

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEES' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE LEVELS

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ABSTRACT

In the increasingly competitive environment of the 21st century, achieving managerial success requires contemporary management practices. At the same time, the presence and influence of emotions should not be ignored. In this context, the aim of this study is to determine the relationship between the emotional intelligence of hotel employees and customer relationship management, and to analyze the effects of emotional intelligence on customer relationship management. Data sets collected from employees of 4 and 5-star hotels operating in Istanbul were used. Frequency, factor, correlation, and regression analyses were employed in the study's analysis. According to the research results, a linear and significant relationship was found between the emotional intelligence level of employees and customer relationship management. Furthermore, the emotional intelligence levels of employees have had a significant effect on customer relations. In this context, the internal customer stands out as an important factor in emotional intelligence and the customer relationship management process. It is thought that high levels of emotional intelligence among employees will be beneficial for the implementation process of customer relationship management. These results support the literature that reveals the existence of relationships between the individual characteristics of employees and some concepts related to organizational qualities.

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INTRODUCTION

With the changes and developments of today, the concepts of time and space have disappeared. Information technologies, which are encountered in almost every aspect of human life, have become indispensable for hotel businesses. This situation has also necessitated changes in the way hotel businesses operate. The communication process of businesses carrying out service activities is becoming more complex every day. Many businesses fail because they cannot establish strong communication with their "customers". The concept of "customer" in businesses is divided into two. Internal customers (employees) are individuals working at all levels of the business. External customers (consumers) are defined as individuals or institutions that are the buyers of the goods and services produced by the business (Çakır & Eğinli, 2010; Solmaz et al., 2014).

Due to their labor-intensive nature, the human element is at the heart of the organizational structure of hotel businesses (Demir, 2021). Kaufman (2018) argues that in order to understand how businesses operate, it is necessary to analyze how people make decisions, how they implement these decisions, and how they communicate with other people. Relationships form the essence of human life. Without relationships, it is difficult for any society or organization to survive, because individuals are described as invisible threads that bind them together. Managing a relationship is not easy; it is quite difficult and complex. Environmental forces that contribute to the increased focus on customer relationships in hotel businesses are quite significant. These can be expressed as factors such as rapid technological advancements, total quality management programs adopted by competing businesses, the growth of the service economy, organizational development processes that guide the empowerment of individuals and teams, and the increased intensity of competition caused by concerns about customer retention (Bakırtaş, 2013; Şen et al., 2017).

With increasing competition, globalization of markets, and the proliferation of options for customers, the profitability and competitive advantage of hotel businesses have begun to disappear. The increased ability of external customers to compare goods and services, and the increasing similarity of these goods and services, have shifted the focus to customer satisfaction. In this context, customer relationship management (CRM) is described as a strategy for creating value within hotel businesses, aiming to achieve customer satisfaction by getting to know external customers better and offering them suitable products (Ekici & Yüce, 2007). The importance of emotional intelligence, which is said to have a significant impact on human relationships, is particularly evident in customer relationship management. Individuals with low emotional intelligence exhibit certain distinguishing characteristics. Numerous negative behaviors such as not taking responsibility, acting accusatory, giving orders, criticizing, liking to advise, despising, scolding, judging, being stubborn and not liking flexibility, exaggerating, hiding emotions, and giving evasive answers are some of these symptoms (Şen, 2018).

Based on the saying "scarcity is value" for businesses, in an environment where external customers are becoming scarce and competition is increasing, businesses need an effective and efficient human resource and contemporary management practices to survive and gain a significant advantage over their competitors. In a period when contemporary management practices are implemented in hotel businesses, having high or low levels of emotional intelligence among employees will have positive or negative effects. High emotional intelligence among employees helps them to better recognize and manage specific emotions experienced by external customers during product/service reception (Miao et al., 2019). Conversely, low levels will have the opposite effect. As can be seen, hotels need the help of

their employees while carrying out their business activities. Therefore, it is observed that today, the satisfaction of external customers is ensured through employees. It is understood that the presence of employees is directly proportional to the continuity and productivity of external customers (Ekici & Yüce, 2007). This situation is important for every business. In hotel businesses operating within the tourism industry and carrying out service activities, there is a need to address the issues of "Customer Relationship Management" and "Emotional Intelligence".

According to this information, the aim of this study is to identify the emotional intelligence competencies of internal customers in hotel businesses and to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and customer relationship management (CRM). A literature review on these two concepts reveals that they have been the subject of numerous studies. However, these studies have mostly addressed the topics separately, and there are no studies that have examined both topics together, particularly in the context of hospitality businesses. Determining emotional intelligence competencies within specific departments of hotel businesses and identifying the relationship between emotional intelligence and customer relationship management can contribute to the efficient use of CRM practices and the effective delivery of services, thus impacting the success of hospitality businesses. For these reasons, this study has the potential to fill a gap in the literature and provide solution-oriented suggestions for the sector.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Customer relationship management

In service businesses, hotels are facing challenges in their business strategy and methods due to numerous factors such as technological advancements, globalization, increased customer awareness, and rising competition. This situation also leads to employees feeling exhausted under the pressure of intense work and heavy workloads. The use of modern management techniques is crucial for their ability to operate effectively under such challenging conditions. In today's increasingly competitive market economy, hotel businesses need to have the ability to manage external customer perceptions through customer relationship management (CRM) practices to gain an advantage. Efforts should also be made to support the efficient execution of this process for employees. A hotel business can achieve continuous corporate development as long as its employees are knowledgeable, high-quality, adaptable to change, and capable of self-improvement. It is predicted that high levels of emotional intelligence among employees contribute to the success of customer relationship management in hotel businesses.

