Do Not Neglect the Power of Symbols on Employee Performance: An Empirical Evidence From Turkey

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Abstract
Symbols, which are considered as a reflection of an organization’s culture, also provide clues about an organization’s character and value system. The positioning of symbols in the business world and academic studies thus remains an important issue. This study, which measures the effects of organizational symbolism on organizational commitment and firm performance, carries out a scale development study to evaluate the concept of symbolism. For this analysis, a questionnaire was provided to 727 family-owned business employees. In the scale development section, the organizational symbolism was divided into three dimensions, where it was observed that structural and administrative symbolism, along with outward symbolism, affect organizational commitment and firm performance, although narrative and discursive symbolism do not affect organizational commitment and firm performance. The findings are partially consistent with the current literature. In the “Discussion” section, suggestions are given to academicians and administrators.

Keywords
organizational symbolism, organizational commitment, firm performance, family companies, scale development

Introduction
Symbols are expressed as a reflection of an organization’s culture, enable organizational members to interpret in-depth information about the organization itself, and provide an organization’s members with information about the effectiveness of the organization in internal and external environments, along with its ideology, character, and value system (Dandridge et al., 1980). The fact that family-owned businesses are significant organizational forms in the world economy and make major contributions to business life, and their unique structures reveal the urgency and importance of this study, which includes perceptions on how they interpret symbols and transfer them to an organization’s members (Chrisman et al., 2003; Diéguez-Soto et al., 2016; Shanker & Astrachan, 1996). Hambrick and Lovelace (2018) stated that the common goal of all authors is to develop existing methods and analyses or to change the organization’s symbolism literature; furthermore, the authors attempt to strengthen their prospective prediction skills using relevant concepts, for example, efficiency and effectiveness, along with various strategic management techniques.

Organizational symbolism means the aspects of an organization that the organization’s members use to explain or make unconscious feelings, images, and values in the organization comprehensible. In short, symbolism demonstrates an institution’s character, ideology, or value system. Symbols can also strengthen or weaken an institution; consequently, they can force an organization to make changes. This character is revealed through various phenomena, that is, the stories and myths that the organization has deliberately made up, created unconsciously, or selected from real-life incidents to give meaning and structure to critical life events (the establishment of the organization, critical events, charismatic characters, etc.). Otherwise, they can emerge as an orientation program, a meeting, a coffee break, or an organization’s logo (the externalized concrete, visual mark that an organization has selected or designed to transmit its unique inner character to the external environment and itself). Jokes and anecdotes that occur in an organization’s daily emotional and political life may also reveal its character. Each of these examples is symbolic, as it is in the words of psychologists and anthropologists; furthermore, individuals shape these symbolic elements, which are made up of intertwined layers, in the organization and culture (Dandridge et al., 1980). Myths, stories, legends, metaphors, and symbols are essential modes for creating meaning, that is, these notions shape

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our imaginations and help us to represent the world and our experiences in ways that would otherwise be incomprehensible (Fotaki et al., 2020).

To date, researchers have focused on the subjects related to an organizational culture and an organizational climate rather than study organizational symbolism; these researchers have also developed many scales and conducted different empirical studies on these subjects. Unfortunately, organizational symbolism was overshadowed by these two subjects and could not make as many advancements as the subjects mentioned above in the literature. The analysis, interpretation, and creation of an integrative effect within the organization of symbols are accepted as a reflection of the organizational culture in specific definitions (Keskin et al., 2016; Morgan, 1985; Rafaeli & Worline, 1999). In short, proper management of symbols is essential for an organization’s survival.

The fact is that the order related to the global economy is built around family-owned businesses (Sarbah & Xiao, 2015), and the richness of family-owned businesses increases in general because they have a mixed structure that consists of the family and other members (Whiteside & Brown, 1991). Consequently, family-owned businesses have unique features (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996), which make investigating the world of symbols that family-owned businesses incorporate more attractive. While primarily the family’s ideas, long-term points of view, common targets, quick decision-making, and particular forms of competitive advantage are regarded as sources created; on the contrary, elements such as family conflict, refusal to accept ideas from outside, and resistance to change are regarded as threats (Barrett, 2014). While all of these demonstrate that the advantageous and disadvantageous symbols in the family-owned business should be investigated, whether these symbols create organizational commitment and affect a firm’s performance are also revealed within this study (Whiteside & Brown, 1991).

This study’s research question is whether organizational symbolism affects organizational commitment and firm performance at family companies. Consequently, the study’s two aims are revealed. The first is to develop an organizational symbolism scale, as no organizational symbolism scale is available in the literature, to the best of our knowledge. The second is to establish a conceptual model to investigate the effect of the organizational symbolism scale developed on organizational commitment and firm performance.

