

## Measuring The Innovation Competencies of Youth Center Managers in The Context of Management, Leadership, and Change

Cengiz ÖZENCİ <sup>1</sup>, İrfan ÇAĞLAR <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ankara Gençlik ve Spor İl Müdürlüğü Ankara, Türkiye

<sup>2</sup>Hitit Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Çorum, Türkiye

<b>Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article-</b>	<b>DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.16630044</b>
Gönderi Tarihi/ Received:	Kabul Tarihi/ Accepted:
05.03.2025	25.06.2025
	Online Yayın Tarihi/ Published:
	31.07.2025

### Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to examine the perceived levels of innovation competence among managers working in youth centers and to identify how these perceptions vary according to demographic characteristics and occupational positions. Designed using the survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, the study sample consists of 1,089 individuals who voluntarily participated and were employed at 220 Youth Centers operating across Turkey as of 2016. Data were collected using the "Innovation Competence Scale" developed by Eraslan (2015). According to the findings, no statistically significant differences were observed in innovation competence perceptions based on gender or marital status. However, significant differences were found in relation to variables such as age, educational background, and professional position. In particular, participants with undergraduate and postgraduate education evaluated youth center managers as more innovative, while those working in closer cooperation with managers such as youth leaders and sports specialists were more likely to perceive them as open to change and innovative. Moreover, similar variations were observed in the "sensitivity to change" subdimension across various demographic factors. The findings suggest that perceptions of innovation competence are shaped not only by individual attributes but also by organizational roles and functional positions. It is recommended that the results be considered in the development of administrative improvement policies within youth services.

**Keywords:** Youth Center, Innovation Competence, Management, Leadership, Change, Youth Leader, Public Administration

## Gençlik Merkezi Yöneticilerinin İnovasyon Yeterlilikleri: Çalışan Algılarına Dayalı Bir Değerlendirme

### Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı, gençlik merkezlerinde görev yapan yöneticilerin inovasyon yeterliliklerine ilişkin algı düzeylerini incelemek ve bu algıların demografik özellikler ile mesleki pozisyonlara göre nasıl farklılaştığını ortaya koymaktır. Nicel araştırma yöntemlerinden tarama modeli kullanılarak yürütülen çalışmanın, örneklemini, 2016 yılı itibarıyla Türkiye genelinde faaliyet gösteren 220 Gençlik Merkezinde görev yapan ve gönüllülük esasına göre çalışmaya katılan 1.089 kişi oluşturmuştur. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak Eraslan (2015) tarafından geliştirilen "İnovasyon Yeterliliği Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen bulgulara göre, cinsiyet ve medeni durum değişkenlerine göre inovasyon yeterliliği algılarında anlamlı bir farklılık saptanmamıştır. Buna karşın yaş, eğitim düzeyi ve meslek gibi değişkenlerin inovasyon yeterliliği puanlarında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farklılıklar ortaya koyduğu belirlenmiştir. Özellikle lisans ve lisansüstü eğitim düzeyine sahip bireylerin, gençlik merkezi yöneticilerini daha inovatif değerlendirdikleri; gençlik liderleri ve spor uzmanı gibi yöneticilerle daha yakın çalışan grupların ise değişime açıklık ve yenilikçilik düzeylerini daha yüksek algıladıkları görülmüştür. Ayrıca değişim hassasiyeti alt boyutunda da benzer biçimde çeşitli demografik faktörlere göre farklar tespit edilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları, inovasyon yeterliliği algısının yalnızca bireysel değil, aynı zamanda örgütsel konum ve işlevsel rol bağlamında şekillendiğini göstermektedir. Elde edilen sonuçların, gençlik hizmetlerinde yönetsel gelişim politikalarının oluşturulmasında dikkate alınması önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Gençlik Merkezi, İnovasyon Yeterliliği, Yönetim, Liderlik, Değişim, Gençlik Lideri, Kamu Yönetimi

\*Bu makale, 2017 yılında, Hitit Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Ana Bilim Dalı bünyesinde, Prof. Dr. İrfan ÇAĞLAR danışmanlığında, Cengiz Özenci tarafından hazırlanan "Yönetim, Liderlik ve Değişim Bağlamında Gençlik Merkezi Yöneticilerinin İnovasyon Yeterliliklerinin Ölçülmesi: Bir Alan Araştırması" başlıklı yüksek lisans tezinden üretilmiştir.

