

## Mediating Role of Career Adaptability in the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement: A Path Analysis Study

## Duygusal Zeka ve İşe Bağlılık Arasındaki İlişkide Kariyer Uyumluluğunun Aracı Rolü: Bir Yol Analizi Çalışması

### Abstract

This study aims to test the mediating role of career adaptability in the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement through path analysis. A correlational design was chosen for this study. A total of 252 volunteer teachers (Age<sup>Range</sup>: 22-57, Age<sup>Mean</sup>: 36.14, Age<sup>SD</sup>: 8.44) participated in the study. The Emotional Intelligence Scale, Career Adaptability Scale, and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale were used as data collection tools. First, preliminary analyses were conducted. Subsequently, since the aim was to reveal the direction and predictive levels of the relationships between the observed variables in this study, the data were analyzed using the path analysis approach. Also, a bootstrap analysis with 1,000 resamples was performed to examine whether career adaptability played a significant mediating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. According to the research findings, career adaptability significantly mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. In addition, emotional intelligence and career adaptability explain 74% of the variance in work engagement. The research findings were discussed in light of existing literature, and suggestions for future research were developed.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, career adaptability, work engagement, path analysis, organizational psychology.

### Öz

Bu çalışmada, duygusal zeka ve işe bağlılık arasındaki ilişkide kariyer uyumluluğunun aracı rolünü, yol analizi yaklaşımıyla test etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma için korrelasyonel bir tasarım seçilmiştir. Çalışmaya toplam 252 gönüllü öğretmen (Yaş<sup>Range</sup>: 22-57, Yaş<sup>Ort</sup>: 36.14, Yaş<sup>SS</sup>: 8.44) katılmıştır. Veri toplama araçları olarak Duygusal Zeka Ölçeği, Kariyer Uyumluluğu Ölçeği ve Utrecht İş Bağlılığı Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada ilkin ön analizler yapılmış; daha sonra bu çalışmada gözlemlenen değişkenler arasındaki ilişkilerin yönünü ve yordama düzeyleri ortaya çıkarılması amaçlandığı için veriler yol analizi yaklaşımı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Ayrıca, kariyer uyumluluğunun duygusal zeka ve işe bağlılık arasındaki ilişkide anlamlı bir aracı rol oynayıp oynamadığını incelemek için 1000 yeniden örneklemeli bir bootstrap analizi yapılmıştır. Araştırma bulgularına göre kariyer uyumluluğu, duygusal zeka ve işe bağlılık arasındaki ilişkiye anlamlı bir şekilde aracılık etmektedir. Ek olarak duygusal zeka ve uyumluluğu, işe bağlılıktaki varyansın %74'ünü açıklamaktadır. Araştırma bulguları, mevcut literatür ışığında tartışılmış ve gelecekteki araştırmalar için bazı öneriler geliştirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Duygusal zeka, kariyer uyumluluğu, işe bağlılık, path analizi, örgüt psikolojisi

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## Introduction

Work engagement is characterized as a person's strong identification with their work (Bakker et al., 2014). Another definition of work engagement is a person's enthusiastic, dedicated, and focused participation in their work, deriving satisfaction from it and achieving a positive mental state (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Additionally, the indicators of work engagement are defined as vigor, dedication and absorption (Eryılmaz & Doğan, 2012).

The literature identifies several factors that influence work engagement. One such factor is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is defined as an individual's ability to understand, regulate, and utilize their own and others' emotions (Schutte et al., 2002). In other words, emotional intelligence is defined as an individual's ability to perceive their emotions, generate emotions that facilitate thinking, access emotional meanings, and regulate their emotions (McCleskey, 2014). Furthermore, emotional intelligence is a multidimensional concept. In other words, emotional intelligence has been conceptualized as a structure comprising subcomponents such as emotional recognition, facilitation, and regulation (Kayıhan & Arslan, 2016).

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and work life. As individuals' emotional intelligence increases, they find their work more meaningful (Mallin et al., 2025). It has been concluded that as emotional intelligence increases, individuals' work-life balance becomes healthier (Eyoun et al., 2025) and their job satisfaction increases (Hemade et al., 2025). Studies have shown that emotional intelligence is associated with work engagement (Hameli et al., 2025; Yuan et al., 2025). Based on this information and these findings, this study hypothesizes that individuals' work engagement will increase as their emotional intelligence increases.

