

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL ATTENTION AND COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY LEVEL OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between school administrators' organizational attention level and cognitive flexibility. In the study, which was conducted with the relational survey model, data were collected using the Organizational Attention Scale and Cognitive Flexibility Scale, and the analyzes were carried out with the SPSS program. According to the findings of the study, although there was no significant difference in organizational attention and cognitive flexibility levels in terms of gender and title, it was observed that the scores of male administrators and principals were slightly higher. No statistically significant difference was found between the length of experience and these variables, but a certain change was observed as the experience increased. While the level of education had a significant effect on organizational attention, it was determined that it did not create a significant difference in terms of cognitive flexibility, but there was an increase in cognitive flexibility tendency as the level of education increased. A positive relationship was found between organizational attention and cognitive flexibility. The fact that especially selectivity and focusing dimensions show a strong connection with cognitive flexibility suggests that managers' ability to direct attention processes effectively may be related to their flexibility levels. In addition, leadership attitudes and collective reaction dimensions were also found to be related to cognitive flexibility, indicating that managers who can think flexibly can exhibit more effective leadership and adapt to changes faster.

Keywords: Organizational Attention, Cognitive Flexibility, School Administrators

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Problem Status

Today's educational institutions have a structure that requires effective decision-making, strategic focus, and flexibility in management processes due to rapidly changing environmental factors and increasing complexity. School administrators must focus their organizational attention on specific issues and adapt to changing conditions in line with their cognitive flexibility in order to successfully manage educational institutions. However, it is seen that there are limited studies in the existing literature that directly examine the relationship between organizational attention and cognitive flexibility. Organizational attention is a process that determines which information managers focus on and which issues they prioritize (Ocasio, 2011). Educational managers must evaluate many sources of information, from daily operations to long-term strategies. In this process, the correct direction of attention plays a critical role in ensuring the efficient, effective and sustainable management of educational institutions. On the other hand, cognitive flexibility is a factor related to managers' ability to adapt to different situations, produce alternative solutions and solve problems (Topal, 2024; Martin & Rubin, 1995). Changing educational policies, unexpected crises and organizational transformations require managers to develop flexible thinking skills and use these skills effectively in decision-making processes.

The relationship between cognitive flexibility and organizational attention is important in understanding how managers direct their attention, which situations they prioritize, and how they shape decision-making processes. However, in the field of educational administration, there is insufficient research to reveal how these two concepts work together, how they affect each other, and what role managers' cognitive flexibility plays in organizational attention processes (Topal, 2024).

In the study, the relationship between organizational attention levels and cognitive flexibility levels of school administrators will be analyzed using the relational screening model using statistical methods. Organizational attention is a process that determines how organizations process existing information, focus on environmental stimuli, and prioritize which information (Ocasio, 1997). In the context of school administrators, it is considered as the capacity to determine strategic priorities, show sensitivity to environmental factors, and focus on management processes (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). Cognitive flexibility is defined as the ability of an individual to adapt to changing environmental conditions, evaluate different perspectives, and develop alternative solutions (Spiro & Jehng, 1990). In the context of management, cognitive flexibility is associated with school administrators' ability to respond quickly to crisis situations, have an innovative management approach, and adapt to different situations (Martin & Rubin, 1995). In this study, whether the organizational attention levels of school administrators have a significant relationship with cognitive flexibility will be analyzed using statistical methods. The main purpose of the research is to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between these two

variables and also to examine the effects of demographic variables such as gender, title, length of experience and educational status.

1.2 Purpose of the Research

The main purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between the organizational attention level of school administrators and cognitive flexibility. In particular, it is aimed to determine the effect of the cognitive flexibility of administrators on organizational attention processes and to reveal the direction and strength of the relationship between these two variables. It is aimed to develop suggestions for management processes by examining the differences in organizational attention and cognitive flexibility of demographic variables such as gender, title, experience and education status.

