THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEPOTISM LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING IN ORGANIZATIONS

KURUMLARDA NEPOTİZM LİDERLİĞİ VE ÖRGÜTSEL ÖĞRENME ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research is to examine the effects of nepotism, in other words favoritism, on leadership behaviors and learning within the organization. Understanding the negative effects of nepotism and preventing favoritism can be a critical factor for the success of organizations and countries. Because trust is important for the economy of countries and the success of organizations. While fair and effective leadership paves the way for organizational learning, negative practices such as nepotism can negatively affect these processes. Therefore, the findings of the study can provide practical contributions in the field of organization management. In this context, the study will be important. The reason for the study is that the research on favoritism, which is a frequently encountered problem in modern organizations, is limited. The method of the research is literature review. As a result of the literature review, all hypotheses created were accepted.

Keywords: Nepotism, Leadership, Learning, Productivity

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ÖZET

Araştırmanın amacı, örgütlerde nepotizmin diğrer bir deyişle kayırmacılığın, liderlik davranışlarına ve örgüt içindeki öğrenmeye olan etkilerini incelemektir. Nepotizmin getirdiği olumsuzları anlamak ve kayırmacılığı önlemek örgütler ve ülkelerin başarısı için kritik bir etken olabilir. Çünkü güven ülkelerin ekonomisi ve örgütlerin başarısı için önemlidir. Adil ve etkili liderlik, örgütsel öğrenmenin önünü açarken, nepotizm gibi olumsuz uygulamalar bu süreçleri olumsuz etkileyebilir. Bu nedenle, çalışmanın bulguları, örgüt yönetimi alanında uygulamalı katkılar sunabilir. Bu bağlamda çalışma önem arz edecektir. Çalışmanın gerekçesi; modern örgütlerde sıkça karşılaşılan bir sorun olan kayırmacılık ile ilgili yapılan araştırmaların sınırlı olmasıdır. Araştırmanın yöntemi literatür taramasıdır. Litertaür taraması sonucu, oluşturulmuş olan tüm hipoezler kabul edilmiştir

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nepotizm, Liderlik, Öğrenme, Verimlilik

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's constantly evolving organizations, which take on new forms while both resembling and diverging from one another, the concepts of leadership, learning, and nepotism are of great significance. Nepotism can be defined as the practice within organizations where individuals in positions of power grant privileges based on familial or close relationships, violating the principle of meritocracy. A leader can be regarded as someone who guides, motivates, inspires, and mobilizes individuals toward a common goal, deriving their influence not from their position but from their behaviors and personal characteristics. Leadership itself is defined as the act of mobilizing a group towards a shared objective. Organizational learning refers to the sharing and utilization of information gathered both from within and outside the organization toward a common purpose. Understanding the relationships among these variables provides an important framework for organizations, as nepotism can harm leadership perceptions and hinder the proper functioning of organizational learning processes.

Nepotism negatively affects perceptions of leadership because a leader who engages in favoritism towards close friends and family members can undermine their authority. It raises doubts about the leader's competence and fairness, which can lead to a loss of trust among employees. Employees may feel undervalued, and this can result in demotivation and job dissatisfaction, ultimately harming the organization's productivity and competitiveness. Furthermore, nepotism may also obstruct organizational learning. Such behavior negatively impacts the flow of information, the sharing of knowledge, and the application of this knowledge within the organization. Nepotism restricts the upward mobility of competent employees, thereby limiting the organization's knowledge-based development. It also adversely affects employee engagement and productivity, causing internal conflicts and disrupting workplace harmony (Arasli & Tumer, 2008; Arasli, Bavik and Ekiz, 2006). This environment can damage innovative thinking and hinder the establishment of a culture of learning within organizations, reducing employees' motivation to share knowledge and pursue innovation. Ultimately, this negatively impacts the overall performance of the organization and could also harm the national economy. It is well known that transformational leadership is critical for organizational learning. Innovative and visionary leaders inspire and motivate employees, facilitating the learning process within the organization. By supporting organizational learning processes, leaders pave the way for continuous improvement and innovative thinking. Transformational leaders are known to enhance employees' sense of competence and improve team performance by motivating them. Transformational leadership allows employees to take ownership of their work, make more independent decisions, and fosters greater collaboration and performance within teams (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Özaralli, 2003). However, nepotism can hinder such leadership approaches, diminishing leaders' influence on employees and negatively impacting organizational performance. Nepotism may also adversely affect the strategic decisions of leaders, jeopardizing the organization's competitiveness and future.

