that universities may have made changes in their personnel policies and staff assignments after the research. These possibilities constitute the limitation of the study in terms of data source.

## Results

**Table 1**

*Number of Academics and Administrators Working in the Public Relations, Publicity, and Advertising Departments of Universities in Turkey in 2024*

University Type	Rector		Vice-Rector		Dean		Vice-dean		Academics	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
State	40	3	111	17	31	12	56	24	191	220
Foundation	26	8	27	50	14	20	18	32	102	231
Total	66	11	138	57	45	32	74	56	293	451
Percentage	85,71	14,29	70,76	29,24	58,44	41,56	57	43	39,38	60,62

**Source:** The researcher (Hacer Hande Ergin Çağatay) created this table within the framework of the information obtained from the websites of the universities.

As of January 2025, the number of female academics in public universities was higher than that of male academics. There were 191 (46.50%) male and 220 (53.50%) female academics in state universities; foundation universities employed 102 (30.63%) male and 231 (69.36%) female academics. The number of female academics working at foundation universities was more than twice that of male academics.

There were 744 academics, 293 of whom were men and 451 of whom were women, working at state and foundation universities. The percentages of male and female academics were ~40 and 60%, respectively.

Based on these numbers, the number of female academics teaching in the undergraduate departments of public relations and publicity and public relations and relations and publicity advertising was higher than that of male academics, a result in line with the perception that there were more women working in the public relations profession worldwide.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of Female Academics Working in Managerial Positions at State Universities*

Sequence Number	University	Rector	Vice-Rector		Dean	Vice-dean	
			1 F**	2 F		1 F	2 F
1	Akdeniz	X	X		X	X	
2	Anadolu		X			X	
3	Ankara		X			X	
4	Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli		X			X	
5	Atatürk		X			X	
6	Aydın Adnan Menderes				X		
7	Bandırma 17 Eylül		X		X		
8	Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart		X		X	X	
9	Ege			X			X
10	Fırat						X
11	Giresun		X				
12	Gümüşhane				X		
13	İstanbul			X			
14	Manisa Celal Bayar	X			X		

Sequence Number	University	Rector	Vice-Rector	Dean	Vice-dean		
15	Munzur		X				
16	Kocaeli		X	X	X		
17	Karabük		X				
18	Samsun On Dokuz Mayıs	X		X	X		
19	Selçuk		X	X	X		
20	Süleyman Demirel				X		
21	Trakya		X				
22	Yozgat Bozok			X	X		
23	Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit			X	X		
24	Erciyes				X		
25	Sivas Cumhuriyet				X		
26	Hatay Mustafa Kemal				X		
27	Necmettin Erbakan				X		
28	Sakarya				X		
29	Pamukkale				X		
30	Niğde Ömer Halis Demir					X	
	Total	3	13	4	11	18	6

**Source:** The researcher (Hacer Hande Ergin Çağatay) created this table within the framework of the information obtained from the websites of the universities.

**Table 3**

*Number and Ratio of Female and Male Academics in Management Positions in Public Relations, Publicity, and Advertising Departments at State Universities*

	Rector		Vice-Rector		Dean		Vice-dean	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Number</b>	3	40	17	111	12	30	24	56
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>6,98%</b>	<b>93,02%</b>	<b>13,30%</b>	<b>86,70%</b>	<b>28,50%</b>	<b>71,50%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>70%</b>

**Source:** The researcher (Hacer Hande Ergin Çağatay) created this table within the framework of the information obtained from the websites of the universities.

Of the 43 public universities in the study sample, 15 did not employ female academics in the rector, vice-rector, dean, and vice-dean positions. This is more than one-third of the 43 universities. Only 3 of these universities had a female rector; the other 40 had a male rector (93,02% and 6,98%, respectively).

An evaluation of public universities with the highest number of female academics on the administrative staff shows that one of the rectors, vice-rectors, deans, and vice-deans is a woman at Akdeniz University. The rector, dean, and one of the vice-deans are women at Samsun On Dokuz Mayıs University. One vice-rector, dean, and one vice-dean are women at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. The rector and dean are women at Manisa Celal Bayar University. One vice-rector, one dean, and one vice-dean are women at Selçuk University. One vice-rector and one dean are women at Bandırma On Yedi Eylül University. One vice-rector is a woman at Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli and at Anadolu universities. The dean and one of the vice-deans are women at Yozgat Bozok, Kocaeli, and Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit universities. One of the vice-rectors is a

woman at four of the state universities and one of the vice-deans of the faculties where there are public relations and publicity and public relations and advertising departments is a woman in 18 state universities. In three, two of the vice-deans are women. Female academics are included in only one of the administrative staff at 12 universities.

Considering the number of vice-rectors working in state universities, most men stood out at 111 (86.70%) with only 17 female academics. Two of the vice-rectors at the Ege and Istanbul universities were women. Apart from this, a vice-rector in the 13 state universities was a woman. The Vice Rectors of 28 of the state universities in the sample are male.

There were 30 male and 12 female academics working as deans in the public relations and publicity, public relations, and advertising departments at the state universities. Of these, 71.50% of the deans were male and 28.50% were female academics.

**Table 4**

*Distribution of Female Academicians Working in Managerial Positions by Foundation Universities*

Sequence No	University	Rector	Vice-Rector		Dean	Vice-dean	
			1 F	2 F		1 F	2 F
1	Atılım						X
2	Ankara Medipol					X	
3	Bahçeşehir	X					
4	İstanbul Arel			X		X	
5	İstanbul Aydın		X			X	
6	İstanbul Medipol		X				
7	İstanbul Topkapı		X				X
8	İzmir Ekonomi			X			X
9	Başkent		X		X	X	
10	Beykoz				X		X
11	Çankaya				X		
12	Doğu Akdeniz		X				
13	Fenerbahçe	X	X		X		
14	Girne Amerikan		X		X		
15	İstanbul Beykent		X		X	X	
16	İstanbul Bilgi		X		X		X
17	İstanbul Galata	X	X		X		
18	İstanbul Gelişim		X		X	X	
19	İstanbul Kent				X		



Sequence No	University	Rector	Vice-Rector	Dean	Vice-dean
20	İstanbul Nişantaşı	X	X	X	X
21	İstanbul Okan	X	X	X	X
22	İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl		X	X	X
23	İstinye		X	X	
24	Kadir Has	X	X		X
25	Lefke Avrupa		X	X	X
26	Maltepe	X		X	X
27	Uluslararası Kıbrıs			X	X
28	Üsküdar	X	X	X	
29	Yaşar		X	X	X
30	Yeditepe			X	X
Total		8	18	8	20
					1
					14

**Source:** The researcher (Hacer Hande Ergin Çağatay) created this table within the framework of the information obtained from the websites of the universities.

Table 4 shows that 8 (23,50%) of the 34 foundation universities had female rectors. All foundation universities with a female rector were in Istanbul and 4 out of 34 had no female academics in any administrative position.

The number of men as vice-vector was higher with 50 (65%) men and 27 (35%) women. One of the rectors, deans, and vice-deans was a woman at Istanbul Nişantaşı, Istanbul Okan, and Maltepe universities, respectively. In addition, one of the vice-rectors at Istanbul Okan University was a woman. Qualitative or quantitative studies can examine whether the rector, dean, and vice-dean of the same university being a woman indicates that the glass ceiling syndrome had been relatively overcome at this university. In addition, it can be investigated how the rector being a woman had an effect on the appointment of women as deans and vice-deans.

In foundation universities in Turkey, 20 female and 14 male academics serve as deans. The rate of female academics serving as deans is approximately 59%.

There are 18 (36%) male and 32 (64%) female vice-deans in foundation universities in Turkey. The number of female academics in the positions of vice-dean and dean is high in these universities. Studies should examine whether this is a result of the high number of female academics working in the field of public relations or whether female academics play a more active role in management.

**Table 5**

*Numbers and Percentages of Female and Male Academics in Management Positions in the Fields of Public Relations, Publicity, and Advertising at Foundation Universities*

	Rector		Vice-Rector		Dean		Vice-dean	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Number</b>	8	26	27	50	20	14	32	18
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>23,5%</b>	<b>76,5%</b>	<b>35,06 %</b>	<b>64,94 %</b>	<b>58,82%</b>	<b>41,18%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>36%</b>

**Source:** The researcher (Hacer Hande Ergin Çağatay) created this table within the framework of the information obtained from the websites of the universities.

**Table 6**

*Number and Titles of Female and Male Academics in Public Relations, Publicity, and Public Relations and Advertising Departments in 2012*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
Professor	21	15	36
Associate Professor	37	22	59
Assistant Professor	72	35	107
Instructor	18	12	30
Research Assistant	52	30	82
Other (Expert, lecturer)	3	3	6
Total	229	127	356

**Source:** Görpe et al., 2012; Cited by: Öksüz & Görpe, 2014.

**Table 7**

*Number and Titles of Female and Male Academics in Public Relations, Publicity, and Advertising Departments in Turkey in 2024*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
Professor	47	54	101
Associate Professor	152	112	264
Assistant Professor	142	50	192
Instructor*			
Research Assistant	86	74	160
Other (Specialist, lecturer)	22	14	36
Total	449	304	753

**Source:** The researcher (Hacer Hande Ergin Çağatay) created this table within the framework of the information obtained from the websites of the universities. \*The title of Assistant Professor was abolished on June 3, 2018 ([www.memurlar.net](http://www.memurlar.net)). In some universities, the titles of Doctor Faculty Member and Faculty Member, PhD are intertwined in this table; therefore, the number of instructors was not specified but was counted within the Doctor Faculty Member.

Compared to the table in the study by Öksüz & Görpe (2014), it is possible to claim that the number of academics in the field of public relations has increased >200% in the past 10 years. Although this increase was in all fields, such as professors, associate professors, faculty members with PhD degrees, research assistants, and specialists, there was a significant increase, especially in the number of associate professors. This can be considered as approximately four times the number of female academics in 2012. There were more than eight times more academics with the title of associate professor than in 2012. Comparing the

2012 table with the 2024 data, the number of female academics working in the field of public relations has increased by ~200%. The number of male academics has also increased; however, the number of female academics remains higher. Despite this increase, it is still striking that female academics are not sufficiently assigned to management positions. According to the literature review, studies on female academics working in the field of public relations in previous years are limited, and no table showing the place data on female academics working in this field in management was found; therefore, no chance to compare the data with that of 2024. The table created in the present study can be taken as a basis for future studies so that different research and comparisons can be made on the subject.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The number of women working in the public relations profession and the problems they face have long been the subject of various worldwide studies. These various studies have addressed several issues, such as sex discrimination against women in the field of public relations, salary inequality, and the lack of opportunities to advance to senior positions within management (Broom, 1980; Mall, 1986; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Sha & Toth, 2005; Hon et al., 2005; Alsager, 2008; Verhoeven & Aarts, 2010; Tanyıldızı, 2011; Turan, 2014; Öksüz & Görpe, 2014; Deren von Het Hof & Hoştut, 2016; Şahin & Acar Şentürk, 2020). In addition, although there is a high number of women in this profession, the ratio remains low compared to the number of men, especially in senior management positions.

In their study, van Veelen & Derks (2022) have found that the number of women in higher education in the social sciences has increased rapidly in recent years and sex equality has been achieved; however, this is not the case in the natural sciences, technology, and economics fields. It has been shown that women working as academics in these fields have a higher perception of the glass ceiling. In addition, there are fewer women academics in senior management positions in both the social and natural sciences, technology, and economics fields. Awareness of the issue and the legality of discrimination should be raised to ensure fairness for all in employment. Solutions to the problem should be developed by investigating what motivates individuals to break the glass ceiling (van Veelen & Derks, 2022, p. 28).

The present study has determined the number of female academics and their ratio to male academics working in undergraduate public relations and publicity or public relations and public relations and advertising departments in various faculties of state and foundation universities in Turkey. The universities are included in the "YÖK Atlas", which comprises the university preference list for 2024. The study also analyzed within the framework of numerical data whether the rectors and vice-rectors of the same universities and the deans and vice-deans of the faculties (Communication, Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, or Business) with these departments are women or men and whether these positions are generally held by male academics within the framework of the glass ceiling. Within the scope of the research, answers to the following questions were sought.

RQ1. What is the number and ratio of female and male academics working in the field of public relations in universities?

RQ2. What is the ratio of female academics working in the field of public relations in universities to those working in senior management positions such as deanship and vice-deanship, rectorate and vice-rectorate?

RQ3. What is the most important problem faced by women academics working at universities in Turkey?

RQ1. What is the number and ratio of female and male academics working in the field of public relations in universities?

Within the framework of the data obtained from the university websites in January 2025, 744 academics—293 male and 451 female—were working at state and foundation universities. The ratios of male and female academics were ~ 40 and 60%, respectively.

Examining these data, the number of female academics teaching in the undergraduate departments of public relations and publicity and public relations and advertising was higher than that of male academics, in line with the perception that there are more women working in the public relations profession worldwide. There is a 20% difference between them; however, it is not possible to suggest that there is no sex discrimination when it comes to senior management positions, such as rector, vice-rector, dean, and vice-dean, in universities in Turkey. The tables show that although the proportion of female academics was quite high, especially in public universities in Turkey, the proportion changed in favor of male academics in the positions of the rector, vice-rector, dean, and vice-dean.

RQ2. What is the ratio of female academics working in the field of public relations in universities to those working in senior management positions such as deanship and vice-deanship, rectorate and vice-rectorate?

Of the 43 state universities that have public relations and publicity and advertising departments at the undergraduate level, women were rectors at only 3 of them. These data show that women were still exposed to the social barrier of the glass ceiling in these positions, which are considered the highest management positions in the universities. Looking at the number of vice-rectors working in state universities, the majority of them (87%) were men (male  $n = 111$ , female  $n = 17$ ). Two of the vice-rectors at Ege and Istanbul universities are women. Apart from this, one of the vice-rectors in 12 state universities was a woman. Males held the vice-rector position in the other 29 state universities.

There are 30 male and 12 female academics serving as deans in the faculties of state universities with public relations and publicity, public relations, public relations and advertising departments. In state universities, 72% of male and 28% of female academics are deans. When this ratio is compared with the total number of academics, it is observed that male academics are more involved in managerial positions. The universities in which female academics are appointed as deans are generally located in the west and central parts of Turkey. Gümüşhane University, in Gümüşhane, a city in the east of Ankara, is the only university with a female dean of the communication faculty. This raises the question of whether the perception of the glass ceiling is higher as we move regionally to the east of the country. In the 43 state universities, there are 56 (70%) male vice-deans and 24 (30%) female vice-deans. Within the framework of CA, in some faculties, the position of vice-dean is shared with one female and one male academic, while in others, both vice-deans are male. Only in Ege, Fırat, and Niğde Ömer Halis Demir Universities are women the vice-deans of the relevant faculty; the deans of the same faculties are men.

Of the foundation universities, 4 out of 34 have no female academics in any administrative position but only 8 (23.50%) of these universities have a female rector. All of these are located in Istanbul, which suggests that there is a glass ceiling perception in foundation universities founded in other cities. The ratio of the number of men in the vice-rectorship positions at the foundation universities is 50 men to 27 women. While the rate of male academics serving as vice-rectors is approximately 65%, the rate of female academics in the same position is 35%. One of the rectors, deans, and vice-deans is a woman at Istanbul Nişantaşı, Istanbul Okan, and Maltepe Universities, respectively. In addition, one of the vice-rectors at Istanbul Okan University is a woman. Qualitative or quantitative research can evaluate whether these numbers indicate that the glass ceiling syndrome has been relatively overcome at this university. Studies should investigate how a female rector at the university has an effect on the appointment of women as deans and vice-deans.

In foundation universities, 14 male (41.10%) and 20 (58.90%) female academics served as deans. It is possible to argue that the more female academics serve as deans in these universities the less they would be put into technical positions and the greater likelihood that they would be elevated to more professional positions; however, whether this is because of the higher number of female academics, or their management skills should be studied in additional research.

RQ3.What is the most important problem faced by women academics working at universities in Turkey?

Considering all the data, the number of female academics working in public relations education in universities in Turkey is quite high compared to that of men; however, the number of female academics working as rectors and vice-rectors at the universities with public relations and publicity or public relations and advertising undergraduate departments, deans, and vice-deans of related faculties is lower than that of men. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the number of female academics working in public relations education in public universities in Turkey is high, but the number of those in managerial positions is considerably lower than that of men. Thus, it can be argued that the glass ceiling social barrier remains in the academic community for women becoming managers.

The present study has made an important suggestion that although women working in the field of public relations, a branch of the social sciences that is typically perceived worldwide as a female profession, occupy an important academic staff position in universities, they often fail to be valued or considered for managerial positions. The results of the study by Çubuk & Erol (2023) correlate with the data in the present study showing that although the number of women working as academics in Turkey continues to increase, they are not promoted to management positions. To overcome this issue, qualitative and quantitative studies investigating the reasons behind the glass ceiling should be conducted. For example, examining whether female academics do not enter managerial positions by choice or for other reasons is important to help prevent the glass ceiling syndrome. One of Dozier's suggestions within the scope of the liberal feminist approach to breaking the glass ceiling is that women should use men's power means and give more space to scientific research in their studies to be more effective on their target audience. As a result, women can take part in decision-making mechanisms by equipping themselves scientifically and overcoming the male dominance in top management (Deren von Het Hof & Hoştut, 2016, p. 102). In addition, as stated in the study by Kaplan et al. (2020), various studies should be conducted to find and eliminate the low participation rates of female academics in decision-making processes in universities, the problems that women experience because of women in academic life, and the sociocultural reasons that prevent them from rising to managerial positions.

As stated by Şahin & Acar Şentürk (2020), necessary training programs should be planned for employees in the fields of public relations and advertising to assert their rights within a legal framework in case they are exposed to inequality behavior based on sex by considering it as a kind of mobbing. The same is true for women working as academics at universities in public relations and publicity, public relations, and advertising departments.

Measures are necessary to prevent women from being caught in the glass ceiling obstacle in both business life and the academic environment. The present study first recommends that research be conducted to reveal the social, legal, and individual barriers to women's access to managerial positions, and solutions should be considered within this framework. Second, if women have reservations about participating in management positions, these reservations should be eliminated by making necessary arrangements and organising training programs. Future research that includes various qualitative and quantitative interviews

and questionnaires may obtain more comprehensive information on the subject. In addition, these studies should also include departments that provide public relation education at the associate, master's, and doctoral levels at the universities.

It may contribute to the solution of the problem for universities to conduct annual self-assessments on the participation of female academics working in public relations and other fields in senior management, to establish gender equality committees on the subject, and to be sensitive to the distribution of duties in senior management equally between male and female academics.

Comparing the studies on the glass ceiling in an international dimension and evaluating the studies that examine how this issue is handled, especially in universities, can have significant effects on overcoming the glass ceiling syndrome.

Conducting cross-cultural studies on the subject may expand the size and impact of future research.

As Ateş & Tanyeri Mazıcı (2022), stated in their study, women's research centers in universities, which operate in line with public relations goals and strategies and provide important data on gender inequality and women's problems, can be used more actively to eliminate gender inequality that causes discrimination in issues such as social development, equality of opportunity, and the implementation of democracy.

As stated by Meng & Neill (2021), mentoring and support networks are vital for women public relations professionals to reach leadership positions and necessary studies can be carried out in this regard.

Martínez-Fierro & Lechuga Sancho (2021) argue that the reason why women are exposed to sexist discrimination in business life and public relations in general, as well as experiencing various negativities when they reach managerial positions, is based on stereotypes that disproportionately affect women and the roles expected of them at the societal level, and women can be provided with the necessary training to overcome these problems.

As Cueto & Pedrosa (2024) state, although women working in the field of public relations are not exposed to gender inequality as much as before, necessary studies can be carried out considering that encouraging women who have achieved significant success in entrepreneurship and public relations to take on communication leadership and managerial roles will increase entrepreneurship and diversity. This study can serve as a basis for future studies in this field.





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### Research Article

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# The Relationship Between Mindfulness and Job Performance Among Air Traffic Controllers: The Role of Decision-Making



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### Abstract

This study examines the effect of air traffic controllers' mindfulness levels on job performance and explores the mediating role of decision-making perception in this effect. The study, conducted with 421 air traffic controllers from different operational units and professional experience levels throughout Türkiye, used an online survey method. The data collection tools included the *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale*, *Decision-Making Styles Scale*, and the *Job Performance Scale*. Demographic characteristics of the participants, such as gender, education level, professional experience, and the unit they work in were also analyzed. Findings indicated that mindfulness levels positively affect decision-making perception ( $\beta = .288$ ) and job performance ( $\beta = .379$ ). The mediation analysis revealed that decision-making perception significantly strengthens the relationship between mindfulness and job performance ( $\beta = .047$ ; 95% BCA CI [.011, .047]). These findings highlight that mindfulness plays a critical role in enhancing job performance through its positive impact on decision-making processes. The study presents the practical contributions of mindfulness-based interventions to improve air traffic control performance by revealing that decision-making perception is a critical mediating variable in the context of the mindfulness-job performance relationship.

### Keywords

Air traffic control • Aviation • Decision-making • Job performance • Mindfulness.

### Jel Codes

M54, D91, J24, L93

### Author Note

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## The Relationship Between Mindfulness and Job Performance Among Air Traffic Controllers: The Role of Decision-Making

Air traffic controllers are professionals who work under high-stress conditions where safety is of critical importance and who are constantly required to make fast, accurate decisions. This profession is shaped by a variety of factors, including individual skills and the nature of the job. The professional success of controllers depends not only on their technical knowledge and skills but also on how effectively they can use this knowledge and skills under stress. Managing air traffic safely and efficiently under difficult working conditions requires controllers to have high performance. According to the latest estimates by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the number of global air passengers is expected to reach 5.2 billion by 2025. This represents a 6.7% increase compared to 2024 and is considered a significant turning point in the aviation industry (IATA, 2024). Similarly, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) predicts that the demand for air passengers in 2024 will be approximately 3% above 2019's. This increase could reach up to 4% on routes where recovery is accelerating (ICAO, 2024). This growth reveals the need for extensive improvements in the aviation infrastructure to meet the increasing air traffic volume. This increase in air traffic further increases the importance of human factors, especially in operations conducted by air traffic controllers. Effective communication, decision-making processes, and overall business performance are critical to ensuring safe and efficient airspace management. However, the current distribution of airspace management among different control units leads to communication difficulties in some regions (ICAO, 2024). This requires focusing on the cognitive and psychological competencies of air traffic controllers working in complex and stressful working environments.

In aviation operations, the performance of air traffic controllers is based not only on psychomotor skills but also on complex decision-making processes and cognitive flexibility. Air traffic controllers undertake critical tasks including safely directing multiple aircraft, managing emergencies, and making strategic decisions for the operation. In this context, decision-making processes include situational awareness, risk assessment under time constraints, and rapid selection between alternatives (Dekker, 2017). However, under conditions of high workload and stress, decision-making errors can lead to serious consequences. For example, Hollnagel and Woods (2005) emphasized that errors due to human factors in air traffic management can increase operational risks by combining with the complexity of systems. Studies on decision-making errors have shown that such errors are generally due to an overload in cognitive processes and a lack of situational awareness (Maurino et al., 2017).

