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EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND LEADERSHIP STYLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ADMINISTRATORS IN TURKEY

This article explores the relationship between the personality traits and leadership styles of civil society organization (CSO) administrators. As the number of NGOs increases and their influence expands in Turkey, it becomes essential to determine which personality traits best contribute to effective leadership and which leadership styles are suited to the specific nature of such organizations. The study was conducted among 105 NGO administrators working in Turkey. The Big Five model, which includes traits such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability, was used to assess personality traits. Leadership styles were evaluated using a leadership style scale that includes authoritarian, democratic, transformational, and transactional styles. The results of the study showed the strongest correlations between democratic and transformational leadership styles and personality traits such as agreeableness and openness to experience. Administrators with high levels of agreeableness exhibited a democratic leadership style, fostering an inclusive environment and effectively involving employees in decision-making processes. Transformational leaders with openness to experience had a significant impact on organizational development, encouraging innovation and positive change. However, traits such as extraversion and emotional stability did not show significant relationships with specific leadership styles, suggesting the need for more in-depth research on these aspects in the NGO context. A limitation of the study is the homogeneity of the sample: all participants were male, which does not allow conclusions to be drawn about female leadership in NGOs. Future research should include female leaders and expand the sample to include volunteers and non-managerial staff. This study contributes to the understanding

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of what personality traits promote successful leadership in NGOs and how leadership style can influence organizational effectiveness.

Keywords: civil society organization, civil society in Turkey, personality traits, leadership behavior, administrator

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Introduction

It is challenging to provide a precise definition and clear meaning of the term 'civil society.' According to the most widely accepted definition made, civil society is a space outside the family, the state, and the market, created by individuals, collective actions, organizations, and institutions (CIVICUS 2011). Vandyck (2017) characterizes civil society as an ecosystem of social and cultural relations situated between the state, business, and family, based on shared knowledge, values, and traditions that aim to promote cooperation and achieve common goals. Thus, civil society can be seen as an organized community united by common values and goals, not bound by kinship, legal or economic obligations. Keyman (2004) notes that civil societies and civil society organizations (CSOs) are voluntary associations that enable individuals to achieve collectively what they cannot accomplish alone. This requires organization and collective action to achieve common goals. CSOs provide citizens with the means to participate more effectively in governance by positioning themselves alongside the institutions and organizations that shape state policy.

The modern concept of CSOs began to take shape in the 19th century. According to Naumov (2013), these organizations have reached their current level through four stages of development. These stages range from the mid-19th century to World War I, the inter-war period, the period between World War II and the 1990s, and from the 1990s to the present day. Today, there is a wide range of civil society organizations, differing in their structure and the social context in which they operate. These organizations can be secular, religious, charitable, paternalistic, or radical (ADB 2008; Egholm et al. 2020; Ferris 2005). Some NGOs focus solely on meeting the immediate needs of the population, while others have a longer-term vision and aim to develop alternative ideas and approaches to solving problems. Due to their operational flexibility and wide range of activities, the rise in the significance of NGOs since the late 1980s has occurred against the backdrop of the strengthening of neoliberal policy agendas (Lewis, Kanji 2009). Indeed, the 21st century has witnessed a rapid increase in the number and diversity of CSOs, as well as an intensification of their activities (Andreeva 2010).

In this century, CSOs have become organizations that have their own place and role in society, and that also interact with governments and markets (OSCE 2011; Wijkström 2009). As such, CSOs are guides who can skillfully lead the way to a sustainable future, and they must also drive social change for their stakeholders and partners (Wijkström 2009). One of the major changes that the 21st century has brought to CSOs is the shift from government-based regulation to market-based approaches, and the increasing importance of public-private partnerships to drive change (Botchway 2019; Egholm et al. 2020; Heller 2013).

CSOs, which have emerged as a result of the globalization process (Stetsko 2010), are structures that operate outside the state system but provide significant support to it. Thus, the concept of civil society serves as an important tool in the process of building democratic institutions (Keyman 2004). Civil society organizations draw the attention of governments and the international community to the needs and concerns of ordinary citizens, exercise public oversight over state institutions, and promote the active participation of citizens in social and political life at both local and global levels (Naumov 2013).