At the core of CRM lies the effort to understand the customer, analyze them, and develop customer-oriented products and services in line with their needs and desires. It is also predicted that factors other than cognitive intelligence influence employees' ability to achieve goals and their quality of life. Mcfarland et al. (2016) state that if employees have high levels of emotional intelligence, negative internal effects (severe conflict, poor cooperation, stress, etc.) can be eliminated. High or increasing emotional intelligence levels among employees will lead to success. With a few exceptions, most studies have focused on understanding the emotions of external customers (Flint & Blocker, 2004). Research shows that before the 2000s, the role of emotional intelligence in the customer context was not explored. It is suggested that this gap was due to the perception that cognitive intelligence had an influence on consumer decisions. Over time, this situation reversed with the emergence of the idea that emotions determine customer decisions regarding the supply of products and services (Ahn et al., 2016). It is believed that selecting employees with high emotional intelligence and providing employees with emotional intelligence training is a way to increase the efficiency of external customer

relations. At the same time, the understanding that emotional intelligence of employees is more important than mental and cognitive intelligence in understanding guests' emotions in hotel businesses has gained traction (Lee et al., 2013).

The necessity of identifying factors that will help manage uncertainties regarding the development and implementation of CRM has been emphasized (Nguyen, 2012). Large-scale investments are being made in CRM applications, but it is observed that they do not meet the expectations of businesses. It is stated that erroneous data entries contribute to this situation (Reimer & Becker, 2015). It is understood that emotional intelligence is important in managing uncertainties and employee-related errors in the CRM process. Emotions are seen as a useful source of information for individuals to understand themselves and to establish connections in interpersonal relationships. Depending on individual characteristics, differences may arise in the ability to process emotionally based information and to relate it to other conditions (Lee et al., 2013). For CRM applications to be carried out more effectively, employees need to have high levels of emotional intelligence. Considering these factors, contemporary practices and emotional intelligence levels are becoming increasingly important for employees of hotel businesses, which are classified as service businesses.

Hotel businesses that adopt a traditional marketing approach will not be able to succeed or lead the market in today's business environment. In today's changing world, increasingly competitive conditions highlight positive relationships between hotel businesses and customers as a crucial factor for gaining a competitive advantage. As is known, healthy and long-term customer relationships can be the only significant competitive tool for hotel businesses. Customer Relationship Management (CRM), proposed by Don Peppers, is not considered a new concept for hotel business life today (Ekici & Yüce, 2007). CRM applications were first used in service sectors such as banking and tourism worldwide. In Turkey, it emerged in the banking sector, but its application in hotel businesses began to be seen from the 2000s onwards (Çeltek, 2013). The evolution of the transition to a customer-centric approach spans approximately 150 years (Pride & Ferrell, 1999). Numerous studies defining customer relationships have been conducted.

Nowadays, the most important advantage of businesses is that the customer relationships they have built over a long period of time, with effort and cost, are very difficult to imitate (Bakırtaş, 2013). Given the challenges businesses face in their growth and profitability processes, and the sheer number of businesses offering similar products and services (Gerson, 1997; Wu, 2007), customer-centric and relationship-based strategic CRM practices should be preferred (Kumar & Reinartz, 2012). The increasing number of hotel businesses necessitates the development of customer relationship strategies (Noone et al., 2003). In the structure of CRM's three fundamental elements – people, processes, and technology – people (employees) understand customer expectations and create solutions beyond standard procedures; processes transform the data transmitted by employees into a customer-centric structure through process revisions; and technology enables automation systems that allow customer information to be tracked at all touchpoints and provide solutions to the requests of different customers (Ekici & Yüce, 2007). To achieve successful CRM, business objectives must be determined through analysis (Newell, 2004). Based on analyses and in-depth interviews with experiential marketing managers, Bakırtaş (2013) states that CRM includes four behavioral components (implementation dimensions). These dimensions are expressed by Hong-kit Yim et al. (2004) as; “customer focus, CRM organization, information management, and technology-based CRM”.

Emotional intelligence

Although the concepts of emotion and intelligence are quite old, it can be stated that studies on the subject have been conducted since the 19th century. The interest in this area stems from the fact that some individuals who are academically successful and score high on cognitive intelligence (IQ) tests during their student years are not equally successful and happy in their professional or personal lives (Şen, 2018). The concept of emotional intelligence was first used by Wayne Leon Payne in his doctoral thesis, "A Study of Emotion: Developing Emotional Intelligence; Self-Integration; Relating to Fear, Pain and Desire," in 1885 (Maboçoğlu, 2006). Emotional intelligence is a concept that has attracted the attention of many researchers as it allows them to analyze and explain human behavior. Listening to the messages of our subconscious and investigating their meanings will lead to positive results (Merlevede et al., 2006). A single sentence is not enough to explain why emotional intelligence is important (Yeung, 2012). In their studies defining emotional intelligence, Salovey and Gardner define it as the ability to control emotions and respond to changing circumstances (Poskey, 2006).

