

LONELINESS AT THE TOP,
ITS ANTECEDENTS, AND COPING MECHANISMS
IN THE SPORTS SECTOR



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Loneliness at the Top,
Its Antecedents, and Coping Mechanisms
in the Sports Sector

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
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ABSTRACT

Loneliness at the Top, Its Antecedents, and Coping Mechanisms in the Sports Sector

Given the increasing importance of sports clubs and the leaders in the sports sector, exploring the factors related to the loneliness of sports leaders has been an essential research topic. However, studies investigating the leaders in the sports sector have generally gathered information from amateur organizations and neglected professional clubs. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring leaders' loneliness in professional sports clubs with the study conducted in Turkey. After briefly presenting the topic's importance and three case studies, the following chapters examine in depth how top executives experienced loneliness at the top in professional team sports. By conducting in-depth interviews with the top executives of professional sports clubs in Turkey, the extent of loneliness at the top, its roots and coping mechanisms are investigated. In the last chapter, the findings were integrated, inter-case analyses were conducted, and conclusions were drawn. By linking various research contexts and alternative approaches to the research question, our recognition of the main factors contributing to leaders' loneliness in professional sports clubs, such as public pressure and crisis situations, and coping mechanisms, such as paternalistic leadership, is advanced.

ÖZET

Spor Sektöründe Zirvede Yalnızlığın Öncülleri ve Baş Etme Yöntemleri

Spor kulüplerinin ve spor sektöründeki liderlerin artan önemi göz önüne alındığında, spor liderlerinin yalnızlığı ile ilgili faktörlerin keşfedilmesi önemli bir araştırma konusu olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Ancak spor sektöründeki liderleri inceleyen çalışmalar genellikle amatör organizasyonlardan bilgi toplamış ve profesyonel kulüpler ihmal edilmiştir. Bu araştırma, Türkiye'de yapılan bir çalışma ile profesyonel spor kulüplerinde lider yalnızlığını inceleyerek bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Konunun önemi ve üç örnek olay kısaca sunulduktan sonra, takip eden bölümlerde profesyonel takım sporlarında üst düzey yöneticilerin zirvede yalnızlığı nasıl deneyimledikleri incelenmektedir. Türkiye'deki profesyonel spor kulüplerinin üst düzey yöneticileriyle derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılarak, zirvede yalnızlığın boyutları, kökenleri ve baş etme mekanizmaları araştırılmıştır. Son bölümde, bulgular bütünleştirilmiş, vakalar arası analizler yapılmış ve sonuçlar çıkarılmıştır. Çeşitli araştırma bağlamları ve araştırma sorusuna yönelik alternatif yaklaşımlar arasında bağlantı kurularak, profesyonel spor kulüplerinde liderlerin yalnızlığına katkıda bulunan kamuoyu baskısı ve kriz durumu gibi ana faktörlere ve patnatlistic liderlik gibi yalnızlıkla başa çıkma yollarına ilişkin farkındalığımız geliştirilmiştir.

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I'm still living with you,
You're always by my side.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Leaders can positively or negatively affect the organizations they lead and even individuals outside the organization with their actions and decisions. For example, Elon Musk, who acquired Twitter (rebranded into X), laid off about half of the 7,500 employees when he took over. Not content with this, the CEO of X laid off another 200 people a few months later, and when the employees learned of their fate, Musk tweeted: "I hope you have a good Sunday. First day of the rest of your life" (Gerken, 2023). As this example illustrates, the decisions of business leaders can directly and significantly influence the lives of many people. The decisions of political leaders also have a profound impact on the society they lead and even on the lives of people living in other countries. For example, Putin's decision for the Russian invasion of Ukraine has profoundly impacted the Ukrainian and Russian people and even any person from any country.

Due to the enormous power and decision-making responsibility placed upon them, leaders face many challenges to their well-being (Bachman et al., 2023), and according to Kaluza and associates (2020), leaders' well-being can directly impact their leadership behaviors. While leaders with higher levels of well-being are more likely to display behaviors that benefit their followers and the organizational goals, leaders with lower levels of well-being may exhibit behaviors that indicate a lack of support and care for the employees and their work. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to invest in the well-being of their leaders to benefit from positive consequences such as higher employee well-being, higher employee performance, and, eventually, higher organizational performance (Kaluza et al, 2020). Therefore,

studying "leaders' loneliness," which is associated with leaders' well-being (Bachman et al., 2023), is significant regarding its personal and social effects. With the pandemic that started in 2020, the increase in remote work and the consequent increase in loneliness in the workplace has made the field of loneliness at the top more critical and exciting.

The idea that people are lonely at the top or, more generally, that people's work gets more challenging as they get to the top is widespread worldwide. In many different cultures, there are aphorisms about the difficulties that leaders experience at the top in different contexts. For example, there is a saying in Turkish culture in a political context that "Those who occupy high places are not as safe as those below". This warning is one of a series of advice given to Osman Bey -the Ottoman Empire's founder- by Sheikh Edebali, his teacher (Masca & Karagül, 2017, p. 5). The idea that leaders at the top face inevitable unrest was also expressed by William Shakespeare, who is viewed as "the preeminent poet and dramatist of the English-speaking world" (Kennedy, 2004). In his history play "King Henry the Fourth," Shakespeare wrote this remarkable line about loneliness at the top: "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown". This saying means that someone with heavy responsibilities, like a king, is frequently anxious and unable to get any rest. The difficulties experienced by people at the top have not only been discussed in a political context, but the concept of "loneliness at the top" has also been the subject of philosophy and poetry. In a poem attributed to Omar Khayyam, known for his contributions to mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and poetry (Levy, 2011), the loneliness of people at the top was expressed with the following words, "Crows fly in a flock, eagles fly alone." This phrase implies that birds flying at medium heights -in other words, those in the middle of the organizational hierarchy- can move in groups with others similar to

themselves, whereas those at the top in nature -and of the organizational hierarchy- are destined for solitude. This saying, still used in daily language, appears in academic articles on leadership as well (Kicir & Paşaoğlu, 2014, p. 14). The phrase has also become a part of popular culture thanks to Şenol Güneş. He was the coach of the football team of Beşiktaş, one of the most predominant Turkish sports clubs, from 2015 to 2019 and 2022 to 2023, and the manager of the Turkey National Team between 2000–2004 and 2019-2021. Güneş recited that poem attributed to Omar Khayyam in 2015, and the fans of Beşiktaş, whose symbol is the black eagle, still refer to this phrase while cheering for their team in the stadium during the football matches of their favorite club.

The concept of "loneliness at the top" is discussed in many contexts, such as politics, literature, philosophy, and sports; the context of this dissertation and the concept makes people think that individuals are doomed to be lonely at the top. In the workplace context, being a popular, liked, or sympathetic coworker can be challenging for many employees, senior or not, due to the many social traps created by the work environment. In addition to the everyday expressions found in many different cultures, some research supports the common belief that leaders are lonely at the top. Some studies conducted in the workplace context also indicate that executives in senior positions feel lonely (Lindorff, 2001; Rokach, 2014; Kuna, 2019; Zumaeta, 2019). Lindorff (2001) investigated whether managers are lonely at the top by questioning the social support they receive. In her theoretical paper, Rokach (2014) examined the interaction between leadership and loneliness. While Kuna (2019, p. 306) showed the "role of executive coaching as a means of emotional support for... loneliness," Zumaeta (2019, p. 111) discussed "how senior leaders navigate the need to belong."

Moreover, some research on leaders' loneliness has already assumed its existence and only examined its consequences (Cooper & Quick, 2003; Chen, Peng, Lei, & Zou, 2021; Gabriel et al., 2021). For instance, Cooper and Quick (2003) examined behavioral and physiological outcomes of isolation. While Chen and associates (2021) showed whether, why, and when leader workplace loneliness increases team turnover intentions, Gabriel et al. (2021, p. 1517) studied "adaptive and maladaptive consequences of leader loneliness at work." Moreover, the statistical data presented in some studies pointed to leaders' loneliness. For example, according to a survey conducted by Harvard Business Review, half of CEOs feel lonely, and 61% reported that this feeling interferes with their job performance (Saporito, 2012). Also, another study revealed that almost one-third of leaders consider loneliness as the most unpleasant aspect of their jobs (Wright et al., 2006).

Also, there are studies that determine the loneliness of not only senior managers but the non-managerial employees. In fact, these studies were conducted way before, and they formed the basis for the research on leaders' loneliness. The studies on workplace loneliness show that non-managerial employees also feel lonely at work (Wright, 2012). Wright's Ph.D. thesis titled "Loneliness in the Workplace" (2005) and his research published next year, "Loneliness in the Workplace: Construct Definition and Scale Development," can be considered as pioneering studies in this field (Wright et al., 2006). Also, Zhou (2018) reviewed the literature on workplace loneliness, and Firoz and associates (2020) wrote a trajectory of research conducted between 2006 and 2019 on this topic titled "Desolated Milieu: Exploring the Trajectory of Workplace Loneliness (2006-2019)." Not only the phenomenon itself but also the consequences of workplace loneliness -similar to studies of leader loneliness in the workplace- have been studied by many researchers.

For instance, Özçelik and Barsade (2018) examined the relationship between workplace loneliness and job performance. However, beyond the findings in workplace loneliness studies that pertain to non-managerial employees, the loneliness at the top that leaders experience in the workplace stems from the specific challenges faced by senior executives. The loneliness experienced by top managers in the workplace is unique due to many reasons, such as the excessive workload (Bell et al., 1990), decision-making responsibility (Jackson, 1977), and social distance (Wright, 2012) that their position brings.

On the other hand, whether leaders are lonely at the top or not is still debated in the literature, as there is no consensus. Some studies suggest that many executives at the top can establish strong relationships with the individuals around them, so they are not lonely (Waytz et al., 2015) or at least not lonelier than non-managerial employees (Wright, 2012). That makes the research on loneliness at the top even more interesting. Due to the conflicting outcomes of these studies, we cannot assume in advance that executives at the top are lonely. Instead, we must consider the ability of numerous CEOs and senior executives who create strong bonds with their colleagues and do not feel alone. As seen, some studies have found that "leaders are lonely," while others have found the opposite. Since we cannot accept both answers as correct in advance, for now, we can assume that "some leaders are lonely, and some are not" as a result of the arguments put forward. However, the existence of studies with conflicting results still raises several questions: Are leaders lonely at the top? If so, what are the reasons why so many top executives feel lonely? While many executives feel lonely at the top, what factors ensure that others do not feel this way? Why and how do some leaders manage loneliness while others fail? To answer these questions, this dissertation focusses on leaders in sports sector, since the impact of

their behaviors, decisions and performance are more visible, ups and downs are more easily observable in this industry. I aim to examine the loneliness of sports leaders and reveal the factors that contribute to the loneliness at the top, such as public pressure caused by stakeholders like fans and sports media.

Firstly, billions of fans throughout the world devote their time, money, and energy to support their team each year. For instance, Real Madrid, with 450 million supporters (Microsoft News Center, 2015), has more fans than the population of every country in the world except India and China. Fans identify themselves with their team and react to events that occur to their favorite team or player as if the events happened to them; feel great when their favorite team wins and horrible when the team loses (Wakefield, 2007). They consider sports as "an escape from work and the other tediums of life" (Sloan, 1989, p. 183) and seek satisfaction and happiness through their favorite team (Mastromartino et al., 2018). Because of this significant place of the club they support in their lives, the team's performance is very critical for the fans.

Secondly, the performance of sports organizations (e.g., match scores, league ranks, number of cups won, etc.) is more observable by the public, compared to firms in other industries, and sports leaders, such as presidents, coaches, and managers of the sports clubs, occupy key positions responsible for organizational performance by strategy development, competitor analysis, media management (Hughes et al., 2010), talent recruitment within budgetary limits, effective utilization of human resources to achieve sporting success and attainment of organizational goals such as championships (Flores et al., 2012). They perform under the spotlight of fans and media (Flores et al., 2012), and fan and media pressure are significant predictors of their tenure; i.e., if the leaders do not meet their performance expectations, they may

lose their jobs (Koning, 2003). Therefore, leaders might feel higher pressure to achieve organizational goals, which may result in feeling lonelier at the top. As Fatih Terim, former coach of Galatasaray (1996-2000, 2002-2004, 2011-2013, 2017-2022 and Turkish National Team (1993-1996, 2005-2009, 2013-1007), said "Coaching, for God's sake, is one of the loneliest professions. I am alone in the crowd (laughs bitterly)! On the stairs you climb when you win, you don't see many people on the way back (when you lose) because you are the ultimate decision-maker. Anyone not ready to pay the price cannot be a coach" (Zorlu, Çelikcan, Gültan, & Aksoy, 2022).

By investigating loneliness at the top in the sports sector, this dissertation aims to fill two main gaps: the unexplored impact of sports-related factors on leaders' loneliness, and professional sport as an unexplored industry segment. Firstly, the generalizability of the existing loneliness at the top studies to the sports context is limited because they were examined within other sectors. The impact of the factors related to the sports industry, such as fans and sports media and the over-visibility of leaders and organizational performance, on leaders' loneliness remained unknown. Secondly, "one of the problems has been that too many theories about organizations have had their gestation in the ivory towers of academia", and these theories are "plodding and detached, often far removed from the reality of day-to-day life" (Kets de Vries, 1994, p. 3). This criticism is also valid in sports management because scholars generally focused on intercollegiate athletics, interscholastic sport, recreational sport. Due to higher accessibility to the data, researchers investigating sports organizations always gather information from amateur organizations; however, the sports industry is much broader than this. Neglecting professional clubs caused many industry segments, namely professional sports, to remain unexplored, which could have otherwise provided such rich and exciting insights. In this

dissertation, I go "beyond the confinement of social science laboratory experiments to observe real leaders in action" (Kets de Vries, 1994, p. 4) and show sports leaders' views in a professional context, which differs from amateur or non-professional administrators and coaches. To do that, I conducted three case studies through in-depth interviews with three sports leaders: former basketball coach of Fenerbahçe, Çetin Yılmaz; President of Giresunspor Football Club, Hakan Karaahmet; and Coordinator of ÜNSPED (formerly known as UPS) Sports and Culture Club, Semra Demirer.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, firstly, I will share previous studies or definitions of the main concepts to be examined in this dissertation: sports leadership, loneliness, workplace loneliness, and loneliness at the top. I will also present the theoretical framework and the literature for the antecedents of loneliness at the top. Then, I will introduce the methods that leaders may apply to manage and diminish the negative consequences of loneliness at the top.

2.1 Sports leadership

In early sports leadership studies, scholars emphasized hardiness and authoritarianism as sports leaders were expected to show such characteristics. Related to the first one, Kobasa (1979, p. 7) highlighted three dimensions of hardiness: commitment, control, and challenge. While the job requires managers to be clear and logical in their decision-making processes, these three characteristics help them cope with stress when experiencing adversity (Kobasa, 1982). Clough et al. (2002) later added confidence as a further dimension of mental toughness in their study in the field of sports psychology. Secondly, regarding authoritarianism, Blake and Moulton indicated the existence of autocratic and democratic styles (Blake & Moulton, 1969); and it was suggested that successful coaches demonstrate more authoritarian attitudes than less successful ones (Penman et al., 1974). Regarding this issue, Chelladurai and Doherty investigated the decision-making styles of coaches by using the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS), and they compared autocratic and democratic styles and their usage under different conditions (e.g., while managing

large squad versus small squad) (Chelladurai & Doherty, 1993). Moreover, scholars examined the effect of coach behaviors on team success and came up with quite different answers. While didactic behaviors were emphasized in the 1970s, such as giving instructions to followers (Tharp & Gallimore, 1976), scholars understood the importance of supportive behaviors in the 1990s, such as encouraging players to put extra effort and intensity (Bloom et al., 1999); or providing supportive, technical, and corrective feedback (Cote et al., 1995).

Since leadership can be defined as "the behavioral process of influencing individuals and groups towards set goals" (Barrow, 1977, p. 232), scholars emphasized the interpersonal dynamics between sports leaders and players, and the complex interpersonal dynamics between coaches and players were highlighted by many scholars (Carron & Chelladurai, 1981; Bloom et al., 1998; Martens & Vealey, 2023) in sports studies. Since managers are responsible for the overall performance of the team as well as the performance of each player, managers are expected to keep players focused on team objectives and connected to team values (Loehr, 2005) by possibly using coercion, persuasion, or manipulation techniques. In parallel with Ohio State's leadership studies, scholars focused on the role of "consideration" as another primary role of a manager. According to their behavioral research, "consideration refers to friendship, mutual trust, respect, and warmth between the leader and subordinates" (Weinberg & Gould, 2023, p. 223).

While scholars emphasized hardiness and authoritarianism in early studies, they focused on interpersonal dynamics between sports leaders and players, namely transformational leadership in sports, since the mid-1990s. Since sport management research began to focus on transformational leadership theory in the mid-1990s, scholars have tested the theory empirically many times in the sports management

context by mainly using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Although some scholars in the sports management field were skeptical about the effect of transformational leadership on organizational effectiveness (Bourner & Weese, 1995; Weese, 1996), other studies yielded the importance of transformational leadership by showing its positive association with handling change (Wallace & Weese, 1995); possessing, carrying, and transmitting the culture (Weese, 1995); and perceived leader effectiveness (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996). For instance, Weese (1995) suggested that transformational leaders carry out significantly more culture-building activities, thus effectively transmitting the culture throughout the organization. In addition, scholars showed that transformational leaders were better at "managing change, achieving goals, coordinated teamwork, and customer orientation" (Wallace & Weese, 1995, p. 182), and they had a cascading effect from top-level management down to third-tier employees (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001). Besides, they increase various stakeholders' acceptance of change by involving them during a significant revolutionary process (Welty Peachey et al., 2011). Finally, "transformational leaders were deemed to stimulate extra effort and foster satisfaction with the leader" (Welty Peachey et al., 2015, p. 574), and they are associated with lower voluntary turnover intentions (Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011), higher employees' commitment at both organizational and individual level (Kim et al., 2012).

To sum up, sports leadership studies developed during the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s under three major topics: (i) Transactional/ transformational leadership in sports, (ii) Gender and sports leadership, and (iii) Sports leader behavior. Nevertheless, sports leadership studies in the 2000s suggested that the preferred leadership style in the sports context was transformational rather than transactional

leadership (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2009; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011, 2012). Finally, scholars have broadened their perspectives since the mid-1990s and sports leadership studies have covered various topics, such as sports governance and leadership implications, leader-member exchange theory, ethical leadership, and other emerging themes.

Regarding the popularity of sports leadership studies, the topic has become increasingly popular in the last two decades. Gilbert and Trudel (2004) analyzed coaching science research published from 1970 to 2001, and researchers followed a similar process and showed the increase in publishing trends in sports coaching year by year from 2005 to 2015 by themes such as sport psychology and coaching methods (Griffo et al., 2019). According to this study, 612 sports coaching-related peer-reviewed research articles were published between 2005 and 2015 in 119 different journals. Besides, the number of articles published within a year increased from 26 (in 2005) to 87 (in 2015) within almost one decade (see Figure 1).

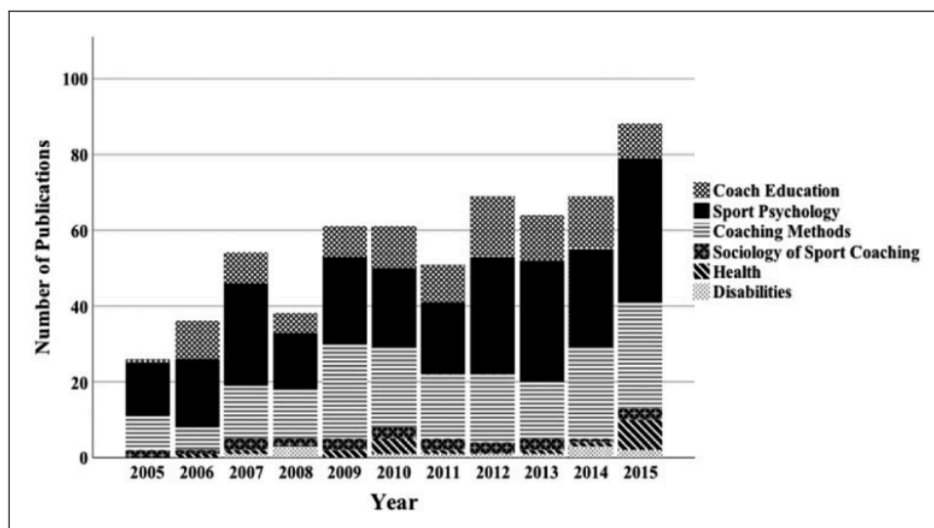


Figure 1. Annual publishing trends in sport coaching by themes (2005–2015)

Source: [Griffo et al., 2019]

So, scholars suggest that the publishing trends in sports coaching revealed a general annual increase over a decade, and this increase in publishing rates is evidence that interest in the coaching field is growing (Griffo et al., 2019).

2.2 Loneliness and workplace loneliness

When it comes to the concept of loneliness, things get complicated because it is not easy to distinguish the concept of loneliness from similar ones or to make a common definition that all scholars can agree on. While Peplau and Perlman (1982) defined loneliness as "an unpleasant and pervasive emotional state arising from a discrepancy between desired and perceived interpersonal relationships" (as cited in George-Levi et al., 2022, p. 2392), Lynch (2000) defined it as "the lack of human companionship, the absence of face-to-face dialogue, and the disembodiment of human dialogue." In other words, loneliness can be described as a state that the person does not want but cannot overcome, a feeling of distancing from people or the lack of people/friends around the person that s/he can trust or get support from. On the other hand, the similarity of the concept of loneliness with others makes it difficult to study.

According to the researchers working on conceptualizing loneliness, it can be confused with similar but distinct concepts such as social isolation, solitude, aloneness, and alienation and questioned for its incremental validity (McHugh Power et al., 2018; Firoz et al., 2020). I have paid attention to differentiating loneliness from similar ones while examining it. The definitions of these concepts and their differences from loneliness are presented in Table 1 and Figure 2.

Table 1. Definitions of Concepts Similar to Loneliness

Concept	Definition
Alienation	"is an experience of disconnectedness with one's self; with others; and with one's gods, nature, or a transcendent realm of being" (Younger, 1995, p. 57-58). "Loneliness refers to the subjective experience of separation from someone or something that one is attached to, while alienation refers to the objective or physical separation from that person or thing" (Bekhet et al., 2008, p.4).
Social isolation	"Pervasive lack of social contact or communication, participation in social activities, or having a confidant" (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015, p. 229). The difference between social isolation with and without choice indicates aloneness or loneliness. (Killeen, 1998).
Aloneness	"... there is an element of choice in wanting to be by yourself, that you might actually prefer it to being with other people" (Killeen, 1998, p. 764). While aloneness is by choice, loneliness is not.
Solitude	"is the joy of being with oneself for the sake of creative self-expression, contemplation, reverie, or rest. Solitude can be found in the silence of nature; in reading poetry, listening to music, or looking at pictures; and in sincere thoughtfulness" (Younger, 1995, p. 60).
Social connectedness	"This sense of closeness is a critical component of one's sense of the belonging and is based on the aggregate experiences of proximal and distal relationships (e.g., parents, friends, peers, strangers, communities, and society)" (Lee & Robbins, 2000, p. 484). "a sense ... of recognizing unity between self and others, of being a part of something that is greater than ourselves" (Younger, 1995, p. 60).

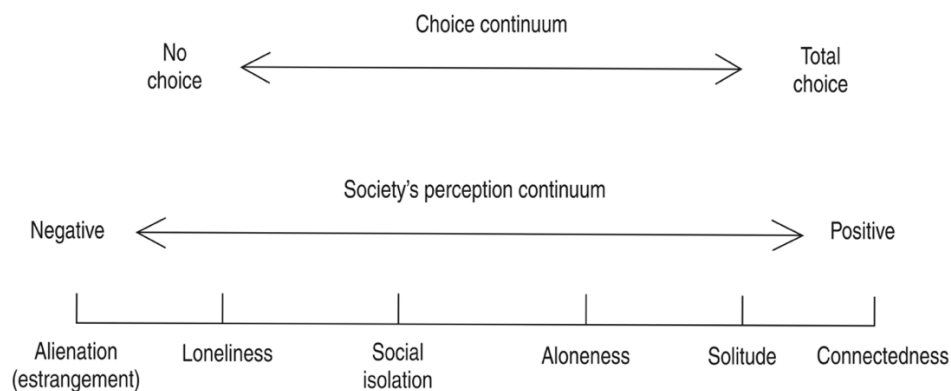


Figure 2. Alienation-connectedness continuum

Source: [Killeen, 1998]

As one of the differences between these concepts, Waytz et al. (2015, p. 70) showed that "loneliness is ... a necessarily negative state," and social distance transforms into loneliness if there is a desire to be close to the individuals from whom they feel distant. Although its similarity with other concepts and the existence of different definitions make it difficult to study loneliness, it is still possible to identify some common points in these definitions (McHugh Power et al., 2018). In these definitions, loneliness is described as an undesired feeling, which differentiates it from the concept of social distance that can also occur voluntarily, as Waytz et al. (2015) mentioned. In addition, each definition refers to inadequacies in one's relationships with the people around her/him. Since it is the most inclusive definition that meets both of these criteria, in this dissertation, the concept of loneliness will be examined through the definition of Peplau and Perlman (1982) which is "an unpleasant and pervasive emotional state arising from a discrepancy between desired and perceived interpersonal relationships" (as cited in George-Levi et al., 2022, p. 2392).

Workplace loneliness refers to the loneliness experienced by employees in the workplace context and was first conceptualized by Wright (2005). Workplace loneliness is "characterized as an undesirable state of mind that results from the absence of qualitative interpersonal relationships" that can be considered as "a reflection of the negativities in the quality of social interactions and individual relations" at work (Wright et al., 2006). Erdil and Ertosun (2011) described the concept as "a workplace-specific emotion that coexists with certain characteristics of the working environment " (as cited in Peng et al., 2017, p. 510).

Özçelik and Barsade (2018, p. 2345) described workplace loneliness as "employees' subjective affective evaluations of, and feelings about, whether their

affiliation needs are being met by the people they work with and the organization they work for." Özçelik and Barsade (2018) differentiated workplace loneliness from workplace ostracism, an intentional exclusion and ignorance exhibited by other employees at work, by highlighting the subjectivity of feeling lonely; according to them, while equally ostracized individuals can feel different levels of workplace loneliness, non-ostracized employees can feel lonely, too.

Even before its conceptualization, studies were conducted to observe employees' workplace loneliness. For instance, in their study focusing on the objective and subjective factors of the experience of loneliness, Jones and Hebb (2003) noted that "whether employees feel lonely depends on the level of closeness, security, and support they seek in their interpersonal relationships" (as cited in Özçelik and Barsade, 2018, p. 2344). As "the same work environment could fulfill the interpersonal needs of some employees while leaving other employees lonely" (Özçelik and Barsade, 2018, p. 2344), even the same conditions in the same work environment can be experienced differently by employees with different expectations. According to an earlier finding, even if employees interact frequently with many individuals, if these interactions do not provide lonely employees with the level of closeness they desire, they may still feel lonely (Fischer & Phillips, 1982). Although loneliness at work is a universal emotion that many people experience, its uniqueness for each employee makes studying it difficult.

Lastly, almost all workplace loneliness studies were conducted in Asian countries (see Figure 3). Thirty-eight per cent of these studies were conducted in Turkey, 19 per cent in China, 11 per cent in India, 8 per cent in Thailand and 12 per cent in Jordan, Pakistan, and Israel, each in equal proportions. In contrast, only 12 per cent of the studies were conducted in Western countries (i.e. the USA and the

UK). Finally, Turkey has the most workplace loneliness studies globally; 38% of the studies in this field were conducted in Turkey (Firoz et al., 2020). It is the first time I have seen such a dominance of researchers from Turkey in any field of study. So, if Turkish academics studying workplace loneliness work together, they will have a competitive advantage over academics in other countries. For instance, they can initiate a program or a yearly seminar on workplace loneliness in Turkey in the future. Working on this topic in this dissertation may allow me to be part of this valuable network. Also, due to the long-term impact of the pandemic, the importance of workplace loneliness has increased even more since it has become an issue that affects almost everyone's lives.

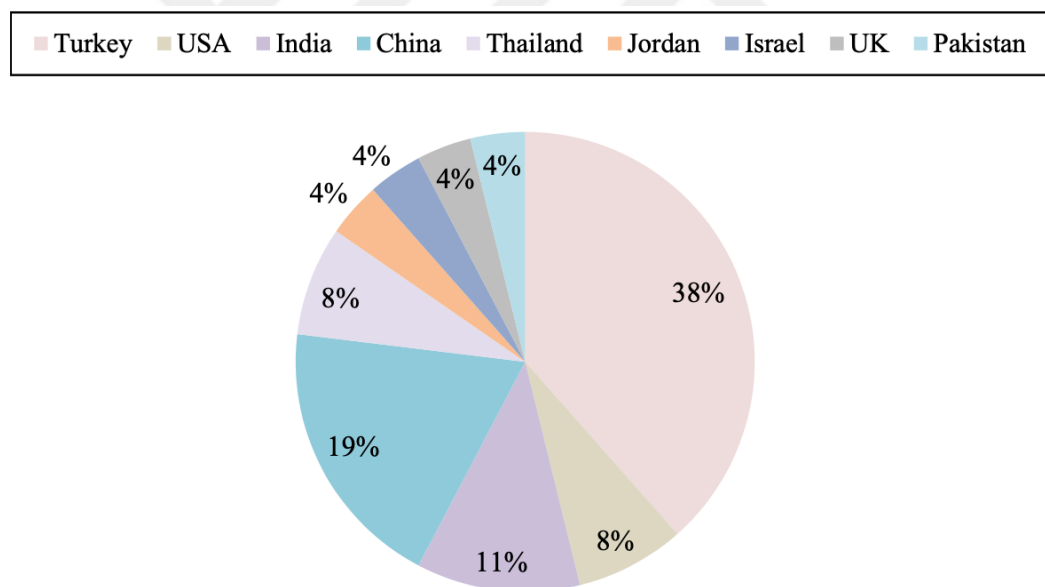


Figure 3. Country-wise classification of studies on workplace loneliness

Source: [Firoz et al, 2020]

On the other hand, while workplace loneliness has been studied in many different industries (Firoz et al., 2020), it has yet to be studied in the sports sector. It is another factor that makes this study significant (see Figure 4).

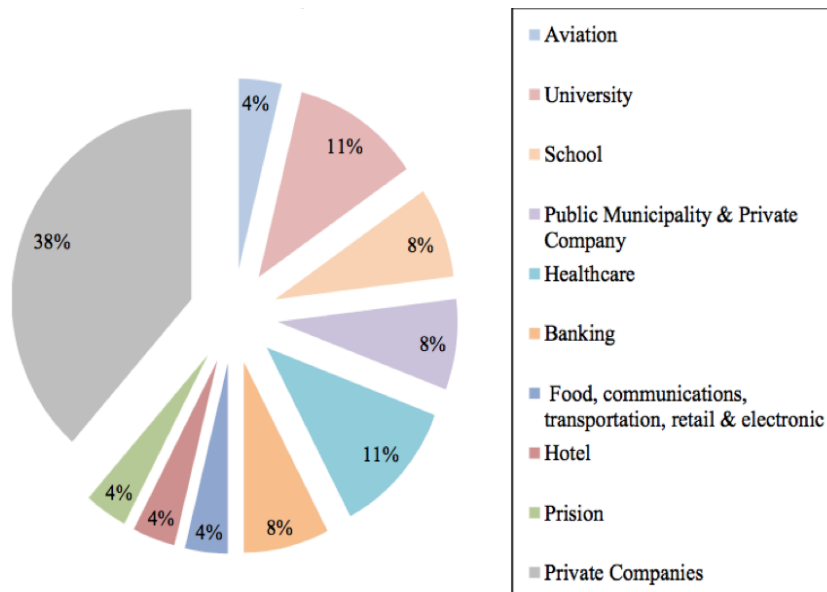


Figure 4. Industry-wise classification of studies on workplace loneliness

Source: [Firoz et al, 2020]

2.3 Theoretical framework

It is crucial for sound research to be grounded in a theory or a framework and to be based on a solid theoretical background. Various approaches have been used to explain workplace loneliness. The major researchers in the literature have used six different theories to explain workplace loneliness as listed below: "social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), need to belong theory (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), need for attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973), affect theory of social exchange (Lawler, 2001), feeling-as-information theory (Schwarz and Clore, 1983) and cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001)" (as cited in Firoz et al., 2020, p. 763). Since there is no consensus among researchers on which theoretical perspective to choose to explain workplace loneliness, it is necessary to identify and use the most suitable one to study loneliness at the top.

Among the existing theories, the need to belong theory and social exchange theory seem to be the most appropriate ones because the need to belong is a

fundamental human motivation for each person, whether is a non-managerial employee or a top executive and as suggested by social exchange theory "interdependent transactions [between people] have the potential to generate high-quality relationships" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 875) which can explain loneliness. Firstly, all individuals have a common drive to establish and maintain at least a minimum number of positive and effective relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and such a drive is as valid for top managers as it is for subordinates. For people to fulfill their instinct to form positive relationships, two criteria must be met. These criteria are to have frequent and emotionally satisfying interactions with several people and that these interactions occur regularly and with mutual emotional interest (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Top managers, like everyone else, have a natural desire to have frequent and satisfying emotional interactions with the people around them regularly, and failure to fulfill this desire can make them feel lonely. Consequently, when loneliness is defined as "an individual's subjective perception of deficiencies in his or her network of social relationships" (Russell et al., 1984, p. 1313), a sense of loneliness inevitably emerges as a result of the unmet need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Past studies also show the relationship between the need for belonging, well-being, and loneliness according to which the last one mediates the relationship between the first two (Mellor et al., 2008).

As mentioned above, social exchange theory can also benefit the study of loneliness at the top. Individuals prioritize their self-interest and seek to be involved in exchanges that maximize their gains (Homans, 1958), i.e., the benefit obtained from an exchange should be higher than its cost. People seek benefits by exchanging their resources. Nevertheless, anything, even interpersonal behavior, can be exchanged as a resource in an interpersonal relationship (Foa & Foa, 1980). These

resources can be classified into six classes, which are "love, status, information, money, goods, and services" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 880). The core of social exchange theory is reciprocity (Blau, 1964). It means if one provides a resource to another, the other one must return, so both parties obtain mutual benefits through that exchange (Guo, 2020). So, when the costs (risks) are higher than the benefits obtained in a relationship, or the gains are not reciprocal, individuals tend to terminate that relationship. When people obey the reciprocity rule of exchange, they can form trusting and loyal relationships over time (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Similarly, "previous research indicates that a positive evaluation of the balance of social exchange is negatively associated with loneliness" (Borawski, 2018, p. 271).

To conclude, in this dissertation, the need to belong theory and the social exchange theory are used to examine the loneliness of top managers due to their suitability for the study.

2.4 Loneliness at the top

Firstly, there is no consensus on the naming of this concept. While some studies use the concept of "lonely/ loneliness at the top" (Jackson, 1977; Reinking & Bell, 1991; Wright, 2012; Waytz et al., 2015), some studies use the concept of "leader loneliness" (Gabriel et al., 2021) and some use the concept of "loneliness in leadership" (Magalhães, Machade, & Nunes, 2022). I will use the most common term, "loneliness at the top." Regarding loneliness at the top, the questions "Are leaders lonely?" or "Do executives become lonely as they climb to the top?" have been frequently asked in the literature and answered in different ways by researchers. Some studies have argued that leaders are lonely for structural reasons, while others have come to the opposite conclusion. If there is a preliminary conclusion that can be

drawn from these studies, it may be the following: Not all leaders are lonely, but some leaders are. This makes the study of leaders' loneliness still crucial in terms of the negative organizational or societal consequences that lonely leaders can create, as outlined in the introduction. This section will first explain the arguments put forward in studies that reject leader loneliness. Then, the arguments for loneliness at the top and the antecedents of loneliness at the top will be presented.

2.4.1 Arguments for the idea that "leaders are not lonely"

- Power: According to Waytz et al. (2015, p. 75), there is a negative relationship between power and loneliness, and it is not "lonely at the top" but "lonelier at the bottom". People with high power, like leaders, are "at the center in social networks" and access social resources and support when needed (Sun et al., 2021, p. 550).

Leaders are not usually alone because they cannot rise to top positions without support from other people. This support may be expected to continue or even increase after becoming a leader since there may be many others who are willing to support the leader because of the power and status he/she gained. In other words, being a leader comes with power, which acts as a magnet, making the leader's circle more crowded; people who want to be close to power will not leave the leader alone.

- Social skills: Effective leaders, according to Goleman (2004, p. 2), possess a high level of emotional intelligence, which includes social skills, defined as "proficiency in managing relationships and building networks". Since leadership is a social job, being a leader requires a strong network and social skills. In order to be a leader, a person needs to understand other people, empathize with them, and have strong communication skills. As Wright (2012, p. 57) mentions, leaders are "socially and personally well-adjusted" people, and the social skills they have may

differentiate them from non-managerial employees and lead them to climb to leadership positions. Because being a leader may depend on one's social skills and network, socially isolated people are unlikely to be selected for leadership positions. In other words, the social skills they possess may explain both why some individuals become leaders and why they experience less loneliness.

- Charisma: Effective leaders need vision, determination in decision-making, strong communication skills, and the ability to inspire their followers to mobilize them. To achieve the last two, in particular, they often rely on their charisma.

Charisma is an essential attribute for successful leadership because charismatic leaders are able to attract people, motivate them, and guide them toward their vision. Charismatic leaders are also skilled communicators, which enable them to influence others (Riggio, 1998). It can be argued that attractiveness that comes with charisma may attract a large number of people around leaders who want to establish social bonds with them; thus, the leaders can establish strong and lasting social ties, which will eliminate the feeling of loneliness. To sum up, leadership is associated with charisma, which brings charm to leaders to draw people around and reduces loneliness.

2.4.2 Arguments for the idea that "leaders are lonely"

It has been already stated that there are many studies claiming that leaders are lonely at the top. In these studies, there are many reasons for leader loneliness. According to Jackson (1977), leaders are more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness and isolation, as the top management job creates a sense of separation from others. In his study published almost half a century ago, Jackson (1977) emphasized the following concepts related to loneliness: busyness, high-level responsibility for decisions, over-

visibility, the need to pretend, and possession of confidential information (Jackson, 1977). Recent studies also supported the claim that high expectations of leaders isolate them. For example, according to Zumaeta (2019, p. 112), "the subjective feeling of loneliness might be the result of several role demands in high-ranked positions." In this section of the study, arguments about the process that steer leaders to loneliness will be discussed under the headings of individual and interpersonal reasons.

2.4.2.1 Individual antecedents of loneliness at the top

There are many reasons for leaders' loneliness. It is possible to analyze the personal factors, i.e., those that may lead to loneliness due to the leaders' internal challenges, under three sub-headings: "excessive workload", "high-level burden for decision-making", and "unmet need for authenticity".

Excessive workload and responsibilities

The amount of work and responsibility that comes with a leadership position can often lead to loneliness at the top. A leadership position can be incredibly time-consuming (Feldman, 2002; Brett & Stroh, 2003) because a leader has to fulfill many extremely difficult tasks in a very limited time. For instance, being a top executive requires fulfilling representative and managerial tasks, creating a vision for the future of the organization, rallying people around this vision, and enduring bureaucratic tasks. In interviews conducted in previous studies, senior leaders described their role as challenging, demanding, draining of their energy and time, full of meetings, overwhelming, complex, constantly politicizing, and intensive (Zumaeta, 2019). Moreover, each promotion that top managers receive brings greater responsibilities

and longer working hours. These burdens reduce the time one can spare to communicate with his/her relatives. Therefore, the promoted employee may neglect his/her relationships with people around him/her, leading to a deterioration in those relationships, especially those with his/her family (Bell et al., 1990). In the same study, Bell and associates (1990) argued that working hours can significantly predict employee loneliness. The longer the working hours, the more likely employees will ignore interpersonal relationships and experience loneliness. Leaders who spend so much time working due to their workload will find it extremely difficult to allocate time for their families or friends with whom they can establish social bonds. Because of their heavy responsibilities and limited resources, such as time and energy, leaders may not have time for friendships. C-level or other senior executives, due to their busy work schedules, find it challenging to spend time even with their families, and it is quite likely that they also find it hard to spend time socializing with their friends, whether inside or outside the workplace (Muna & Mansour, 2009).