1.3 Importance of Research

This study is important in terms of being one of the limited number of studies examining **the relationship between organizational attention and cognitive flexibility in the field of educational administration**. Today, it has become a critical skill for educational administrators to make effective decisions in changing and dynamic school environments and to manage their strategic attention efficiently. Organizational attention is an important factor that determines what information school administrators focus on, what they ignore, and how they make decisions. Cognitive flexibility is directly related to the capacity of administrators to adapt to different situations, produce alternative solutions, and improve decision-making processes. The research aims to contribute to the decision-making mechanisms in educational institutions by revealing how the concepts of attention and flexibility interact in management processes. It is thought that the findings will contribute to the determination of educational policies and the development of training programs for school administrators.

1.4 Limitations

This research was conducted within the following limitations:

- The universe of the research consists of school administrators working in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).
- The research was conducted within a specific time period.
- Organizational Attention Scale (Topal, 2024) and Cognitive Flexibility Scale (Martin & Rubin, 1995; Çelikkaleli, 2014) were used in the research.
- Variable Limitation : Only organizational attention and cognitive flexibility variables were considered in the study.

1.5 Definitions

Organizational Attention: It refers to the process of how decision makers manage the flow of information within the organization, which issues they focus on, and which information they filter and prioritize (Ocasio, 1997).

Cognitive Flexibility: It is defined as the ability of a person to adapt to changing environmental conditions, evaluate different perspectives and produce alternative solutions (Topal, 2024)

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Organizational Attention

Attention can be defined as a cognitive process in which an individual consciously selects environmental information or actively processes information and thoughts in memory (Ocasio et al., 2017). From a broader perspective, attention can be considered as the ability to focus and show interest in a specific topic or task, including the control of mental distraction. One of the basic characteristics of attention is that it is selective. The preference of certain stimuli among many available ones is one of the most obvious indicators of the concept of selective attention (Groenewald et al., 2009).

Organizational attention is defined as the shaping of the attention processes of decision makers within the organization within a social structure (Williams, 2019). This concept refers to the collective awareness of the immediate or long-term threats and opportunities that occur in both the internal and external environment of the organization. Organizational attention is largely based on communication and interaction processes. Organizational members need to develop a common understanding and produce solutions by sharing information about various problems facing the organization (Wickens and McCarley, 2007).

Organizational attention is a set of cyclical routines and processes that determine which information is included in organizational memory and which is filtered out and considered less important. This approach treats the organization as a distributed information system. The effectiveness of information within the organization depends on the degree to which it attracts attention. Ocasio's (1997) definition focuses on decision makers who operationalize existing information for strategic decisions. This perspective emphasizes that selection processes that filter information are shaped not only by top management but also by various organizational actors.

In the daily functioning of organizations, the actions of individuals and subunits do not always directly coincide with the decisions of the upper management. Many actions take place without being dependent on a central direction and become a part of the organizational functioning. Such actions are included in a wide flow of decisions and actions. In order for information to take place in the organizational memory, it is not enough for it to attract the attention of the upper management alone; the attention of other representatives within the organization is also a determining factor. These actors become a part of the process that determines which information will be integrated into organizational processes and transformed into a long-term source of information (Topal, 2024).

2.2. Cognitive Flexibility

Cognitive flexibility is the ability of an individual to restructure their current knowledge and produce alternative solutions to adapt to changing conditions. Spiro and Jeng (1990) were the first researchers to define this concept. Martin and Rubin (1995) emphasized that an individual should be aware of their options, be willing to adapt, and feel competent. Individuals with high cognitive flexibility can adapt to environmental changes more quickly, are responsible, enterprising, and have effective communication skills in their business and private lives (Martin et al., 1998). While flexibility increases an individual's self-confidence, confidence also enables the individual to be more flexible. Çelikkaleli (2014) stated that cognitive flexibility is positively related to problem solving, stress management, and collaborative decision-making skills, and negatively related to depression and argumentative personality. Managers with high cognitive flexibility can effectively manage organizational attention levels and make rational or intuitive decisions.