**Theory Development and Hypotheses**

**Organizational Symbolism, Organizational Commitment, and Firm Performance**

The conceptual model and hypotheses were created after developing the organizational symbolism scale and revealing its dimensions. Subject analyses are presented in the “Data and Method” section. It is argued that structural and administrative symbolism, narrative and discursive symbolism, and outward symbolism, which are the dimensions of organizational symbolism, will affect organizational commitment and firm performance positively. This is because it is believed that symbols inside and outside an organization, as interpreted by managers and organization members, should increase organizational commitment and performance.

Symbols are the focal points of social values and are embedded in the abstract and concrete concepts of an organization (Koçoğlu et al., 2016). Accordingly, in-depth analysis of the meanings of people’s actions in events, behaviors, processes, and similar situations occurring in organizational settings is the focus of the subject (Frost, 1985). In other words, the basic method is the removal of deeper meanings and facts corresponding to everyday objects, actions, events, processes, and language expressions (Jermier et al., 1991). The adoption of symbols by certain groups shows that elements related to those symbols are significantly accepted within those communities. Accordingly, symbols can be interpreted in various ways, depending on different levels of understanding and the social status of groups of people in cultures. Briefly, it is possible to say that every community has its own language of symbolism. These symbols are positively understood within an organization and, if used, can turn into a positive force (Kesken, 2016). At this point, it is desired to examine the reflections of an organization’s managerial decisions and behaviors as well as its structure, the stories told and discourses, the organization’s image, competitive power, ethical codes for organization members, and the effects of this situation on organizational commitment and firm performance.

This research primarily focused on previous studies of organizational commitment and firm performance and organizational culture and its elements, given that, to the best of our knowledge, no empirical study on symbols has been conducted, and the following results were obtained. Accordingly, Ahmad (2012) measured the effects of the sub-dimensions of the organizational culture on firm performance with a survey applied to the employees of the Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South. As a result, there may be a significant and positive relationship between the sub-dimensions of organizational culture and performance management. Wahjudi et al. (2013) carried out research on 151 companies to verify the impact of organizational culture on company performance in Indonesian manufacturing firms. It was observed that an organization’s culture and sub-dimensions had a significant impact on a company’s performance. Shahzad et al. (2012) also stated that an organization’s culture had a profound impact on employee performance. Mitic et al. (2016) investigated the organizational commitment of 400 mid-level managers in 129 companies producing paper in Serbia in the context of their organizational culture. The primary elements of organizational culture addressed at this point were future orientation, power distance, human orientation, and performance orientation; the study also measures the state of the organizational
commitment of organization members in the context of these elements. As a result, depending on the statistical analyses performed, it is now possible to discuss the significant relationship between the elements of the organizational culture and the organizational commitment. Hakim (2015), in a study on the District South Konawe of Southeast Sulawesi Hospital with 115 staff, claimed that organizational culture had a positive and significant effect on organizational commitment and employee performance.

In the light of these ideas, thoughts, and studies, the main hypotheses of the study are as follows:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Organizational symbolism directly and positively affects organizational commitment.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Organizational symbolism directly and positively affects a firm’s performance.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to support the sub-hypotheses depending on the main hypotheses to verify the main hypotheses. Accordingly, the sub-hypotheses were created as follows from the following information in the literature.

Regarding structural and administrative symbols, according to Çakınberk and Demirel (2010), the state of managers about their leadership styles increases the commitment of organizational members. It was found that transformational leadership among leadership styles has a strong effect on organizational commitment. Again, according to Telli et al. (2012), the leadership styles of managers affect the commitment of organizational members to the organization. The positive styles and behaviors of managers have a reductive effect on the exhaustion organization members experienced in organizations as well as reduced the number of those who left their employment. According to Holagh et al. (2014), there is a strong correlation between the structure of the organization and organizational commitment. For example, if the members of the organization are supported regarding producing creative ideas, this positively affects organizational commitment. According to Shafeae et al. (2012), positive business features related to the structure of the organization have a positive effect on job satisfaction, and this positively affects organizational commitment. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

**Hypothesis 1a (H1a):** Administrative and structural symbols that are among the sub-dimensions of organizational symbolism directly and positively affect organizational commitment.

Narrative and discursive symbols are at the top of the most essential elements of organizational culture and organizational symbolism. It is possible to say that specifically elements such as stories, myths, language, and heroes create narrative and discursive symbols. For example, according to Çelik (2004), organizational stories are among the main factors that determine an organizational culture. This is among the main elements that affect the organizational commitment in the light of previous information. It is stated that these symbols that are among the critical elements of organizational culture reinforce organizational commitment by strengthening it (Azizollah et al., 2016, pp. 199–200). Gülova and Demirsoy (2012) also emphasize that there is a definite relationship between an organizational culture and the specific dimensions of organizational commitment, and they also emphasize how critical these dimensions are. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

**Hypothesis 1b (H1b):** Narrative and discursive symbols that are among the sub-dimensions of organization symbolism directly and positively affect organizational commitment.