In addition, top executives stated that the burnout and fatigue they feel are not only due to long working hours but also to the necessity to be available at all times (Zumaeta, 2019). Therefore, even when they have the chance to spend time with the people around them, they may not be emotionally available because of the high level of stress they are exposed to at work. Such difficulties may lead to a lack of happiness or closeness/intimacy in personal relationships, which may be followed by social problems that may lead to loneliness. In short, the lack of time comes with a leadership position, which can negatively affect the leader's relationships with the people around him/her and the pressure of work responsibilities, which continues in his/her inner world in the rare moments when he/she has time to socialize, can prevent the leader from establishing close relationships with the people around

him/her. Moreover, since they are under pressure, leaders may become more intolerant of people, and they may act angry or show irritable behavior. Because they are so tired, leaders may just want to relax during their non-work time in order to relieve the pressures they are exposed to daily and regain their energy and strength, which can prevent them from forming close bonds with the people around them (Collinson, 2005). Therefore, on the rare occasions when leaders want to build relationships with people, their expectations may not be met, and they may feel lonely.

This situation is also valid for leaders in the sports sector, who may feel the obligation to work for long hours since they are under the spotlight of fans, media, and competitors; their performance is frequently and publicly observable, and their tenure is generally dependent on the fans' satisfaction. As the need to belong theory suggests, all people desire to be accepted and to belong to groups (Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2013), and top executives in the sports sector also desire the acceptance of their team's fans. Since fans' satisfaction is a parameter for their tenure in the organization (just like the board of directors' approval is a crucial determinant for a CEO's future in any company), executives in the sports sector may feel the urge to work more and harder, resulting in less time to socialize, fewer intimate relationships, and more stress (just like their colleagues in other sectors). Moreover, leaders in professional sports clubs, such as Pep Guardiola, are overly visible as public figures, just like famous business executives like Elon Musk. Therefore, these famous sports figures may feel like they are working all the time - even when they spend time with their family members or friends- since they are always under the spots, resulting in higher stress levels and problems in social

relations. As a result, the heavy workload and related issues may negatively affect the leader's relationships and lead them to loneliness at the top.

To conclude, leaders want close relationships, as the need to belong theory predicts. They can have this by having social exchanges. In those social exchanges, they can use the resources of their time, energy, and emotional resources so that they can expect other parties to reciprocate. However, due to their excessive workload, leaders do not have enough time, energy, and emotional resources left in them to use as resources needed to participate in a social exchange in close relationships. Since they do not have the resources to exchange, they will also not get return in exchange. Hence, in accordance Peplau and Perlman's (1982) definition, "an unpleasant and pervasive emotional state arising from a discrepancy between desired and perceived interpersonal relationships" (as cited in George-Levi et al., 2022, p. 2392) occurs, and they feel lonely.

Proposition 1: Their excessive workload and responsibilities make leaders lonely.

High-level burden for decision-making

In addition to the heavy working conditions of their jobs, top managers reported feeling a great deal of responsibility for decisions (Jackson, 1977). Because of the organizational and, in some cases, societal responsibilities they carry, many leaders are forced to focus on getting the maximum performance or efficiency from their subordinates, seeing them as just employees, separate from their personal characteristics and needs. This usually forces the leader to make unpleasant decisions for his/her colleagues. For example, a leader may have to discipline employees to get things done, push them to work after hours, and, in many cases, refuse requests for

leave or time off. In more difficult times, leaders may have to fire an employee, cancel a project, or take bold steps to implement a vision that they think will benefit the organization, such as downsizing, which may involve mass layoffs. These different perspectives that the leader has to adopt, and such conflicts of interest may cause employees to react to the leader or feel negative emotions. These possible reactions of the employees prevent them from feeling close to the leader, and an unavoidable distance is created between the leader and the employees. This distance, in turn, prevents the establishment of a real and strong bond, and as a result of all this, leaders may be doomed to loneliness. Executives, who are expected to influence their subordinates and manage competitive relationships to achieve certain goals in a professional working environment, may, therefore, distance themselves from the people around them and become lonely in the working environment (Wright, 2012). In addition to their responsibilities of making tough calls, communicating painful information, and giving difficult instructions; top managers perceive themselves as the natural representative of the organization since they are the ultimate decision-makers (Collinson, 2005). However, the emotional burden of taking on these challenging tasks and responsibilities that come with a leadership position, mostly alone, can also isolate leaders.

Secondly, the concepts of fairness, objectivity, and emotional detachment come to the fore regarding the decision-making responsibility of the top executives. Leaders carry out their orders and evaluate their subordinates' performance - positively or negatively (Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001), and make decisions about them, such as their promotions, dismissals, and salary raises. However, in this process, they should be fair, objective, and detached from emotional ties (Wright, 2012), which distances them from their employees (Granovetter, 1982; Messe, Kerr,

& Sattler, 1992). This distancing, however, prevents senior managers from creating intimate bonds with others and, therefore, leads to isolation in the workplace (Chen et al., 2021). These findings support Wright (2012) that social isolation is a danger for top managers and that leadership positions often do not foster work environments where friendship and social intimacy are possible. Consequently, for all these reasons, the social distance that has to be established and maintained by leaders is a significant contributor to their loneliness (Rokach, 2014). To sum up, senior managers' relationships with their subordinates are negatively affected by their need to distance themselves from them while fulfilling their decision-making responsibilities.

In addition to making hard calls and sharing painful information with subordinates, leaders in many sectors are likely to get adverse reactions since their decisions may take the interest of many people and be found unpleasant. In this manner, the sports sector is not an exception, as leaders have to communicate with the media and fans, who criticize top executives for their decisions. So, sports leaders can feel high responsibility for their decisions since most fans passionately identify their favorite teams with themselves and perceive the team's successes and failures as their own (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). To conclude, just like other C-level top executives, as the ultimate decision-maker responsible for many critical tasks like developing strategy or acquiring talent, sports leaders have great responsibility regarding the organizations' sportive success, contributing to their loneliness at the top.

To sum up, leaders act with the necessity of getting maximum performance from their subordinates. So, their obligation to fulfill leadership duties leads them to make hard decisions that employees may find unpleasant, and employees may react

to these decisions. This obligation makes it impossible for leaders to exchange friendship or closeness in their relationship (as suggested by social exchange theory), which causes a discrepancy between desired and perceived interpersonal relationships, eventually creating loneliness (as suggested by the need to belong theory).

Proposition 2: Having to make difficult decisions (or decisions perceived as unpleasant by employees) makes leaders lonely.

On the other hand, there may be a counter-argument that having decision-making authority gives the leader room for maneuver and that s/he can protect herself/himself from loneliness with the decisions s/he will take. However, studies with leaders have shown that despite having decision-making authority, leaders may feel powerless due to their complicated situation (Zumaeta, 2019). In an interview, a CEO expressed the difficulty of this situation and stated that s/he does not have much real power because the field of action is very limited as there are tons of procedures and norms. Besides, s/he stated that s/he had less time to spend with her/his family since everybody is looking at her/him now, and if s/he did not go to the office, there would be chaos (Zumaeta, 2019). This example embodies both propositions. Firstly, the lack of time due to their heavy workload and busy schedules, and the fact that they are often emotionally unavailable when they do have time, can damage leaders' relationships with those around them and make them lonely. Secondly, the fact that they have to make difficult decisions, often alone, can condemn leaders to feel lonely, and the fact that they have the authority to make decisions does not mean that they can extricate themselves from this situation, as the example illustrates.

Unmet need for authenticity

The first studies on leader loneliness, conducted almost half a century ago, suggested that leaders need to pretend while they perform their tasks (e.g. when they face with criticism) (Jackson, 1977). Later, modern leadership studies have also confirmed and deepened this finding and showed that leader emotional displays are identified under three categories, two of which are named "surface acting," and "deep acting" (Gardner, Fischer, & Hunt, 2009, p. 466). Accordingly, leaders reported that being in a certain position required them to behave in a certain way, for example, to pretend to be more serious, cautious, or boring (Zumaeta, 2019). Leaders reported that because of this, they could not express themselves honestly and relate to others authentically, from the heart. In other words, leaders reported a contrast between their natural way of being and the behaviors they felt obliged to do to fulfill their role, and, as a result, they had to hide their personalities in certain situations. For example, one manager stated that he had to spend time with all his employees at work, whether they were good people or bad-unpleasant people, and that he had to go to business dinners, wear a "mask" and pretend to have fun, which required a great deal of effort. A senior manager interviewed stated that he wears a forced smile on his face every day to project a positive image; otherwise, things go more slowly, which is very tiring (Zumaeta, 2019).

Moreover, concerning the way leaders fulfil their roles, the motivations of projecting prestige and influence come to the fore (Antonakis & Atwater, 2017). Recent studies have shown that one of the necessary conditions for senior managers to fulfill their roles is preventing themselves from becoming too emotionally involved and maintaining social distance (Zumaeta, 2019). Thus, they can fulfill their obligations to make difficult decisions, assign challenging tasks (Collinson, 2005),

and perform a senior management role to project prestige and influence (Antonakis & Atwater, 2017). Senior managers interviewed stated that they had to act with the concern of protecting their image, and for this, they felt obliged to keep their mistakes and weaknesses hidden from their subordinates. A senior manager interviewed said that one can never relax in a leadership position and that a leader must always be alert, vigilant, and careful (Zumaeta, 2019).

As a result, leaders' need for distance directly affect their relationship with subordinates since they find the idea of making friends at work complicated. Recent studies on loneliness at the top also show that most senior executives interviewed reported consciously trying to separate work and personal relationships. Of the executives interviewed, 81% stated that they do not have personal friends at work and that not making friends at work is a way of protecting themselves. One of these managers stated that he was lonely at the workplace, that he had to carry out all his social life outside of work, and that he never invited a colleague to his home (Zumaeta, 2019). In conclusion, having adequate social support or friends in the workplace seem to be limited, and this makes them lonely.

Another factor that triggers and reinforces this situation is over-visibility, which indicates that managers are constantly in the public eye due to their position. This implies that managers have to act almost all of their working days. The findings of recent studies also confirm the over-visibility experienced by managers. Accordingly, a top manager stated that he was constantly under the spotlight, that everyone was looking at him, that everything he said or did have a significant impact on his employees, and that he had to watch his words and behavior constantly (Zumaeta, 2019). Recent studies have also shown that top managers often have to avoid the authentic expression of negative feelings and therefore, experience more

loneliness through "the mediated effects of the restriction of negative emotion display" (Silard & Wright, 2020, p. 403). Finally, as the severity of role-person conflict increases with over-visibility, a "risk of role-person imbalance" may occur. In other words, the top manager who falls more and more into the role-playing trap faces the risk of not being able to distinguish his/her real personality from the "persona" he/she has created (Zumaeta, 2019). As a result, the leader may experience situations associated with stress, depression, and loneliness, such as perceiving criticism as a personal attack, not accepting it, and forgetting that the job title can leave as quickly as it came (Zumaeta, 2019).

The challenge of over-visibility is intense in many sectors, including sports since top executives need to talk to the press frequently. The declarations of these leaders are followed and discussed by a group of stakeholders, such as journalists, and in the sports context, by fans. Therefore, under constant visibility and pressure from others, most leaders feel the necessity to wear virtual masks when they spend time with their subordinates and in public. As the spokespersons of their clubs, business executives in the sports sector may feel pressured to act or speak in public in a way that the media and fans expect from them. For instance, when the team loses a game, the leader might feel frustrated and hopeless but state that everything is okay and that the team will perform better next week.

In conclusion, as the need to belong theory suggests, leaders, like all humans, are constantly driven to connect with people at a deeper level, build meaningful and lasting relationships with them and want to be accepted as who they indeed are, all of which create a need to provide authenticity. Nevertheless, as social exchange theory suggests, top executives must provide relevant resources to other people in social exchange for resources they expect from them. Meanwhile, they cannot express

themselves openly and freely due to their leadership duties. Accordingly, since they cannot provide authenticity, they will not receive the feeling of being accepted as they are, and this discrepancy makes them feel lonely.

Proposition 3: While performing their duties, their obligation to abstain from the authentic expression of their emotions makes leaders lonely.

In sum, leaders feel lonely because of their (I) excessive workload and responsibilities, (II) high-level burden for decision-making, and (III) unmet need for authenticity.

2.4.2.2 Interpersonal antecedents of loneliness at the top

I have already explained that leaders experience problems in their relationships with others and become lonely due to some personal factors. For example, their busyness (Jackson, 1977) causes them to lack the resources to form strong social ties; they have to devote their time and energy to work or self-development rather than building social bonds, which makes them lonely. However, it is not only individual factors but also issues related to the people around them - for example, the lack of peers or the negative attitudes of those below them towards leaders - that isolate leaders as they rise to the top.

Relationship with superior(s) & peers

When managers do not have a suitable group of equals with whom they can establish social ties, they face the risk of becoming socially isolated at work (Lindorf, 2001). The fact that most traditional establishments are organized in pyramidal structures with a very pronounced hierarchy indicates that top managers do not have an appropriate group of equals with whom they can bond. This organizational structure,

with a small number of C-level executives at the top, inevitably means that these senior managers have fewer opportunities to receive support and develop meaningful relationships (Wright, 2012). Because there are few managers at a similar level within the traditional organization, a top manager probably cannot find colleagues with similar challenges and problems to share them with. If the senior manager is at the top of the organization, such as the owner of the company or the chairman of the board of directors, when facing a problem, he/she will never be able to get the psychological or social support he/she may need from someone at a similar level within the organization. So, being higher up in the organization and having fewer people around implies less opportunity for social dialogue and feedback. The fact that the top is not a crowded place and there are fewer people at that level to provide support and feedback creates an environment that can foster isolation and loneliness for top managers (Wright, 2012). In addition, moving up a level upward disconnects the top manager from the lower-level employees who used to report to him/her (Rokach, 2014). In line with these arguments, the researchers found that the most significant problem two-thirds of CEOs face is feeling disconnected from others at work. One CEO who shared his feelings in that study stated that he experienced frustration and distress because he had no one at work who could listen to him with common sense and without judgment, which made him feel uncomfortable at the top (Adamson & Axmith, 2003).

It cannot be claimed that a senior manager finds support and does not feel lonely even when s/he works with managers in higher positions than her/him. This is because "the presence of others in the workplace does not automatically lead to the availability of social support" (Lindorf, 2001, p. 281). Studies with top managers have shown that top managers, especially those who report to a board of directors,

describe this relationship as reward/punishment-based, transactional, and demanding (Zumaeta, 2019). Regarding relationships with peers, the chief executives interviewed in previous studies reported that they had little interaction with their peers outside of work, that their relationships were often driven by organizational politics, and that they were not entirely satisfying. One of these managers stated that he could define only one of his colleagues as a friend, but this friendship was not meaningful and if one of them left the organization, their friendship would not continue (Zumaeta, 2019).

To conclude, leaders want to have close relationships (recall need to belong theory), and they would like to exchange the resources of friendship with other parties at their level (recall social exchange theory). However, at the top, there are few parties to participate in such an exchange. This discrepancy between desired and perceived interpersonal relationships causes loneliness in leaders, as suggested by the need to belong theory. In addition, in many sectors including sports, the high visibility of leaders and the public pressure they face can make them need to connect and interact with people going through the same challenges and who can understand them without judgment. The lack of peers and superiors in their organization to fulfil this need may cause these leaders to feel more lonely.

To sum up, a pyramid organizational structure, where hierarchy is prominent, may cause the leader to feel lonely and unable to find the social support within the organization that they need. This makes the top manager lonely as he/she moves up in leadership positions.

Proposition 4: As leaders move up in organizations, the number of peers and supervisors they can get support from decreases, making them lonely at the top.

Relationship with subordinates

The pyramid structure that most organizations have indicates that top managers have little support and opportunities to develop meaningful relationships, which can create an environment leading to isolation and loneliness (Wright, 2012). The idea of a chief executive feeling lonely may seem counterintuitive, as the nature of his/her job requires him/her to relate to a large number of people and engage in many daily interactions with followers (Gabriel et al., 2021). However, as mentioned earlier, the presence of others in the workplace does not necessarily imply receiving social support (Lindorf, 2001), and leaders may still feel isolated from their followers as their interactions with them are more formalized (Toegel et al., 2013). The factors that isolate leaders in their relationships with their subordinates can be categorized under the following headings: Employees are less supportive and less authentic towards leaders; they also avoid spending time with them. Despite all these, employees have high expectations from leaders. Finally, managers appointed to top positions within the organization have extra difficulties in managing their former peers. Whatever the underlying reason, leaders who fail to establish the close and positive relationships they desire with their subordinates may feel lonely at the top because they cannot meet their need to belong.

- Subordinates are less supportive towards their leaders

Moving up the organizational ladder leads to non-reciprocal relationships between leaders and subordinates, as leaders are expected to provide information and support to their subordinates as part of their managerial duties, but such support is often not available to these leaders (Blake & Mouton, 1978; Moyle, 1998; Lindorff, 2001). In other words, although leaders support their followers, followers see support as an in-

role responsibility of leaders and do not feel obliged to reciprocate (Toegel et al., 2013). Similar issues apply to middle managers (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017), and in their interviews, middle and senior managers reported that their relationships at work are often not supportive (Zumaeta, 2019). Consequently, the lack of support from subordinates or peers (Johnson & Hall, 1994), the lack of reciprocal personal communication due to unequal status (Wright, 2012), not receiving the same support and feedback that they give to their followers despite frequent interactions (Toegel et al., 2013; Lanaj & Jennings, 2020); and not having many colleagues who share their passion and vision, and carrying the burden of commitment and responsibility alone (Dor-Haim, 2023) can lead to social isolation and loneliness in leaders.

In other words, leaders are expected to provide and maintain continuous support to those around them. However, this endless need for support from others can become a heavy burden for leaders over time, and they may not be able to carry this psychological burden after a certain point. On the other hand, subordinates may have simplistic assumptions that the person in the top position has to deal with every situation, and this may lead them to perceive support for top managers not as a priority. This can result in top managers not receiving adequate support from their subordinates. As a result, leaders can become isolated by their position, which requires them to be alone on the front line and to take all the pressure and responsibility without adequate support from their subordinates.

This problem gets profound for many top executives due to their over-visibility in the media and public. For the C-level executives of famous brands and presidents or coaches of sports clubs with a fan base, publicity means being constantly in the public eye and recognized by millions. Even if the popularity of top executives in small cities is not that high, they are still some of the most influential

people in their cities. Thus, they are known by almost the entire community, and it also applies to sports club executives. Accordingly, when the media or people emphasize how influential, powerful, successful, or wealthy they are, subordinates may assume that these leaders do not need their support, strengthening the loneliness of these leaders at the top.

Proposition 5a: The lack of support from subordinates in the workplace makes leaders lonely.

- Subordinates avoid open and sincere communication with their leaders

Leaders' access to more resources and power contributes to their loneliness (Hsiao-Yen Mao, 2006) because subordinates may try to get close to and befriend leaders to gain access to resources such as money or information, which are often only available to leaders (Rokach, 2014). Top managers who know their subordinates are motivated to engage with them for personal gain, benefit, and advantage may have to draw certain boundaries and pull themselves back to protect their personal or organizational interests. For example, they may feel obliged to keep themselves from situations where they would have to share information, preventing them from establishing genuine intimacy with their subordinates. Even when subordinates try to engage with them sincerely, leaders may not know which of their subordinates are genuine in their intentions and which are seeking to benefit from the relationship. Therefore, again, the leaders may feel the need to distance themselves from their followers. As a result, they may be unable to establish a close, sincere, genuine relationship with their subordinates outside of a professional relationship, which may isolate the leaders.

In addition, subordinates may see the leader as different and separate from them and, as a result, may avoid open and sincere communication with him/her (Cooper & Quick, 2003). In their interviews, top managers reported that most of the time, their subordinates unquestioningly approve of what they are told but then, in many cases, do not do what they are told (Zumaeta, 2019). In the same study, top managers also complained about a lack of feedback and not being openly questioned by others. One manager even reported that all his employees laughed at his jokes because he was their boss, even though he was not a funny guy at all, which made him feel disappointed, upset, and eventually very lonely (Zumaeta, 2019). To summarize, leaders who find it challenging to establish sincere relationships with their subordinates and even receive sincere feedback from them may feel lonely for these reasons.

Moreover, in many sectors, as top executives become over-visible in the media, they can be portrayed as heroes when things go well and as scapegoats when things go badly at the organization. Accordingly, their subordinates may behave insincerely depending on the public perception of these leaders. Even if they do not like the leader, if the public perception of the leader is positive, they may act as if they do, for instance, by flattering the leader. Conversely, subordinates may accuse the leader when things go badly to avoid public backlash, even if they do not think the leader is to be blamed. For instance, just because the team is troubled in a sports competition, players -who would not do this otherwise- may give negative statements to the press about the coach to position themselves far from him and get rid of the fans' anger. To sum, over-visibility and public pressure can lead subordinates to engage in more insincere behaviors, making the executives more lonely at the top.

Proposition 5b: Subordinates' insincere attitudes make leaders lonely.

- Subordinates avoid socializing with their leaders

Senior managers reported that their employees feel uncomfortable and stressed around them and, therefore, these employees avoid spending time with them. For example, employees show avoidance behavior even in simple, everyday situations, such as inviting senior managers to WhatsApp groups or lunches. Consequently, many senior managers interviewed reported feeling lonely, especially at lunch. As a result of the reduction in the number of social invitations they received from their employees, these managers also reported a distance between them and their employees (Zumaeta, 2019). This situation repeats itself in a vicious cycle. Since leaders who are isolated from their employees do not have complete or accurate information about the organization and its members, this lack of information can further increase feelings of loneliness by excluding them from even the simplest conversations (Cooper & Quick, 2003).

In addition, even if managers and employees want to spend time together, there may be factors that prevent them from doing so, such as the differences in the economic status of employees and managers. For example, a CEO may fall into a very high-income bracket while most people working under him/her are far below that income level. This difference in income level alone can make it difficult for them to share the same social environment outside the office, like over lunch. In other words, apart from emotional barriers, employees may avoid socializing with their leaders outside of work because they cannot afford the financial costs. As a result, the significant gap between leaders' and subordinates' economic status reduces their chances of socializing and forming close bonds outside of work, which in turn isolates leaders.

Subordinates' avoidance can be more noticeable, mainly when the organization performs poorly. Since subordinates in the organization may also be public figures, they may also care about their image in public. For instance, not only the CEO but also the members of the executive board of OpenAI, such as Ilya Sutskever, are well-known public figures, and they position in the opposite direction to the CEO, Sam Altman, in times of crisis. Similarly, in the sports sector, players in a football team are also famous, and they care about their image (e.g., being perceived as successful and competitive). Thus, when the team's performance does not satisfy the fans' expectations and club leaders, i.e., the president or coach, are heavily criticized in the press, subordinates may not want to be perceived as close to them. For instance, players may avoid socializing with the coach or board members may avert the president so that they do not attract adverse criticism directed at these leaders.

Proposition 5c: Being excluded by subordinates who avoid spending time with them makes leaders lonely.

- Subordinates idealize their leaders

Sometimes, employees perceive leaders as if they were important authority figures from their past, such as a parent or teacher, and thus, in their minds, the distinction between their past and present disappears (Cooper & Quick, 2003). In the case of such a transference towards the leader, subordinates may idealize their leaders and re-feel the sense of security, caring, and stability they felt in their childhood when they were cared for by their parents (Rokach, 2014). In their interviews, top managers also reported that employees have unrealistic expectations of them. One noted that he traveled to different parts of the country as part of his job and was

welcomed by his subordinates as if he were the Pope visiting to bless them all (Zumaeta, 2019). However, such transference to leaders increases their stress and eventual isolation (Cooper & Quick, 2003), and leaders reported that the social distance between them and their followers increased (Zumaeta, 2019). Another negative consequence of subordinates' attachment to and idealization of the mystical qualities of leaders is that when the company faces certain problems and employees' expectations are not met, they may blame the leaders for everything. When their already high expectations are not met, the admiration felt by the employees may change in the opposite direction and turn into hostility, which naturally isolates the leader (Cooper & Quick, 2003).

In some sectors, including sports, subordinates may have even unrealistically high expectations of leaders due to their over-visibility. The constant media coverage of leaders may lead subordinates to perceive them as more competent, influential, and powerful figures than they frankly are. Thus, subordinates may expect more from them than they are capable of, and when these unrealistic expectations are not met, they may turn against them, making these leaders lonely at the top.

To conclude, as suggested by the need to belong theory, top executives, like all humans, want to connect with people at a deeper level and be accepted as who they indeed are. Accordingly, as social exchange theory suggests, they would like to receive this acceptance from their followers in a social exchange. However, subordinates cannot exchange the resource of accepting the leaders as who they indeed are due to their idealization of leaders. This discrepancy between desired and perceived interpersonal relationships results in loneliness at the top, as the need to belong theory predicts.

Proposition 5d: Subordinates' unrealistically high expectations of leaders make leaders lonely.

Relationship with the stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g. fans and media)

The stakeholders with which firms are associated may differ from sector to sector.

The more valuable a stakeholder's resources are to the firm, the more influence they have on the decision-making processes of its leaders. In other words, the more say a stakeholder has over the firm's actions, the more pressure it exerts on the firm.

Managing pressures from stakeholders also creates a challenge for top executives.

For example, top executives of a heavy industrial company must cope with the pressure created by the community and environmentalists if their company causes pollution and harms the natural environment. Although the stakeholders who see themselves as having the right to intervene in company decisions vary from sector to sector, the phenomenon of loneliness at the top caused by stakeholder intervention can be experienced similarly by managers in every sector. Although this study collects data from the sports sector, the findings regarding loneliness at the top (i.e. its antecedents, consequences, and coping mechanisms) can be generalized to leaders in many sectors.

Accordingly, the two main factors, fans, and media, put significant pressure on managers in the sports sector. Unlike other sectors, the sports sector has fans as stakeholders, and these fans increase the pressure on sports managers by constantly expecting high success. It is not possible to imagine a similar situation in another sector. A consumer (e.g., a consumer of Coca-Cola) would not react if her/his favorite product lost market share in specific countries; they would not even be aware of it or would not care. Typically, the primary pressure on any top executive

(e.g., the CEO of the Coca-Cola Company) is about being accountable to only the board of directors above him or her. Nonetheless, every behavior, every decision and even every word of sports executives, such as presidents or coaches, is subject to the judgment of the club's fans.

Secondly, a concept that hardly exists in any other industry emerges as an essential element in the sports sector: the sports media. Although there are certain media outlets in other sectors -for instance, some monthly magazines on the aviation sector- only the events in the sports sector are reported and analyzed in daily newspapers, in their dedicated "sports" pages. Sports journalists carefully monitor every move of sports executives and report to the fans. Even if they run the world's largest companies by consolidated revenue, such as Walmart and Amazon, many top executives -compared to managers in the sports sector- rarely appear in the news. However, sports executives, such as basketball coaches, must speak to the reporters before and after every game and even during halftime. For example, the coach of any NBA team has to talk to the press 246 times during the 7-month-long regular season in which they play 82 games and explain their decisions. In contrast, the top executives of Apple or Microsoft do not have to appear in the media that often to defend their decisions, despite running companies with revenues of nearly 3 trillion USD. In addition to the relentless visibility imposed by their position, sports executives are intensely criticized -often unfairly- by analysts and journalists in the sports media for their decisions and speeches. This public pressure created by the fans and the media makes the situation of the sports manager unique. The managerial pressures, such as being successful or properly representing the organization, already exist on the shoulders of the sports managers, as in other sectors. Nevertheless, these pressures become much more severe with the impact of public pressure.

In addition, there is an interaction between these elements (media and fans), and both feed each other. For example, research shows that negative news reaches more viewers than positive or neutral news. People are "more aroused by and attentive to negative news " (Soroka & Krupnikov, 2019, p. 18891), and "bad news travels fast" in social media (Naveed, Gottron, Kunegis, & Alhadi, 2011, p. 5). While "negative words in news headlines increased consumption rates, ... positive words decreased consumption rates" (Robertson, Pröllochs, Schwarzenegger, Pärnamets, Van Bavel, & Feuerriegel, 2023, p. 812). This is probably valid for the sports media, and it can be assumed that negative news is watched or read by sports fans more than positive news. Therefore, sports media executives, who are aware of this situation, share and analyze negative news with sports fans by exaggerating them with underlying motivations such as more viewership (e.g., TV rating), more readership (e.g., print circulation), more interaction (e.g., more likes and subscribers on YouTube). As a sports reader, who has been closely following the sports media and the sports sector for at least two decades, my personal observations also confirm that sports media executives, analysts, and commentators are fed by negative content. These negative news impact the teams' fans and increase the pressure on the sports executives.

In the end, the team's fans are a critical aspect of the sports club. They participate in every match, and if they are unhappy, they can protest against the sports managers and even call for their resignation, leading to the resignation of coaches or even presidents. Therefore, every sports manager inevitably wants to be accepted by the team's fans. If a sports manager cannot establish the desired bond with the fans -recall that loneliness is defined by the lack of the desired emotional relationship- it can lead the sports manager to experience loneliness at the top. By the

way, the purpose of collecting the data from the sports sector was to observe the effect of public pressure on loneliness.

In summary, leaders want acceptance and belonging in their relationships and can receive this in social exchange with the fans and sports media members. However, fans and sports media do not always provide this and even engage in behavior to the contrary, such as asking for the resignation of the leaders. This discrepancy between desired and perceived interpersonal relationships leads to leaders' loneliness, as suggested by the need to belong theory.

Proposition 6: The pressure from the stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g., fans and media) makes leaders lonely.

2.4.2.3 Coping with loneliness at the top

The fact that loneliness at the top has negative consequences for the leader, the organization they lead, and the society that the organization affects make the issue of loneliness at the top even more critical. The issue of how leaders cope with loneliness at the top is an important dimension of the study of loneliness at the top because it reduces the adverse personal, organizational, and societal effects. Top managers can apply many methods to prevent or mitigate the negative effects of loneliness at the top, such as health problems (Rokach, 2014). While some studies list specific items on what leaders can do to manage loneliness at the top (Goleman, 1998; Cooper & Quick, 2003; Zumaeta, 2019), the following methods are common to all of these studies: "peer support from outside of the organization," "confidants," and "self-development and self-motivation".

Peer support from outside of the organization

I have already explained that finding peers in the upper echelons of an organization is often quite difficult for most executives. While mentoring from more experienced leaders can be a highly effective way for senior executives to develop, as they move up in the organization, there are fewer mentors to turn to. By the time they reach the top echelons of the organization, there is almost no chance of finding a more experienced leader for mentoring. Therefore, senior executives often have to outsource this much-needed function (Cooper & Quick, 2003). One of the most effective methods to deal with the problem of not receiving effective feedback within the organization is executive coaching (Morris & Tarpley, 2000). An executive coach is a confidant who knows the organization, the sector, or the psychological state of the leader being mentored and to whom the leader can speak freely (Kilburg, 2000).

In order to find peer support, some executives may also choose to find friends outside the organization who are of equivalent status to them. But only if they are lucky, they may find friends in similar positions in other organizations with whom they can confide (Cooper & Quick, 2003). These external peers can be an effective source of support because of their similarities to leaders (Zumaeta, 2019). In order to find peers from outside the organization, there are institutions managers can turn to. One of these organizations is the Young Presidents' Organization (YPO), founded in 1950 (Cooper & Quick, 2003). In its own words, YPO welcomes "extraordinary leaders to grow stronger together" and through YPO, "[they] are inspired and supported to make a difference in the lives, businesses, and the world [they] impact" (YPO, n.d.). By joining YPO or similar organizations or through personal friendships with colleagues in other organizations, leaders can gain experience and ideas to help them deal with the concerns and issues they face. Thus, these managers can access

peer support from outside the organization that they cannot access within the organization. In a recent study, senior managers who were interviewed said that their leadership position gave them new acquaintances from their colleagues in other organizations and that their connections outside the organization were stronger in senior positions than before. One of these executives said that he belongs to a club of CEOs like him, which has been meeting regularly for more than a decade, and when they meet, they share the same kinds of problems and ideas they have (Zumaeta, 2019).

Public pressure on some sectors may differentiate and strengthen top executives' experiences and challenges. Therefore, an over-visible leader can be understood and appreciated much better by those who have experienced similar experiences. Therefore, to cope with loneliness, leaders might seek support from their colleagues in other organizations with the same position. For example, club presidents and coaches may seek help from other club presidents and coaches.

To sum up, top executives only sometimes have peers or more experienced leaders in their organizations to get support. Thus, they can turn outside, such as executive coaches or external peers, to have high-quality and enduring relationships to fulfill their need to belong. Their external colleagues or peers become the party who can provide them with the resource of support and closeness in a social exchange relationship, decreasing the discrepancy between desired and perceived interpersonal relationships that leads to loneliness at the top.

Proposition 7: Leaders cope with the loneliness at the top with support from colleagues outside their organization.

However, many reasons that lead to loneliness at the top still exist, which can render these ways of managing loneliness dysfunctional. For example, leaders may

be overloaded with work, making it difficult to seek external support, as they may not have the time or energy to connect with people outside of work. Moreover, as Cooper and Quick (2003) point out, only if they are lucky, they can find friends in similar positions in other organizations with whom they can confide, and in many cases, these rare friendships do not last long. Therefore, leaders also need alternative ways to manage the problem of loneliness at the top.

Confidants

One of the techniques suggested to leaders is sharing problems with confidants (Goleman, 1998). Leaders receive different types of support, such as care, comfort, and acceptance, from relationships outside the workplace, most often from their spouse or partner (Lindorff, 2001). Similarly, as Cooper and Quick (2003) explain in their list of "preventive measures for executives," when leaders need someone to open up, listen, and understand their deepest fears and concerns, they often turn to their spouses to fulfill these needs (Cooper & Quick, 2003, p. 5). In a recent study, it was observed that the most frequently mentioned source of support for top managers was their spouses or families (Zumaeta, 2019). The need for spousal support in the face of loneliness at the top is not only true for business leaders but also for some of the most important political leaders in history. Probably the best-documented case of spousal support is the relationship between Winston and Clementine Churchill. Soames, the youngest of the couple's five children, published his parents' letters to each other in *Winston and Clementine: The personal letters of the Churchills*. In this book, she demonstrated the invaluable support Winston Churchill received from his wife as he faced the pressures of his position during the Second World War (Soames, 1999). As a reflection of the theory, leaders who fail to develop at least the minimum

number of high-quality relationships they need in the workplace might seek stronger relationships with their partners to get support and fulfil their need to belong.

As mentioned before, because of their over-visibility in the media, some leaders have a public image, and their impression in the public eye (e.g. among fans) may be too glorifying. For instance, the nickname of Fatih Terim, the most successful Turkish football coach, is "the Emperor". However, this image might become a heavy psychological burden to bear all the time, and what these leaders are like in their personal lives may be very different from this image. The only place where these leaders can be just themselves may be their home; the only time they can be relaxed and free to behave authentically can be when they are with their family members. Thus, they might be expected to seek support from their spouses to cope with the loneliness that public pressure and over-visibility intensify. As Fatih Terim said, "I did not seek help from anyone else in this loneliness; I came straight to my home to my wife and two children " (Zorlu et al., 2022), probably to the only place that he could be not "the Emperor" but just "Fatih" or "dad".

Proposition 8: Leaders cope with the loneliness at the top with support from confidants, such as spouses or partners.

However, for top executives, a partner may not always be the ideal solution to reduce loneliness at the top. The leaders may not be able to discuss all issues with their partners since the partner is not familiar with business issues. In addition, their relationship with their partners may be negatively affected by constantly discussing business issues. Therefore, to manage the problem of loneliness at the top, managers need other methods.

Self-development and self-motivation

Alternatively, some studies have suggested that leaders should fundamentally change their perspective (Lynch, 2000). According to Lynch (2000), people feel compelled to compete with their environment, which drives them to fight or run away from others (i.e., fight/ flight mode). This mode, in turn, results in constant isolation and loneliness. Lynch, who defines this situation as a "physiology of exclusion," says that people need to get out of this mode and find harmony with the world they live in and calls this situation "physiology of inclusion" (Lynch, 2000, p. 289). According to Lynch (2000), a serious effort should be made for this psychological transformation, and just as exercises are done on treadmills to improve physical health, exercises to improve communication should be done with the same commitment and determination.

In case of becoming distanced from the subordinates as leaders' status in the organizations increases, organizations can help top executives manage their feelings of loneliness by encouraging them to think positively about challenging work events and further train them to reflect on problem-solving (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005).

Because self-awareness is the first step to effectively regulating feelings of loneliness, leaders may benefit from being encouraged to think more about problem-solving at home. Moreover, studies have shown that engaging in problem-solving reflection tends to trigger higher levels of work engagement and helping (Gabriel et al., 2021). As a result, a top manager with enhanced problem-solving skills may also improve in building positive relationships with subordinates and managing loneliness.

Journal writing is one of the methods recommended for leaders to develop themselves, change their perspective, and increase their self-awareness (Goleman,

1998; Cooper & Quick, 2003; Zumaeta, 2019). Expressing emotions through journal writing is also an effective way to resolve unfinished business and heal traumas.

Unresolved issues are at the forefront of one's thought processes, and only completed issues can be forgotten; therefore, it helps to write about the events that are bothering one so that it is possible to move on to other thought processes (Pennebaker, 1997).

Senior managers who have to deal with problems all day long can avoid trying to think about a large number of pending problems simultaneously by writing a journal and focusing their minds on a single issue. Thanks to journaling, managers can think clearly and logically with a conscious effort and coherently organize their thoughts (Cooper & Quick, 2003). Lastly, there are several other techniques suggested for leaders to manage loneliness at the top, such as spirituality and rituals (Goleman, 1998).

According to the theory, all people have a persistent drive to be accepted and to belong to groups (Leary et al., 2013). Accordingly, mass customer acceptance of top business executives may become a critical determinant of the company's success in some sectors. For instance, society's high acceptance of Steve Jobs can be related to Apple's massive dominance during the 2000s and 2010s. On the contrary, the decreasing acceptance of Elon Musk lately may be related to X's decreasing profitability and popularity (formerly known as Twitter). Moreover, in some contexts, such as politics, leaders seek acceptance of the largest group, i.e., the public.

Similarly, sports leaders also seek the acceptance of a large group, namely their fans. However, the ups and downs that organizations experience also dramatically change the status of these leaders, e.g. top executives, politicians, or sports club presidents, in the public eye. For instance, when the team wins the

matches, the fans consider the leaders heroes, but when the team loses, they blame and resent the leaders. In other words, there is a fragile relationship between leaders and followers, e.g., between sports leaders and fans. Since the leaders may also be aware that their relationships with their followers are fragile and the conditions are easily changeable, they may think that they can only sometimes meet their need to belong by relying on their relationship with their followers. Instead, they can be expected to cope with loneliness by overcoming this need in their inner world through self-development and self-motivation since these relationships are not under their control.

To sum up, top managers can try to cope with the loneliness they experience at the top by developing themselves, namely changing their perspectives on the people in their work environment, enhancing their problem-solving skills, focusing on their personal growth, motivation, and understanding, and improving their self-awareness.

Proposition 9: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top by focusing on their self-development and self-motivation.