**Sorumlu Yazar/ Corresponded Author:** Cengiz ÖZENCİ, E-posta/ e-mail: [cengizozenci@gmail.com](mailto:cengizozenci@gmail.com)

## INTRODUCTION

The effective and purposeful use of leisure time has become a key determinant of individual and societal well-being in the contemporary world (Walker et al., 2019). In today's context characterized by rapidly evolving social, technological, and institutional structures leisure is no longer perceived merely as free time. Rather, it is increasingly recognized as a developmental domain, particularly for young individuals, where they can enhance their cognitive, social, and emotional capacities (Witt & Caldwell, 2018). Numerous studies emphasize that when young people participate in structured and meaningful leisure activities aligned with their interests and abilities, they not only develop holistically but also become more resilient, socially responsible, and better prepared for civic life (Caldwell & Witt, 2011; Akyol & Akkaşoğlu, 2020; Bälter et al., 2023; Utepova et al., 2024).

Maximizing the potential of young people is not only an investment in individual development but also a long-term strategic gain at the societal level. In this regard, youth development has become an integral component of national development strategies, particularly in countries like Türkiye with a young and dynamic population structure (SBB, 2025). The Republic of Türkiye recognizes the strategic importance of investing in youth through various programs and institutional frameworks aimed at ensuring inclusive participation, well-being, and long-term integration of young people into society. Within this scope, the primary public authority responsible for the planning, implementation, and coordination of youth-related policies is the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The Ministry implements a multidimensional youth policy that aims to support the physical, cultural, social, and personal development of young individuals and to empower them as active members of society (GSB, 2025). Youth Centers, organized under the central and provincial units of the Ministry, serve as the primary operational units through which direct services for young people are delivered. These centers, operating under the coordination of the General Directorate of Youth Services within the Ministry of Youth and Sports, implement non-formal education, social participation, volunteerism, and recreational programs at the local level to support the multidimensional development of young people. Youth Centers are institutional mechanisms designed to foster the personal, social, cultural, and cognitive growth of young individuals. Functioning within the framework of non-formal education, these centers aim to complement formal schooling by offering a wide range of educational, recreational, artistic, and civic-oriented activities. Through this approach, they seek to promote youth participation, empowerment, and social integration (GHGM, 2025).

According to Articles 5 through 7 of the Youth Centers Regulation (GMY), the primary objectives of these centers are to encourage the active participation of young people in national and international educational, cultural, artistic, and sports activities; to cultivate a sense of social responsibility and volunteerism; to support the development of critical thinking, creativity, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills; and to implement preventive and protective programs against harmful behaviors such as substance addiction (GMYa, 2025). Membership criteria are outlined in Article 13 of the Regulation, which delegates the authority to determine age requirements to the Ministry. Furthermore, individuals under the age of eighteen may participate in Youth Center activities without formal membership, provided that written consent is obtained from their parents or legal guardians (GMYb, 2025). This flexible structure reflects an inclusive policy approach that prioritizes developmental needs over rigid age classifications. It aligns with the Ministry's public service mandate and broader youth policy framework, emphasizing principles of equal access, inclusiveness, and social justice. Accordingly, Youth Centers function not only as spaces for individual development but also as accessible and empowering public venues that facilitate community engagement and social learning. In sum, Youth Centers in Türkiye serve as comprehensive policy instruments that promote active citizenship, democratic participation, and preventive social services. Their multidimensional structure positions them as both developmental and protective actors within the national youth service delivery system.

Given the strategic importance of Youth Centers, the role of their managers is exceptionally multifaceted and entails a high level of responsibility. Youth Center managers are not merely individuals in administrative positions; they are also expected to serve as visionary leaders, organizational innovators, institutional representatives, and facilitators of inter-agency collaboration. These managers must plan, coordinate, and supervise a wide range of activities while remaining responsive to the evolving needs of young people. This complex leadership role requires an advanced set of managerial competencies, particularly in the areas of innovation, communication, adaptability to change, and motivational leadership (Atasoy, 2024). As Top (2011) emphasizes, managers in public institutions serving youth must skillfully balance technical, theoretical, and interpersonal capabilities to effectively lead dynamic and multidimensional service environments.

In this context, innovation competencies emerge as a fundamental determinant of effective leadership. Innovation is not merely associated with technological advancement; it also reflects a broader organizational capability to respond to internal and external challenges,

drive transformation, and generate value (Godin, 2008). Youth Center managers are expected to adopt innovation-oriented approaches in areas such as programming, staff coordination, community engagement, and institutional development. However, despite the growing recognition of innovation as a strategic competency, empirical studies assessing the innovation capacities of youth-sector managers in the public sector remain limited (Cinar et al., 2023).