Lewis and Kanji (2009) identify three key roles for these organizations: implementer, catalyst, and partner. Implementer roles are carried out in areas such as health, legal aid, agriculture, emergency and humanitarian relief, and resource mobilization to provide services to those in need. In recent years, CSOs have played an increasingly important role in responding to man-made crises and humanitarian emergencies, particularly during natural disasters. The catalytic functions of these organizations can be described as activities aimed at inspiring, facilitating, and supporting thought and action that promotes social change. These functions include organizing social movements, forming groups, conducting gender studies, and influencing broader political processes through advocacy, innovation, and political entrepreneurship. Such activities ensure the involvement of local communities in the policy-making process and contribute to the development of their capacities (Becerikli 2017). The partnership activities of CSOs involve cooperation with government structures, donors, and the private sector in the context of broader programmatic or project-based initiatives aimed at assuming and sharing social responsibility.

Currently, a significant number of CSOs are registered with the United Nations (Rofiyarti, Dugis 2017). Among them are organizations that have established themselves on the international stage, operating in various countries around the world. Although the global political system remains state-centric, at the beginning of the third millennium, civil society organizations have emerged as important and active participants in international relations.

Theoretical Background

The tradition of civil society in Turkey has deep historical roots. Numerous lobbies, fraternities, societies, dervish orders, cults, sects, and communities, which

have existed since the ancient Turkic, Seljuk, and Ottoman periods and continue to function today, can be considered civil society organizations according to the aforementioned definition of CSOs. It should be acknowledged that the non-governmental organizations operating during the Ottoman period were different from those of today. This is because the Ottoman political culture was not of a nature that would form the basis of a civil society as we know it today. Throughout their history, however, the Turks have adopted organic approaches to the state and have been sympathetic to solidarist doctrines (Çaha 1994). These organizations generally carried out relief activities. The reason for this was that the commercial and industrial middle classes were not developed in the Ottoman Empire as they were in Europe (Özbudun 1989). The absence of a democratic regime like today, and the fact that state control was at the highest level in the Ottoman Empire, limited the scope of action of these civil organizations (Acun 2005).

During the republican period, the activities of some CSOs were officially suspended, but they continued to operate unofficially and began to revive in the early 1980s. During this period of acceptance of a new regime, the one-party government followed a modern Western line of social transformation, while at the same time not refraining from using oppression and bans against the emerging opposition (Tosun 2008). Due to the repression of the government and the state, democracy could not develop, and no organization that was or could be considered to be an opposition was allowed (Akçeşme 2013). Civil society organizations also received their share of these bans and reppressions and could not develop until the 1980s.

During the one-party system and after military coups, civil society organizations operated in a controlled manner as social transformation followed a more centralized trend (Aslan 2010). However, with the transition to the multiparty era, these organizations began to operate more freely. In addition, factors such as the reduction of government personnel, liberal policies, privatization, decentralization, the emergence of various social movements, and especially the increasingly influential work and media prominence of intellectuals advocating freedom of thought and belief, have contributed to the development of civil society organizations (Çaha et al. 2013). This process, which began with the transition to a multi-party system in 1946, marked a new era in which civil society organizations could operate more comfortably (Özkiraz, Arslanel 2015).

In recent years, CSOs have become increasingly widespread and significant as a result of legal reforms in Turkey regarding fundamental human rights and freedoms in the context of harmonization with the European Union. Turkey has enacted regulations that reduce the state influence, expand freedoms, and strengthen the role of civil society organizations. Therefore, civil society organizations have gained enough influence to play a more active role in the harmonization process with the European Union (Akçadağ 2011). Keyman (2004) argued that the absence or dysfunction of civil society organizations indicates a totalitarian structure, while an increase in their number and influence is seen as a sign of a democratic society.