Emotional intelligence is a psychological trait that involves recognizing, regulating, and utilizing emotions in human relationships (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence appears to be directly related to career adaptability. According to the cognitive-emotional processing system theory (Mischel, 1973), the psychological structures individuals build include emotions and various beliefs. Career adaptability is also a psychological structure. Individuals discover themselves and their professions through career adaptability (Eryılmaz & Kara, 2018a). One characteristic of self-discovery is how individuals feel about their career. An individual's ability to recognize and regulate their own emotions through emotional intelligence is a resource that facilitates career adaptability (Coetzee & Harry, 2014). Based on this information and these findings, this study developed the hypothesis that individuals' career adaptability will increase as their emotional intelligence increases.

Another factor influencing work engagement is career adaptability. Career adaptability is an individual's ability to cope with changes in professional roles or expected tasks, crises, and transitions in career development (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Career adaptability has a structure composed of four psychosocial resources known as adaptive abilities (Kara et al., 2020). The first, career concern, is the individual's awareness of their professional future and their ability to plan their career. Secondly, career control reflects the individual's belief in personal responsibility and in their ability to control their professional future as they structure their career development. Thirdly, career curiosity is the individual's tendency to explore themselves and their environment by recognizing who they are and envisioning their future. Fourthly, career confidence is the feeling of trust an individual develops in their ability to face and solve career problems (Savickas, 2005). Empirical studies in the literature have shown that as individuals' career adaptability increases, their work engagement also increases (Chen et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2019). Career adaptability, by its very nature (Savickas, 2005), can improve individuals' work engagement by aligning their work with their career goals, presenting work challenges not as threats but as opportunities for growth, and making individuals feel competent and in control of their work. Based on all these findings and information, this study hypothesizes that as career adaptability increases, individuals' work engagement will also increase.

This study hypothesizes that career adaptability mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. There are several reasons for this assumption. Emotional intelligence can directly increase individuals' work engagement, and career adaptability can further enhance it. This is because an emotionally competent individual, if they have not explored themselves and their profession in terms of career adaptability and are experiencing uncertainty or feeling incompatible with their career, may create emotional distance from their job rather than commit to it. At this point, career adaptability will act as a mediating factor between emotional intelligence and work engagement. Furthermore, Savickas's Career Construction Theory emphasizes that individuals build their careers not only based on professional skills but also on meaning, values, and personal stories (Kara & Eryılmaz, 2021). In this context, individuals' career adaptability can act as a mediator, enhancing the impact of their emotional intelligence on work engagement. This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature by empirically testing this theoretical information.

When studies on this subject in Türkiye are examined, it is seen that the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement has been demonstrated in various samples (Kabar, 2017; Şeker & Aslan, 2024). In addition, studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence and career adaptability have been conducted among university students (Kaya & Sart, 2021) and young adults (Kaya & Sart, 2020). Furthermore, career adaptability has been examined in relation to career engagement (Kara, 2024), attachment styles and social support (Erzen & Kara, 2022), job satisfaction and psychological well-being (Kulbaş & Kara, 2021), and perceived control (Eryılmaz & Kara, 2018b). On the other hand, the absence in the literature of a path analysis model aimed at determining the mediating role of career adaptability in the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement, particularly within a teacher sample, highlights the originality of this study. In conclusion, this study aims to test the mediating role of career adaptability in the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement through path analysis. To this aim, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H<sup>1</sup>: Emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of work engagement.

H<sup>2</sup>: Emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of career adaptability.

H<sup>3</sup>: Career adaptability is a significant predictor of work engagement.

H<sup>4</sup>: Career adaptability significantly mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement.