Within this framework, the primary objective of the study is to conduct a multidimensional analysis of the innovation competencies of Youth Center managers in the context of management, leadership, and change. The research explores how these managerial competencies are perceived by youth workers employed in various roles within Youth Centers, the majority of whom serve under contractual status. Focusing particularly on components of innovation such as sensitivity to change, internal and external communication, leadership capacity, and organizational motivation, the study aims to determine whether perceptions of these competencies vary significantly according to participants' demographic (gender, age, marital status, education level) and professional (job role, length of service) characteristics. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to addressing a gap in the literature concerning the managerial innovation capacity that directly affects the quality of youth services. The central research question guiding this study is as follows:

Do the perceptions of personnel working in different roles within Youth Centers regarding the innovation competencies of Youth Center managers significantly differ according to gender, age, marital status, educational background, professional status, and length of service?

This study holds significance from multiple perspectives. First, it provides empirical insight into a relatively underexplored topic—innovation leadership in public youth institutions in Türkiye. Second, it offers practical guidance for policymakers, administrators, and institutional leaders seeking to enhance the quality and impact of youth services. Third, it serves as a reference point for future research aiming to replicate similar analyses in other public sector contexts. By identifying patterns and gaps in innovation capacity, the study aims to contribute to the development of a more coherent, creative, and needs-responsive youth services infrastructure across Türkiye.

## **METHOD**

This research was designed using the survey model, one of the quantitative research methods (Karasar, 2009). Survey models aim to describe a situation as it existed in the past or currently exists, without manipulation (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009). In this context, the study seeks to describe the perceptions of youth workers employed in Youth Centers affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Türkiye regarding the innovation competencies of their managers, and to examine whether these perceptions differ significantly according to certain demographic and professional variables.

### **Population and Sample**

The study population consists of individuals working in various positions and employment statuses within Youth Centers affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Türkiye. These centers operate widely at both provincial and district levels, delivering services to young people across the country. The sample of the study includes 1,089 individuals who voluntarily participated in the research. These participants comprise youth leaders and other Youth Center personnel serving in different roles and under varying employment conditions.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The data were collected using the “Innovation Competency Scale for School Administrators,” developed by Eraslan (2014). The scale has been previously validated in terms of reliability and construct validity and is widely accepted in the field of educational leadership. It consists of 25 items grouped under five dimensions, each measured on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”). The five dimensions assessed by the scale are: “Sensitivity to Change,” “Internal and External Communication,” “Leadership,” “Organizational Motivation,” and “Institutional Innovation Behavior.” Prior to implementation, official approval was obtained from the General Directorate of Youth Services under the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The digital version of the questionnaire was distributed via email to 220 Youth Centers across Türkiye using their official institutional email addresses during the 2016–2017 period. In addition, all center directors were contacted by phone and informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and based on informed consent.

## Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted within certain limitations. First, the study population is limited to personnel employed at Youth Centers affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Türkiye. As a result, the findings are specific to the practices and managerial context within this institutional framework, and their generalizability to other public institutions or youth service organizations is limited. Second, the data were collected solely during the 2016–2017 period. This temporal constraint restricts the study’s ability to capture longitudinal changes in perceptions of innovation competencies among Youth Center managers or to reflect the impact of subsequent institutional, societal, or political developments. Given the dynamic nature of reform processes and strategic management practices in the public sector, the findings of this research should be interpreted as being specific to the period in which the data were collected.

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** Reliability Values of the Innovation Competency Scale Used in the Study

Scale and Sub-Dimensions	Cronbach’s Alpha
Innovation Competency	0.984
Sensitivity to Change	0.942
Internal Communication	0.933
External Communication	0.935
Leadership	0.961
Motivation	0.970

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach’s alpha values are well above the generally accepted threshold of 0.70. Therefore, the scale was administered directly without any modifications.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Participants by Demographic Characteristics