It is possible to say that outward symbols are in the most important position regarding the points of view of organizational members because the symbols of the organization that are of vital importance for it are its outward image, competitive power, ethical behaviors, reputation, and position, which emerge as outward symbols. For example, according to Valentine and Barnett (2003), the strong ethical codes and ethical values of the organization lead to a high level of communication in the organization and consequently affect organizational commitment. According to Öcel (2013), the power and reputation of the organization also affect organizational commitment. According to Meydan (2010), organizational power and justice perceptions influence both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. As a result, individuals are satisfied because of their commitment, but what ensures their commitment is their organizational power and perceptions of justice. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

**Hypothesis 1c (H1c):** Outward symbols, among the sub-dimensions of organization symbolism, directly and positively affect organizational commitment.

Concerning the effect of structural and administrative symbols on firm performance, Demir and Okan (2009) point to the relationship between the operational and strategic decision structure and the performance of the organization, and as a result of their study, they found that the organizational structure has a significant and positive effect on firm performance. According to Ceylan (2001), firm performance increases as flexibility, one of the significant concepts related to the organization’s structure, increases. Furthermore, the rate of return, profitability ratio, and economic profitability on investments all increase as the quality of employees increases. The human-centered cultural structure and flexibility in the application of the processes increase profitability ratios. Cummings and Schwab (1973) stated that the most critical factor that affects the performance of organizational members is the leadership skills of managers (Yilmaz &
Karahan, 2010). Avolio and Bass (1995) are of the same opinion that the behaviors and styles of managers have a positive effect on the performance of organizational members, and consequently, this has a positive effect on organizational performance. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a):** Administrative and structural symbols that are among the sub-dimensions of organizational symbolism directly and positively affect firm performance.

Regarding narrative and discursive symbols, a direct relationship can be established between the strength and weakness of these symbols and firm performance. It has been found that organizations that have such strong elements show better performance than others because the expected output of these elements create cooperation and solidarity among members of the organization, and the commitment to the organization provides for a higher performance (Gunçlü, 2003). According to Ojo (2008), these elements, which are the building blocks of organizational culture, are quite critical for the performance of the organization and they should not be disregarded. The central beliefs and assumptions that underlie the organizational culture model of Denison (1984) are quite important for the organization. These main beliefs and assumptions are built on symbols, rituals, and heroes, and these make up the basis of the cultural component. These elements ensure that the organization is more consistent and better adapted to the required conditions and they affect organizational performance (Ahmad, 2012). The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b):** Narrative and discursive symbols, which are among the sub-dimensions of organizational symbolism, directly and positively affect firm performance.

Relating to outward symbols, the value and image of the organization affect organizational performance according to Damey et al. (2016). Furthermore, the value of the organization has more of an effect when compared with the organization’s image in affecting the organization’s performance. According to Adams et al. (2005), the synergy between the strong position of the organization and managers and the values of the organization also affects the performance of the organization. According to Sabir et al. (2012), the ethical values of the organization are regarded as one of the most significant factors both for ethical leadership and employee performance. Again, according to Burns (1978), ethical values positively affect leaders and their followers regarding their performance. Indeed, ethical values are among the most significant components of ethical leadership and employee performance (Sabir et al., 2012). Finally, Malik et al. (2016) also investigated the relationship between the opinion of the organization on ethical values and firm performance, and consequently, they observed that organizations that exhibit ethical behaviors inspire their employees, and this is positively reflected in the organization’s performance. The sub-hypothesis created in the light of this information is as follows:

**Hypothesis 2c (H2c):** Outward symbols, among the sub-dimensions of organizational symbolism, directly and positively affect firm performance.

## Data and Method

### Sample and Data Sources

The development steps of a scale are as follows (Churchill, 1997): The first stage of the procedure is to indicate the area of impact of the scale. In other words, the limitations of the research should be clearly defined. The first and most important constraint of the research is that family companies have been interviewed. It was also made to reveal how administrators used scale symbols that had been developed. It was important for the study to determine how managers use symbols to manipulate employees and whether they can unite them for a purpose. In this context, the scale of organizational symbolism was collected in three dimensions as structural and administrative symbolism, narrative and discursive symbolism, and outward symbolism. These dimensions are another essential constraint of research. The scale was applied to 314 family business members in Istanbul. This was one of the constraints made in determining the impact of the scale. Finally, as a result of the literature survey, expressions of all sizes had a significant impact on the scope of the study.