The aim of this research is to examine the effects of nepotism, or favoritism, on leadership behaviors and organizational learning within organizations. The study highlights that nepotism undermines perceptions of fairness within organizations, negatively impacting leadership performance and damaging organizational learning processes. Since leadership and learning are critical factors for achieving sustainable success, favoritism could significantly impair an organization's performance, with further negative consequences for national economies by weakening sustainable competitiveness. Understanding the negative consequences of nepotism and preventing favoritism is crucial for the success of both

organizations and countries, as trust is essential for economic success and organizational achievement. Fair and effective leadership fosters organizational learning, while negative practices such as nepotism can obstruct these processes. Therefore, the findings of this study may provide practical contributions to the field of organizational management. The importance of this study stems from the fact that there is limited research on nepotism, a frequently encountered issue in modern organizations. The method of the study is a literature review. The research first addresses the definitions of the study's variables, then builds a theoretical framework explaining the relationships between these variables. Subsequently, studies examining these variables and their results are meticulously reviewed, and hypotheses are formed. Based on the findings of these studies, the hypotheses will be either accepted or rejected. Finally, recommendations will be made to organizations based on the research results. For the literature review, databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Web of Science were utilized.

The research may provide new insights into the relationships between nepotism, leadership, and organizational learning, thereby making a significant contribution to the existing literature. Additionally, the study will offer concrete suggestions on how organizations can combat nepotism, establish stronger learning cultures through fair leadership practices, and achieve success in sustainable competition. This is important not only from the perspectives of human resource management and organizational strategies but also for the economic success of nations. Thus, the research could contribute to both national economies and organizational productivity. Moreover, the study's results may serve as a foundation for future research, further enriching the literature.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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The definitions of the research variables derived from the literature review are outlined below.

Nepotism is defined in the literature as the privilege granted to individuals by managers or executives within organizations. Managers or executives offer privileges based on familial or close relationships, prioritizing personal connections over merit. These managers provide individuals with opportunities such as job positions or promotions within the organization based on close relationships (Khatri & Tsang, 2003). Such practices can undermine perceptions of fairness among employees and create distrust (Padgett & Morris, 2005). Additionally, favoritism can negatively affect the organization's efficiency and productivity in the long term, thereby reducing organizational performance. Furthermore, it can have adverse effects on employee engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction (Bilal, Fatima, & Imran, 2020; Padgett & Morris, 2005). Moreover, such practices can hinder the long-term sustainable success of organizations.

Organizational learning can be defined as the continuous process through which an organization renews itself by using the knowledge gained from individual and organizational experiences to develop its knowledge, skills, and abilities. Through this process, businesses can more easily adapt to environmental changes, innovate, and enhance their performance, making learning a critical factor for organizations. Organizational learning refers to the ability to generate new knowledge, improve existing knowledge, and apply this knowledge within the organization (Senge, 1990). Organizational learning increases an organization's flexibility in the face of changes, particularly those resulting from technological innovations, thereby providing a competitive advantage. It enhances employees' ability to improve work processes

and facilitates the rapid identification and correction of mistakes through continuous feedback (Demirel & Kubba, 2014; Örmeci & Öcal, 2023; Ercan, 2014).