Cognitive flexibility is the ability of an individual to adapt to changing environmental conditions, evaluate different perspectives, and develop alternative solutions. This concept plays an important role in problem solving, decision making, and learning processes. Cognitive flexibility allows an individual to change previously learned thought patterns when necessary and develop strategies appropriate for new situations (Aslan & Turk, 2022). Cognitive flexibility is a critical skill, especially in coping with uncertain or complex situations. The ability of a person to switch from one task to another, to apply old knowledge to new contexts, and to adopt different thinking perspectives are the basic indicators of cognitive flexibility. This ability is a part of cognitive processes called executive functions and is closely related to attention control, memory management, and problem-solving skills. Studies in the fields of neuroscience and psychology show that cognitive flexibility is linked to the prefrontal cortex. The development of cognitive flexibility depends on education, experience, and environmental factors. Supporting flexible thinking skills in learning processes helps individuals to be innovative and adaptive. It is observed that individuals with high cognitive flexibility are more successful, especially in the changing business world and social dynamics (Dağ and Gülüm, 2013).

2.3. Related Research

Durand (2003) suggests that forecasting ability is a distinctive competence in organizational terms. In the study, a model explaining the differences in forecasting ability among firms was developed and tested. When the mutual effects were controlled, it was found that two basic organizational factors (organizational control illusion and organizational attention) affected both the bias and magnitude of forecast errors. A high level of organizational control illusion increases positive forecast bias. On the other hand, an increase in relative investments in market information within the scope of organizational attention reduces positive forecast bias and error magnitude. It also plays a balancing role for the forecast bias caused by the illusion of control. An increase in relative investments in employee competence unexpectedly increases both negative forecast bias and error magnitude. The study reveals that attention management and investment strategies are important for organizations to improve their forecasting capabilities.

In the study conducted by Topal (2024), it was aimed to develop a theoretical model related to the process and management of organizational attention. In the study, the conceptual framework of organizational attention was created, the views of educational administrators on this process were determined, and the components of organizational attention were examined. It was aimed to develop a valid and reliable scale on organizational attention. The research findings revealed that the basic elements of organizational attention are selectivity and focus. Within the scope of the study, the Organizational Attention Scale (OAS) consisting of three sub-dimensions and 16 items was developed and it was determined that the scale was highly valid and reliable. According to the structural equation model (SEM) analysis, it was concluded that organizational attention has a partial mediating role in the relationship between cognitive flexibility and rational and intuitive decision-making processes. This finding shows that organizational attention is an important factor affecting the decision-making processes of managers.

Hilligoss and Wong (2024) argue that organizations need to coordinate the attention of a wide range of employees in order to effectively respond to and manage extreme uncertainty and volatility. The ability of organizations to consciously organize their collective attention resources by focusing them on a specific problem is critical to successful crisis management. However, the existing organizational attention literature does not fully explain how organizations achieve such concentration. In order to fill this gap, a qualitative case study was conducted in a US

healthcare organization responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the research, a process model was developed in which organizational concentration operates in a rhythmic cycle between two main phases. In the divergence phase of attention, organizational attention is spread among different issues and actors, and issues are analyzed in detail and examined in depth. In the convergence phase of attention, organizational attention is integrated horizontally and vertically and focuses on a specific issue or set of issues. These two phases affect the quality of attention in different ways in terms of stability, vitality, and integrity, contributing to the overall management capacity of the organization. The study reveals that repetitive organizational activities (e.g., meetings) are the primary mechanisms that regulate the transitions between attention separation and fusion. Effective management of these processes strengthens organizational concentration and enables organizations to better adapt to uncertainty by increasing their agility.