In conclusion, the following framework emerges regarding the antecedents of loneliness at the top and the methods of managing leaders' loneliness (see Figure 5).

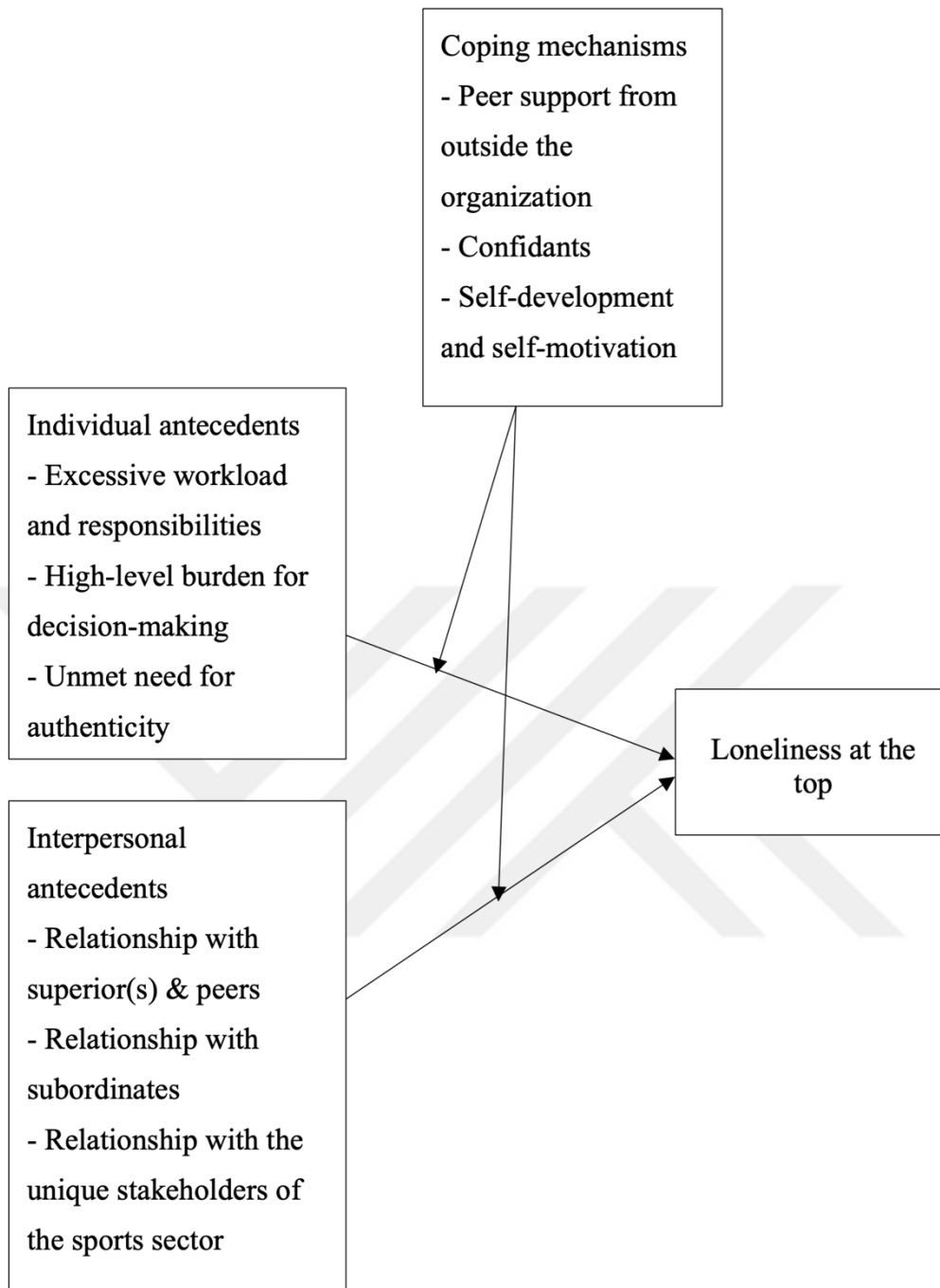


Figure 5. Proposed model

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The five components of research design are crucial in case study research: (i) research questions; (ii) its propositions, if any; (iii) its case(s); (iv) the logic linking the data to the propositions; and (v) the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2018, p. 60-61).

3.1 Research questions

A study should be reduced into one central research question with the broadest scope possible and some sub-questions that include the issues the researcher wishes to comprehend. These qualitative research questions articulate the purpose of the study in more detail and usually begin with a word like "what" or "how" to investigate a main phenomenon. They are also "open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional" (Creswell, 2013, p. 138). The central research question of this dissertation is: "Are leaders lonely at the top?" The sub-questions are "What are the antecedents of leaders' loneliness at the top?", "How do public pressure affect the loneliness at the top?" and "What are the methods that leaders can apply to cope with their loneliness?".

3.2 Propositions

Propositions "[reflect] an important theoretical issue," guide the researcher "where to look for relevant evidence," and thus direct the focus of the study to the areas that need to be examined, ensuring the researcher is on the right track (Yin, 2018, p. 62). The more detailed these research questions and propositions are, the more applicable

the study is (Yin, 2018). Also, as Yin (2018) points out, without proper research questions and propositions, the researchers may not know what to cover about the case(s), so they may tend to include everything in their study. Since it is impossible to do, it becomes very hard to direct their work in the right direction and complete it successfully. In line with Yin's (2018) suggestion, I identified specific research questions and propositions so that I could channel my efforts correctly without drowning in the high volume of data I had collected. For instance, I could effectively analyze tens of pages of verbal data from interviews lasting up to five hours via detailed and well-crafted propositions.

3.3 Cases

In this stage, the researcher defines the case(s) that will be included in the study.

While "programs, events, processes, [and] activities" can also be the cases (Creswell, 2013, p. 150), "an individual person can be the case being studied" (Yin, 2018).

Also, in a multiple-case study like this dissertation, more than one individual can be included as each being one case (Yin, 2018).

3.3.1 Sample size

When the researcher has "the choice (and resources), multiple-case designs may be preferred over single-case designs" (Yin, 2018, p. 98) because single-case study design can be challenged on the "uniqueness" or "artifactual circumstances" of the case (Yin, 2018, p. 99). In other words, single-case study design means "put[ting] all ... eggs in one basket" and is therefore risky (Yin, 2018, p. 98). Including two or more cases in a study can help mitigate such skepticism and may have significant analytical advantages (Yin, 2018). However, an upper limit on the number of cases

to be included in a study should also be considered because, to make cross-case analysis effectively, researchers should not include "more than 4 or 5 case studies in a single study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). Having too many cases can be overwhelming since the researcher needs to "collect extensive detail about each" case (Creswell, 2013, p. 157); therefore, I included 3 cases in this dissertation. After the third case study, there was no need to conduct a fourth one as data saturation was reached, and I was able to analyze each case in depth and perform cross-case analysis effectively.

3.3.2 Type of sampling

Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research so that researchers can choose cases in a way that "they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). To select the cases, as Creswell (2013) suggests, I predetermined some criteria to distinguish the participants and then chose subjects who differed greatly on those criteria. By using "maximum variation sampling" and "maximiz[ing] differences at the beginning of the study," I "increase[d] the likelihood that the findings [would] reflect differences or different perspectives" as aimed in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). Following Creswell's suggestion (2013), maximum variation sampling is preferred as the sampling strategy of this study, and position, existence or non-existence of public pressure, sports branches, tenure, and gender are used as the criteria to differentiate participants. First, participants from different leadership positions (coach, coordinator, and president) are selected to reflect differences. Furthermore, two leaders (Yılmaz and Karaahmet) work under maximum competition and public pressure; in contrast, one of them (Demirer) works in a non-

competitive environment, where there is no or very little public pressure. In addition, the sports branches and level of expertise of the leaders also differ; Karaahmet was in charge of football -less than 3 years-, Yılmaz was in charge of basketball -more than two decades-, and Demirer was in charge of various sports teams, such as volleyball -for almost two decades-. Also, participants from different gender are included in the study to observe gender-specific issues (if they exist). As suggested by Creswell (2013), three participants (cases) are included in this dissertation. The names of the subjects, their gender, the organization they work for, and their positions in the organization are as follows (see Table 2):

Table 2. Detailed Information about the Participants

Name	Gender	Organization	Position
Çetin Yılmaz	Male	Fenerbahçe and other basketball teams	Basketball coach
Hakan Karaahmet	Male	Giresunspor Football Club	President
Semra Demirer	Female	ÜNSPED/ UPS Sports and Culture Club	Coordinator

3.3.3 Data collection

"Case study evidence can come from [many] sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts" (Yin, 2018, p. 153). Among all, the interview is one of the most important and widely used data collection methods in case study research as it can "[suggest] explanations of key events..., as well as the insights reflecting participants' relativist perspectives" (Yin, 2018, p. 161). Case study interviews will not resemble structured questions but instead guided dialogues. Even though the researcher will follow a consistent line of questioning, the flow of questions will be fluid rather than fixed in these interviews

(Rubin & Rubin, 2011). In these "intensive", "in-depth", or "unstructured" interviews (Weiss, 1994), the researcher should make sure that the questions on the questionnaire are answered while guiding the conversation with sincere, unthreatening, yet relevant questions (Yin, 2018). Finally, it is not mandatory to use a recording device in these interviews; this decision is entirely up to the researcher (Yin, 2018).

The primary sources for data collection in this dissertation were mainly interviews, and the interviews I conducted took exactly the form described above. The interviews, which lasted 35 minutes, 4.5 hours, and over 1.5 hours, respectively, took place as conversations guided by me, and the flow of questions was inevitably very flexible, shaped by the conversation. Some questions did not need to be asked because they were already answered in the conversation, or some questions in the question set were brought forward or left for later because the conversation evolved in that way. In some cases, the conversation developed in such a way that the subject came to the following question in the question set with his/her own narrative so that the conversation could continue without changing the flow of the questions. As for the sincerity and non-threatening nature of the conversation, in one of the interviews, the top manager who shared his experience said that at several points, he felt as if he was in a therapy session, and he could open up freely. Finally, I chose to use a recorder, and during the analysis, I realized that this decision was correct, as I could not have preserved such a long and detailed data set without a recorder. Lastly, a good case study should be based on as many sources as possible (Yin, 2018); therefore, I used secondary data sources such as news and articles from the mass media to check and complement the data collected from the interviews where necessary.

The dates and durations of the interviews conducted with each participant are presented below (see Table 3):

Table 3. Interviews

Participant	Date	Duration
Çetin Yılmaz	November 7, 2022 (at his home)	4 hours 25 minutes 43 seconds
Hakan Karaahmet	October 22, 2022 (via telephone)	37 minutes 45 seconds
Semra Demirer	October 31, 2022 (at her office)	1 hours 39 minutes 28 seconds

3.4 Linking the data to the propositions and interpreting the findings

This stage includes the data analysis steps of case study research. At this stage, the researcher is not constrained by overly restrictive rules, such as fixed formulas or statistical analyses; "instead, much depends on a researcher's own style of rigorous empirical thinking, along with the sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations" (Yin, 2018, p. 213). Although researchers may develop their own strategy "to link [the] case study data to important concepts of interest" (Yin, 2018, p. 223), there are also four strategies that can be used exclusively or in combination: "(i) relying on theoretical propositions, (ii) working the data from the ground up, (iii) developing a case description and (iv) examining plausible rival explanations" (Yin, 2018, p. 216-221). According to the first of these strategies, propositions reflect the research questions and literature review, and they form the base of the objectives and design of the case study. Propositions also shape the data collection procedure and data analysis priorities (Yin, 2018). In this thesis, I also relied on theoretical propositions that reflected the

research questions, literature review, and the theoretical framework, i.e., the need to belong theory. They were also shaped the data collection and analysis procedures.

Regardless of the strategy used, the researcher should also use an analytic technique to "deal with the ... problems of developing internal validity and external validity" (Yin, 2018, p. 223), and one of these techniques is "cross-case synthesis." This technique, which naturally applies only to the analysis of multiple case studies, adopts a "case-based" rather than a "variable-based" approach (Byrne & Ragin, 2009). Accordingly, the first aim is to preserve the integrity of the whole case, and therefore, it is absolutely necessary to avoid ignoring the holistic features of cases by dividing them into separate variables. In fact, it is not common that a researcher conducting a case study will have enough cases to create a meaningful picture at the variable level (Yin, 2018). As suggested in the literature, this multiple-case study consisted of three single-case studies, presented as separate chapters for each case, and ended with a final chapter covering the cross-case analysis and results to compare or synthesize any within-case patterns across the cases (Yin, 2018). In other words, in this multiple-case study, the findings section included a detailed description of each case and issues found in each of them, then similarities and differences among the cases, and finally, the interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2013).

3.5 Validation

"Qualitative researchers engage in at least two of [the validation strategies] in any given study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 253); therefore, I also engaged three validation strategies in this dissertation: "triangulation"; "rich, thick description."; and "peer debriefing".

Triangulation: To provide corroborating evidence, researchers use different theories, sources, methods, and investigators (Creswell, 2013), and qualitative researchers may apply multiple methods, such as interviews, documents, and observations, to locate different themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000). As suggested by Yin (2018), to triangulate the data, the findings of our case studies were supported by more than a single source of evidence. In this study, both primary and secondary data were used; while the primary data was collected from the interviews with participants, the secondary data was gathered from documents, i.e., news and articles from the mass media. In other words, convergent evidence was developed via data triangulation in this study to strengthen the construct validity of our case studies (Yin, 2018).

Rich, thick description: To establish credibility in a qualitative study, researchers may describe the participants, the setting, and the themes by providing as much detail as possible. Researchers may describe even a small slice of action, interaction, or experience so that they can make readers feel they have experienced or could experience the events being described (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Researchers may share detailed physical, movement, or activity descriptions, or they may use strong action verbs and quotes (Creswell, 2013), thanks to which readers may transfer information to other settings with shared characteristics (Erlandson et al., 1993). In this dissertation, all participants and settings were described in great detail; interactions and experiences of participants were shared; and quotes and physical descriptions were used when needed.

Peer debriefing: A peer who is familiar with the research or the phenomenon being explored reviews the data and research process to challenge the assumptions by asking tough questions about methodology or interpretations; and to provide

support (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This external peer establishes credibility to the study by creating a close collaboration with the qualitative researcher and by adding a critical paradigm to the research process (Creswell and Miller, 2000). In this dissertation, Professor Hayat Kabasakal, an expert on organizational behavior and leadership field, has been the peer debriefer and she added credibility to the study with her supervising and by giving feedback during the entire study; and this procedure was used over time during the process of an entire study as suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000).

Finally, I also followed Creswell's criteria for evaluating a case study (2013) throughout this dissertation so that there are clear identifications and descriptions of the cases in the study, and the cases are used to understand a research issue or used because the cases have intrinsic merit. Finally, themes are identified for the cases, and assertions or generalizations are made from the case analyses (Creswell, 2013).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Case I: Loneliness at the top: The cost of deserving

Since basketball gained popularity in Turkey at the beginning of the 20th century, it remains the second most popular national sport today. A new name shook the world of Turkish basketball during the 1990s: Çetin Yılmaz, who became the finalist six times and held the championship title three times. In those years, many well-educated people were coaching in the Turkish basketball league who graduated from Middle East Technical University (METU), one of the top two universities in the country back then. Among those coaches, Çetin Yılmaz became the one who won the most championships. According to Çetin Yılmaz, there was a robust relationship between his high level of education and basketball coaching: "Being a coach for a basketball team might seem different, but it was quite close to all levels of the business world. It was like managing a bank, a hospital, or a company. Parameters in professional life could be found in coaching for a team: management, expertise, leadership, teamwork, and work discipline."

Cetin Yilmaz is also one of the most popular speakers of "Speaker Agency"* -the most active speaker agency in Turkey and the MEA Region- and participates in seminars and conferences designed by businesses about teamwork, leadership, productivity, personal development, and motivation as a speaker (Speaker Agency, n.d.). He gives seminars to the most respected Turkish and global companies in Turkey and abroad, such as Pfizer, Roche, Unilever, McDonald's, Volvo, Nissan, Mercedes Benz, Siemens, IBM, Intel, Schneider Electric, Koç Holding, Anadolu Group, and Turkcell. He also worked with people at (Speaker Agency, n.d.):

- Sandoz (a global leader in generic pharmaceuticals and biosimilars),
- Group SEB (the world's largest manufacturer of cookware),
- Zoetis (the world's largest producer of medicine and vaccinations for pets and livestock),
- Remax (a real estate company that has more than 100,000 agents in 6,800 offices in about 100 countries),
- Cargill (has 155,000 employees working every day to nourish the world),
- AkcanSA (Turkey's largest cement producer), and
- Hedef Filo (the leading fleet leasing company in Turkey).

Yılmaz works as a management consultant, trainer for basketball trainers and as the Turkish Basketball Coaches Association President. He had worked as a commentator for Lig TV and SKY Turk and wrote on the Hürriyet newspaper's sports page. What makes Çetin Yılmaz special is that he is one of the seven coaches with the most championships in the second most popular sport in Turkey, he is a favorite speaker for some of Turkey's and the world's most respected companies, and he is currently the president of the Turkish Basketball Coaches Association. These characteristics made him an ideal example for our first case study on loneliness at the top. As a result, I conducted two interviews with him, totaling 4 hours, 28 minutes, and 45 seconds. This part of the study is based on interviews with Çetin Yılmaz and secondary sources about him.

Becoming Çetin Yılmaz: The early years as the coach of a college team

Çetin Yılmaz was born in 1956 in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. He attended middle and high school in Karabük and Ankara, where he was educated in English. He was involved in the family's decision-making processes from an early age. Involving

children in decision-making was uncommon in traditional Turkish families, especially back then. Çetin Yılmaz described how his parents treated him and his sister as adults, and he explained the decision-making processes that took place within the family in those days as follows:

I grew up in an extremely modern family, as if my parents were teleported from the 2020s to the 1960s. Even when planning a vacation, they would ask my sister and me for our opinion. They would inform us about every aspect of the decision to be taken, including the financial aspect, so we would make the decisions together and understand the reasons behind them. I also always received lots of love from them.

After graduating from high school, he enrolled in one of the best universities in Turkey, Middle East Technical University (METU), and graduated in 1980 with a bachelor's degree in Sociology. Yılmaz realized that he could not be a professional basketball player when he was in college. Instead, he found himself as the head coach of the METU Basketball Team. This was his first head coaching position, and Yılmaz coached the team for eight seasons, including the period after he graduated from university. They even won the Universities Championship during these years. Managing a team of mentally highly developed players at the age of 21 played an essential role in the development of Çetin Yılmaz's leadership skills.

The professional years of a highly dedicated head coach

During his last years of coaching at the METU basketball team, Çetin Yılmaz also worked at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), where he quickly climbed the career ladder within one and a half years. While holding these two positions simultaneously, Yılmaz received an offer so tempting that he quit both and became the assistant coach of the Çukurova Basketball Team.

Çukurova Basketball Team was one of the teams with the highest payrolls in the league at that time. Erkan Tapan, also a METU graduate, was the head of the

holding, and he decided to bring Osman Erverdi and Çetin Yılmaz to head their basketball team. The head coach, Osman Erverdi, and the assistant coach, Çetin Yılmaz, had been close friends since high school. They took responsibility and made decisions jointly while coaching the Çukurova Basketball team. Erverdi always showed his trust and appreciation to Çetin Yılmaz, especially in front of the players and club executives. After the tragic death of Osman Erverdi in 1985, Yılmaz became the head coach of the Çukurova Basketball Team.

It was an arguable move to hire a coach with no professional head coaching experience who had only trained a college team and had never played basketball at the professional level. In fact, in terms of earning players' acceptance and respect, it was a risky decision to choose, according to Yılmaz's own words, the shortest man in the basketball world to lead the giants, some of whom were over 2 meters 10 centimeters. Çetin Yılmaz accepted this challenging position to prove that he deserved this job to himself and everyone else. Thus, although he did not realize it then, he agreed to pay the price that would mark the rest of his life: "the cost of deserving".

How the little tough man ruled the giants in the Turkish basketball league

In the five seasons he was in charge of the Çukurova Basketball Team, Çetin Yılmaz gained experience coaching a professional team. The team also got second place in the major league championship for the first time in the club's history. Afterwards, Çetin Yılmaz coached the Fenerbahçe basketball team, one of Turkey's most prominent sports clubs, for five years and achieved great success with this club. Fenerbahçe won its first major league championship (1990-1991 season) and the first two Presidential Cups (1990 and 1991) with Çetin Yılmaz's coaching. In the regular

season (i.e., before playoffs), the team got first place three times and second place once during Yılmaz's five-year tenure.

He also coached Sümerbank Beykoz, one of the teams with the lowest payrolls, for one year. He accepted this offer due to the invitation of Erkan Tapan, who had given him his first chance to lead a professional team with the Çukurova Basketball team. However, the team lost three friendly games a week before the start of the season with a total of more than 150 points difference from opponents. This was a disaster! In Çetin Yılmaz's words, this was the equivalent of playing three football matches and losing 5-0 each. These friendly games were played just before the start of the season after the transfer window closed and the training period ended. Even though the coach thought he had prepared the team best, he realized they were not ready. Although he used their resources to the best of his knowledge, they faced a 50-point difference from the opponent in each match. Also, the team consisted of a limited number of players who were mostly veterans, and it was no longer possible for them to make transfers - as required by the rules. After this, Çetin Yılmaz considered leaving the team and more, quitting coaching and returning to his job at the United Nations Development Program. Nevertheless, his character would not allow it. He invented a game strategy named "Fabian basketball," which could be seen as a revolution -or counter-revolution- in basketball for its time. Thus, he achieved the main organizational goal and prevented his team's relegation to the lower league at the end of the season. He was also chosen as the most successful coach of the season.

Later, Çetin Yılmaz became the head coach of the Ülkerspor Basketball Team, one of the biggest Turkish clubs of that time, where he worked for seven seasons. Ülkerspor Basketball Team won its first two major league championships

(1994-95 and 1997-98) and the first Presidential Cup (1995) under Çetin Yılmaz's coaching. The team also played in the quarter-finals two times in the European Cup during Yılmaz's seven-year tenure.

The offer from the last-placed team in the league and the coach's confidence to say "yes!"

After his glory years as the coach of the Fenerbahçe and Ülkerspor Basketball teams, Çetin Yılmaz decided that he deserved to rest but could only find the opportunity for a few months. The Tuborg Basketball team started the 2004-2005 season with a poor performance and was intent on working with Çetin Yılmaz as their new coach to solve their crises. However, Çetin Yılmaz, who started the season without coaching a team, was not eager to accept the Tuborg basketball team's offer in December.

There were many reasons why Yılmaz felt hesitant about this offer. First, the Turkish basketball branch of Tuborg, a global beer brand under the Carlsberg group, was based in İzmir. This meant that for the first time in Çetin Yılmaz's life, he would have to work 480 km away from his family. Although Tuborg made a serious financial investment in its basketball branch, they were at the bottom of the league in the middle of the season. Also, Çetin Yılmaz did not know how to deal with the mood of the players and staff in a team struggling to fight against relegation, as he had always coached top teams in the league before, which were in contention for the title. That is why he first turned down the offer over the phone. When he was called the next day again, he learned that the club executives had come from İzmir to meet him face to face, so Yılmaz went to meet with them because of the respect he felt. Even though he said that he had never taken over a team in the middle of the season

before and was hesitant about how he would handle a group of players in such devastation, the executives of Tuborg were very insistent on working with him.

Thinking of his unique experience at Sümerbank Beykoz, the coach was convinced he could handle the difficulties he would face in Tuborg. While he had never taken over an underperforming team in mid-season before, he had the mental strength and intellectual capacity which allowed him to find creative solutions to problems. Also, despite being a global company, Çetin Yılmaz appreciated the monumental effort that the executives of Tuborg put in for Turkish basketball. So, he thought the Tuborg basketball team should not be relegated from the league. He felt ethically responsible to them and decided to accept their head coaching offer when the club needed his help that much. Four hours later, he found himself on a flight bound for Izmir.

The importance of having solid values: Getting things back on track at Tuborg basketball team

On December 24th, 2005, Çetin Yılmaz, a 6-time finalist and 3-time champion coach, assumed the coaching position of the Tuborg basketball team. Although Tuborg's Turkey branch made a serious financial investment in basketball, they were at the bottom of the league in the middle of the season. Until Yılmaz took over this underdog team, they lost nine out of eleven games that season. Therefore, the Tuborg basketball team's main objective was not to be relegated from the top league in the 2005–2006 basketball season when Çetin Yılmaz took over the coaching position. However, it was not an easy task, not only because the team got only two wins out of 11 matches until then, but Çetin Yılmaz also had never worked with such an underperformed team before and had no experience in how to get players out of the

negative mode they were in. The team also lost their last game by 44 points (89-55) just before December 24th, when Yılmaz signed the contract with the club.

However, thanks to the coach's vast experience, things started to go well for the Tuborg basketball team. The team began to win games and even surpassed expectations. Çetin Yılmaz made a magic touch to the team with all the experience he had accumulated until that day, and thus, they managed to win 7 of the first eight matches they played in the league. They outdid their opponents in 3 of these victories by 25 points, 22 points, and 19 points. Another win was against Fenerbahçe (away), one of the most influential teams in the league.

When Yılmaz was coaching the Tuborg basketball team, they worked hard to achieve early victories and overcame the fear of relegation in the first two months. Nevertheless, they still had a very symbolic goal: defeating the Karşıyaka basketball team in front of rival fans in the İzmir derby, the most prestigious match of the season. Although Karşıyaka started the game well, the coach's team drew in the last quarter with a 52-52 by gaining a 12-point advantage over their opponent in the second and third quarters. Starting the last quarter by maintaining this momentum, the team had the scoring advantage, and they only needed their players to keep their performance in the last minutes to get the victory. However, Karşıyaka fans, known for their passion nationally and in Europe, managed to fire up their teams. As a result, the coach's team got stressed, panicked, and made mistakes at the end of the match, and they lost 71-68 in the symbolically most crucial game of the season, the İzmir derby, with a single basket behind their opponent.

Everyone was quiet in the dressing room. While the coach was going to scold his players, he would say that he could see how scared they were, which is why they lost the match; suddenly, the club president stormed in the dressing room and started

scolding the players. While the president was shouting at the players, the coach did not know what to do for a moment as he faced a challenge that would test the strong bond between him and his players and their trust in him. Although what the president said to the players was not wrong, letting players be treated like that could have damaged his leadership and influence over the players. If the players felt that the coach was not defending them against the president and protecting them from his anger, they might lose their trust in the coach. Trust was the most fundamental element for Çetin Yılmaz in his relationship with his players as a leader. He would prefer losing a game rather than losing their trust. His silence in such a situation could cause irreversible damage to his relationship with the players, which could mean the glass, i.e., trust, was broken.

On the other hand, if he had made a strong comeback against the president, his contract at the club could have been terminated. Besides, the president was also the club owner, and he was using his authority when talking to the players. As the club president, he had the right to give feedback to the people working under him due to his position. What appears to be yelling at the time could also be perceived as the president's way of giving feedback to the team, and the president had such a right. As Yılmaz weighed these pros and cons, his past experiences flashed before the coach's eyes. Remembering his early experiences, Çetin Yılmaz saw that the president was still scolding the players and felt that he had to decide at that moment. His silence in this situation could cause irreversible damage to his relationship with his players, which could mean the trust is broken. Yet, his opposition to the president -whom he thought was right in what he said- could mean he was fired, so such a reaction would take lots of courage. While trying to decide, Çetin Yılmaz thought he

might be caught between a rock and a hard place. Çetin Yılmaz decided to stand up to the president and said:

Wait a minute. You cannot enter here without my permission. Also, I did not allow you to speak, so you cannot talk like that even if you were the prime minister, let alone the club president. Yes, we lost the match today, but these players were brave in the past when they won matches and were brave when they lost. These are my players, and you cannot call my players cowards.

That was the president's turn to assess the situation now. Until then, the team was doing very well thanks to the coach; if the president had argued with him, he could have left the club. If the coach left, the players might play poorly in the remaining games because they respected and admired the coach. If the coach left and the team's performance dropped, the team might have to fight not to be in the relegation zone again. In addition to all this, in the coach's own words, the president was "one of the politest men in the world who is interested in and invested in the sport." The president quickly assessed the situation, said briefly, "Yes, sir," and left the locker room.

Last but not least, they surprised almost everyone by reaching the semi-finals of the Turkish Cup, the national cup tournament. According to the coach, in a tournament where everyone, including the organizers of the tournament, expected the two strongest teams in the league - Efes and Ülkerspor - to face each other in the final, the Tuborg basketball team had the chance to shatter this expectation. However, the organizers had kept the time between the quarter-final game and the semi-final game to be played very short. The team had to play the semi-final game about 24 hours after winning the quarter-final. The coach foresaw that they would not be able to defeat Ülkerspor with their regular strategy. Therefore, he used the first few hours of this short time to develop an alternative strategy that could enable them to beat Ülkerspor. However, there was no time to show this strategy to the team

and practice because it was midnight, and the players needed to sleep and rest for tomorrow's game.

Nevertheless, there was no option but to wake the players in the hotel rooms for training at midnight. Unsurprisingly, it was easy to get from the faces of the players - and even from the half-baked curses that came out of their mouths - that they were not happy. He wanted the players to practice the alternative tactic he had come up with on paper before applying it on the field in tomorrow's game. When the game started the next day, first, they tried to resist the opponent with the set offence they had always played. Nevertheless, as the coach predicted, the opponent was powerful and increased the difference to more than 20 points. The coach took a timeout with six to seven minutes remaining in the game. He changed the game strategy and switched to the tactic they had practiced the previous night. The score difference went down to 20 points, then 15, and then to single digits! However, time was also running out. If they could score a basket from their last attack, they could make it to the final by knocking out the favorite team of the tournament in the semi-final. According to the coach, the referee made a bad call on their last offence, so they could not score and lost the game. However, it was still an outstanding achievement to take the team from the bottom of the league to the semi-finals of the Turkish Cup.

The team finished 11th in the league at the end of the season. Although the team was not in the top 8 and did not make the playoffs, they reached their goal of not being relegated. Even though they lost to their rivals in the Izmir derby, the most symbolically important game of the season, they reached the semi-finals of the Turkish Cup. At the end of the season, the club management offered the coach a new 3-year contract. However, in the summer of 2006, the top executives of the

company's branch in Turkey changed, and the new management decided to close the professional basketball branch.

As the Technical Coordinator of the Anadolu Efes Basketball Team between 2010 and 2014, Çetin Yılmaz played a key role in reaching the Euroleague quarter-finals and Turkish League final. In 2014, he retired, and as of December 2023, he was still the Chairman of the Turkish Basketball Coaches Association's Board of Directors and working as an instructor at coach training seminars. As I explained in detail on the first page of the case, Yılmaz is also a management consultant and a speaker at conferences and seminars organized by the most respected Turkish and global companies and gives speeches on topics like "team spirit", "leadership", "productivity", "personal development", and "motivation".

4.1.1 Findings – Case I

The main purpose of the study is to identify loneliness at the top, to examine the impact of the unique challenges of top positions on leaders' loneliness, and to explore the ways in which leaders manage loneliness. Therefore, I will analyze the findings of the case study of Çetin Yılmaz under these two headings: (I) the effects of antecedents of loneliness at the top on the coach's loneliness and (II) the coach's methods for coping with loneliness at the top.

4.1.1.1 Antecedents of the leader loneliness

In this part of the study, I will examine the extent to which Çetin Yılmaz, as a leader, was vulnerable to factors that could lead to loneliness at the top or, on the contrary, when he was able to cope with these factors, how he managed to do so.

Individual antecedents of loneliness at the top

Excessive workload and responsibilities

Top executives describe their work as challenging, demanding, draining (of their energy and time), full of meetings, overwhelming, complex, requiring constant policy-making, consuming in terms of personal/family life, and intense (Bell et al., 1990; Feldman, 2002; Brett & Stroh, 2003; Muna & Mansour, 2009, Zumaeta, 2019). Similarly, Çetin Yılmaz felt like a gamer with a joystick in his hands when coaching a team. Starting with the first game of the season and ending with the last, he was working 24/7 (BAKTAD, 2020). He described what a typical working day was like at the top in the following words:

I was only thinking about my work, even in my sleep. My mind was there all day long. I was not a normal person. When I eat, even when I go to the toilet, my mind was on my work. Unfortunately, my private life takes a back seat. I do not claim that I was right. People only live once; should they put their private life and family on the back burner by living in such stress to solve crises at the top? No! Is this crazy? Yes! Did I waste my life for work? Yes! My psychiatrist asked me these questions, and I said yes, you're right! Is it worth it? It is not! So why did I do all this? I don't know! But this is the only way to solve crises at the top. This is the only way to do a job at the top properly. If you are a technician or a civil servant, you just do your job and can go on vacation. However, as a leader, this is truly the only way to solve crises and become a champion. Let me reinforce this with a scene. It was 2:30 a.m., I was up in bed and cursing loudly for something. My wife was hugging my legs, crying her eyes out, saying, "Çetin, calm down, Çetin, you are dreaming; it's not real," and then I wake up. So, crises can only be solved by living them every single moment. It is very tragic, isn't it?

Top managers in previous studies reported that long working hours caused the burnout and fatigue and also leading to a deterioration in those relationships, especially those with their family (Bell et al., 1990). As can be seen, beyond fatigue, the high workload also had severe consequences for Çetin Yılmaz's work-life balance, reducing the time he spent with his family. Throughout his active coaching career, to fulfill the demands of his job, Yılmaz rarely had the opportunity to take a vacation with his family, and he had to endure the consequences of this sacrifice.

When asked how he balanced his work and daily life and how his excessive workload affected his family and his relationship with his wife and children, Yılmaz gave the following candid response:

I had no private life... (silence) I missed my wife all the time. I missed my son all the time. For example, my son was a very good basketball player, and he got a scholarship from California State to play basketball in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Nevertheless, I've seen him playing basketball just three times in my entire life. I don't know how my son plays basketball. It's excruciating, you know. (silence) I feel like I'm in therapy right now. (His eyes got teary.) (*NCAA: The most elite college basketball league in the world. Many of the best players in the world played in this league before joining to the NBA.)

It is a remarkable finding that the coach, who has watched thousands of basketball players in his lifetime, could watch the games of his only child, his son, a good basketball player playing in the NCAA, only three times. It reminds me of the clichéd scene in Hollywood movies: A little girl has been preparing for an event (ballet, theater, dance, etc.) all year. She was about to go on stage, but more than the excitement of the performance, she had been thinking about her father all evening. Could he make it? Meanwhile, there was a new crisis in her father's office, and he could not come to see the show. Unaware of this, the child anxiously stares at the empty seat in the audience -where her father was supposed to be sitting- and continues to wait for him. What makes the case of Yılmaz even more dramatic (beyond the fact that it actually happened) is that, in this case, the child has the same profession as his father. So, even though he was one of the world's most elite athletes of his age in the sport his father coached, he was still affected by his father's work-life imbalance. It is impossible to argue that the lack of attention that Yılmaz's son experienced in his youth did not impact their relationship today and the intense loneliness that the coach feels.

Moreover, Çetin Yılmaz sincerely shared how the work-life imbalance caused by the heavy workload and responsibilities he undertook affected his relationship with his wife and the deep loneliness he felt as a result as follows:

"My wife's life had always been about missing me. She waited for me at home while I was working. I left my job at Efes basketball team in 2014; I retired from the sports industry and feel that I have been living since then. Should a lifetime be spent like this? I don't know. If someone says, "I wish you were with your wife every day. You could earn less money, but you wouldn't miss your wife," s/he is also right. But I think that's what it takes to be a successful leader."

Finally, at the end of the interview, Çetin Yılmaz said that one song described his relationship with his wife very well and reflected his feelings towards her in the best possible way. The coach stated that during his busy work life, every time he came home from a match, away game, or training session and opened the door, there was a fear inside him that his wife might not be able to take it anymore and had left him. With this feeling, the song started playing in his head each time, and he still experiences it every time he comes home. After the 3.5-hour interview, when the coach was seeing me off, and we realized that his wife was not at home, he said that he felt the same fear again, and the song started playing in his head:

Belongings have been packed up with you.
(Eşyalar toplanmış seninle birlikte)
Remembrances have disseminated to the room, everywhere
(Anılar saçılmış odaya her yere)
That smell I like isn't in this house anymore
(Sevdiğim o koku yok artık bu evde)
You (Sen)
On the side and corner, your smile has been lost
(Kıyıda köşede gülüşün kaybolmuş)
Please don't leave me, loneliness is biting...
(Ne olur terketme yalnızlık çok acı...)

To summarize, as argued, too much workload and responsibility make leaders lonely at the top due to many factors, such as leaving them with no time or energy to spend with their families. Yılmaz's case fully confirmed this proposition.

High-level burden for decision-making

Top managers have the ultimate responsibility for critical decisions and, therefore, see themselves as the most natural representative of the organization (Collinson, 2005). Similarly, Çetin Yılmaz stated that when they won games, people treated him like a king, but the players were even more treated like a king than he was. When they lost games, the coach was considered the only one responsible. Ergin Ataman, the coach of Anadolu Efes, who won back-to-back EuroLeague Championships in 2021 and 2022, gave the same statement recently after the game against Partizan: "If we win the game, the players are kings; if we lose the game, I am the only one responsible". However, Ataman made this comment resentfully as a criticism of those who think like that (maybe the media, the fans, or the club's executives). Nevertheless, in the case of Cetin Yilmaz, this perspective, which is exhausting for coaches, was adopted by the coach himself. The coach adopted this as his motto in life, but this hurt him a lot and made him feel very lonely. Çetin Yılmaz always thought he was the only one to blame after each loss, but this perspective harmed his inner peace:

When a team loses a game, it's not because of a low budget -because I was awarded "coach of the year" when I was coaching both a low-budget team and a high-budget one. When a team loses a game, it's not because the referee was bribed or the players played poorly; as the coach, it was my duty to make the players play well and beat the opponent. When I was coaching, I never said, "We lost because of the referee's poor decisions" or "We lost because we played away". The strength of the opponent or pressure of the opponent fans cannot be the reason for the defeat; many teams have won against clubs like Real Madrid and Olympiacos away, which means that away games could be won. Or if other teams won away and my team could not, it was my fault

as the coach. I had to improve myself, transform myself, differentiate myself. I always felt lonely after losing a match because I never thought it was someone else's fault. That's one of the reasons for my loneliness at the top.

Yılmaz believed that internal dynamics were the main determining factor, not only in his job but also in everything else in life. He explained how this mindset affected him, especially in times of crisis, difficult situations, or critical decisions, as follows:

The determining factor in everything in life is internal dynamics. External dynamics only affect, but internal dynamics determine. For example, you bring soil from the Mekong Delta, water from Greenland, and fresh air from Antarctica; if the seed is dead, it will not flourish since the internal dynamics will not allow it. Therefore, external dynamics are only influential; internal dynamics are decisive. This is one of the main points of my philosophy. When I lost a match, it was due to the internal dynamics. So, in times of crisis, important decisions, and major defeats, I, as the leader at the top, was always left alone and suffering.

Çetin Yılmaz explained that as a result of the strong sense of responsibility he felt, he was in a constant struggle with himself. Even when talking to his players or his wife, he experienced some conflicts in his inner world:

I think everything in nature has an antagonist* of itself, and I have an "antagonist Çetin" inside me, too. This Çetin is like my auditor. Whatever I do, he blames it on me. For example, when I argue with my wife, this voice gets angry with me and says, "Is it worth offending one of the most important people in your life over such an insignificant issue?". Or when I get angry with one of my players, the Çetin in my head blames me by saying, "If he could make the pass you want him to make, he would play in the NBA, not in this team. A good coach doesn't punish, he teaches! So, you didn't teach him, that's why he is making that mistake." In short, my inner voice told me that I was wrong in every situation and made me feel guilty after every loss. (Antagonist*: In fiction, a person who is responsible for preventing the main character (protagonist). Also known as the opponent or the enemy. The opposite of the main character.)