Air traffic controllers' decision-making processes are vital to the safety and efficiency of aviation operations. However, accidents throughout history have shown that air traffic controllers face challenges due to human factors such as lack of communication, lack of situational awareness, and poor decision-making under stress. The 2002 Uberlingen mid-air collision is a tragic example of a conflict between air traffic control instructions and the Traffic Alert and Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) that led to the loss of 71 lives (BFU, 2004). The 2001 Linate Airport accident resulted in the loss of 118 lives due to inadequate air traffic control supervision and lack of communication in poor visibility conditions (ANSV, 2004). The deadliest accident in aviation history, the 1977 Tenerife Airport disaster, caused the deaths of 583 people and demonstrated the great risks that misunderstandings and lack of communication between air traffic controllers and pilots can

create (ICAO, 1978). These accidents provide a critical framework for understanding the relationship between conscious awareness, rational decision-making, and the job performance of air traffic controllers.

Mindfulness has been widely associated with cognitive and emotional regulation, both of which are critical for effective decision-making processes. Research indicates that individuals with higher mindfulness levels demonstrate enhanced attentional control, reduced cognitive biases, and improved judgement when navigating complex decision-making scenarios (Teper et al., 2013). By fostering present-moment awareness and mitigating impulsivity, mindfulness facilitates more rational and well-informed decisions, particularly in high-stakes environments such as air traffic control (Jha et al., 2010). Moreover, mindfulness has been shown to strengthen executive functions, including working memory and cognitive flexibility, which are fundamental components of decision-making (Shapiro et al., 2006). These cognitive enhancements contribute to better situational awareness and more adaptive responses to dynamic operational demands (Langer, 1989). Additionally, mindfulness has been linked to improved job performance, as it enhances focus, reduces stress, and fosters more effective decision-making, ultimately leading to increased efficiency and accuracy in task execution (Dane & Brummel, 2014). This is particularly relevant in high-reliability professions, such as air traffic control, where optimal performance depends on sustained attention and well-regulated cognitive resources. The study aims to examine the relationship between mindfulness, decision-making, and job performance in the context of air traffic controllers. By analyzing the effect of mindfulness levels on job performance and the mediating role of decision-making processes in this effect, the research aims to contribute to the theoretical knowledge of human factors and offer practical implications for improving performance in air traffic control operations.

## Literature Review

Mindfulness, decision-making, and job performance are among the areas of increasing importance in human factors research. Understanding the interaction of these variables is crucial for air traffic controllers, who work under high stress and cognitive load while managing complex air traffic systems. There is strong evidence in the literature that mindfulness positively affects individuals in areas like coping with stress, developing situational awareness, and cognitive flexibility (Dane, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). These characteristics are important in optimizing performance in occupations that require complex and time-pressured decision-making, as seen in air traffic control.

Decision-making is a cognitive process in which individuals choose among alternatives for a specific purpose. In the literature, decision-making processes are generally divided into three main categories: *rational decision-making*, *intuitive decision-making*, and *naturalistic decision-making*. Rational decision-making refers to a process in which the decision-maker systematically evaluates all available information and tries to determine the most optimal option that provides maximum benefit (Fischhoff & Broomell, 2020; Simon, 1957). This type of decision-making is of indispensable importance to ensure safety and efficiency in complex and critical situations, especially in high-risk sectors like aviation. In the aviation industry, decision-making is of vital importance for professionals who play critical roles, for instance, pilots and air traffic controllers. Aviation requires the ability to choose the most appropriate decision among alternative options within a limited time frame (Endsley, 1995; Szafran & Lukaszewicz, 2020). Decisions made during an operation directly affect not only the safety of the current flight but also the order and success of future operational options (Fischhoff & Broomell, 2020). Aeronautical Decision-Making (ADM) is defined as a systematic approach that encompasses all decisions made in aviation and is aimed at optimizing individuals' decision-making processes (FAA, 2022). ADM is a set of mental processes that aviation professionals use to

determine the best course of action under certain conditions. The 3-P Model (*Perceive - Process - Perform*), developed by the FAA for the effective implementation of ADM, allows air traffic controllers and pilots to systematically collect information at each flight stage, process this information, and implement the best course of action. In the literature, air traffic controller decision-making processes are often associated with situational awareness, workload management, and information processing capacities. Anthony and Ahmad (2021) emphasized that fast and accurate decision-making by air traffic controllers is a critical element for flight safety, and that delayed decisions can lead to aircraft accidents and incidents. In addition, it has been shown that decision-making processes are affected by individual factors such as thinking style, and air traffic controllers with a holistic thinking style intervene earlier, increasing safety but decreasing airspace efficiency (Xiaotian & Zhang, 2017). On the other hand, Bonaceto et al. (2005) examined decision-making processes in air traffic control towers with a naturalistic approach and evaluated the factors affecting air traffic controllers' performance using methods such as cognitive modelling, critical incident analysis, and coordination analysis. These studies made significant contributions to understanding the causes of errors and their solutions, especially in non-routine situations. Tang et al. (2022) stated that human errors in air traffic control systems increase safety risks and should be supported by comprehensive safety management systems to reduce these risks. This study also highlighted the importance of analytical methods for developing the cognitive skills required for complex tasks.

Mindfulness stands out as a tool that improves the job performance and well-being of professionals who work under high stress and cognitive load, such as air traffic controllers. Mindfulness allows individuals to focus on the present moment and develop a clear awareness of environmental and internal stimuli, allowing them to manage their mental processes more effectively (Cardaciotto et al., 2008; Sutcliffe et al., 2016). These features are of critical importance for air traffic controllers working in a dynamic and complex work environment because in these situations, attention and focus are key elements for safe and effective operations (Ngo et al., 2020). Research has shown that mindfulness practices reduce air traffic controllers' stress levels, increase attention span, and support problem-solving skills (Li et al., 2022). For example, one study found that mindfulness improved air traffic controllers' cognitive flexibility under workload and reduced emotional burnout (Meland et al., 2020). This allows individuals to make faster and more effective decisions in complex situations. In addition, it was stated that mindfulness acts as a buffer to alleviate the negative effects of stress and has a positive relationship with job satisfaction (Alaydi & Ng, 2024; Jha, 2020). However, it has also been discussed in the literature that mindfulness may not always produce positive results in the workplace. For example, it was stated that excessive mindfulness practices can lead to distraction and decreased performance (Britton, 2019).

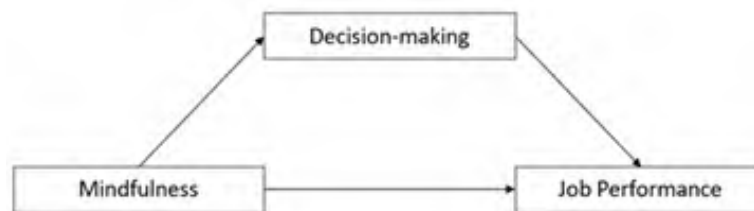
Air traffic controllers' job performance is seen as one of the fundamental elements of safety and operational success in the aviation sector. Job performance is a multidimensional concept, including technical skills, decision-making processes, and communication competencies that air traffic controllers display while ensuring airspace regulation. Air traffic controllers' task performance involves directing aircraft in a safe and orderly manner. Contextual performance includes social and organizational contributions such as cooperation, team harmony, and effective communication in critical situations (Van Dyck et al., 2005). Mental workload is a factor that directly affects air traffic controllers' job performance. High traffic volume, airspace complexity, and unexpected events can especially strain controllers' cognitive resources and elevate the risk of errors (Cummings & Guerlain, 2007). Therefore, managing the effects of mental load on air traffic controllers' performance is of critical importance in terms of flight safety. How mental workload affects job performance is also associated with personal skills such as individual resilience, emotional intelligence, and



attention management (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). When mental workload increases, job performance may decrease due to distraction and errors in information processing (Majumdar and Ochieng, 2002). However, these effects can be mitigated by individual and organizational resources. For example, the JDR (Job Demands-Resources) model reveals that the negative effects of job demands can be reduced by individual resources (e.g., mindfulness) and organizational support (e.g., social support mechanisms) (Bauer et al., 2014). In this context, the presence of personal resources can increase the capacity of air traffic controllers to cope with complex and stressful situations (Alaydi & Ng, 2024). Job performance in aviation is associated not only with individual skills but also with organizational processes and leadership approaches. For example, the empowering leadership style has been shown to increase air traffic controllers' participation in safe decision-making processes and support organizational performance (Martínez-Corcoles & Vogus, 2020). In addition, improving situational awareness and team coordination are among the factors that positively affect air traffic controllers' performance (Endsley, 1995). Designing work processes and supporting controllers are important for improving performance. Simulator-supported training programs and decision support systems enable air traffic controllers to perform their duties more effectively (EUROCONTROL, 2018).

## Hypothesis Development & Research Model

**Figure 1**  
*Research Model*



The research model created for the research hypotheses is shown in [Figure 1](#).

Mindfulness includes awareness and acceptance dimensions by enabling individuals to focus on current situations (Cardaciotto et al., 2008). These features allow air traffic controllers to better manage their attention during decision-making processes in busy work environments and cope with stress (Jha, 2020). Positive effects of mindfulness on work performance have been reported in the literature; for example, a study conducted in Spain showed that mindfulness practices increased memory and concentration in air traffic control, while reducing negative effects such as burnout and tension (Li et al., 2022). Ngo et al. (2020) stated that mindfulness directly increases work performance and promotes creativity. However, the effects of mindfulness may not always be positive. Britton (2019) stated that excessive mindfulness can lead to the depletion of individual resources, namely attention, and negatively affect performance. Air traffic controllers can use mindfulness as an important resource to maintain their work performance while working under a high mental load. The Job Demand-Resources (JDR) model emphasizes the role of personal resources, specifically mindfulness, in reducing the effects of job demands like mental load on job performance (Bauer et al., 2014). Mindfulness can support flight safety by enhancing the performance of air traffic controllers under mental load and improving decision-making processes in critical situations. However, the effects of mindfulness may vary depending on context and individual differences, so a more in-depth examination of the effects of mindfulness practices on air traffic controllers is necessary. These theoretical arguments and previous research findings lead us to our first hypothesis.

*H1: Mindfulness positively and significantly effects air traffic controllers' perceptions of job performance.*

In the aviation sector, decision-making processes include elements particularly situational awareness, risk analysis, and outcome prediction, while individual awareness (mindfulness) can play an important role in these processes. Individual awareness can increase the effectiveness of decision-making processes by allowing the decision-maker to focus on the current situation, manage attention more effectively, and reduce stress-related cognitive load (Shapiro et al., 2006). Especially in aviation professions, for instance air traffic controllers, where fast and accurate decision-making is critical, individual awareness can have a positive effect on decision-making processes. If an air traffic controller has a high level of awareness when determining a safe route for aircraft in an emergency, it becomes possible for them to evaluate environmental factors and flight plans more quickly and accurately. This not only increases operational efficiency but also plays an important role in preventing accidents (Endsley, 1995). On the other hand, it is known that factors, notably time pressure and cognitive load, can negatively affect decision-making processes (Wickens, 2000). However, individual awareness can support decision-makers in overcoming such difficulties and increase decision quality. In this context, it is thought that mindfulness can positively and significantly affect air traffic controllers' decision-making perceptions.

*H2: Mindfulness positively and significantly effects air traffic controllers' perceptions of decision-making.*

Decision-making perception is considered a critical mechanism that shapes the relationship between job performance and individual characteristics. In particular, mindfulness can positively affect decision-making processes by increasing the individual's capacity to focus on the current situation and develop situational awareness (Dane & Pratt, 2007). It has been shown that mindfulness supports individuals' cognitive processes and improves decision-making skills, thus increasing the performance of professionals working in complex and dynamic environments (Good et al., 2016). In this context, mindfulness may be a critical prerequisite for effective decision-making in high-stress air traffic control environments. The effect of decision-making perception on individuals' job performance perceptions can be explained particularly by the regulation of cognitive processes and their contribution to the solution of complex problems. Decision-making not only ensures operational safety in air traffic controllers' duties but also plays a role in workload management and balancing stress levels (Orasanu & Fischer, 1997). The increased situational awareness provided by mindfulness can improve controllers' decision-making perceptions, which can positively contribute to job performance perception (Hülshager et al., 2013). However, decision-making perception can explain the relationship between individuals' mindfulness levels and job performance perceptions as a mediating variable. The theory of mindfulness proposed by Langer (1989) argues that it strengthens decision-making processes by allowing individuals to focus more consciously and clearly in their current situations. This process allows air traffic controllers to make more effective and strategic decisions that increase job performance (Klein, 2008). Therefore, to fully understand the effect of mindfulness on job performance, it is necessary to focus on the mediating role of decision-making perception. In this context, revealing the mediating role of decision-making perception in the relationship between mindfulness and job performance perception can fill an important gap in the literature.

*H3: Decision-making perception mediates the relationship between mindfulness and air traffic controllers' job performance perceptions.*



## Method

### Participants

The population of the study consisted of air traffic controllers in Türkiye. As in many other countries, air traffic controllers in Türkiye are employed under the Air Navigation Service Provider (ANSP), which, in the national context, corresponds to the General Directorate of State Airports Authority (DHMI). Furthermore, they are organized under the Turkish Air Traffic Controllers' Association (TATCA). According to DHMI (2024), there were 1,948 licenced air traffic controllers in Türkiye at the time of data collection. Participants were reached through convenience sampling, and data were also gathered via dissemination on social media platforms whose members consisted exclusively of air traffic controllers. In total, 421 air traffic controllers from various regions and operational units across Türkiye participated in the study. All participants completed the survey online and took part in the study voluntarily. As the dataset did not contain any missing or erroneous responses, the data obtained from all participants were considered valid and included in the final analysis.

### Ethical Approval

The study involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the Istanbul University Research Ethics Committee (IUREC 404/2024). The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in the study.

### Data Collection Tools

*Demographic Form:* The demographic form used in the study was prepared to determine the individual and professional characteristics of the participating air traffic controllers. The form consists of four main categories: gender, education level, professional experience period, and air traffic control unit. The information was included in the study to obtain detailed data on the participants' professional backgrounds and areas of duty.

*Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS):* The MAAS, developed by Brown and Ryan (2003), was adapted into Turkish by Özyeşil et al. (2011). The scale has 15 items and is one-dimensional. The scale employs a 5-point Likert format. Scoring is as follows: "Strongly Disagree" (1), "Disagree" (2), "Neutral" (3), "Agree" (4), "Strongly Agree" (5). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated based on item analysis for the reliability of the scale is .80 and the test-retest correlation is .86.

*Decision-Making Styles Scale (DMSS):* The DMSS, developed by Scott and Bruce (1995) and adapted to Turkish by Taşdelen (2002), is a 25-item scale that measures individual differences in decision-making styles. The DMSS has a five-factor structure and uses a 5-point Likert scale. Scoring is as follows: "Strongly Disagree" (1), "Disagree" (2), "Neutral" (3), "Agree" (4), "Strongly Agree" (5). The overall internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .74. In the study, the 5-item rational decision-making subscale was used, with an internal consistency coefficient of .76.

*Job Performance Scale:* The job performance scale is an 11-item scale developed by Karakurum (2005) based on the performance scales of Beffort and Hatstrup (2003) and Borman and Motowidlo (1993). The scale has two dimensions: contextual and task performance. Scoring is as follows: "Strongly Disagree" (1), "Disagree" (2), "Neutral" (3), "Agree" (4), "Strongly Agree" (5).

## Findings

### Descriptive Statistics

The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1. The study included 421 air traffic controllers. The majority of participants were male (64.61%), while females accounted for 35.39% of the sample. Regarding the educational background, 81.71% of the controllers held a bachelor's degree, and 18.29% had a graduate degree.

In terms of professional experience, 25.42% of the participants had less than six years of experience, while another 25.42% had 11–15 years of experience. Those with 6–10 years of experience made up 14.96% of the group, followed by 13.78% with 16–20 years and 20.43% with over 20 years of experience.

When categorized by their air traffic control unit, more than half (54.87%) of the participants worked in aerodrome control units (TWR). Approach control units (APP) accounted for 22.33% of the participants, while 22.80% worked in area control centers (ACC).

**Table 1**

*Demographic information*

		n	%
Gender	Female	149	35.39
	Male	272	64.61
Education	Bachelor's degree	344	81.71
	Graduate degree	77	18.29
Experience (year)	< 6	107	25.42
	6-10	63	14.96
	11-15	107	25.42
	16-20	58	13.78
	> 20	86	20.43
Air Traffic Control Unit	Aerodrome control unit (TWR)	231	54.87
	Approach control unit (APP)	94	22.33
	Area control centre (ACC)	96	22.80
Total		421	100.00

### Reliability Analysis

The reliability results for the scales used in the study are presented in Table 2. As shown in the table, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the mindfulness scale was .872, indicating excellent internal consistency. The decision-making scale demonstrated acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .702. Similarly, the job performance scale showed good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha value of .775. According to Büyüköztürk (2011), a Cronbach's alpha value of .70 or above is generally considered acceptable, indicating that the scales used in the study are reliable for measuring the respective constructs.

**Table 2**

*Reliability results*

	Cronbach's Alpha
Mindfulness	.872

	Cronbach's Alpha
Decision-making	.702
Job Performance	.775

## Normality Test

The distribution of the variables used in the study was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values, as presented in Table 3. The skewness values for mindfulness (-.190), decision-making (.223), and job performance (.080) indicated that the data for these variables were approximately symmetrical. Similarly, the kurtosis values for mindfulness (-.387), decision-making (-.244), and job performance (-.338) suggested that the distributions were relatively normal. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013),  $\pm 1.5$  are considered acceptable for normality in most research settings. Based on these criteria, the variables in the study meet the assumptions of normal distribution, supporting their suitability for regression analyses.

**Table 3**

*Skewness and kurtosis values*

	Skewness	Kurtosis
Mindfulness	-.190	-.387
Decision-making	.223	.244
Job Performance	.080	-.338

## Correlation Analysis

The correlation results regarding the relationships among mindfulness, job performance, and decision-making are presented in Table 4. As shown in the table, mindfulness was found to have a significant positive correlation with job performance ( $r = .379$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and decision-making ( $r = .288$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Additionally, job performance was positively and significantly correlated with decision-making ( $r = .256$ ;  $p < .01$ ). These findings indicate that higher levels of mindfulness are associated with improvements in both job performance and decision-making, and that job performance is also positively linked to decision-making.

**Table 4**

*Correlation Analysis*

	MI	JP	DM
MI	1		
JP	.379**	1	
DM	.288**	.256**	1

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

MI= Mindfulness

JP= Job Performance

DM= Decision-making

## Regression Analysis

The regression results regarding the effect of mindfulness on job performance are presented in Table 5. The mindfulness was found to have a significant impact on job performance ( $\beta = .379$ ,  $p = .000$ ). It was observed that as mindfulness levels increased, job performance also improved. In this context, Hypothesis 1 suggesting a positive effect of mindfulness on job performance was supported.

**Table 5***Effect of Mindfulness on Job Performance*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	b	se	$\beta$		
(Constant)	3.116	.115		8.375	.000
Mindfulness	.221	.026	.379		

*Dependent Variable: Job Performance*

The regression results regarding the effect of mindfulness on decision-making are presented in Table 6. The mindfulness was found to have a significant impact on decision-making ( $\beta = .288$ ,  $p = .000$ ). It was observed that as mindfulness levels increased, decision-making also improved. In this context, Hypothesis 2 suggesting a positive effect of mindfulness on job performance was supported.

**Table 6***Effect of Mindfulness on Decision-Making*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	b	se	$\beta$		
(Constant)	3.499	.112		6.151	.000
Mindfulness	.159	.026	.288		

*Dependent Variable: Decision-making*

## Mediating Analysis

The mediating relationships between the variables in the study were analyzed using the Process macro (v4.2) plug-in developed by Hayes (2022) within the SPSS (v27) program. The significance of the mediation analyses was determined by evaluating the BootLLCI (lower limit confidence interval) and BootULCI (upper limit confidence interval) values. These values are required to align (both positive or both negative) to indicate a statistically significant effect. If the value of 0 falls within the confidence interval, the findings are interpreted as statistically insignificant (Hayes, 2022; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004).

The results of the analysis are presented in Table 7. The total effect of mindfulness on job performance was found to be statistically significant ( $b = .221$ ;  $se = .026$ ;  $\beta = .379$ ;  $p < .001$ ; 95% CI [.169, .273]). Similarly, the direct effect of mindfulness on job performance was also found to be significant ( $b = .194$ ;  $se = .027$ ;  $\beta = .332$ ;  $p < .001$ ; 95% CI [.141, .248]).

The indirect effect of mindfulness on job performance revealed that decision-making significantly mediated this relationship ( $b = .027$ ;  $se = .009$ ;  $\beta = .047$ ;  $p < .05$ ; 95% BCA CI [.011, .047]). This result indicates that the positive relationship between mindfulness and job performance is enhanced through decision-making, which acts as a mediating variable. Furthermore, the proportion of the indirect effect within the total effect was calculated as 0.122, indicating that 12.2% of the total effect of mindfulness on job performance was mediated through decision-making. The remaining 87.8% of the effect was attributed to the direct relationship between mindfulness and job performance.

Based on these findings, Hypothesis 3 of the research hypotheses was supported and accepted.

**Table 7***Mediating effect*

Total effect of MI on JP							
	b	se	b	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	.221	.026	.379	8375	.000	.169	.273
Direct effect of MI on JP							
	b	se	b	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	.194	.027	.332	7133	.000	.141	.248
Indirect effect of MI on JP							
	b	se	b	LLCI		ULCI	
DM	.027	.009	.047	.011		.047	

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of air traffic controllers' levels of mindfulness on job performance and the mediating role of decision-making perception in this effect. The findings obtained in the study indicate that the research hypotheses were supported, and the quantitative investigation of decision-making as a mediating role between mindfulness and job performance made a significant contribution to the literature.

The research findings show that mindfulness positively and significantly affects job performance. The analyses revealed that an increase in mindfulness levels improved job performance. This suggests that mindfulness helps individuals enhance their attention and focus, allowing them to concentrate more on the present moment, thus facilitating more effective actions in achieving job goals. Supporting studies in the literature also highlight these findings. King and Haar (2017). Akdeniz Balyemezler and Saraç (2022), Aydoğmuş (2022), Vaculik et al. (2016), Dane and Brummel (2014), Reb, Narayanan, and Chaturvedi (2014), and Shao and Skarlicki (2009) emphasized the positive impact of mindfulness on job performance. Dane and Brummel (2014) noted that this positive relationship in the workplace is strong and independent of factors such as job satisfaction. Similarly, Reb, Narayanan, and Ho (2013) and Karavardar (2015) confirmed the positive relationship between mindfulness and job performance in different contexts. Additionally, Monteiro and Padhy (2020) showed that employees' cognitive and emotional mindfulness levels positively affect job performance. These findings suggest that mindfulness should be considered as a factor that enhances individuals' efficiency in the workplace and contributes significantly to job performance.

The study also found that mindfulness positively and significantly affects decision-making perception. An increase in mindfulness levels was found to improve individuals' decision-making perception, enabling them to adopt more conscious and effective approaches in decision-making processes. This is consistent with the findings of Glomb et al. (2011), which suggested that mindfulness allows individuals to quickly assess different perspectives and approaches. Fiol and O'Connor (2003) highlighted that mindfulness contributes to better decision-making, and Galles et al. (2019) emphasized the meaningful relationship between mindfulness and decision-making processes. In this context, it can be understood that mindfulness plays a critical role not only in job performance but also in decision-making processes.