In the second stage, detailed literature research is carried out on the subject, and items are created accordingly. A pre-questionnaire is then created with these expressions and applied to a specific sample. Thanks to this application, the results of the items give the researcher some predictions and ideas. Consequently, the researcher finalizes the scale by revising expressions that are not fully understood or have different meanings. It is possible to list these sources used as follows chronologically:

The fact that Dandridge et al. (1980) expressed the character, ideology, or values system of the term organizational symbolism in their article was used as a reference in preparing the questions of the “Organizational Symbolism Scale.” As it is stated in the article, the stories and myths told, critical incidents and charismatic acts taking place in the organization, ceremonies and rituals such as orientation, meeting and coffee breaks held, the effects of the organization’s logo inside and outside the organization, and the jokes and anecdotes told in the organization have become a source of inspiration in the preparation of the scale questions. The fact that symbols are perceived as the subjective proof of the climate in the study ensured the inclusion of the organizational climate element in the scale. Finally, the categorization of
organizational symbolism as verbal (myths, legends, stories, slogans, beliefs, humor, rumors, nicknames), operational (parties, parades, meals, breaks, starting the day, etc. rituals, particular actions), and physical (status symbols, company products, logos, prizes, badges, brooches, flags) was also reflected on the study regarding the scale. According to Morgan (1985), symbols are at the top of the most important tools used in ensuring intra-organizational communication.

According to the researcher, organizational life is all about a symbolic process, and symbolism studies must focus on three main subjects. The first one is to understand the needs with symbolic importance related to the order, control, and organization. The second one requires the investigation of the close relationship between the conscious and non-conscious aspects of symbolism. The third one requires understanding the closeness of the relationship between power and ideology to understand symbolism. This information in work was used as a reference in the scaling study.

According to Fromm (1992), the symbol is defined as “the elements that remain in the place of something else, that replace and represent it.” People can explain their feelings as if they are concrete perceptions, and they can talk about many things with the language of symbols representatively. According to Pratt and Rafaeli (1997), organizational symbolism includes physical structures, language, metaphors, dramaturgy, ceremonies and rituals, and stories and myths. In simpler terms, anything that has to mean is a symbol. All this information was used as a reference in the scaling study.

Rafaeli and Worline (1999) focus on four functions of symbols. These functions consider symbols as the physical tips and meaning bearers in organizations. The first one of these reflects the main and shared values or assumptions of symbols. Symbols represent the underlying values, assumptions, philosophies, and the expectations of the organizational life. In the second one, symbols affect behaviors by revealing inward values and norms. Here, according to their position in the organization, employees exhibit certain behavioral patterns depending on their roles, and these roles and patterns are directly affected by symbols. In the third function, symbols facilitate communication between employees in the organization. Symbols are shown as reference frameworks that enable talking about abstract concepts. In the fourth function, symbols ensure intra-organizational integration. All these functions have become the source of inspiration for the scaling study.

According to Fuller (2008), examples of symbols also include organizational incidents that may potentially have a symbolic meaning such as titles, decisions, structure, personnel policies, and physical environment in addition to comprising classical language, myths, and stories about the culture. All this information was taken into consideration when creating the scale.

According to Keskin et al. (2016), organizational symbols can be exemplified as a corporate logo, parking spaces, formal meetings, corporate plans, office layout, architecture, sculptures, interior design, decoration, stories, myths, legends, slogans, and jokes. Symbols are the objects, stories, discourses, tastes, and smell that give an idea to organizational members about the sense of identity, meaning, and structure. These elements were taken into consideration in the scaling study.

The items on the scale of organizational symbolism were created as a result of detailed literature research. The research was then applied to members of the family company consisting of 80 people and accordingly the items were revised again. Finally, the items were reviewed and approved by five academic members. According to above sources, the scale created consists of two main and four sub-dimensions and a pool of 51 questions in total.

In the third stage, some analyses of the scale are carried out. First, the reliability of the scale is measured by checking on Cronbach’s alpha values. The Cronbach’s alpha value is above .700, indicating that the scale is reliable. These values of organizational symbolism appear to be well above .700.

If the scale is reliable, factor analysis is applied to the scale. As a result of the analysis, the scale is divided into different dimensions and expressions. At this point, the researcher checks the pre- and post-analysis states of the scale and finds the opportunity to compare. Organizational symbolism scale has not changed much as a result of factor analysis. In other words, it is possible to say that the scale sizes and expressions are well constructed.

Finally, convergent and discriminant validity analyses of the scale should be looked at. Convergent validity is an analysis that measures the correlation level of multiple indicators of the same structure. Factor load, compound reliability (CR), and mean variance (average variance extracted [AVE]) of the indicator should be considered for convergent validity to occur. The value is 0 to 1. The AVE value should exceed .50, so that it is sufficient for convergent validity. At Table 1, it is seen that all these conditions are met. In other words, the convergence validity of the scale has significant values.