Cooper and Sawaf, who conducted studies on measuring emotional intelligence, define it as the individual's ability to recognize their own emotions and those of those around them, as well as the information related to these emotions. They define it as the ability to use the emotional energy needed by emotions in a way that allows for positive responses by effectively and efficiently reflecting it in our daily activities (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997). Many views and various models have been put forward regarding the theory of emotional intelligence from the past to the present. It is seen that assumptions and determination studies have been made regarding the dimensions of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence approaches have been tried to be explained with mixed and ability-based model studies (Mayer et al., 2000).

Hotel businesses meet the food, beverage, and accommodation needs of travelers. At the same time, they also provide laundry, entertainment, and shopping services, etc. during this time. It is defined as an organization that carries out economic, social, and commercial activities to meet needs (Akoğlan, 1997; Turkay et al., 2014). Considering its characteristic features, the importance of emotional intelligence and customer relations should be taken into account. It is necessary to understand how emotional intelligence affects thoughts, behaviors, and reactions (Weisinger, 1998). In customer relationship management, strategies can be developed based on the emotional relationship between the consumer, product, and service (Yaylacı, 2008). In this highly competitive sector, showing the necessary sensitivity to emotional intelligence will be effective in achieving success in the services provided. It is argued that emotional intelligence is important in work environments (Mcfarland et al., 2016). Managing customer information is necessary to provide services (Sedighi et al., 2012). It is emphasized that emotional factors are important in the interaction between the employee and the external customer (Çakır & Eğinli, 2010). This supports the need for emotional intelligence competencies during customer interaction.

The interaction between CRM and emotional intelligence

It is stated that hotel businesses prefer CRM databases and loyalty applications to provide individual products and services, but these applications have significant shortcomings (Barnes, 2000). The coordinated use of human, technology, and process components is necessary in customer relationship management (Bakırtaş, 2013). It is noted that calculations made using computers and similar decision-makers in the human evaluation process are insufficient (Flint & Blocker, 2004). One of the main shortcomings of the application is the failure to evaluate the emotional intelligence levels of the human factor (employees). Studies by Yalın (2015), Lee et al. (2013), and Çapkulaç (2013) support the idea that emotional competencies have an important

place in human life. As a result, the desired efficiency is not achieved in the applications. It is stated that people with high EQ levels are more successful in interpreting emotional information (Mcfarland et al., 2016) and that this positively affects job performance (Lee et al., 2013).

The communication process in hotel businesses is two-way; "Trust is based on empathy" (Barnes, 2000). CRM should absolutely not be seen as merely a technological structure. Employees with strong emotional competencies are expected to create long-term customer satisfaction and loyalty (Miao et al., 2019). The communication that managers and employees establish with customers plays a significant role in customers' choice of business (Aksatan & Aktaş, 2012). A great deal of information is obtained from customers during reservation and registration processes (Yolal & Çetinel, 2005). Hotel businesses provide customer service support through various communication channels such as telephone, fax, mail, email, or video conferencing (Ahlert, 2000). Even if employees possess high cognitive intelligence, they may be inadequate in maintaining interpersonal and customer relationships if they do not manage their emotions correctly (Mcfarland et al., 2016). Researchers have concluded that high emotional intelligence leads to better performance (Lee et al., 2013). Therefore, there is a need to evaluate the impact of the relationship between employees' emotional intelligence and customer relationship management practices on hotel businesses.

METHODOLOGY

The most important data collection tool in this method, which uses primary data sources, is the survey, and this study also utilized a survey. The questionnaire created to collect data in the research consists of 3 sections. The first scale of the survey is Bar-On's (2006) emotional intelligence inventory. The translation into Turkish was done by Mumcuoğlu (2002). Acar (2001) used the EI scale, which has 88 variables, in the application process of his doctoral thesis. It should be considered that the large number of questions in the scale may cause difficulties for the survey participants in the response process and negatively affect the reliability of the answers given. In his master's study on the effect of employees' emotional intelligence levels on their intention to leave their jobs, Oğuzhan (2012) used Önder's (2010) reduced 40-variable Bar-On EI scale. The scale provides ease of application due to the reduction in the number of variables. The second scale, developed by Sin et al. (2005) and Erol (2012) in their master's thesis entitled "The Relationship between Customer Relationship Management, Organizational Learning Ability and Firm Performance," utilizes the CRM scale used by Stein and Smith (2009) to create a 32-item customer relationship management scale. Two different scales were considered to determine CRM application competencies. A 5-point Likert scale was used in all sections. This is a rating type commonly preferred in social sciences, named after Rensis Likert (Altunışık et al., 2015). The final section of the questionnaire included a 6-question information form for participants to gather data on "gender, age, education level, vocational training status, department, and length of service in the hotel business."