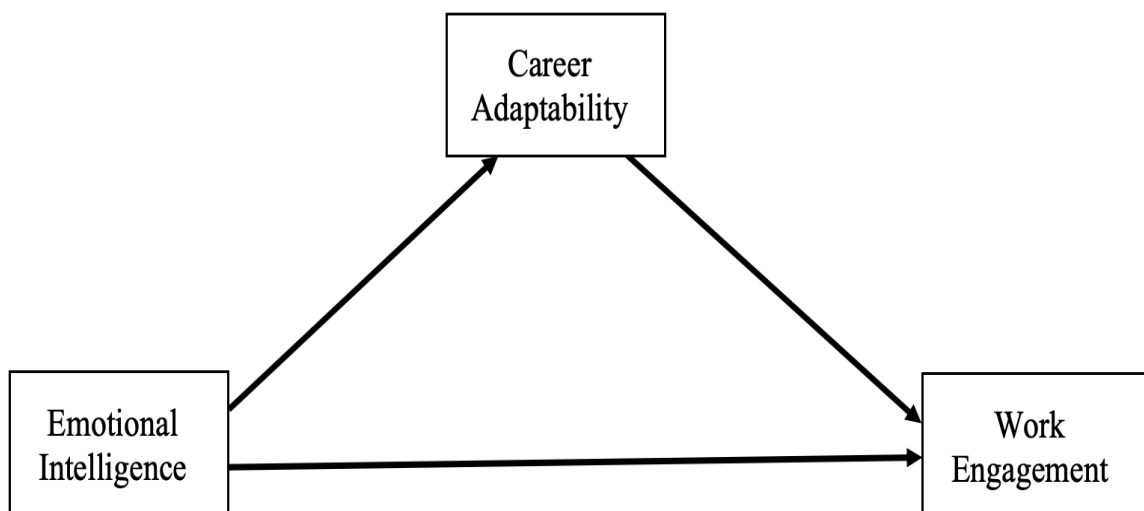


Figure 1. Hypothetical path model

## Method

### Procedure and Participants

The data collection process was conducted face-to-face with 252 teachers actively working in Turkey. The measurement tools were administered individually to participants by the researchers, with each administration taking approximately 20 minutes on average. The administrations were conducted at the schools where the teachers worked or in environments deemed suitable for the research, which were quiet and free from distractions. Before data collection, the purpose and scope of the study, the voluntary nature of the research, participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason, and the confidentiality of the data obtained were explained to participants both verbally and in writing. Following this briefing, informed consent was obtained from all participants. During the application process, the researchers answered participants' questions; however, no guidance was provided that could influence their responses. The collected data were anonymized and used solely for scientific purposes. Within the scope of our study, the dataset was examined in detail, and no missing data were identified.

The study included 252 volunteer teachers (Age<sup>Range</sup>: 22-57, Age<sup>Mean</sup>: 36.14, Age<sup>Sd</sup>: 8.44) selected using criterion sampling. The inclusion criteria for the study were as follows: no history of mental disorder requiring clinical evaluation based on self-report, active practice in the teaching profession in Turkey, and voluntary participation in the study. Of these teachers, 192 are female (76.2%), and 60 are male (23.8%). Furthermore, the years of service of these teachers are distributed as follows: 115 (45.6%) have 0-10 years of service, 90 (35.7%) have 11-20 years of service, and 47 (18.7%) have 21 years or more of service. In this study, the sample size calculation approach recommended in the literature for path models ( $N = q \times 20$ ;  $q$  = the number of model parameters) was used to determine the sample size. In this context, the hypothetical model contains 11 parameters; the required sample size was determined to be  $11 \times 20 = 220$  (Jackson, 2003; Kline, 2019). A total of 252 participants were included in this study, and the sample size obtained meets the calculation criteria.

### Data Collection Tools

#### *Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)*

EIS was developed by Lee and Kwak (2012). It was adapted into Turkish and its psychometric properties were examined by Kayıhan and Arslan (2016). The EIS is a 20-item, 5-point Likert-scale measurement tool. The lowest possible score is 20, while the highest is 100; higher scores indicate a higher level of emotional intelligence. Confirmatory factor analysis findings revealed that the goodness of fit indices of the EIS ( $\chi^2=399.55$ ,  $df=167$ ,  $RMSEA=.075$ ,  $NNFI=.90$ ,  $CFI=.91$ ,  $IFI=.91$ ) were at an acceptable level (Kayıhan & Arslan, 2016). Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha reliability value for the entire EIS was calculated as .83 (Kayıhan & Arslan, 2016). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the entire EIS was .91.

#### *Career Adaptability Scale (CAS)*

CAS was developed by Eryılmaz and Kara (2016) and has undergone validity and reliability analyses. CAS is a 10-item, 5-point Likert scale. The lowest possible score on the CAS is 10, and the highest is 50. Higher CAS scores are interpreted as greater career adaptability. In the exploratory factor analysis conducted to assess the construct validity of CAS, the total variance explained was 55.87%. Confirmatory factor analysis obtained acceptable goodness of fit indices ( $\chi^2/df=2.08$ ,  $RMSEA=0.071$ ,  $AGFI=0.90$ ,  $NFI=0.95$ ,  $GFI=0.94$ ,  $NNFI=0.97$ ,  $CFI=0.98$ ) (Eryılmaz & Kara, 2016). The Cronbach's alpha reliability value for the total CAS is .85 (Eryılmaz & Kara, 2016). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for all CAS items was .94.