In summary, the coach was angry with himself and questioned himself even while showing his players their mistakes. The fact that the coach was so hard on himself might not only result from being at the top as a leader but also explain how he made it to the top. Because Çetin Yılmaz was able to criticize himself so much, to

see his mistakes, and to take responsibility for his decisions -and even for everything that happened around him- he was able to perform a challenging job that many people can only dream of doing, staying at the top for two decades. On the other hand, Çetin Yılmaz paid the price for this; he was constantly divided even within his head. In other words, he had the burden of constant self-criticism in exchange for the blessing of constant self-improvement. As a result, the coach's high sense of responsibility and critical view of himself turned out to be extremely painful for him and led to intense loneliness at the top.

Lastly, I will share an insight into a possible answer to the questions that even Çetin Yılmaz himself could not answer, such as "Why couldn't he watch his son's games?" "Why did he always long for his wife?" and "Why did he endure all these challenges?" and this answer is related to the high-level burden of accepting the responsibility to be at the top and be the ultimate decision-maker. When Yılmaz assumed a position, he considered the responsibility associated with that position as he said, "It's all in my philosophy of life; it's all about earning it!" and shared the following words about a movie he recalled:

There is a movie called Saving Private Ryan. Four brothers go to war, three of them die, and the commanders decide to send the only surviving brother (Ryan) back home. But Ryan is on the front line, so a team is formed to rescue him from there. Ryan is worth saving since he has not abandoned his squad and fights until he completes his mission. As he fights, the team that comes to rescue him has to fight, and as they fight, some of the soldiers in the team die one by one. Finally, the battles end and the mission is completed. Private Ryan is saved, and he can go back home. But during the last battle, Captain Miller (played by Tom Hanks), the head of the rescue team, is shot and lies on the ground. Ryan is at his side, thanking him, not knowing that he is going to die. The dying team leader says to Ryan: "Many of us died to save you. Many soldiers died so that you could live. Earn it!"

By saying this striking phrase, Captain Miller urged Ryan to live a good life and make the sacrifices of those who died to save him worthwhile. The fact that Yılmaz was so moved by this tragic scene, which ended with death and an emphasis

on the concept of earning, reminded me of a tragic loss he experienced in his own life. Çetin Yılmaz, who took over the Çukurova Basketball Team as an assistant coach alongside head coach Osman Erverdi, successfully managed the team with Erverdi for two years. Erverdi and Yılmaz, who had been close friends since high school, took responsibility and made decisions together, and Erverdi always showed his trust and appreciation for Yılmaz in front of the players and the club's executives. The tragic death of Osman Erverdi in a car accident in 1985, along with his wife and children, devastated Yılmaz deeply. While he did not keep any basketball-related items in his room, except for a basketball, and kept all his medals in a box, the whistle Erverdi used as a coach is still on Yılmaz's library shelf (This was the only souvenir he showed me during the interview). After such a tragic loss, Çetin Yılmaz took on the role of head coach at the professional level for the first time, replacing his high school friend who passed away. Thus, although he did not realize it then, and perhaps still does not, he bore the "cost of earning" that affected him for the rest of his life and inspired the title of this case study.

To summarize, as argued, the burden of decision-making, namely holding the most responsible position and being the ultimate decision-maker, makes leaders lonely. The analysis of Yılmaz's experiences fully confirmed this proposition as well.

Unmet need for authenticity

In previous studies, leaders indicated that being in a managerial position requires them to pretend while they perform their tasks (Jackson, 1977), and behave in a certain way, and this prevented them from expressing themselves honestly and engaging with others authentically. Unlike them, Çetin Yılmaz stated that he never

fell into the trap of not being himself and refused to behave in certain ways simply because his job required it. Yılmaz explained that it is very wrong to have an insincere attitude and that this is not sustainable in the long run -during a short conversation we had with him even before the interview began- with the following words:

If you are not sincere when you lead, no one will believe you. Wearing a mask, i.e., pretending, is not sustainable because tough days will arrive eventually. In regular times, you can wear makeup and act by hiding yourself, but in difficult times, your true face comes out. Someday, it rains, and the makeup comes off. When it rains, and your real face is exposed, it is a bigger shock to others because not only do your ugly features show, but you look much uglier with the makeup coming off. When under pressure, if the coach says or does something very different than before, the player thinks, "This is the real face of this man; he is not the person he has shown up to now; he was just pretending." At that point, the bond between the coach and the player breaks, and the sincerity in the relationship ends. Therefore, when you are leading, you need to be genuine, real, authentic; you need to be yourself.

Yılmaz also stated that the primary job of leaders is to positively influence the people they work with and to guide them in the right direction. He noted that if leaders, while leading authentically, projects out every negative feature they have, the people around them will not like these negative qualities; on the contrary, they will feel annoyed. In this case, followers will not be influenced by the leader and will not follow them. As a result, Yılmaz believes that leaders should not mask their weaknesses but should not expose them, either. According to Yılmaz, as the only way out of this paradox, leaders should not wear a mask but constantly improve themselves. In other words, a person can be a leader only if they act authentically and constantly improve themselves; there is no other way.

This solution might have a positive impact on leader-follower relationships and organizational outcomes. On the other hand, constantly working to improve oneself puts a lot of burden on the leader. Accordingly, Yılmaz's approach to

leadership increased his effectiveness as the leader and made the organizations he worked for more successful, but it also increased the burden on him enormously.

Secondly, previous research has indicated a conflict between leaders' "natural way of being and the behaviors they consider necessary to fulfill their role". This conflict puts the leader in the difficult position of hiding their personality, feelings, or thoughts in certain situations. For example, in past studies, some managers said they could not be themselves and that there was a conflict between their essence and what they needed to do to achieve the organizational objectives. For example, they do not have a chance to choose with whom to spend time at work. Thus, they spend time with the people they must be with, whether good or bad, which requires much effort (Zumaeta, 2019). Çetin Yılmaz, on the contrary, expressed his love and respect for his players and his sincere happiness to be with them in the following words:

I really liked all my players, and I got on with all of them. Anytime I saw my coaching staff, my players, Pete Williams, Larry Richard, Orhun (Ene), and Harun (Erdenay), in practice, I thought, "I can overcome anything with these people." I had great respect and love for them. I believed nothing would happen to us; we could get through anything with these players, so I felt calm and peaceful.

Finally, in previous studies, the inability to be oneself mainly focused on relationships with other people. However, in the case of Çetin Yılmaz, there was a major conflict between the requirements of the coach's job and his inner world, and to fulfill the demands of his position, he had to sacrifice the lifestyle in which he could be happy. In other words, his job as a leader, which required him to work very hard, not only affected his family relationships but also conflicted with his inner world -i.e. how he liked to be-. The coach expressed this situation in the following words:

If there were a competition to determine "who loves being lazy the most", I would be in the top five in the world. The most enjoyable thing for me is to lie around and do nothing. I love to be lazy. However, to be a champion, one has to work like crazy, and I could only be a champion by working like crazy.

In conclusion, previous studies suggested that leaders experience a conflict between what their job requires and what they desire. Thus, they felt obliged to pretend, even creating a separate persona if necessary. Consequently, it was found that this resulted in outcomes such as the inability to accept criticism (Zumaeta, 2019). On the other hand, Çetin Yılmaz drew an opposite profile to the leaders who were reported in previous studies. He did not experience a conflict between his personality and job requirements, and he did not need to pretend or create a separate persona. Yılmaz did not fall into the trap of pretending in his relationships with others, and he believed that his sincere and genuine approach was the reason for his long-term success throughout his long professional career.

Nevertheless, demonstrating a different and authentic leadership approach forced him to work harder to continuously improve himself, increasing his workload and responsibilities and supporting his loneliness at the top. Also, he was a leader who did not perceive criticism as an attack on himself. On the contrary, he was very open to criticism; he was his own harshest critic. Although these self-criticisms fostered his development, they also affected him negatively regarding achieving inner peace, feeding his loneliness at the top.

To sum up, the analysis of Yılmaz's experiences rebuts the proposition that leaders cannot behave authentically, as Yılmaz showed that it was possible. Therefore, I will discuss (i) the concept of authentic leadership, (ii) how Çetin Yılmaz's responses indicate that he is an authentic leader, and (iii) the impact of authentic leadership on loneliness at the top in the discussion section.

Relationship with superior(s) & peers

In previous studies, top managers reported "the presence of others in the workplace does not automatically lead to the availability of social support" (Lindorf, 2001, p. 281). Yılmaz's relationship with his superiors, namely the club presidents, was not always positive; in fact, it was often challenging. First, Yılmaz shared the following anecdote that he had experienced with a club president, although he did not specify who this president was: "When I made a call during a match, such as replacing a player with his substitute, and we ended up losing, the president was telling everyone he saw all week why my judgement was wrong." The lack of support from the club president, the one any coach expects to receive the most, must have been an unforgettable experience for Yılmaz, as he expressed this memory with sadness in his voice many years later.

As previously mentioned, in the last period of his professional coaching years, when Yılmaz was coaching the Tuborg basketball team, the players got stressed, panicked, and made mistakes at the end of a match, and they lost the symbolically most crucial game of the season, the İzmir derby. At the end of the game, the coach, preparing to scold his players because they were afraid of the rival fans, found himself in an unexpected situation. The club president suddenly entered the locker room and started shouting at the players, forcing the coach to face a severe dilemma. Either he would remain silent and risk damaging his leading position in the eyes of the players, or he would risk being fired by going against the president, even though he thought the president was right in what he said. While on the verge of this challenging decision, Yılmaz weighed the pros and cons of his options, and then he stood up to the president and had a conflict with him. Although he was not fired after

this incident, his tenure at the club ended when the basketball branch was closed at the end of the season.

To summarize, Yılmaz shared exciting examples from his professional life about his relationships with the most significant figures above him, the club presidents, and he provided evidence that the lack of support from these superiors affected him negatively, thus confirming the proposition.

Relationship with subordinates

- Subordinates are less supportive towards their leaders

What a top manager desires most is for their subordinates to be committed to organizational goals and support the leader and the organization by working selflessly and giving everything they can. Yet, in previous studies, top managers complained that they do not receive such support from their subordinates. As mentioned in the literature review, subordinates do not share the passion and vision of leaders. Therefore, leaders must carry the burden of commitment and responsibility alone (Dor-Haim, 2023) and feel lonely at the top. On the contrary, Yılmaz shared a striking example of how he was able to get support from his subordinates. Like top executives expect their middle managers to work selflessly, coaches expect their players to support them by working devotedly for their coach, teammates, and the club, putting everything they have on the field, and helping the team win championships. Similarly, Yılmaz stated that one of his African-American players promised him and his teammates to make the team win the championship, that he worked hard to fulfill this promise, and that he was one of the two most outstanding players who led the team to win the title at the end of the season.

Yilmaz also described the event that made him receive this support from his player in detail. During a match played in Belgrade, a racist opponent player teased and bullied this Afro-American player. After the match, his player got into a fight with the player who bullied him during the match. Seeing this, when the other players of both teams got involved in the fight, a huge clash started between tens of powerful, athletic men. Çetin Yilmaz, who found himself in the middle of a massive fight by giants twice his body, had to decide at that moment. He could have gone directly to the locker room and defended himself from all possible attacks. He could try to break up the fight. Alternatively, he could get into the heart of the fight even if he knew the painful outcome for him. The first option was unacceptable, as he could never escape the fight while his players were in it, which would have meant losing the team's trust altogether. Secondly, there was no point in breaking up the fight between the players because the police were already trying to do it. However, according to the coach's narrative, the King Kong-like giant basketball players could rule out the police officers by hitting them into each other while officers were clutching players' arms to stop them. Although the coach knew he would be beaten badly, he joined the fight, thinking, "If my team was in a fight, I had to be with them as their leader." The coach preferred to be beaten rather than break the glass cup that represented the trust of his players in him. By the time they could throw themselves into the locker room at the end of the fight, everyone was so tired, and some were even covered in blood. The African-American player whom the team fought to defend asked the coach for a word and said: "The white men fought for me for the first time in my life. And I will make you champion at the end of the season". He kept his promise and became one of the two who played the most significant role in the championship.

To summarize, Yilmaz got extra support from his player and the team even won a championship thanks to his player's support. However, to earn this support, the coach was willing to fight for his player and beaten by men twice his size. I realized that the core of this incident was the strong relationship between the coach and his players and that at the bottom of this strong relationship was the coach's sincerity. In a moment of the interview independent of the above story, the coach stated that he did not need to pretend to gain the trust of his players:

I didn't need to pretend to win the heart of my players. For instance, I didn't need to pretend to build a bond with African-American players by talking about African-American rights. I am well aware of the problem they face, i.e., the racial discrimination and oppression against black people in the U.S. His problem is already part of my worldview. When I shared my view with the players, their respect for me increased.

In sum, "being himself" and building a relationship based on trust with his players and technical staff is an important part of Çetin Yılmaz's leadership approach. Even this was much more important to the coach than winning a game because trust has always been at the center of his leadership principles throughout his career. The coach explained the importance of trust with these words:

Trust is the most fundamental element in the relationship between a coach and a player. And once it is broken, it cannot be rebuilt. It's like a glass vase; once broken, it will never be the same again. When the trust is broken, the player perceives everything you've experienced with him up to that point, every dialog, every interaction, and every word you've said to motivate him in a negative way. He negatively encodes all these things, and he feels like the coach has actually manipulated him, deceived him, and then it is impossible for the coach to fix it.

Lastly, Yılmaz stated that although he was usually the one who was praised when the team was successful as the head coach, he also received much support from his assistant coaches. Namely, Alaattin Yakan and Murat Özyer were very competent and knowledgeable and could not be replaced in any way. Yılmaz stated that he felt strong with these assistant coaches, who are still conducting the training camps

provided by the Turkish Basketball Federation, by his side and supporting him.

Stating that having top-level assistant coaches and receiving strong support from them is not unique to him, Yılmaz said that Aydın Örs, a 6-time Turkish Basketball League champion, gave credit to Ergin Ataman and Oktay Mahmuti, who were his assistant coaches in the past, and that he would not have been so successful without their support. Former assistant coaches of Örs still serve Turkish basketball, for example, Ergin Ataman, who won the Euroleague twice as the head coach of Anadolu Efes.

In conclusion, the proposition that "lack of support from subordinates in the workplace makes leaders lonely" is partially supported in the case of Çetin Yılmaz since his authentic leadership traits, namely his ability to "build trusting relationships", prevented him from facing such a problem. I will explain this in detail in the discussion section.

- Subordinates avoid open and sincere communication with their leaders

According to earlier studies, one of the biggest complaints of top executives was that employees are less authentic with them in many different ways. First, subordinates may see the leaders as different and separate from them and, as a result, may avoid open and sincere communication with them (Cooper & Quick, 2003). Nevertheless, Yılmaz reported that he established close relationships with his subordinates and openly and sincerely communicated with them, but that in the end, he was still lonely:

The assistant coaches I worked with were very valuable and of top quality, and I had very close relationships with them. They were committed to what we were doing and contributed with their ideas when I was not able to. So, I owe them a lot. Occasionally, I got tactics from the players in the game and was never ashamed of it. Sometimes, I implemented the ideas I got from assistant coaches or players and achieved good results; sometimes, their ideas

didn't feel right, and I didn't implement them. Nevertheless, I felt responsible for everything because I made the final decision. That's what causes loneliness.

Second, a top executive in previous research mentioned that all his subordinates laughed at his jokes since he was their boss, although he was not a funny guy at all, which made him feel disappointed, sad, and eventually very lonely (Zumaeta, 2019). However, Yılmaz stated that his experiences were contrary to previous research in terms of employees' sincerity towards him:

When I was the coach of the Ülker basketball team, we formed our own little orchestra as the technical crew. When I entered the office, all the assistant coaches would start smiling. One of them would put on some popular music, usually arabesque or a cover song (the kind of music that the lower socio-cultural class mostly listens to), and everyone would sing along. One would tap the can with his hands to keep the beat. The other would fill a pencil box with paper clips and play them like maracas. Everyone would dance. The day after losing a game, we, serious guys who had graduated from top universities, would dance together to music that wasn't really our genre. There had always been a strong sense of camaraderie among us, and that was how the staff, who came to the office upset, would feel better.

So, as a leader, Yılmaz did not encounter such things as employees not being genuine to him or laughing falsely at his jokes. In sum, Çetin Yılmaz did not experience any problems in getting sincere attitudes and feedback from his employees. Even though it is highly unusual for a coach to take tactics from a player, the coach did so voluntarily. In all of these ways, he differed from the top managers in the previous studies, who complained about the unauthentic behaviors of their subordinates. So, the proposition "subordinates avoid open and sincere communication with their leaders" is not supported in this case.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this: First, the coach had an open and friendly relationship with his employees and asked for their opinions, feedback, and support. However, the final decision had to be made by him, and at that moment, all the weight of responsibility was on his shoulders, making him feel lonely. In the

previous chapter, I explained this in detail under the heading "high-level burden for decision-making" (recall proposition 2). Second, in the previous analysis, I noted that Çetin Yılmaz, as a leader, acted authentically and sincerely (recall proposition 3). In this section, the coach reported positively on the sincerity of the subordinates towards him, too. However, in earlier studies, top managers had stated that they inevitably pretended while leading, and their subordinates were not genuine to them. All this suggests that there may be a causality between these two actions. I discuss the issue of whether a leader's approach (i.e., authenticity) can have an impact on the subordinates' approach (i.e., authenticity) in detail in the discussion section.

- Subordinates avoid socializing with their leaders

Leaders become lonely at the top since their subordinates, feeling uncomfortable or nervous around them, avoid spending time with them. On the other hand, top managers reported that they were also not always happy to spend time with their subordinates either, for example, when they have to go to a business dinner and pretend to have fun or put a forced smile on their faces every day to speed things up at work. However, Yılmaz and his subordinates' attitudes towards each other and their relationship were the opposite of what was described in earlier studies. The coach's relationship with his colleagues, namely the assistant coaches and the players, was genuinely based on mutual respect. They spent -and still spend- plenty of time together outside of work. Yılmaz described his experience as follows:

Seeing my assistant coaches always made me smile. They were like my brothers, and they still are. They worked hard and being among them made me feel strong and happy. In the office, we were dancing together without pretending. When I walked into our office, I always felt the power of being with them.

Regarding socializing in the office, Yılmaz said that 20 years ago, when it was not yet widespread in organizations, they switched to an open office layout. Instead of working in a separate room as the head coach, Yılmaz had the walls torn down, and he and all assistant coaches worked together in the same place. As in the previous proposition's analysis, Yılmaz said he was still in touch with his assistant coaches. Even on the day of our interview, he planned a dinner with one of his former assistant coaches at his house. So, it is true that his subordinates did not avoid Yılmaz; on the contrary, they liked to spend time together and even dance together in their office. Mostly, Yılmaz's ability to maintain his positive image was why his subordinates did not feel stressed or nervous around him. The coach said something quite interesting about this:

Years ago, in an interview, one of my assistant coaches was asked, "What type of a leader was Çetin Yılmaz? What impressed you the most while working with him?" He answered like this: "What impressed me the most about Çetin Yılmaz was the way he motivated all of us when things went wrong, for instance, when we lost a game. After a match we lost on Sunday, he still entered the office on Monday full of joy, energy, and self-confidence and lifted the mood of all of us. So, we started working with the highest motivation, as if we had won the last game. Thus, we won the championships without any crisis that defeats could have caused.

On the surface, the assistant coach's statements suggest that Yılmaz has been quite successful in maintaining a positive image and, as a result, making his subordinates want to socialize and work with him. However, the fact that assistant coaches were relaxed and behaved without pretending around Yılmaz resulted from the bitter experience of the coach's loneliness at the top. Yılmaz's words revealed the other side of the coin, a cost that his assistant coaches were not even aware of, and a very striking insight into his loneliness at the top:

One of the coaches I worked closely with was the one who misunderstood me the most. Honestly, when things went wrong, I could not sleep and would jump out of bed at night and cause my wife to cry (the coach here refers to the incident described in the analysis of the first proposition). Sometimes, I

felt terrible and thought about leaving the job or quitting basketball (for instance, at the beginning of the season when he coached the Beykoz team). If these walls could talk, they would tell about the nights I watched over and over again the games we lost until I detected the mistakes and found a way to fix them. I worked hard and put much effort into that. When we lost the game on the weekend, that night always went very harsh for me until I found the solution. I got relief only when I found the tactic we would implement at the next training. But as my assistant coach described, I went to the office on Monday morning so energetic, as if I had not had a hard night. That is loneliness.

In short, subordinates, e.g., assistant coaches, always saw Yılmaz's positive image. However, they were not aware of the burden the coach had to bear to maintain that image. What helped the coach to get into a positive mode was finding the right solutions to problems, but this process was extremely painful. Since Yılmaz always solved problems and presented a positive image to the outside, he minimized the troubles regarding leader-follower relationships, leader effectiveness, organizational performance and more. However, during the problem-solving process, the coach went through deep inner struggles that were not recognized by others. The only thing people saw was the coach's smiling face. As the coach named it, "This is the loneliness (at the top)".

To conclude, Çetin Yılmaz was not excluded by his subordinates, indicating the proposition "Since subordinates exclude leaders and avoid spending time with them, leaders become lonely." is not supported in this case study. However, this was due to the intense workload on the coach and his responsibility to decide how to solve crises instantly (recall proposition 1 and proposition 2). So, Yılmaz kept experiencing loneliness at the top, albeit from a different angle.

- Subordinates idealize their leaders

In earlier studies, top managers stated that one of the reasons for their loneliness is that their subordinates have unrealistic expectations of them, which leads them to

distance themselves from the leader and thus increases their stress and eventual isolation (Cooper & Quick, 2003). Similarly, Çetin Yılmaz said his subordinates, and even his superiors, still have high expectations of him, even though he retired from coaching many years ago:

Every problem that anyone I worked with faced, namely presidents', players', assistant coaches', club personnel', and masseurs' problems, became my problem, too, and it still does. I am 66 years old, and they still call me when they are in trouble. For instance, a former president I worked with 25 years ago still asks my advice when he has a family problem. Furthermore, when the son of my former player, with whom I am still so close, suffers from a health problem, he calls me to ask what he should do, even if the problem is so intimate. I helped one of the family members of an assistant coach I worked with fifteen years ago during his recruitment process. Then, I coached him for life, even after she left that job. I do not say these to praise myself; I just tell what happened. So coaching is not just for some time but lifelong, and these things tire me out.

To summarize, Çetin Yılmaz made similar statements to those of top managers in earlier studies, indicating that he suffered from the high expectations placed on him as a leader. Beyond that, in addition to striving to meet these expectations while working as a coach, Yılmaz stated that he continued to help his former colleagues even a decade after his retirement, and it was exhausting. In conclusion, the proposition "Subordinates' unrealistically high expectations of leaders make leaders lonely" is fully supported in this case.

Relationship with the stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g. fans and media)

Relationships with stakeholders impact leaders' loneliness at the top, and Yılmaz's experiences with stakeholders in the sports sector also made him lonely. In the early years of his career, during his first coaching experience at the METU basketball team, he faced the problems created by stakeholders in the sports sector. The most common stakeholders that coaches who train youth teams have to deal with and have problems with are the parents of the athletes. Although managing the

METU basketball team at the age of 21 played an essential role in the development of young Çetin Yılmaz's leadership skills, dealing with players' parent was one of the toughest parts of his job. Since his players were mentally highly developed - mainly because they were students at one of the most elite universities in Turkey-, some of their parents were believing that playing in a basketball team was a waste of time for their children. For instance, the mother of a player insisted that her child leave the team and focus on his bachelor program. The young coach, Çetin Yılmaz, on the other hand, opposed her, arguing that it would be better for the child to stay in the team, and he prevented this. When the student's mother got angry with him and told him, "He is my child; you cannot interfere," he replied, "No, you are only his mother; I am his teacher; in fact, you cannot interfere". Even though Yılmaz came out victorious, and started to give the first clues that he would do justice to his name and surname* throughout his career; he also had to enter such a conflict in his early twenties and left alone by his organization (note that Çetin means tough, and Yılmaz means tenacious, persistent, indomitable in Turkish).

Secondly, as mentioned, leading in the sports industry requires being constantly under the spotlight and permanently observed by others. Since everybody looks at them, sports leaders must watch all their speeches and behaviors. Çetin Yılmaz also felt he was constantly under the spotlight during his tenure as a coach. No matter how many championships his teams won or how many final matches they played, Yılmaz felt he had to prove himself to "his players, club executives, fans, media and opponents" in every game and in every decision he made. Yılmaz, who sees this situation as part of his job, said there is no such thing as "yesterday" in the sports sector, that past achievements are easily negligible to anyone, and that all stakeholders are constantly waiting to achieve new successes. Therefore, he felt

pressured to prove himself to all stakeholders repeatedly in every match he was in charge. In addition, Yılmaz said that when coaching ambitious teams such as Ülker and Fenerbahçe, he never had a chance to lose three games in a row. If they lost two matches, he was prepared for the third one as if it was the final game to determine his future in that team, which was very exhausting for him, making him feel lonely at the top.

When leading a famous club like Fenerbahçe, which today has more than 20 million fans, Yılmaz was the center of attention, with fans and the media criticizing every move he made, rightly or wrongly. For instance, when he implemented a revolution in basketball in the 1990s, some journalists harshly criticized the coach. Yılmaz persistently directed the tallest player on the team to shoot three-pointers, which was very unusual at the time. At the end of the season, this tallest player became the second-best three-point shooter in the entire league, and the team won the championship. The three-point shooting of taller players became a revolution in basketball in the 2010s and is quite the norm by the 2020s. However, as an innovative leader who was the first to see and implement such a revolutionary strategy, Çetin Yılmaz initially got adverse reactions from the media and fans. Aside from all this, Yılmaz was bullied by fans who disliked him for whatever reason. For example, in one match, a fan shouted at Yılmaz several times during the national anthem: "Çetin, stand up during the national anthem! You have no manners, stand up, stand up!" (Basket Dergisi, 2010). Truthfully, the coach was already standing, but it looked like he was sitting because he was shorter than 1.70 meters, and the players next to him were around 2.10 meters tall.

To conclude, Yılmaz dealt with the pressures of his players' parents in his early years as a coach and the pressures of the fans, media, and club executives as a

professional coach. Being alone against all these pressures was one dimension of his loneliness at the top. So, the proposition that "the pressure from the stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g., fans and media) makes leaders lonely" is supported in this case study.

4.1.1.2 Managing loneliness at the top

Another purpose of the study was to identify leaders' methods of coping with loneliness at the top and their sources of support outside the organization. I will now briefly summarize these and show how they fit or do not fit the case of Çetin Yılmaz.

Peer support from outside of the organization

Top executives become lonely as they rise to the top of their organizations, and their sources of support diminish with each step up the ladder. Therefore, they turn to their colleagues outside their organization for support, which was also the case for Çetin Yılmaz. Aydın Örs, his biggest rival in his career, has long been one of Yılmaz's most significant sources of support. Before explaining their relationship, I need to give the following striking information about the rivalry between him and Örs:

During the eight seasons between 1990 and 1998, no one other than these two coaches was champion! In these eight years, Yılmaz became champion three times and Örs 5 times! (During this period, Yılmaz won the first championship in the club's history with Fenerbahçe and the first and second championships in the club's history with Ülkerspor, while Örs won all his championships with Anadolu Efes. In 2007, on the 100th anniversary of Fenerbahçe's foundation, Aydın Örs won his 6th and last championship with the team formed by the merger of Fenerbahçe and Ülker).

Although they were rivals many times as coaches of opponent teams while dominating Turkish basketball in the 1990s, Yılmaz saw Örs as an older brother and shared his feelings about him as follows: "I hope everyone has such valuable, high-quality, ethical rivals like Aydın Örs. He was an excellent person and intelligence beyond coaching. In our country, artists do not like artists, singers do not like singers, and people do not like their competitors in their line of work. Nevertheless, I bow to him with respect." (Doğanay, 2020). In our interview, he said he was still very close to Aydın Örs, whom he described as "a principled, honest and brilliant person". Yılmaz said that when they coached the national team together at the 2001 Eurobasket tournament, in which Turkey came second in Europe, they became like non-biological brothers and are still very fond of each other from that time. In conclusion, the Yılmaz case confirmed that top managers get support from colleagues outside the organization to cope with their loneliness at the top.

Confidants

When top executives cannot find support from their colleagues inside and outside their organization, they seek support from two primary sources: family members and friends. Çetin Yılmaz also confirmed that he relied on both sources to get support. Firstly, regarding his friends outside of work, he stated that he still keeps in touch with his classmates from university (METU Department of Sociology) and that maintaining these relationships gives him happiness and peace of mind. He also stated that he is very close friends with the athletes from the METU basketball team and that they still keep in touch. He even stated that the medals and trophies he won during his basketball career are in a box and do not mean anything to him; on the other hand, his ongoing friendships with the METU basketball players are the most

outstanding achievements of his coaching life. Çetin Yılmaz mentioned how much he enjoys leading people and leaving a mark on them, in parallel with the previous studies that revealed top managers identified teaching and mentoring as precious for them in their efforts to cope with their loneliness at the top.

At the early years of his career, Çetin Yılmaz considered himself as a life coach more than a university basketball team head coach. Although they won the Universities Championship during his coaching position in the METU basketball team, Cetin Yilmaz cared more about the development of his players than anything else. He adopted a player-centered approach at that time and has maintained it throughout his career. He described that approach with the following words:

When developing young talents, the coach must train the young person in every sense. S/he is the daughter or son of a mother and father, and the coach needs to develop her/his intellectual capacity. Having a place in the heart of that young person is a prize more precious than any medal.

The player-centered approach he adopted was about developing the player not only as an athlete but also as a whole person. His approach left a strong impact on many players he coached on the METU basketball team. These players, who graduated from one of the best universities in Turkey, became respected businesspeople in Turkey and the world. Yılmaz said that one of his players, Ms. Melda Kündük, a professor at Louisiana State University, once asked him how he could give them that amount of knowledge and understanding, which was so surprising as the coach was only 21 years old, and players were only around 18. She reminisced the years that Yılmaz was coaching them at the METU basketball team with amazement and longing, and she said she felt as if the coach was with her during her entire life even after her graduation from the university. Another player named Filip Tahinci, the associate at Atako Transportation Shipping JSC, one of the biggest shipowners in Turkey, gave the following invaluable feedback to the coach at

a team dinner where all players, the coach, and their families met decades after their graduation:

Whenever there was a crisis at work, I asked people's permission and said, "Excuse me guys, wait a minute, I have a phone call.", and went to the next room. I was sitting and thinking, "What decision would Çetin abi* make if he were here?" (* "abi" means big brother in Turkish)

To sum up, Yılmaz's pleasure from teaching and mentoring his former basketball players was unrequited, and maintaining friendships with them and still receiving respect and compliments from them has become a precious source of emotional support for him.

Yılmaz also received much emotional support from his wife. He stated that his wife has been with him throughout his career, always waiting for him when he went to tournaments and camps and supporting him even from a distance. He also stated they have similar characteristics, such as his wife being a natural, never-pretending person like him. Being natural is essential because, in previous studies, another example of top managers' experiences of not being themselves was that leaders were influenced by sociocultural pressures to embody their success in top positions to other elements. In other words, they felt pressured to do certain things, buy certain brands of clothes, and live in a particular neighborhood in order to show that they had the status that comes with high salaries. Otherwise, they were looked down upon and could not advance in their careers (Zumaeta, 2019). Çetin Yılmaz stated that they did not endeavor to show such "harmony" with other people in their sector. He earned a good income in return for his hard work, but they refused to spend it to be like other colleagues. Yılmaz said those who earn in their economic conditions buy diamond rings, furs, and expensive bags, constantly shop at the mall, and go on trips to America or other places. However, his wife was not like that; she was like a Swedish or Norwegian woman in terms of mentality. She did not

discriminate between people, participated in marches of non-governmental organizations, and celebrated the 1st of May Labor Day. As a result, Yılmaz chose to be like himself, to lead and live in this way. The fact that his wife has the same characteristics supports this authentic characteristic of Yılmaz. To conclude, the proposition that leaders can overcome their loneliness at the top by getting support from his wife and friends was confirmed in the Yılmaz case.

Self-development and self-motivation

In addition to getting support from colleagues outside the organization, family members or friends, leaders can also develop themselves to cope with the loneliness at the top. At this point, as already mentioned, leaders can specifically improve their problem-solving skills. Yılmaz also made it a lifestyle to develop himself intellectually and draw on the knowledge of great thinkers to improve his problem-solving skills.

- Standing on the shoulders of giants

I used this title to contribute to the "loneliness at the top" literature, specifically its coping mechanisms. "Standing on the shoulders of giants" is a metaphor for "using the understanding gained by the great thinkers who have gone before to make intellectual progress". Its most well-known and popular expression is found in a 1675 letter by Isaac Newton: "If I have seen further [than others], it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." (Newton, 1976). Çetin Yılmaz also benefited from his intellectuality during his entire career to lead his team to success and to improve his players' mood. As a METU Sociology graduate and a former United Nations Development Programme employee, the coach defined himself as a person who

constantly reads and develops himself intellectually. Since he was just 14 years old, he had chosen a topic every month, read books and watched movies, and equipped himself on that topic throughout the month. He believed a leader could not solve crises just by acting as he felt; such a method would not work in the long run, and intellectuality was the key to crisis management. In this section, I shared in detail two experiences of how Çetin Yılmaz, using his intellectual background and reading important sources, saved himself from situations that could have led to his failure and possible loneliness.

Firstly, Çetin Yılmaz turned the biggest crises of his career into one of the outstanding achievements by converting a historical war strategy into a basketball game strategy. Recall the times when Yılmaz coached Sümerbank Beykoz and invented the Fabian basketball strategy. A week before the start of the season, Sümerbank Beykoz had lost three friendly games with a total of more than 150 points difference from the rivals. Thus, the coach came to a fork in the road: To resign or to remain in office. The latter probably might cause Yılmaz to face severe failure and let his career suffer a significant prestige loss. Alternatively, he could discover a way that he does not know exists yet, that he cannot see. At first, the coach decided to resign. Although he informed the club executives about his decision, he was given a 4-day vacation to reconsider. At the beginning of this holiday, Çetin Yılmaz started reading a book on women's rights to keep a promise he made to Seyhan Aydınligil, one of his instructors from METU Sociology department, which he could not keep for eight years. In one of the methodological discussions on the development of women's rights, a point of view referred to as "Fabian" was being criticized, so Çetin Yılmaz wondered about this concept and where it comes from. When he searched, he learned that the word "Fabian" derives

from the name of Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus, a Roman commander who invented a delaying, defensive military strategy during the Second Punic War. Fabius had been aware of the military superiority of the Carthaginians, so he had refused to fight with them in a large, pitched battle as the Roman army had always done. Instead, he had kept his troops close to Carthaginians to wear them down through small, harassing actions. Thus, he had given Rome time to recover its strength. The Romans, who had built a large army with soldiers from all over the empire in these two years, managed to destroy the enemy, which weakened over time.

Having read all this, Çetin Yılmaz pondered how to adapt it to basketball and thus developed a strategy he called "Fabian basketball." According to this strategy, when the team was attacking, the players stood still for the first 15 seconds of the 30 seconds they had to attempt a shot, so the opponents had no choice but stood still, too. Thus, the coach slowed down the pace of the games a lot and overcame the disadvantage of having a team consisting of a limited number of players who were mostly veterans. With this strategy, the team could resist the opponents, even beating the teams they were beaten by a 50+ points difference in the pre-season training camp. At the end of the season, he prevented the team's relegation to the lower league and was chosen as the most successful coach of the season.

Secondly, Çetin Yılmaz had won the hearts of his players by overcoming many major and unexpected crises, thanks to his intellectuality. Once, he was coaching in Ülkerspor, the highest-paid player on the team, who was also the leading scorer and rebounder, came up to Yılmaz before a big game, saying that he wanted to talk to him privately. There were only a few minutes left before the game started, and the other players were about to take the field. However, the coach stayed with this former NBA player in the locker room, locked the door at the player's request, and

did not let anyone in. Believing that he had finally found a private place to talk, the player suddenly started to cry on the coach's shoulder, stating that he trusted him as he had never trusted any coach before. Shocked by this situation, Çetin Yılmaz asked the player why he was crying and got an unexpected answer: "I'm so scared to play today; I don't want to."

This player was quite different from the others on the team in terms of personality. He was a deeply religious, introverted, and egocentric person who read the Bible over and over again. According to the coach's description, he had an egocentric mindset, meaning that he had a mentality that saw himself, his family, and his belief system at the center and positioned everyone else according to their commitment to that belief system. As a result, the coach was either going to accept the player not playing that day or try different ways to persuade him to play. For instance, he could have tried to motivate the player to play for the team or himself. He could also intimidate the player with fines and force him to play. Alternatively, he could try another way.

Accepting the player's request was totally unacceptable because not having the player in the game meant that the team would definitely lose it. Also, it would inevitably be heard by others in the sports industry that the player was not playing because he was afraid, which would damage the player's career and reputation. Due to the player's unique characteristics, other arguments which might affect many players were not going to affect him at all, such as "You will have to pay a very high fine if you don't play." or "Play for your friends, play for the team." In addition, the coach's attempt to motivate the player by putting himself forward might not work, and it would cause him to lose his unique position in the eyes and heart of the player.

At that moment, when he was weighing the options, the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18: 10–14) he had read in the Bible just a couple of days ago came to the coach's mind. It was about a shepherd who had a flock of 100 sheep, and one of them wandered off and got lost. The shepherd searched high and low for the lost sheep until he found it. The coach, who was not Christian, quoted "the Parable of the Lost Sheep" by even stating the verse numbers and caught his player quite off guard. Touching his player's heart, the coach threw the room key under the door to the manager waiting outside and said to his player:

What matters to me is not the ten players on the field, but the one player left behind, namely you. I cannot leave you behind, so I will stay here with you. Either you're going to let me sit here with you, or we're going to the field together. You'll only play for the first few minutes of the game; then I'll take a timeout, pretend to be mad at you, kick you off by yelling, and you will not play for the rest of the game. So, when the game is over, and we lose, the club executives, the media, the fans, and your teammates will not be angry with you but me, and they will hold me responsible for the defeat. No one will know about this conversation between us.

Upon this conversation, the player agreed to take the field just before the warm-up period was over. In the meantime, the coach told the point guard to make all attacks through this player in the center and achieved an extraordinary result. The player, who was crying on his shoulder a few minutes ago, had performed outstandingly in the first five attempts, and he was not Çetin Yılmaz but the coach of the opponent who took the timeout. All the fear of the player who had cried just a few minutes ago was gone. He played until the final whistle and became the top scorer of the game with over 20 points.

As a result, in the first story, Çetin Yılmaz read a book on the women's rights movement after he resigned from his position, on the promise he made to his professor from the Sociology department he graduated. Curious about a concept he saw in this book, he read Roman history. Thus, he returned to his office, transformed

a war strategy he saw in Roman history into a basketball strategy, and succeeded. In the second case, he influenced a Christian athlete by referring to a passage from the Bible that he had read, thus motivating him to perform well. In both crises, Yılmaz, who was all lonely at the top, overcame his loneliness thanks to his intellectual curiosity and knowledge.