Leadership can be defined as the process by which a person influences and directs employees or others to achieve specific goals. In modern definitions, leadership goes beyond merely giving orders or using authority; it involves inspiring, motivating, and fostering collaboration. In today's complex and fast-changing business world, leadership is associated with strategic thinking, effective communication, and the necessary competencies to maximize employees' potential (Yeşil, 2016; Baker, 2022). Leadership is a process that fosters development at both the individual and organizational levels. Leaders can shape organizational culture and promote innovation, change, and high performance through approaches such as transformational leadership (Mohammed & Baş, 2020).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of nepotism can be explained within the framework of social capital theory. Social capital theory is an approach that examines the impact of social networks, relationships, and norms between individuals and groups on economic and social outcomes. This theory helps in understanding how individuals interact within a network and how these interactions generate value for the individuals involved. In this context, social capital is defined through three main components: networks, relationships, and trust (Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988).

The relationships established by individuals and groups through social networks can be considered as social capital. Through these relationships, individuals gain access to information, resources, and numerous opportunities. For example, in professional life, individuals with strong social networks can access new job opportunities more easily compared to others (Bourdieu, 2018). The structure referred to as a social network facilitates interaction between individuals, encouraging information sharing, collaboration, and solidarity. Trust can be said to be the most important component of social capital. The presence of trust between individuals fosters collaboration and makes it easier to get things done. This is because a trust-based environment allows individuals to take risks more easily, share information more freely, and collaborate toward achieving common goals (Fukuyama, 1995). Additionally, social capital takes form through norms. A community's shared values and rules influence how individuals interact with each other, contributing to the formation of social capital (Putnam, 2000).

It can be said that social capital has significant economic and social outcomes. According to some research findings, communities with strong levels of social capital have been found to exhibit higher economic performance, lower crime rates, and an overall higher quality of life (Kawach, Berkman & Glymour, 2014). Furthermore, this form of capital strengthens the resilience of communities during crises, enhancing their capacity to support each other in emergency situations (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). In summary, this theory provides an important perspective for understanding how individuals and communities interact through social networks and the impact of these interactions on economic and social outcomes.

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4. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ADDRESSING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RESEARCH VARIABLES AND HYPOTHESES

4.1. Nepotism and Leadership

The relationship between nepotism and leadership has significant effects on the functioning and performance of organizations. While nepotism refers to granting privileges to relatives or close associates in an organization without regard to merit, such practices directly impact leadership processes. It can have particularly adverse effects on perceptions of the leader's fairness, reliability, and competence (Akar, 2020).

The most evident impact of nepotism on leadership is the weakening of the leader's perception of fairness. When a leader makes decisions based on personal relationships, employees begin to perceive that the leader is not impartial. This perception erodes employees' trust in their leader and calls into question the leader's authority (Araslı & Tümer, 2020). When employees believe that the leader only favors their close circle, their motivation decreases, and their job performance is negatively affected. This weakens the leader's ability to direct the team and negatively impacts the overall performance of the organization (Polat, 2022).

Furthermore, nepotism makes it difficult for a leader to establish a merit-based culture within the organization. In an environment where the leader's decisions are based on familial relationships, employees may think that the leader's decisions are shaped by personal interests rather than merit and competence. This undermines the leader's legitimacy and makes it difficult for the leader to build healthy relationships with their team (Çetin, 2023). At the same time, employees in such an environment may be reluctant to trust their leaders and follow their guidance (Sezgili, 2023).

In conclusion, nepotism negatively affects a leader's ability to demonstrate fair, reliable, and effective leadership. When the leader's decisions do not appear impartial, employee motivation declines, and the organization's overall functioning weakens. Therefore, it is crucial for leaders to develop mechanisms to prevent nepotism, as this is essential for maintaining effective leadership (Yılmaz & Kılıç, 2022). In this context, the first hypothesis of the study is formulated as follows:

H1: The impact of nepotism on leadership is negative.

4.2. Nepotism and Organizational Learning

Nepotism can be defined as the favoritism of individuals based on familial or close friendship ties, independent of merit, within organizations. Such practices can negatively impact the functioning of businesses in various ways, one of which is the weakening of organizational learning processes. Organizational learning refers to the process by which institutions adapt to environmental changes, enhance their knowledge base, disseminate this knowledge at the organizational level, and integrate it into innovation processes. Organizational learning is critical for organizations to gain a competitive advantage and achieve long-term sustainable success. However, the presence of nepotism can disrupt these processes (Baş, 2019).