<b>Gender</b>	Male	602	55.3%
	Female	487	44.7%
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	615	56.5%
	Single	474	43.5%
<b>Educational Level</b>	Secondary Education	274	25.1%
	Undergraduate	723	66.4%
	Master’s Degree	92	8.4%
<b>Age</b>	20–25	110	10.1%
	26–30	552	50.7%
	31–35	260	23.9%
	36–40	109	10.0%
	41 and above	58	5.3%
<b>Profession</b>	Trainer / Education Expert	60	5.5%
	Sports Education Expert	19	1.7%
	Youth Leader	594	54.5%
	Volunteer Youth Leader	76	7.0%
	Public Officer	225	20.7%
<b>Years of Service</b>	Service Staff	115	10.6%
	1 Year	191	17.5%
	2 Years	375	34.4%

3 Years	306	28.1%
4 Years	146	13.4%
5 Years	47	4.3%
6 Years	5	0.5%
7 Years	2	0.2%
8 Years	3	0.2%
Over 10 Years	14	1.3%

As shown in Table 2, the majority of participants are male (55.3%) and married (56.5%). A large proportion of the participants are between the ages of 26 and 30 (50.7%), hold an undergraduate degree (66.4%), and serve as Youth Leaders (54.5%). In terms of professional experience, 93.5% of the participants have between 1 and 4 years of service. Overall, the sample consists of young, educated, and professionally active individuals with short- to medium-term experience in the youth field.

**Table 3.** Innovation Competency Scores of Youth Center Managers by Gender

Sub-Dimensions	Gender	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	p
Sensitivity to Change	Male	602	12,1	4,17	>0,05
	Female	487	12,2	3,72	
Internal Communication	Male	602	5,33	1,95	
	Female	487	5,31	1,74	
External Communication	Male	602	5,19	1,95	
	Female	487	5,27	1,8	
Leadership	Male	602	10,2	3,93	
	Female	487	10,2	3,55	
Motivation	Male	602	9,79	4,08	
	Female	487	9,58	3,91	
Innovation Competency (Total)	Male	602	42.6	9.1	
	Female	487	42.5	8.7	

As shown in Table 3, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the innovation competencies of Youth Center managers differed significantly by gender. According to the results, the differences in mean scores across all sub-dimensions of the scale were not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that participants' evaluations of innovation competencies did not significantly differ based on gender.

**Table 4.** Innovation Competency Scores of Youth Center Managers by Age Group

Sub-Dimensions	Age Group	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	p
Sensitivity to Change	20–25 years	110	24,44ab	3,8	<0.05
	26–30 years	552	25,33a	3,95	
	31–35 years	260	23,25ab	4,1	
	36–40 years	109	20,56b	3,75	
	41+ years	58	25,87a	4,05	
Internal Communication	20–25 years	110	10,54ab	2,4	
	26–30 years	552	11,02a	2,55	
	31–35 years	260	10,31b	2,35	
	36–40 years	109	9,22b	2,1	
	41+ years	58	11,48a	2,5	
External Communication	20–25 years	110	10,37ab	2,3	
	26–30 years	552	10,89ab	2,6	
	31–35 years	260	10,03ab	2,45	
	36–40 years	109	9,12b	2,2	

Leadership	41+ years	58	11,2a	2,55
	20–25 years	110	20,15ab	4,2
	26–30 years	552	20,98ab	4,1
	31–35 years	260	19,72ab	4
	36–40 years	109	17,98b	3,85
Motivation	41+ years	58	22,05a	4,15
	20–25 years	110	19,17ab	3,9
	26–30 years	552	19,54ab	4
	31–35 years	260	19,38ab	3,95
	36–40 years	109	17,61b	3,8
Innovation Competency (Total)	41+ years	58	21,81a	4,25
	20–25 years	110	84.67ab	7.63
	26–30 years	552	87.75ab	7.85
	31–35 years	260	82.69ab	7.74
	36–40 years	109	74.37b	7.25
	41+ years	58	92.41a	8.02

As shown in Table 4, participants' perceptions of Youth Center managers' innovation competencies differed significantly across age groups ( $p < .05$ ). The lowest mean scores across all sub-dimensions were observed in the 36–40 age group, while the highest scores generally came from participants aged 41 and above. Notably, participants in the 36–40 age group rated managers lower in the dimensions of *Sensitivity to Change*, *Internal and External Communication*, *Leadership*, and *Motivation*. In contrast, participants aged 41 and over provided the most favorable evaluations across all competency areas.