Another significant finding of the study is the evidence that decision-making perception plays a mediating role in the relationship between mindfulness and job performance. Mediation analysis showed that decision-making perception significantly strengthened the positive relationship between mindfulness

and job performance, with 12.2% of the total effect occurring through decision-making. This suggests that mindfulness improves individuals' ability to control, organize, and make more conscious decisions, thus enhancing their job performance. Similar results are found in the literature. Kabat-Zinn (2003), Kiken and Shook (2011), Moore and Malinowski (2009), and Ostafin and Kassman (2012) emphasized that mindfulness enhances cognitive flexibility, decision-making accuracy, and problem-solving skills. Good et al. (2016), Reb et al. (2017), and Schmertz et al. (2009) found that mindfulness helps individuals pay more attention to details, detect potential problems, and maintain emotional stability. These findings show the significant indirect effect of decision-making skills on job performance.

## Conclusion, Practical Implications and Limitations

The study makes a significant contribution to the literature by examining the effect of mindfulness on job performance among air traffic controllers and the mediating role of decision-making perception. The findings showed that mindfulness enhances individuals' attention, focus, and emotional regulation, leading to improved job performance and more conscious and effective decision-making approaches. Air navigation service providers should implement mindfulness-based training programs due to their positive effects on job performance and decision-making processes for air traffic controllers. Such training can help employees gain new experiences related to tolerance and mindfulness in their lives. Furthermore, it can enable employees to focus more on the present moment and develop a deeper connection with themselves, allowing them to exhibit more conscious and constructive behaviors rather than reflexive or defensive reactions (Christopher et al., 2006). Organizations like Google, Aetna, Mayo Clinic, and the U.S. The Army has successfully implemented mindfulness training to enhance workplace functionality (Jha et al., 2015; Tan, 2018; West et al., 2014; Wolever et al., 2012). These training programs are expected to enable air traffic controllers to work more effectively in high-stress and attention-demanding environments, thereby increasing individual performance and the decision-making process. Thus, mindfulness-based approaches can be considered a strategic tool to enhance flight safety and efficiency in high-risk sectors such as aviation.

The findings of the study shed light on various practical applications to improve the job performance and decision-making processes of air traffic controllers. First, mindfulness training and awareness-raising programs are recommended to be implemented in the workplace. Baer et al. (2006) stated that mindfulness skills are effective in reducing employees' job stress and increasing their cognitive flexibility. In this respect, mindfulness programs specially designed for air traffic controllers can help them perform more effectively in high-stress and intense work environments. Second, innovative technologies can be used to support decision-making processes. Parasuraman et al. (2000) showed that decision support systems (DSS) supporting human-machine collaboration both reduce error rates and increase decision-making speed. When such technologies are combined with the mindfulness skills of air traffic controllers, they can provide safer and more effective results in decision-making processes. Third, it is recommended that leadership approaches at the organizational level be restructured to encourage mindfulness practices. Spreitzer et al. (2005) drew attention to the effect of leadership styles on developing employees' psychological resources. Empowering leadership can enable air traffic controllers to be more effective in both decision-making processes and job performance. Finally, mixed methods be used to better understand the individual differences in air traffic controllers. Mixed methods studies, as emphasized by Creswell and Plano Clark (2023), can provide a more comprehensive understanding by combining quantitative and qualitative data. For example, in-depth interviews on air traffic controllers' mindfulness levels and decision-making processes and observational studies analyzing their daily work patterns can expand the current knowledge in this area.

The study has some limitations. The first limitation is that the current attitudes and emotional states of air traffic controllers may influence the measurement of their mindfulness levels and the interpretation of the results. Because participants' psychological states at the time of the survey could affect the responses, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. A second limitation is that the study only employed quantitative data collection methods. This may have prevented a deeper understanding of the participants' mindfulness and decision-making perceptions. Future studies could use qualitative data collection methods to enable a more comprehensive analysis of the findings and contribute to the growing knowledge in the field.



Ethics Committee Approval	This study was approved by the Istanbul University Research Ethics Committee (IUREC 404/2024).
Informed Consent	Written consent was obtained from the participants.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
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### Research Article

### Open Access

# Bibliometric Analysis of a Digital Leadership Concept According to Visual Mapping Technique



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### Abstract

The concept of digital leadership has become popular as leadership approaches have shifted from the traditional dimension to digitalisation, which is necessary in the current era. Therefore, leaders need to adapt to change in today's conditions, where technological advances are rapidly occurring. This study aims to determine the developmental stages of the concept of digital leadership in the literature, provide a comprehensive and holistic perspective on the field by conducting a bibliometric analysis of publications, and offer a guide for future studies. For this purpose, 587 publications were identified from the Scopus database between 2016 and 2025, after which data cleaning was performed, and 405 English publications in the fields of 'Business, Management and Accounting' and 'Social Sciences' were taken into consideration. The data obtained were analysed with the Vosviewer program and the R Studio program, which is integrated into the R program. Because of the analysis, the highest number of publications was made in 2024 (n=168). Additionally, the country with the highest number of citations was Indonesia (n=339), the average number of citations per publication was 10.71, and the journal with the highest number of publications on the subject was Sustainability (n=12).

### Keywords

Digital Leadership · E-leadership · Digital Transformation · Vosviewer · R Studio

### Jel Codes

M10, M12, M15



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## Bibliometric Analysis of a Digital Leadership Concept According to Visual Mapping Technique

The phenomenon of leadership in ancient civilisations has played an important role in shaping the course of human history. From a historical perspective, the emergence of leadership is associated with hierarchical structures and dominant authority figures. The framework of leadership theories can be seen as evolving from behavioural theory to contemporary concepts, including transformational leadership approaches (Shahzad, 2024). The shift in leadership paradigms caused by digitalisation has made digital leadership an increasingly important phenomenon in both theoretical discourse and practical application (Bach, 2024). Digital leaders are characterised as individuals who have pioneering concepts about the digital world, demonstrate the ability to inspire employees in a digital context, establish sustainable communication with their employees even in digital interactions and develop effective digital strategies, (Sağbaş & Erdoğan, 2022). The concept of digital leadership offers a multi-faceted perspective on how to foster innovation and facilitate digital transformation in organisations. This concept encompasses the development of dynamic digital capabilities required for effective implementation of digital transformation. These capabilities include detection, capture, and transformation. They allow leaders to develop strategies based on technological trends, boost organisational agility, and redesign internal structures, thereby ensuring digital success (Albannai et al., 2024). Digital leadership practices are effective in transforming organisational culture and creating an innovative and collaborative cultural structure (Bala, 2024; Subiyanto et al., 2024). Digital leadership is a critical component used across a variety of industries, enabling organisations to adapt and thrive in an ever-evolving digital environment (Kok Ming & Mansor, 2024). Laukka et al. (2022) stated that technology can be used in the education sector for integration into administrative processes, improve educational outcomes, and promote innovation. Rangavittal (2024) stated that digital leadership and e-leadership practices in the health sector, especially in digital health services, benefit clinicians and patients and improve service quality. Competent digital leaders use advanced data analytics and artificial intelligence to develop medicines and optimise processes, thereby reducing the time to market. Pasalong et al. (2024). The study stated that digital leadership significantly improves the performance of the industrial sector and supports activities to increase productivity within organisations. In the context of digital transformation, digital leadership has become an important concept for organisations (Espina-Romero et al., 2023).

Existing literature on digital leadership has been examined in various contexts, but it is frequently restricted to conceptual definitions or is fragmented due to the emphasis on specific sectors within applied studies. This situation points to a lack of studies that include a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the development of digital leadership over time, its thematic evolution, and global academic interest. Although recent analyses such as Aydın et al. (2024) point to the growth dynamics of the field, comprehensive analyses that contribute to the theoretical construction of digital leadership and evaluate research clusters in a thematic context are still limited.

In this context, the primary objective of the present study is to methodically reveal the thematic evolution of the concept by examining the academic accumulation on digital leadership through publications between 2016 and 2025. Furthermore, this study aims to address the structural gap in the literature in this context. The study aims to contribute both academically and practically by analysing not only the numerical trends but also the themes that shape the theoretical framework of digital leadership. In this respect, this study

aims to deepen knowledge production in the field with a more holistic approach by contributing to the theoretical infrastructure of the concept of digital leadership.

## Theoretical Background

Technological progress and industrial change significantly alter socioeconomic dynamics and thereby affect organisations that act as key players. In particular, this interaction is taking place in a way that fundamentally changes cultural practices and the relationships of organisations with their stakeholders, rather than solely focusing on the digitalisation of business processes and the integration of technological developments into business life (Sürücü et al., 2022).

This situation, which has accelerated, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, has made it necessary for companies to participate in digitisation activities (Hussein et al., 2024; Faraj et al., 2021). The emergence of digital technologies, exemplified by innovations such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, 5G, machine learning and big data, has significantly reshaped the understanding of organisational management by promoting change in an environment of economic and industrial uncertainty (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Mollah et al., 2024; Peng, 2022). The emergence of digital technologies and versatile applications has brought about a significant change in leadership paradigms and led to the concept of digital leadership (Schwarz Müller et al., 2018). Consequently, digital leadership is regarded as a potent instrument for managers to motivate their employees to pursue innovation and excellence (Alsetoohy et al., 2022). Digital leadership is defined as the alignment of leadership skills with digital competencies to increase organisational performance (Wasono & Furinto, 2018). According to another definition, digital leadership is the process of formulating a specific vision within the context of digitalisation and subsequently activating suitable strategies to achieve this vision. It also involves the strategic allocation of human resources towards the realisation of predefined objectives (Karafakioglu & Afacan Findikli, 2024). Digital leadership approaches facilitate the dissolution of hierarchical structures and organisational boundaries through enhanced connectivity and information exchange. Consequently, leadership function has become imperative for comprehending the significance of digitalisation in employee engagement, talent retention and talent management (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). A number of studies have been conducted on the subject of digital leadership and its association with digital innovation (Mollah et al., 2024), organisational commitment (Braojos et al., 2024), work engagement (Li et al., 2024), performance (Amran et al., 2024; Büyükbeşe & Doğan, 2022; Chatterjee et al., 2021; Oğan & Wolff, 2022; Örücü & Hasırcı, 2024; Senadjki et al., 2024; Surahman & Legowo, 2024), organisational agility (Karafakioglu & Afacan Findikli, 2024), innovative work behaviours (Abbas et al., 2024; Ahmed et al., 2024; Zia et al., 2024). It was determined that they were studied in conjunction with their subjects. Moreover, bibliometric studies in the domain of digital leadership yield significant insights on prevailing trends and thematic research clusters in this field. A number of studies have been conducted on the subject of digital leadership. (Aydın et al., 2024; Espina-Romero et al., 2023; Prawestri vd., 2024; Alshidi & Binti Ahmad Rashid, 2024; Ming et al., 2023; Tigre et al., 2023; Wider et al., 2023).

Prawestri et al., (2024). It identifies the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) as leading contributors to research on digital leadership and suggests that future research opportunities exist in areas such as: leadership, digital leadership, innovation, digital technology, e-learning, digitalisation and industry 4.0, which highlights seven clusters in the network visualisation. Aydın et al., (2024). The findings revealed that the annual growth rate in the field of digital leadership was 15.09%, while the average number of citations per article in performance analysis was 21.48. Espina-Romero et al. (2023) observed that the leading countries in the field of digital leadership according to the number of citations are the USA, Germany,

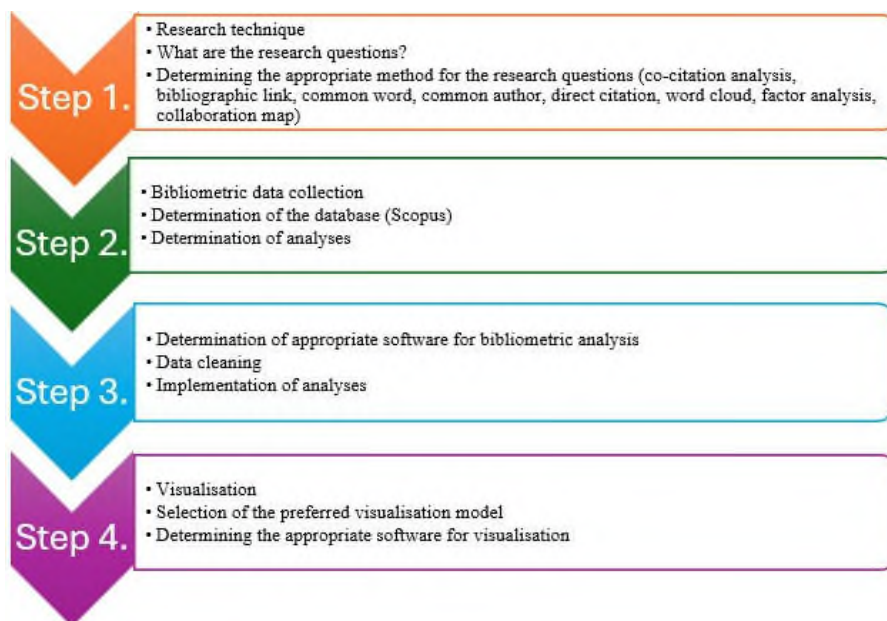


and China. The authors identified nine industry sectors related to digital leadership. Alshidi & Binti Ahmad Rashid, (2024). The study conducted a period-based analysis, concluding that in the first period, the theme of technology management emerged as a primary focus; in the second period, the themes of virtual teams and technology became predominant; and in the third period, the themes of COVID-19, virtual reality, and digital technologies became the primary focus of research in this field. Tigre et al. (2023). They concluded that there has been a 243% increase in digital leadership in the last 10 years and stated that the growth is expected to continue as the field has not yet reached saturation. Studies on digital leadership have been increasing since 2002. Germany is the most productive country, with 12 (7.74%) published documents. Wider et al., (2023). The identification of four primary clusters for research in the domain of digital leadership emphasises the growing importance of this research area in various disciplines, as well as the necessity for a more integrated perspective on the research landscape.

## Methodology

A literature review is a method used to evaluate the literature, in order to fill existing gaps (Tranfield et al., 2003). The objective of this method is to identify qualitative and quantitative variables associated with a particular field with statistical procedures known as bibliometric analyses (Rey-Martí et al., 2016). Bibliometric analysis methods are used to accomplish objectives such as performance analysis and science mapping. Performance analysis is employed to evaluate the publication performance of individuals or institutions, while science mapping aims to reveal the framework of a field (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Bibliometric analysis is a method that uses quantitative data to facilitate a scientific mapping of data, encompassing elements such as citation analysis, performance analysis, co-occurrence, keywords, and co-citation (Beloskar et al., 2024).

**Figure 1**  
*A Bibliometric Analysis Process*



**Source:** Kodalak & Akman, 2023

In this study, to demonstrate the bibliometric analysis process shown in [Figure 1](#), a search was carried out by typing "Digital Leadership" in the Scopus database. Some restrictions were applied during this process. In this context, English-language studies in the fields of 'Business, Management and Accounting'

and ‘Social Sciences’ between 2016 and 2025 were evaluated, and the number of publications, which was initially 587, was reduced to 405. In addition, data cleaning was performed. Then, the data downloaded from the Scopus database as CSV files, were analysed using the Biblioshiny and VOSviewer programs with the RStudio program integrated into the R programming environment.

During the research, answers to the following questions were sought:

- Who are the most cited authors on the concept of ‘Digital Leadership’ in the Scopus database?
- What are the most relevant references regarding the concept of ‘Digital Leadership’ in the Scopus database?
- How is the distribution of articles related to the concept of ‘Digital Leadership’ in the Scopus database between 2016 and 2025, according to years?
- Which countries had the highest number of citations for the concept of ‘Digital Leadership’ in the Scopus database?

## Findings

In this section, the analyses conducted on the data obtained about the concept of “Digital Leadership” are given.

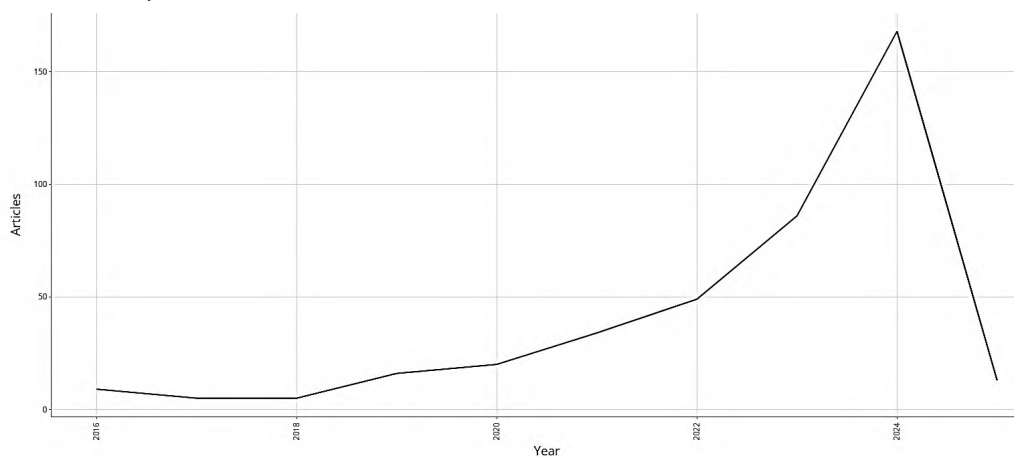
**Table 1**

*General Information on the Concept of Digital Leadership*

Main Information	
Timespan	2016-2025
Sources	277
<b>Documents</b>	405
Annual Growth Rate %	4.17
Average age of documents	2.41
Average Citations Per Doc	10.71
<b>Document Contents</b>	
Keywords Plus (ID)	606
Authors’ Keywords (DE)	1040
<b>Authors</b>	
<b>Authors</b>	1089
Authors of single-authored docs	57
<b>Authors Collaboration</b>	
Co-Authors per Doc	3.15
International co-authorships %	27.65
<b>Document Types</b>	
Article	252
Book	11
Book Chapter	65
Conference Paper	45
Other	32

A bibliometric analysis of 405 academic studies published in the Scopus database between 2016 and 2025 reveals growing academic interest in digital leadership. The annual growth rate of publications was 4.17%, the average number of citations was 10.71, and the average number of authors per document was 3.15. These findings indicate that studies are both effective and collaborative. While the international collaboration rate of 27.65% suggests that the issue of digital leadership is being addressed on a global scale, the diversity of author keywords ( $n=1040$ ) indicates that the issue is being studied from multiple perspectives. When analysed by type of publication, academic articles constitute the largest share (62.22%), followed by book chapters (16.05%) and conference proceedings (11.11%). With an average document age of 2.41 years, the literature shows that the topic of digital leadership remains current. These data provide important insights into how leadership has evolved in the academic world during the digital transformation era.

**Figure 2**  
*Annual Scientific Production*



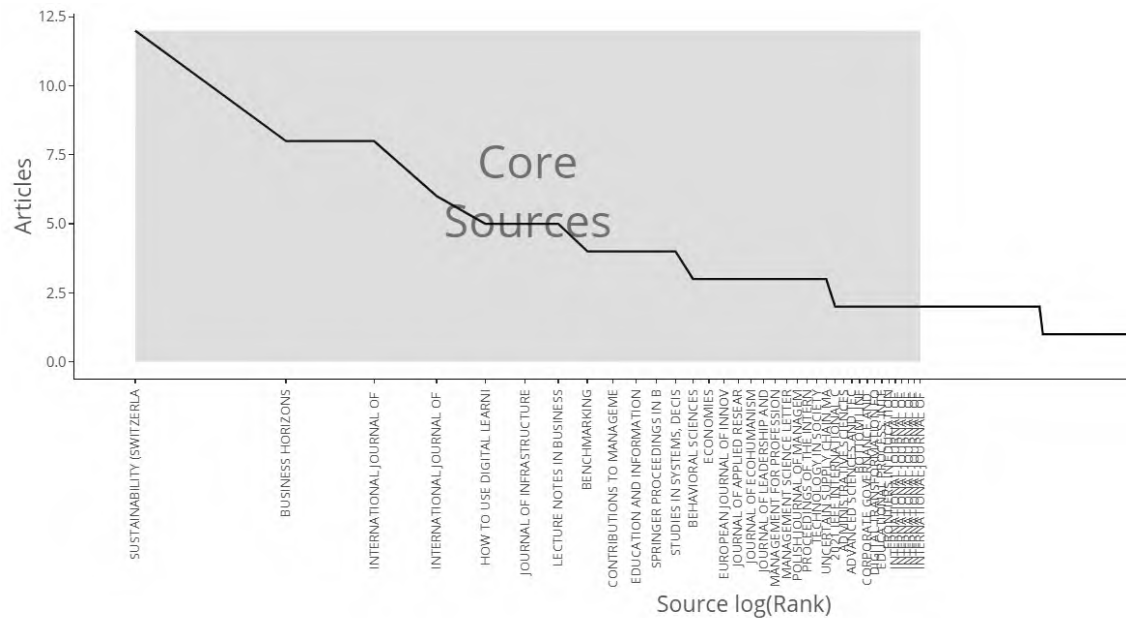
When the last 10 years of scientific publication productions related to the concept of ‘Digital Leadership’ are examined in [Figure 1](#), it is determined that the first years evaluated were 2016 ( $n = 9$ ), 2017 ( $n = 5$ ), 2019 ( $n = 16$ ), 2021 ( $n = 34$ ), and 2024 ( $n = 168$ ), and interest in the subject has constantly increased over the years and has become a popular topic.

The graph covering the years 2016–2025 shows significant fluctuations in scientific publication production during this period. Although production volume was low and stable from 2016 to 2018, it increased in 2019 and continued rising steadily until 2024. This increase can be attributed to the maturation of the research group, the expansion of academic capacity and the increase in external funding. In 2024, the number of publications increased dramatically, reaching a production volume of approximately ( $n=168$ ) papers. This spike is thought to be the result of factors such as the completion of extensive projects, systematic reviews, and the publication of several delayed papers. However, the sharp decline in the number of publications observed in 2025 may be due to incomplete data for that year. Therefore, data from after 2025 are critical for ensuring the sustainability of scientific productivity. An analysis of publications from the mentioned period reveals that topics such as digital citizenship emerged in 2016 (McGillivray et al., 2016). In 2017, e-leadership and digital collaboration emerged (Antoni & Syrek, 2017). By 2019, renewed interest emerged in digital transformation and digital citizenship (Dimitriadis, 2019; Mihardjo et al., 2019). The 2021 pandemic significantly impacted the concepts of digital leadership and competence (Claassen et al., 2021; De La Calle et al., 2021; Fischer et al., 2021). By 2023, digital trust, innovation, and business intelligence had become central themes (Mo et al., 2023; Raed et al., 2023). In 2024, the focus shifted to innovative business behaviour and



knowledge sharing (Ahmed et al., 2024; Yahya et al., 2024). In 2025, digital adoption and employee motivation will be key areas of interest (Binsar et al., 2025; Palmucci et al., 2025). This study examined the evolution of these topics. Considering the increase in the number of articles over the years, we conclude that digital leadership is an interesting concept.