Nepotism leads to a weakening of the perception of fairness in organizations and increases distrust among employees. Promotions and job assignments made independently of merit create a sense of injustice among employees, negatively impacting their motivation (Polat, 2022). Organizational learning requires trust-based information sharing and collaboration among employees. However, in organizations where nepotism is prevalent, employees may become concerned that their individual achievements will be overshadowed

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by personal relationships, leading to reluctance in sharing information. This hinders the flow of information, one of the fundamental elements of organizational learning, and weakens the organization's capacity to learn (Araslı & Tümer, 2008).

Furthermore, nepotism also has negative effects on organizational innovation. Contributions from individuals with diverse perspectives and competencies are a key factor in fostering innovation within organizations. However, in environments dominated by nepotism, a homogeneous structure may emerge, which can stifle different ideas and innovative approaches (Arslan, Erol & Boylu, 2014). Particularly, appointments to strategic positions based on personal relationships rather than merit weaken the organization's ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions and reduce its competitive strength in the long term (Asunakutlu & Avcı, 2010).

In conclusion, nepotism is a significant factor that negatively affects organizational learning processes. The weakening of the perception of fairness, loss of motivation, reduced information sharing, and limitation of innovative ideas are the main negative effects of nepotism on organizational learning. In this context, it becomes critical for organizations to develop transparent, merit-based management policies to enhance the effectiveness of organizational learning (Yılmaz & Kılıç, 2022). Based on this, the second hypothesis of the study is formulated as follows:

H2: The impact of nepotism on organizational learning processes is negative.

4.3. Nepotism, Leadership, and Organizational Learning

The relationship between nepotism, leadership, and organizational learning presents a complex and multifaceted interaction within the dynamic structure of modern organizations. Understanding how these three concepts influence each other is crucial for ensuring the sustainable success of organizations. Organizations can gain a competitive advantage by establishing effective leadership practices, fair human resource policies, and a robust learning culture. In this context, it is important to examine the effects of nepotism, the role of leadership styles, and the development of organizational learning processes.

Nepotism refers to the practice of giving preferential treatment to relatives or close friends over other candidates. This often leads to decisions being made independently of merit and undermines the perception of fairness within the organization. The presence of nepotism can lead to distrust and a loss of motivation among employees. When an employee observes someone being promoted or rewarded without regard to their skills or performance, their personal motivation may be negatively affected. Consequently, nepotism creates an imbalance within the organization and may hinder healthy competition among employees (Topçu, 2021).

Leadership plays a critical role in the success of organizations. Effective leaders are individuals who motivate, inspire, and direct their employees toward development opportunities. Leaders have a significant influence on shaping the culture and working environment within an organization. However, leadership practices can be negatively impacted by nepotism. When a leader makes decisions based on personal relationships, the perception of fairness among employees weakens, and the leader's credibility is called into question (Benzer & Masun, 2024).

A leadership style associated with nepotism often manifests through a protective or authoritarian approach. This type of leadership may hinder employees from taking initiative and make it difficult for innovative ideas to emerge. When employees believe that their leaders adopt a personal relationship-based rather than merit-based approach, their motivation

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decreases. As a result, leadership processes weaken, and the overall efficiency of the organization is negatively impacted (Altun Alkan & Yaylı, 2022).

Organizational learning refers to the continuous development of an organization's knowledge and skills and the production of innovative solutions. Effective leadership and fair human resource policies support organizational learning processes. However, nepotism can adversely affect these processes. For instance, in an organization where nepotism is widespread, trust deficits and a loss of motivation may arise among employees, which weakens the organizational learning processes (Atasoy, 2022).

Organizational learning is the process by which an organization increases its ability to adapt to environmental changes and enhances its knowledge base. This process includes employees learning from their experiences, sharing their knowledge, and developing innovative approaches organization-wide. Organizational learning is critical for an organization to gain a competitive advantage and achieve sustainable success (Gökyer & Demir, 2024).