- Fulfilling personal passion and influencing others

Another coping mechanism is living one's passion and influencing others inside or outside the work environment. In previous studies, top managers reported that they enjoyed and found it fulfilling to lead and make their mark on others. In addition to the opportunity to influence others positively, they felt the pressure on them was reduced (Zumaeta, 2019). The following example shows the importance of chasing his dreams and fulfilling his passion for the coach at the cost of no matter what. Recall when Çetin Yılmaz developed an alternative strategy to beat their opponent in the semi-final match, and there was no time to show this strategy to the team and practice. The coach had three options to manage this crisis: (a) explain this tactic to his players before the match or during a timeout at any time in the match; (b) never explain this tactic to his players, as they do not have time to practice this tactic; (c) forcing players, many of whom were already asleep, to get out of their beds at night and train them in the hotel's ballroom.

Çetin Yılmaz believed that no matter how good a tactic is on paper if it is not practiced in training, it cannot be successfully implemented on the field. Players who would have heard the new tactic before the match or during a timeout might not have been able to apply it successfully on the field, that might have even led to worse results. On the other hand, after putting so much thought into it and finding a tactic

that could help them beat the opponent, it was unacceptable for the coach not to share it with the players.

Besides, it wasn't just that the players were going into tomorrow's game with less rest; the team also needed access to a field where they could train at that hour. So, while the players were told to be ready for practice in an hour, the staff worked feverishly to turn the ballroom on the ground floor of the hotel into half a basketball court within that hour. Tables and chairs were pushed to the edges of the hall; court lines were created on the floor with plastic tapes; a basketball hoop was simulated by placing a bucket at the top of a ladder. Thus, within an hour, the hall and the players were ready for training.

The coach told the players that he understood them, that he was aware that some of them were swearing at him, and that he didn't mind, and asked the players to trust him. Their opponent had the best players in the tournament, so Tuborg's chances of beating them in a set play were very slim indeed. However, Çetin Yılmaz was a coach who had won many championships before, and he was not going to accept defeat in advance. It was after 2 o'clock when the training ended, and the players returned to their beds with mixed feelings.

In the first three-quarters of the game, they tried to resist the opponent with the set offence they had always played, but the opponent was powerful and increased the difference to more than 20 points. The coach took a timeout with six to seven minutes remaining in the game. The morale of the players was down. However, the coach said, "Why are you upset? Heads up, we didn't do anything to be ashamed of. We just fell behind on the scoreboard against a strong opponent. The fun begins for us now! We're switching to the tactic we practiced last night in the hotel ballroom!" He both cheered the players up and changed the game strategy. The tactic worked

like a charm! The team had managed to reduce the point difference with the opponent to one basket before their final offense. According to the coach, the referee made a bad call on their last offense, so they could not score and lost the game.

The coach, who never hid behind the excuse of losing the game because of the referee, said that this was one of the calls he could not accept, besides the many refereeing mistakes he saw throughout his career. Although they did not win the semi-final game, it was still a great achievement to take the team from the bottom of the league to the semi-finals of the Turkish Cup and to lose to one of the two favorites of the tournament by a few points. The tactical genius he showed and his determination to teach this tactic to his players made them appreciate, respect, and trust him more at the end of the game. Even though they lost on the scoreboard due to a bad refereeing decision, the coach and the team felt in their hearts that they had won this game. Today, at the age of 65, the coach still imagines his team winning the game, and he said that no referee could take away this dream from him.

Thus, the bond between the coach and the players and the players' trust in the coach was strengthened. The players respected the coach's tactical know-how, creativity, and commitment to his training methods; the coach appreciated the players' determination to work no matter the circumstances and their fight on the field. This mutual respect strengthened the trust between the coach and the players. In this way, while influencing his players and leaving his mark on them with his work ethic, the coach also lived and pursued his passion. Even though he did not win the cup at the end of the process, he guided his players to believe in the importance of hard work and felt great satisfaction from this experience. He still remembers and recounts this memory with a sense of reward. As a result, the proposition that leaders

can overcome their loneliness through personal development and self-motivation was confirmed in the Yılmaz case.

To summarize the entire case (see Table 4), firstly, Yılmaz's exhaustion related to his role is at the maximum since his position fully absorbed him. Secondly, his sense of responsibility in decision-making is also great. On the other hand, he and the people around him mostly had sincere relationships based on respect. Thanks to his sincerity and positive image, he continued to spend time and socialize with his subordinates during his coaching days and even a decade after his retirement. Nevertheless, he could present this positive image to the outside and establish genuine relationships with his colleagues only because he solved problems by constantly staying up, being mindful, and going through long, tiring nights. Moreover, even today, he can never relax and has always to be alert and careful to support people around him, which is exhausting.

Table 4. The Antecedents and Coping Mechanism of Yılmaz's Loneliness

Propositions	Absolute existence of the antecedent (or managing method)	Leadership type performed to cope with the antecedent	Further need for discussion
P1: Their excessive workload and responsibilities make leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P2: Having to make difficult decisions make leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P3: While performing their duties, their obligation to abstain from the authentic expression of their emotions makes leaders lonely.	NO!	Authentic leadership	YES!
P4: As leaders move up in organizations, the number of peers and supervisors they can get support from decreases, making them lonely at the top.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P5a: The lack of support from subordinates in the workplace makes leaders lonely.	NO!	Authentic leadership	YES!
P5b: Subordinates' insincere attitudes make leaders lonely.	NO!	Authentic leadership	YES!
P5c: Being excluded by subordinates who avoid spending time with them makes leaders lonely.	NO!	Authentic leadership	YES!
P5d: Subordinates' unrealistically high expectations of leaders make leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P6: The pressure from the unique stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g., fans and media) makes leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P7: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from colleagues outside their organization.	Yes		No
P8: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from confidants, such as spouses or partners.	Yes		No
P9: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top by focusing on their self-development and self-motivation.	Yes		No

4.1.2. Discussion

It is definitely lonely at the top: How Çetin Yılmaz confirmed it

In this section, I will summarize Çetin Yılmaz's experience of loneliness. Çetin Yılmaz stated that loneliness is inevitable in senior positions and that he felt lonely while working as a coach in top clubs. Yılmaz still felt lonely even in his retirement, albeit in a different dimension. I categorized Çetin Yılmaz's statements under two main headings: workplace loneliness, and familial loneliness.

Leader loneliness at work: Firstly, Yılmaz confirmed that leaders take responsibilities that cannot be shared with others. His experience showed that leaders are lonely by the very nature of their positions since they are ultimate decision-makers. Their responsibility for making the final call, which cannot be shared with someone else in the organization, makes leaders lonely (recall proposition 2). Yılmaz summarized this situation: "When we won games, people treated me like a king, but the players were treated like a king even more than I was. But when we lost, I was considered the only one responsible. In these times, I never blamed anyone else and always focused on myself. That's why I always felt lonely when we lost". Secondly, Yılmaz confirmed that there is a "one for all, but not all for one" approach towards those at the top. He expressed that the role of a coach inevitably leads to loneliness as follows: "A coach has to prove himself to his players, club executives, fans, media, and opponents every day." So, Yılmaz had to prove his competence to everyone around him as the top executive, and when he couldn't do that, he became lonely. For instance, when they lost a game, the president told everyone he saw all week why Yılmaz's decision to replace a player was wrong. Yılmaz was under intense pressure to prove himself again and again in every decision he made. In other words, every match they lost damaged his relationships with the people around him

and isolated him by creating a gap in the quality of his relationships. First, his relationship with the president deteriorated because he showed insincere behavior and bad-mouthed Yılmaz to all the employees around him after every match they lost, which upset Yılmaz. In addition, the pressure to make the right decision all the time increased his workload because he had to watch the same position dozens of times or watch a single match several times to identify mistakes made by his players or to find a winning tactic. This increased workload caused him to spend less time with his family. For example, while he watched the game of a player he would transfer many times, he watched the game of his son, a professional basketball player, only three times in his life. So, this gap between his desire and the reality in the quality of his relationship with his son constituted the most profound dimension of his loneliness at the top.

Also, Yılmaz said that even though it's been more than ten years since he retired from coaching, he still continues to help everyone: the former president (probably not the same president above), assistant coach, players, whatever they need, and his "duty" of helping still exists. However, it's not the other way around; people didn't do much for him in the past and still don't. On the contrary, the coach was worn down by the heavy criticism from people within the organization. In other words, the coach was either criticized by those around him or helped them. In other words, he could have expected at least some reciprocity in his relationships regarding helping. However, the relationships he established were one-sided, mainly in the form of him helping others, which was very tiring for him. For this reason, there is a gap between his desire (i.e. more support from others) and reality in his relationships (i.e. he is the "giver" in his relationships at the back, now and then), making him lonely, both in the past and present.

Familial loneliness: On the websites where Çetin Yılmaz is introduced, information about his family is simply given as "married with one child." However, only a study such as this could reveal in depth what Yılmaz experienced or could not experience with his wife and child and the impact of the heavy burden of his work on the two most important relationships in the coach's life. It is enough to look at the section "Excessive workload and responsibilities" to see the intense loneliness regarding Yılmaz's relationship with his son and wife in detail. In the general discussion part at the end of the dissertation, I examined this in-depth under the title "Critics to stakeholder theory".

Authentic leadership and its impact on loneliness at the top

I have already mentioned that Çetin Yılmaz did not fall into the trap of not being himself, refusing to behave in certain ways because his job required it, or trying to project a positive image in a fake way. In our short conversation with him before the interview, he talked about the importance of being real and authentic as a leader. This approach demonstrated by Çetin Yılmaz points to authentic leadership, and in this section, I will introduce the concept of authentic leadership, show how Çetin Yılmaz's characteristics match this leadership style, and discuss its impact on leader loneliness.

The Authentic Leadership Theory was first introduced by Bill George, the former CEO of Medtronic and a Harvard Business School professor, in 2003. A leadership model that is more ethical and humane has been needed, especially after the business scandals like Enron and Arthur Anderson. In his book, George (2003) suggested leaders should develop a leadership style consistent with their character, and they should be authentic to be influential. Similarly, Luthans and Avolio (2003,

p. 243) state that authentic leaders are true to themselves, and their "authentic values, beliefs, and behaviors serve to model the development of associates." George defined five dimensions of authentic leadership: self-discipline, establishing trusting relationships, leading with heart, having solid values, and being purpose (2003). Definitions of dimensions and their relation with Çetin Yılmaz's loneliness are shared as follows:

Self-discipline: Authentic leaders are determined and self-disciplined in order to convert their values into consistent actions. They are "dedicated to developing themselves because they know that becoming a leader takes a lifetime of personal growth" (George, 2003, p. 12). The coach defines himself as a person who constantly reads and develops himself intellectually. Since he was just 14 years old, he has chosen a topic every month, read books and watched movies about that, and equipped himself on that topic throughout the month. It means he is self-disciplined and dedicated to developing himself.

This concept corresponds to self-development, which I have mentioned as a coping mechanism for loneliness. Thanks to this trait, Yılmaz continuously improved himself, and when he felt lonely (for example, in times of crisis when the responsibility of finding a solution was on his shoulders), he was able to cope with the loneliness that comes with great responsibility thanks to self-development reinforced by self-discipline.

Establishing trusting relationships: These leaders establish real and trusting relationships with their followers (George, 2003). Recall when his player suddenly started to cry on the coach's shoulder and said he trusted him as he had never trusted any coach before. In many cases, in away games or big games, players may be scared and perform poorly, and their coaches and viewers may not know precisely why.

Nevertheless, in that case, the player trusted the coach enough to voice his fear and cry on his shoulder, showing the leader's honest and trusting relationship with his player.

This is an excellent example of how those around Yılmaz could be authentic and sincere with him. Typically, a huge basketball player over 2.10 meters tall would never cry on a coach's shoulder, even though sometimes he feels fear (i.e., performance anxiety). If we hadn't heard about this incident, we wouldn't have imagined such a thing could happen. This means that the coach gave his subordinates the confidence to be sincere with him, thanks to authentic leadership and his ability to build real and trusting relationships. This was one of the coach's characteristics that made him feel less lonely.

Leading with heart: They show genuine compassion to their followers and lead with their hearts (George, 2003). Çetin Yılmaz also showed genuine compassion to his player when he was crying on his shoulder. Yılmaz said to his player, "What matters to me is not the ten players on the field, but the one player left behind, namely you. I cannot leave you behind, so I will stay with you... when the game is over, and we lose, the club executives, the media, the fans, and your teammates will not be angry with you but me, and they will hold me responsible for the defeat. No one will know about this conversation between us." The attitude of Yılmaz and the whole conversation shows that he genuinely showed compassion to his player and led with his heart.

Yılmaz's sincere and open-hearted reaction after his athlete broke down in tears in front of him is remarkable. Even in such a situation, the coach acted to protect his player. This ensured that the player put his 100% on the court that day and helped the coach as much as he could to achieve the organizational goals. I gave

an example of a single incident here, but I had already mentioned that his subordinates were generally sincere and supportive of Çetin Yılmaz, and that sincerity and support resulted from the coach's authentic leadership qualities.

Having solid values: They have solid values and act on those values. "When their principles are tested, they refuse to compromise" (George, 2003, p. 12). Recall when his team was going to play the semi-final game about 24 hours after winning the quarter-final, and there was no time to show the strategy to the team and practice because it was midnight already. Çetin Yılmaz believed that no matter how good a tactic is on paper, it cannot be successfully implemented on the field if not practiced in training. When this principle was tested, he refused to compromise. He turned the ballroom on the hotel's ground floor into half a basketball court for training at midnight. Even though they did not win the semi-final game against Ülkerspor, it had a major role in strengthening the trust between the players and the coach. Having such solid values and trying to instill them in his assistant coaches and players has helped him to gain their trust. As a result of building trusting relationships with his assistant coaches and players, he has positive experiences that not every leader can have, such as getting their support, making them feel comfortable around him and socializing with them. Thanks to all these, his experience of loneliness at the top has eased. In general terms, even though he had a severe experience of loneliness at the top, at least these factors did not endorse his loneliness.

Being purposeful: Finally, authentic leaders have a sense of purpose and are passionate about their purpose (George, 2003). By the nature of his work and his own, Çetin Yılmaz was a leader who constantly set goals for himself and his team. When he coached the METU basketball team, he challenged his players not only to

achieve sporting success but also to develop themselves. Throughout his professional coaching journey, he has always been a man of many firsts, always setting ambitious goals for his teams and working passionately to achieve them. For instance:

- Cukurova was ranked in 2nd place and 3rd place in the major league championships for the first time (1985-86 / 1986-87)
- Fenerbahçe won its first major league championship (1990-1991 season) and the first two Presidential Cups (1990 and 1991)
- Ülkerspor won its first two major league championships (1994-95 and 1997-98), the first Presidential Cup (1995), and played in the quarter-finals two times in the European Cup under Çetin Yılmaz's coaching.

All of this is related to the experience of loneliness because, as I will explain in the general discussion, crisis triggers loneliness at the top, whereas achieving success reduces it. In this respect, the fact that Yılmaz always had a sense of purpose and was passionate about achieving this purpose were the factors that made Yılmaz successful and, in this respect, alleviated his loneliness at the top.

In conclusion, Çetin Yılmaz can be described as an authentic leader. Since he was an authentic leader, as I will discuss in more detail in the following sections, he did not exhibit leader-induced reasons that could increase the social distance between leader and followers. For instance, he did not behave in a way he did not feel like, such as being more strict, because he thought his position required it. Yılmaz did not force himself to maintain a positive image or deliberately distance himself from his subordinates by using the excuse that he had to make difficult decisions.

Additionally, he did not experience the "person vs. role" conflict mentioned in the previous research (Zumaeta, 2019), and the coach even struggled to understand what this conflict refers to. By exhibiting authentic leadership, the coach avoided many

pressures and conflicts that can lead to loneliness in the workplace. Researchers in the field of leader loneliness can also focus on the relationship between authentic leadership and leader loneliness and seek to demonstrate the causal relationship between the two, whether the former eliminates or weakens the latter.

4.2. Case II: Loneliness at the top: Outstanding success, peace lasting one match

In the early 2020s, the world of Turkish football met a new leader: Hakan Karaahmet, the club president who led Giresunspor's rise to the Turkish Super League. In the summer of 2020, Karaahmet was elected as the president of Giresunspor, the most popular football club in Giresun, which is a small city in Turkey on the Black Sea coast. The club had been founded in 1925 and re-formed in 1967 as three other small clubs merged. It played in Turkish Super League (Turkish first league) between 1971 and 1977 and was back in the top flight after a 44-year absence, with the leadership of Hakan Karaahmet in the 2020–21 football season. Even though it was quite a difficult task, the president ensured that the club was not relegated from the super league in the 2021-22 season. Although Giresunspor made a promising start to the 2022–23 football season with two wins out of 3 matches, the team fell behind its rivals regarding squad depth due to financial difficulties. As of February 1, the consecutive crushing losses pushed the team into the relegation zone. The team, fans, and the president were devastated. Hakan Karaahmet, who felt the loneliness at the top to the bone, was faced with the dilemma of resigning from the club or not.

This case revealed the story of Karaahmet, who faced many difficulties during his presidency of the Giresunspor club and could not find support despite his outstanding success. Karaahmet, who considered leaving his position in the middle

of the second season in the Super League due to his experience of loneliness at the top, served as an ideal example for our case study on loneliness at the top in the sports sector. This case was written using both primary and secondary data. The qualitative data was collected directly from the president of Giresunspor, Hakan Karaahmet, by conducting an in-depth interview on 25 October 2022. Also, the secondary data was collected from his published interviews, speeches, and news articles about him and Giresunspor.

A dream come true: Back in the Super League after 44 years

Karaahmet, who was in the club's management team before his presidency, played an important role as the football branch executive in Giresunspor's promotion from the 2nd league to the 1st league in 2014. He continued to work as the football branch executive for two terms while the team was competing in the 1st league, with his goal of becoming the club president and ensuring that the team would be promoted to the Super League. On August 8, 2020, he took over the club as the president by receiving 63% of the valid votes in the election.

The first thing the president did after assuming the leadership of the club was to sign a contract with Hakan Keleş to take over as Giresunspor's head coach on August 10, 2020. During his tenure as president, regardless of the match results, Karaahmet always stood by the head coach Keleş. He may have gone down in Turkish football history as the only club president who did not fire a head coach during his presidency, but it was not easy. In the first season of Karaahmet's presidency, the team did not have a good start to the season and won only 4 of the first 11 matches (all of these wins were achieved by scoring only 1 goal more than the opponents). Although the team was ranked 8th in the league at the end of the

11th week, the president continued to work with the coach Keleş. From the 12th week onwards, the team began to win the matches and broke the 1st league record with a 12-match winning streak. In these 12 matches, the team gained 36 points and scored 24 goals while conceding only 1 goal! The winning streak, which started on December 5, 2020, ended with a defeat on February 28, 2021.

On January 5, 2021, in the middle of this winning streak, Karaahmet explained the secret of the club's success as the strong relationships he had established with the players:

We started to feel the excitement of our players when they scored goals, in the way they look at us. Our relationships and the team chemistry have been excellent; that is what is important. You cannot achieve this with money; it is seen in many wealthy teams that it cannot be done. We have become a true team and have been greatly appreciated for this. We are ranked 8th in the league regarding player wages, but we are the leader in excitement, fight, and struggle. This is a different kind of success. It happens when everyone believes in it, from the club's cleaning staff to the players. We have achieved this unity with all our employees and stakeholders. ("Giresunspor Kulübü," 2021).

Stating that the players have been happy at Giresunspor, Karaahmet emphasized that this is also a great pleasure for him, and this happiness has been the source of the great efforts put forth by the players on the field. Telling that the performance they have shown throughout the season has surprised people, he expressed that they have a team that plays with their hearts, and they hope to maintain team unity ("Giresunspor Kulübü," 2021).

Although the 12-match winning streak was broken with three consecutive defeats, the club showed a high-level performance against its rivals during the rest of the season to promote to the Super League. By achieving four wins and two draws in the remaining seven matches, Giresunspor turned the last match of the season into a final game. If they won this last league match, they would achieve their goal to promote to the Super League after 44 years. Four months after the president's

declarations about the high motivation of his players, the team won the last away match 2-1 on May 9, 2021, and was promoted to the Super League. Giresunspor, which conceded only 25 goals in 34 matches, also became the team that conceded the fewest goals in the league and, thus, the team with the best defense.

Great achievement through teamwork

Giresunspor was finally in the "Super League" after 44 years, and Hakan Karaahmet must have felt "super" to achieve this success thanks to the strong relations he had established with his team. The success undoubtedly resulted from great teamwork.

The president shared how close he was with the members of the executive board with the following words:

We had a shared sense of comradeship; we were always together in good and bad times. That is why we always looked after each other. I took into account everything that all board members said, filtered them, and if what they said was right, I made that decision without any doubt or arrogance. When you set out with the right people, they always support you on this path. This is how all our board members behaved.

The president had close relationships with not only the board members but also the coaching staff, players, and club personnel. He considered himself their older brother. Whenever he was in the club's complex, he communicated with almost everyone. He often met with the head coach and the players outside the club and hosted the players and their families in his own house. Hakan Karaahmet's wife, a lecturer in the field of communication, played a complementary role to the president regarding social relations in the club. When necessary, she could say things that the president could not say and handle the problematic relationships in the club.

The president was very pleased that he and his team had accomplished something that had not been achieved for a long time. He described his feelings as follows:

What I like the most about my job is that people follow us, believe in us, and trust us. A 7-year-old child or a 70-year-old man smiles at me with a sparkle in his eyes. Also, I am most happy about achieving something that has not happened for a long time in my city. This job is tough, but you will be thrilled when you succeed. This happiness cannot be found anywhere else.

Super League after 44 years and brand-new challenges

Karaahmet, who led Giresunspor's promotion to the Super League for the first time since 1977, endeavored for the club to compete successfully in the league during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 seasons, despite being one of the lowest-income clubs in the league. When Giresunspor started to compete in the Super League after almost half a century, the team had a tough time adapting and made a terrible start to the season. In the first five matches of the 2021-22 season, Giresunspor, which suffered four defeats and one draw, could only get one point and scored no goals. The team also lost the next match 2-1, and by the end of the 6th week, Giresunspor was in the last place in the league with one point gained. In the next game, the team played out a 1-1 draw; thus, they could only obtain two points and score two goals in seven matches.

While the president sought a solution in this difficult period, the fans and the other stakeholders were pressuring him into dismissing the head coach. Prior to this season, Hakan Keleş had worked as a head coach for only 23 matches in the Super League, with eight wins, six draws, and nine defeats, averaging only 1.30 points per match (Note that in the case of one win, one draw, and one defeat in every three games, it is possible to achieve an average of 1.33 points). Karaahmet described the time when he was under pressure to fire the head coach as follows:

At that time, there was a lot of criticism against our head coach, me, and the team; maybe these reactions were normal. People asked me, "How could you continue working with the head coach Keleş?". There may be a tendency to change head coach (in case of poor results) in club presidents. I even asked

another club president, "Are you going to change the coach?". I got the answer, "Since I can't sack myself, I will sack the coach. " It is a common thing; in case of failure, the coach goes (Ungan, 2022).

However, Karaahmet trusted head coach Hakan Keleş and did not dismiss him. Feeling the trust and support of the president, the team started to get good results from the 8th match onwards and collected 20 points in 10 games played until the 18th week, with six wins and two draws. Among these wins, the most spectacular was undoubtedly the 4-0 away win against Beşiktaş, the champion team of the previous season. From the 8th to 18th weeks of the league, Giresunspor scored 16 goals, conceded just six, and climbed up from 20th to 12th rank in the league.

In the nine weeks after this rise, the team could only achieve one win and one draw while losing seven matches. They scored six goals and conceded 15 in these nine matches. Consequently, Giresunspor ranked in 17th place in the league, which is in the relegation zone, with 12 games to go. In one of these matches, on February 12, 2022, the home team, Giresunspor, played with Fenerbahçe, one of the strongest football clubs in Turkey. Despite scoring a goal in the 2nd minute, Giresunspor lost the match 2-1; that is why the fans were angry with President Karaahmet and the team. Hakan Karaahmet shared a message on social media and expressed that these reactions against their team, which competed in the Super League for the first time after 44 years, were not fair: "It was not easy to go from being a city that regrets not being able to play with Fenerbahçe because it does not compete in the Super League to being a city that regrets not being able to beat Fenerbahçe. One chooses what to be sad about." ("Giresunspor Başkanı," 2022). The president stated that they experienced great loneliness as the executives of the club and got very little support while continuing their struggle to stay in the league. In this 1-month period, he even considered resigning from the club. He was aware that the financial sources he

provided to the club could not be enough alone. The club was in need for much more support to be permanent in the Super League ("Hakan Karaahmet," 2022).

Even under these circumstances, the president insisted on his decision not to fire the head coach and explained that period with the following words at the end of the season:

I said this from the beginning: 'We will not act as you are used to because this method is wrong. Maybe why football in Turkey was criticized so much and why there were few success stories, because of the lack of stability. Now Giresunspor has stability. No matter what happens, the head coach and the entire team act together and solve the problems. We showed this to Turkey. We said that the team may get poor results, but if you stand behind the head coach, he can change these results (Ungan, 2022).

The head coach and his staff, who received full support from the president, led their team to defeat their rivals in the most critical matches. In the period that started three days after the president's press conference on February 24, 2022, the team won 4, drew 1 in 6 games, and climbed above the relegation zone with 13 points difference. During this 6-match period, in which the average of 2 points per match was exceeded, the team defeated 3 of its direct rivals in the fight to stay in the league (i.e., Göztepe, Rizespor, and Malatyaspor), who will be relegated to the lower league at the end of the season. Especially, their away win against 17th-placed Rizespor was crucial. While Giresunspor not only added a major victory to their belt but finally lifted themselves out of the line of relegation, Rizespor were relegated from the Super League, where they had been competing for many years.

In his interview at the end of the season, Karaahmet stated that they set an example for Turkish football. He emphasized that the team achieved great success in his first term as president by rising to the Super League after 44 years and that they did this without any head coach changes. Reminding that they failed to score a goal in the first five weeks of the Super League, Karaahmet said:

Maybe the head coach could have been dismissed if there were managerial problems or commitment issues, but poor match results should not be a criterion alone for replacing a head coach. We did not change the head coach; the success story came out of this. What would have happened if we had dismissed him? We might have been relegated from the Super League if we had fired him. We are one of the few teams that do not change the head coach. I think this model has become popular in Turkey now; everyone says, 'Mr. President, I will do the Giresunspor model' (Ungan, 2022).

Giresunspor was defeated only twice in the remaining six matches and achieved their goal of staying in the league by collecting 9 points more than the 17th team in the season in which the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th teams were relegated to the lower league. During the season, Giresunspor showed great defensive performance, conceding only 47 goals in 38 matches. The club surpassed even the biggest Turkish football clubs like Galatasaray, who conceded 53 goals, and Beşiktaş, who conceded 48 goals this season and was only behind four teams in terms of defensive performance -these teams ranked in the first four places of the league at the end of the season-.

Although Giresunspor managed not to be relegated from the Super League, where they competed for the first time in 44 years, this success was not achieved easily. On the contrary, as shared above, the president stated that the club was in deep financial trouble, experiencing the greatest loneliness ever, and called for support from the club's stakeholders. Giresunspor's average attendance in 19 home matches during the season was only 5679 (Giresunspor Info 21-22, 2022). It was a striking indication of the low level of support for the team from the fans in the city and proved the necessity of the president's request for support.

2022-23 season: "The last dance" of the president

Being promoted to the Super League after 44 years and managing to stay in the league at the end of the first season should have been a joy for the president.

Although they achieved the sportive success aimed for this season, they still could not overcome the financial difficulties. Since they could not access the financial resources that would help them to reach the level of competitiveness required to stay in the league permanently, the club was constantly open to crises:

Crises can arise in many different ways in football. For example, the Turkish lira has severely weakened and affected all football clubs in Turkey since the payments to the players have been made in foreign currencies, and the value of these payments in terms of Turkish lira rocketed. When there is an economic crisis like this, you, as the president, have to solve it. That's why club presidents are much more exposed to crises. Once a crisis occurs, it usually does not go away in a day because football is not only about the game played on the field. Football is affected by all crises because it is a sector of people, not machines. So, you can face a new crisis every week, and it won't end. Even if a crisis is over this week, there might be another one next week.

Hakan Karaahmet described presidency of a football club as one of the most challenging jobs in life because the revenues did not match the expenses. The money earned by the players was astronomical, and all football clubs in Turkey were heavily indebted. The situation was almost impossible to manage. Karaahmet, like other sports club presidents, had to find support for sponsorship from stakeholders specific to the sports sector. All the clubs he competed with signed shirt, stadium or name sponsorship agreements and generated revenue by having the names of other companies (or, as is standard in Turkey, public institutions) printed on their shirts, on their stadiums, or even on the name of their teams. For this purpose, all club presidents established relations with politicians representing or governing the city or with other city stakeholders, such as other business people in the city, and through them, they received sponsorship support from private or public institutions. Nevertheless, the president was not getting much support from the business people or politicians in Giresun while the club was struggling with difficult financial conditions. Thus, the president was trying to achieve success with a low-budget team while competing with other clubs from bigger cities. Because of the economic

problems and lack of support from the stakeholders, the club could only sign free agents in the 2022-23 summer transfer period, with only two exceptions. Firstly, they paid only 0.2 million Euros to add a 19-year-old talent from three lower-league levels to their team. Secondly, the club loaned another player with only 0.2 million Euros in expenses. Apart from these two players, the club could only sign free agents, and due to the lack of valuable players in their squad, they could only sell one player with only a 0.7 million Euros gain. Considering that Giresunspor was competing in a league where footballers' total market value was over 1 billion Euros, it was evident that the club's financial resources and related competitiveness level were meager ("Giresunspor Transfers," 2023).

Giresunspor was the 3rd team with the lowest squad value in the league when the summer transfer period ended. The total value of the players in the Giresunspor was only 17.33 million Euros ("Süper Lig," 2022). The squad value of the team, which was one place above Giresunspor in this list, was 28.85 million Euros. The fact that even the 4th team with the lowest squad value in the league was 66% more valuable than Giresunspor indicated that the economic gap between the club and its rivals was enormous. Due to this financial gap, every season that Giresunspor managed to stay in the Super League might be seen as a success equivalent to their promotion to the Super League.

The team made a promising start to the 2022-23 season, which began on August 7, winning 2 of the first three matches. The most notable of these wins was the one against Galatasaray in Istanbul in front of 45,152 spectators. Thus, Giresunspor ranked 8th in league with the 6 points it gained in 3 matches. However, the team fell behind its rivals in terms of squad depth since the club failed to respond to the transfer moves of the competitors during the transfer period that continued

until September 8. This soon affected the match results. Giresunspor could not win in 8 consecutive matches and managed only three draws and five defeats in this period. The team scored only four goals in these eight games but conceded 14 goals and dropped to 17th place in the league.

Upon this poor performance, Hakan Karaahmet turned out to be the scapegoat since he was the public face of the club as the president. On the morning of the interview I conducted with Karaahmet on October 25, 2022, a group of fans came to the club's facility, shouting, "Karaahmet, resign!" (Haber 28, 2022). When the team won the games, everything was ok; but when they lost a match, the fans called for him to resign or even insulted him. Hakan Karaahmet thought that football was similar to politics, even worse. Although politicians lost or won elections every 4-5 years, football club presidents lost or won each week. Making comparisons with other European clubs in terms of fan loyalty, Karaahmet wished Turkish fans were more loyal to their clubs:

Even if a European team is relegated to a lower league, they still play their matches in front of huge fan crowds next year. However, in Turkey, fans can get aggressive when their team loses matches. This relationship should not be so fragile. I think fans should be more loyal. Every team needs fans, not only on good but also on bad days. If this happens, we will be much more motivated.

In the meantime, to end the period of poor performance and strengthen the sense of unity in the team, the president organized a dinner party for all executives, coaching staff, players, and their families on October 28, 2022 -just three days after our interview in which I asked him questions about his relationships with the stakeholders in the club- ("Giresunspor Moral," 2022). One week after this dinner, on November 5, 2022, Giresunspor ended its 8-game losing streak by defeating İstanbulspor. The following week, the team recorded another win against Fenerbahçe, the leader of the league at that time, in front of 41,203 rival fans in

Istanbul. The team recorded a draw and another win in the next two weeks. Thus, Giresunspor collected 10 points in 4 matches and ranked 10th in the league at the end of 2022.

Even though the whole club -the president, executives, coaching staff, and players- were doing their best, the financial gap between Giresunspor and their rivals was becoming unbearable. On January 12, 2023, Karaahmet, as the president of a team that had lost two matches at the beginning of 2023 without scoring a goal, once again addressed the club's stakeholders. Stating that they could not transfer any new player in the winter transfer window, the president explained the insufficiency of the club's financial resources and the depth of the economic crisis the club was in:

People ask me about the winter transfer window, but they don't see that the club doesn't even have 1 Turkish Lira. How can a club that cannot sell its VIP lounges and season tickets add any new player to the team? If this city (business people and politicians in the city) will not support this team, there is no need for transfers. We are the only club in Turkey that receives no support. Let everyone in Giresun know under what conditions we manage this club ("Destek Verilmeyen," 2023).

The financial crisis deepened the managerial crisis and soon spread to the team. In addition to two defeats at the beginning of January without scoring a goal, the team failed to win the next two matches, too. Hakan Karaahmet called the stakeholders out for the last time on January 22, 2023, to support the team before it was too late by stating that those not supporting the club would regret it in the future (Düzgün, 2023). At the General Assembly held on January 23, the president emphasized the importance of the club for the city, stating that no other brand could contribute to the promotion of Giresun more ("Giresunspor'da Seçimsiz," 2023).

The game against Galatasaray on January 28, 2023, had a special meaning for the president and head coach. It was the 100th match that head coach Hakan Keleş was in charge of the team. It had been almost two and a half years since the president

hired Hakan Keleş as head coach, just two days after he took over the presidency of Giresunspor on August 8, 2020. During this long period, Hakan Karaahmet, believing in the importance of stability, stood behind his coach regardless of the game results. This was not common in Turkey, a country at the top of Europe regarding the statistics on firing coaches. For example, in the 2020-21 season, when Hakan Keleş was hired as the head coach of Giresunspor on March 24 (two months before the end of the season), 27 coaches were already dismissed from the clubs in the Turkish Super League. On the same date, this number was 3 in England, 5 in Spain, 7 in Italy, 8 in Germany, and 11 in France ("Teknik Direktör," 2021). In such an environment, Karaahmet went down in history as "the Turkish football club president who did not fire a head coach during his 2.5-year presidency". Presenting an award and flowers to Keleş for his 100th match, President Karaahmet deserved an award for himself as much as Keleş ("Hakan Keleş'e," 2023).

Unfortunately, the stability was not enough to close the financial gap between the team and its rivals. On January 28, Giresunspor, for the first time since Hakan Keleş took charge of the team, lost to its opponent by four goals difference. This home defeat was followed by another 5-1 defeat on February 1. These crushing losses pushed the team back into the relegation zone. The team, fans, and the president were devastated. When Giresunspor was promoted to the Super League, Hakan Karaahmet said his biggest goal was keeping the team in the league. However, while striving for this goal, he could not receive any support from external stakeholders, was occasionally insulted by the fans, and could not get the club out of the financial crisis it was in. When considering resigning from the club, Hakan Karaahmet remembered his close relations with the players and the coach, his desire to serve the city, and his love for the job. As the legendary president of the club, was

it time for him to say goodbye? Apparently, the answer was yes since Karaahmet and Giresunspor's executive board decided to hold an extraordinary general assembly with elections on 2 February. Hakan Karaahmet chose not to run in the presidential election on 25 February. Karaahmet, who led the team to be promoted to the Super League after 44 years and to successfully compete in the league under challenging circumstances for one and a half seasons, stepped down from his position in February 2023. On 25 February 2023, the new president took over the club, and the team was relegated at the end of the season in June 2023. Today, Karaahmet, as a business person, continues to run his businesses in several different sectors, such as education and tourism.

4.2.1 Findings

The study's primary purpose was to examine the impact of the unique antecedents of senior positions on loneliness at the top and to explore how leaders cope with loneliness. Therefore, I analyzed the findings of the Hakan Karaahmet case study under these two headings: (I) antecedents of the leaders' loneliness and (II) managing loneliness at the top.

4.2.1.1 Antecedents of the leaders' loneliness:

In this part of the study, I analyzed how Hakan Karaahmet, as a leader, was open to elements that could lead him to loneliness at the top or how he could protect himself against these elements.

Individual antecedents of loneliness at the top

In this section, I will examine the personal factors that contributed to the loneliness of Hakan Karaahmet at the top during his two-and-a-half-year presidency.

Excessive workload and responsibilities

Senior executives described their roles as demanding, energy and time-consuming, overwhelming, complex, and intensive work that required constant policy-making (Zumaeta, 2019). Karaahmet also experienced similar exhaustion related to his leadership role throughout his presidency. Football is a highly visible sector, and sports fans put much pressure on club presidents to achieve success. For this reason, the money earned by the players is always astronomical. Therefore, as Karaahmet stated, the club's revenues in the Turkish Super League never match the clubs' expenses, and all clubs in the league are heavily indebted. For this reason, the managers of the clubs, which were initially founded as non-governmental organizations and subsequently incurred enormous debts, came to power mainly on the promise of finding additional revenues for these clubs. Either they use their connections to find sponsors for the club, or they directly, through the companies they already manage, transfer money to the club as sponsors and thus try to turn the debt around. The extra burden and responsibility on the sports manager is the obligation to fulfil the fans' expectations of success by paying the enormously high prices demanded by famous footballers.

In addition, Giresunspor was one of the league's lowest-income clubs, and the economic gap between the club and its rivals was enormous. Besides, the team fell much behind its rivals in terms of squad depth since the club failed to respond to the transfer moves of the competitors during the transfer periods. Indeed, in the last year

of Karaahmet's presidency, Giresunspor was the 3rd team with the lowest squad value in the league when the summer transfer period ended. Thus, the president had to seek achievement with his low-budget team while competing against other clubs from bigger cities. As the financial gap between Giresunspor and their rivals became unbearable, Karaahmet admitted that the situation was almost impossible to manage. So, the president repeatedly addressed the club's stakeholders, explained the insufficiency of its financial resources and the depth of the economic crisis the club was in, and asked for their support. However, businesspeople and politicians in the city did not support the team. As a result, they could not overcome the financial difficulties during the last season of the president.

Since their need for more financial resources to help them reach the level of competitiveness required to stay in the league never met, the club was constantly open to crises. Karaahmet explained that crises can arise in many different ways in football. For example, the Turkish lira had severely weakened and affected Giresunspor football club since the payments to the players had been made in foreign currencies, and the value of these payments in terms of Turkish lira rocketed. Besides, the football sector is affected by all crises because it is not only about the game played on the field, but it is a sector run by people, not machines. Moreover, once a crisis occurs, it usually does not go away in a day. So, sports club executives can face a new crisis every week, and this circle always continues. Even if a crisis is over one week, another might be next. Last but not least, when there is a crisis, people expect the president to solve it. That is why club presidents are much more exposed to crises. Due to these reasons, Hakan Karaahmet described the presidency of a football club as one of the most challenging jobs ever and added that his colleagues would definitely agree with this statement. The president also addressed

the young sports administrator candidates about how challenging his job is, saying: "It is a tough job, if they want to do this job, they will accept this from the beginning: "Everything will be tough". If they remember this slogan, they will have already accustomed themselves to this job. If they accept that everything will be complicated, then they may become a football manager". The president also stated that the more successful one becomes, the more difficult things will become, and the higher one gets to the top, the more difficult things will be. Finally, addressing the young prospective sports managers, he shared the following observation about the inevitability of loneliness at the top: "People at the top are lonely. Not because they want to be alone, but because their work is more difficult at those points. Loneliness is inevitable; they should never forget this. They may get into this business only if they can cope with this loneliness."

In conclusion, the findings in the Karaahmet case aligned with the idea that the weight of their work and responsibilities makes top managers lonely. However, in the sports sector, where there is high public pressure for success, I confirmed that the leader's workload and responsibilities are heavier, leading them to loneliness.