**Table 5.** Innovation Competency Scores of Youth Center Managers by Marital Status

Sub-Dimensions	Marital Status	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	p
Sensitivity to Change	Married	615	11,9	4,18	>0,05
	Single	474	12,3	3,67	
Internal Communication	Married	615	5,27	1,92	
	Single	474	5,39	1,78	
External Communication	Married	615	5,17	1,95	
	Single	474	5,3	1,8	
Leadership	Married	615	10,1	3,85	
	Single	474	10,1	3,65	
Motivation	Married	615	9,71	4,09	
	Single	474	9,68	3,89	
Innovation Competency (Total)	Married	615	42.15	9.1	
	Single	474	42.77	8.8	

As shown in Table 5, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the innovation competencies of Youth Center managers differed significantly based on marital status. The analysis revealed that the differences in mean scores across all sub-dimensions of the scale were not statistically significant at the  $p > 0.05$  level.

**Table 6.** Innovation Competency Scores of Youth Center Managers by Education Level

Sub-Dimensions	Education Level	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	p
Sensitivity to Change	Postgraduate	92	25,13a	4	<0.05
	Undergraduate	723	25,26a	3,95	
	High School	274	21,47b	3,85	
Internal Communication	Postgraduate	92	11,26a	2,5	



External Communication	Undergraduate	723	11,06a	2,45
	High School	274	9,36b	2,35
	Postgraduate	92	11,03a	2,45
Leadership	Undergraduate	723	10,92ab	2,4
	High School	274	9,05b	2,25
	Postgraduate	92	21,29a	4,05
Motivation	Undergraduate	723	21,18a	4
	High School	274	17,85b	3,8
	Postgraduate	92	19,97ab	4,1
Innovation Competency (Total)	Undergraduate	723	20,02a	4,05
	High School	274	17,52b	3,9
	Postgraduate	92	88,68a	8,7
	Undergraduate	723	88,44a	8,5
	High School	274	75,25b	8,1

According to Table 6, educational level creates statistically significant differences in participants' perceptions of Youth Center managers' innovation competencies ( $p < 0.05$ ). Participants with postgraduate and undergraduate degrees reported higher mean scores in the sub-dimensions of Sensitivity to Change, Internal Communication, External Communication, Leadership, and Motivation compared to those with only a high school education.

**Table 7.** Innovation Competency Scores of Youth Center Managers by Occupation

Sub-Dimensions	Occupation	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	p-value
Sensitivity to Change	Instructor / Trainer / Educational Expert	60	24,65ab	3,37	<0,05
	Sports Training Expert	19	25,31a	3,79	
	Youth Leader	594	25,76a	3,51	
	Volunteer Youth Leader	76	23,48	3,1	
	Public Officer	225	21,35b	2,79	
	Service Staff	115	22,68ab	2,68	
Internal Communication	Instructor / Trainer / Educational Expert	60	11,38a	3,36	
	Sports Training Expert	19	11,15ab	3,06	
	Youth Leader	594	11,25ab	3,61	
	Volunteer Youth Leader	76	9,97ab	3,58	
	Public Officer	225	9,46b	3,34	
	Service Staff	115	9,84ab	3,87	
External Communication	Instructor / Trainer / Educational Expert	60	10,65ab	3,09	
	Sports Training Expert	19	10,63ab	4,23	
	Youth Leader	594	11,17a	4,41	
	Volunteer Youth Leader	76	9,51ab	3,84	
	Public Officer	225	9,23b	3,33	
	Service Staff	115	9,67ab	3,62	
Leadership	Instructor / Trainer / Educational Expert	60	21,05a	2,96	
	Sports Training Expert	19	20,78ab	3,98	
	Youth Leader	594	21,5a	3,32	
	Volunteer Youth Leader	76	18,43ab	4,44	
	Public Officer	225	18,36b	3,13	
	Service Staff	115	19,14ab	3,88	
Motivation	Instructor / Trainer / Educational Expert	60	20,7a	3,42	
	Sports Training Expert	19	20,52ab	4,31	
	Youth Leader	594	20,05ab	2,18	
	Volunteer Youth Leader	76	17,57b	2,58	
	Public Officer	225	18,55ab	2,84	
	Service Staff	115	17,98ab	4,26	
Innovation Competency (Total)	Instructor / Trainer / Educational Expert	60	88,43ab	7,9	
	Sports Training Expert	19	88,39ab	8,1	

Youth Leader	594	89.73a	8.5
Volunteer Youth Leader	76	78.96ab	7.3
Public Officer	225	76.95b	7.1
Service Staff	115	79.31ab	7.4

According to Table 7, statistically significant differences were identified in the sub-dimensions of innovation competencies based on professional position ( $p < 0.05$ ). The overall innovation competency scores of Youth Center managers varied significantly depending on the participants' occupational roles. The highest mean score was observed among youth leaders (89.73), while the lowest was reported by public officers (76.95). The scores of educational staff, sports experts, and volunteer youth leaders fell within a moderate range.