### **Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)**

UWES was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). It was adapted into Turkish and its psychometric properties were evaluated by Eryılmaz and Doğan (2012). The UWES is a 17-item scale using a 5-point Likert scale. Scores range from a minimum of 17 to a maximum of 85. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater work engagement. In the confirmatory factor analysis of the UWES based on a three-factor model, the goodness of fit indices (NFI = 0.97, RFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.84) were found to be acceptable (Eryılmaz & Doğan, 2012). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the entire UWES was calculated as .94 (Eryılmaz & Doğan, 2012). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the entire UWES was .95.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The data were first subjected to preliminary analysis procedures (normality, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, correlation, and multicollinearity) (George & Mallery, 2019; Kline, 2019; Nunnally, 1979). Subsequently, to determine the direction and predictive levels of the relationships among the observed variables in this study, the data were analyzed via path analysis (Kline, 2019). Furthermore, standardized path coefficients and t-values were used to establish the validity of this path model (Hayes, 2017). Finally, the mediating role of career adaptability in the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement was investigated using bootstrap analysis with 1,000 resamples (Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analysis**

When examining the normality values of the observed variables in the current study, it was determined that the skewness values ranged from (-1.13 to -0.20) and the kurtosis values ranged from (-0.40 to 1.28). These values confirm the normality assumption of the current study (George & Mallery, 2019). In addition, it was established that the VIF values of the observed variables in this study were less than 5 (1.35), the tolerance values were greater than .10 (.74), and the conditional index values were less than 30 (between 1.00 and 19.06). Based on these findings, there is no multicollinearity problem in this study (Kline, 2019). Finally, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the observed variables ranged from .91 to .95. According to these findings, all observed variables in the current study have high measurement reliability (Nunnally, 1979).

**Table 1**

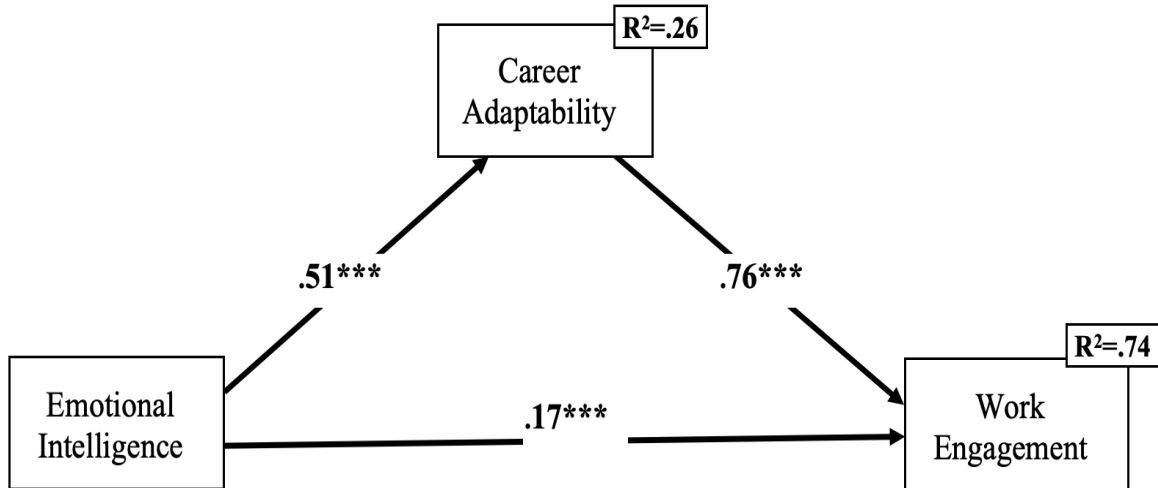
#### *Preliminary Analysis*

<b>Observed variables</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
(1) Emotional Intelligence	1		
(2) Career Adaptability	.51**	1	
(3) Work Engagement	.55**	.84**	1
Cronbach's Alpha	.91	.94	.95
Arithmetic Mean	80.48	41.25	66.85
Standard Deviation	10.73	8.03	13.43
Skewness	-.20	-1.13	-.63
Kurtosis	-.40	1.28	-.02

**Note:** \*\*p<.01

## Path Analysis

The current study aims to test the mediating role of career adaptability in the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. Within this scope, the data were examined using path analysis. The analysis revealed a path model diagram (Figure 2). Furthermore, the path analysis results are presented in Table 2.