The discriminant validity can be evaluated by using cross-loading of indicator, Fornell and Larcker criterion,
and heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation. By looking at the cross-loading, the factor loading indicators on the assigned construct have to be higher than all loading of other constructs with the condition that the cut-off value of factor loading is higher than .70. It is seen that the discriminant validity of the scale has significant values at Table 2.

The quality of the research depends on both the values of the analysis and the number of samples. The higher the number of samples, the higher the quality and the more significant the research will be. It is possible to say that the scale of organizational symbolism developed as a result of these analyses is high in quality and significance.

The organizational commitment scale used in the model together with organizational symbolism in the conceptual model was developed by Mowday et al. (1979), and it consists of 15 questions. The firm performance scale, which is another scale to be used in the conceptual model, consisted of 12 questions and took its final shape with the contributions of Venkatraman and Ramanujan (1986), Baker and Sinkula (1999), Vohs et al. (1999), Antoncic and Hisrich (2001), King and Zeithaml (2001), Zahra et al. (2002), Chang et al. (2003), Rozenzweig et al. (2003), and Vohs and Morgan (2005).

According to the information obtained from the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, the size of the population revealed was calculated as 4,000,000 insured employees in Istanbul region, and the number to be surveyed was determined accordingly. First, the 7-point Likert-type scale study was applied to the employees of 314 family-owned businesses at the confidence interval of 90% based on this universe in the relevant study on the development of the organizational symbolism scale. In the second study, the model of the thesis study was tested, and the 7-point Likert-type scale model was applied to 413 family-owned business employees at a confidence interval of 95% again based on the same universe.

### Variables

**Independent variables**

**Organizational symbolism.** As it is specified above, the organizational symbolism scale was created by being inspired by the studies in the literature on the subject. Accordingly, organizational symbolism is divided into two main dimensions: inward and outward symbols. Inward symbols consist of three sub-dimensions: structural and administrative, aesthetic, and narrative and discursive symbols.

**Dependent variables**

**Organizational commitment.** Organizational commitment means the bond created between the organizational member and the organization, and this concept is defined as the loyalty to the organization, being identified with the organization, and the willingness to participate in the organization (Griffin et al., 2010; Kessler, 2013; Wolowska, 2014). In short, the success of an organization depends on factors that connect organizational members to the organization. The managers of the organization should analyze these factors thoroughly and try to keep them at the same level at all times (Wolowska, 2014).

Kanter (1968) defines organizational commitment as a process in which organizational members strive for achieving the targets that the organization has set. Etzioni (1975) investigates organizational commitment in three dimensions stating that the power or authorities of the organization on organizational members result from the approaching of the organizational member to the organization. These are defined as alienative, moral, and calculative commitment. In alienative commitment, organizational members have a negative

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**Table 2. Discriminant Validity Values of Scale Development Process (Fornell-Larcker Criterion).**

| Sub factors                              | 1    | 2    | 3    |
|-----------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Narrative and Discursive Symbolism      | .752 |      |      |
| Outward Symbolism                       | .739 | .755 |      |
| Structural and Administrative Symbolism | .682 | .670 | .765 |
attitude toward the organization. It is dominant in the relationships between intra-organizational oppositional members. In moral commitment, organizational members exhibit a positive attitude toward the organization. As for calculative commitment, there is an interest-based relationship between organizational members. Here, it is not possible to talk about a positive or negative attitude of organizational members toward the organization. O’Reilly and Chatman (1986) define organizational commitment as a psychological bond that connects the organizational member and the organization with each other. According to Mowday et al. (1979), organizational commitment is defined as a strong desire of organizational members to believe and accept the aims and values of the organization, the willingness to make an intensive effort for the aims of the organization, and to remain in the organization and maintain one’s membership to the organization. According to Meyer et al. (1993), organizational commitment is a psychological condition that characterizes the relationship between organizational members and the organization and affects their decisions on whether to continue their membership or not.

Allen and Meyer state that organizational commitment is based on three main elements (Meyer et al., 2002). These are affective, continuance, and normative commitments (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Shore et al., 1995). According to affective commitment, organizational members exhibit a determined attitude to achieve the aims of the organization and remain in the organization. This ensures the identification of organizational members with the organization (McGee & Ford, 1987; Shore et al., 1995). The commitment to maintain is the state of being aware of the costs that quitting the organization will bring, and therefore, organizational members strive to maintain their membership (Gül, 2002). Normative commitment includes the moral obligations of organizational members regarding continuing to work in a particular organization. Organizational members who feel committed to their organization because of the sense of gratitude and the wish to give back what one takes or the need to socialize think that they should stay in their organization (McMahon, 2007). The approach of Penley and Gould (1988) is based on the commitment approach of Etzioni. However, they focused on the concepts of moral and calculative commitment rather than the concept of alienative commitment. Concepts such as work addiction, willingness to work outside the working hours, and working at home comply with the concept of moral commitment; behaviors such as introducing oneself, asking for more responsibility from the seniors and trying to prove oneself are defined as calculative commitment. According to Becker (1960), the concept of commitment is a clear indication of the operation in the behavior of a consistent human being. At this point, the members of the organization shape their interests with a series of consistent activities by performing the party-bet operation. The party-bet state occurs as a result of the participation of organizational members in social organizations. It is necessary to analyze the values system in which party-bets are made to understand the intra-organizational commitment fully. According to Salancik (1977), organizational commitment includes the state in which organizational members are bound with their actions. According to the researcher, commitment exists in every area of life, and people live without being informed of its restricting effects and its fine control on their behaviors, and they act according to it. Commitment is what makes us what we do, and human beings continue to do it even when the results are not visible.