However, nepotism can negatively affect organizational learning processes. In an environment where nepotism is prevalent, employees become reluctant to share information because the perception of fairness has weakened, and individuals start to feel undervalued (Karahan & Yılmaz, 2024). In such situations, a trust erosion occurs among employees, and the flow of information decreases. The restriction of information sharing hinders the emergence of innovative ideas and creative solutions, which are fundamental components of organizational learning (Gökyer & Demir, 2024).

Nepotism weakens the effectiveness of leadership and is a factor that negatively affects organizational learning. When a leader is influenced by nepotism, their capacity to make impartial decisions diminishes. This not only undermines employees' motivation and trust but also impairs collaboration and the sharing of information. As a result, the presence of nepotism reduces the power of leadership and causes organizational learning processes to stagnate.

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The relationship between nepotism, leadership, and organizational learning has significant implications for the success of organizations. Understanding the interaction of these three concepts necessitates creating a fair, transparent, and supportive culture for the sustainable success of organizations. Minimizing the effects of nepotism, developing effective leadership practices, and promoting organizational learning are key to ensuring the long-term success of organizations. In this way, organizations can both increase employee satisfaction and create a continuous learning and development environment.

The literature review suggests that leadership may play a mediating or moderating role in the relationship between organizational learning and nepotism, as there are existing effects and relationships between the variables. In this context, the third hypothesis of the study is formulated as follows:

H3: Leadership plays a mediating/moderating role in the relationship between nepotism and organizational learning. Based on the literature review, all hypotheses have been accepted. However, it is crucial that these results are supported by quantitative studies. Results obtained from different populations and samples may either support the research findings or lead to the rejection of the proposed hypotheses.

5. WAYS TO PREVENT NEPOTİSM

Preventing nepotism is crucial for ensuring the sustainable success of organizations. In this context, the first step is to develop transparent human resource policies. Clearly defining the processes of recruitment, promotion, and reward allocation will increase employees' trust in these processes and reduce the likelihood of nepotism (Karakavuz & Çini, 2023). Additionally, establishing merit-based evaluation systems creates an environment where employees' performance is assessed according to objective criteria. This strengthens the perception of fairness, increases employee motivation, and prevents nepotism (Akar, 2020).

Providing open communication channels is extremely important for enabling employees to reach management. Creating platforms where employees can voice their concerns and report issues related to nepotism allows for quicker identification of negative situations within the organization. In this context, organizing training and awareness programs is also an effective strategy. Educating employees about nepotism and its negative impacts helps emphasize the importance of justice and equality (Araslı et al., 2006).

Establishing independent evaluation and auditing mechanisms is a critical step in preventing nepotism. An external independent audit body can evaluate human resource processes and ensure that fairness is being maintained. Such mechanisms allow for prompt intervention in the event of nepotism (Asunakutlu & Avcı, 2010). Additionally, reviewing leadership and management styles is important. Leaders must avoid making decisions based on personal relationships and adopt a fair and equitable leadership approach. Such leadership builds trust among employees and reduces the likelihood of nepotism (Bayhan, 2002).

Promoting diversity and inclusion is another strategy to mitigate the effects of nepotism. Enabling individuals from different backgrounds and experiences to work together fosters a merit-based environment. Moreover, strengthening performance feedback processes contributes to employee development. Regular and constructive feedback creates a competitive environment among employees, enhancing their motivation. Increasing employee participation is also a crucial step. When employee involvement in decision-making processes is encouraged, it builds trust that leaders' decisions will be made more fairly and impartially.

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Finally, emphasizing social responsibility and ethical values is of great importance in preventing nepotism. Creating an ethical work environment helps employees value the principles of justice and equality. Implementing the aforementioned strategies to prevent nepotism contributes to building a healthier organizational culture and achieving long-term success. The adoption of these strategies will not only enhance employee satisfaction but also strengthen leadership effectiveness within organizations.