High-level burden for decision-making

- Thumbs up or down: Turkish football community as the Roman Emperor of modern times

As with other top executives, who reported feeling a great deal of responsibility for decisions (Jackson, 1977), one of the challenges faced by sports club presidents is the responsibility of decision-making. In all sectors, top executives have supervisory and decision-making responsibilities. For example, the Executive Board are appointed, counselled, and monitored by the Supervisory Board. However, sports

sector executives are under unique pressure from many sports-related stakeholders (e.g. fans and the media) when deciding to fire or retain a coach. Karaahmet had a similar experience in particular periods when the football team had terrible results. While the president sought a solution in difficult periods, the fans and the other stakeholders pressured him into dismissing the head coach. At that time, there was much criticism against the head coach, the president, and the team. People asked Karaahmet, "How could he continue working with the head coach, Keleş?" Club presidents always tend to change head coach in case of poor results. Karaahmet even asked another club presidents, "Are you going to change the coach?", and he got the answer, "Since I can't sack myself, I will sack the coach." It is common in Turkish football; in case of failure, the coach is fired. Indeed, every time the match results are negative, the stakeholders of Turkish football, especially the fans and the media, want to take the coach's head, as the old Roman Emperors did in the Colosseums.

- Battle over "stability or change": One man against all!

However, Karaahmet declared that they would not act as the football managers were used to because he believed their understanding was wrong. He believed that frequently firing the head coaches and lacking managerial stability were the main reasons for the few success stories in Turkish football. So, even when he was under a huge pressure, the president insisted on his decision not to fire the head coach, and he brought Giresunspor stability. No matter what happened, the head coach and the entire team acted together and tried to solve the problems. He wanted to show the Turkish football community that the team may get poor results, but the head coach could change bad results if the executive board stood behind him. Furthermore, he was right many times, and the head coach and his staff, who received full support

from the president, led their team to defeat their rivals in the most critical matches. Feeling the trust and support of the president, the team started to get good results, and achieve greatness in their first two seasons.

Unfortunately, ensuring stability was not enough to close the financial gap between the team and its rivals. The club was in an enormous economic crisis; they struggled to manage it financially again and could not find a way out in the third season of Karaahmet's presidency. The financial instability affected the team's performance, and supporting the coach did not solve the crisis this time. Top managers see themselves as the most natural representative of the organization, as they are ultimately responsible for critical decisions (Collinson, 2005), and all stakeholders see the same way. Moreover, as explained above, in Turkish football, the head coaches are always held responsible for the decisions, who are the first to be blamed and who pay the price. Therefore, one more time, fans put massive pressure on Karaahmet to fire the coach since the team struggled again. However, Karaahmet believed that the head coach may have been dismissed only if there were managerial problems or commitment issues. However, poor match results should not be a criterion alone for replacing a head coach. So, he trusted head coach Hakan Keleş and decided not to dismiss him. Since his decision was based on the desire to protect stability, a value not shared by others, and he stood behind his coach regardless of the game results, Hakan Karaahmet became the scapegoat. As a result, a group of fans came to the club's facility, shouting, "Karaahmet, resign!" When the team won the games, everything was ok, but when they lost matches, the fans called for him to resign and even insulted him. During the interview, Karaahmet mentioned several times that fans insulted him (as if it were a regular situation) when the team lost a match. When loneliness is defined as "the difference between the desired and the

perceived intimacy in a relationship", the fact that fans swear at the top manager every time the team fails came across as a very striking element of the loneliness of club presidents at the top.

Hakan Karaahmet thought that football was similar to politics, even worse. "At least politicians run in elections every 4-5 years, but football club presidents are expected to win every match weekend. As such, there is a risk of being in a crisis every week; we are not good in the eyes of the fans after losing a match", he said. In other words, the success or failure of a sports manager, even if that person is the president of the club that led the club to the Super League after 44 years, is determined by the last match played by his team, even in the eyes of his community. This situation is similar to that of Napoleon Bonaparte, who was exiled to the island of St. Helena after losing a single battle (the Battle of Waterloo) despite winning dozens of battles. It is speculated that Napoleon said to the guard, who could not understand this situation: "The most important battle is the last one", a rule that seemingly also applies in sports management.

As a result, Karaahmet always stood by the head coach Keleş regardless of the match results, and he may have gone down in Turkish football history as the only club president who did not fire a head coach during his 2.5-year presidency. However, what did he get in return during his presidency; when his team lost a match, he was invited to resign and even insulted. He also faced various crises each week as the highest decision-making authority. As the president, he felt responsible for resolving all crises with the right decisions he made. Even in a single decision he had to make on whether to fire the coach, he was left all alone. He was perhaps the only club president who believed in the importance of stability against the "culture of change" that pushed the country's football to failure. Thus, he got lonely because of

the indirect effect of the decisions made by other top managers in the sector - i.e., firing their coaches in times of crisis. As a result, he was criticized and even insulted by the fans and media of his club for taking decisions in line with the values he believed in and thus became lonely. After all this loneliness, he faced the fate he had protected his head coach from and resigned. In conclusion, the findings in the Karaahmet case align with the idea that the weight of decision-making responsibilities leads top managers to loneliness. The case analysis also confirmed that in the sports sector, where public pressure for success is extreme, the leaders' decision-making responsibilities are heavier, and the loneliness they experience is profound.

Unmet need for authenticity

In many cases, leaders cannot behave as they wish, and that is why their need to behave authentically is not met. The situation contrasts the leaders' "natural way of being" and the behaviors they consider necessary to fulfil their leadership role (Zumaeta, 2019, p. 119). Sometimes, top managers need to act or adopt a behavior. Nevertheless, their role or behavior may be at odds with their character, feelings, and thoughts. This difference, this contrast, is challenging for leaders, and the inability to project their true character, feelings, and thoughts makes leaders feel lonely at the top (Zumaeta, 2019).

Hakan Karaahmet also experienced the difficulties regarding to his unmet need to behave authentically during his presidency. Hakan Karaahmet played the role he had to while managing the ups and downs throughout the football seasons. He admitted that he had a role to play as the president of the club since he had to impact fans and players. People they were dealing with in football (i.e. the players and a significant

proportion of the fans) are in their twenties to thirties. Accordingly, their expectations and what they want to see from the president are different than how Karaahmet originally felt and desired to express. So, he had to play the role that was required on that day; yet, this role sometimes conflicted with his emotions or thoughts. Sometimes he was not angry at all, but he had to play "the angry man". He stated that this was a role he needed to play correctly in fulfilling his position as the president.

In addition, Karaahmet stated that he could not act as he wished when fighting against public pressure. He advised young sports management candidates: "They should do what they know is right and try to convince the public. Because if they do not do what they know right and only listen to the voices from outside, they will not have done their job themselves. (But if they cannot convince others why they are right) they still should do what they believe is right but make it look to outsiders as if they are doing what they say. So, they need to manage all sides and play their role well. If they can do this, they may become football managers. If they cannot do this, I do not think they should get into football club management." To conclude, as predicted in previous studies, the president also needed to behave unauthentically during his tenure. However, unlike other managers, he found this situation quite natural and adapted to it.

On the other hand, as Karaahmet named it, "there were two sides to the coin". Regarding the consequences of his "role", he painfully learned that success comes with a price. When he became president, the demands and expectations of people around him increased tremendously. When he faced the dilemma (i.e. meeting these demands or not), his role as the organization's leader conflicted with his emotions or thoughts. He had responsibilities to fulfil as the club president, although he wished to

satisfy the expectations of his friends. So, he played the role he had to, but his friends thought he changed, and they felt ignored because of the role Hakan Karaahmet played as a leader. Nevertheless, this is not the case; according to Karaahmet, he was doing his job; he had stayed the same, but since the environment and conditions had changed, it was necessary to act accordingly. In other words, he did not change, but the conditions were different compared to the earlier situation. Nevertheless, people around him did not consider the situation in this way. Therefore, their criticism and complaints increased a lot, and he was getting lonelier and lonelier. Finally, he was so upset to say that many of his long-standing friendships ended during his presidency due to the role he had to play as a leader. Moreover, since Karaahmet could not share his problems with others, he often felt even more isolated and lonely.

In summary, Karaahmet stated that the idea that those at the top are lonely undoubtedly reflects his own experience of leadership and that the role he had to play led to the end of friendships with very close friends. In conclusion, the findings in the Karaahmet case support the idea that their unmet need to behave authentically leads top executives to loneliness. Interestingly, in Karaahmet's case, this situation was not caused by being forced to pretend. However, he became lonely through the indirect effect of his need to pretend. Still, Karaahmet's experiences also confirmed that in the sports sector, where public pressure is extreme, the leaders' unmet need to behave as they desire is heavier, and the loneliness they experience is profound.

Interpersonal antecedents of loneliness at the top

Relationship with superior(s) & peers

As managers rise to the top of the organization, the number of people they can find support from dramatically decreases as there is no one above or equal to them on the

organization chart. The lack of a superior or peer from whom he/she can get support also pushes the top manager into loneliness. In this case, since Karaahmet was the club president, no other senior manager was his equal or superior. So, he could not get support; he could not find a peer to share his problems with, and thus, he became lonely.

On the other hand, although we cannot analyze his current relationships, we can analyze his relationship with his superiors by considering the previous years of Karaahmet's career. For example, as mentioned at the beginning of the case, Karaahmet had many duties and responsibilities at the club before becoming president. Regarding his relationship with the then-presidents, Karaahmet said he tried to help the club presidents as much as possible. However, since the presidents made the final decisions, the presidents of the time did not consider Karaahmet's words and made decisions opposite to what Karaahmet advised.

As a result, we can state that during Karaahmet's presidency, he did not receive any support from his superior or equivalent managers, as there was no such thing, and that he was not supported or taken into consideration by his top manager in the early years of his sports management career. In all these aspects, the case has presented findings that support the idea that leaders are lonely at the top, and we confirmed that sports managers are (at least Karaahmet is) no exception in this aspect.

Relationship with subordinates

Another critical factor affecting the loneliness of leaders at the top is their relationship with their subordinates. Employees may be less supportive and less authentic towards leaders and refrain from spending time with them. Nevertheless,

they may still have high expectations from leaders, all of which make leaders lonely at the top.

- Subordinates are less supportive towards their leaders

Previous studies have suggested that leaders become lonely because they lack sufficient support from their subordinates. However, that is not the case for Karaahmet since all executive board members always supported the president. Even Karaahmet considered members of the executive board as "friends of the cause".

What made this answer more striking than it sounded was that the president gave it when I asked him whether he received support from his "family or friends" rather than from his Board members or colleagues at work. Moreover, contrary to his own experience as a member of the Executive Board, he, as president, tried to avoid making the mistake of ignoring the ideas coming from the Executive Board. He considered every thought expressed by all board members and analyzed it, and if he believed what they said was true, he accepted that decision without any skepticism or pride. He believed that is how a top executive should manage an organization. Finally, he believed that achievements resulted from outstanding collaboration and that all the successes were due to the strong bonds he had built with his board.

As for the support he received from the players, the president only shared an experience from his first season when they were in the middle of a winning streak. He stated that Giresunspor had a team that played with their souls and made tremendous sacrifices on the field because their players were so happy. The reason why they were the leader in enthusiasm was that everyone believed that they could achieve their goals. Thus, unity was achieved with all employees and stakeholders in the first season of Karaahmet's presidency.

In conclusion, Karaahmet stated that he received support from the executive board throughout his presidency, and when things were going well, he received support and extra effort from the players in the team. In particular, the fact that he received continuous support from the executive board was in contrast to the ideas put forward in the literature; therefore, I have analyzed this situation in the discussion section.

- Subordinates avoid open and sincere communication with their leaders

Researchers proposed that leaders become lonely due to their subordinates' insincere attitudes and behaviors, and Karaahmet also reported similar experiences. As stated in the previous section, he commented positively about his players when the team was in the top position in the lower league and the middle of a 12-match winning streak. However, this was the only positive feedback about his players that I found in secondary sources and the interview. On the other hand, the president also shared detailed feedback about the problems he experienced in his relations with his subordinates, mainly due to the insincere behaviors of football players. He faced difficulties managing a large group of football players, particularly a football team with 14 foreign players, many of whom were from different countries. He inevitably faced many crises in his relations with his players while managing such an international group of staff. In Karaahmet's words: "Sometimes our players showed insincere behavior towards the team and created the crises themselves". When he faced these difficulties, a distance inevitably occurred between him and his players during these periods of crisis. However, he was unwilling to allow the distance between him and his subordinates to increase or last long. Thus, he believed

everyone had to stand at a certain point during crises so that the distance would not increase.

To conclude, Karaahmet faced insincere attitudes and behaviors of his subordinates, namely football players, which ended up in crises in the team, and a distance occurred between the president and the players. So, in Karaahmet's case, the social distance between the top executive and subordinates mediated the relationship between the insincere behavior of subordinates and the loneliness at the top. Finally, Karaahmet's experiences during his presidency confirmed the idea that insincere attitudes of subordinates make top executives lonely at the top, and sports managers are (at least Karaahmet is) no exception.

- Subordinates avoid socializing with their leaders

One reason why leaders become lonely is that their subordinates avoid socializing with them. However, Karaahmet's case did not fit this proposal since he regularly spent time with all the club members. Firstly, whenever he was in the club's facility, he communicated with all employees: the coach, football players, and board members, but mostly the coach, Keleş. More or less, everyone who worked in the club saw Karaahmet when he came to the facility, and they communicated in some way. Secondly, Karaahmet met regularly with the coach and the players, not only in the club's facility and during working hours but also outside and during off times. In fact, contrary to what was predicted in previous studies (Zumaeta, 2019), neither the president himself nor the players and their families hesitated to meet at the president's home. As they were "footballers who came to the club from many parts of the world", Karaahmet spent time with them outside, welcomed them at his home, socialized with them and behaved close to them to foster their adaptation to Giresun,

an entirely new city and culture for not only foreign players but for almost any player. In addition, the president also met with other club executives outside, and they went to away matches; spending time together was very motivating for him. Lastly, in times of crisis, the president organized social events with the participation of board members, coaching staff, players, and their families to strengthen the sense of unity in the club. Once, after a social event, the team ended its 8-game losing streak and recorded three gains and a draw in a row (i.e. gained 10 points in 4 matches).

In summary, the president stated that he often socialized with the coach, football players and other managers reporting to him and that these social activities increased his and the club members' motivation to do better. To conclude, Karaahmet reported opposite experiences to what was proposed by scholars, and it is not possible to argue in Karaahmet's case that executives face loneliness at the top due to the avoidance behaviors of their subordinates. In the discussion part, I will analyze why there was no lack of social exchange due to subordinates' avoidance in this case.

- Subordinates have very high expectations from their leaders

Having high expectations from subordinates is an essential factor that makes leaders lonely, and Karaahmet's case also confirmed this. Firstly, the group of employees with the highest expectations from the presidents are football players, and this is true not only for Giresunspor but for the entire sector. In Karaahmet's words: "All presidents say the same thing: one of the most difficult things in life is football management. Its economy is not a balanced budget, and it is challenging to manage because the money earned by players in the sector is huge. A footballer plays for

€500,000, €1,000,000 (per year). It is difficult to manage football players since they live extreme lives in many parts of the world. It is difficult to make a team out of them".

Secondly, even when success is achieved, crises arise because subordinates have high expectations of the leader. Even though many subordinates worked with the president to achieve success, after the club achieved it (e.g. promoted to the Super League after 44 years), they had various expectations about sharing this success. Karaahmet said, "Everyone expected much praise; everyone wanted a bigger share of people's compliments when there was a success. This crisis is much more difficult when surrounded by people who do not know how to share". So, there were times when Karaahmet also encountered people who did not know how to share, and the crises at that time exhausted him even more than any other crises caused by adverse situations. When these unfulfilled expectations for more praise and a more significant share of the success were not met, they showed negative behavior, directly impacting Karaahmet and his sense of loneliness. As a result, by reporting this situation, the president revealed the mechanisms -that existed even in the context of success- that exhausted him more than ever and thus made him feel lonely.

Relationship with the stakeholders of the sports sector

This section analyses the effects of the actors and dynamics in the sports sector -e.g. fans, media, stakeholders in and around the club, and competitors- on Karaahmet's loneliness at the top.

- Relationship with the fans: "distance vs closeness conflict" and "fan loyalty"

A distinctive feature of the sports sector is that fans think they understand sports management as much as sports managers. For this reason, they do not hesitate to criticize sports administrators on every subject, quickly and often perhaps unfairly.

Due to the popularity of the game of football and the fact that fans consider themselves knowledgeable in this field, football managers are also often subjected to heavy criticism from fans. Therefore, it must be accepted that these positions have their extra challenges. Due to this phenomenon, Karaahmet could not keep his distance from the fans and had many difficulties. Thanks to the following feedback given by the president in the interview, I observed this problem that only a manager in the field of sports management can experience:

Football management is a field that people of all ages can discuss. When a manager enters this field, they think they can say anything to her/him. Politics and football are equivalent in this sense. People think they always know the truth; thus, they try to direct and manipulate the sports managers in many ways. Up to a certain point, I had to listen involuntarily. Nevertheless, this pressure caused me the most difficulty in this job.

There are many negative consequences of spectators thinking they understand sports management as much as sports managers. The most harmful consequence is not that everyone tries to direct the sports managers in their way. As mentioned earlier, the most severe consequence of this situation is that the fans, feeling intense anger after losing matches, call for the resignation of the managers, especially the president, and even insult the president, which is unacceptable. It is indeed absurd and morally wrong for a spectator to insult the president of a club just because the team has failed. However, the more exciting dimension of this matter is that the same fans, regardless of the results, show interest and want to talk to the president and take photos with him if they meet him on the street. However, due to group psychology, after losing an important match, the same fans may consider it their right to insult the

president, with whom they can share their affection on the street the next day. This situation, firstly, causes sports managers to become lonely for a reason related to their sector. Secondly, it puts the responsibility on the sports managers to be "close enough" to the fans to endear themselves to them and make them support the club but "distant enough" not to violate their personal rights and leadership in negative moments.

As shown earlier, Karaahmet's case provided concrete, quantitative data on the lack of fan loyalty and how fans develop sharp, inconsistent, contradictory opinions about sports managers and presidents. For example, Giresunspor's average home attendance barely exceeded 5000, which was a severe disappointment for the managers of a team playing in the Super League for the first time in 44 years. As stated earlier, the president also shared the problems he experienced regarding the lack of fan loyalty. In this regard, the president compared the football culture in Europe and said that Turkish fans should be more loyal in their relationship with the club. He stated that the fans should support the team in bad times, applaud the team when defeated, and motivate the players. According to Karaahmet, as fan loyalty develops, clubs will be more institutionalized, everything will be smoother, and there will be much greater motivation for all sports managers. Ironically, the president, who conveyed these excellent wishes, was invited to resign by a group of fans in front of the club facility on the morning of the day he gave this interview to me. To conclude, the fans, who constantly criticized him, sometimes even insulted him, and showed no loyalty to the club, became an essential element of Karaahmet's loneliness at the top.

- Relationship with the sports media

In addition to sports fans, another stakeholder in the sports sector is the sports media, which is not even present in many sectors, or at least not as influential as in the sports sector. When working in other sectors, for example, in the education sector where the president's companies operate, the media do not intervene in the management processes, the work done by the top executives and their decisions. However, in the sports sector, before and after every match, media members intervene in the process, dictating to the presidents which players they should transfer and to the coaches which players they should give a chance in the squad. The sports media's involvement is another difficulty differentiating sports management from other sectors' management. President Karaahmet also stated that the negativities in the sports media have a destructive effect on sports managers who wish to contribute to the Turkish football sector for a long time:

The difficulties we have with the sports media are the same in our relations with the fans. Unfortunately, since the sports media in Turkey is focused only on criticism, we see attitudes like "let the teams lose, let's make a show out of it, let's apply pressure, let's attack the presidents, managers, footballers, let's insult them". These attitudes are terrible because they destroy people (i.e., their motivation to do good things). A president may make an outstanding contribution to that club, and s/he may work for many years, but because of these behaviors, the number of people who want to be a manager in Turkish football is decreasing.

To conclude, the sports media, constantly criticizing -even insulting- sports managers, play a destructive role in the sector. Therefore, just like sports fans, sports media also contribute to top executives' loneliness at the top, and Karaahmet had no exceptional position regarding his relationship with this destructive element of the sports sector.

- Relationship with stakeholders within the sports club

Sports clubs have the status of associations in Turkey, Germany, and many other countries; therefore, the club's president is, in most cases, not the owner of it.

Instead, the president is a manager elected by the association (i.e. the club) members. So, presidents come to the office by running against other candidates and winning the election in which hundreds, maybe thousands of members of the association vote. Consequently, during their administration, they often faced opposition from other club members, such as other presidential candidates. In other words, they have to deal with the intense criticism of their rivals who lost the election, have presidential ambitions in the next election, or of other opposing association members, groups, and their social circles. The direct or indirect influence of these opposing individuals or groups can also strongly impact the loneliness at the top, which they experience in their leadership positions.

Karaahmet spontaneously touched upon this issue in his first answer to a very general question I asked in the interview and explained that even when he was successful, he could not avoid encountering the negativities described above. According to Karaahmet, it is much more challenging to be the president of a club and be successful in a small province like Giresun because there is much more criticism, and even when they succeed, there is much more negativity. In the case of success, the number of people who dislike the leader increases as much as the number of people who like him; the two go hand in hand. In other words, Karaahmet stated that when he led the Giresunspor football club to success, the so-called shared value of the city, the number of people who did not like Karaahmet increased among the city's stakeholders. In this respect, this factor contributed to Karaahmet's loneliness.

- Relationship with stakeholders outside the sports club

As mentioned, sports club managers need to manage relationships with key stakeholders of their sector, such as sponsors and politicians. This situation specific to sports management imposes an extra responsibility on the sports managers to establish and manage relationships with local firms in the province where the sports club is located, national companies in the country, or even global corporations. In football environments where political factors are influential, establishing and developing strong relations with politicians is also among the unwritten duties of the club president. Therefore, managing these relations with these groups, which have high expectations has emerged as a challenge.

The president said that the most challenging factor he faced as a leader was managing the relationship with football-specific stakeholders. As the club president, he had to deal with many factors, including problems with the team and the coach and economic problems. Nevertheless, apart from all these, there were also relations with the city's stakeholders or political relations that he had to balance. The president stated, he did not have the chance to maintain these relations with everyone perfectly because each side's expectations were different, even opposed to each other. Thus, if he satisfied one side, the other was dissatisfied. So, he faced crises and difficulties since he suddenly found himself in the middle of conflicting situations entirely outside his control and desire. Therefore, the difficulties he experienced in his relationship with the external stakeholders of the club, namely managing relations outside the club, constituted the most severe difficulty for him as the president.

Although it is vital in the sports sector to get support from business people and institutions outside the organization, Karaahmet failed to do so despite his many attempts. For instance, it is required to make sponsorship agreements to generate

income, and Karaahmet had also called publicly many times that they expected support from all stakeholders, especially the business world and politicians in Giresun, for their team. However, the president could not find an answer to his call, and he said the following words about the depth of the financial crisis and loneliness they were experiencing a month before his resignation: "The club does not even have 1 TL. There are no lodges or season ticket sales. This city does not support this team. We are the only club in Turkey that is not supported. We cannot even get 10 thousand TL support."

In the end, they had great difficulty getting support and experienced the most profound loneliness in the club's history. Thus, Karaahmet stated: "Together with our executive board, we are experiencing the greatest loneliness in the history of Giresunspor. Today, Giresunspor is left alone, and we are trying to take this team as best we can with this loneliness. We are struggling for this team not to go into obscurity." He said that if Giresunspor is relegated to the lower league, everyone will be sad and ask themselves the following questions: "Is this what we could do? Why didn't we come together that day to protect our team? What was our problem? What was it that we could not agree on? What was it that we could not achieve?"

Like Cassandra in the Trojan story, all Karaahmet's fears came true. He never found the support he was looking for and had to resign. One of the first things the new president did was to terminate the contract with Keleş, with whom Karaahmet had worked for 2.5 years, and Giresunspor was relegated to the lower league at the end of the season. In summary, not receiving the support he needed to remain competitive in the league was the most crucial factor contributing to Karaahmet's loneliness during his management process.

- Relationship with rival clubs and differences in competition

The nature of the competition in the sports sector also has significant differences compared to other sectors. The main difference is that the product produced in the sports sector is a sports competition, and this product is formed by the mutual performance of two rival teams. In other words, while one sports team puts forth a performance, the other team simultaneously endeavors for the failure of its competitors' performance due to the nature of the business. For example, all parts of the home team in the city, especially the spectators, endeavor to make the away team fail. For instance, when players from the away team are making a move on the field, e.g. passing the ball between each other, tens of thousands of fans supporting the home team whistle at the players of the away team, thus making it difficult for the opposing players to communicate and coordinate their actions and forcing them to make mistakes. In rare and extreme cases, home team fans gather in front of the hotel where the away team's players arrive and sleep the night before the match, making noise and trying to prevent the away team's players from sleeping. However, we cannot imagine such a situation in any other sector. For example, when a fast-food company produces a product, the competitor cannot intervene in the production process and directly influence it to fail, for example, by adding something different to the recipe. Consequently, sports club managers must deal with the inevitable differences in their sector's nature when competing with rival organizations.

Karaahmet also shared his experiences during the away match against Rizespor about the unique challenges of the sport. The President explained that their victory against Rizespor was the most important one, enabling them to stay in the Super League at the end of their first season. However, the conditions under which this victory was achieved made this event worth sharing. Any team that lost the

match had to face the risk of relegation (indeed, Rizespor lost the match, and they were relegated from the top league at the end of the season). Both clubs were aware of the importance of the match, so when they went to Rize, there was a mobbing created by the atmosphere of that province, said Karaahmet. He added that he and all other members of Giresunspor had many fair reasons to hesitate and fear since the rival fans could do many things to influence their players on the field negatively. Before the match, Giresunspor's spokesperson Önal stated: "Our demand (from referees) is a fair judgement on the field. Referees should bravely see everything. We wish to have a competition where the referees are in the background. We will respect their decisions in this match that will be played in front of everyone's eyes." Karaahmet also met with the President of the Turkish Football Federation in Istanbul before the match due to the appointment of a referee who allegedly made decisions against Giresunspor and in favor of Rizespor in previous matches. Karaahmet wished that other issues would not interfere with the match and emphasized that the comments and thoughts made before the match were disturbing.

Thinking that everything could work against them, Karaahmet thought his speech to his players before the match and his stance as president was critical. He directed his players to follow a wise strategy, told them they had to play clever and mild to calm the rival crowd down, and put them to sleep. Karaahmet, on the one hand, calmed his players to ensure that they played the match without fear, and on the other hand, he made friendly statements to reduce the tension of rival fans so that the pressure they would put on the referees and players would decrease. To do so, he made the following statements to the media: "Giresunspor and Rizespor are two brother teams. Our brotherhood will continue in this match, where two distinguished

teams of the Black Sea region will face each other. Friendship and brotherhood will always be the winners on the field".

As a result, in the process of playing only one match, the president took many actions and decisions to ensure that (i) the federation's decision to appoint referees was correct, (ii) the referees' decisions were fair, (iii) his players were wise, and (iv) the opposing team's spectators were calm. During this period, to manipulate them in the direction of the club's benefit, he showed the necessary face to every element he dealt with (i) his stern face to the federation and the referees, (ii) a calm and wise face to his players and (iii) a friendly face to the opposing fans. So, to ensure that the result of a single match would be as they intended, there was a boost in (i) his workload, (ii) decision-making responsibility, and (iii) the need to pretend, and through the effect of all this, his loneliness at the top strengthened.

4.2.1.2 Managing loneliness at the top

As explained earlier, to prevent or mitigate the negative effects of loneliness at the top, top managers can apply many methods, such as "peer support from outside of the organization", "confidants" (Goleman, 1998; Cooper & Quick, 2003; Zumaeta, 2019), and "self-development and self-motivation".

Peer support from outside of the organization

As stated earlier, top executives have minimal options to share their thoughts or feelings simply due to the pyramid-shaped design of organizations. Thus, external peers with similar experiences are a critical source of support for top executives. This support, which top managers can receive from partners, associates, colleagues, or

friends outside the organization, offers them a significant opportunity to cope with loneliness.

Although the sports sector is highly competitive, common problems affecting all clubs, such as the pandemic and the economic crisis, have increased solidarity and cooperation among clubs struggling with these problems in the Turkish football community. Karaahmet also stated that while they were carrying the burden and responsibility of the presidency of a Super League club on their shoulders, all presidents helped each other when needed. For example, they communicate as club presidents and support and help each other at Club Unity meetings, in common WhatsApp groups, or by calling each other. So, Hakan Karaahmet had close relationships with other club presidents and contacted them to get their opinions when he faced a problem. Although Karaahmet did not have a chance to get financial support from other club presidents, even the exchange of ideas among the common problems must be fulfilling for him. To conclude, Karaahmet confirmed that he got support from outside the organization, namely support from other Super League club presidents.

Confidants

As stated earlier, family, spouse or partner support offers top executives an outstanding chance to deal with their loneliness at the top. Karaahmet received this support many times more than what is usually expected. His wife, an academician who lectures on "communication" at the university, was one of Karaahmet's most important support points. She played a complementary role to him regarding social relations and sometimes stepped in to manage social relations because she was an expert on this subject. When the President could not do or say something, his wife

helped him. She managed the relationships in the club that she saw as problematic, thanks to her specialization in communication. To sum up, his wife, as the power behind the President, was in a complementary position to Hakan Karaahmet. The President also stated that his daughter and son supported him with their comments, and he spent time with his family and tried to be together every evening. On the other hand, regarding his colleagues outside of work, as explained in detail in the previous sections, the President, far from receiving support from them, had fallen out with his closest friends during his presidency of Giresunspor, and many of his close friendships ended.

Self-development and self-motivation

As explained earlier, top managers, for many reasons, do not receive support from their superiors, peers, or subordinates in the organization, which leads to loneliness. For this reason, they turn to their colleagues outside the organization or relatives outside the profession -their spouses and friends- for support. However, apart from all these, they can also manage their loneliness by improving their perspective, changing their approach to problems or life, or developing other mental methods. Karaahmet, to a large extent, tried to cope with loneliness through mental disconnection, acceptance, and physical disconnection.

Mental disconnection and acceptance: Firstly, among the ways of coping with loneliness, the most dominant method Karaahmet used was mental disconnection (Zumaeta, 2019). In the face of the difficulties he experienced, Karaahmet tried to take his mind away from the problems and let things go. Defining time as "the thing that makes everyone mature" in the business, Karaahmet learned to let things go and started not to worry about them as he became more experienced as a president. He

stated that the difficulties he experienced and the expectations of the people on the other side stayed the same. However, he changed and developed over time, and he no longer sees the events, which he used to see as a crisis, as problematic as before.

Regarding how he coped with the loneliness at the top and how he managed this situation, he explained that he adopted a similar approach of getting used to this loneliness, accepting it, and ignoring the external factors that caused him to feel lonely over time:

Loneliness is the reality of this business. As leaders, we need to get used to this; we need to accept this. If one cannot live with this reality, s/he has no chance to manage the process. It was tough at first when I tried to fix and manage everything, every relation, but I realized that I could not manage it all because there were too many things that I had to handle. I learned it becomes much more unmanageable if I also get into these external elements/relationships. When leaders reach the top, everyone, even those closest to them, may take offence at them. Moreover, people may think they have changed, but convincing everyone that they have stayed the same would be a huge waste of time. Otherwise, they cannot do the work they need to do. So, if one is at the top, s/he is lonely! Leaders must accept that and work with this acceptance until their mission is complete.

As a result, even those closest to him turned against him because of his position, but Karaahmet accepted his loneliness in his job as president. Indeed, he could do his job only through this acceptance. Moreover, a successful leader is expected to have a low need for affiliation (McClelland, 1961), and the president's response suggests that his need for affiliation may be low, as consistent with previous findings. To summarize, he showed an example of leadership without feeling the need for affiliation. He tried to overcome the loneliness he experienced when even those closest to him took a stand against him through mental disconnection and acceptance.

Physical disconnection: Whenever the President faced a problem or crisis, he tried to distance himself from it physically, too; not only did he do it himself, but he also advised and made his subordinates do it. For example, the President advised his

footballers to distance themselves from the factors that could affect them negatively after losing a match. He told them to stay away from social media and mobile phones for 24 hours and not to make any comments about the match to anyone. He said the executive board met 24 hours later and decided on their announcement. Because football is a human-centered sector where results are obtained every week and emotions are experienced intensely and instantly, the decisions made in those first 24 hours could have been wrong. For this reason, he believed that in the first moments of a crisis, one should wait 24 hours to decide. In some crises, he even let it go without intervening at all.

Resign as a mental and physical disconnection: Finally, the decision to resign can be considered as a derivative of this "mental and physical disconnection". The last solution, the last step that top managers can take to cope with the problems and the loneliness that they cannot overcome, is to resign from their position. By resigning, they put an absolute distance between themselves and the problems and ultimately get rid of all the issues related to his/her job and the feeling of loneliness their position brings. The act of resignation, which means absolute mental and physical detachment from the factors that cause loneliness, is, of course, the last step that top managers take, willingly or unwillingly, after trying many other ways, perhaps when they cannot see any other way, accepting that they cannot find a solution. However, this situation can be seen frequently in organizations in every period.

Just a few months after he had led his team to the Super League after 44 years, Karaahmet was thinking about every possibility, having incredible difficulties, losing sleep, and considering resigning due to the loneliness he had fallen into. It was not an easy work; it was not going to be easy; he knew that. Still, losing a series of

matches on the pitch was awful for the president; he could not explain any reason to people why he could not prevent all failures. Although business people and fans of Giresunspor were supposed to help Karaahmet raise Giresunspor, he was put into unnecessary discussions, which was more tiring than all for him. He stated that football management is about giving from the heart, money, and time; therefore, he questioned why he faced such problems, especially regarding the problems in his relationships with external stakeholders. Even though he could not tell everything, he was experiencing many difficulties. Karaahmet stated that when confronted with these big crises during his presidency, he thought of leaving his position and walking away.

In my interview with him on 25 October 2022, Karaahmet said, "If I had decided to resign in times of crisis, maybe our team would be experiencing much more difficult days today. But we continued on our way, and I am glad we did". However, the president made an opposite evaluation regarding continuing in office later, as the unresolved difficulties and loneliness he experienced continued to increase. So, he resigned at the beginning of February 2023, only 3.5 months after the interview, in which he declared that he was glad to be in office and keep fighting. His statement, "If I had decided to resign, maybe our team would be experiencing much more difficult days today, " was justified because Giresunspor was relegated from the Super League to the lower league, namely the first league, three months after his resignation. As of 18 December 2023, they are in 17th place, one place above the bottom, in the first league, with only 9 points gained in 15 matches, and the risk of being relegated to the second league is too high.

As a result of these analyses, the following table on the extent to which propositions were supported emerged (see Table 5).

Table 5. The Antecedents and Coping Mechanism of Karaahmet's Loneliness

Propositions	Absolute existence of the antecedent (or managing method)	Leadership type performed to cope with the antecedent	Further need for discussion
P1: Their excessive workload and responsibilities make leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P2: Having to make difficult decisions make leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P3: While performing their duties, their obligation to abstain from the authentic expression of their emotions makes leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P4: As leaders move up in organizations, the number of peers and supervisors they can get support from decreases, making them lonely at the top.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P5a: The lack of support from subordinates in the workplace makes leaders lonely.	NO!	Paternalistic leadership	YES!
Prop. 5b: Subordinates' insincere attitudes make leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P5c: Being excluded by subordinates who avoid spending time with them makes leaders lonely.	NO!	Paternalistic leadership	YES!
P5d: Subordinates' unrealistically high expectations of leaders make leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P6: The pressure from the unique stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g., fans and media) makes leaders lonely.	Yes.	Not mentioned.	No
P7: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from colleagues outside their organization.	Yes		No
P8: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from confidants, such as spouses or partners.	Yes		No
P9: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top by focusing on their self-development and self-motivation.	Yes		No

To summarize the entire case, although Hakan Karaahmet created strong bonds with his board members, players, and coach, and his desire to serve the city, and his love for the job was still strong, he could not receive any support from external stakeholders of Giresunspor, could not get the club out of the financial crisis it was in, meanwhile, was occasionally insulted by the fans. Thus, Karaahmet experienced loneliness at the top of the bone, and since he could not find a way out of it, he finally had to end this loneliness by resigning.

4.2.2. Discussion

Leaders' paternalistic characteristics and subordinate behavior

In this case, two main phenomena were observed beyond expectations: firstly, the president received support from his subordinates, and secondly, the subordinates did not avoid socializing with the president. Moreover, earlier studies on loneliness at the top revealed that leaders also distance themselves from their subordinates and even avoid inviting them to their homes, with concerns about hiding their flaws so that they can project a strong image, power, and prestige. However, we observed that Karaahmet's behavior was also contrary to this narrative, which suggested that the different behaviors of Karaahmet and his subordinates may be interrelated.

To better illustrate Karaahmet's difference from other top executives described in the earlier studies, recall that Karaahmet had intimate relationships with board members, coaches, footballers, and club personnel. Karaahmet spoke with everyone whenever he was in the club's facility. He often met with the head coach and the players outside the club and hosted the players and their families in his house. Also, his wife, a lecturer in the field of communication, supported him a lot and played a complementary role to the president regarding social relations in the

club. When necessary, she handled the problematic relationships in the club by saying things that the president could not say. So, Karaahmet considered himself their older brother; he and his wife treated the young footballers and their wives like brothers and sisters. To conclude, Karaahmet (and even his wife) showed some paternalistic leadership characteristics, which lead the idea that there may be a relationship between his paternalistic characteristics and the support and socialization of his subordinates. However, paternalistic leadership characteristics were detected in two other cases: Çetin Yılmaz and Semra Demirer. Therefore, I will discuss the paternalistic characteristics of the leaders and their possible effect on subordinates' behaviors in the cross-case analysis part.

"Is it lonely at the top?": Debate over the nature of the loneliness

As explained earlier, there is an ongoing debate in the literature regarding whether leaders are lonely at the top. One side claims that influential leaders are often highly interconnected in their social relationships, which is how they are influential and respected (Wright, 2012). Thus, lonely people are not expected to be successful leaders. The other side argues that leaders are lonely at the top because they have to carry a heavy responsibility that they cannot share with subordinates or others. Thus, they may find themselves isolated when they reach the top position. This isolation may foster stress, alienation, emotional turmoil, and loneliness, all of which may even lead to health problems and negatively affect their relationships with their family and friends (Rokach, 2014). Also, increased social distance, limited social support, exhaustion related to the role, and role vs person conflict in leadership positions contribute to loneliness (Zumaeta, 2019). Here, I discussed whether Hakan Karaahmet was lonely at the top or not based on his job requirements and his

relationships with various stakeholders presented in the case. Then, I also discussed what Karaahmet's experience at the top tells us about the nature of loneliness.

One can claim Karaahmet was not lonely at the top since social support refers to the "help, comfort, guidance, and information one receives from one's social network" as Wright (2005) described (as cited in Zumaeta, 2019, p.113), and Hakan Karaahmet had solid relationships with the board members, coaching staff, and players as mentioned in the case and the previous chapter. Contrary to what was predicted in the literature, the president received much support from his subordinates, especially from board members, who shared a sense of comradeship with him. They were always together in good and bad times and looked after each other. Again, according to the literature, it was expected that the president would be avoided by his employees, but according to the findings, the opposite was the case. Nevertheless, there was no distance between him and other club employees. They also got together in social gatherings. He often invited the players and their wives to dinner at his house. In addition, Hakan Karaahmet had close relationships with other club presidents, and they supported and helped each other when needed. Whenever he faced a problem, he contacted others for their opinions. Since he got much social support as a leader, one may claim that Hakan Karaahmet was not lonely at the top.