From Keyman's perspective, Turkey is a country where civil society organizations have grown quantitatively and developed qualitatively, but their capabilities remain limited. Keyman thus identified Turkey as an authoritarian regime in the process of democratization. Keyman's argument is supported by the fact that even today there is no independent strategic legislation regulating the cooperation of CSOs with public institutions. As a result, CSOs are easily excluded from the policy-making process (Bulut et al. 2017).

There are currently large and significant civil society organizations operating in Turkey that influence state policy. Some of these organizations are the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD), Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TÜSEV), Turkish, Foundation for Combating Erosion, Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA), Turkish Red Crescent, AKUT Search and Rescue Association, Green Crescent, Foundation for Children with Leukemia (LÖSEV), Community Volunteers Foundation (TOG), Educational Volunteers Foundation of Turkey (TEGV), Turkish Education Foundation (TEV), and Mehmetçik Foundation, which are still active and can also be considered as civil society organizations.

Relation among CSOs, leadership, and personality

Leadership, which plays a key role in initiating and implementing change within organizations (Robinson, Bucic 2005), is viewed as a combination of qualities, behaviors, and values that foster the engagement, commitment, and development of those who follow the leader (Northouse 2004; Taş et al. 2007). The ability of CSO staff to work effectively in harmony and solidarity with their leaders depends on how well their expectations of leadership are aligned with those of their leaders (Yılmaz 2004). As CSO leaders are often isolated and lack sufficient support, they face challenges in both their personal and professional lives (Dragos 2013). The difference between an administrator and a leader becomes evident in their ability to overcome challenges and work effectively with their team. Administrators in civil society organizations are expected to possess leadership skills, provide strategic direction, inspire and initiate change, promote learning, and cultivate a unique organizational culture (Hailey 2006). Moreover, leaders can adapt their leadership style and personal qualities to the specific situation and team, making their ability to lead more effective (Mintzberg 1998).

The role of leaders as agents of change is evident in their interactions with followers. Leaders do not intimidate or coerce their followers; instead, they foster an atmosphere of equality and cooperation (Howell, Shamir 2005). Leadership has become a key element of institutional effectiveness, particularly in civil society organizations that shape social structures and ensure citizen participation in governance (Bass 1990). Therefore, studying the characteristics of leaders working in these organizations contributes to improving the quality of civil society activities.

Personality is a set of consistent behavioral patterns that distinguish an individual from others (Burger 2006; Horzum et al. 2017). It is a stable structure that encompasses an individual's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (McCrae, Costa 1990). In nonprofit organizations, people with diverse beliefs and perspectives may come together, and they may transmit their personal qualities, values, and beliefs to the organizational culture (Cameron, Freeman 1991; Schein 1997; Yıldız 2019). In addition, the personality traits of NGO leaders and members may influence the organization's openness to different ideas and innovations (Jaskyte, de Riobó 2004).

This study was conducted with the participation of leaders of a civil society organization in Turkey that has over 500 000 members and was established in the early 1900s. This organization has been continuously active both within the country and internationally. It has around 800 administrators and 300 coordination centers, as well as offices in 25 different countries. The organization has the privilege of collecting aid without the need for approval from the Council of Ministers of Turkey. The study analyzed the personality traits and leadership styles of individuals currently holding administrative positions in this organization, as well as the relationship between these variables.