In the study conducted by Kartal et al. (2024), the relationship between the cognitive flexibility levels of physical education and sports teachers and their self-efficacy for inclusive education was examined. The research findings show that as teachers' cognitive flexibility increases, their self-efficacy for the education of individuals with special needs also increases. In other words, it was determined that teachers who can easily adapt to different situations and have flexible thinking skills feel more competent in the education of students with special needs. It was determined that cognitive flexibility is a variable that significantly predicts self-efficacy levels. However, it was observed that whether teachers take courses on inclusive education or not does not create a statistically significant difference on self-efficacy and cognitive flexibility scores. Despite this, it was determined that the average self-efficacy scores of teachers who take courses are relatively high. In general, the research results reveal that teachers with high cognitive flexibility feel more competent in inclusive education processes and this situation is positively reflected in educational practices.

In the study conducted by Altuğ and Ünal (2024), cognitive control and cognitive flexibility levels of healthy geriatric individuals were compared in terms of gender. The cognitive flexibility levels of individuals aged 65 and over participating in the study were evaluated with the Cognitive Control and Flexibility Scale (CFC). According to the results of the study, no statistically significant difference was found between women and men in cognitive control over emotions, appraisal and coping flexibility, and total cognitive control and flexibility scores. However, in women, the presence of chronic disease was negatively associated with appraisal and coping flexibility. In men, the presence of chronic disease was negatively associated with cognitive control over emotions and total cognitive control scores.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Model

This study was conducted with the relational screening model within the scope of the quantitative research method. The quantitative research method is a research approach that focuses on measuring the relationships between variables and obtaining generalizable results by working with numerical data (Creswell, 2014). In quantitative research, the data collection process is carried out in an objective, systematic and measurable manner. In the research, hypotheses are tested using statistical analysis methods and the cause-effect or relational links between variables are evaluated (Büyüköztürk, 2012). The relational screening model is a research model used to determine the existing relationship between two or more variables and to examine the direction and strength of the relationship (Karasar, 2009). In this model, instead of establishing a causal link between variables, how the variables are related to each other is analyzed. It is determined whether there is a positive, negative or insignificant relationship between variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

3.2 Universe and Sample

In this study, the school principals in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) constitute the universe. There are approximately 189 school principals in the TRNC. In the study, the proportional stratified random sampling method was used to ensure that the participants represented the universe. This method is a method that divides the universe into subgroups and selects random samples from each stratum proportionate to the size of that group (Büyüköztürk, 2012). The sample size of 70 school principals was selected proportionally according to their education levels.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

In this study, the Organizational Attention Scale (OAS) developed by Topal (2024) and the Cognitive Flexibility Scale (CFS) created by Martin & Rubin (1995) and adapted to Turkish by Çelikkaleli (2014) were used.

SRS is a 6-point Likert-type scale consisting of 16 items and 3 sub-dimensions developed to measure the level of organizational attention. It includes leadership attitudes, collective reaction and selectivity & focus dimensions. High scores indicate high organizational attention. Validity and reliability analyses yielded positive results, and the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as .92.

BEÖ is a 12-item, single-dimensional scale that evaluates the level of cognitive flexibility and uses a 6-point Likert-type response system. Items 2, 3, 6 and 10 are reverse scored. High scores indicate that the individual has

a high level of cognitive flexibility. In the validity and reliability analyses conducted by Çelikkaleli (2014), the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .74 and it was determined that it was a reliable measurement tool.

3.4 Analysis of Data

The data obtained in this study were analyzed using the SPSS program. For the reliability analysis of the data collected with the Organizational Attention Scale (OAS) and the Cognitive Flexibility Scale (CFS), Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated and the internal consistency of the scales was tested. As a result of the analysis, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the Organizational Attention Scale was determined as 0.87 and the Cognitive Flexibility Scale as 0.83, and it was determined that both scales had high reliability. In the data analysis process, the normality assumption was evaluated with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, and it was determined that the distribution was normal. Since the normality assumption was provided, parametric tests were applied. Independent Groups t-Test was used to compare the organizational attention and cognitive flexibility levels according to the gender variable, and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for categorical variables such as title and education level. Pearson Correlation Analysis was performed to examine the relationships between experience length and other variables and it was determined that there was a positive significant relationship between organizational attention and cognitive flexibility.