**Table 8.** Innovation Competency Scores by Years of Service

Sub-Dimensions	Years of Service	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	p-value
Sensitivity to Change	1–2 Years	566	24,37	3,7	>0,05
	3–4 Years	452	24,02	3,6	
	5–6 Years	52	24,34	3,8	
	7+ Years	19	28,47	4,1	
Internal Communication	1–2 Years	566	10,59	2,2	
	3–4 Years	452	10,67	2,3	
	5–6 Years	52	10,59	2,1	
	7+ Years	19	12,26	2,5	
External Communication	1–2 Years	566	10,46	2,3	
	3–4 Years	452	10,38	2,4	
	5–6 Years	52	10,65	2,1	
	7+ Years	19	11,78	2,4	
Leadership	1–2 Years	566	20,35	3,9	
	3–4 Years	452	20,17	3,8	
	5–6 Years	52	20,61	3,7	
	7+ Years	19	24,31	4,2	
Motivation	1–2 Years	566	19,57	3,6	
	3–4 Years	452	18,92	3,5	
	5–6 Years	52	19,88	3,7	
	7+ Years	19	23,73	4	
Innovation Competency (Total)	1–2 Years	566	85.34	7.9	
	3–4 Years	452	84.16	8.0	
	5–6 Years	52	86.07	8.2	
	7+ Years	19	100.55	9.1	

As shown in Table 8, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether participants' perceptions of Youth Center managers' innovation competencies differed significantly based on length of service. The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in the overall scale score or in the sub-dimension means according to years of service ( $p > 0.05$ ). This finding indicates that participants' evaluations of innovation competencies did not vary significantly based on their length of service.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine how perceptions of Youth Center managers' innovation competencies vary across different demographic and professional variables. In this context, the

relationships between innovation competency and variables such as gender, age, marital status, educational background, profession, and length of service were evaluated. Additionally, the reliability level of the measurement scale was analyzed to assess its capacity to produce valid results. The findings indicate that both individual characteristics and organizational context have a multidimensional influence on the formation of innovation perceptions. In this section, the results are interpreted in light of the current literature and integrated with the theoretical framework.

The “Innovation Competency Scale” used in the study demonstrated a high level of internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .82 to .89 for the sub-dimensions and was calculated as .91 for the overall scale (Table 1). These values exceed the  $\geq .70$  threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), thereby confirming the reliability of the scale. High reliability indicates that the obtained scores consistently reflect the construct intended to be measured. This is a fundamental prerequisite for the validity of the interpretations made based on the data (DeVellis, 2016; Tavşancıl, 2019).

No statistically significant differences were found based on gender in this study (Table 3). This finding suggests that perceptions of innovation are shaped more by organizational role, professional experience, and the leadership environment than by an individual’s biological sex (Alsos et al., 2016; Díaz-García et al., 2013). Indeed, the literature presents inconsistent evidence regarding the influence of gender on innovative behavior. For instance, some studies (DiTomaso & Farris, 1992; Fox & Schuhmann, 1999) report that women tend to evaluate innovation more cautiously, whereas others (Damanpour & Schneider, 2009; Knol & Linge, 2009; Yılmaz & Beşkaya, 2018; Atasoy, 2024) find no significant relationship between gender and innovation.

The study revealed statistically significant differences based on age (Table 4). Specifically, participants aged 41 and above evaluated managers as more innovative, whereas those in the 36–40 age group provided lower ratings. This may suggest that organizational commitment, strategic perspective, and visionary thinking tend to increase with age (Ng & Feldman, 2010). On the other hand, it has also been noted that middle-aged individuals may approach change more critically or exhibit a tendency to preserve the status quo (Janssen et al., 2004). In a study by Atasoy (2024), managers aged 56 and above scored higher in overcoming barriers, while younger age groups (29–45 years) received higher evaluations in the sub-dimension of innovative outcomes. This indicates that younger managers may have an

advantage in terms of flexibility and adaptability, whereas older managers tend to excel in experience-based problem-solving skills.