**Firm performance.** The word performance is expressed as the number of goods and services produced within a specific period, and it is also mentioned synonymously in the literature with concepts such as “effectiveness,” “productivity,” and “output.” It is also described as a result of interaction between one’s skills and motivation. Performance is the good, service, or thought revealed to fulfill a duty and achieve a goal in such a way that fulfills the previously defined targets during the task (Helvacı, 2002).

Upon examining the literature on performance measurement in firms, it is observed that it consists of two stages. The first one is between the 1880s and 1980s, and financial measures such as profit, the return on investment, and efficiency were focused on at this stage. The second stage started at the end of the 1980s depending on the changes in world markets (Ghalayini & Noble, 1996). In other words, it is observed that performance measurement has a finance-based traditional approach until the 1980s. Nevertheless, the globalization movements that occurred in the world as of these years led organizations to think and make decisions more strategically, and consequently, new not traditional models consisting of low-cost, high-quality, flexible, and robust distribution channels were developed (Ossovski et al., 2016).

Enterprises that want to achieve a competitive position under changing environmental conditions achieved many stages from strategically low-cost production to flexibility, and from short delivery period to safe delivery. Such enterprises also implemented new production technologies and philosophies such as computer integrated manufacturing, flexible production systems, just-in-time manufacturing, optimized production technology, and total quality management (Ghalayini & Noble, 1996).

The aim of the performance system is to determine and realize the targets of the organization by its vision. Nevertheless, it is quite essential to evaluate the participation of organizational members with a just, systematic, and measurable method and support their personal development when achieving these targets (Şen & Bolat, 2015).

**Method**

The analyses to be applied to the organizational symbolism scale consist of the factor analysis and reliability analyses, and they have performed in the SPSS (Statistical Package for
the Social Science) software. The analyses to be applied to the conceptual model developed as the effect of organizational symbolism on organizational commitment and firm performance consist of the factor analysis, validity and reliability analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling, and they are analyzed in the SPSS and SMART PLS (Partial Least Square) software.

Results

Summary Statistics

Regarding the demographic information of the participants that contributed to the study on organizational symbolism, 77.1% consists of mid-level managers, 47.1% consists of managers aged between 30 and 39 years, 43.6% consists of university graduates, and 47.1% consist of female participants. The Kaiser–Mayer–Olkin (KMO) value in the organizational symbolism scale was determined as 0.941. This is a quite high value. This shows us that the consistency of the variable values is at a perfect level. Furthermore, the chi-square test statistics of the scale were found as 11,012.214; as \( p < .05 \) was found significant, the data used in the study showed a normal distribution. As a result of the factor analysis of the scale, the organizational symbolism scale consists of three dimensions and 32 items: structural and administrative symbolism (nine items), narrative and discursive symbolism (nine items), and outward symbolism (14 items). The aesthetic symbolism part that was previously included in the dimensions of the scale was removed from the scale by failing to provide the necessary values as a result of the factor analysis. Considering the reliability analysis of the scale, it is observed that structural and administrative symbolism (\( \alpha = .911 \)), narrative and discursive symbolism (\( \alpha = .904 \)) and outward symbolism (\( \alpha = .932 \)) have a Cronbach’s alpha (\( \alpha \)) value more than .700. These values show that the scale and its dimensions are highly reliable.