4. FINDINGS

In this study, demographic information of the sample group of 70 school administrators is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Groups	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Woman	27	38.6
	Male	43	61.4
Title	Manager	39	55.7
	Deputy Director	31	44.3
Experience Period	0-5 years	11	15.7
	6-10 years	16	22.9
	11-15 years	20	28.6
	16 years and above	23	32.9
Educational Status	Licence	33	47.1
	Degree	29	41.4
	Doctorate	8	11.5

When gender distribution is examined, 38.6% (n=27) of the participants are female and 61.4% (n=43) are male. When evaluated on the basis of title, 55.7% (n=39) are school principals and 44.3% (n=31) are assistant principals. In terms of experience, 15.7% (n=11) of the administrators have 0-5 years, 22.9% (n=16) have 6-10 years, 28.6% (n=20) have 11-15 years, and 32.9% (n=23) have 16 years or more experience. When educational background is examined, 47.1% (n=33) of the participants have a bachelor's degree, 41.4% (n=29) have a master's degree, and 11.5% (n=8) have a doctorate degree.

Table 2. Independent Group t-Test Results of Organizational Attention and Cognitive Flexibility Scales According to Gender Variable

Point	Groups	N	X	ss	Shx	t	Sd	p
Organizational Attention	Woman	27	98.75	22.32	4.08			
	Male	43	104.51	20.99	3.32	-0.688	68	0.362
Cognitive Flexibility	Woman	27	90.58	16.01	2.92			
	Male	43	98.66	17.08	2.70	-0.959	68	0.688

male and female managers ($p>0.05$). However, it was observed that male managers had slightly higher organizational attention and cognitive flexibility scores compared to women. This may suggest that male managers may have a broader perspective in terms of cognitive flexibility and may show higher focus in attention processes.

Table 3. Independent Group t-Test Results of Organizational Attention and Cognitive Flexibility Scales According to Title Variable

Point	Groups	N	X	ss	Shx	t	Sd	p
Organizational Attention	Manager	39	102.35	19.87	3.18			
	Deputy Director	31	99.42	21.36	3.84	-0.789	68	0.442
Cognitive Flexibility	Manager	39	96.72	17.51	2.81			
	Deputy Director	31	94.38	16.89	3.04	-0.654	68	0.518

The results show that there is no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) based on title. However, it was observed that the organizational attention and cognitive flexibility scores of the principals were slightly higher than those of the assistant principals. This may suggest that the principals may have a broader perspective in the management processes and assume more responsibility in the organizational attention processes.

Table 4. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results According to the Experience Length Variable

Variable	Variance Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (D)	Mean Squares (MS)	F	p
Organizational Attention	Intergroup	1487.25	3	495.75	2,145	0.087
	Within Groups	15587.32	66	236.17		
Cognitive Flexibility	Intergroup	985.63	3	328.54	1,872	0.142
	Within Groups	14467.89	66	219.06		

According to the results, no significant difference was found in the levels of organizational attention and cognitive flexibility depending on the length of experience ($p > 0.05$). However, it was observed that the means of organizational attention and cognitive flexibility changed as the length of experience increased. This result suggests that managers may show a certain development in their attention processes and flexibility levels as they gain experience.