On the contrary, one may argue Karaahmet was lonely at the top due to many reasons, such as "role vs person conflict", "excessive workload and responsibilities", and "limited support from club's stakeholders". Firstly, a leader feels lonely when her/his natural way of being and the role s/he has to play as the leader conflict. Karaahmet also experienced person-role conflict during his presidency. His role as the leader sometimes conflicted with his emotions or thoughts. Because of the role he had to play as a leader, his long-standing friendships ended. His friends thought he

changed, and they felt ignored because of the role Hakan Karaahmet played. Secondly, Karaahmet felt exhaustion related to his role. As the president who managed to promote Giresunspor to the Super League after 44 years, he also felt a great responsibility to keep the team in the Super League. Over visibility (acting as the club's public face) and high-level responsibility (being accountable for any crisis) contributed to his exhaustion. Lastly, as the organization's leader, he received minimal support from the club's stakeholders. He could not get support from business people, politicians in the city, and even his friends as he wished. He also had a fragile relationship with the fans. They supported him only when the team won the matches, but they called for him to resign or even insulted him when the team was defeated. To sum up, these factors led Karaahmet to feel lonely at the top.

In this debate, it could be mistakenly inferred that Karaahmet was partially lonely and partially not lonely, but his experiences showed that Karaahmet felt incredibly lonely overall. Two and a half years after he took office and only one and a half years after his team reached the Super League, he resigned. Even one year before his resignation, he declared that he felt so lonely. In the middle of the first season of their promotion to the Super League, the title of a news article about him was "Hakan Karaahmet: We are experiencing the greatest loneliness in club history" ("Hakan Karaahmet," 2022). As a result, one major factor, namely the lack of stakeholder support, mainly constituted Karaahmet's loneliness. Karaahmet struggled with this for at least the last year of his presidency and finally lost this struggle and resigned. We can infer from this that the nature of the concept of "loneliness at the top" is that many factors cause loneliness, and the fact that some of them do not exist or are not strong does not mean that the person is not lonely. The strong presence of just one of them, alone, may be enough to make a person feel lonely. For instance, a

table on several legs can be a good analogy to a person's inner world. The weakness of one of these legs may be enough to topple the entire table when the load is placed on it. In this sense, arguments that suggest that leaders are not lonely for specific reasons (e.g. because they have power) only point to the strength of a particular leg. However, since not being lonely requires all of these legs to be strong, the fact that particular legs are strong does not mean that the leader is not lonely. On the other hand, the weakness of a single pillar may be enough for a leader to feel lonely. Karaahmet's experience of loneliness at the top, who was supported in many ways but felt lonely due to the lack of a single pillar, is an excellent example.

How leader effectiveness is related with the leader loneliness

To answer this question and present findings comprehensively, "leader effectiveness" must be defined first. Researchers conceptualize leader effectiveness differently, so the problem of assessing a leader's performance has yet to be answered (Yukl, 2010). However, it is safe to say that including several criteria for leader effectiveness and analyzing the leader's career on each criterion over time is often beneficial. Yukl (2010, p. 10) states that one indicator of leader effectiveness is the degree of enhancement in team's or organization's performance, and I discussed "how organizational success prevents and failure accelerates the loneliness at the top" under cross-case analysis part. Other criteria for leader effectiveness are the "attainment of goals", "follower attitudes and perceptions", and "contribution to the quality of group processes" (Yukl, 2010, p. 10).

Firstly, a criterion for leader effectiveness is the "attainment of goals" (Yukl, 2010, p. 10). As explained throughout the case, the primary goals of Hakan Karaahmet were to promote the team to the Turkish Super League in his first season;

after the promotion, not being relegated from the Turkish Super League in his second year, keeping the team in the Super League permanently; improving the financial stability of the club; and reaching sufficient financial resources and support to be able to compete against the rivals in the Turkish Super League. Hakan Karaahmet achieved the goals of promoting the club to the Super League and not being relegated in the next season. The third goal, keeping the team in the Super League permanently, was not achieved. However, it was only partially Karaahmet's responsibility since he was in charge only half of the season.

Regarding financial goals, Hakan Karaahmet could not get support from business people and politicians as he wished, and the financial gap between Giresunspor and their rivals became unbearable. He stated that the club does not even have 1 Turkish Lira. Because of the economic problems and the unmet need for support from the stakeholders, the club could almost only sign free agents in the 2022-23 summer transfer period. Giresunspor became the 3rd team with the lowest squad value in the league when the summer transfer period ended. Regarding goal attainment and its relation with Karaahmet's loneliness at the top, one can conclude that the more successful he was in achieving goals (e.g. maximizing team performance), the less lonely he felt. Similarly, the less successful he was (e.g. in reaching financial goals), the more lonely he was at the top.

Secondly, another metric of leader effectiveness is the followers' attitudes and perceptions of the leader. Followers respect and admire leaders who satisfy their expectations and support their growth and development (Yukl, 2010). As Karaahmet said, he had solid and close relationships with the board members, coaching staff, and players. He often invited the players and their wives to dinner parties at his house. He considered himself as their older brother. The players were pleased at

Giresun, and this happiness was the source of the extraordinary efforts put forth by the players on the field when they became champions in the first league.

Regarding the relationships with the fans, the president complained about the inconsistency in fan loyalty. According to him, when the team won, everything was ok. Nevertheless, when the team lost a match, the fans called for him to resign or insult him. To sum up, one can conclude that Hakan Karaahmet was successful in terms of his followers' attitudes and perceptions, except for the fragile relationship between him and the fans. Thus, these relationships directly affected his loneliness at the top, positively or negatively.

The last indicator of leaders' effectiveness is their "contribution to the quality of group processes." It shows to what extent "the leader enhance[s] group cohesiveness, member cooperation, member commitment, and member confidence [so] that the group can achieve its objectives" (Yukl, 2010, p. 10). As Hakan Karaahmet stated, the team chemistry was perfect during the first year of his presidency. They became a true team and achieved unity with all employees. Everyone on the team, from the head coach to the club's cleaning staff, believed that Giresunspor could achieve its goals, and the footballers played with their hearts. Hakan Karaahmet was appreciated a lot on this matter. So, regarding the leader's contribution to the quality of group processes, Hakan Karaahmet can be evaluated as an effective leader in their champion year, when his effectiveness was at the top while his loneliness was at the bottom. To conclude, Karaahmet's effectiveness was negatively correlated with his loneliness during his presidency regarding different dimensions. So, scholars may examine the relationship between leader effectiveness and leader loneliness in future studies.

Resigning as a way of getting rid of the loneliness at the top

Regarding the relationship between resignation and the concept of loneliness at the top, I previously argued that resignation could be considered the last way for top executives to get rid of their loneliness at the top. In this section, I discussed two perspectives on this question: Was Hakan Karaahmet's decision to end his loneliness at the top by resigning from the club right or not?

Firstly, I shared the arguments and the academic sources that support the idea that Hakan Karaahmet's decision to end his loneliness at the top with a resignation from the club was justifiable. As a basis for arguments in favor of this idea, firstly, I need to refer to the organization theorists Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik and their book, *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective* (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978), in which they introduced Resource Dependence Theory. This theory mainly explains the relationships between organizations and their environment to obtain the necessary resources. An organization's environment is the source of scarce resources crucial for its survival, such as capital and labor (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2013). Organizations must acquire at least some control over their vital resources to decrease vulnerability (Daft, 2010). It means one of the most essential duties of the top management is finding ways to minimize resource dependencies and maximize the organization's autonomy. For instance, one of the strategies to gain control over critical resources is "establish[ing] favorable relationships with key elements in the environment" (Daft, 2010, p. 159).

As presented in the case, Giresunspor was already in financial trouble, which deepened when the club was promoted to Super League. The Turkish lira was severely weakened and affected all football clubs in Turkey since the payments to the players were made in foreign currencies. The money earned by the players was

astronomical. Giresunspor, like other football clubs in Turkey, was heavily indebted and did not establish a balanced budget (the revenues did not match the expenses). The club could not sell VIP boxes and season tickets. Only around 5500 spectators bought tickets to watch games per match. Although the president called the stakeholders (fans, business people, and politicians in the city) out to support the club financially many times, he could not receive any. He failed to establish favorable relationships with key actors to obtain the necessary resources. So, Karaahmet could not acquire sufficient financial resources and support to make Giresunspor competitive so that they could strongly compete against its rivals in the Turkish Super League. For the sake of the organization, his decision to resign from the presidency was right.

This decision can also be analyzed from the organizational behavior perspective with concepts like job satisfaction and perceived organizational support. Job satisfaction is defined as "a positive feeling about a job resulting from an evaluation of its characteristics." (Robbins & Judge, 2017, p. 116). In other words, it is "the extent to which employees like their work" (Abraham, 2012, p. 27). Many researchers found that happy (satisfied) employees are more likely to be productive. It means workers with higher job satisfaction perform better, as do their organizations (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Perceived organizational support is described as "the degree to which employees believe the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Robbins & Judge, 2017, p. 116). A comprehensive meta-analysis study by Riggle et al. (2009, p. 1027) shows that "perceived organizational support has a strong positive effect on job satisfaction... and a strong, negative effect on the intention to leave." The studies also show that job satisfaction is positively correlated with life satisfaction (one's overall happiness in

life) (Robbins & Judge, 2017). As expressed throughout the case, although Hakan Karaahmet had good relationships inside the organization, he could not receive support and appreciation from external stakeholders like business people and politicians as he wished. When the team lost a match, the fans called for him to resign or even insulted him. He felt great loneliness as the president of the club. These negative feelings and work-related stress may decrease his satisfaction and enthusiasm regarding the job, resulting in lower job performance and life satisfaction. Therefore, it would be better for him to quit and end his loneliness at the top.

On the other side, one may claim that Hakan Karaahmet should have found another way to deal with his loneliness at the top. Therefore, he should not have resigned from the club. To support this perspective, I referred to solid motivation theories. Two contemporary theories of work motivation are self-efficacy theory and goal-setting theory. Self-efficacy theory refers to people's belief that they can perform a task. Workers with higher self-efficacy have a higher belief in themselves to succeed. When there is a challenging task, employees with higher self-efficacy put in more effort and push harder, while others quit. Moreover, when employees with higher self-efficacy receive negative feedback, their motivation increases (Robbins et al., 2013). Also, if they completed a task successfully before, they believe themselves to succeed in a relevant (similar) task in the future (i.e., their self-efficacy increases). On the other hand, goal-setting theory suggests that working toward a goal is a significant source of motivation and specific and challenging goals with feedback result in higher performance. Goal-setting and self-efficacy theories complement each other (Robbins & Judge, 2017).

As mentioned in the case, at the end of the first year of Karaahmet's presidency, Giresunspor was promoted to the Turkish Super League for the first time since 1977. The team achieved great success in his first term as president by rising to the Super League after 44 years. Achieving such massive success in the past may lead to higher self-efficacy for Hakan Karaahmet in the future. Thus, working toward challenging goals like keeping the team in the Super League and improving the club's financial stability is expected to increase Hakan Karaahmet's work motivation and performance. Also, receiving negative feedback from fans can motivate him even more since he has high self-efficacy. As a result, he puts even more effort into achieving these goals. In addition, Hakan Karaahmet loves his job and is happy about achieving something that has not happened for a long time in his city. He appreciates the opportunity to serve the city's biggest brand, Giresunspor. Even though his job is tough, he believes such happiness cannot be found anywhere else. He has very close relationships with the board members, coaching staff, and players. During his presidency, Giresunspor became a true team with unity. To sum up, since Hakan Karaahmet is highly motivated about his job, one may support the idea that he should not have resigned from the club for the sake of the organization and himself; instead, he should have found another way to cope with his loneliness.

4.3. Case III: Loneliness at the top: Touching lives forever by dedicating her own

ÜNSPED (formerly known as UPS) Sports and Culture Club was founded in 2003 by Mr. Haluk Ündeğer to give children from low-income families access to opportunities that would otherwise be denied. The club was particularly active in the Zeytinburnu district, one of the unsafe neighborhoods in Istanbul. In a region full of young people with little hope for the future, Mr. Ündeğer founded the club to do

good, educate the youth, rehabilitate this district, and improve society. Since its founding, the club has served the Zeytinburnu community by raising productive individuals with critical thinking skills trained with scientific and modern methods and revealing their potential in an environment intertwined with sports, education, culture, and arts. Their vision was to offer a new living space to children with the slogan "Journey that improves upon your talents." As a philanthropic organization, the club's main goal was to raise children with responsibility, discipline, self-confidence, collaboration, and making quick decisions under pressure. By doing so, the club aims to help children from low-income families discover and reach their full potential. In addition to youth and professional teams in volleyball and basketball that competed in the second league, the club offered training to children and young people in table tennis, modern dance, theatre, gymnastics, swimming, chess, music, and more. The club's goal was not to become a champion in the competing leagues but to train young athletes first. As the teams were playing in the second league, the club did not have many fans, and these few fans did not expect high sporting performance in line with the club's goals. Nevertheless, the club only depended on external financial support -from UPS, then Ünspe- rather than internal revenues like all other basketball and volleyball clubs in Turkey.

Shortly after the club's founding, Ms. Semra Demirer, a physical education teacher who devoted her life to children's and young people's physical, cultural, and personal development, crossed paths with the UPS Club. The club's aim to raise young people and provide them opportunities to acquire a profession through sports overlapped with Semra Demirer's goals and their collaboration continued for many years. As the General Coordinator of the UPS Sports and Culture Club, Semra Demirer embraced all members of the Zeytinburnu community without

discrimination. She treated each member of society, even the most marginal ones like drug addicts, with respect and care. Ms. Demirer acted as a role model not only for the children from disadvantaged groups but also for the whole community of Zeytinburnu. She always paid attention to the different needs and wishes of the athletes of the club and encouraged them to develop and reach their full potential. While answering the questions I asked her in this study on loneliness at the top, Demirer thought about her long journey, which spanned almost two decades, and how she had overcome the difficulties and conflicts she was experiencing.

"God sent me an angel, and I have been here ever since."

The paths of Semra Demirer and UPS Sports and Culture Club crossed in early 2004. Demirer wanted to introduce children to sports and arts, connect them to life, make their career planning, and make them feel valued in an organization like a human development and life skills workshop. When they met Mr. Haluk Ündeğer, he said to her, while they were hopelessly trying to find someone like Ms. Semra, she suddenly appeared. They need her desperately". However, Demirer reminded him that all leaders, presidents, prime ministers, and business executives, in fact, all people, are raised by teachers and said that teachers could not have a boss because they should keep their principles. For these reasons, Demirer stated that she did not want to work by taking orders and politely declined Ündeğer's offer. However, Ündeğer did not give up; he asked Demirer to lead projects that would benefit children, and she started to design projects and take them to the club.

Afterwards, Ündeğer invited Demirer to work at the club again, saying, "Please come one last time." When Demirer entered the garden, she was greeted by a lovely, dark-haired boy. When this little boy saw Ms. Semra, he buttoned his jacket

with a maturity one would not expect from his age; he took the arm of Ms. Semra, whose leg was in a cast at the time, and helped her out of the vehicle. This little boy suddenly called out her name and said, "Semra teacher! What happened to you? Did someone jinx you? I love you". Ms. Semra was delighted and surprised by the child's attitude towards her and his behavior. They entered the meeting room, and there was a meeting going on. However, the little boy did not even glance at the table because the general coordinator, Mr. Adnan, who was in charge of the place at that time, was such a tough man. He had a successful career as the coach of national teams, but he was a disciplinarian and made no compromises. Without looking at him, the little boy took Ms. Semra's casted foot and handed it to the coffee table. The little boy, his name was Oğuzhan, said again, "Semra teacher. I love you!" He took a step back, bowed, walked backwards, bowed again at the door, and ran out.

Ms. Semra was very touched and started to cry. Afterwards, she described these words as "the most beautiful compliment I have ever received in my life; nothing can replace it" and that moment as "a crucial moment; it was my turning point." Mr. Adnan, even that autocratic, tough man, was touched and immediately turned to Ms. Semra and said: "The children here need you." Years later, Ms. Semra commented on that event, comparing that little boy to an angel with these words:

Look, God sent me an angel... And there is a duty that God, the divine order, gives everyone. It is also a reward for something your heart desires. That is how it felt to me then. I thought the more children I could connect to life, the more happiness I would feel. I started that day, and I have been here ever since.

UPS: Ultra Parasız Sevgi (Ultra Money-Free Love)

In the last ten years, with immigrants from many countries, such as Syria and Afghanistan starting to live in this area, Zeytinburnu turned into a neighborhood where the most low-income people of many nationalities live. Factors such as

financial deprivation and widespread drug use have inevitably harmed the lives of children and young people in the area, making it even more difficult for them to look to the future with hope. While walking through the dangerous streets of the neighborhood, young people and even children carried Muslim rosaries. Since these rosaries were usually used by adults, children and young people started carrying rosaries to send a message and signal to their surroundings that they grew up, that they were strong and would not be oppressed. Founded in such an economically and socially troubled region, the UPS Sports and Culture Club recruited and trained young athletes between 2003 and 2019 without expecting a financial gain. The club and the adjacent primary, middle, and high school offered children from low-income families very special opportunities, free of charge. The club hired expert trainers and coaches to help children and young people develop many skills, especially the ability to produce together and to make quick decisions under pressure. In their journey intertwined with sports and art, the club offered children and young people opportunities to discover themselves. So, their first step into the UPS Sports and Culture Club became the turning point in the lives of thousands of children. That is why, in their daily conversations, the children changed the name of UPS, the world-renowned logistics company, to Ultra Parasız Sevgi, meaning Ultra Money-Free Love.

Thanks to the opportunities provided by the club, thousands of children have received better educational opportunities. They also attended elite universities that they would never have dreamed of attending without the contribution of the UPS Sports Club. Oguzhan, the young boy who was the reason Ms. Semra was convinced to work at the UPS Club in 2004, earned a bachelor's degree in engineering in 2017 and later an MBA from one of Turkey's top universities, Istanbul Technical

University (ITU). Then, while continuing to work at one of Turkey's most prominent banks, he started his second master's degree at Koç University in the Data Science program. Another one of their students, Uğurcan, a former basketball player, graduated from the same department at ITU four years after Oğuzhan and started working as an engineer. As another example, they helped one of their female athletes to study at a university in the USA via a volleyball scholarship. She later became an executive at one of the most prominent banks in Turkey. Another example is a female student who had drug habits, but the club raised her so well that she joined a more competitive team even by generating a transfer income for UPS Club. She married, had a child, became an elite player at the 1st league level; and she is now an elegant lady. Nevertheless, the first time they met that girl and how she developed afterwards, as Ms. Semra says, would be a subject of a scientific research.

These examples were not exceptional cases. On the contrary, they had many such cases in their clubs. According to Demirer, many children were once on the streets and are now business executives with high-quality social lives. Many children came in as drug addicts, vagrants, or lunatics, and they all regained their health at the UPS Sports and Culture Club and became teachers, managers, bank officers, and other significant professions. None of these children were educated at Turkey's elite high schools, such as Robert College and German or French schools. They graduated from schools in Zeytinburnu, which people compare to a village.

This is precisely why the stories of the UPS Sports and Culture Club and teacher Semra Demirer are intertwined. The young, idealistic teacher Semra's belief and what she wanted to prove was this: "Not everything is about money. Not everything depends on money!". Children from low-income families succeeded when treated with the utmost care and given a good education. Teacher Semra

proved this with every success of her students, whether they won a sports competition or a scholarship from a good university: "So it can happen! Look, the children won again".

Sport and art in the context of "the Rights of the Child" and personal development Demirer considered doing sports, such as walking and swimming, as a natural human right for children and all people. Therefore, she believed that people should consider sports a natural part of their lives; in other words, sports should become a culture and a way of life for all. Moreover, Article 31 of UNESCO's "Convention on the Rights of the Child" states that "States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts". Aware of the right of children to participate in cultural and artistic life in Article 31 of UNESCO, "UPS Sports and Culture Club" competed against its rivals, almost all of whom were "Sports Clubs", by including the word "Culture" in its name, and they organized art events to honor their name. Also, her father's words, "Sports and art are the harmonious dance of the body and the brain," which he told her when she was still a young girl, must be motivating Demirer in her role as the coordinator of the "Sports and Culture Club". Ms. Semra described the art activities they organize with these words:

We do not just teach basketball and volleyball here; this club is a place to develop life skills. That is why we organize art nights and cultural activities. I require all my athletes to play chess and dance, and I make them practice body percussion. I take them on stage; I make them sing in front of 300 people. I make them dance with choreography to gain a sense of rhythm and feel that ambience. For example, Simge Şebnem Aköz (a former youth player, now a national team athlete) sings beautifully. Where did she get that quality? She gained it at our art nights. We still do that here. As a consultant, I organized these events at the (2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Euroleague champions) Anadolu Efes basketball team academy.

Ms. Semra considered the club a human engineering and development center and created opportunities for the children to improve their English speaking skills. Accordingly, the children, who were learning English, started to speak little in English with the American guests who came to the club, welcoming them and making simple conversations like "Welcome, how are you." After improving their English, they introduced the club and its history to them, saying, "We have basketball players and volleyball players who grew up here and are now very successful."

Ms. Semra believed that since humans are social beings, children must have role models for their development. However, she realized that many children in the region did not have role models in their families and that this lack of role models had negative and even traumatic consequences for them and misled them in their choices. Thus, she thought it was her responsibility to solve this problem and she ensured that children saw and met role models at sports competitions and social events. To address this problem, she encouraged children to meet many important guests, such as the governor, the district governor, and other high-ranking officials during sports matches at the club. Moreover, she organized social events at the club so that children could meet professional athletes from the world of sports, such as:

- Zaza Pachulia, who played 16 years in the NBA,
- Melih Mahmutoglu, captain of the Euroleague champion Fenerbahce basketball team,
- Doğuş Balbay, captain of two times Euroleague champions Anadolu Efes basketball team,
- 1 Euroleague and 5 Turkish basketball league champions Barış Hersek and many more.

When the children entered the club and suddenly saw the captains of the most prestigious teams and national players in front of them, they were very excited every time they met them. Especially the children who had such an experience for the first time could not believe it. They asked each other, "I do not believe it. Is this a joke?" Some of them screamed and said, "Melih captain is talking to me, Melih captain." It was a natural consequence that Ms. Semra saw these children's value and felt it in her heart. As a leader, Ms. Semra also connected with other great athletes who saw these children's value and arranged for them to visit their clubs. Thus, in this simple but incredibly effective way, they tried to show the children their value, which they may not even be aware of. Through these activities, they attempted to engrave the message in the children's minds: "I am precious."

Leadership principle: There are no hopeless situations, only hopeless people
Although Demirer saw the potential and value of the children, they often had difficulty recognizing their importance due to many reasons, such as their socioeconomic situation, lack of role model or even mental health problems.

However, the self-doubt of children caused crises in the club. According to Demirer, as the leader of the club, she needed to keep calm and use body language well in times of crisis because she believed personal traumas and even mass upheavals happened when leaders were not calm. To overcome times of crisis, the leader also needed to have the ability to innovate, come up with a solution immediately, and act quickly to implement the strategy. In line with the premise that innovation is crucial in crisis management, Demirer experienced the following heartwarming incident: One year, at the beginning of the summer, a child arrived from Canada, a mentally "special" child. He was constantly screaming and making a mess everywhere he

went. Suddenly, Ms. Semra had an idea and said to her staff, "Let us act like him." Wherever the child went, whoever was there suddenly started screaming too. When he went to the canteen, the staff started screaming, and when he went out into the garden, the sports coach started screaming. After a while, the boy was surprised. He just felt that he was not alone "in this jungle"; by the second day's end, he stopped screaming. For three months, he continued to go to the club. After returning to Canada, he kept in touch with Ms. Semra by writing letters.

According to Demirer, the creative solutions found by the leader did not necessarily have to be radical and immediately end the crisis. Still, they had to give the team hope that they could end the crisis. Because for a leader to successfully manage crises, he or she must also have the ability to provide hope to those around him or her. According to Demirer, a leader should never give up, and that is why, in times of crisis, she always instilled hope in her staff and athletes and always tried to keep the hopes of the youth and children at his club for the future alive. She believed there were no hopeless situations, only hopeless people.

Giving examples from the lives of famous athletes, Demirer said that she believes in all children and the potential they have, and thanks to this belief, children at the club achieved miracles:

For example, we have paralympic children. How should we approach them? Many people around these children tell them, "You are nothing"; even if they do not say that, they look at them that way. People say these negative words to all children, including paralympic children and the ones born differently. For example, when Michael Phelps won nine medals, he said, "I salute my English teacher. Because he said, "You are nothing." And I said to him, "See what will come of me! I thank my mother for believing in me". I have also experienced this a lot; we have achieved miracles with children who were told 'nothing can happen from you.

The miracle that grows with hope: Simge Şebnem Aköz

An athlete factory, the UPS club's academy has produced many professional athletes.

There have been many children who, clinging to hope, grew up under the arms of Ms. Semra -or "Semra mother," as they called her- and later in their careers became professional, successful, well-known athletes. Ms. Semra still named them as "many beautiful children", many of whom are still pursuing their professional sports careers and even those who have completed their careers, i.e., those who are old enough to quit sports. One of the most successful of the "children" who grew up under Ms. Semra's supervision was Simge Şebnem Aköz.

Simge Aköz, an important figure in the club's history, grew up in the UPS Sports and Culture Club between 2005 and 2010 when she was 14-19. At the beginning of her career, she played as a spiker, but her height was too short for a volleyball player (1.68 m). She started to think, "I cannot do it with this height." At home, some family members would ask her, "What are you doing in volleyball? You are not getting taller. Quit volleyball". Indeed, it took great courage for an athlete less than 1.70 meters tall to choose professional volleyball as a career path. On the contrary, it was natural for her to hesitate. So, convincing her that she would succeed must be challenging. However, when Simge was thinking of quitting volleyball, Ms. Semra stepped in, talked to her, and motivated her by saying, "You are a UPS athlete. You are a girl in the footsteps of Atatürk and a gift of the republic. You cannot give up".

Ms. Semra drew an alternative career path for Simge so that she would not have negative, pessimistic thoughts about the future and would not think, "Will I be left without a job?". Ms. Semra made Simge sing songs on stage in front of hundreds of people and motivated her by saying, "If you do not become a volleyball player, I

will make sure that you become a singer, and I will release an album for you." With advice and guidance, Ms. Semra helped little Simge to make volleyball the focal point of her life again. Ms. Semra later explained her leadership in the process of Simge Aköz's continuation in sports as follows:

A leader should be a person who can create solutions, make people forget their pain and anxiety, and give them hope. I told Simge that she should not quit this job by opening another door for her. There may be a door closing, but the leader should open another door. I gave her confidence and ensured she did not lose hope. This is the characteristic of a leader.

In addition to motivating Simge to continue playing the sport, they also planned Simge's career at the club. First, they moved the player to the libero position where she would not be at a height disadvantage, and then they sent her to a club where she could develop herself better. In the summer of 2016, just two years after leaving that club, with the help of Ms. Semra, she joined Eczacıbaşı Volleyball Club, historically one of the most successful clubs in Turkish women's volleyball. Just one year after her transfer to Eczacıbaşı, Aköz was selected for the national team for the first time in her career at the age of 25. The player, who had never been selected for the national team while playing in youth teams, felt hesitant when she was selected for the first time and consulted her "mother," Ms. Semra. When Simge asked, "Semra mom, will it be possible? Can I do it?" Ms. Semra replied, "My daughter, it will happen. It is not a matter of question. Yes, you can!". Again, she motivated her players in a way that she understood best. Thus began Simge's successful national team career.

Aköz, who started winning medals at the end of the first year she was selected to the national team, managed to leave five tournaments she participated in within five years with a medal. Aköz, who won bronze medals in the European Championship in 2017 and 2021 and silver in 2019, also won the best libero award in

2019, when they played the final. In 2018 and 2021, she won silver and bronze medals in the Nations League, adding two more valuable pieces to her medal collection. Most recently, she won the Gold Medal at the 2023 Nations League and 2023 European Championships. Her "mother," Ms. Semra, summarized her faith's role in Simge's success with these words: "I opened such a door for that child, and I first made her believe. Now, she has been named the best libero in the world."

Simge Aköz's club career was also full of outstanding achievements. In her first year with the club, she won the FIVB Volleyball Women's Club World Championship, the most prestigious tournament in women's volleyball. Aköz won bronze medals in 2018 and silver medal in 2019 in the same tournament and was named the best libero of the tournament in 2019 when they were finalists. Aköz, who won the Women's CEV Cup championship with her club in 2018 and 2022, competed for the gold medal in the Women's CEV Champions League on May 20, 2023, after winning the bronze medal in 2017.

On the edge of shutdown: Severe financial and administrative crisis and the pandemic

However, Ms. Semra, as the person at the top of the club's management, had to struggle with all the financial and managerial difficulties, perhaps many times alone, while managing the club with scarce resources. Especially in 2019, when UPS Club's former athlete Simge Şebnem Aköz was having a career season; in contrast to these achievements, the club was in its worst economic and administrative crisis. In 2019, Aköz played in the finals of the FIVB Volleyball Women's Club World Championship with Eczacıbaşı and the European Championship with the Turkish national team and was named the best libero of the tournament in both organizations.

However, while Aköz, the club's pride, was having a career season, UPS Club was going through the most financially challenging days of its history. At that time, the club, which was doing very well in competitive terms and ranked high in the second league, suddenly found itself in a financial bottleneck and faced the risk of closure.

At 2019, UPS Türkiye employees wanted to be members of the labor union to reach better working conditions and they complained and pressured Mr. Haluk, saying, "You spend too much money on the club. Still, you give us too little salary increase". As a result, the worker union was formed in the UPS Türkiye, and employees reached better working conditions. Accordingly, related financial difficulties and administrative conditions did not allow the club to continue its activities under the UPS name, and UPS Türkiye withdrew from the club's sponsorship. Mr. Haluk told Demirer the following: "Ms. Semra, you are very successful. You came when we had given up hope and made us very happy and proud. You created a miracle when we could not even find a manager here. But we must end the investment in the club, namely the team in the second league." When Ms. Semra learned about this situation, she was initially distraught. Reminding Ündeğer of a conversation they had years ago, Demirer said: "I am a teacher, and I told you from the beginning that a teacher cannot have a boss, and you accepted it. You accepted that I am the boss here. Now, you cannot close the club; you cannot ignore my tremendous effort." Therefore, Demirer said that she did not accept the closure decision and pointed out that the closure of this 16-year-old club, embedded in the heart of Zeytinburnu, would mean a heavy blow for hundreds, maybe thousands of children in the district. Ms. Semra directed Mr. Haluk to search for alternative solutions with the following words: "The day these children see the door of this club closed; you will experience a great burden of conscience. Are you ready

for this? Please think again. Let's build the dream together. Maybe with smaller budgets, in a different way. Let's find a method, a way out of this problem". After conversing with him, Ms. Semra said: "OK, close the A team competing in the 2nd league. Give the workers in UPS Türkiye their rights and relieve everyone; no one should be restless. I will rebuild the A team from scratch."

Meanwhile, Demirer also found herself in the middle of a great internal conflict. As the financial challenges increased and severe uncertainty over their future emerged, the risk of closure occurred. In an environment where everyone knew that the club barely survived financially with external support, she had to decide whether she withhold this information or not. If she did, sharing this information could have triggered a process that force athletes and staff to find a new club to work, which could have led to the closure of a club that had given hope to thousands of children in the district. Nevertheless, not sharing this information would put her employees and young athletes in such a difficult situation because if they were suddenly unemployed in the end, it would be really tough for them to find new jobs in such a limited time. Demirer thought deeply about how she could overcome the conflict over transparency and confidentiality she was experiencing, and she decided to share this information only with a few employees around her.

In the end, Ms. Demirer convinced Mr. Haluk to take a middle path before the crisis deepened too much and spread to the staff and athletes. So, the club was able to continue its activities with lower budgets. At the end of the crisis, even though the 16-year-old UPS Sports and Culture Club was closed, it was decided to continue its activities under Ünsper Sports and Culture Club. The team was closed down; even though some of the players could have provided income to the club with a transfer fee, the club sent all the athletes it had raised to other teams without

receiving any fee. Although it was difficult for Semra Demirer, they started from scratch, established a new second-league team, and trained new players.

In the summer of 2019, they overcame this financial and administrative crisis by losing their most prominent sponsor, downsizing their budget considerably, closing the club, and moving on under a new name. Still, it was impossible to overcome the tough times completely. Istanbul's population already reached nearly 20 million, with international migration occurring in the last ten years. The standard of living of people in Zeytinburnu and many similar neighborhoods had fallen even further - as if that was possible. Although they tried to put the crisis behind them by downsizing; less than a year after, they faced the pandemic turmoil that shook the whole world. The club, which relies on people coming together and competing in sports branches such as basketball and volleyball, inevitably faced severe difficulties due to the pandemic. Demirer summarized the challenges of this time with this simple sentence: "The pandemic, a giant shock, followed the crisis in 2019."

In the case of the Ünsper Club, it had been less than a year since they overcame the most severe crisis in their history by downsizing. Besides, the challenges they faced in 2020 were brand new and went beyond the knowledge the club and Demirer had accumulated since the early 2000s. All sports organizations around the world had been suspended indefinitely. Then the concept of social distancing came into people's lives, and it took much effort to pay attention to it and fulfil the requirements of team sports, such as practicing as a team and playing matches. When they finally got permission for their athletes to train and play matches, spectators were not allowed in the sports matches. The pandemic shook the whole world and all sectors, putting a financial and administrative strain on the sports industry. Moreover, these new challenges were unlike any previous ones, and

past experiences were only sometimes instructive in overcoming them. Immediately after the trouble they barely overcame, Demirer had to find creative solutions to overcome the difficulties they faced during the pandemic period in 2020, and so they managed to pass that difficult period by working hard and not giving up.

To sum up, thanks to her sense of responsibility, resistance to difficulties, and intrinsic motivation, Demirer met the daily needs of thousands of children with scarce resources without discriminating against them for almost two decades. While the UPS (and Ünspe) club introduced thousands of children to sports, culture, and art activities and trained and developed future stars like Simge Aköz; it competed in the second league in men's basketball and women's volleyball. However, these were the most competitive sports in Turkey, as it was in women's volleyball and men's basketball that Turkey achieved its greatest successes in team sports. In addition to the achievements in women's volleyball that intertwined with Simge's career, male basketballers also had silver medals in the World Championship and European Championship in this century. Competing in the second league in these competitive branches required having one of Turkey's 32 most elite teams in both leagues. For almost two decades, Semra Demirer, as a physical education teacher, has been successfully managing a sports club that included both these competitive teams and the valuable youth teams that Simge Aköz grew up in.

4.3.1 Findings

In this part, I analyzed Semra Demirer's leadership experience and how, as a leader, she was affected by the factors that could lead her to loneliness at the top or how she could cope with loneliness at the top.

4.3.1.1 Antecedents of the leaders' loneliness

Individual antecedents of loneliness at the top

In this section, I will examine the personal factors that contributed to the loneliness of Semra Demirer at the top during her two-decade top execution to the sports club.

Excessive workload and responsibilities

As mentioned in the literature review, working hours can significantly predict employee loneliness (Bell et al., 1990) and the amount of work and responsibility that comes with a leadership position can often lead to loneliness at the top. This was also true for Demirer because it was clear from her statements in the interview that Demirer has a strong sense of compassion and responsibility towards children. As a teacher, she was constantly concerned about the health and well-being of the children entrusted to her care. Demirer, who cared for every one of the children as if they were her own, explained this situation with the following analogy: "For example, when you are driving a car, if you are the only one in the car, you drive differently, you can drive more carelessly. However, if there is someone you love in the car, your child, mother, or father, you drive carefully. Nevertheless, if it is your student you take responsibility for; you drive much more carefully."

However, as stated in the literature, each promotion that top managers receive brings greater responsibilities and longer working hours. Demirer's acceptance of the position of general coordinator at the UPS Sports and Culture Club meant that she had to take on much more responsibility and work much harder. Nevertheless, she believed her (and all other adults') responsibility towards children was to provide them with playgrounds, libraries, sports centers, and places where they could do the art and sports activities they needed for a healthy life. Therefore, to meet more and more children with sports and arts activities at a professional institution, Demirer

assumed the responsibility of being the general coordinator of this club with a very low budget, and she turned it into a human engineering/ development center. They did not just teach basketball and volleyball in the club; on the contrary, in line with this engineering, she created opportunities for the children to improve their English speaking skills and organized art nights and cultural activities to develop their social skills. Besides, Demirer believed that it was her responsibility to solve the problem that children in the club do not have proper role models in their family. Therefore, she worked hard to organize social events at the club so that children may meet their role models, namely professional athletes from the world of sports, such as captains of Fenerbahçe and Anadolu Efes basketball teams.

As a result, Demirer said people of this low-income neighborhood saw that she had successfully undertaken this heavy responsibility and appreciated her tremendous effort by saying "You are not just training athletes, you are educating people and making them have a profession". She stated that under this discourse, that is, under the minds of people, lies the following idea: "Take your child to the Ünspe Club. They will make a career plan for the child until s/he is old enough to get married."

The UPS (later Ünspe) Sports and Culture Club, which has become such an essential institution for the low-income neighborhood in which it is located as a result of the almost endless hours Demirer devotes from her life and the enormous responsibility she carries, has faced the threat of closure several times. Demirer stated that she felt very lonely in such periods, but she did not lose her faith, and she found strength by thinking about the efforts she had made, the years she had invested, the children she had raised and the work (the club) she had brought to life. Demirer said that she could not leave these children without a head and a mother; if

she gave up taking responsibility for the club, then the club would close down, and the power of the children would not be enough to keep the club going. These words indicate that her enormous workload and sense of responsibility skyrocket in times of crisis and that she feels responsible for the future of each child in her club, and even in her neighborhood.

Demirer also felt a responsibility towards her colleagues and the pressure to represent her profession. Even beyond that, she aimed to change people's dismissive perspective of her profession. She desired to show people that sports is not a regular physical activity but a valuable activity that gives people character, strengthens personality, boosts self-confidence, and gives people strong communication skills. As a physical education teacher, she was expected to successfully manage a sports club that included both competitive professional teams and valuable youth teams in fields like basketball and volleyball, which the successful volleyball player Simgе Aköz and others grew up in. Demirer had to work hard and develop herself to fulfill these high expectations. For instance, she first improved her own perspective, and she considered herself a physical education teacher and also a sports scientist. On the other hand, this self-development process inevitably meant an increasing workload for Demirer.

As if all this were not enough, another obstacle in her efforts to improve the lives of children in this highly competitive sports sector was that she was a woman. Since almost all the other club presidents or top executives were men, Demirer felt responsible not only as a teacher or a manager but also as a woman to lead society in a republic founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Although the male-dominated culture in the sports sector and the male hegemony in club presidencies increased her burden to represent her gender, she regarded this situation as a motivation for herself. As a

top executive, she first believed in herself and convinced herself she was a leader: "I am a leader," she said. She thought, as a woman, she should be a leader; she should be on the path of Atatürk and use the rights given to her by the Republic. She thought that since Atatürk gave women -political and social- rights before women in Britain or other developed countries, she must improve herself and use these rights well. With this sense of responsibility, Demirer was able to lead the club, manage crises, and influence society as the club's top executive. For example, she felt the responsibility of being a role model not only for the staff or young athletes but also for the mothers of these athletes. Many women from Zeytinburnu, one of the most underprivileged districts of Istanbul, said that it was at this club that they learned how to throw a shawl, which shoes to wear on which occasion, what a gala looks like, how to behave as a couple at a gala, how to speak, and so on.