The study area was defined as the employees working in the front office, customer relations, public relations, sales and marketing departments of 291 hotels (160 four-star and 131 five-star) according to the December 2019 data of the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (İstanbul İl Kültür Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2019). Due to the inability to determine the exact number of personnel, a pilot study was conducted in 30 establishments before proceeding with the survey. Based on the information obtained in the pilot study, it was predicted that an average of 8 participants could be reached in the front office, sales, marketing, public relations, and customer relations departments of the hotels. Generalizing the acceptable sample size for the populations described by Coşkun et al. (2017) to 291 hotels (291 x 8) resulted in a total of 2,328 internal customers. Since it was not possible to collect data from 2400 people, data

collection was carried out through sampling. Non-random sampling methods provide more meaningful results in studies. Among these, the commonly preferred sampling type is the "convenience sampling" method (Kurtuluş, 1989). This method is also described as a low-cost and easy-to-implement sampling method (İslamoğlu & Almaçık, 2014).

In this study, the dataset obtained within the scope of Görür's (2020) study was used, and the fieldwork was carried out between January and July 2020. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 386 were included in the evaluation due to 14 missing data. It was assessed that the scales had the power to represent the population during the study period (Coşkun et al., 2017). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients and factor analyses of the scales were performed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for The Social Sciences) software package. Factor analysis determined under which factor the variables in the two different scales were grouped. Normality analyses were performed to determine the distribution of the data during the analysis process, and it was found that the data showed a normal distribution.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the distribution of employees participating in the study according to their gender, age, education, professional training status, departments, and length of service. According to the findings, when the gender variable of the 386 participating employees from four and five-star hotel businesses was examined, it was determined that there were 149 women (38.6%) and 237 men (61.4%). This indicates that the gender balance of internal customers in the hotel businesses reached in the study favors male participants.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

| Variables | Groups | n | % | Variables | Groups | n | % |
|------------------|---------------------------|-----|------|----------------------------------|---------------------|-----|------|
| Gender | Female | 149 | 38,6 | Vocational Training | Yes | 319 | 82,6 |
| | Male | 237 | 61,4 | | No | 67 | 17,4 |
| Age | 18-28 | 185 | 47,9 | Department | Front Office | 194 | 50,3 |
| | 29-39 | 127 | 32,9 | | Sales and Marketing | 80 | 20,7 |
| | 40-50 | 64 | 16,6 | | Public Relations | 57 | 14,8 |
| | 51 and above | 10 | 2,6 | | CRM | 55 | 14,2 |
| Education | High school | 72 | 18,7 | Employment at the Company | 0-5 | 245 | 63,5 |
| | Associate degree | 110 | 28,5 | | 6-10 | 94 | 24,4 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 178 | 46,1 | | 11-15 | 31 | 8,0 |
| | Master's degree and above | 26 | 6,7 | | 16 and above | 16 | 4,1 |
| Total | | 386 | 100 | Total | | 386 | 100 |

The majority of employees are concentrated in the 18-28 age range (47.9%) and the 29-39 age range (32.9%). This is followed by the 40-50 age group (16.6%) and finally the 51 and over age group (2.6%). A noteworthy detail in the age distribution is the high proportion of the 18-

28 age group. This can be attributed to the dynamic nature of the tourism sector (long working hours, tiring working conditions, stress, etc.). Looking at the education levels of the employees, it was determined that 74.6% had an associate's degree or higher, and 82.6% had vocational training. It appears that importance is given to employing highly educated personnel. The distribution of participants by department is as follows: 50.3% in the front office department, 20.7% in sales and marketing, 14.8% in public relations, and finally 14.2% in customer relationship management.

Table 2. Factor analysis and reliability coefficients for emotional intelligence

| VARIABLES | Factor Loading | |
|---|---|--|
| Personal Ability | I am happy with the personality style I have. | ,800 |
| | I am self-confident in most situations. | ,799 |
| | It is quite easy for me to show my emotions. | ,794 |
| | I need others more than they need me. | ,783 |
| | I appreciate myself. | ,763 |
| | I am happy with my physical appearance. | ,763 |
| | I can tell someone when I disagree with them. | ,740 |
| | I am more of a follower than a leader. | ,697 |
| | I try to make my life as meaningful as possible. | ,677 |
| | When working with others, I trust their ideas more than my own. | ,653 |
| | I don't have a definite idea of what I want to do in life. | ,631 |
| | I can't make decisions on my own. | ,578 |
| | Stress Management | I know how to stay calm in difficult situations. |
| I am an impatient person. | | ,777 |
| Once I start talking, it's hard for me to stop. | | ,771 |
| Even when things get harder, I usually have the motivation to keep going. | | ,767 |
| Facing upsetting situations is difficult for me. | | ,740 |
| I find it hard to control my anger. | | ,737 |
| I am anxious. | | ,721 |
| When arguing with people, they tell me to lower my voice. | | ,700 |
| I am a very cheerful person. | ,682 | |

the scales used in the research, Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient was used, indicating the internal consistency of the variables included in the scales (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2015). The variables in the scale have an internal consistency degree ranging from "0-1". The lowest value, "0", indicates no internal consistency, and the highest value, "1", indicates complete internal consistency (Arslantürk & Arslantürk, 2010). Factor analysis was used to dimension the scales. This analysis technique aims to reduce the relationship between variables in a spiral of relationships to a smaller number of basic dimensions to facilitate the interpretation of the relationship between the variables (Coşkun et al., 2017). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test results were evaluated to test the suitability of the variables for factor analysis. Tables 2 and 3 show that exploratory factor analysis with varimax ratios was performed to identify the sub-dimensions of the Emotional Intelligence and Customer Relationship Management scales.