No statistically significant differences were found between managers' length of service and their total innovation competency scores (Table 8). This finding suggests that organizational tenure is not a decisive factor in innovative behavior, and that individuals' levels of innovation do not vary solely based on years of service. Indeed, a comprehensive meta-analysis by Ng and Feldman (2013) also concluded that neither age nor job tenure has a direct relationship with innovativeness. Similarly, Tüysüz (2019) and Kör et al. (2021) reported no significant increase or decrease in innovative behavior among individuals with long service durations. However, it has been noted that long-serving employees may be more inclined to adhere to organizational routines, which could, in turn, limit innovative behavior (Binnewies et al., 2007; Ford & Gioia, 2000).

The findings of the study indicate that marital status does not have a significant impact on perceptions of innovation competency (Table 5). Similarly, studies by Hobfoll (2001) and Judge & Bono (2001) emphasize that personal life circumstances have an indirect and limited effect on job performance.

The findings of the study reveal that participants' educational levels significantly influenced their evaluations of Youth Center managers' innovation competencies (Table 6). Specifically, participants with undergraduate and postgraduate education perceived the managers as more innovative compared to those with only a high school diploma. This suggests that as individuals' educational attainment increases, so does their evaluative sensitivity regarding managerial competencies and innovation processes. This finding aligns with theoretical frameworks that explain how education enhances cognitive abilities, strategic awareness, and organizational perception. Subramaniam and Youndt (2005) noted that individuals' knowledge base and learning capacity contribute to the effective utilization of organizational resources. Damanpour and Aravind (2012) argued that individuals with higher educational backgrounds tend to develop greater perceptual sensitivity toward change and innovation. Similarly, Shin and Zhou (2003) found a significant relationship between educational attainment and creative evaluation capacity. However, the literature also presents conflicting results concerning the influence of education on perceptions of managerial innovativeness. For instance, Kör et al. (2021) found no significant differences in innovative work behavior perceptions based on education level among managers in the Turkish banking

sector. Çelik (2021) reported similar findings in a study on school administrators. Therefore, the effect of educational level may vary depending on contextual and institutional factors.

The findings of the study indicate that perceptions of Youth Center managers' innovation competencies vary significantly based on professional position (Table 7). Specifically, youth leaders rated the managers' innovation capacity the highest, whereas public officers perceived these competencies at the lowest level. Educational staff, sports specialists, volunteer youth leaders, and support personnel provided moderate ratings. These results suggest that professional position plays a determining role in an individual's ability to observe, interpret, and evaluate managerial behavior. The literature supports the idea that job role and the level of intra-organizational interaction directly influence individuals' tendencies to assess managerial competencies (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). In particular, personnel who are in direct, day-to-day communication with managers are more likely to observe leadership vision, change management practices, and innovative actions more clearly (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). In this context, the closer involvement of youth leaders in internal decision-making processes may have contributed to their more favorable evaluations of innovative behaviors. Similar findings have been reported in studies conducted within educational institutions. For example, Eraslan (2014) found that teachers considered their school principals to be competent in communication. Likewise, studies by Ağaoğlu et al. (2012) and Argon & Zafer (2009) reported that teachers perceived school administrators as effective communicators. Katman's (2010) research also revealed that school principals and their assistants generally did not face significant difficulties in internal communication. These findings support the notion that communication levels across organizational layers play a critical role in shaping perceptions of leadership behavior (Wang & Rode, 2010). As emphasized in the literature, managerial effectiveness is not solely determined by strategic outcomes but is also directly linked to employee perceptions (Yukl, 2012). In conclusion, the significant differences in innovation competency perceptions across occupational roles in Youth Centers underscore the influence of internal communication dynamics and role definitions on leadership performance. Therefore, it is of strategic importance to consider the perceptions of various actors within the organizational hierarchy in the design of innovation policies.

The research findings revealed variations in the "sensitivity to change" sub-dimension based on several demographic variables such as gender, age, length of service, education level, and occupational role. The fact that groups working in closer proximity to managers—such as youth leaders, sports specialists, and educational staff—provided higher ratings in this

dimension indicates that the level of internal organizational interaction plays a decisive role in shaping perceptions of managerial responsiveness to change. While differences were limited in seniority-related variables such as age and tenure, factors like professional role and education level more strongly reflected openness to change. Indeed, Eraslan (2014) reported that teachers perceived their school principals as competent in terms of sensitivity to change, while Yıldız (2012) and Gökçe (2004) emphasized that school administrators were highly capable of identifying the need for change and managing the process effectively. Similarly, the findings of Er (2013) indicated that managers were perceived as open to change. These results highlight the strategic importance of the observations of staff members who are in direct contact with field operations in accurately constructing perceptions of innovative leadership.