**Figure 3**  
Bradford's law

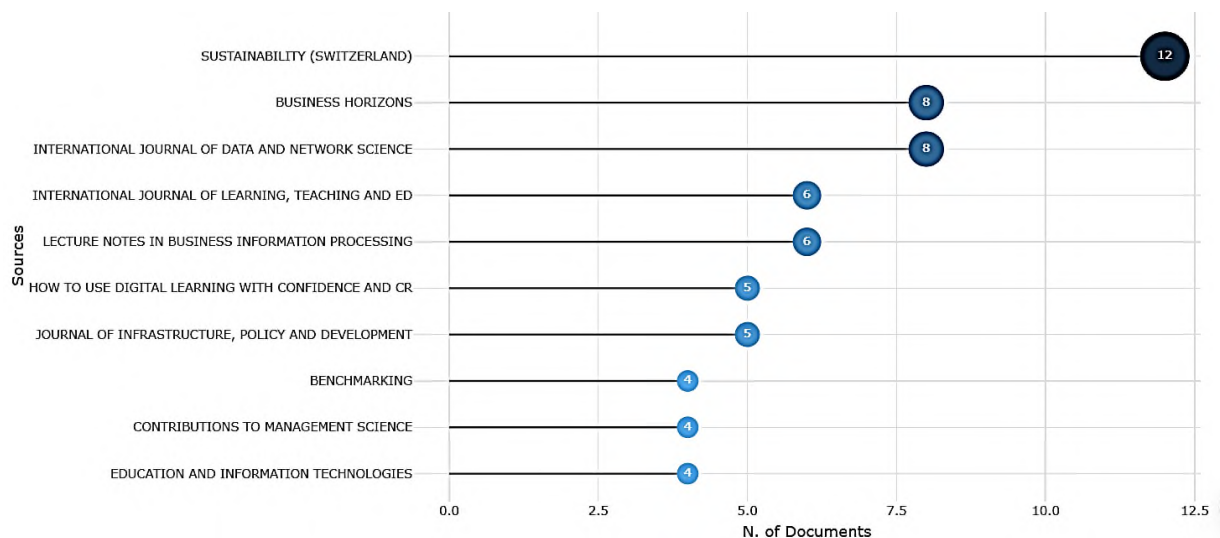


Bradford's law describes a bibliometric approach that characterises the distribution of scientific articles among various journals within a given academic discipline, specifically clarifying the phenomenon of diminishing effectiveness and scatter. This law makes it possible to determine the most appropriate journals for a subject. Accordingly, it is assumed that journals are categorised into three groups. The first group should consist of core journals with 33% of production and high productivity. The second group is expected to consist of large journals that will account for 33% of the publication output and have lower productivity. The last group is expected to contribute less although it includes a much larger number of journals (Alves, 2019). It was determined that the core journals related to the concept of digital leadership included *Sustainability*, *Business Horizons*, *International Journal of Data and Network Science*, *Lecture Notes in Business Information Processing*, *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, *"How to Use Digital Learning with Confidence and Creativity: A Practical Introduction,"* *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, *Benchmarking*, *Contributions to Management Science*, *Education Information Technologies*, among a total of 37 journals and 134 articles. Core journals are important for meta-analyses, literature reviews, and systematic reviews. They constitute the main body of literature (Fleming et al., 2014). When conducting a general evaluation, the graphic is important for visualising which sources the literature in the relevant field focuses on (Eifert, 2022). It also contributes to accessing scientific information, creating a bibliography, and selecting journals.

**Table 2***Evaluation of the Data Used in the Study According to Bradford's Law*

Number of Journal Articles			Number of Articles	
Zone	N	%	N	%
1	37	%13,35	134	33.08
2	108	%38,98	168	41.48
3	132	%47,65	103	25.43
<b>Total</b>	277	%100	405	100

This table presents a bibliometric analysis of the distribution of the journals and articles used in the study, evaluated within the framework of Bradford's Law. This study covers a comprehensive analysis of 277 journals. Although they account for only 13.35% of the total journals, Zone 1 core journals account for (33.08%) of the total publications, indicating a high publication density in this subject area. Zone 2, which accounts for (38.98%) of the journals, corresponds to 41.48% of the total articles, indicating medium-sized contributing journals. While Region 3 contains the highest number of journals (47.65%), only 25.43% of published articles are published, indicating that the topic is more scattered and infrequently addressed in the literature. This distribution is generally consistent with Bradford's Law. This finding is of great importance in terms of identifying target journals, especially in the context of academic publication strategies.

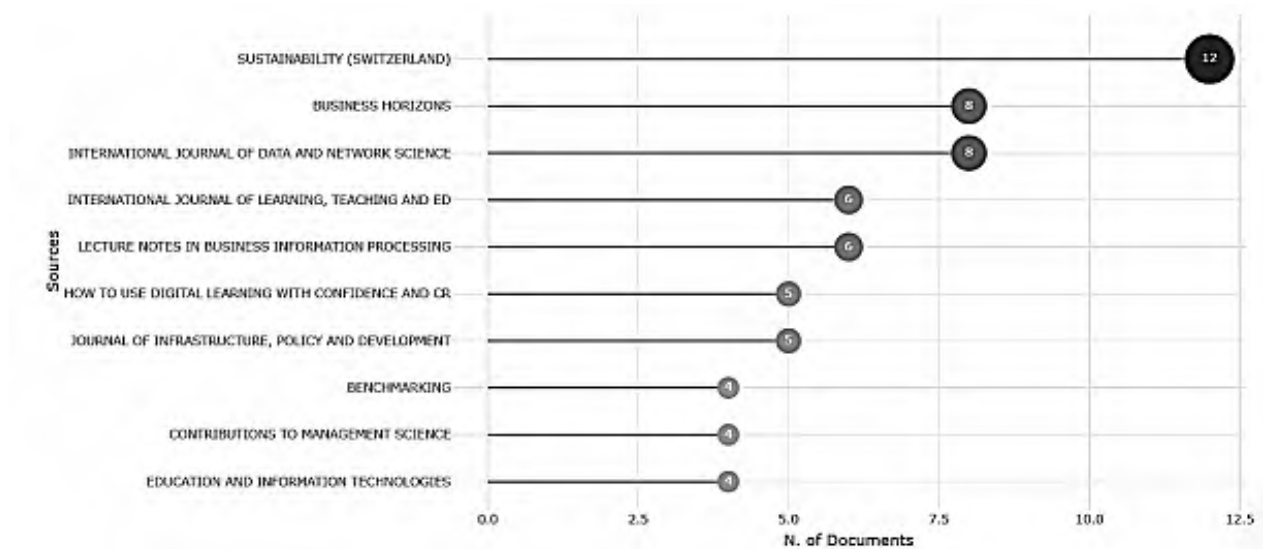
**Figure 4***Most Relevant Sources*

When the distribution of publications on the concept of digital leadership is analysed, the journal with the highest number of studies is Sustainability (Switzerland), which stands out by far with (n=12) publications. The journal's impact factor of 3.3 indicates that it has significant academic visibility in terms of sustainability-oriented studies; it also reflects a strong interest in the intersection of digital leadership with sustainable development and corporate strategy. The second-ranked journal, Business Horizons, with eight publications, exhibits a higher academic impact than the first-ranked journals, which have an impact factor of 5.8. This finding indicates that research on digital leadership is not only prevalent in public and educational spheres, but also in strategic management and business contexts. International Journal of Data and Network Science (n=8), which shares the third place with the same number of publications, focuses on

digital leadership from a technical and systemic perspective, focusing on data network systems and digital transformation components. It is followed by International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research and Lecture Notes in Business Information Processing with (n=6) publications. The concentration in these journals reveals how the theme of digital leadership is integrated with educational technologies, learning processes, and information systems. In general, this distribution shows that digital leadership is addressed with a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach, ranging from sustainability to business management, data science to educational technologies.

**Figure 5**

*Most Related Authors*



When the authors with the highest number of publications on the concept of digital leadership are analysed, Na Na ranks first with (n=12) publications. He is followed by Abbu H (n=6) and Karaköse T (n=6), with an equal number of publications. Each with an equal number of publications, they were followed by Gudergan G (n=5), Malik M (n=5), Mıhardjo LWW (n=5), Mugge P (n=5), and Raziq MM (n=5). This distribution shows that certain authors stand out in the literature covered by the study and that there is a significant concentration in publication production. The high number of publications suggests that these individuals have gained competence and expertise in their fields and are frequently preferred for research collaborations. Moreover, such analysis is of strategic importance for the development of potential academic partnerships. In conclusion, this graph not only provides a quantitative assessment but also makes visible the centres of knowledge production in the research ecosystem.



**Table 3***Most Cited Countries*

Countries	Total Citation	Average Article Citation
Indonesia	339	9.70
Germany	323	15.40
China	308	14.70
Italy	234	26.00
France	232	77.30
Greece	194	64.70
Malaysia	192	10.10
UK	186	12.40
USA	179	13.80
Türkiye	165	11.00

According to the data, the total number of citations countries receive in digital leadership-themed publications and the average number of citations per article show not only academic productivity but also the level of scientific impact. France is the most remarkable country, with a very high average of 77.3 citations per article, despite 232 total citations. Similarly, Greece and Italy have an average citation value of 64.7 and 26.0, respectively. It is understood that the studies conducted in these countries are strong in terms of both quality and impact. They are published in high-quality journals and are frequently cited in the literature. On the other hand, although countries such as Indonesia, China, and Germany rank high in the total number of citations, their average number of citations is relatively lower, indicating that although the number of publications in these countries is high, the impact level of each publication remains limited. Turkey, on the other hand, has a balanced but moderate impact, with 165 citations and an average citation value of 11.0. Overall, this analysis suggests that academic activity across countries should be assessed not only in terms of quantity and quality.

**Table 4***Most Cited Articles*

Author	Journal	Title	Scientific Contribution	Total Citation	Annual Total Citation
(Benitez vd., 2022)	Information and Management	Impact of digital leadership capability on innovation performance: Role of platform digitisation capability	This study empirically analyzes the relationship between digital leadership capability and innovation performance and determines that digital leadership enhances innovation through platform digitisation.	196	49
(Karakose vd., 2021)	Sustainability	Examining Teacher Perspectives on School Principals'Digital Leadership Roles and Technology Capabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic	The study emphasised that teachers' level of digital technology use during the COVID-19 pandemic was perceived as adequate. The results also demonstrate that principals could effectively integrate digital tools into their leadership practices.	148	29.60

Author	Journal	Title	Scientific Contribution	Total Citation	Annual Total Citation
(Borah vd., 2022)	Technology in Society	Linking social media usage and sustainable SME performance: The role of digital leadership and innovation capabilities	The study concludes that the use of social media has a positive and significant impact on innovation and SME performance.	138	34.50
(Peter vd., 2020)	Journal of Strategy and Management	Strategic action fields of digital transformation: An exploration of the strategic action fields of Swiss SMEs and large enterprises	This study identifies seven primary strategic action fields that reflect common understanding among Swiss managers and employees and facilitates a nuanced view of digital transformation processes.	127	21.17
(Schiuma vd., 2022)	International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research	The Transformative Leadership Compass: Six Competencies for Digital Transformaion Entrepreneurship	To support digital transformation entrepreneurship, a general profile of the digital transformation leader was developed.	119	29.75

**Table 4** lists the most cited articles. When the table is examined, the article titled “Impact of digital leadership capability on innovation performance: The role of platform digitisation capability” by Benitez et al. (2022) ranks first with (n=196) citations. The total annual citation count for this article was (n=49). This article evaluates the relationship between digital leadership and innovation performance. Subsequently, the article titled “Examining Teacher's Perspectives on School Principals' Digital Leadership Roles and Technology Capabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic” by Karaköse et al. (2021) was cited (n= 148) times, and its total annual citation was calculated as (n= 29.60). The study investigated the increasing interest in the digital approach and how it affects telecommuting and leadership roles in the field of education. The article “Linking social media usage and SMEs' sustainable performance: The role of digital leadership and innovation capabilities” published by Borah et al. (2022) ranks third with (n=138) and (n=34.50) total citations per year. This study investigates the relationship between social media use and innovation capabilities to improve sustainable SME performance. When the ranking is examined, Schiuma et al. (2022) (n = 119) is being at the bottom of the list in terms of the number of citations. However, the total number of annual citations is higher than that of Peter et al. (2020), which is in fourth place. Research shows that digital leadership involves more than just using technological tools; it also plays a strategic role in organisational innovation. Citation data reflect growing academic interest in various aspects of digital leadership, such as platform digitalisation and educational management.

**Figure 7**  
Thematic Map

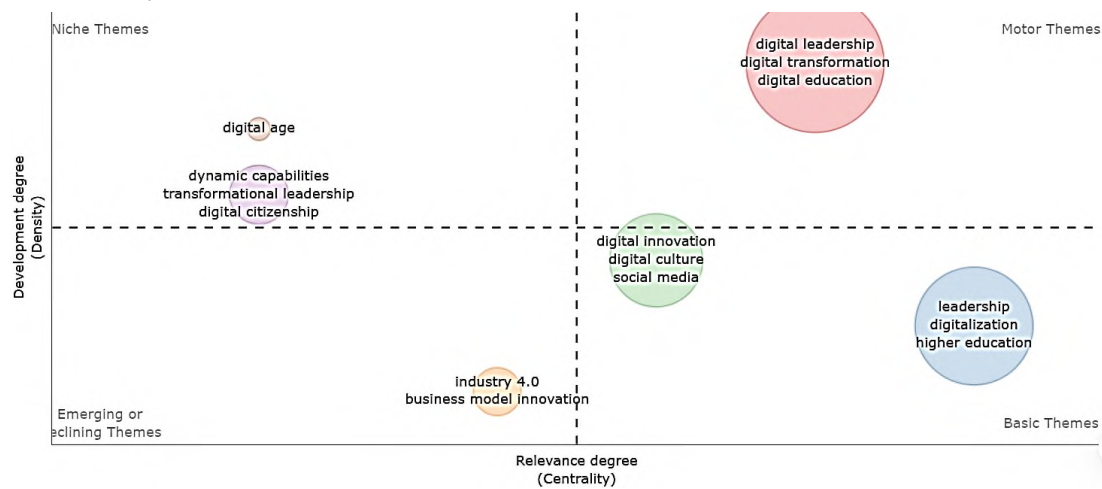


Figure 7 shows the development in thematic areas. Within the scope of thematic mapping analysis, intersecting network clusters are shown as bubbles considering the centrality and density parameters (Callon et al., 1991). The X-axis in the figure represents centrality, while the Y-axis represents density. Whereas centrality expresses the degree of interaction of a particular network cluster with other clusters, density is a measure that shows the strength of the connections within the cluster and the development of themes (Aydin et al., 2024). The thematic mapping technique was evaluated in four areas representing different themes. In this study, the authors' keywords were used in the analysis. The first 50 words were selected, and the number of words represented in each theme was set to 3. Because of the analyses performed, it was determined that there were 6 clusters in 4 themes. When the themes were evaluated separately, motor themes with high density and centrality appeared in the upper right corner, indicating that the themes needed for the study were expressed in this group. The frequencies of digital leadership ( $n = 261$ ), digital transformation ( $n = 90$ ), and e-learning ( $n = 7$ ) were determined. The niche themes in the upper left indicate areas with high density and low centrality. This section presents the areas of limited interest. The concepts in this part are represented with the frequencies of the following: digital age ( $n=4$ ), dynamic capabilities ( $n=7$ ), transformational leadership ( $n=6$ ), and digital citizenship ( $n=4$ ). The simple themes on the bottom right side include high centrality and low density. The more publications that address these concepts, the more likely these concepts are to move towards motor themes. In this theme, the following elements are represented with frequencies: digital innovation ( $n=12$ ), digital culture ( $n=8$ ), social media ( $n=8$ ), leadership ( $n=30$ ), and digitalisation ( $n=13$ ). The lower left quadrant shows decreasing themes with low centrality and low density. In this section, the topics are Industry 4.0 ( $n=6$ ) and business model innovation ( $n=5$ ). These findings reveal that digital leadership is at the centre of the field, while some themes are open to development and integration.



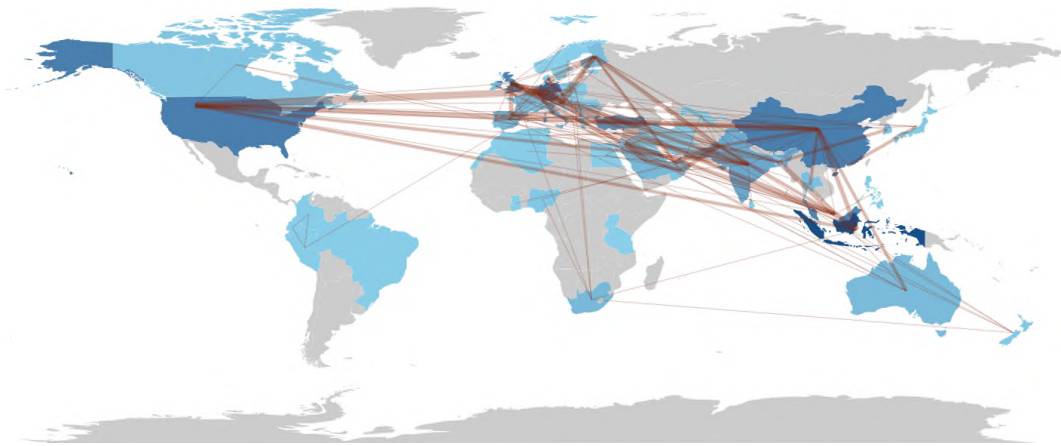
**Figure 8***Cooperation Map of Countries*

Figure 8 shows the collaborations of authors on publications on the concept of "Digital Leadership," categorised by their countries of origin. Countries that publish on this concept are indicated with colours ranging from light blue to dark blue. When countries that collaborate most on the concept of digital leadership are listed, Germany and the USA, (n=7) rank first in terms of publications. They are followed by Indonesia and Malaysia (n=5), China, the USA, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh (n=4). Overall, networks of scientific collaboration are concentrated in the Northern Hemisphere, reflecting global inequality in research infrastructure.

## Conclusion

The concept of digital leadership is critically important today with the acceleration of technological transformation. This concept refers to leaders effectively using digital tools to manage organisations and make strategic decisions. Digital leadership includes not only following technological innovations, but also the ability to integrate these innovations into the organisational culture, and the inclusion of employees in digital transformation. In this study, a bibliometric analysis method was used to examine the development of the literature on the concept of digital leadership and to fill gaps. Bibliometric studies are tools that guide a specific field and provide researchers with information about future trends (Akman & Erdirençelebi, 2024). For this purpose, maps and visualisations of studies conducted on the concept of digital leadership in the last decade (2016-2025) were presented. First, 587 studies were identified in the article. Then, data cleaning was performed, and 405 English studies in the fields of "Business, Management and Accounting" and "Social Sciences" were evaluated. The obtained data were analysed using biblioshiny and Vosviewer software integrated with R Studio. When the findings were evaluated, it was determined that digital leadership research is still in the development stage but has not yet matured (Aydın et al., 2024; Purwanto & Irawan, 2023; Tigre et al., 2023).

A significant increase in the number of publications has been observed up to 2024, with the highest number of publications being reached this year at (n=168). The average number of citations per publication was 10.71. The growing importance of digital leadership in the field of international research can be clearly demonstrated by the fact that 27.65% of studies were conducted in collaboration with researchers from different countries. Furthermore, the diversity of the 1,040 keywords employed by the authors indicates an interdisciplinary and multidimensional approach to this research area. In this context, publications



appeared in journals named Sustainability (n=12), Business Horizons (n=8), and International Journal of Data and Network Science (n=8). This distribution shows that the topic of digital leadership is addressed across a wide range of areas, from sustainability, data science, to business management. When the publications were evaluated over the years, it was determined that topics of digital citizenship were most popularly studied in 2016, e-leadership and digital collaboration in 2017, digital transformation and digital citizenship in 2019, digital competence and digital leadership in 2021, innovative business behaviour and knowledge sharing in 2024, and digital adoption and employee motivation in 2025. When the analyses are examined, the data obtained from the co-creation map reveal that this subject is suitable for international cooperation when e-leadership and virtual leadership are used together with the concept of digital leadership (Aydın et al., 2024). Although the concept of e-leadership has attracted attention in the literature, keyword analyses found that 'digital' was used more frequently in discussions about the challenges faced by organisations (Tigre et al., 2023). The thematic clusters, organised by colour coding, provide a comprehensive overview of the technical, pedagogical and managerial aspects of digital leadership, covering topics such as e-learning, digital maturity, information systems and emotional intelligence. This multi-layered analysis shows that digital leadership is a multidisciplinary and strategic research area that also encompasses information systems, organisational behaviour and strategic management. When the authors who published the most on digital leadership are examined, Na Na ranks first, with (n=12) publications. This is followed by Abbu H (n=6) and Karaköse T (n=6), who have equal numbers of publications. This distribution reveals that certain authors stand out in the reviewed literature and that there is a notable concentration of publications. The high number of publications by these authors demonstrates their expertise in the field, making them preferred partners for research collaborations. Among the countries that cooperate the most on digital leadership, Germany and the USA share the first place. When the countries that receive the most citations on the subject are evaluated, Indonesia (n=339) is in the first place, followed by Germany (n=323). It is believed that Germany will lead in the number of publications and citations on digital leadership, due to the emergence of the concept of Industry 4.0 at Hannover Fair in Germany. Additionally, the importance that the German government attaches to digitalisation and its desire to be a pioneer in developments in the field of information technologies contribute to this position (Erer et al., 2023).

Digital leadership is of strategic importance for developing countries such as Turkey, which are in the process of digital transformation. Turkey aims to accelerate digitalisation processes in line with national policies such as Digital Turkey Vision, e-Government applications and National Technology Move (Koç, 2022). In this context, the interaction between the public, private sector and academia supports the formation of governance models based on digital leadership, and the sustainability of digital transformation at the institutional level is ensured through multi-actor collaborations (OECD, 2023). This transformation process requires not only the enhancement of technological infrastructure but also the presence of digital leaders who can develop strategic visions and assume an active role in change management. In order to improve the current situation in Turkey, continuous training programmes should be implemented in areas such as digital strategy development, change management, data literacy and cybersecurity. Furthermore, leadership programmes to reduce the digital divide should be integrated into local governments, and systems for technical support and infrastructure should be established to enable digital leaders to use big data, artificial intelligence, and business intelligence tools in decision-making processes. Despite the results obtained, the study has some limitations. The studies were taken from the Scopus database and may exclude documents obtained from other sources. In addition, although searches were made regarding the concept of digital leadership while designing the research, some articles might not have been included. This is because

different terminologies can be used considering this term. It is thought that making sectoral and country-based comparisons on digital leadership will contribute to the literature. In addition, further research will contribute to the literature to determine the role of developing technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, 5G, machine learning, and big data in shaping digital leadership and their effects on leadership approaches.