Regarding the demographic information of the participants who contributed to the study on the conceptual model, 49.6% consists of mid-level managers, 43.6% consists of managers aged between 30 and 39 years, 36.6% consists of university graduates, and 43.8% consists of female participants. Upon investigating the Fit Index values in the conceptual model, it is observed that the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value is 0.058, and the normed fit index (NFI) value is 0.750. The KMO value of the conceptual model was found as 0.959. This shows us that the consistency of the variable values is at a perfect level. Furthermore, the data used in the study show a normal distribution as the chi-square test statistics of the scale were found as 22,536.763, and \( p < .05 \) was found significant. Upon investigating the factor analysis of the organizational symbolism scale regarding the conceptual model, it is observed that structural and administrative symbolism (nine items), narrative and discursive symbolism (nine items), and outward symbolism (14 items) dimensions that occurred in previous analyses are maintained. Upon examining the factor analysis of the organizational commitment scale, it is observed that the scale has a single dimension, and the number of questions decreased from 15 items to 13. The firm performance scale decreased to a single dimension. As a result, the factor analysis maintained the number of its items, which are 12. Again, upon examining the reliability analysis of the organizational symbolism scale regarding the conceptual model, it is observed that the Cronbach’s alpha (\( \alpha \)) values of structural and administrative symbolism (\( \alpha = .916 \)), narrative and discursive symbolism (\( \alpha = .942 \)), and outward symbolism (\( \alpha = .954 \)) are well above .700. The values of the organizational commitment (\( \alpha = .923 \)) and firm performance (\( \alpha = .959 \)) scales are close to the organizational symbolism scale. These values show us that the scale and its dimensions are highly reliable. At the convergent validity of the research model, it is seen that AVE values exceed .500. In other words, the convergence validity of the research model has significant values. Construct reliability and validity values are shown at Table 3.

It is possible to say that the values are meaningful and this analysis has positive values, as shown in Table 4 about the discriminant validity of the model.
According to the conceptual model in Table 5, administrative and structural symbols directly affect organizational commitment (β = .383, p < .01) and firm performance (β = .163, p < .05) in the same direction. In other words, the behaviors and attitudes of managers toward organizational members, and the structure and rules they create ensure commitment among organizational members and positively affect the firm performance. In the light of all this information, it is observed that the organizational members who participated in the survey developed a sense of belongingness to the organization by being affected by the behaviors of the manager and the structure of the organization, and these elements positively affect the firm performance.

The effect of narrative and discursive symbols, which are another important concepts of the study, is observed neither on organizational commitment (β = .015, p > .05) nor on firm performance (β = .086, p > .05). In short, the stories told about the organization and leaders, slogans, jargon, clothes, and logos within the organization do not have any effect on organizational commitment and firm performance. While legendary stories about leaders were used as a tool of motivation for the organization in the past, it seems to have lost its power especially due to the major role of social media in today’s world. The easy access to information and the fact that there are different information and opinions about any subject nowadays have probably created certain question marks in the minds of organizational members on the issue of investigating and questioning the reality of these legendary stories. In short, these stories and discourses do not affect organizational commitment and firm performance.

It is observed that outward symbols, which are the last symbolism variable of the study, directly affect organizational
commitment ($\beta = .465, p < .01$) and firm performance ($\beta = .408, p < .01$) in the same direction. Here, it is observed that the outward image of the organization, its effect on the sector, state of competition, and customer relations create commitment of organizational employees. Again, this is reflected positively and significantly on firm performance. Furthermore, it is observed that the sub-factors of organizational symbolism affect firm performance at a rate of 37.4%, and organizational commitment at a rate of 61%. The research model is shown at Figure 1.

The hypotheses of the conceptual model were tested in the light of all this information, and information in Table 5 was obtained.

**Discussion**

The study has examined the effects of the dimensions of organizational symbolism (structural and administrative symbolism, narrative and discursive symbolism, outward symbolism) on organizational commitment and firm performance. It is observed that structural and administrative symbolism, which is the first dimension, profoundly affect organizational commitment and firm performance. The second dimension, narrative and discursive symbolism, does not affect organizational commitment and firm performance. The last dimension, outward symbolism, has a high effect on organizational commitment and firm performance. According to these results, H1 and H2 are partially supported. Upon examining the sub-hypotheses, while H1a, H1c, H2a, and H2c were verified, H1b and H2b were not supported. In the light of all of this information, the importance of the concept of organizational symbolism and its elements regarding the internal and external environment of the organization can be observed. The most important point to be considered here is that the findings are parallel to a 30-year-long literature (Alvesson & Berg, 2011; Cheney & Tompkins, 1987; Green, 1988; Larkey & Morrill, 1995; Turner, 1990). Symbolism, especially as a part of culture, has become a favorite of researchers in recent years, regardless of the size of the company. Numerous theoretical and practical studies have shown the meaning of symbolism for organizational structures in hundreds of works.

Regarding these outputs, professional managers are suggested to interpret the symbols in the organization and transmit them to organizational members in the correct way. Continuously changing environmental factors will lead to a change in certain symbols, and certain symbols will even disappear as new ones replace them. This will cause the constant renewal and update of the organization’s managers and employees. It is necessary to study empirically the concept of organizational symbolism, which has not received enough academic interest as it has been overshadowed by the subjects of organizational culture and organizational climate to date, and to examine it by modeling it with different concepts. Furthermore, organizations need to investigate and interpret the subject outside family-owned businesses based on different target masses.