Table 5. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results According to the Educational Status Variable

Variable	Variance Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (D)	Mean Squares (MS)	F	p
Organizational Attention	Intergroup	1725.43	2	862.72	3,574	0.032*
	Within Groups	16528.61	67	246.69		
Cognitive Flexibility	Intergroup	943.27	2	471.63	1,984	0.112
	Within Groups	15984.23	67	238.57		

According to the results, a statistically significant difference was found between the educational status groups in terms of organizational attention ($F = 3.574$, $p = 0.032$). This finding shows that the organizational attention levels of managers differ as the level of education increases. In terms of cognitive flexibility, no significant difference was found according to the level of education ($p > 0.05$), but when the means were examined, a certain trend was observed in the levels of cognitive flexibility as the level of education increased.

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between Cognitive Flexibility and the Organizational Attention Scale and its sub-dimensions.

Table 6. Relationship Between Cognitive Flexibility and Organizational Attention Scale and Its Sub-dimensions

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Cognitive Flexibility	1,000	0.721*	0.654*	0.589*	0.532
Organizational Attention Total	0.721*	1,000	0.678*	0.643*	0.712*
Selectivity and Focus	0.654*	0.678*	1,000	0.691*	0.637
Leadership Attitudes	0.589*	0.643*	0.691*	1,000	0.725*
Collective Reaction	0.532	0.712*	0.637	0.725*	1,000

asterisk () in the table indicates statistically significant correlations at the $p < 0.05$ significance level.*

The analysis results show that there is a significant and positive relationship between cognitive flexibility and organizational attention total score ($r=0.721$, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, different levels of relationships were found between cognitive flexibility and the sub-dimensions of organizational attention, which are selectivity and focus ($r=0.654$, $p < 0.05$), leadership attitudes ($r=0.589$, $p < 0.05$) and collective reaction ($r=0.532$, $p > 0.05$).

These relationships between organizational attention and cognitive flexibility indicate that school administrators' cognitive flexibility levels may have an impact on organizational attention processes. The fact that selectivity and focus dimensions in particular have a strong relationship with cognitive flexibility suggests that administrators' ability to direct their attention efficiently may be related to cognitive flexibility skills. Leadership attitudes and collective reaction dimensions also exhibit significant relationships with cognitive flexibility, suggesting that administrators who can think flexibly can exhibit more effective leadership and adapt to organizational processes more quickly.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research results show that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female managers in terms of organizational attention and cognitive flexibility. However, the fact that male managers have slightly higher scores in terms of these two variables may suggest that they may have a broader perspective in cognitive flexibility and attention processes. In the examinations made on the basis of title, it was observed that the organizational attention and cognitive flexibility levels of managers were slightly higher than those of assistant managers. When evaluated in terms of experience, no significant difference was found in organizational attention and cognitive flexibility levels. However, it was observed that the means of these two variables changed as experience increased. A significant difference was found in organizational attention levels in terms of education level. It is observed that the organizational attention levels of managers change as the education level increases. In terms of cognitive flexibility, although there is no statistically significant difference depending on the education level, it was observed that there is a certain trend in cognitive flexibility levels as the education level increases.

It has been determined that there is a positive relationship between organizational attention and cognitive flexibility. The fact that selectivity and focus dimensions show a strong relationship with cognitive flexibility in particular suggests that managers' ability to direct their attention efficiently may be linked to their flexibility levels. In addition, significant relationships have been found between leadership attitudes and collective reaction dimensions and cognitive flexibility. This suggests that managers with flexible thinking skills can exhibit more effective leadership and adapt to organizational processes more quickly.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations can be made:

- Training and workshops should be organized to improve managers' organizational attention and cognitive flexibility skills.
- Considering the impact of education level on organizational attention, it is important to encourage managers to engage in continuous learning and development processes.
- Content that strengthens cognitive flexibility and attention processes should be included in leadership and management programs.
- In order for managers to improve their attention management skills, supportive training on strategic thinking and focus techniques should be provided.
- Considering that managers who can think flexibly manage organizational processes more efficiently, cognitive flexibility skills should also be taken into account in manager selection and promotion processes.

These suggestions can contribute to more effective execution of school management processes and increase the ability of administrators to adapt to changing conditions.

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