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### Research Article

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# A Qualitative Study of the Innovative Work Behaviours of Bank Employees



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### Abstract

This study explores how innovative work behaviour emerges in the organisational context, through which processes it is implemented, the cultural factors that ensure its continuity, the main factors that hinder the behaviour and its consequences from a qualitative perspective. In the existing literature, innovative work behaviour has mostly been examined using quantitative approaches and in relation to certain variables, but qualitative studies on how this behaviour is experienced in depth and contextually by employees are quite limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill this theoretical gap by revealing the internal dynamics of innovative work behaviour and guiding practitioners in creating environments that support innovative behaviour. Data for this qualitative research were collected through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. A focus group discussion was held with six employees working at a public bank in Ardahan. An in-depth interview was conducted with an employee working at a private bank in Istanbul, and data were also collected from another employee working at a different private bank in Istanbul through written responses to a semi-structured question form. Because of the data analysis, a total of five distinct themes emerged. These themes include the implementation method and process of innovation, the sustainability of innovative culture, key points hindering innovative behaviour, the source and rationale of innovation, and the outcomes of innovative behaviour. Each of the five obtained themes reflects various dimensional perspectives on innovative work behaviour of bank employees.

### Keywords

Innovative Work Behaviour • Bank Employees • Qualitative Research Method • In-Depth Interview • Document Analysis

### Jel Codes

M10, O32, D23



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## A Qualitative Study of the Innovative Work Behaviours of Bank Employees

Enterprises exert intense efforts to survive and grow in the increasingly competitive business world. Over time, the methods and elements of competition have become highly diverse. In the past, simply producing and differentiating products and services was sufficient to compete. However, there have been periods when the importance of quality has become paramount. With the increase in digital activity in the early 2000s, digital technologies were used to optimise business flows. Currently, digital processes have become the new norm, and digital technologies have become an accepted fact of business for organisations (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). Therefore, innovative thinking in products and services, production processes, business practices, and marketing activities and reflecting this mindset to the customer has become a necessity. Customers have numerous alternatives; thus, they have the opportunity to choose among enterprises. The opportunities available to customers drive enterprises to think more innovatively. The innovative thinking of enterprises, adding innovation to their processes and, consequently, offering innovative products and services, is not solely the responsibility of top management. Indeed, the ability of employees involved in organisational activities to develop creative ideas, implement these ideas with the support of top management, and make innovative updates in products and services in line with customer demands can play a significant role in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage (Elidemir et al., 2020). Encouraging innovation across all levels of the organisation has emerged as a key strategic focus in today's competitive landscape (Katz, 2025). Companies that successfully harness the creative potential of their workforce to develop and execute innovative initiatives are better positioned to remain agile and competitive during constant environmental change (Caligiuri, 2025). Within this framework, important questions that need to be investigated include whether employees possess innovative work behaviour, their willingness to exhibit this behaviour, the factors that may influence innovative work behaviour, the areas where innovative work behaviour predominantly emerges, the potential outcomes of innovative work behaviour, and whether top management provides support to employees for the emergence of innovative work behaviour. This study aims to answer the aforementioned questions, and in this context, an exploratory research on innovative work behaviour has been presented. As a result of the literature review, while studies on innovative work behaviour exist, The greater part of these studies generally focus on examining the relationships between employees' innovative work behaviour and other individual and organisational variables. In this study, innovative work behaviour is the sole variable of the research, and the aim was to conduct an in-depth investigation to obtain findings that would contribute to the literature. Additionally, quantitative research methods were applied to the studies in the literature. In contrast, in this study, a qualitative research method is adopted, focusing solely on a comprehensive investigation of employees' innovative work behaviour. Conducting an in-depth investigation into employees' innovative work behaviour will provide more diversified insights into innovative work behaviour. In the Turkish literature, some qualitative studies have been conducted on innovative work behaviour. In one of these studies, Karamanlioğlu et al. (2024) conducted in-depth interviews with employees working in the education sector to investigate the role of metacognitive awareness in exploring the relationship between innovative work behaviour and creative self-efficacy.

Karamanlioğlu & Şenkul (2024) conducted a study in which they investigated how digital leadership contributes to the development and maintenance of innovative behaviours in the workplace. In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts working in information and communication technology (ICT) firms in the IT sector. Sönmez & Yıldırım (2014) conducted a qualitative study on innovative work

behaviours and the factors influencing these behaviours. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with nurses working at a university hospital, and findings regarding the presence of innovative behaviours were obtained. The factors affecting innovative work behaviours were categorised into four main headings; occupational, individual, organisational, and environmental. Kavas (2017) conducted a study to identify whether employees with innovative personality traits exhibit creative/innovative behaviours and explore the factors influencing innovative behaviour. The study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In-depth interviews were conducted with individuals from various companies operating in the electronics sector. Kırmızı & Özpeynirci (2025) conducted a study to explore the role of self-compassion in the impact of positive/negative affect on innovative work behaviour, utilising both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In this context, in-depth interviews were conducted with female entrepreneurs. Eroğlu et al. (2018) carried out a study examining how innovative behaviours influence conflicts and intend-to-leave among colleagues, utilising both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Focus group meetings were held with employees working in a public organisation in the defence industry in Ankara. In the Turkish literature, studies that have applied qualitative research methods primarily associate innovative work behaviours with other variables. Some studies have investigated the factors influencing innovative work behaviours using qualitative research methods. In these studies, more detailed research focused solely on innovative work behaviours can be observed. The current study includes a detailed and exploratory investigation of innovative work behaviours, it is expected to make significant scientific contributions to the findings of the aforementioned studies. As mentioned above, the majority of studies on innovative work behaviour have been conducted using quantitative methods, and BOT has been examined in relation to individual and organisational variables. However, a significant number of these studies fail to grasp the contextual and process-based nature of innovative work behaviour. In particular, questions such as how employees perceive these behaviours, in what kind of organisational and individual dynamics they emerge from, and under what conditions they are supported or suppressed require a more in-depth and exploratory approach. In this context, the limited number of qualitative studies in the literature makes it difficult to develop a comprehensive understanding of the nature of innovative work behaviour. The main research question of this study is as follows:

**RQ:** How is innovative work behaviour made sense of by employees within the organisational context and what are the interactional and structural dynamics influence the emergence, persistence, and consequences of these behaviours?

## Theoretical Framework

Innovative work behaviour is defined as the behaviour of employees to create, establish, and implement new ideas intentionally at work within a group or an organisation for helping to perform (Janssen, 2000). Employees' innovative work behaviour can be seen as a self-initiated, multidimensional behaviour that generates new ideas in terms of critical thinking, recognising current and potential problems, discovering opportunities and solutions, and developing new methods and procedures that will enhance organisational performance (AlEsa & Durugbo, 2022). Because of this behaviour, innovative employees are not expected to be satisfied with current conditions or the status quo. Employees continue to seek positive and new ideas to improve work methods and processes (Siregar et al., 2019). By introspection of the results of a current task, employees can enhance their expertise and abilities for similar tasks in the future. In the same way, current actions can be updated by reflecting on experiences with related previous activities (Messmann & Mulder, 2012). Rather than focusing on whether a product is wholly innovative or not, innovative work behaviour



is thought to be ongoing and focused on the relative level of originality of each given output (Prieto & Pérez-Santana, 2014). It can be observed that innovative work behaviour is examined in four dimensions. These dimensions are idea exploration, idea generation, idea championing, and idea implementation. The innovation process begins with the discovery of opportunities or the identification of problems. The factor that triggers the urge to innovate may be an emergency requiring immediate intervention or the thought of improving current conditions (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010). In line with this idea, Drucker (1985) categorised the sources of opportunities that could trigger the urge to innovate into seven categories that may arise both within and outside the business and industry. These sources are the unexpected and unexpected failures, innovation based on process needs, the incongruity between actual reality and the desired reality, changes in market or industry structures, changes in mood, perception, and meaning, changes in demographics, and, finally, new knowledge. Basadur (2004) stated that developing new ways, rather than relying on basic assumptions when defining problems and seeking solutions, can be considered under the scope of idea exploration. It is stated that idea generation encompasses a broad scope, including both the discovery of new ideas and behaviours related to individuals presenting their ideas (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010). New products, services, technologies, and processes and procedures can be considered within the scope of idea generation (van de Ven, 1986). In the idea generation process, it is crucial to combine and restructure existing knowledge and concepts to address problems or enhance performance (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010). Idea championing refers to promoting an idea within the organisation to achieve future developments. Support involves building coalitions of potential allies by expressing confidence and enthusiasm about success (Galbraith, 1982). Idea championing involves gaining support for generated ideas and involving key organisational members in employee ideas. These members could be managers and immediate co-workers (Veenendaal & Bondarouk, 2015). Idea implementation involves making innovations a regular part of business (Kleysen & Street, 2001). To implement an idea, people must be persuaded, resources must be obtained, and business teams must be formed. Creative thought may involve cognitive capabilities during each phase, from idea exploration to idea implementation (Mumford, 2003). Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, according to the principle of reciprocity, individuals tend to reciprocate the benefits or support they receive, ultimately promoting equilibrium in social exchanges over time (Blau, 1964). When employees perceive that their contributions are met with support and encouragement, this reciprocal social exchange becomes a significant motivator for engaging in innovative work behaviour (Ajmal et al., 2025). Within the framework of this theory, employees may actively participate in innovative tasks in return for the benefits they receive from the organisation, such as support, fairness, and rewards (Hameli et al., 2025; Souki et al., 2025; Ajmal et al., 2025).

The demonstration of the innovative work behaviour described above is important for both employees and organisations. However, it is essential to focus on elements that can promote or obstruct the emergence of this behaviour. One of the primary elements that can impact innovative work behaviour is organisational climate (Imran et al., 2010). Önhon (2019) found that organisational climate has a positive impact on innovative work behaviour. It has been stated that organisational climate is more closely related to idea realisation than to idea generation behaviour. In this regard, it has been stated that in organisations with a positive innovative climate, idea realisation occurs, whereas in organisations with a negative innovative organisational climate, the realisation of ideas is difficult. Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2019) conducted a study on nurses and indicated that nurses have a high perception of organisational climate and revealed that a positive organisational climate could have a positive impact on nurses' innovative work behaviour. Another factor that may influence innovative work behaviour is organisational justice (Akram et al., 2020). Inaneswar

and Ranjit (2020) have proven that organisational justice has a positive impact on innovative work behaviour. They stated that when enterprises treat their employees fairly, a social exchange relationship is likely to begin, where employees develop a positive perception of support and trust. It has been proposed that employees reciprocate an enterprise's fair approach by displaying positive, productive behaviours that enhance performance. Fadul (2021) found that procedural justice has a positive impact on innovative work behaviour, whereas distributional justice and interactional justice were found to have no effect on innovative work behaviour. Other factors are also expected to influence employees' innovative work behaviour. Several other factors have been identified as influencing innovative work behavior, including pay, job autonomy, obligation to innovate (Ramamoorthy et al., 2005), workplace happiness, coworker support (Bani-Melhem et al., 2018), affective commitment, innovative organizational culture, perceived organizational support (Nazir et al., 2019), work engagement (Agarwal, 2014), psychological capital (Ertürk, 2023), self-efficacy (Hameli et al., 2025), leader-member exchange, leader role expectations, systematic problem-solving style, career stage (Scott & Bruce, 1994), communication flow, knowledge flow (Ortega-Egea et al., 2014), job knowledge, contextual knowledge, perceived innovation-reward (Hussain et al., 2020), personality traits (Fırın & Sevim, 2022), psychological empowerment (Canbek & İpek, 2021), management and coworker support, as well as work engagement, psychological empowerment, transformational leadership, and symbolic incentive meaning (Jaruanakul & Vongurai, 2021). More studies have identified the effects of organisational climate, organisational justice, and organisational support on innovative work behaviour. Factors originating from the organisation, as well as those stemming from individuals and the nature of the job, can also influence innovative work behaviour.

Employees exhibiting innovative work behaviour can provide benefits to the organisation, and other colleagues by enabling them to perform their tasks more effectively (Ramamoorthy et al., 2005; Marampa et al., 2025). The impact of innovative work behaviour at the organisational level is primarily related to performance (Alshahrani et al., 2024; Utomo et al., 2023; Waheed et al., 2017). Shanker et al. (2017) found that innovative work behaviour enhances organisational performance. It was stated that, in order for employees to be innovative, they need support for their ideas and space to express themselves. It has been stated that when idea support and intellectual stimulation are present, the innovation climate will be strengthened, and dynamic opportunities will be provided for employees to pursue new ways of doing things. Utomo et al. (2023) determined that innovative work behaviour has a positive effect on the performance of SMEs. They stated that innovative work behaviour initially begins with the recognition of problems at the individual level and the generation of ideas, and then innovative ideas are applied in organisational practices. The benefits that employees with innovative work behaviour bring to the organisation are not limited to an increase in organisational performance alone. Innovative work behaviour has been found to be associated with knowledge sharing and change management (Adam, 2022), product innovation (Bratianu et al., 2023), and organisational creativity (Sart, 2021). When examining the benefits of innovative work behaviour in the context of employees, it is observed that it has a positive effect on performance (Leong & Rasli, 2014; van Zyl. et al., 2021; El-Kassar et al., 2022). Gökçen & Çetin (2022) conducted a study to investigate the impact of innovative work behaviour on employees' job performance. In this study, the effects of the dimensions of innovative work behaviour—idea exploration, idea generation, idea development, and idea implementation—on job performance were examined. The results of this study revealed that idea generation and idea implementation have a significant and positive effect on job performance. Tunca et al. (2018) investigated the impact of innovative behaviour on task performance in addition to proactive personality traits. The results of this study reveal that as innovative behaviour is exhibited, employee task performance can increase. Al

Wali et al. (2023) investigated the mediating effect of innovative work behaviour on the relationship between employees' dynamic capabilities and job performance. The study found that innovative work behaviour has a positive and significant effect on job performance. Additionally, the research demonstrated that innovative work behaviour acts as a mediator. There are also other benefits that innovative work behaviour provides to employees. It has been revealed that innovative work behaviour is associated with job involvement (Hanif & Bukhari, 2015), digital well-being (Arslan et al., 2023), subjective well-being (Bel, 2022), job satisfaction (Varol & Kılınç, 2021), work engagement (Çavuş, 2023), and subjective career success (Bandar et al., 2019). It would be beneficial to highlight the impact of innovative work behaviour on business model innovation in terms of its organisational outcome. Individuals who exhibit strong innovative work behaviours tend to have a well-developed innovation-oriented mindset, which equips them with dynamic capabilities on a personal level. Despite a changing environment, dynamic capabilities are crucial for the renewal and adaptation of business models (Hock-Doepgen et al., 2025). There has not been extensive research on both individual and organisational outcomes of innovative work behaviour in general. Particularly, studies focusing on organisational outcomes appear to be relatively limited.

When studies on innovative work behaviour in the banking sector are examined, causal relationships are generally observed with other variables. These causal relationships are typically framed as the determinants or outcomes of innovative work behaviours. For example, Khan et al. (2012) examined leadership styles as a precursor to innovative work behaviour. They investigated the effects of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership on innovative work behaviour. Kör (2016) investigated the mediating effect of self-leadership in the relationship between perceived entrepreneurial orientation and innovative work behaviour. In this context, the effects of self-leadership and entrepreneurial orientation as determinants of innovative work behaviour were examined. Dincer and Orhan (2012) conducted a study investigating the effects of emotional intelligence on innovative work behaviours. Nurjaman et al. (2019) explored the moderating role of job characteristics on the effect of proactive work behaviour on innovative work behaviour. Proactive work behaviour was examined as a determinant of innovative work behaviour. Logacheva and Plakhotnik (2021) investigated the effect of humour climate on innovative work behaviour. In this context, they also examined the impact of variables such as positive humour, negative humour, outgroup humour, and supervisory support. Kör et al. (2021) investigated the effect of perceived organisational innovativeness, self-leadership, behaviour-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought pattern strategies on innovative work behaviour. Yogun (2015) examined the effect of cyberloafing on innovative work behaviour. In this context, the impact of the four distinct capacities of cyberloafing-informational, social, leisure, and virtual emotional capabilities-on innovative work behaviour was investigated. Tri et al. (2019) conducted a study on the relationships among empowering leadership, challenging work environments, creativity, innovative work behaviour, and innovative output. Empowering leadership, challenging work environments, and creativity were considered determinants, while innovative output was evaluated as an outcome. Ojedokun (2012) investigated the effect of perceived fair interpersonal treatment and organisation-based self-esteem on innovative work behaviour. In addition, whether the educational level influences innovative work behaviour is another research question explored. Ariyani and Hidayati (2018) examined the effect of transformational leadership and work engagement affect innovative work behaviour. Rahman et al. (2022) explored the relationships among cyberloafing, person-organisation fit, innovative work behaviour, and employee performance. Cyberloafing and person-organisation fit were considered determinants, while employee performance was addressed as an outcome. Garg and Dhar (2017) examined the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and

employee service innovative behaviour. Additionally, they investigated the moderating role of job autonomy in the relationship between work engagement and employee service innovative behaviour. LMX and work engagement were considered determinants of employee service innovative behaviour. In other studies conducted in the banking sector, it is also evident that causal relationships have been established, focusing on the antecedents and outcomes of innovative work behaviour. As stated above, when examining scientific studies on innovative work behaviour in the banking sector, it is generally observed that the research focuses on identifying the factors that determine innovative work behaviour and those that may influence it. Few studies have explored the potential impacts of innovative work behaviour on employees and organisations. This study presents an exploratory investigation into innovative work behaviour, aiming to identify factors that may influence the level of innovative work behaviour and its individual and organisational outcomes. Additionally, studies in the literature have generally been empirical, with a noticeable lack of qualitative methods applied to the investigation of innovative work behaviour. This study employed a qualitative research method, providing a comprehensive approach to understanding innovative work behaviour.

## Method

### Sample

The sample of the study consists of a total of 6 employees working at two public banks operating in Ardahan, and a total of 2 employees working at private bank branches in Istanbul (Table 1). Bank employees play a significant role in the dynamic and competitive structure of the financial sector. In the rapidly changing banking industry, which is influenced by technologies such as digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and fintech solutions, employees are expected to adapt to these changes and exhibit innovative behaviours. The examination of bank employees' innovative work behaviours provides valuable insights into how innovation can be promoted at both the individual and organisational levels. To investigate these behaviours and collect the research data, Ethical Committee approval was acquired from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Ardahan University (with the Ethics Committee Approval Certificate dated 26.12.2023, E-67796128-000-2300041064).

**Table 1**

*Sample Characteristics*

Participant Number	Gender	Bank type	Department	City
P1	Female	Public	Personal loans	Ardahan
P2	Female	Public	Personal loans	Ardahan
P3	Female	Public	Operation	Ardahan
P4	Female	Public	Personal loans	Ardahan
P5	Male	Public	Personal loans	Ardahan
P6	Male	Public	Operation	Ardahan
P7	Female	Private	HRM/recruitment	İstanbul
P8	Male	Private	Insurance	İstanbul

### Data Collection Procedure

The qualitative research method was employed in this study. Focus groups, in-depth interviews, and document analysis techniques were used as data collection tools. A literature review was conducted to design semi-structured in-depth interview questions. In this context, six in-depth interview questions were

prepared, considering the information gathered from studies in the literature on innovative work behaviour, as well as the researcher's subjective perception. The questions aligned with the research problem and focused on innovative work behaviour. A focus group discussion was held with six employees working at a public bank in Ardahan. It took place at the bank branch in a calm and quiet environment. This lasted approximately 45 minutes and was conducted inclusively, ensuring that a view was obtained from each participant. It is suggested that for validity and reliability in focus group discussions, an ideal sample size would be at least five and no more than eight participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Based on this assumption, the research sample is sufficient. A focus group is a special type of group in terms of size, purpose, procedure, and composition. Focus groups are held to gain a deeper understanding of participants' opinions and feelings regarding a certain concept, issue, product, or service. The selection of participants was based on common characteristics related to the focus group's theme (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The focus group discussion provided detailed data from the employees, who had diverse thoughts and feelings. In addition, an in-depth interview was conducted with an employee working at a private bank in Istanbul. The in-depth interview was conducted online. It lasted thirty-five minutes, and the participant provided detailed answers to each question. The use of in-depth interviews is predicted on the assumption that social reality is subjective and therefore requires the researcher to engage with the unit of individuals. In-depth interviews are crucial for data collection on personal experiences and perspectives (Hofisi et al., 2014). The in-depth interviews provided rich data on employee subjective opinions and personal experiences. No guidance or direction was provided during the focus group discussions or the in-depth interviews. In addition to answering the questions, the participants were allowed to express their personal thoughts on the subject. The focus group and in-depth interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission for subsequent transcription. Additionally, semi-structured questions were sent via email to another employee working at a different private bank in Istanbul. The employee provided detailed responses and returned them via email. The written response, which contained textual data, was considered a document, and the necessary qualitative analyses were conducted on the text. Therefore, the transcription process was not processed as in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

There are several elements that verify a qualitative study. These elements include credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Guba, 1981). To ensure credibility, which indicates the extent to which the findings are related to reality, participant verification was conducted. The findings were shared with the bank employees who were interviewed, and they were questioned about whether the findings correctly reflected their opinions. In this way, an understanding was developed based on the attitudes and perceptions of the bank employees regarding innovative work behaviour. In qualitative research, to determine transferability, it is crucial to explicitly define how the sample was chosen, the environment of the research, the traits of the participants, and the duration of the data collection process (Johnson et al., 2020). In this study, a purposive sampling method was preferred. Since the topic and aim of the research were determined within the scope of bank employees, the sample selection considered employees working at one public bank in Ardahan and employees of private banks working in Istanbul. The participants generally have experience in the sector in which they work and have been conducting their activities at the same bank branch for an extended period. In qualitative research, to ensure confirmability, it is essential to clearly describe the availability of raw data like audio recordings and field notes, the data analysis process, the formulation of findings, and the development of measurements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the data obtained were audio-recorded and later analysed to generate findings. The audio-recorded data were first transcribed. Then, open and axial coding was applied in sequence, leading to the development of

categories and themes. In this process, open-ended questions were used to ensure the necessary measurements (Appendix). In qualitative studies, reliability is often determined through the triangulation method. Triangulation refers to the use of two or more data sources or two or more data collection methods within the same study, followed by the comparison of their results (Mays & Pope, 2000). In this study, triangulation was based on data sources. The research includes two different sample groups, and the employees in these groups work at the branches of public and private banks. In this study, which includes two different sample groups that may have distinct characteristics in terms of work practices, organisational climate, and management style, the results can be decisive regarding the reliability of the study. Based on all the information, the four elements required to guarantee the validity and reliability of qualitative research were examined. The purpose of using three different data collection methods in this study is to understand innovative work behaviour in a multidimensional, in-depth and rich way. Data triangulation method was designed to increase the reliability of obtaining data from different sources. Focus group discussions revealed group dynamics and shared perceptions, whereas written responses allowed participants to express their thoughts more freely. An in-depth interview was conducted to understand the participant experiences in detail. The insufficient number of in-depth interviews in this study creates a limitation. At this point, the fact that only one in-depth interview was considered an area that needed to be increased in terms of data richness was considered. However, by complementing this single in-depth interview with other data collection methods, data diversity was ensured, and solid insights on the complex nature of innovative work behaviour were obtained.