Table 2 presents the reliability and validity analysis results for the emotional intelligence scale. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the emotional intelligence scale is .859. It was determined that emotional intelligence levels are explained by five basic factors with a total variance of 55.651%, and the sample adequacy coefficient (KMO) is .865. It was determined that employees have a high average value for emotional intelligence. Considering the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the factors, it was determined that the reliability and validity level of the emotional intelligence scale is high.

Table 3. Factor analysis and reliability coefficients of the customer relationship scale

| VARIABLES | Factor Loading |
|--|----------------|
| Your hotel designs employee training programs to develop skills that will help acquire and strengthen guest relationships. | ,798 |
| Top management accepts and offers leadership to establish and maintain guest relationships as a key tool of your hotel. | ,798 |
| Your hotel has clearly defined business objectives for acquiring, developing, retaining, and engaging guests. | ,786 |
| Your hotel has strategies to identify returning guests. | ,783 |
| Top management at your hotel spends a significant amount of time with returning guests. | ,781 |
| Your hotel's organizational structure is carefully designed to be guest-oriented. | ,764 |
| Your hotel's employees are responsive and willing to assist guests. | ,764 |
| Your hotel's management and staff are resilient to change. | ,757 |
| Your hotel uses time and resources effectively to ensure guest loyalty. | ,725 |
| Your hotel has harmonious and coordinated activities among guest satisfaction functions. | ,708 |

CRM Organization

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--|-------------|
| | Your hotel possesses the sales and marketing expertise and resources to succeed in guest relationship management. | ,705 |
| | Your hotel regularly evaluates the lifetime value of each of our customers. | ,660 |
| | Your hotel frequently and regularly measures guest satisfaction. Your hotel bases its competitive advantage on establishing and maintaining long-term guest relationships. | ,632 |
| | Computer technologies can help offer personalized offers to your guests. | ,567 |
| Technology-based CRM | Individual guest information is available in every department where guest interaction takes place in your hotel. | ,786 |
| | Your hotel has the right equipment to serve your guests. | ,782 |
| | Your hotel has the right software to serve your guests. | ,782 |
| | Your hotel has a comprehensive guest database. | ,717 |
| | Your hotel has the right technical personnel to provide technical support for the benefits of computer technology in structuring guest relations. | ,677 |
| | Information obtained about returning guests is used to provide a better experience for guests. | ,628 |
| | Your hotel personalizes guest interaction to ensure guest loyalty. | ,766 |
| Customer Orientation | In your hotel, any changes or activities deemed important are implemented for the benefit of your guests. | ,766 |
| | Your hotel establishes one-on-one dialogue with returning guests to tailor products and services to the guest. | ,741 |
| | In your hotel, when it understands that a guest wants a change in a product or service, it works in coordination with all its departments to achieve this. Your hotel provides personalized goods and services for returning guests. | ,734 |
| | All employees at your hotel share and understand the common goal of establishing and developing guest relationships. | ,734 |
| | New information obtained from various touchpoints at your hotel is coded for easy dissemination and sharing by all staff. | ,709 |
| Knowledge Management | Your hotel establishes channels to ensure continuous and two-way communication between employees and guests. | ,780 |
| | Your hotel has well-archived critical policies and procedures in guest relationship management and ensures consistency across all touchpoints. | ,773 |

| | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Your hotel fully understands guest requests thanks to its information resources. | | | | | ,758 |
| When the goods and services desired by guests are identified, departments work in coordination to fulfill them. | | | | | ,750 |
| Your hotel designs employee training programs to develop skills that will help acquire and strengthen guest relationships. | | | | | ,724 |
| Top management accepts and offers leadership to establish and maintain guest relationships as a key tool of your hotel. | | | | | ,542 |
| Cronbach's Alpha for Factors | ,932 | ,829 | ,825 | ,819 | |
| Mean for Factors | 3,53 | 3,75 | 3,82 | 3,51 | |
| Explained Variance (%) for Factors | 23,62 | 10,54 | 10,20 | 10,04 | |
| Cronbach's Alpha for the scale: .827, Total Explained Variance (%): 54.428, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO): .878 | | | | | |

Table 3 presents the results of the reliability and validity analysis of the customer relationship management scale. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the customer relationship management scale is .827. It was determined that the customer relationship management scale is explained by four main factors with a total variance of 54.428%, and the sample adequacy coefficient (KMO) is .878. It was determined that employees have a high average value for customer relationship management skills. Considering the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the factors, it was found that the reliability and validity level of the customer relationship management scale is high.

Correlation analysis is an analysis technique used to reveal the strength of the relationship or dependence between two variables measured at the interval and ratio level. The symbolic expression for the analysis is shown as the letter "r" (Coşkun et al., 2017). A correlation coefficient of "r = +1" indicates an excellent positive relationship; A correlation coefficient (r=-1) indicates a perfect negative correlation, while an r=0 indicates no correlation (Büyüköztürk et al., 2015). Correlation analysis was used to determine whether there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence dimensions and customer relationship management dimensions.