6. CONCLUSION

Nepotism, or favoritism, is one of the factors that negatively impact leadership processes and organizational learning. The adverse effect of nepotism on leadership manifests in the decline of trust in the leader and the increase in the perception of injustice among employees. Since the leader prioritizes familial relationships over merit in decision-making, the motivation and performance of organizational members decrease. Additionally, the literature indicates that nepotism undermines a leader's legitimacy and hinders the establishment of strong working relationships with the team (Ozdemir & Karaçınar, 2022).

Nepotism directly impacts leadership competencies by eroding the leader's justice performance. Studies show that when employees perceive a leader's decisions as biased, trust in the leader's authority weakens, which harms the overall work environment within the organization. In this context, it can be concluded that nepotism negatively affects

organizational performance as it undermines the leader's integrity. Furthermore, in organizations where nepotism is prevalent, the authority of leaders is questioned, and employees' trust in their managers diminishes (Karaçınar & Ozdemir, 2022).

Organizational learning is a critical factor that allows organizations to enhance their processes to adapt to environmental challenges and gain competitive advantage. However, nepotism is one of the primary reasons for the deterioration of organizational learning processes and organizational development (Gider & Okçu, 2022). One of the biggest obstacles to organizational learning is the internal conflicts of interest that may arise among employees. Nepotism fosters such conflicts, and the atmosphere of mistrust it creates hampers the sharing of knowledge. Moreover, the hiring of relatives through nepotism reduces personnel diversity, which stifles creativity in organizational structures and leads to the loss of sustainable competitive advantage (Gider & Okçu, 2022).

In organizational learning processes, the contributions employees make through their knowledge and skills are extremely important. However, in organizations that promote nepotism, employees may become reluctant to share knowledge with colleagues when they believe family or friendship ties take precedence over expertise and qualifications (Ozdemir & Karaçınar, 2022). This leads to a slowdown in learning activities and a reduction in the organization's capacity to adapt to environmental changes. Furthermore, limited access to knowledge and decreased internal interaction hinder the development of innovations and unique processes. Research shows that nepotism creates dual and ambiguous effects on both organizational learning processes and leadership. Preventing the entrenchment of nepotism largely falls on the responsibility of leaders. Effective leaders can minimize the negative effects of nepotism by ensuring transparency and fairness in human resource policies while maintaining a strong organizational learning culture. However, in organizations where nepotism is widespread, the influence of leaders diminishes, distrust among employees increases, and leadership processes deteriorate. This directly impacts organizational learning, weakening knowledge-sharing and knowledge-creation processes (Aasland et al., 2010).

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To mitigate the effects of nepotism and prevent it from damaging the fundamental structure of the organization, various measures should be implemented. Firstly, recruitment, promotion, and reward policies must be transparent, performance-based, and fair. It has been understood that performance-based evaluation systems can reduce the perception of nepotism by increasing employees' trust. Additionally, providing open communication channels facilitates the expression of employee complaints related to nepotism and helps implement improvements within the organization. Training and awareness programs related to nepotism should also be considered as an important measure. Since this study focuses on the negative consequences of nepotism and the importance of the principle of justice within the organization, raising employee awareness on these issues is crucial. Independent auditing mechanisms also play an important role in reviewing human resource processes and detecting nepotism.

Stripping leadership strategies of personal biases supports a fair leadership approach in reducing the negative effects of nepotism. By fostering a performance-based organizational culture and promoting diversity and inclusion, businesses can enhance competition and innovation among employees. Collective feedback processes can raise employee morale, making performance evaluations more objective. In this context, emphasizing ethical values and social responsibility is of great importance for creating a fairer and more sustainable work environment. To control the effects of nepotism, open, fair, and result-oriented management policies should be implemented, ensuring the organization's future is secured and its success sustained. Furthermore, it is recommended that researchers conduct quantitative studies to

explore the relationships between leadership, learning, and nepotism in future research. Understanding the relationship between nepotism, leadership, and organizational learning is crucial for gaining a competitive advantage and improving organizational management.

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