## Data Analysis

The data obtained from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were transcribed and converted into text and then prepared for the analysis process together with the written data obtained through document. In the first stage, the data were coded using open coding, which is a qualitative analysis method. All elements in the data, such as words, sentences, paragraphs, phrases, gestures, facial expressions, etc., were coded. Each code represents an underlying meaning related to innovative work behaviour. Because of open coding, 60 codes were obtained. In the second phase, these codes underwent axial coding. Accordingly, the codes were grouped around specific axes, which led to the identification of relevant categories. The axes represent common intersections and perspectives of the codes. In this direction, a total of eight categories were obtained. In the final phase, similar or complementary categories were combined to form themes. Because of the exploratory investigation of innovative work behaviour identified five themes. Each theme represents a different perspective on innovative work behaviour.

## Findings

Following data analysis, a total of eight categories and five themes emerged. The categories include innovative content, ways of innovation, motivation development, ability to sustain innovative behaviours, barriers to innovative behaviours, conditions, source and rationale of innovation, and innovative behaviour outcomes. The codes that led to the identification of each category were discussed. For example, some of the codes that led to the identification of the innovative content category are as follows; "innovations that are useful, user-friendly, and yield quick results," "innovations that provide economic benefits to the customer," and "innovations that increase market share and customer potential." Some of the codes that led to the identification of the ways of innovation category include; "benchmarking studies," "researching competitors' ideas and creating alternatives," and "developing based on customer feedback." Some of the codes that

led to the identification of the motivation development category are as follows; "measuring and rewarding ideas," "existence of an idea development platform," "implementation of ideas and innovations," and "rapid progress of processes." Similarly, relevant codes were used to identify the other categories. The themes that emerged from the research are as follows; "the implementation method and process of innovation," "key points hindering innovative behaviour," "sustainability of innovative culture," "the source and rationale of innovation" and "innovative behaviour outcomes." Under the theme "the implementation method and process of innovation," the categories of innovative content and ways of innovation are included. Under the theme key points hindering innovative behaviour, the categories of barriers to innovative behaviours and conditions are included. The theme sustainability of innovative culture encompasses the categories of motivation development and the ability to sustain innovative behaviours. The themes, the source and rationale of innovation and innovative behaviour outcomes, consist of a single category each, and since each is explanatory on its own and distinctly separated from the other themes, they are directly considered as themes. Therefore, these themes were titled with the names of their respective categories. Information regarding the obtained categories and themes can be found in [Table 2](#), while examples related to the participants' statements are provided in [Table 3](#).

**Table 2***Categories and Themes*

Categories	Themes
Innovative contents	Implementation Method and Process of Innovation
Innovation: Ways of	
Motivation development	Sustainability of Innovative Culture
Ability to sustain innovative behaviours	
Barriers to innovative behaviours	Key Points Hindering Innovative Behaviour
Conditions	
Source and rationale for innovation	Source and rationale for innovation
Innovative behaviour outcomes	Innovative behaviour outcomes

**Table 3***Examples of participants' statements*

Statements	Themes
P4: "Innovations in the digital field are generally carried out by the General Directorate, with little exchange of ideas with the branches."	Implementation Method and Process of Innovation
P5: "Recently, digital approval has been introduced." When a customer provides approval via mobile, it substitutes a signature, eliminating the need for a physical signature."	
P7: "Initially, I researched different ideas observed in competing firms and expanded on these ideas by exploring how they could be implemented in place of those that appeal to me." I then prepare presentations and visuals for these presentations and share them with my manager. Subsequently, my manager will direct the relevant team regarding how to proceed in this area. I will also share the ideas with the relevant team. Alternatively, I reflect on processes from my	



Statements	Themes
<p>previous organisation that I found appealing but consider insufficient in the current organisation.”</p> <p>P8: “For example, in one of our products, the customer experience team informs us about issues that customers find troubling, and at this point, they are dissatisfied.’ How can we improve this situation? How can we make it easier for customers? The goal is to create a user-friendly interface that is approachable and intuitive. We aim to design a screen that is easy to use, allowing customers to quickly reach their desired outcomes. Specifically, this would involve designing a screen on which a policy can be created and its sale and payment can be processed immediately.”</p>	
<p>P3: “A new application has been introduced, and employees are encouraged to provide their opinions and suggestions about this application.”</p> <p>P7: “During the periodic performance reviews, my manager provides feedback and requests the development of new ideas.’ For example, in our most recent performance review, they asked us to propose ideas related to artificial intelligence and recruitment.”</p> <p>P8: “An award was presented to a colleague during a formal ceremony.” Academics specialising in the relevant field were invited from the university, and innovation awards were conferred by them, accompanied by our general manager. From an employee’s perspective, this initiative holds value not only in terms of the idea itself but also in terms of its applicability. Moreover, the presence of an award provides an additional incentive, thereby encouraging participation and innovation.”</p>	Sustainability of Innovative Culture
<p>P1: “Our system includes a designated section where employees can submit suggestions when a new product is launched, particularly in response to the question of whether any additional requirements are needed.” However, in my ten years of experience, I have never witnessed a colleague’s suggestion being seriously considered or implemented within the system.”</p> <p>P2: “Branch-level personnel are generally not individually considered in decision-making processes.” If there is a specific deficiency related to a certain operation, branches tend to submit collective suggestions that are more likely to be considered. However, it cannot be said that individual contributions are given much consideration.”</p> <p>P3: “As my colleagues mentioned, it is very rare.” As my colleague pointed out earlier, if you encounter a problem with a particular transaction and many branches report issues related to that transaction, they take note of it and conduct studies regarding the matter. However, branch personnel are generally not considered in new projects or initiatives. The general manager’s separate unit handles these tasks.”</p> <p>P6: “In our workplace, we deal with a high volume of customers —often engaging with one hundred or more.’ As soon as one</p>	Key Factors Hindering Innovative Behaviour

Statements	Themes
interaction ends, another begins, and it is common to handle five or six tasks simultaneously. Unlike many other professions, the work cannot be approached with a "one task at a time" mindset. Each customer's transaction is different and requires distinct procedures and attention."	
P7: "I strive to generate new ideas with the aim of optimising my workload and minimising time lost on operational tasks. My goal is to improve processes that I perceive as redundant or insufficient in order to enhance overall efficiency."	
P8: "Technology has shown us that distance is no longer a barrier." As these advancements increasingly become integrated into our daily lives, they inevitably place us in a highly competitive environment. Consequently, there is a growing need—and often a natural inclination—to adopt innovative approaches in our work practices."	Source and rationale for innovation
P1: "This approach significantly enhances time efficiency and reduces customer-related responsibilities." When a customer provides digital approval, I no longer require my direct involvement, allowing them to complete the process independently. Additionally, it helps eliminate unnecessary crowding."	
P4: "It wasn't a very well-liked bank before.' Our relationship with our customers is now quite good."	
P5: "It also reduces operational costs by minimising paper waste." Although individual cost savings may seem negligible, they become significant when considered cumulatively. Moreover, digital records eliminate the risk of loss or physical damage and can be preserved indefinitely."	Innovative behaviour outcomes
P1: "There has been a significant shift in customer perspective." Previously, customers often displayed a commanding attitude, treating transactions in a one-sided, authoritative manner. However, in recent times, a more disciplined and structured approach has emerged. Their stance towards service providers has evolved, their expectations have changed, and their demands have notably increased."	

## Discussion

In this study, detailed and comprehensive findings were obtained to gain a deeper understanding of innovative work behaviour. Although innovative work behaviour is not a new concept in the literature, it possesses content that requires further development through new findings. An examination of the findings reveals that the perceptions of bank employees regarding innovative work behaviour are shaped by five different perspectives. These include why banks need innovative behaviours, how innovations will be implemented through these behaviours, in which areas these innovations could stand out, what kind of culture could be created to sustain innovations, what factors may hinder employees' innovative work behaviours, under what conditions innovative work behaviour may be more effective, and what outcomes innovative work behaviour could produce. It is possible to make certain evaluations by integrating the perspectives obtained because of the research with the codes. In line with customer orientation, banks feel the need to be

innovative in order to ensure customer satisfaction and create a positive customer experience. Additionally, environmental and technological changes drive banking activities to become more innovative, which, in turn, motivates employees to exhibit innovative work behaviour. The importance of adapting to environmental changes to avoid being subjected to natural selection is thus evident. Innovations that provide convenience and ease for customers, along with innovative practices that reduce employees' workload, may make it easier to adapt to environmental changes. In addition, user-friendly innovations, customer-oriented, and yield quick results are crucial for customer satisfaction. In the banking sector, mobile applications primarily shape such innovations. Benchmarking studies conducted through investments in younger employees, generating ideas from the customer perspective, and development efforts based on customer feedback have demonstrated how innovations can be implemented. In order to establish an innovative culture, it is crucial to value employees' ideas and implement those ideas in practice. Feedback on ideas (such as comments, evaluations, rewards, etc.) can enhance employee motivation levels. In addition, by creating innovative platforms, the emergence of new ideas can be encouraged. However, some individuals in the research data expressed concerns about the lack of feedback, albeit to a small extent. Işık (2018) identified a positive correlation between factors influencing knowledge sharing, knowledge sharing processes, and innovative work behaviour. This study emphasises the positive impact of the knowledge-gathering process on innovative work behaviour. Additionally, top management support accelerates the knowledge-gathering process, thereby facilitating the further development of innovative work behaviour. The ability of bank employees to share innovative ideas with managers and the importance of these ideas being valued and implemented are crucial for fostering the motivation development process and sustaining innovative behaviour. Furthermore, top management support was identified as a critical condition for the realisation of innovations in this study. In their study, Yeşil et al. (2016) investigated the impact of psychological capital on bank employees and found that hope and optimism, dimensions of psychological capital, positively influence innovative work behaviour. Bank employees with a high level of hope can seek solutions to achieve their goals, whereas those with high self-efficacy are more confident in their abilities. The results of this research revealed that when examining the way innovation is implemented, top management tends to focus more on younger employees. This trend can be explained by the self-efficacy levels of the younger staff. Furthermore, in motivation development processes, the ability of bank employees to generate ideas and share them with their managers may indicate that solutions are being sought to foster innovation. The theme of the sustainability of innovative culture identified in this research is also consistent with this result. An innovative culture perspective was presented, where bank employees' ideas are valued, implemented, and rewarded. As part of the innovative culture, enabling the sharing of ideas with managers and providing top management support can also facilitate bank employees' display of innovative work behaviour. Previous research has demonstrated that organisational cultures characterised by collaboration and innovation contribute significantly to the development of innovative work behaviour. Such environments are conducive to fostering both enthusiasm for innovation and the implementation of innovative actions (Liu & Sun, 2025; Waseel et al., 2025). Consistent with these findings, the current study identifies the sustainability of an innovative culture as a key outcome, emphasising its vital function in promoting and facilitating innovative practices within organisations. Certain factors may hinder the development of innovative work behaviour, which is crucial for banks. In particular, the intense work pace and the expectation of innovative ideas from specific teams or units can prevent the collective development of innovative work behaviour. When a situation arises that concerns everyone or could affect everyone, it was observed that ideas were consulted inclusively. However, in general, when responsibility is delegated to specific units, it becomes difficult to obtain more diverse and rich ideas.

Sökmen et al. (2024) conducted a study highlighting the importance of relationship quality for developing innovative work behaviour. The study revealed that the presence of collaborative, positive communication, and relationships that foster trust and commitment within the organisation has an enhancing effect on innovative work behaviour. The results of this research show that when examining the factors that hinder innovative behaviour, it becomes clear that, in order to generate innovative ideas, communication should not be limited to specific teams or units but should encompass total communication across the entire organisation. Given the importance of relationship quality, all internal stakeholders must be included in the bank's communication process. Furthermore, it is understood that support from senior management who understand the importance of innovation and sufficient budget allocation are required for the implementation of innovative ideas. It has been stated that significant improvements have been observed, particularly in customer segments and behaviours, as a result of innovations driven by innovative business practices. Positive effects on employees, such as job satisfaction, career development, time savings, and increased self-confidence, have been noted. Institutional benefits, including reduced waste and costs, low bureaucracy levels, market efficiency, active size, and increased profitability, have been achieved. There is no broad body of literature on the outcomes of innovative work behaviour. While research on the outcomes of innovative work behaviour remains limited, one existing study revealed that such behaviour exerts a positive effect on organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and moderates the relationship between individualised care and OCB (Liu et al., 2024). Furthermore, the literature has yielded findings indicating that innovative work behaviour can enhance productive work performance (El-Sayed et al., 2024). Similarly, it has also been found that innovative work behaviour is a determinant of employee performance (Liman et al., 2024). The limited number of studies on the outcomes of innovative work behaviour in the literature may highlight the consequences identified in this study more prominently.

### Limitations and Future Directions of this Study

This study has two primary limitations. First, due to the limited sample size, the generalizability of the findings was limited. Therefore, future qualitative studies may yield more robust results with a slightly larger sample size. Additionally, data collection from bank employees working in two different cities, both in terms of size and volume, could present a geographically and organisationally limited perspective. Second, as participants' personal experiences and perceptions primarily shaped their responses, the data reflect individual viewpoints rather than objective measurements. This inherent subjectivity may limit the generalizability of the findings because individual biases and contextual factors can influence how innovative work behaviour is understood and reported. To address these limitations, future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights with quantitative measures to capture both the depth and breadth of innovative work behaviours. Incorporating objective performance data or supervisor assessments can complement self-reported perceptions and provide a more balanced view. Expanding the sample size and including diverse organisational settings and industries would also enhance the external validity and allow for cross-contextual comparisons. Furthermore, how approaches to and barriers against innovative work behaviour vary across different areas of banking (e.g., operations, marketing, etc.) should be investigated. Finally, longitudinal designs could be employed to track how innovative behaviours develop and sustain over time within different organisational cultures and strategic environments. Cross-cultural studies could also provide deeper insights into the ways in which cultural elements shape both the expression and antecedents of innovative work behaviour. Moreover, incorporating complementary theoretical

lenses, such as dynamic capabilities, psychological empowerment, and job crafting, could strengthen the theoretical depth and explanatory potential of future research in this area.

## Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore the innovative work behaviour of bank employees in greater depth. While previous studies in the literature have examined IWB using predominantly quantitative approaches, the adoption of a qualitative research design in this study enabled a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of the phenomenon. Through this approach, the research uncovered a richer and more diverse set of insights that go beyond existing conceptualizations. The findings reveal that bank employees perceive and exhibit innovative work behaviour from multiple dimensions, reflecting both individual and organisational influences. Specifically, five distinct themes emerged from the data: (1) the implementation method and process of innovation, (2) sustainability of innovative culture, (3) key points hindering innovative behaviour, (4) the source and rationale of innovation, and (5) innovative behaviour outcomes. These findings propose that innovative work behaviour is not a uniform or static concept but rather a dynamic and multifaceted construct shaped by contextual realities in the banking sector. Importantly, the study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the significance of organisational culture in fostering innovation, and by emphasising the subjective interpretations of innovation by employees themselves.



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## Appendix

### In-Depth Interview Questions

- 1)** Do you try to innovate, explore opportunities, generate novel ideas and integrate these ideas in the your organisation?
  - a) If so, what actions are you taking in this context?
  - b) What are the reasons that motivate you to think innovatively, seek opportunities, generate new ideas, and implement these ideas?
- 2)** Does your organisation have expectations regarding innovative thinking and the development of new ideas? If so, could you elaborate on these expectations?
  - a) Are the expectations of the organisation included in your official job description, or are these expectations beyond your job description?
- 3)** Do factors influence the sequence of innovative thinking and the generation of new ideas?
- 4)** In which areas or fields do you feel the need to think innovatively and develop new ideas?
- 5)** Are the ideas you develop in the organisation institutionalised and implemented?
- 6)** What outcomes does developing innovative business ideas provide for you and the organisation?



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# Not Quite My Tempo: Reframing Toxic Leadership Through Whiplash



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### Abstract

Toxic leadership is increasingly recognised as a serious threat to psychological well-being and ethical culture within organisations. Characterised by manipulation, emotional abuse and coercive control, such leadership styles are often normalised in high-performance or results-driven environments. This study examines the portrayal of toxic leadership in the film *Whiplash*, focusing on the intense and damaging dynamic between a music instructor and a student. Using document analysis as a method, the research systematically analyzes selected scenes to identify key leadership behaviours and their psychological consequences, including anxiety, dependency, and identity fragmentation. The analysis draws on a multi-dimensional understanding of toxic leadership, emphasising patterns such as authoritarianism, verbal hostility, emotional unpredictability, and self-serving manipulation. The findings reveal that while toxic behaviours may be culturally rationalised as a means to achieve excellence, they ultimately undermine follower autonomy and mental health. The film's narrative offers a compelling case for reevaluating how leadership can be defined, enacted, and rewarded. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential of cinematic texts as reflective tools in leadership research and education.

### Keywords

Toxic leadership • abusive supervision • film analysis • psychological trauma • qualitative research • leadership ethics

### Jel Codes

M12, M14, D23, Z13, D91



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## Not Quite My Tempo: Reframing Toxic Leadership Through Whiplash

In recent years, the study of leadership has expanded beyond the traditional notions of charisma and effectiveness to include its darker dimensions. Among these, toxic leadership has emerged as a critical field of inquiry because of its profound and often long-lasting effects on individuals and organisational systems (Lipman-Blumen, 2006; Schmidt, 2008). Toxic leadership involves sustained patterns of abusive, manipulative, and self-serving behaviour that exploits followers for personal or institutional gain, often under the guise of high standards or excellence. In terms of document analysis, several studies have used textual and narrative sources, including films and organisational documents, to examine leadership phenomena (Love, 2013; Özdemir & Ardiç, 2020; Lindebaum & Courpasson, 2019). These approaches offer valuable insights into the emotional and symbolic dimensions of leadership practices, especially in contexts where traditional empirical methods may fall short.

While empirical research has extensively documented the psychological and organisational consequences of toxic leadership—such as burnout, turnover, emotional exhaustion, and identity erosion—there remains a need for alternative methodologies that can illustrate the lived experience of such dynamics (Tepper, 2000; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Wolor et al., 2022). Film analysis has become an increasingly valuable tool in this regard, allowing researchers to explore leadership phenomena through rich narrative, visual metaphor, and emotional storytelling (Bumpus, 2005; Lindebaum & Courpasson, 2019).

This study employs a qualitative, theory-driven document analysis of the film *Whiplash* (2014), which serves as a narrative text to explore the relationship between an aspiring jazz drummer and his authoritarian instructor. The purpose of this study is to explore how toxic leadership is depicted cinematically and what this portrayal reveals about followers' emotional and psychological toll. Using the Toxic Leadership Scale (Schmidt, 2008) and the Toxic Triangle framework (Padilla et al., 2007) used analytical tools, the study identifies and interprets key scenes that exemplify the dimensions and outcomes of toxic leadership. By examining *Whiplash* through this theoretical lens, the research contributes to the growing literature on destructive leadership while demonstrating the potential of film as a reflective and pedagogical medium in management and organisational behaviour studies.

## Literature Review

### Toxic Leadership: Definitions, Dimensions, and Organisational Impact

Toxic leadership is now widely acknowledged as a distinct and harmful form of leadership that inflicts enduring damage on individuals, teams, and organisations (Lipman-Blumen, 2006; Schmidt, 2008; Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). It is characterised by a persistent pattern of destructive behaviours and attitudes—including manipulation, emotional abuse, authoritarianism, and narcissism—often enacted under the guise of competence or charisma (Lipman-Blumen, 2006).

Although the term has been broadly used in both academic and non-academic discourse, early attempts to define it were vague or overly inclusive. For instance, Lipman-Blumen (2006) included in her typology not only abusive supervisors but also political, corporate, and religious leaders who used fear, manipulation, and control to sustain power. The defining characteristic of toxic leadership is the sustained psychological and professional harm it causes to followers, which distinguishes it from merely ineffective leadership—regardless of the leader's intentions or achievements (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013).

Later conceptual clarity emerged from empirical work such as Schmidt's (2008) Toxic Leadership Scale, which formalised five core dimensions of toxicity: (1) abusive supervision, (2) authoritarianism, (3) narcissism, (4) unpredictability, and (5) self-promotion. These traits distinguish toxic leaders from simply poor managers or unskilled supervisors.

These dimensions capture not only overtly hostile behaviours but also covert, psychologically destabilising patterns of interaction. Abusive supervision refers to sustained verbal hostility, belittling, and coercion that targets a subordinate's dignity and emotional security (Tepper, 2000). Authoritarianism involves rigid hierarchical control, where dissent is silenced and leader authority is absolute, often discouraging initiative or creativity (Padilla et al., 2007). Narcissism, marked by an inflated sense of self-importance, a strong need for admiration, and a lack of empathy, often leads to leadership behaviour that focuses more on the leader's personal image than on the well-being of others (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Unpredictability disrupts follower stability through inconsistent rules, erratic mood shifts, and sudden changes in expectations, fostering anxiety and learned helplessness (Schmidt, 2008). Lastly, self-promotion entails the leader's persistent efforts to claim disproportionate credit, manipulate perceptions, and construct a heroic narrative around their own actions (Pelletier, 2010). Together, these dimensions delineate a pattern of systemic harm that distinguishes toxic leadership from general incompetence or poor interpersonal skills.

Building on this typology, scholars across various studies have further elaborated recurring behavioural patterns that characterise toxic leaders. Across the literature, several consistent traits of toxic leaders have been identified:

- **Abusive Supervision:** Persistent verbal hostility, public ridicule, coercive control, and emotional manipulation (Tepper, 2000; Pelletier, 2010).
- **Narcissism:** An inflated sense of self-importance and deep need for admiration, often paired with low empathy (Wilson-Starks, 2003; Lipman-Blumen, 2006).
- **Authoritarianism:** Strict command-and-control behaviour, often dismissing dissent or critical thinking in subordinates (Ashforth, 1994; Padilla et al., 2007).
- **Manipulative Communication:** Withholding critical information, reframing destructive actions as noble or necessary, and scapegoating others (Lipman-Blumen, 2006; Pelletier, 2010).
- **Verbal Abuse:** Toxic leaders frequently engage in verbal aggression, including yelling, insults, and degradation, often under the guise of discipline. Labrague (2021) found a statistically significant correlation between toxic leadership and increased verbal abuse in healthcare settings, highlighting its impact on emotional distress and reduced job engagement. Octavian (2023) emphasised that verbal abuse is often strategic—public, intentional, and used to consolidate authority and suppress dissent.
- **Public humiliation:** Leaders ridicule or degrade subordinates in front of others. This tactic is not only demoralising but also designed to reinforce hierarchical dominance and obedience. As Pelletier (2010) reported, some organisations allowed public displays of employee mistakes (e.g., a “boo-boo board”), fostering chronic anxiety and the suppression of innovation. Ashforth (1994) and Reed (2004) further argued that public ridicule serves as a mechanism to instil fear, weaken team cohesion, and silence feedback. Lipman-Blumen (2006) added that this humiliation-reward cycle creates emotional dependency and normalises abuse as a leadership style.

These behaviours are not merely dysfunctional—they are often systemic and intentional. This distinguishes toxic leadership from incompetence or poor social skills. Public humiliation, a frequent tool of toxic

leaders, functions not only as corrective feedback but also as a method of dominance and emotional control. In higher education contexts, this tactic has been documented as a means to silence dissent, reinforce hierarchy, and isolate targets from peer support (Smith & Fredricks-Lowman, 2019). To better explain the structural and contextual conditions under which such leadership can arise and persist, several theoretical models have been developed. One of the most widely cited frameworks is the Toxic Triangle (Padilla et al., 2007), which outlines three interactive elements necessary for toxic leadership to emerge:

- Destructive leaders (e.g., narcissistic, controlling),
- Susceptible followers (e.g., conformers or colluders) and
- Conducive environments (e.g., lack of accountability, high instability).