**Figure 2.** Path model diagram (\*\* $p < .001$ )

According to Figure 2, a one-unit increase in emotional intelligence is associated with a 0.51-unit increase in career adaptability ( $t=9.389$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Also, a one-unit increase in career adaptability was associated with a 0.76-unit increase in work engagement ( $t=20.209$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, a one-unit increase in emotional intelligence was associated with a 0.17-unit increase in work engagement ( $t=4.423$ ;  $p < .001$ ). In addition, when the explained variance ( $R^2$ ) was evaluated, emotional intelligence and career adaptability accounted for 74% of the variance in work engagement.

**Table 2**

### Path Analysis

Predicted Variables		Predictor Variables	B	S.H.	t	p
Career Adaptability	<---	Emotional Intelligence	.382	.041	9.389	***
Work Engagement	<---	Career Adaptability	1.272	.063	20.209	***
Work Engagement	<---	Emotional Intelligence	.208	.047	4.423	***

**Note:** \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Bootstrap Analysis

In the current study, bootstrap analysis was applied to test the significance of the indirect effect of career adaptability on the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. For this analysis, 1000 resamples were generated, and upper and lower confidence intervals were identified (Hayes, 2017). The bootstrap analysis findings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3***Bootstrap Analysis*

External Variable	Mediating Variable	Internal Variable	Bootstrap Coefficient	Standard Error	95% CI (Lower and Upper Bound)	p
Emotional Intelligence	Career Adaptability	Work Engagement	.38	.04	[.290, 480]	.002

According to the bootstrap analysis findings presented in Table 3, the indirect effect of career adaptability on the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement is significant [ $\beta = .38$ ,  $SE = .04$  (95% CI = .290, .480,  $p < .05$ )]. All these findings confirm that career adaptability significantly mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement.

### Discussion and Recommendations

This study examines the mediating effect of career adaptability on the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. Being happy in one's work life is crucial for productivity and job satisfaction. Work engagement is the concept that describes individuals' well-being in the workplace (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Increased work engagement not only improves individuals' productivity but also significantly impacts their overall happiness (Eryılmaz et al., 2021).

This study is a contribution to the literature because it presents a model explaining work engagement. It is imperative because it demonstrates that career adaptability serves as a mediator between emotional intelligence and work engagement. These study findings have once again empirically underscored the psychosocial basis of the concept of career adaptability (Savickas, 2005).

The nature of emotional intelligence can explain the relationships between emotional intelligence, career adaptability, and work engagement. Humans are emotional beings. Emotional intelligence, the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions, is an effective psychological construct that empowers people (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). High emotional intelligence facilitates work life. When individuals with high emotional intelligence are exposed to work-related stressors that reduce their productivity, they quickly self-regulate using their emotional intelligence (Extremera et al., 2018). As a conclusion of this regulation, obstacles to individuals' desire to work, concentration, and dedication are removed. Thus, increased emotional intelligence positively affects work engagement. This reality helps individuals regulate not only their own emotions but also those of their colleagues, thereby removing societal obstacles to work engagement.

This study concludes that career adaptability mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. Career adaptability is an important psychosocial resource (Savickas, 2005). When individuals use this resource, they experience discoveries about themselves and their careers (Eryılmaz & Kara, 2016). People may possess emotional intelligence, but if their career adaptability is low, their dedication, engagement, and concentration at work may decrease. This is because career adaptability is the most important indicator of an individual's self-discovery in their professional field (Eryılmaz & Kara, 2021). Career adaptability is the reflection of an individual's self in their work. If adaptability increases, it indicates that the individual has a self-image compatible with their profession (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). While individuals regulate their own and others' emotions with emotional intelligence, they need a mediator that leads this regulated structure to the individual's engagement with their work. This study has revealed that this mediator is the individual's career adaptability.

The most significant limitation of this research is its reliance on cross-sectional and instantaneous data. Future research could include longitudinal studies based on time-interval measurements. Furthermore, instead of conducting emotional intelligence training in isolation, professional institutions and organizations could functionally integrate these skills with adaptability components such as career planning, flexibility, decision-making, and future foresight. This would allow for multi-purpose activities

to be carried out simultaneously. In particular, the findings of this study could be utilized in team-based mentoring programs. Organizational psychologists could also incorporate variables such as emotional intelligence and career adaptability, as discussed in this study, into their experimental programs to increase individual work engagement.

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