**Conclusion**

**Theoretical Contributions**

The most important contribution of the study to the literature is the development of the organizational symbolism scale. Many empirical studies were conducted on organizational culture and organizational climate, which are concepts that are close to organizational symbolism in previous studies. The effects of organizational symbolism both on organizational commitment and firm performance were first investigated in this study. At this point, while a major part of the hypotheses presented is supported, it is observed that organizational symbolism affects organizational commitment at a rate of 61%, and firm performance at a rate of 37.4%. These numerical expressions show the importance of organizational symbolism for organizations.

**Limitations and Future Research**

While the study has significant effects and contributions, it does not seem possible to conduct the study without having limitations. Nevertheless, these limitations also provide opportunities for researchers doing future research. First, the fact that the study was conducted in family-owned businesses led to the emergence of the findings depending on these organizational members, and this is a significant limitation. Second, the fact that the study was carried out in the Istanbul province of Turkey is another limitation. It is believed that it will be beneficial to perform the study in different countries and cities. Third, the fact that the organizational symbolism scale has not been modeled with a variable other than organizational commitment and firm performance is another limitation that offers an important opportunity for researchers. Fourth, a new study that will be conducted by increasing the number of study participants may bring a different dimension to the literature. Considering all these limitations, it should be ensured that more should be contributed to the literature on organizational symbolism.

**Practical Implications**

Currently, when organizations are considered as living organisms, one of the most important criterion for survival and growth is the reaction of organizations to changing internal and external environmental factors. At this point, it is quite important for the organizational structure to be flexible to respond to these internal and external environmental factors. As noted by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), organizations feel the need to differentiate themselves by being affected by certain internal and external environmental changes, and they change accordingly. After that, managers should act in an integrative way for the organization to continue its path with stability so any change can be integrated. In ensuring this integration, in addition to organizational culture and climate, analyzing, interpreting, and creating an integrative
effect within the organization by symbols interrelated with them are of crucial importance for the organization. It is necessary for especially integrators at administrative positions in the organization to analyze the hidden, implicit, and complex world of symbols to make them comprehensible by organizational members and use them as a positive power for the organization. The organizational symbolism scale developed in the light of all of this important information in this study was applied to the managers and members of family-owned businesses, and it was divided into three sub-variables: structural and administrative symbols, narrative and discursive symbols, and outward symbols. Afterward, the effects of the organizational symbolism scale on organizational commitment and firm performance were measured.

Administrative and structural symbols consist of elements such as the behaviors and decisions of managers in the organization and the structure and culture of the organization. According to the results of the analysis, these elements significantly affect organizational commitment. In other words, the behaviors of managers and the structure of the organization increase the commitment of employees to the organization. Again, it is observed that administrative and structural symbols affect firm performance; the managers and members of the organization are successful in analyzing and interpreting structural and administrative symbols. In short, it is possible to say that organizational members commit to their organization and increase their performance in organizational structures in which administrative and structural symbols are interpreted and turned into power for the organization.

Narrative and discursive symbols consist of essential people and stories in the past of the organization: legendary managers, slogans, jargon, clothes and appearance, and firm logos. As a result of the analyses, it is revealed that these symbols have an effect neither on organizational commitment nor on firm performance. It is observed that nowadays, different legendary stories and discourses told about organizations, preferred clothes, and logos do not ensure commitment to the organization and do not affect firm performance. It is known that the founders of organizations or managers who became legends affected organizational members positively and were used as an element of motivation, especially in years when the technology and internet were not widespread. Nevertheless, it is observed that these elements have now lost their effect and now organizational members are motivated by different situations.

Outward symbols generally include many external environment elements from the relationships of the organization with customers to its position in the competitive environment, and from its reputation in the sector to its ethical codes. As a result of these analyses, it is observed that outward symbols significantly and positively affect organizational commitment and firm performance. In other words, the appearance, position, and image of the organization toward the external environment motivate organizational members and increase firm performance.

In general, it is observed that the hidden, implicit, and complex structures of organizational symbolism are positively analyzed by the managers and employees of family-owned businesses. At this point, it is possible to say that the managers and employees of the organization follow the developments related to the business world, and they develop and update themselves by these conditions. In today’s competitive conditions, it is inevitable for organizations to update themselves continually to survive and grow. At this point, one of the most critical factors that distinguish organizations is the world of symbols that represent organizations inside and outside of them. It is necessary for these symbols to be well interpreted by the managers of the organization and transferred most positively for them to have an integrative effect on organizational members. In today’s conditions, it is not sufficient for organizational members to create a positive organizational culture in the organization, and they must ensure that the organization positively benefits from the world of symbols, which have a broader scope and extend to all the units of the organization. At this point, it is possible to say that organizations that regularly update themselves, grow in a planned way, and consequently use the internal and external symbols of the organization will survive and grow.

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