Theoretical Model and Hypotheses

Personality traits have been studied in relation to various concepts such as management levels (Ahmetoglu et al. 2010; Furnham, Crump 2015; Moutafi et al. 2007), job performance (Barrick, Mount 1993; Furnham, Stringfield 1993; Rice, Lindecamp 1989), intelligence (Furnham 2008; Moutafi et al. 2007), general mental ability and lifetime career success (Judge et al. 1999), leadership (Judge et al. 2002), cognitive ability (Spector et al., 2000), job satisfaction (Judge et al. 2000; Rahim 1981), values (Parks-Leduc et al. 2014), personal values (Saiz et al. 2011), political orientation (Caprara et al. 2009), well-being (Chraif, Miulescu 2015), and academic achievement (Andersen et al. 2020; Bardach et al. 2023). Studies have also examined the relationship between leadership and socio-political intelligence (Hogan, Hogan 2002), self-esteem and optimism (Chemers et al. 2000), sustainable school success (Jacobson 2011; Rautiola 2009), academic achievement (Leithwood, Massey 2010; Neufeld 2014; Rautiola 2009), project success (Alkadash, Nadam 2020), customer satisfaction (Budur, Poturak 2021), and emotional intelligence (Macht et al. 2019; Maqbool et al. 2017; Muhammad, Maria 2020). Research involving non-governmental organizations has placed significant emphasis on the values (Luengo Kanacri et al. 2012), well-being (Navajas-Romero et al., 2020), and organizational compassion (Kasekende et al. 2022) of NGO employees.

In this study, the existence of multiple relationships between the two variables was tested by the following question:

H1. Is there a significant relationship between the personality traits and leadership styles of NGO managers.

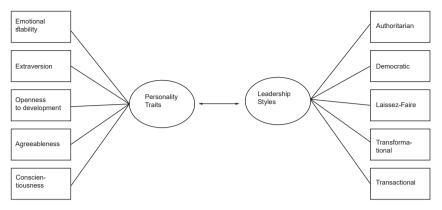


Figure 1. Research model

This study used a relational survey model, one of the descriptive models. A sample representative of the population was selected, and the researchers conducted a face-to-face survey, in which the participants manually completed the questionnaires. For each question, the respondents were given a scale to fill in based on self-assessment.

Study Group

In this study, the target population consisted of administrators from all civil society organizations based in Turkey. The accessible sample included those who were administrators in one of these NGOs. The study included 105 male administrators, selected through convenience sampling from the group of administrators accessible for the survey. The majority of NGO leaders in Turkey are men (82%) (Kap 2024; Yalçındağ Baydemir 2009), so the sample consisted exclusively of male participants. At the time of the study, all respondents held administrative positions in civil society organizations. The participants' age ranged between 22 and 51 years (mean = 32.29; median = 31; SD = 6.70). Half of the respondents were married and had at least one university degree. Their management experience ranged from 1 to 28 years (mean = 7.40; median = 5.00; SD = 6.31). Descriptive data on the participants' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1 (see the electronic application). Prior to the survey, the senior management of the organizations and branch leaders were informed of the objectives of the study. After receiving instructions by phone or online, the participants were sent the questionnaire electronically.

Data Collection Tools

The Big Five Inventory (BFI), developed by Oliver John and colleagues (1991), was used in this study and adapted to Turkish language and culture by Sümer and colleagues (2005) as a part of a study conducted in Turkey, which

included data from 56 countries on individuals' self-descriptive profiles (Schmitt et al. 2007). This Likert-type scale included five response options for each statement: '1 – It does not describe me at all, 2 – It somewhat describes me, 3 – It partially describes me, 4 – It describes me well, and 5-It describes me completely.' The 44-item instrument measured five dimensions: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was .70. Sümer et al. (2005) noted that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for different dimensions of the scale ranged from 0.64 to 0.77. Basim (2009) tested the factorial structure of the scale and reported a chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ 2/df) of 2.39 and root mean square error of estimation (RMSEA) of .059. However, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tuker-Lewis Index (TLI), also known as the non-normed fit index, were below the acceptable threshold of .90. In this study, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated to be .89.

The Leadership Style Scale (LSS), developed by Taş et al. (2007), was used to determine the leadership styles of the participants. This assessment tool, consisting of 59 items, covered five aspects: Authoritarian, Democratic, Laissez-Faire, Transformational, and Transactional leadership. The scale was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale with response options: 'never,' 'seldom,' 'sometimes,' 'often,' and 'always.' Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients, which calculated separately for each sub-dimension, ranged from 0.74 to 0.86. In this study, the overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was calculated to be .92.