Table 4. Correlation results between scale dimensions

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal Skills | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Interpersonal Skills | r ,227** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| | p ,000 | | | | | | | | |
| Ensuring Compatibility | r ,101* | ,270** | 1 | | | | | | |
| | p ,047 | ,000 | | | | | | | |
| Stress Management | r ,049 | ,280** | ,047 | 1 | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | p | ,335 | ,000 | ,361 | | | | | |
| Overall Mood | r | ,131* | ,230** | ,356** | ,111* | | | | |
| | p | ,010 | ,000 | ,000 | ,029 | | | 1 | |
| Customer Orientation | r | ,111* | ,253** | ,110* | ,179** | ,161** | | | |
| | p | ,030 | ,000 | ,030 | ,000 | ,001 | | 1 | |
| CRM Organization | r | ,009 | ,159** | ,057 | ,113* | ,190** | ,271** | | |
| | p | ,853 | ,002 | ,265 | ,026 | ,000 | ,000 | 1 | |
| Knowledge Management | r | ,109* | ,176** | ,043 | ,093 | ,162** | ,209** | ,365** | |
| | p | ,032 | ,001 | ,402 | ,069 | ,001 | ,000 | ,000 | 1 |
| Technology-based CRM | r | -,21 | ,053 | -,075 | ,011 | ,087 | ,124* | ,206** | ,172** |
| | p | ,684 | ,302 | ,142 | ,833 | ,089 | ,015 | ,000 | ,001 |

*n=386; *p<0,05, **p<0,01*

Table 4 presents the correlation values between the dimensions constituting the emotional intelligence levels of the employees included in the study and the dimensions of the Customer Focus Scale (CSS). In the correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between the variables, it can be stated that there is a significant and positive relationship between interpersonal skills and customer focus ($r=,253$; $p=,000<0.01$); personal skills and customer focus ($r=,111$; $p=,030<0.05$); adaptability and customer focus ($r=,110$; $p=,030<0.05$); stress management and customer focus ($r=,179$; $p=,000<0.01$); and general mood and customer focus ($r=,161$; $p=,001<0.01$). In this context, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the personal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood dimensions of the ESS scale and customer focus, one of the CSS application dimensions. In other words, as internal customers' personal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and overall mood competence increase, CRM organizational skills increase.

In the correlation analysis, it can be said that there is a significant and positive relationship between interpersonal skills and the CRM organizational dimension ($r=,159$; $p=,002<0.01$); between stress management and the CRM organizational dimension ($r=,113$; $p=,026<0.05$); and finally, between overall mood and the CRM organizational dimension ($r=,190$; $p=,000<0.01$). Table 4 shows that there is no relationship between personal skills and adaptability dimensions and CRM organization ($r=0$). In this context, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the interpersonal skills, stress management, and overall mood dimensions of the DZ scale and the CRM organizational dimension of the CRM implementation dimensions. In other words, as internal customers' interpersonal skills, stress management ability, and overall mood competence increase, CRM organizational skills increase.

Considering that the correlation coefficient ranges from +1 to -1, it is observed that there is no relationship between the dimensions of personal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood, and the technology-based CRM sub-dimension of CRM application dimensions ($r=0$). However, it is observed that there is no relationship between adaptability and stress management dimensions ($r=0$). In the correlation analysis, it can be said

that the highest degree of significant positive relationship is between interpersonal skills and the knowledge management dimension ($r=,176$; $p=,001<0.01$). Secondly, it is observed that there is a significant and positive relationship between general mood and knowledge management variables ($r=,162$; $p=,001<0.01$). There is a significant and positive relationship between personal skills and the knowledge management dimension ($r=,109$; $p=,032<0.05$). Accordingly, as the interpersonal and personal skills and general mood competence of the internal customer increase, their knowledge management competence also increases.

Regression analysis is defined as a statistical method applied to examine the relationship between a dependent metric variable and at least one independent metric variable. Regression analysis with a single independent variable is defined as "univariate regression" analysis (Coşkun et al., 2017). This part of the study aims to reveal the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and customer relationship management (CRM), or if a relationship exists, to determine its strength and mathematical expression. According to Table 5, the independent variable subjected to analysis is "emotional intelligence," and the dependent variable is "customer relationship management." The simple linear regression analysis shows that the model is significant ($F=140.201$; $p=0.000<0.05$). This result indicates that the model is significant at a 95% confidence interval, and it is possible to understand from this model that emotional intelligence is an important factor in explaining the dependent variable, customer relationship management.

Table 5. Effect of emotional intelligence on customer relationship management

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | p |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | Beta | Std. Hata | Beta | | |
| Constant | 1,486 | ,186 | | 8,064 | ,000* |
| Emotional Intelligence | ,570 | ,048 | ,517 | 11,841 | ,000* |
| R | | | ,517 | | |
| R ² | | | ,267 | | |
| Adjusted R ² | | | ,266 | | |
| Standard Error | | | ,393 | | |
| F | | | 140,201 | | |
| | | | | ,000* | |