This model helps explain how toxic leadership persists even in organisations with strong stated values. For instance, environments that reward performance at all costs or lack feedback mechanisms are particularly vulnerable.

Another framework distinguishes toxic leadership from other “dark” styles such as abusive supervision or petty tyranny by emphasising intent and magnitude of harm (Krasikova et al., 2013; Milosevic et al., 2020). Volitional, goal-oriented behaviour that harms either individuals or organisational outcomes—or both marks toxic leaders (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013).

Given this deliberate and sustained nature of harm, it is not surprising that toxic leadership produces significant consequences at both individual and organisational levels. The consequences of toxic leadership are extensive and well documented in empirical studies. At the individual level, they include the following:

- Psychological distress and emotional exhaustion (Pelletier, 2010; Tepper, 2000),
- Low job satisfaction, commitment, and morale (Wolor et al., 2022),
- Increased turnover intentions and absenteeism (Rayner & Cooper, 1997; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007).

Toxic leadership also erodes trust, impairs team functioning, and reduces productivity. In extreme cases, it fosters counterproductive work behaviours, such as sabotage, withdrawal, and deliberate underperformance—often framed as a form of “revenge” or equity balancing (Aquino et al., 2001; Bies & Tripp, 1996). At the organisational level, the effects include increased legal and healthcare costs, damage to reputation, difficulty in attracting ethical talent, and reduced innovation and psychological safety across teams (Pelletier, 2010; Winn & Dykes, 2019; Wolor et al., 2022).

These findings show that toxic leadership is not simply a human resources issue—it poses a strategic and ethical risk to organisations. Its high prevalence in contemporary workplaces further exacerbates this concern. Recent studies—such as those by Life Meets Work (2017) and Wolor et al. (2022)—suggest that toxic leadership is alarmingly widespread. According to a global workplace survey, more than 30% of employees reported working under toxic managers, with effects that extended beyond direct targets to entire teams.

Taken together, the literature reveals that toxic leadership is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be dismissed as individual misbehaviour or poor managerial style. Rather, it represents a systemic challenge that undermines psychological well-being, ethical leadership principles, and long-term organisational sustainability. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms and outcomes of toxic leadership is essential not only for protecting employees but also for safeguarding institutional integrity and culture. To enrich this theoretical framework, this study employs a document-based visual analysis, treating Whiplash as a narrative representation of toxic leadership. This methodological choice allows for a deeper exploration



of the emotional, symbolic, and relational dimensions of toxicity—elements often underrepresented in traditional organisational research.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design using document analysis, a widely accepted method in the field of organisational behaviour and leadership studies. In this context, film analysis serves as a tool to investigate complex human interactions, emotional responses, and leadership phenomena through rich visual and dialogic data (Love, 2013; Bumpus, 2005; Lindebaum & Courpasson, 2019).

The film selected for this study is *Whiplash* (Chazelle, 2014), which provides a compelling narrative for examining toxic leadership and its psychological effects on individuals in high-pressure performance environments. The film was chosen due to its intense depiction of a leader–follower dynamic and its thematic relevance to the literature on abusive supervision and stress-based leadership styles. The basic production details of the film are summarised in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1**

*Film Details*

<b>Film Title</b>	Whiplash
<b>Original Release Dates</b>	16 January 2014 (Sundance Film Festival) / 10 October 2014 (USA)
<b>Duration</b>	1 hour 46 minutes
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Director</b>	Damien Chazelle
<b>Producer(s)</b>	Jason Blum, Helen Estabrook, Michel Litvak, and David Lancaster
<b>Screenwriter</b>	Damien Chazelle
<b>Leading Actors</b>	Miles Teller (Andrew Neiman), J.K. Simmons (Terence Fletcher), Paul Reiser (Jim Neiman), Melissa Benoist (Nicole)

## Research Design

The method employed in this study is document analysis, in which the film is treated as a narrative text and analysed through descriptive scene coding based on predefined theoretical constructs. The Toxic Leadership Scale (Schmidt, 2008) and related literature (e.g., Pelletier, 2010; Lipman-Blumen, 2006) were used to guide the categorisation of the leader's behaviours into specific toxic dimensions, such as abusive supervision, narcissism, and authoritarianism.

In addition, scenes involving the follower (Andrew) were analysed in terms of psychological outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and behavioural change, as discussed in contemporary empirical studies (e.g., Wolor et al., 2022; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016).

## Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The research was conducted in the following stages:

- **Literature Review:** An extensive literature review of toxic leadership was conducted, focusing on its dimensions, outcomes, and theoretical frameworks.
- **Film Viewing:** The film was viewed multiple times to ensure a deep understanding of character dynamics, emotional arcs, and key narrative sequences. This repeated viewing aligns with best practices in document and media analysis, in which immersion is essential for accurate interpretation (Love, 2013).

- **Scene Selection and Coding:** Scenes involving central characters (Fletcher and Andrew) were selected based on their relevance to toxic leadership dimensions. Both verbal and non-verbal elements—including tone, gestures, and contextual cues—were manually coded according to predefined categories derived from the Toxic Leadership Scale (Schmidt, 2008).
- **Interpretative Analysis:** A theory-driven thematic analysis was conducted to interpret the coded scenes. This approach facilitates the identification of patterns, power relations, and psychological effects embedded in narrative texts (Bowen, 2009), allowing for a structured, conceptually grounded interpretation of leadership behaviour.

## Methodological Justification

The use of document analysis as a qualitative research method allows researchers to examine texts—such as organisational records, speeches, or narrative media like films—for latent meanings, symbolic structures, and theoretical patterns (Love, 2013). In this study, the film is treated as a self-contained narrative document, where character interactions, dialogue, and visual sequences are systematically coded and interpreted through established leadership theories. As noted by Özdemir & Ardiç (2020) and Üstündağ (2021), film analysis—when framed as document analysis—enables scholars to connect abstract theoretical concepts with emotionally rich, contextually embedded representations of leadership behaviour. No historical or biographical validation of events is conducted; rather, the focus is on the film’s symbolic and thematic portrayal of leadership dynamics.

## Findings

A total of 12 key scenes were selected, coded, and categorised based on their relevance to toxic leadership dimensions and the psychological responses of the follower. These scenes were chosen through purposive sampling, focusing on moments where power dynamics, emotional manipulation, or abusive behaviours were most prominently displayed—consistent with theory-driven selection practices in qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009). The findings are illustrated in [Table 2](#) and elaborated below through selected scene-based analyses.

**Table 2**

*Coded Scenes and Toxic Leadership Dimensions*

Scene No	Timecode (Approx.)	Scene Summary	The toxic leadership dimension
1	00:02:20	Fletcher auditions for Andrew for the first time	Authoritarianism
2	00:18:30–00:23:00	Fletcher Publicly Humiliates Metz in the U.S.	Public Humiliation
3	00:27:00–00:30:00	“Not quite my tempo” scene: verbal abuse and chair throw	Abusive Supervision
4	00:40:00–00:43:28	Folder lost, Carl humiliated, and Andrew replaced him.	Emotional Manipulation
5	00:42:40–00:46:50	Andrew defends Fletcher at dinner	Narcissism (internalised by follower)
6	00:47:3–00:50:30	Fletcher Quietly Replaces Andrew with Connolly in the Proposition:	Unpredictability
7	00:53:35–00:55:55	Fletcher plays Casey’s Song and shares the story of Sean Casey’s death	Emotional Manipulation

Scene No	Timecode (Approx.)	Scene Summary	The toxic leadership dimension
8	00:56:30–01:01:37	Fletcher subjects drummers to hours of abuse; Andrew bleeds but earns the part.	Physical and Verbal Abuse
9	01:05:00–01:10:00	Andrew crashes his car en route to performance, plays with a broken hand, and physically attacks Fletcher.	Extreme Pressure
10	01:19:00–01:22:41	Fletcher defends his abusive methods to Andrew by reframing cruelty as necessary for greatness:	Ideological Justification
11	01:30:50	Andrew is publicly humiliated after a failed solo; Fletcher dismisses him, “I assume you don’t have it.”	Strategic Sabotage
12	01:32:18–End	Andrew reclaims the stage and delivers a brilliant solo; Fletcher nods in approval—submission mistaken as triumph.	Trauma Bonding

### Scene 1: Prologue Scene: “Then Why Did You Stop Playing?”

**Toxic Leadership Dimension:** Emergent Authoritarianism/Psychological Control

**Follower Reactions:** Anxiety, compliance, self-doubt

In a dim, nearly empty practice room late at night, Andrew is rehearsing alone as a tall man with all black steps enters. He removes his coat slowly and silently. This is Fletcher—stoic, unreadable, and immediately commanding figure. He does not raise his voice; instead, he uses calm, precise questions to assert his dominance and evaluate Andrew with cold detachment. A performance test framed as a psychological trap is presented.

**FLETCHER:** *What is your name?*

**ANDREW:** *Andrew Neiman, sir.*

**FLETCHER:** *What year are you?*

**ANDREW:** *first year, sir.*

**FLETCHER:** *Do you know who I am?*

**ANDREW:** *Yes...*

**FLETCHER:** *So, do you know I’m looking for players?*

**ANDREW:** *Yes.*

**FLETCHER:** *Why did you stop playing?*

(Andrew, flustered, tries to recover and starts playing again—fast fills, fast hands, showing off. But Fletcher cuts him off.)

**FLETCHER:** *Did I say to start playing again?*

**ANDREW:** *I thought— I’m sorry, I misun—*

**FLETCHER:** *I asked you why you stopped. Your version of the answer was to turn it into a wind-up monkey?*

**ANDREW:** *I—I stopped because—*

**FLETCHER:** *Show me your rudiments.*

(Andrew performs rolls and patterns.)

**FLETCHER:** *Double-time swing.*

(Fletcher claps, and Andrew follows. Fletcher claps faster.

**FLETCHER:** *No. Double it. Bop-bop-bop-bop...*

(Andrew tried, but fails. Fletcher stops clapping abruptly.

(Andrew keeps playing until he hears the door close. Fletcher has left.

This scene masterfully establishes Fletcher's dominance not through aggression, but through precise emotional manipulation. His calm tone contrasts with his anxiety. The exchange is a test disguised as a conversation—each question tightens the psychological noose.

Fletcher's use of sparse language and abrupt corrections communicate judgement without offering clear feedback. Andrew's repeated "I'm sorry" and desperate efforts to highlight his immediate submission and emotional dysregulation. The sudden, silent exit is punishing through absence, reinforcing confusion and self-doubt. This is a classic example of what Lipman-Blumen (2006) calls "psychological priming for dependency" in toxic leadership: the leader destabilises the follower emotionally and then positions himself as the sole source of validation.

**Scene 2: "Metz, get the out": Public Humiliation as a Control**

**Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** Authoritarianism, public humiliation, unpredictability

**Follower Reactions:** Fear, confusion, shame, and emotional suppression

Andrew enters the studio band for the first time and silently observes as Fletcher leads the group with hyper-focus and calculated aggression. He uses sexually explicit insults, targets individual musicians, and humiliates them in front of his peers. The most disturbing moment comes when Metz, a trombonist, falsely accuses him of playing out of tune—forcing him to admit guilt under pressure, only later to reveal that he was not out of tune at all.

**FLETCHER:** *"That is not your boyfriend's dick.' Do not come early."*

(Band plays. He paces. Then abruptly:)

**FLETCHER:** *"We have an out-of-tune player." Does the player want to reveal himself?"*

(Silence. Fletcher cuts the band off again.

**FLETCHER:** *"Either you know you're out of tune, and you're sabotaging my band—or you don't know, which is worse."*

(He zeroes in on METZ.)

**FLETCHER:** *"Tell me it's not you, Elmer Fudd."*

(Metz, trembling.)

**FLETCHER (whispers):** *"Do you think you're out of tune?"*

**METZ:** *"Y-yes."*

**FLETCHER (shouting):** *"Then why the FUCK didn't you say so?!"*

(He explodes for the first time, unleashing full verbal assault.)

**FLETCHER:** *"Your mind is on a fucking Happy Meal." Get the out."*

(Metz leaves, crying. Fletcher turns to the rest:

**FLETCHER:** *"For the record, Metz was not out of tune.' You were Wallach. But Metz did not know. Furthermore, that's bad enough."*

(He turns and looks directly at Andrew.)

This scene is a masterclass in performative cruelty: Fletcher employs sexually degrading language, ridicules appearance ("Elmer Fudd", "Happy Meal"), and exploits personal insecurity to reinforce his dominance. He weaponized silence and then volume, creating a whiplash effect in the band's emotional state—confusion, fear, and paralysis. Andrew, though not yet the direct target, internalises the message: *No one is safe*. In this case, perfection is expected. The fallibility is punished.

This aligns precisely with Schmidt's (2008) toxic leadership scale: authoritarianism, abusive supervision, and emotional unpredictability. It also reflects Pelletier's (2010) findings on toxic leaders who use scapegoating and public breakdowns to strengthen personal authority. This scene demonstrates how toxic leadership does not only harm the direct target (Metz) but also creates a culture of silence and fear in the entire group. Fletcher ensures that emotional safety is removed from the environment, and in its place, he instills vigilance, shame, and blind obedience. For Andrew, this is the moment he fully enters the toxic system—silent, terrified, but deeply motivated to gain Fletcher's approval.

**Scene 3: "Not My Tempo": Full Psychological Breakdown**

**Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** Abusive supervision, verbal degradation, physical assault, and emotional manipulation

**Follower Reactions:** shock, freeze response, emotional breakdown, learned helplessness, identity erosion

During an early studio band rehearsal, Fletcher singles out Andrew for his tempo inaccuracies. The initial clinical correction quickly escalates into a full-blown psychological assault. Fletcher throws a chair at Andrew, slaps him repeatedly, hurls homophobic and deeply personal insults at him, and forces him to admit his emotional vulnerability in front of the entire band.

This is not a correction. It is a calculated destruction of ego under the guise of "discipline."

**FLETCHER:** "Were you rushing or were you dragging?"

(Andrew hesitates. Fletcher slaps him — once, twice, and three times.)

**FLETCHER:** "Start counting."

(Andrew tries; Fletcher screams louder, faster, until Andrew mutters:)

**ANDREW:** "Rushing..."

**FLETCHER:** "So you do know the difference!"

(He mocks Andrew, berates him, calls him mentally disabled.)

**FLETCHER:** "Is that a tear?' Do I look like a double rainbow to you?"

(Andrew tries to hide his tears.)

**FLETCHER:** "Say it.' Are you upset?"

(Andrew whispers. Fletcher demands he scream:

**ANDREW (yelling):** "I am upset!!!"

**FLETCHER:** "You are a worthless, friendless faggot-lipped little piece of shit..."

This scene presents the most explicit and violent manifestation of Fletcher's toxic leadership, integrating nearly all the dimensions identified in the scholarly literature on destructive supervision. It begins with a shocking act of physical aggression, as Fletcher hurls a chair directly at Andrew's head, followed by repeated slaps during a forced tempo-counting ritual. These acts are compounded by sustained verbal and psychological abuse, including homophobic slurs, personal insults directed at Andrew's family background, mocking of his emotional vulnerability and a coerced public admission of distress. Fletcher's behaviour is marked by rapid shifts between calm interrogation and explosive rage, producing a state of emotional confusion that is deliberately weaponized to establish dominance. The humiliation reaches its peak as

Andrew, trembling and tearful, is forced to shout “I am upset” to the entire room under Fletcher’s demand, effectively stripping away his emotional agency in front of his peers.

The scene aligns closely with Tepper’s (2000) definition of abusive supervision as the sustained display of hostile behaviours—though here, the abuse crosses physical territory. Moreover, Fletcher’s methods exemplify Pelletier’s (2010) assertion that toxic leaders often rationalise cruelty by invoking ideals like greatness or excellence. For Fletcher, Andrew’s psychological breakdown is not collateral damage—it is the very process by which he believes excellence is forged. Andrew’s disintegration mirrors what Hadadian and Zarei (2016) define as emotional exhaustion and identity conflict among subordinates who have been exposed to abusive leadership.

Narratively, this moment is a critical turning point. From this scene onward, Andrew is no longer merely seeking approval; he becomes psychologically dependent on it. The mentor-mentee dynamic collapses into a cycle of coercion and submission, marking the transition from aspirational leadership to psychological captivity. In doing so, the film offers a sharp critique of how cultures of performance may confuse abuse with rigour and interpret personal collapse as the price of artistic excellence.

**Scene 4:** *“You’d Better Pray Your Memory Doesn’t Fail”*

**Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** Gaslighting, emotional manipulation, authoritarianism, verbal abuse, and scapegoating

**Follower Reactions:**

Carl: Humiliation, helplessness, withdrawal

Andrew: Eagerness to please, anxiety, and rising overidentification

As the band prepares for the competition, a folder containing the important charts is missing. Carl accuses Andrew of losing it. Fletcher, instead of calmly resolving the situation, responds with overt verbal abuse, mocking Carl with an ableist and humiliating language. When Carl admits he cannot play without sheet music because of a medical memory condition, Fletcher publicly ridicules him and essentially forces Andrew to take his place.

Andrew steps in—not just to help but to sense an opportunity to rise. He delivers a shaky but successful performance. Later, after the band wins first place, Fletcher gives an emotional speech, referring to the students as “his family”—framing abuse as care. However, when Carl’s folder is found, it’s revealed that neither he nor Andrew were at fault. Fletcher never apologises. The next day, Fletcher demotes Carl without explanation and reinstates Andrew. Carl is shocked and forced to leave the drum set. The decision is delivered without eye contact, discussion, or closure.

**CARL:** *“I can’t go on-stage... I don’t know the charts by heart.”*

**FLETCHER:** *“What are you Sanjay Gupta? Play the music!”*

*(Carl panics. Andrew volunteers.)*

**FLETCHER:** *“You’d better pray your memory doesn’t fail you.”*

*(After the win:)*

**FLETCHER (to band):** *“I treat them like my own kids. Meaning I terrorise them.” (Laughter.)*

*(Next day, to Carl:)*

**FLETCHER:** *“Core only today. I cannot waste time with alternates.” (Carl is dismissed.)*

This scene is a masterclass of subtle cruelty masquerading as opportunity. Fletcher does not raise his voice—instead, he operates with surgical precision, transforming a moment of logistical confusion into a carefully orchestrated public trial. When Carl nervously admits that he cannot perform without sheet music because of his cognitive condition, Fletcher seizes the chance to humiliate him in front of the group. His use of deeply ableist and dehumanising language—comparing Carl to a “retard with a calculator” and ridiculing his need for “visual cues”—reveals a toxic, zero-tolerance culture in which vulnerability is punished and not supported. In contrast, when Andrew volunteers to take Carl’s place and manages to deliver a passable performance, Fletcher immediately reframes the situation as a personal triumph of talent and trust. His emotional speech after the band’s victory, in which he compares his students to his “own kids” and admits to “terrorising them,” is both manipulative and revealing. It masks structural abuse in the performance of paternalistic care, which Padilla et al. (2007) identified as the “benign façade” of toxic leadership. These events illustrate what Krasikova et al. (2013) and Pelletier (2010) describe as manufactured crises used by toxic leaders to test loyalty and consolidate power. The reward of praise is conditional, manipulative, and tied not to merit but to compliance under pressure.

Narratively, this moment marks a further erosion of moral clarity. Andrew steps in not because he is fully prepared, but because he has internalised the belief that Fletcher’s approval is more valuable than personal readiness or peer solidarity. His complicity in Carl’s removal signals a shift from idealism to self-preservation. Fletcher’s version of success demands sacrifice—not just of time or energy, but of empathy and conscience. As such, this scene crystallises the emotional cost of surviving under toxic leadership: the quiet normalisation of harm in pursuit of validation.

**Scene 5:** *“I’d Rather Die at 34...” – Internalising the Narcissistic Standard*

**Toxic Leadership Dimension:** Narcissism (Internalised by follower)

**Follower Reactions:** Overidentification, moral rigidity, and social isolation

Andrew joins his family for dinner, where a casual conversation about his achievements turns subtly competitive. As his athletic cousins receive admiration and accolades, Andrew’s attempts to share his accomplishments in Studio Band are met with condescension and misunderstanding. Frustrated, he erupts—defending not only himself but an ethos of success based on pain, sacrifice, and artistic transcendence. In doing so, he mirrors Fletcher’s earlier justifications for cruelty and hardship as necessary for greatness.

**ANDREW:** *“I’d rather die broke and drunk at 34 and have people at a dinner table somewhere talk about it than die rich and sober at 90 and have no one remember me.”*

**ANDREW:** *“Charlie Parker didn’t know anyone until Jo Jones threw a cymbal at his head.”*

**ANDREW:** *“I prefer to feel hated and cast out.” It gives me purpose.”*

*(Later, citing Laszlo Polgar:)*

**ANDREW:** *“He got his daughters to practice chess before they could even talk.’ All three were world champions.”*

This scene is quiet in tone but psychologically charged, revealing a deep shift in Andrew’s internal world. His rigid posture, clipped tone, and unflinching eye contact reveal not only defensiveness, but also a growing ideological detachment from his family. The camera isolates him visually, placing a distance between Andrew and the rest of the dinner table, emphasising his emotional estrangement.

Andrew's defence of Jo Jones throwing a cymbal, an abusive moment Fletcher previously mythologised, reveals the extent to which he has internalised the logic of toxic mentorship. Padilla et al. (2007) describe in the Toxic Triangle framework that individuals have become conforming followers—someone who adopts the dysfunctional values of the toxic leader to gain proximity and perceived significance. No longer questioning Fletcher's methods, Andrew justifies them as necessary truths. This progression also reflects the identity-based followership outlined by Hadadian and Zarei (2016), in which the follower's personal identity is fused with the leader's vision. The result is moral rigidity, loss of autonomy, and withdrawal from social connectedness.

Narratively, the dinner scene marks a pivotal moment in Andrew's psychological transformation. He is no longer merely surviving under Fletcher's dominance; he is rationalising and defending it, even in spaces of intimacy and kinship. His desire for validation had eclipsed his need for belonging. In choosing Fletcher's brutal and isolating standard of success over the imperfect warmth of family, Andrew confirms his total ideological submission—an artist no longer just shaped by pressure but consumed by it.

**Scene 6:** "That's Not Quite My Tempo..." AGAIN.

**Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** *Unpredictability, Gaslighting, and Psychological Undermining*

**Follower Reactions:** *Disorientation, desperation, and loss of trust*

During a quiet rehearsal, Fletcher asks Andrew to run through a part at tempo 330. Andrew, nervous but focused, begins playing—only to be subtly cut off by Fletcher's familiar line: "That's not quite my tempo." Without raising his voice or displaying overt aggression, Fletcher replaces Andrew with Connolly, another drummer who delivers a flawless performance. Fletcher praises Connolly in front of Andrew, delivers a cold verdict—"Connolly, the chart's yours"—and walks away with no explanation.