Data analysis

Given the presence of multiple interrelated sets of variables in the study, canonical correlation analysis was chosen for data analysis. Whereas simple bivariate correlation calculates the relationship between two variables, such as X and Y, canonical correlation assesses the complex relationship between two sets of variables, each with more than two dimensions. No distinction was made between dependent and interdependent variables (Kalayci 2005; Özdamar 2004).

Findings

The means and standard deviations of the BFI and LSS scores, as well as the Pearson correlation coefficients between these variables, are presented in Table 2 (see the electronic appendix). As shown in the table, the highest mean score for personality traits was observed for Conscientiousness, while the lowest was observed for Neuroticism. Among the leadership styles, the most common was Democratic, and the least common was Autocratic.

To perform canonical correlation analysis, it is necessary to assume that there is no multicollinearity in the data sets. Multicollinearity between them can be suspected if the correlation value between them is .90 or higher. As shown in

Table 2, all correlation values between the variables are below .90, indicating that there is no problem with multicollinearity. In addition, the VIF values ranged from 1.08 to 1.80, and the fact that these values are below 2.5 further confirms the absence of multicollinearity (Allison 1999; Field 2005; Hair 2010).

Canonical correlation analysis, performed to determine the correlation between the parameters of two pairs of variables showed that only two out of five canonical pairs of variables were statistically significant (supplementary material, Table 3). To test the statistical significance of the obtained canonical models, Wilks' lambda was used as a measure of multivariate significance. Canonical correlation coefficients, eigenvalues, Wilks' lambda, F-values, degrees of freedom, and significance levels were calculated. The analysis of F-values using Wilks' lambda indicated that the model for the first canonical pair of correlations was statistically significant (Wilks λ = 0.377, F(25) = 4.257, p < .05). It was noted that the pairs following the first canonical pair of correlation were not statistically significant.

Standardized canonical coefficients were used to examine the relationships between the two sets of variables and the canonical variables. These coefficients indicate the extent of change in the canonical variable in terms of standard deviation in relation to an increase in the standard deviation of the corresponding variable (Sharma 1996). The standardized correlation coefficients for the variables in the first and second sets are presented in Table 3 in the electronic appendix.

Table 3 presents the correlation and loading values for the first and second canonical sets. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), loading values exceeding 0.30 indicate that the variable is part of the cluster. Consequently, the loading values of the variables in the table were above 0.30, with the exception of the transactional variable in the second set, indicating that each variable is part of this cluster.

Examining the relationship between the variables in the first set and the canonical variables presented in Table 3, the equation for the first canonical variable is as follows:

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BFI = -.096 × Emotional Stability 1+.343 × Extraversion+.099 × Openness to Development+.493 × Agreeableness+.281 × Conscientiousness
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Similar equations can be constructed for other canonical variables. Additionally, the variable that contributed the most to the first canonical variable was Agreeableness, followed by Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Openness to Development, and Emotional Stability.

According to the correlation values of the variables belonging in the second set with the canonical variables presented in Table 3, the equation for the first canonical variable of the second set is as follows:

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LSS = -.288 × Authoritarian + .380 + Democratic + -.244 + Laissez-Faire + +.580 × Transformational + -.103 + Transactional
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The analysis of similarly constructed equations showed that the variable that contributes most to the first canonical variable is the Transformational

style, followed by the Democratic, Authoritarian, Laissez-Faire, and Transactional styles.

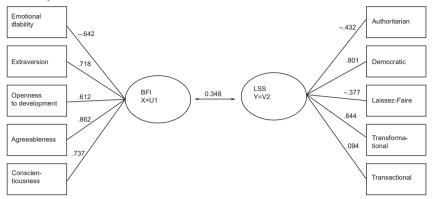


Figure 2. General chart of canonical correlation analysis between LSS and BFI datasets. The figure indicates the calculation of the common variance between LSS and BFI datasets

The total variance between the LSS and BFI data sets was calculated. According to Temurtaş (2016), since Wilks' λ value is interpreted as the inverse of the effect size,

$$1-\text{Wilks's }\lambda = 1-0.38 = .62.$$

Thus, the total variance between the BFI and LSS datasets was 62%.