Dependent Variable: Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

The emotional intelligence of the employees can explain only 26.7% of the variation in the variable, with an R² of 0.267. Since the adjusted R² is 0.266, this explanatory value decreases to 26.6%. The beta coefficient for the independent variable in the model is $\beta=0.570$, and the corresponding standardized beta regression coefficient is $\beta=0.517$. This value indicates a statistically significant contribution. In this context, it can be said that a one-unit increase in the emotional intelligence level of employees working in hotel businesses positively affects the customer relationship management process by $\beta=0.517$ units. It can be said that the emotional intelligence of employees has a significant impact on the customer relationship management

process. The research results in this regard are consistent with the results of studies by Miao et al. (2019), Ahn et al. (2016), Mcfarland et al. (2016), and Wolter et al. (2016), etc.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Hotel businesses need to abandon outdated management approaches and adopt new, contemporary management techniques to ensure their continued operation. The multifaceted and complex problems arising from evolving technology and the diversification of specialization within organizations can no longer be solved with traditional and intuitive approaches. A common thread in these new management approaches is the focus on the human factor. Businesses need to utilize the human factor more effectively and efficiently to achieve and maintain strategic gains. The emotional intelligence level of employees has been found to have an impact on customer relationship management in four and five-star hotels. Frow and Payne (2009) argue that giving more importance to CRM studies is now a necessary requirement. In this process, high emotional intelligence competence among employees will contribute to the corporate growth and development of hotel businesses. A work environment where employees feel safe and secure will be established. Employees with high emotional intelligence competence are expected to build strong relationships by reflecting positive behaviors both among themselves and towards external customers. It is also predicted that this will increase the success of CRM practices. Based on the compiled data and information, the following conclusions have been reached:

- Investments in CRM applications ensure successful results.
- Giving importance to the emotional intelligence level of employees will lead to successful external customer management.
- It has a positive impact on complaint management.
- High emotional intelligence levels of employees positively impact sales and marketing strategies in the customer relationship management process.
- High emotional intelligence of employees increases internal and external communication and collaboration capabilities. • Employees with high emotional intelligence provide a competitive advantage in the process of collecting, analyzing, and implementing customer data.
- High emotional intelligence competence of employees in hotel businesses contributes to increased internal satisfaction.
- High emotional intelligence competence in hotel businesses is effective in reducing employee turnover rates.

Personnel with high emotional intelligence will increase cross-selling capabilities and profitability. The decisions employees make for themselves and their environment should not only be judged on their high cognitive intelligence, but also on their ability to manage and coordinate themselves and others. When hiring, dismissing, or promoting employees, their cognitive (IQ) abilities should not be the sole focus. Emotional intelligence (EQ) should also be considered. Klaus and Edvardsson (2014) state that external customers will always have a positive, negative, or indifferent experience with the product or service they purchase. Employees need to have a high level of emotional intelligence. It plays a significant role in creating a positive experience for the business. For employees working in hotel businesses, emotional intelligence and customer relationship management are integrated issues. Based on this information, several recommendations have been developed for hotel businesses and researchers, which are as follows:

- The emotional intelligence competence of employees working in hotel operations should be assessed, and internal training programs should be prepared based on the results.

- When developing CRM (Customer Relationship Management) practices, employees' emotional intelligence competencies should be considered and planned according to the organization as a whole.
- Organizational planning should be structured to include employees with high emotional intelligence in central or management roles.
- Emotional intelligence should be utilized in the processes of collecting, analyzing, applying, and determining the results of external customer data in hotel operations.
- High emotional intelligence levels among employees will have a reducing effect on external customer complaints and operating costs.
- The employment of employees with high emotional intelligence competence should be ensured in applications such as call centers and customer service lines.
- Training support should be provided to employees involved in the customer complaint handling process to increase their emotional intelligence competence.
- Support programs should be implemented to increase the emotional intelligence competence of departments that are in direct contact with external customers.
- Hotel businesses should develop competitive strategies through unique CRM (Crew Resource Management) practices based on employees' emotional intelligence levels.

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Extended Abstract

This study examines the relationship between customer relationship management (CRM) practices and the emotional intelligence levels of employees in hotel businesses. In today's highly competitive business environment, hotel enterprises are required to adopt contemporary management approaches in order to maintain sustainability and gain competitive advantage. At the same time, the increasing complexity of customer expectations and communication processes has made the human factor more important than ever in service-oriented industries. Since hotel businesses are labor-intensive organizations, employees constitute the core component of organizational success. Within this framework, the study focuses on the role of emotional intelligence in strengthening CRM practices and improving organizational performance in hotel enterprises.

Customer relationship management is defined as a strategic process that enables businesses to understand customer expectations, develop customer-oriented products and services, and maintain long-term relationships with customers. CRM practices are particularly important in hotel businesses because the tourism sector operates in a highly competitive environment where customer loyalty and satisfaction are essential for sustainability. Technological developments, globalization, increasing customer awareness, and the growth of the service economy have forced hotel businesses to adopt customer-centered strategies. However, CRM should not be considered solely as a technological infrastructure. Human interaction, communication quality, and employees' emotional competencies are also crucial determinants of successful CRM implementation.

The concept of emotional intelligence has attracted increasing scholarly attention due to its influence on human behavior, interpersonal communication, and organizational outcomes. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability of individuals to recognize, understand, manage, and effectively use their own emotions as well as the emotions of others. In hotel businesses, where employees interact directly with guests, emotional intelligence is considered highly important for service quality, customer satisfaction, and relationship management. Employees with high emotional intelligence are more capable of understanding customer expectations, controlling stress, managing conflicts, and creating positive customer experiences. In contrast, low emotional intelligence may negatively affect communication, customer satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness.