Andrew, humiliated and confused, walks directly into Fletcher's office, insisting he can play the part. Fletcher screams "NOT NOW!" However, unexpectedly, Andrew notices that Fletcher's eyes are moist. For the first time, Fletcher appears emotionally vulnerable—his voice is shaken, and his expression is subtly painful. Andrew does not understand what he is witnessing, and the moment ends in eerie ambiguity.

**FLETCHER:** "That's not quite my tempo..."

**FLETCHER (to Connolly):** "That was excellent'. This is the beauty of Studio Band—you come in an alternate, a minute later you're core."

**ANDREW:** "You're not serious."

(Later, bursting in:)

**ANDREW:** "I can play that part." You know I can—"

**FLETCHER (shouting):** "NOT NOW!"

(Andrew notices: Fletcher's eyes are watering.)

This scene is quietly devastating, offering a masterclass in psychological destabilisation through subtle manipulation. Fletcher's tone remains calm and composed, but his actions carry a sharp psychological weight. By asking Andrew to play a difficult section and then immediately replacing him with Connolly—who performs flawlessly—Fletcher creates a gaslighting dynamic: Andrew is punished and displaced without having clearly failed. Fletcher's praise of Connolly, delivered with gentle authority in front of Andrew, reinforces the ambiguity. The effect is not open aggression but emotional invalidation. The cinematography



mirrors this confusion: Andrew is visually positioned between Connolly's relaxed presence and Fletcher's cold detachment. His rapid breathing and clenched body language convey his rising panic, while Fletcher's tranquil demeanour and, later, his unexpected tears invert the emotional logic of the scene. In this moment, Fletcher appears vulnerable, even wounded—but whether this display is authentic or another layer of manipulation remains deliberately unclear.

From a theoretical standpoint, the scene reflects what Schmidt (2008) defines as toxic unpredictability: leadership behaviour that destabilises followers by defying emotional expectations. Lipman-Blumen (2006) noted that toxic leaders often undermine psychological stability by blurring the boundaries between praise and punishment, closeness, and rejection. Andrew's urgent confrontation in Fletcher's office illustrates the attachment anxiety discussed by Hadadian and Zarei (2016), in which the follower becomes emotionally entangled in the leader's validation, needing it not just for performance but for personal coherence. Fletcher's visible emotion, whether genuine or performative, deepens this entanglement—giving just enough humanity to complicate Andrew's judgement of him. As a result, Fletcher simultaneously becomes an abuser and saviour in Andrew's perception.

#### **Scene 7: "He Was a Beautiful Player"**

**Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** Emotional manipulation, a benign façade

**Follower Reactions:** Sympathy, silence, and emotional entanglement

In a quiet rehearsal room, Fletcher asks the band to set down their instruments. He plays a muted trumpet ballad—Sean Casey's song—on the CD player. As the music plays, Fletcher delivers a deeply emotional monologue about Sean, a former student who, according to him, was once overlooked but whom Fletcher believed in. He describes Sean's rise from near failure to first trumpet at Lincoln Centre, only to reveal that Sean died in a car accident the previous day. Fletcher's voice cracks. He is nearly cries. Then, without transition, he turns off the music and coldly announces: "*Caravan.*" *From bar 142, please.*"

This scene is charged with performative sincerity. Fletcher appears vulnerable, open, and human. His voice wavers. His body was smaller. The story he tells is one of mentorships, belief, and tragic loss. However, the sudden shift back into rehearsal—"Caravan, bar 142"—strips the moment of authentic mourning and repositions it as a tool. This performance of grief reinforces his narrative: greatness requires suffering, and he alone can see and cultivate that potential.

This scene reflects what Padilla et al. (2007) identified as a benign façade—a leadership mask of care and vulnerability that conceals manipulative intent. Fletcher's storytelling builds emotional loyalty without offering relational reciprocity. Schmidt (2008) defined emotional manipulation as the use of feelings to control perceptions and behaviour; here, grief is deployed to reinforce Fletcher's power, not to process a loss.

The follower's response—silence, reverence, and compliance—suggests successful manipulation. In Hadadian and Zarei's (2016) framework, such moments deepen affective dependency. By revealing just enough vulnerability, Fletcher creates a sense of intimacy that strengthens students' emotional investment, especially for followers like Andrew who already perceive his approval as existentially meaningful.

#### **Scene 8: "Faster..Faster!!"**

**Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** Abusive supervision, physical and verbal assault, emotional exhaustion, gaslighting, authoritarianism

**Follower Reactions:** Physical collapse, bloodied hands, obedience under duress, and emotional numbness

Following his emotional story about Sean Casey, Fletcher immediately pivots into a brutal “tempo test” with his three drummers: Andrew, Connolly, and Carl. At first, Fletcher appears calm and tentative—but quickly descends into uncontrolled rage. He cycles through the drummers for hours, screaming obscenities, hurling objects, and inflicting verbal and physical terror. His insults range from homophobic slurs to psychological attacks on family, masculinity, and worth.

**FLETCHER:** “Maybe now’s the time for Neiman to earn the part...”

(Andrew’s hope flickers—he grips his sticks, breathes in, prepares...)

**FLETCHER (immediately after):** “No, I guess not.’ Tanner.”

(An intentional whiplash—hope replaced by humiliation.)

**FLETCHER:** “I will find my tempo out of one of you faggots if it takes me all goddamned night.”

(Rage, homophobia, and authoritarianism converge.)

**FLETCHER (to Andrew):** “Not my fucking tempo!”

(Degradation becomes rhythmic and ritualistic.)

**FLETCHER:** “You hear me talking, cocksuckers? You’d better start me for perfect 400s!”

(Inhuman standards paired with obscene verbal abuse.)

(Later, Andrew back on the kit—bleeding, shaking, exhausted...)

**FLETCHER:** “Speed up! God-fucking-damnit, I said SPEED UP!!!”

(Repeated over and over in a frenzied crescendo.)

**FLETCHER (beating cowbell):** “Don’t stop!”

**FLETCHER:** “Do it!” Do it! Do it! One! One! One! One!”

(Andrew misses one beat—Fletcher throws the floor tom into the wall.)

**FLETCHER:** “KEEP PLAYING!!!”

(Andrew obeys. Blood on his hands, his identity dissolving.)

**FLETCHER (final line):** “Congratulations, Neiman.” You earned the part.”

(Approval through annihilation—an indoctrinated victory.)

This sequence is the film’s most visually and sonically overwhelming moment, when the emotional tension that has been building finally detonates. Through rapid-fire editing, extreme close-ups of Andrew’s bloodied hands, sweat-drenched face and the cowbell striking inches from his head, the viewer is pulled into a sadistic endurance ritual that transcends pedagogy and enters the realm of psychological warfare. The soundscape becomes an assault in itself—ringing ears, relentless cymbals, and Fletcher’s manic commands merge into a near-traumatic viewing experience. What initially seems like a rehearsal quickly reveals itself to be an orchestrated breakdown. Fletcher’s earlier emotional bait—his teary monologue about Sean Casey—renders the brutality that follows even more disorienting, blurring the boundary between mourning and manipulation. His calculated use of repeated switches, invalidation, verbal degradation, and ultimately physical violence (such as hurling the floor tom across the room) systematically strips Andrew of his autonomy. Yet, Andrew does not cry, plead, or resist. He plays. Broken in body but trained in obedience, he

endures. Furthermore, when Fletcher finally delivers his perverse benediction—“Congratulations, Neiman. You earned the part.”—it is clear that what Andrew has won is not approval, but submission.

The dynamics at play in this scene exemplify the full convergence of toxic leadership theories. Tepper’s (2000) concept of abusive supervision is manifested in its most literal and extreme form. Schmidt’s (2008) toxic leadership dimensions—authoritarianism, unpredictability, emotional abuse, and narcissism—are all simultaneously present, reinforcing the environment as one of coercive dominance rather than guidance. The escalation from psychological pressure to physical force marks a descent into what can only be described as organisational sadism, where the goal is not development but complete control. Andrew’s response—driven not by passion but by desperation—reflects the emotional exhaustion and identity fusion described by Hadadian and Zarei (2016). He no longer plays for music, but for survival. Padilla et al.’s (2007) Toxic Triangle is also fully realised: a destructive leader, a psychologically vulnerable follower, and an enabling institutional context that prioritises prestige over well-being.

#### **Scene 9: “You’re Done”**

**Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** Extreme pressure, authoritarianism, emotional exhaustion, and psychological breakdown

**Follower Reactions:** Self-harm, dissociation, violent outbursts, and emotional collapse

As Andrew races to arrive on time for his critical performance, he crashes his car. Bleeding and with a visibly broken hand, he refuses medical help, retrieves his drumsticks from the wreckage, and runs three blocks to the concert hall. Stumbling onstage, he forces himself into the drummer’s seat. Despite agonising pain, the mangled hand, and the band’s disbelief, Andrew insists on playing. But the tempo collapses, the beat unravels, and the piece fails in front of the audience. Fletcher, calm and scathing, leans in and whispers: “You’re done.” Andrew, overwhelmed and broken, explodes. He knocks over the drums and physically tackles Fletcher on stage, screaming, before being dragged off by security, sobbing and bleeding. The total meltdown is

**ANDREW (to truck driver):** *“I must go, it’s three more blocks.”*

*(Self-sacrifice overrides survival instinct.)*

**ANDREW:** *“Get off the set.”*

*(Reclaims control momentarily—desperation framed as agency.)*

**FLETCHER (whispers):** *“You’re done.”*

*(The ultimate devaluation—cold, dismissive, lethal.)*

*(Andrew flips drums, tackles Fletcher, screams in rage.)*

This is one of the most physically intense and emotionally catastrophic scenes in Whiplash. Andrew’s decision to prioritise performance over his own life and body demonstrates the devastating power of internalised toxic leadership. When he arrives at the concert, the visual cues are unmistakable: his hands are shaking, his shirt is soaked in sweat, and his left hand is useless. Still, he plays. But his agony manifests in the slow collapse of timing, precision, and control.

When Fletcher tells him “You’re done,” it is not a correction—it is a death sentence. The quiet insult unleashes a response shaped by long-standing emotional tension. Andrew’s violent outburst—flipping

drums, charging at Fletcher—is not rebellion but rupture. The image of Fletcher being dragged offstage in tears while he remains untouched is the final proof of who holds power.

This scene marks the psychological breaking point of toxic leadership's impact. Fletcher's authoritarian control, paired with Andrew's identity fusion and escalating emotional dependency, culminates in a moment of physical self-harm and emotional collapse. What begins as overcommitment—racing to the performance despite a car crash—quickly reveals itself as what Lipman-Blumen (2006) terms “self-sacrificial loyalty,” a hallmark of toxic leader-follower dynamics wherein high-achieving subordinates internalise their leader's demands at the expense of self-preservation. Andrew's refusal of help and determination to perform with a broken, bleeding hand demonstrate the complete disintegration of the boundaries between ambition and obedience. This moment also fully activates Padilla et al.'s (2007) Toxic Triangle framework: Andrew has become the conforming follower, Fletcher the destructive leader, and the institution—the Shaffer Conservatory—a passive enabler that fails to intervene. Thus, the scene transcends the logic of discipline or performance; it becomes a vivid example of organisational collapse, where the pursuit of excellence becomes indistinguishable from psychological destruction.

**Scene 10:** *“There Are No Two Words More Harmful Than ‘Good Job’”*

**Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** *Ideological justification, narcissism, grandiosity, instrumentalism*

**Follower Reactions:** *Moral absorption, ideological alignment, and conflicted admiration*

In a quiet jazz bar, Fletcher opens up to Andrew in an initially vulnerable, even reflective conversation. He claims he never wanted to be a performer, but rather a man who made a great artist, the mentor of the next Charlie Parker. Through storytelling, he reframes his abuse as a moral obligation to cultivate genius. The story of Jo Jones throwing a cymbal at Parker becomes his foundational myth: greatness, he argues, only emerges from adversity. *“There are no two words more harmful than ‘good job,’”* he says, summarising his philosophy. When Andrew questions whether such tactics might scare off true talent, Fletcher dismisses the idea entirely: *“Because the next Charlie Parker would never be discouraged.”* In this moment, Andrew appears captivated, not just by Fletcher's certainty, but by the clarity of his worldview.

This scene marks a pivotal transformation in the toxic leader-follower relationship: coercion gives way to ideological capture. Fletcher no longer relies on physical intimidation or verbal degradation; instead, he delivers a carefully crafted philosophy that frames cruelty as a moral duty. He embodies what Lipman-Blumen (2006) calls a narcissistic visionary—a leader very devoted to a transcendent mission that ethical boundaries are suspended in the pursuit of greatness. His belief that *“there are no two words more harmful than ‘good job’”* encapsulates a worldview built on grandiosity and elitism, where suffering is reframed as a rite of passage, not a warning sign. This rhetorical strategy reflects what Krasikova et al. (2013) describe as the instrumentalization of followers—turning subordinates into tools for achieving abstract, often self-serving goals. In this logic, outcomes justify all means, and accountability becomes irrelevant.

Andrew's response in this moment aligns precisely with Padilla et al.'s (2007) description of “conformers” in the Toxic Triangle: followers who internalise the leader's ideology in search of purpose or identity. His prior trauma is not resolved, but the re-narrated pain becomes validation, and obedience becomes destiny. When Fletcher says, “I will never apologise for trying,” it is not an act of self-defence, but a final renunciation of guilt, cloaked in the language of legacy. Andrew's reply—*“Who's your Charlie Parker?”*—reveals that he is no longer seeking safety or critique; he is seeking significance within the very system that broke him. Control, in this context, is no longer physical—it is cognitive, moral, and nearly irreversible.

**Scene 11:** *“I assume You Don’t Have It”: Public Defeat, Private Collapse***Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** Strategic sabotage, humiliation, public shaming, strategic undermining**Follower Reactions:** Defeat, emotional collapse, public exposure

Andrew, having just attempted to follow Fletcher’s unexpected tempo and piece changes, finishes playing alone. The last cymbal hit lingers, and then—nothing. Silence is deafening. No applause. No acknowledgment. Only a faint ripple of muted, reluctant clapping could be heard. The concert hall, filled with confusion and discomfort watches a young man unravel.

**NARRATION:** *“No one here has ever seen a disaster quite like that before.”*

*Fletcher walks calmly back towards Andrew. His demeanour is light and victorious. Andrew is sitting, devastated, with tears forming as he stares blankly into space. Fletcher leans in, softly—cruelly:*

**FLETCHER:** *“I assume you don’t have it.”*

This moment represents the final stage of manipulative leadership: public humiliation follows private exploitation. Fletcher uses the stage not merely to test Andrew’s limits but to obliterate his credibility. The act reflects a pattern of manipulative control that aligns with the dimensions of toxic leadership outlined by Schmidt (2008), particularly unpredictability and abusive supervision. It further echoes what later literature terms “strategic sabotage”—a deliberate tactic of setting up followers for failure and disowning them publicly (Pelletier, 2010). The cruelty lies not in overt aggression, but in precision: Fletcher withholds support, shifts expectations without warning, and, after Andrew’s painful solo effort, delivers the cutting blow—“I guess you don’t have it.” It is not spoken in anger, but in judgement, finality, and utter dismissal. Lipman-Blumen (2006) emphasises that toxic leaders often build psychological dependency in their followers before orchestrating a betrayal to reassert dominance. Fletcher’s line is the culmination of that pattern—quiet, devastating, and in full view of Andrew’s peers, family, and an indifferent audience.

The public nature of this defeat magnifies its emotional and psychological cost. As Hadadian and Zarei (2016) noted, such invalidation—especially when preceded by conditional praise—can trigger identity confusion, emotional exhaustion, and long-term trauma in followers. Andrew, who sacrificed his health, relationships, and sense of self for Fletcher’s approval, is left shattered, not just as a musician but as a person. Yet narratively, this scene is not merely an endpoint—it is a turning point. By stripping Andrew of all external validation, Fletcher inadvertently clears the stage for a new form of agency: one no longer built on obedience but on self-assertion. In this way, the moment of collapse becomes a silent catalyst for the film’s final reversal, when Andrew, no longer seeking permission, reclaims his performance on his own terms.

**Scene 12:** *“Caravan” – The Illusion of Triumph***Toxic Leadership Dimensions:** Trauma bonding, manipulative reinforcement, and narcissistic validation**Follower Reactions:** Self-erasure, identity fusion, and emotional detachment

After being publicly humiliated and dismissed with Fletcher’s cold verdict—“I guess you don’t have it”—Andrew initially exits the stage in defeat. However, moments later, as Fletcher launches into a piece Andrew has not rehearsed, he returns. Without cue or permission, he reclaims the tempo and launches into an electrifying, extended solo of “Caravan.” The audience is being stunned. Fletcher is first livid and then visibly impressed.

This scene, visually and narratively, illustrates the culmination of Padilla et al.’s (2007) Toxic Triangle: Fletcher is the destructive leader, Andrew the conforming follower, and the jazz community—applauding

brilliance without asking what it cost—is the enabling context. The performance is not an act of artistic expression but an endpoint of identity erosion. Andrew is no longer playing to grow—he is playing to fulfil Fletcher’s vision. As Pelletier (2010) argued, such followers experience emotional dissonance: a simultaneous sense of achievement and loss. This tension permeates the final scene—Andrew achieves artistic excellence, but not on his own terms.

Fletcher, in turn, embodies Lipman-Blumen’s (2006) narcissistic visionary. He does not see himself as a mentor but as a creator of greatness justified in inflicting pain if it yields results. The faint smile he gives to Andrew is not pride—it is ownership. Andrew’s transformation is his triumph.

## Discussion

The findings confirm that *Whiplash* offers a vivid, multi-layered portrayal of toxic leadership as conceptualised in contemporary literature. Fletcher, the film’s central authority figure, exhibits nearly all the major dimensions of toxic leadership—including abusive supervision, authoritarianism, narcissism, unpredictability, and manipulative rhetoric—as outlined in the Toxic Leadership Scale (Schmidt, 2008) and theoretical frameworks such as the Toxic Triangle (Padilla et al., 2007).

These behaviours are not isolated incidents but form a consistent pattern of coercion and control, fitting Lipman-Blumen’s (2006) definition of toxic leadership as a systemic abuse of power that damages individuals and institutional integrity. Fletcher’s actions foster a high-performance environment driven not by mutual respect or ethical standards but by fear, humiliation, and dependency.

### *Psychological and Emotional Impacts on Followers*

The psychological responses exhibited by Andrew—emotional breakdown, identity confusion, self-isolation, and eventual psychological collapse—are aligned with the known effects of toxic leadership in empirical studies. For example, Hadadian and Zarei (2016) highlight the direct correlation between toxic leadership and emotional exhaustion, a state that Andrew clearly enters at the film’s midpoint. Similarly, Wolor et al. (2022) argued that abusive leadership reduces motivation and performance quality by inducing fear-based compliance, not inspiration.

One striking finding is how Andrew internalises Fletcher’s worldview. He begins to echo his leader’s ideals of greatness through suffering and superiority through exclusivity, echoing Lipman-Blumen’s (2006) observation that toxic leaders often shape their followers’ identities to mirror their own narcissistic values. Andrew’s dinner table argument, in which he defends the idea that “it’s better to die great than live mediocre,” is a classic example of this ideological transfer.

### *Trauma Misrecognised as Triumph*

The film’s final act—the solo drum performance and Fletcher’s appreciative nod—has often been interpreted as a moment of earned respect or mutual recognition. However, this study’s analysis demonstrates that this moment reflects not resolution, but the climax of trauma bonding. The nod is not a redemption but a subtle reinforcement of the abusive dynamic.

This aligns with findings by Milosevic et al. (2020), who argue that toxic leaders often disguise control as mentorship and pain as growth. The leader-follower relationship becomes a site of emotional entrapment, wherein the follower equates suffering with self-worth.

Furthermore, Pelletier (2010) identifies emotional dissonance as a long-term consequence of toxic leadership—followers feel satisfaction and shame simultaneously. Andrew’s final performance, achieved through bleeding hands and psychological pressure, exemplifies this duality: a performance of brilliance, fuelled by emotional devastation.

### ***The Seductive Myth of “Toxic Excellence”***

A broader implication of this analysis is the critique of a cultural narrative that glorifies suffering in pursuit of greatness. Fletcher is allowed to exist and thrive because his behaviour is framed as necessary for producing excellence. Lipman-Blumen (2006) noted that followers and institutions often enable toxic leaders due to their charisma, results-oriented facade, or perceived brilliance.

This is particularly relevant in high-performance domains such as music, sports, and finance, where abusive behaviours are normalised under the rhetoric of toughness and resilience. In *Whiplash*, Fletcher’s toxicity is tolerated—and eventually rewarded—because it is seen as producing results, despite the evident psychological toll.

The discussion aligns with Winn and Dykes (2019), who warn against confusing output with ethical leadership and highlight the long-term harm of romanticising cruelty as “standards.”

### ***Theoretical Contribution and Reflection***

By applying the toxic leadership framework to a cinematic text, this study contributes to leadership theory and qualitative methodology. This shows how film, as a cultural artefact, can serve not only as entertainment but also as a reflective medium for understanding complex interpersonal and organisational dynamics.

Moreover, the analysis confirms that toxic leadership is not always overt or extreme—it can be gradual, seductive, and even celebrated. This echoes Pelletier’s (2010) concern that toxic leaders are often seen as misunderstood geniuses rather than dangerous manipulators.

Finally, the analysis invites reflection on what ethical leadership ought to be: leadership that does not trade psychological safety for productivity or manipulate others under the illusion of “pushing limits.”

## **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that *Whiplash* offers a powerful and nuanced cinematic portrayal of toxic leadership and its psychological consequences. Through the systematic document analysis of 12 key scenes, the film reveals all major dimensions of toxic leadership—abusive supervision, authoritarianism, unpredictability, narcissism, and manipulative justification—as identified in the Toxic Leadership Scale (Schmidt, 2008) and related frameworks (Pelletier, 2010; Padilla et al., 2007). By interpreting the film as a narrative document, this research bridges cinematic representation and organisational theory, offering new insights into how toxic leadership is normalised, internalised, and rationalised in high-performance cultures.

Compared with the existing literature, the findings align with prior empirical studies showing that toxic leadership fosters emotional exhaustion, identity erosion, and trauma bonding among followers (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Wolor et al., 2022). However, *Whiplash* goes further by dramatising how these effects are morally justified and even celebrated in certain professional domains. This cinematic representation extends the understanding of how cultural narratives can shape and legitimise abusive leadership practices.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a single film, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Second, the interpretation of visual and narrative elements carries a degree of subjectivity, despite being guided by established theoretical constructs. Lastly, treating the film as a self-contained document means that historical or biographical information about the director, actors, or real-world parallels was not considered.

Future research could build on this study by analysing multiple films across genres or industries to explore whether different portrayals of leadership reinforce or challenge toxic norms. Additionally, integrating audience reception data—such as viewer interpretations or emotional responses—could enrich the understanding of how toxic leadership representations are internalised or resisted. Scholars may also compare cinematic portrayals of leadership with real-world case studies to better understand the interplay between narrative and lived organisational experience.

Ultimately, Whiplash serves as both a cautionary tale and a pedagogical resource. This illustrates that while toxic leaders may inspire short-term performance, they do so at the cost of psychological well-being, ethical integrity, and human dignity. As leadership scholars and educators, there is a pressing need to challenge cultural narratives that conflate cruelty with excellence and to promote leadership models grounded in empathy, accountability, and resilience.



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