Discussion, conclusion, and recommendations

This study examined the relationship between the personality traits and leadership styles of CSO administrators. The study involved 105 administrators working in CSOs operating in Turkey. It was found that the participants scored the highest on the traits of 'Agreeableness' and 'Openness to Development' from the Big Five model. Agreeableness is an important factor for members of these organizations, as people with high levels of this trait tend to be more altruistic and attentive to others. Those with higher levels of agreeableness are more likely to exhibit qualities such as helpfulness, forgiveness, and acceptance than those with lower levels of this trait (Çiçek, Aslan 2020; John et al. 2008). In order to build a positive organizational image, it is crucial that administrators work together in harmony to ensure the success of the organization (Alkın 2006; Yahyagil 2005). A high degree of openness to experience among leaders indicates their forward thinking nature and willingness to embrace change (Bilginer, Saltan 2020; Judge et al. 2002).

The participants gave the highest scores to the 'democratic' and 'transformational' leadership styles. Given the structure and function of such organizations,

their leaders should adopt a democratic leadership style. The democratization of these organizations depends on increasing employee autonomy (Clarke, Butcher 2006; Pateman 2002). In fact, civil society organizations where employees are encouraged to think critically, make decisions, and act independently are considered democratic (Ataç 2017). Leaders with a transformational leadership style are those who can influence the beliefs and values of their followers, implement changes and innovations, and help the organization achieve significant success Luthans 1995; Yılmaz, Gürhan 2019). Therefore, CSO administrators with a transformational leadership style play a key role in leading their organizations to success.

The study investigated the relationship between the leadership style of CSO administrators and their personality traits. The results showed a positive and significant correlation between the variables. Canonical correlation analysis revealed that the five BFI parameters explained approximately 12.1% of the participants' LSS scores. Although several studies in the literature have found a significant relationship between personality traits and leadership style (Giderler 2005; Lita, Grigoraș 2007; Orsal 2016), this study did not find convincing evidence to support this argument. However, in the study by Zaccaro et al. (2003), it was concluded that personality traits significantly explain leadership style. O'Connor and Jackson (2010) showed that leadership can be largely explained by personality traits. Tașdöven et al. (2012) concluded that personality and temperament can be significant predictors of leadership change. It was concluded that the findings of the aforementioned studies in the literature regarding the importance of personality traits as a predictor of leadership styles are consistent with the findings of this study.

The question of how to effectively manage NGOs, whose number and influence are rapidly growing in Turkey, remains open. Key issues include determining which leadership style is best suited to the organizational structure of NGOs, and what personality traits their leaders should possess (Kılınç 2019). This study provides insights into which leadership styles are best suited to NGOs, and what personality traits of leaders contribute to the development of leadership skills. According to Erçetin (2000), NGOs in Turkey need leaders who can adapt to change, set direction, and exert influence. The results of the study showed that NGO managers in Turkey have traits such as agreeableness and openness to development, but they lack emotional stability, extraversion and responsibility. In order to increase the influence of NGOs in Turkey, more research is needed on the personality traits identified as insufficient. Additionally, the study's findings suggest that NGO managers should be developed with regard to autocratic style, laissez-faire principles, and interaction within the framework of their leadership qualities.

Limitations and future directions

The socio-cultural characteristics of NGO managers were not included in this study. Among the many psychological characteristics, the research focused only on the Big Five personality traits. Sociocultural aspects were excluded due to time, financial, and other resource constraints. Future studies should consider investigating the direct and indirect effects of these variables on both personality and leadership style. In addition, attention should be paid not only to managers but also to NGO volunteers. Similar studies should be conducted among non-managerial staff of civil society organizations.

Another limitation of the study is the gender composition of the sample. The fact that all participants were male did not allow for the results to be generalized to female NGO leaders. Future studies should also include female leaders to provide a more comprehensive view. Moreover, this study was conducted with a limited sample, as all participants were NGO managers, which made them difficult to recruit. Future studies could extend the findings by including a larger sample.

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