In conclusion, this study revealed that Youth Center managers' innovation competencies differ significantly based on individual and professional demographic characteristics. The findings demonstrate that perceptions of innovation are shaped not only by individual factors but also by structural elements such as organizational position, educational level, communication intensity, and internal organizational interaction. The higher innovation perceptions observed among staff members in direct contact with field operations—such as youth leaders, educational personnel, and sports specialists—indicate that managerial competencies are largely assessed through observable behaviors, which play a decisive role in evaluations. While variables like age and tenure produced limited differences, factors such as educational attainment and occupational position had a more substantial impact on perceptions of managerial innovation. Notably, Youth Center directors received unexpectedly lower scores in certain sub-dimensions, suggesting that beyond formal titles, the capacity to demonstrate innovative leadership must be assessed using more comprehensive and performance-based criteria.

### **Recommendations**

Leadership development programs focused on change management, strategic visioning, and overcoming organizational barriers should be implemented for all managerial levels, particularly for Youth Center directors. The study demonstrates that the level of internal organizational communication is a key determinant of perceived innovative leadership. Therefore, communication channels between managers and staff should be structured to be open and bidirectional.

Perceptual differences based on occupational position indicate that managerial performance criteria should not be based solely on job titles but should instead reflect field-

level interaction capacity. Accordingly, innovation-oriented performance evaluation systems should be redesigned and differentiated by position.

As educational attainment increases, sensitivity in assessing innovation also rises. Institutional decision-makers and prospective managers should be provided with opportunities for graduate-level (Master's and PhD) education, and lifelong learning policies should be actively promoted.

Considering the evaluative capacity of field staff regarding innovative practices, their participation in decision-making processes should be increased, and feedback from lower-level personnel should be systematically monitored.

This study is limited by its perception-based measurement approach. Future research may benefit from employing qualitative data collection methods to directly observe managerial innovation behaviors. Additionally, factors such as regional disparities, cultural structures, and institutional scale could be analyzed to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

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<b>KATKI ORANI</b> <b>CONTRIBUTION RATE</b>	<b>AÇIKLAMA</b> <b>EXPLANATION</b>	<b>KATKIDA BULUNANLAR</b> <b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>
Fikir ve Kavramsal Örgü <i>Idea or Notion</i>	Araştırma hipotezini veya fikrini oluşturmak <i>Form the research hypothesis or idea</i>	C.Ö, İÇ C.Ö, İÇ
Tasarım <i>Design</i>	Yöntem ve araştırma desenini tasarlamak <i>To design the method and research design.</i>	İ.Ç İ.Ç
Literatür Tarama <i>Literature Review</i>	Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak <i>Review the literature required for the study</i>	C. Ö C. Ö
Veri Toplama ve İşleme <i>Data Collecting and Processing</i>	Verileri toplamak, düzenlemek ve raporlaştırmak <i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i>	C.Ö C.Ö
Tartışma ve Yorum <i>Discussion and Commentary</i>	Elde edilen bulguların değerlendirilmesi <i>Evaluation of the obtained finding</i>	C. Ö C. Ö

#### **Destek ve Teşekkür Beyanı/ Statement of Support and Acknowledgment**

Bu çalışmanın yazım sürecinde katkı ve/veya destek alınmamıştır.

*No contribution and/or support was received during the writing process of this study.*

#### **Çatışma Beyanı/ Statement of Conflict**

Araştırmacıların araştırma ile ilgili diğer kişi ve kurumlarla herhangi bir kişisel ve finansal çıkar çatışması yoktur.

*Researchers do not have any personal or financial conflicts of interest with other people and institutions related to the research.*

#### **Etik Kurul Beyanı/ Statement of Ethics Committee**

Bu çalışma, 2017 yılında Hitit Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Anabilim Dalı'nda, Cengiz Özenci tarafından, Prof. Dr. İrfan ÇAĞLAR danışmanlığında tamamlanan yüksek lisans tezinden türetilmiştir. Tezin hazırlandığı dönemde ilgili mevzuat gereği etik kurul izni zorunlu olmadığından, çalışma etik kurul izni alınmaksızın, gönüllü katılım ve bilgilendirilmiş onam çerçevesinde yürütülmüştür.



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