The study argues that emotional intelligence and CRM are integrated concepts in hotel businesses. CRM practices require not only technological systems and organizational processes but also emotionally competent employees who can establish effective communication with guests. Emotional intelligence contributes to customer-oriented behaviors, stress management, interpersonal relationships, and adaptability, all of which support the successful implementation of CRM practices. Therefore, the study aims to determine the relationship between employees' emotional intelligence competencies and customer relationship management practices in hotel businesses and to analyze the effects of emotional intelligence on CRM.

The research was conducted among employees working in four and five-star hotels operating in Istanbul. The target population included employees from front office, customer relations, public relations, and sales and marketing departments. The study utilized data obtained within the scope of a previous research project conducted between January and July 2020. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 386 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis. Convenience sampling was preferred because of its practicality and accessibility in the tourism sector. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section included the emotional intelligence scale based on Bar-On's emotional intelligence inventory. The second section included the customer relationship management scale developed from previous CRM studies. The final section contained demographic questions related to gender, age, education level, vocational training, department, and length of employment. All scale items were measured using a five-point Likert scale. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software. Frequency analysis, factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were employed to evaluate the data. Normality analysis indicated that the data showed a normal distribution. The demographic findings revealed that most participants were male employees and that the majority of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 39. A significant proportion of employees had associate or bachelor's degrees, and most participants had vocational training. The findings also indicated a high employee turnover rate in hotel businesses, as most participants had worked in their current establishments for ten years or less. Front office employees constituted the largest group among participants, followed by sales and marketing, public relations, and customer relationship management departments.

The factor analysis results demonstrated that emotional intelligence consisted of five dimensions: personal skills, stress management, adaptability, interpersonal skills, and overall mood. The emotional intelligence scale showed high reliability and validity values. Similarly, the CRM scale consisted of four dimensions: CRM organization, technology-based CRM, customer orientation, and knowledge management. Reliability and validity analyses indicated that the CRM scale was also statistically reliable. The correlation analysis revealed significant and positive relationships between emotional intelligence dimensions and CRM dimensions. Interpersonal skills, stress management, adaptability, personal skills, and overall mood were positively associated with customer orientation. Similarly, interpersonal skills, stress management, and overall mood were positively related to CRM organization. The findings also showed positive relationships between interpersonal skills, personal skills, overall mood, and knowledge management. These results indicate that employees with higher emotional intelligence competencies demonstrate stronger customer relationship management capabilities. The regression analysis further confirmed that emotional intelligence has a statistically significant effect on customer relationship management. Emotional intelligence explained approximately 26.7% of the variation in CRM practices. The regression model demonstrated that an increase in employees' emotional intelligence positively affects CRM implementation. In other words, employees with higher emotional intelligence contribute more effectively to customer-oriented organizational processes and relationship management practices.

The findings of the study highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in hotel businesses. Employees with high emotional intelligence are more capable of establishing positive relationships with both internal and external customers, managing customer complaints effectively, supporting sales and marketing activities, and contributing to organizational communication and cooperation. High emotional intelligence also supports employee satisfaction and may reduce employee turnover rates in hotel businesses. Furthermore, emotionally intelligent employees contribute to the collection, analysis, and implementation of

customer information, thereby increasing the effectiveness of CRM practices and creating competitive advantage for hotel enterprises.

The study concludes that hotel businesses should prioritize emotional intelligence competencies in recruitment, training, and organizational planning processes. Emotional intelligence training programs should be developed for employees, especially for departments that maintain direct communication with guests. CRM practices should be designed by considering employees' emotional competencies, and organizations should create supportive work environments that enhance emotional intelligence development. In addition, hotel businesses should integrate emotional intelligence into customer complaint management, customer communication strategies, and customer data management processes. In conclusion, this research demonstrates that emotional intelligence is an important determinant of successful customer relationship management practices in hotel businesses. The findings support the argument that CRM cannot be managed solely through technological systems but requires emotionally competent employees who can establish effective interpersonal relationships and create positive customer experiences. By integrating emotional intelligence into CRM strategies, hotel businesses can improve customer satisfaction, organizational performance, and long-term competitive advantage.

Etik kurul beyan notu:

Araştırma sürecinin planlanması, veri toplama, analiz, yorumlama ve raporlama dâhil olmak üzere tüm aşamalarında bilimsel araştırma ve yayın etiği ilkelerine titizlikle uyulmuştur. Çalışmada akademik dürüstlük, şeffaflık, tarafsızlık ve bilimsel güvenilirlik esas alınmış; intihal, veri manipülasyonu, uydurma veri kullanımı ve benzeri herhangi bir etik ihlale kesinlikle yer verilmemiştir. Ayrıca kullanılan tüm kaynaklara akademik atıf kurallarına uygun biçimde yer verilmiştir.

Araştırmacıların katkı oranı beyanı

1. yazar %50 oranında katkı sağlamıştır
2. yazar %50 oranında katkı sağlamıştır

Çıkar çatışması beyanı

Bu çalışmada herhangi bir potansiyel çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.