To summarize, for almost two decades, Demirer had taken on a challenging job as the general coordinator of the UPS (later ÜNSPED) Sports and Culture Club. She cared for the children to develop them as athletes and independent individuals. While doing so, she also dared to change society's perceptions and prejudices against her profession and gender in a male-dominated sector. Even though she devoted her life and took on enormous responsibilities to succeed in all these areas, there are always two sides to the coin. As explained before, since leaders have to fulfill many extremely difficult tasks in a very limited time, leadership positions can be incredibly time-consuming (Feldman, 2002; Brett & Stroh, 2003). As a result, business executives may neglect their relationships with people around them, leading to a deterioration in those relationships, especially those with their family (Bell et al., 1990). From my observations during the interview -e.g. the pictures and photographs in her office or the gifts she received- I conclude that these statements above describe

exactly the situation in which Demirer finds herself. As will be explained in more detail in the following sections, Demirer's life is strongly intertwined with the club and her leadership role has taken over her life to a great extent. For example, all of the dozens of photos she showed me were of people she communicated with through the UPS (and Ünspe) club. In addition, even though I asked her multiple times, both implicitly and directly, she barely mentioned her family during the hour-and-a-half-long interview, and she never mentioned any support she currently got from her family, relatives, or friends. Besides, although she showed many personal items, she did not show anything about her family, relatives, or friends outside of work.

To sum up, as researchers suggested, C-level or other senior executives, due to their busy work schedules, found it challenging to spend time even with their families and socializing with their friends, whether inside or outside the workplace (Muna & Mansour, 2009), and Demirer was no exception. In addition, as mentioned at the beginning, working hours can significantly predict employee loneliness (Bell et al., 1990); and Demirer also stated that she felt very lonely especially when the club was in crises and she had to work much harder than usual. To conclude, our second proposition (i.e. their heavy workload and responsibilities make leaders lonely) is fully supported in this case.

High-level burden for decision-making

As explained in the literature review, top managers reported feeling great responsibility for decisions (Jackson, 1977) as leaders make tough calls (e.g., firing an employee, cancelling a project or downsizing), communicating painful information, and giving demanding instructions. Semra Demirer echoed this sentiment conveyed by senior managers, stating that she had significant and

challenging experiences with making difficult decisions. First, Demirer mentioned that being a manager is very difficult since she has to make difficult decisions, such as firing someone or letting someone go from the team, and she described this task as "something so brutal." Demirer said that when she has to perform these difficult tasks, she looks at specific performance criteria of the club or herself and confirms the person's fit with her/his teammates. Finally, she felt no remorse in dismissing the person only if the person was destructive to the team; otherwise, deciding to dismiss a person from the team or club was still a brutal task for Demirer. Secondly, she shared a more detailed example, and she stated that the club was on the edge of shutdown due to the financial and administrative problems, and she found herself in a significant internal conflict. If she had shared the information about the severe financial difficulties and the risk of closure with her staff and athletes, they might have tried to chart a new path for themselves, which could have turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy and resulted in the club's closure. However, if she had not shared this information with them and the club closed, these employees and athletes would have had difficulty finding a new job, which could have made their lives very difficult. As a result, she said, she could share the risk of the club closing with almost no one, only with a few people over time. Knowing that the club was in danger of closure and having to decide whether to share the club's predicament with the rest of the staff and athletes must have been a challenging experience that left the top manager feeling lonely. Indeed, as Wright (2012) points out, top managers distance themselves from the people around them for such reasons and become lonely in the working environment. Demirer also confirmed that there was a distance between her and her subordinates when she made difficult decisions; however, she also said that

she could find a way to communicate at such times because she approached the people around her with love.

Finally, as I mentioned earlier since top managers are the ultimate decision-makers, they perceive themselves as the natural representative of the organization (Collinson, 2005). However, Demirer stated that she developed a different perspective on being the ultimate decision-maker and explained that whenever possible, she tried to involve other employees in the decision-making process. Noting that she liked being a team, sharing and taking ideas because she was an athlete herself in the past, Demirer said that if she were going to make a decision, she would ask the team in meetings, "I have such an idea, do you think this idea is appropriate?". Stating that it would be helpful for her if her staff were more intelligent than her, Demirer said that she would sit her subordinates, from the driver to the cleaning staff -even the children and young people at the club- in her seat and ask them "Imagine that you are in my shoes. Suppose I am the employee, you are the manager. Let's say I have given you the decision-making responsibility. What would you do if you were in my shoes?".

In summary, as suggested in the literature, Demirer described the leadership position as challenging and even "ruthless" when it forced her to fire someone. She also stated that she was the only one who knew certain crucial information (e.g., the risk of the club closing) and that it was tough for her to decide whether or not to share it with other employees. Accordingly, she confirmed that having to make difficult decisions made her distant from her subordinates. On the other hand, Demirer stated that she practiced servant leadership characteristics, namely empowerment, to mitigate the impact of the challenge of loneliness fed by the necessity for making difficult decisions and communicating them with subordinates.

In conclusion, Demirer's case mostly supported the proposition that making difficult decisions makes leaders lonely, but Demirer sometimes clearly shared the burden of decision-making by empowering her subordinates. This led to the insight, which I analyzed in more detail in the discussion section, that leaders can empower their subordinates to manage this antecedent (i.e. high-level burden for decision-making) of the loneliness at the top.

Unmet need for authenticity

As I mentioned in the literature review, top managers often have to avoid the authentic expression of negative feelings and, therefore, experience more loneliness through "the mediated effects of the restriction of negative emotion display" (Silard & Wright, 2020, p. 403), and Demirer also reported similar experiences. For example, as I have described earlier, the club faced the risk of closure, but Demirer never expressed her feelings about this situation to people in the organization. She shared only the information about the situation -but not how she felt- with a few on the condition that they would not tell anyone else. Throughout the whole process, she said that no matter how much negative emotions -stress, anxiety, tension, panic- she felt, she did not show these negative emotions to the outside. Demirer explained that situation with the following words: "For example, you go hungry, but you make yourself look full. What I was doing was not faking; it was just something I had to do to manage the crisis. I could not look unhappy and spread that unhappiness".

Afterwards, to avoid the risk of closure, they had to send all the professional players away for free and build a new team by gathering only the amateur young people from their neighborhood. Managers are constantly in the public eye due to their position, and as predicted in the literature, the team's new athletes also looked

Demirer in the eye to understand their situation. So, while the organization was downsized and the club was transformed under a new brand -Ünsped-, Demirer did not show any negative emotions and communicated this decision to the players with the following words: "We want to be reborn, we are renewing the team, we are restructuring. We want young fresh seeds to replace the old players. We will not be a consumer club; we will be a producer club". Demirer also found a slogan to motivate her new athletes: "You have an important reason to get off at the Merkez Efendi tram stop" (Merkez Efendi: the tram stop closest to their sports center). By saying this, she aimed to encourage and motivate her athletes by pointing out a simple fact and reframing it into a special thing. Thus, while the club returned from the edge of closing, she overcame the crisis by relying on young, talented athletes in the district. Nevertheless, it must have been tough for Demirer to go through the worries of the club's closure almost alone and suppress all the negative emotions she felt while both fighting to prevent the closure and then moving on with a much lower budget. In the end, as predicted by the researchers, Demirer must have experienced situations associated with stress, depression, and loneliness (Zumaeta, 2019).

Moreover, leaders need to pretend while they perform their tasks in a way that they behave more seriously, cautious, boring (Zumaeta, 2019), or, as in the case of Demirer, braver. According to Demirer, the leader was the one who did not lose hope, who did not show fear even if she felt it, and who gave her team this passion, excitement, and strength to fight. In times of crisis, she told her athletes: "You have so much willpower and resilience that even if you are down by 30 points, you can fight with the opponent team and take the lead with one point". Alternatively, she said: "When you are down 0-2, you can take this game 3-2; as long as you stand upright, as long as you fight". The part "who did not show fear even if she felt it" is

particularly critical because Demirer's statement means that even if she was afraid, she was pretending not to be afraid. For almost two decades, as she was leading many children from low-income families who had extreme concerns about their future, she probably had to suppress her fear constantly and pretend not to be afraid even when she felt it.

On the other hand, previous studies showed that top executives act with the concern of protecting their image, and therefore, they feel obliged to keep their mistakes and weaknesses hidden from their subordinates. In other words, leaders need to increase the social distance between them and their followers to project prestige and influence. Otherwise, their influence and followers' respect for them may diminishes if their weaknesses become easily detectable by followers (Antonakis & Atwater, 2017). However, Demirer did not have such a way of thinking; on the contrary, she practiced precisely the opposite of this approach since she believed a manager cannot be an indispensable, immortal, all-knowing person. Therefore, she did not make any effort to hide her weaknesses; for example, she did not hesitate to ask those around her for advice when she could not find a solution to a problem. When faced with a situation that she could not comprehend, she asked the other person: "I do not know; I do not understand it. Can you please teach me?". In other words, when she experienced an unfamiliar situation, she did not feel a negative emotion about herself, such as a sense of inadequacy. In other words, since she did not need to hide her weaknesses, she had no related negative emotions to suppress. On the contrary, she accepted the problems that she could not quickly solve as expected and chose to deal with them authentically without worrying about portraying a "strong, knowledgeable, competent" image to others. Furthermore, Demirer believed that being emotional may be difficult but necessary in leadership,

and a person should be emotional, not unemotional. Lastly, she thought that children had an incredible ability to decode emotions and understand everything without seeing a display of emotion. In other words, she believed that when children look at a person, they can see into her/his soul. Also, she was very comfortable acting like a child around them -sometimes even dressing and behaving like them- and communicating with them as if she was their age, despite the general management mentality or suggestions of other adults around her.

Similarly, business executives feel that they should distance themselves from their employees (Granovetter, 1982; Messe et al., 1992) in order to be fair, objective, and detached from emotional ties (Wright, 2012) while they make essential decisions about subordinates. For instance, most senior executives consciously separate work and personal relationships and do not make friends at work to protect themselves (Zumaeta, 2019). On the other hand, distance prevents leaders from creating intimate bonds with employees, leading their isolation in the workplace (Chen et al., 2021). As a result, leadership positions often do not foster work environments where friendship and social intimacy are possible. However, contrary to the researchers' findings, Semra Demirer's leadership experience revealed the opposite, demonstrating how much she cared to create close ties with her subordinates in the office and the athletes at the club. Many anecdotes she shared demonstrated how she did not distance herself from her subordinates but, on the contrary, built extreme intimacy with them. First, Demirer cared so much about building an emotional attachment, even a strong bond of love with her employees, and described the club as a huge family. Demirer believed that the relationships with her subordinates were reciprocal, and she saw them as a mirror of herself, getting back the vibes she gave to them. She valued and loved her subordinates and got the same feelings back. For

example, she sent a message to her assistant every morning, and her assistant sent it back to her. These messages contained warm expressions such as "My sunshine" and "You are my light". Demirer also spoke warmly about her relationship with another employee, the club's cleaning lady, saying that she kissed her cheeks every morning and told her, "You do the hardest job in the best possible way; you provide us with a clean restroom". Another group of her subordinates was the coaches working for the club. Demirer was very interested in their well-being and even played a significant role in one coach's meeting and marrying his wife.

Moreover, Demirer paid extra attention to develop an incredible closeness with the athletes, and as a result of the strong bonds of love that developed between them, all young athletes called her "mom". After convincing herself that she's a leader and improving herself, she became the mother of underprivileged children. Demirer believed that the Republic is for the underprivileged, and as a woman of the Republic, she was destined to become the mother of the underprivileged children. When children get hungry, they meet their nutritional needs. When she saw their shoes were worn out, they bought new shoes, show them a selection of shoes, and say, "Choose any one you wish. You can take them all if you wish so." All kinds of people were embraced there, without discrimination; they never ask "Whose child?" for any child. That is why everyone called her "mom." Even when these children became adults, they still called her "mom." Some young people around looked dangerous from the outside; they walked around with Muslim rosaries in their hands, and when they saw her, they hid their rosaries. Demirer explained that hiding a rosary was a highly symbolic gesture to show that they trusted the other person and believed they would not be harmed by the other. These children also called her "mom". Every child in the club, and even in the neighborhood, called her mom.

In summary, as suggested in the literature, Demirer reported that she suppressed and did not express her negative emotions in difficult situations (e.g., when the club faced the risk of closure). Similarly, when the club was operating on a much tighter budget and with amateur players, she projected this situation positively to the players. When Demirer motivated the players, she did so without showing she was scared, even when she was. On the other hand, she did not concern to protect her image, or project prestige and influence. She also did not distance herself from others and hesitate to bond strong emotional ties. In conclusion, Demirer's case partially supported the proposition that "while performing their duties, their obligation to abstain from the authentic expression of their emotions makes leaders lonely".

Relationship with superior(s) & peers

When managers do not have a suitable group of equals with whom they can establish social ties, they face the risk of becoming socially isolated at work (Lindorf, 2001); however, the organizational structure, with a small number of C-level executives at the top, inevitably means that these senior managers have fewer opportunities to receive support and develop meaningful relationships (Wright, 2012). This was also the case for Demirer; as she held the general coordinator position, no one could be described as Demirer's peer, and she had only one superior, Mr. Haluk Ündeğer, who was in charge of the management of UPS Turkey and the owner of Ünspeid.

However, an analysis of the entire interview reveals that Mr. Haluk was mentioned almost exclusively at milestones. First, he insisted on bringing Demirer on as a top manager, and Demirer did not accept this offer for a long time. During this period, Demirer repeatedly told Ündeğer that she was a teacher, that teachers raised managers, top executives, and prime ministers, and that teachers could not have

bosses. When Ündeğer accepted Demirer's perspective, their nearly 20-year collaboration began. He was also mentioned as the most critical funder who kept the club financially afloat, as he was the head of UPS Turkey and sponsored the club's expenses. As already explained, UPS Sports and Culture Club only depended on external financial support -from UPS- rather than internal revenues, like all other basketball and volleyball clubs in Turkey.

We also heard Ündeğer's name frequently when the closure issue suddenly came to the agenda due to the unionization of UPS employees who were unhappy with the funds spent on the UPS sports club and demanded higher wages. As soon as Demirer heard the closure news, she immediately found herself in the room of Haluk Ündeğer, who decided to close the club. Ündeğer explained to Demirer that they must end the investment in the club, namely the team playing in the second league. She showed him all the work she had done up to that day and reminded Ündeğer of their agreement: "I told you at the beginning that a teacher cannot have a boss, and you accepted that I am the boss here". She also repeatedly reminded him of the importance of the club for the young athletes and the local community and offered Ündeğer alternatives to find a middle ground. After all, although financial support from UPS was cut down, Demirer's pressure was not entirely wasted. Ündeğer stated that even though UPS had to end their investment in the club (i.e., the team playing in the second league), he would not close the club completely, that there would be no harm to Demirer, and that he would continue to invest, albeit in a more limited way, through his own company, Ünspeid.

In conclusion, the researchers explained that the top is not crowded, and having only a few people at that level causes a lack of support and feedback, creating an environment that can foster isolation and loneliness for top managers (Wright,

2012). Demirer's situation fits this description fantastically because in the almost two decades she worked as a top manager, she never had a colleague who was her peer; she only had one supervisor. Although she received support from her supervisor sometimes, as described above, during the most critical period, she could only get partial support by using altruistic arguments. Demirer's use of altruistic arguments to influence Ündeğer and convince him to continue investing through his own company's sponsorship can be considered an example of stewardship characteristics of servant leadership. To conclude, the proposition that "As leaders move up in organizations, the number of peers and supervisors they can get support from decreases, making them lonely at the top" is mainly supported. The discussion section will address whether servant leadership, namely stewardship enable leaders to get support from their superiors or peers.

Relationship with subordinates

Another critical factor affecting the loneliness of leaders at the top is how their subordinates treat them. The factors that isolate leaders in their relationships with their subordinates can be categorized under the following headings: Employees are less supportive and less authentic towards leaders and avoid spending time with them. Despite all these, employees have high expectations from leaders. Finally, managers appointed to top positions within the organization struggle to manage their former peers.

- Subordinates are less supportive towards their leaders

As mentioned earlier, moving up the organizational ladder leads to non-reciprocal relationships between leaders and subordinates, as leaders are expected to provide

information and support to their subordinates as part of their managerial duties, but such support is often not available to these leaders (Blake & Mouton, 1978; Moyle, 1998; Lindorff, 2001). Demirer supported her subordinates even in very important but very private matters, such as marriage; however, she probably did not receive any support similar to that she gave. It is very likely that none of the employees in the organization made any effort to make Demirer feel happier in her personal life or even felt any concern in this regard.

The underlying reason is that although leaders support their followers, followers see support as an in-role responsibility of leaders and do not feel obliged to reciprocate (Toegel et al., 2013). In line with this statement, Demirer had the following experience: Throughout her career, she worked to develop young athletes in the face of financial difficulties, and all the expenses were covered entirely by external financial support. Many of these young people, provided with sports training thanks to external financial support, became professional athletes and earned substantial incomes. While some of these athletes later supported the club, others, as Demirer reported with a bitter feeling, did not give any financial or emotional support to the club, even though they knew that the club was dependent on external funding. Their lack of support might be because these professional athletes perceived working for the good of young people as a responsibility that came with Demirer's role. In addition, they might not share Demirer's passion and vision to support underprivileged children; therefore, they did not feel the commitment and responsibility that Demirer felt. As predicted, being unable to share their passion and vision and carrying the burden of commitment and responsibility alone (Dor-Haim, 2023) can lead to social isolation and loneliness in leaders.

Finally, researchers argued that the lack of reciprocal personal communication due to unequal status (Wright, 2012) and not receiving the same support and feedback that they give to their followers despite frequent interactions (Toegel et al., 2013; Lanaj & Jennings, 2020) can lead to social isolation and loneliness in leaders. When the club faced the risk of closure, Demirer experienced this painful experience since she was in a higher position than all of the employees, and this unequal status prevented her from communicating with them. She could only reveal this information to two of her closest colleagues. For a long time, she could only share this information with a coach she trusted most, and it was kept between them. Only much later, she could share it with a third person she trusted. Demirer expressed this difficult situation: "It was difficult to carry the burden of being the only one who knew such important information. Later, when I passed this information on to a few of my subordinates, I shared the burden a little". In the end, during the most challenging times for her emotionally, she could receive only minimal support. In addition, she could not seek and receive feedback in this challenging situation from her employees, with whom she was in constant contact every day and to whom she usually asked for feedback on almost anything. Moreover, she had to make an extra effort not to make others feel that risk of closure.

To conclude, Demirer's case showed that only a limited amount of support was available in the leadership position, as suggested in the literature. Accordingly, she revealed that having minimal support created a bitter feeling in her heart and an extra burden on her shoulders, which ended with a feeling of loneliness. In conclusion, Demirer's case fully supported the proposition that "limited support from subordinates in the workplace makes leaders lonely."

- Subordinates avoid open and sincere communication with their leaders

Researchers showed that subordinates unquestioningly approve of what they are told but then, in many cases, do not do what they are told (Zumaeta, 2019). Demirer also reported that she experienced a similar situation: Employees constantly did wrong things to test her boundaries even though she repeatedly told them that was wrong. In other words, even though she usually had very close, intimate relationships with her employees, her subordinates sometimes deliberately misbehaved to test the limits and then tried to justify themselves. This insincere behavior of the employees negatively affected the intimacy between Demirer and her subordinates. Moreover, leaders' access to more resources and power contributes to their loneliness (Hsiao-Yen Mao, 2006) because their subordinates may try to get close to and befriend leaders to access resources, often only available to them (Rokach, 2014). Considering the decision-making authority (to punish or forgive) as a resource in only the manager's possession, employees' insistence on making mistakes that require the manager's forgiveness can be viewed as an example that fits the above sentence. Besides, the persistence of such behaviors by employees that require forgiveness at the expense of abusing the manager's goodwill can also be considered insincere. Demirer explained how difficult it was to cope with this problem with the following words:

There is a time when every person (employee) does not follow the rules, and as a manager, I have to punish her/him after those behaviors. While I am applying the sanction, that employee still thinks that s/he is right. Even when s/he knows his/her mistake, s/he tries to test the limits of his/her manager. I try to resolve it with kindness, but it does not work. I impose sanctions, but it also does not work.

Stating that she felt lonely most in such situations, Demirer expressed that when dealing with these situations, she offered options to the employee. She said to them, "Let us make the decision together." and deciding with the employees relieved

her. So, Demirer showed another example of empowerment through this coping method. In conclusion, the proposition that "subordinates' insincere attitudes make leaders lonely" is mostly supported.

- Subordinates avoid socializing with their leaders

In early studies, senior managers reported that their employees feel uncomfortable and stressed around them; therefore, employees avoid spending time with them (Zumaeta, 2019). Since leaders are isolated from their employees and do not access complete and accurate information about the organization and its members, this lack of information can further increase feelings of loneliness by excluding them from daily conversations (Cooper & Quick, 2003). However, Demirer's narratives reveal the opposite; they organized many social activities together, and subordinates did not avoid spending time with her. In order to strengthen the sense of teamwork among the employees, they played sports matches together, formed choirs, and sang songs in cultural activities they organized. At these events, employees (as Demirer called "friends") with beautiful voices sang in the conference hall, while those with talents such as drama and mimicry displayed their talent and laughed a lot together. For example, a veteran employee, Mr. Muzaffer, once imitated Michael Jackson, danced, and became a legend in the club. They also impersonated Demirer during these events, which she sincerely enjoyed. They also went on picnics, had barbeques, and watched movies and plays together. They organized birthday parties for the employees' children in the garden of the club many times. They organized festivals and danced in the garden on holidays and special occasions. Demirer said that everyone in the club loved doing such activities and that when they were all together and having fun, they became closer and even more united.

On the other hand, Demirer's case entirely rejected the proposition that "since subordinates exclude leaders and avoid spending time with them, leaders become lonely." This objection indicates that leaders can manage the problem that subordinates avoid socializing with them by organizing social events that might attract these employees inside and outside the office. As it is the first and only entirely rejected proposition among antecedents, I will deeply explain why Semra Demirer was a servant leader and how servant leadership directly address subordinates' feelings (i.e., being uncomfortable and stressed) and avoidance behavior.

- Subordinates idealize their leaders

As stated earlier, subordinates may perceive leaders as if they were vital authority figures, such as a parent or teacher (Cooper & Quick, 2003), and then they may idealize leaders and re-feel the sense of security, caring, and stability they felt in their childhood when they were cared for by their parents (Rokach, 2014). This description fits Demirer's case precisely because she was so close with her subordinates and athletes that everyone in the club, especially the children and young athletes, saw her as their mother. In Demirer's words: "I became the mother of underprivileged children... Everyone calls me Mom". Even beyond what was predicted in the literature, Demirer not only made some children under her supervision re-feel security, caring, and stability but enabled many of them to meet these feelings for the very first time in their lives." For instance, in a video Demirer shared, Simge Aköz addresses her as "mom" (Demirer, 2021). Also, in a TV program that she attended and in the news headlines, Demirer was portrayed as the "Semra Mom" of athletes (Haberturk TV, 2021; "Başkan Semra Demirer," 2023). She was

called as "mom" of a lot of successful athletes like Barış Ermiş, Barış Hersek, Cenk Akyol, Zaza Pachulia, Semih Erden, and Melih Mahmutoğlu and described as idealistic as the movie character "Mahmut Hoca" of "Hababam Sınıfı" and as compassionate as "Hafize Ana" from the same movie (Yıldırım, 2018). Zaza Pachulia, a successful Georgian-Turkish basketball player who played in NBA teams like Atlanta Hawks (2005–2011), Golden State Warriors (2016–2018), and Detroit Pistons (2018–2019) and won two NBA championships in 2017 and 2018, had expressed his gratitude specifically to Semra Demirer having a significant contribution to his development ("Türkiye'ye Yeşil Işık," 2011).

On the other hand, such an idealization process may increase leader stress and eventual isolation (Cooper & Quick, 2003), and leaders also reported that this increased the social distance between them and their followers (Zumaeta, 2019). Besides, when their already high expectations are not met, the admiration felt by the employees may change in the opposite direction and turn into hostility, which naturally isolates the leader (Cooper & Quick, 2003). In order to avoid such a process and to keep expectations about her more realistic, Demirer told her employees that as a manager, she did not have to be irreplaceable and omniscient, and when she faced a problem to which she could not find a solution, she said, "I do not know, I do not understand; can you please guide me to a solution." She also told her subordinates that she was one of them, saying, "I get sick, I get diarrhea too, I get constipated too, I fall in love, I have problems, I hurt when I am pinched. I am a human being, too. I do not know more than you; I am just more experienced than you. I am just specialized in this job."

Demirer's way of dealing with this problem by reminding them that she is also human indicates her authenticity. In other words, by emphasizing that she was

human, too, Demirer tried to minimize the social distance between her and her subordinates and prevent them from idealizing her. In conclusion, the proposition that "subordinates' unrealistically high expectations of leaders make leaders lonely" is partially supported, and authenticity stood out as a trait Demirer used to manage these high expectations.

Relationship with the unique stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g. fans and media)

As explained in the literature review, the two main factors specific to the sports sector, fans and media, put significant pressure on sports managers. Unlike other sectors, the sports sector has "fans" as stakeholders, and these fans pressure sports managers by constantly expecting high success in a short time. However, the UPS (then Ünspeid) club has few fans as it competes in non-professional branches (e.g., basketball and volleyball) and the second league. Moreover, since the club's goal is not to become a champion but to train young athletes, few fans, if any, do not expect high sporting performance from the teams. Due to these factors, it is impossible to say there is pressure on Demirer from the fans.

Regarding the sports media, it cannot be claimed that the media follows Demirer's every move and criticizes her every word. Since the pressure on teams to achieve sporting success is not high, no journalists in the sports media made critical comments on the club's performance. On the contrary, even though Demirer and her club were covered a few times in the sports media (ÜNSPED, n.d.), these stories were conveyed to the readers with positive statements. For example, the following favorable headlines were used in these news reports: "The power of Turkish women," "They are producing and also beneficial to society," "The project that gives

hope to hopeless children," "The warm home of famous athletes," "Turks marked the World Fair Play award ceremony."

Due to the lack of data on this topic, the proposition that "the pressure from the unique stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g., fans and media) makes leaders lonely" could not be tested. Nonetheless, one of the reasons I chose Semra Demirer and UPS (later ÜNSPED) sports club in the case selection phase was to create diversity among the cases through the concept of public pressure, which I explained in more detail in the discussion section.

4.3.1.2 Managing loneliness at the top

Peer support from outside of the organization

The most effective methods to deal with the problem of not receiving effective feedback within the organization are executive coaching (Morris & Tarpley, 2000) or finding friends in similar positions in other organizations with whom they can confide (Cooper & Quick, 2003). Although Demirer shared no data about executive coaching, she mentioned friends with similar jobs. For example, Demirer, a former board member of Kayserispor club, had a close relationship with Berna Gözbaşı, the club's former president. Kayserispor is a highly competitive club with a football team that competes in the Turkish Super League. Also, Berna Gözbaşı is an iconic leader because she is the only woman to have been a club president in the Turkish Super League. These external peers can be an effective source of support because of their similarities to leaders (Zumaeta, 2019), such as facing similar problems and experiencing the same challenges. So, Gözbaşı could be considered an effective source of support for Demirer, as she carried a similar responsibility. However, regarding their relationship and exchange, Demirer did not share any memories of

receiving direct help from Gözbaşı; on the contrary, she stated that during the pandemic, she told Gözbaşı about a PR campaign she had organized at Ünsper, later on, Demirer also conducted the same PR campaign at the Kayserispor club. Demirer also mentioned her close relationships with Esra Gümüş Kırıcı, a board member of the Turkish National Olympic Committee and the İstanbul BB Sports Club, and Neşe Gündoğan, the Secretary-General of the Turkish National Olympic Committee. In addition to these female leaders, Demirer also showed photographs of herself with many other leaders from the sports sector. As a result, it can be inferred that Demirer, who can be described as a "social butterfly", benefited from her fellow executives in her massive network in the sports sector, at least as a source of emotional support. Demirer also stated that executives in the sector and former athletes provided financial and emotional support to their club, which operated like an NGO. In conclusion, the proposition that "leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from colleagues outside of their organization" is supported.

Confidants

One of the techniques suggested to leaders is sharing problems with confidants (Goleman, 1998), most often their spouse or partner, to receive care, comfort, and acceptance (Lindorff, 2001). When leaders need someone to open up, listen, and understand their deepest fears and concerns, they often turn to their spouses to fulfil these needs (Cooper & Quick, 2003). However, Demirer is not married and has no children. Indeed, when we first met, during the very beginning of our conversation, she stated that she had once been married, then got divorced. Another time, when she met one of my colleagues, she shared the same information. Thus, the proposition

that "leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from confidants, such as spouses or partners" does not apply to this case.

Self-development and self-motivation

As leaders hold top executive positions with higher status, they become more separated from their followers. Thus, companies can help top executives deal with loneliness by coaching them to think positively about challenging work events (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005). Moreover, organizations can train top executives to reflect on problem-solving more to foster positive relationships with their followers and manage their loneliness at the top since reflections on problem-solving trigger adaptive responses through increased work engagement and helping (Gabriel et al., 2021). Finally, awareness is the first step to effectively regulating feelings of loneliness, and leaders may benefit from being encouraged to engage in problem-solving pondering at home (Gabriel et al., 2021).

Demirer also believed that one of the most needed leadership qualities, especially when managing a sports club with a meagre budget, is the ability to manage a crisis. To do so effectively, Demirer adopted the principle of handling a crisis without seeing it as a crisis; instead, she perceived every challenge she faced in business as a new "surprise" and an opportunity to develop and strengthen herself. Thus, confirming that "leaders should think positively about challenging work events," she adopted a perspective that enabled her to see every challenge and obstacle as an opportunity. Stating that she considers the club as a legacy that still has a lot to be built upon, Demirer said that without the club, the children in the neighborhood would be miserable. Stating that many children were in poverty or had

lost their mother or father, Demirer said that these children motivated her the most and that she found the strength to struggle by thinking, "I am providing for them".

According to another argument proposed in the literature, leaders should find harmony with the world (Lynch, 2000) to deal with the loneliness at the top. In line with this statement, Demirer enjoyed her job so much that all kinds of problems were of secondary importance. Demirer did not see her job as work, and she went to the office every morning for decades without feeling like she was going to work; on the contrary, thinking, "What will I learn from those young people today?" "Which love letter will I receive?". Young athletes' love and energy were her most significant source of motivation and strength. Demirer got their ideas, told them about problems she experienced, and asked them, "What would you do if such a thing happened to you?". Then, they came up with creative ideas since these young minds had broad imaginations.

In the previous sections, where the difficulty of her job was described, I explained that her desire to change how other people view her profession (physical education teacher) was one of the factors that motivated Demirer. In addition, another factor that motivated Demirer and helped her not feel powerless when she felt lonely was the image of Atatürk formed in little Semra's mind by the words her father said to her when she was a child. The roots of Semra Demirer's motivation to value children and to lead society as a woman in the footsteps of Atatürk were planted long ago. When she was a little girl, just five years old, her teachers handed her a microphone and made her read poetry at school. Her father calmed little Semra's excitement with the words of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: "Do not underestimate a child. If she wishes, she can discover a pole, awaken a nation, establish a new country". Her father crowned this motivation with the following

observation: "If your mother has rights as a woman, if you, as a little girl, can receive this education at 5, it is thanks to Atatürk. Do not forget this". These words were engraved in little Semra's mind that day and never left it.

In addition to the motivation she received from her father in her childhood, Demirer's athletic background also played an essential role in her battle against all difficulties. When she was young, she was a skinny child who did not eat properly and perhaps would not have been so solid and combative if she had not been initiated into sports. Demirer said, "We need to be strong to accomplish difficult things. One cannot get stronger unless she accepts her weaknesses. But the thing that gave me this perspective is sports". Demirer believed that one of the essential qualities needed to manage the loneliness she encountered while managing the club was to remain calm. That was the quality she gained by practicing sports in her youth.

Finally, several other techniques are suggested for leaders to manage loneliness at the top, such as spirituality and rituals (Goleman, 1998). Demirer also stated that there were periods when she faced many challenges, and she felt lonely during those difficult times, but she did not lose her faith and prayed. When she felt lonely, Demirer convinced herself that loneliness was temporary; she motivated herself with the idea that a top executive could be alone at any time; therefore, she had to bear it. When overwhelmed, she read to calm down and did things that gave her relief and joy, such as walking in the park and watching movies. If there was a meeting, she had it somewhere outside, relaxed by eating and drinking outside. In conclusion, the proposition that "leaders manage the loneliness at the top by focusing on their self-development and self-motivation" is strongly supported. As a result, the following table on the extent to which propositions were supported emerged (see Table 6):

Table 6. The Antecedents and Coping Mechanism of Demirer's Loneliness

Propositions	Absolute existence of the antecedent / (or managing method)	Leadership type performed to cope with the antecedent	Further need for discussion
P1: Their excessive workload and responsibilities make leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P2: Having to make difficult decisions make leaders lonely.	Yes	Servant leadership - Empowerment	Yes
P3: While performing their duties, their obligation to abstain from the authentic expression of their emotions makes leaders lonely.	Yes	Servant leadership – Authenticity	No
P4: As leaders move up in organizations, the number of peers and supervisors they can get support from decreases, making them lonely at the top.	Yes	Servant leadership - Stewardship	Yes
P5a: The lack of support from subordinates in the workplace makes leaders lonely.	Yes	Not mentioned.	No
P5b: Subordinates' insincere attitudes makes leaders lonely.	Yes	Servant leadership - Empowerment	Yes
P5c: Since subordinates exclude leaders and avoid spending time with them, leaders become lonely.	NO!	Servant Leadership	Yes, deep analysis is required!
P5d: Subordinates' unrealistically high expectations of leaders make leaders lonely.	Yes	Servant leadership – Authenticity	Yes
P6: The pressure from the stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g., fans and media) makes leaders lonely.	No. Data is not available (as expected)	Not required.	No
P7: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from colleagues outside their organization.	Yes		No
P8: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from confidants, such as spouses or partners.	NO!		Yes, deep analysis is required!
P9: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top by focusing on their self-development and self-motivation.	Yes		No

4.3.2 Discussion

As the literature on loneliness at the top continues to debate whether leaders are lonely, this study first aimed to determine whether leaders are lonely. In the Demirer case, Semra Demirer answered, "What do you think about the concept of loneliness at the top? Does it reflect your leadership experience?" by stating that she strongly agreed that leaders are lonely. She confirmed the existence of almost all of the antecedents of loneliness at the top that I expected to identify in this case. For instance, Demirer confirmed that she had too much workload and responsibilities (p1); she had to make difficult decisions (p2); she had to suppress her negative emotions (p3).

Regarding the loneliness caused by the actions and attitudes of other employees around her, she confirmed that she did not receive enough support from her superiors, peers, and subordinates (p4 and p5a); her subordinates were sometimes insincere (p5b), and they had too high expectations of her (p5d). Contrary to what was expected, she did not share any data on her subordinates avoiding her (5c); in fact, she provided information to the opposite of this (I analyzed it in depth below). Finally, as I explained in more detail below, I did not make any findings on the pressure from the unique stakeholders of the sports sector (p6), as expected.

Regarding the mechanisms for managing loneliness at the top that had been proposed, Demirer provided extensive evidence of self-development and self-motivation (p9) and support from colleagues outside the organization (p7). On the other hand, she did not share any information about receiving support from close family members or friends (p8). I analyzed this unexpected absence in depth at the end of the discussion section.

It is also possible to analyze the mechanisms she employed to manage the loneliness at the top, which still needs to be suggested in the literature. For example, when she had difficulties making tough decisions (p2) or her subordinates showed insincere behaviors (p5b), she included them in the decision-making process. Alternatively, when they had too high expectations of her (p5d), she made her natural qualities and weaknesses visible. When she struggled to get enough support from her superior (p4), she reminded her superior of her sacrifices to protect society. Finally, her subordinates did not ostracize her (p5c) thanks to her many positive qualities, such as humility and interpersonal acceptance.

Typically, each of these relationships provides particular insights into the existence of separate coping mechanisms. As I mentioned many times in the previous part, the coping methods mentioned by Demirer -and even many other data she presented- indicate that Demirer was a servant leader.

Semra Demirer, servant leadership & the loneliness at the top

As explained in detail below, this study showed that Demirer fits the characteristics of servant leadership. In this section, I shared the definition of servant leadership, then its characteristics, and showed how they match Demirer's leadership characteristics.

The theory of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) proposed that the primary responsibility of a leader is to serve her/his followers and to focus on the well-being of the followers and their communities. So, it differs from other leadership theories that focus on the organization's well-being. A servant leader nurtures and defends her/his followers when needed and speaks out against social inequality. S/he treats every member of the society, even the most marginal ones, in the same way,

respectfully. A servant leader prioritizes social responsibility even if it is not the best for the organization financially (Yukl, 2010). All these descriptions describe Demirer: prioritizing serving the club's athletes and the people of Zeytinburnu; treating all members of the community equally and protecting everyone; fighting social inequality by using sport as a tool; resisting the closure of the club even though it would be financially unfavorable to the organization.

According to Van Dierendonck's study, cited more than 3500 times, "these six key characteristics give a good overview of servant leadership behavior": empowerment, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, stewardship, and providing direction (Van Dierendonck, 2011). A comparison of these key characteristics that I deeply analyzed below with the data I obtained in Demirer's case revealed that Semra Demirer can be considered a servant leader. More importantly, the discussion revealed that key characteristics of servant leadership may cure the loneliness at the top, at least to some extent.

Empowerment: Servant leaders believe in the intrinsic value of each individual, and they recognize and acknowledge their abilities and potential (Greenleaf, 1998). As they value people and desire to encourage their personal development, servant leaders give their subordinates a sense of personal power, and they foster a proactive, self-confident attitude among them (Laub, 2000). By showing empowering leadership behavior, they encourage self-directed decision-making and coaching for innovative performance (Konczak et al., 2000). Moreover, servant leaders consult with subordinates about decisions affecting them, provide them with appropriate autonomy and discretion, and encourage them to express concerns or dissenting views without becoming defensive (Yukl, 2010). In parallel with these findings in theory, Demirer consulted with subordinates (even the cleaner or the

junior athletes) about almost any decision, including those affecting them, and encouraged them to express their ideas. She benefited from the rich imagination of little kids without any opposing thoughts or concerns about projecting a powerful image in their minds, like "she knows all."

Besides, her leadership approach, based on empowering her subordinates, also had a preventive effect against the antecedents leading to loneliness at the top. Firstly, Demirer gave her subordinates a sense of personal power by encouraging them to engage in self-directed decision-making. As a servant leader, she asked for advice from anyone in almost any possible situation to empower her subordinates. So, by clearly sharing the burden of decision-making with others, she decreased the high-level burden on herself (recall proposition 2).

Moreover, she did not give up on her empowering attitude even in the most challenging situations. For example, even when her employees showed an insincere attitude and pushed Demirer to her limits by making the same mistakes over and over again (recall proposition 5b), she did not exclude them from the decision-making process. She consulted with them about decisions affecting them and gave them the right amount of autonomy even when she had to punish them. She made her subordinates a part of the decision-making process, and they made the decision together, so she felt relieved. With this managing method, she again demonstrated the empowerment characteristic of servant leadership. Besides, she prevented her subordinates' insincere attitudes made her feel uncomfortable and lonely.

To conclude, leaders may empower their subordinates even when they show insincere attitudes so that they do not feel bad about themselves when dealing with these insincere attitudes. So, leaders' feelings of loneliness may diminish when they empower their subordinates, even when they show insincere attitudes.

Humility: Servant leaders feel a sense of responsibility for their subordinates (Greenleaf, 1996), and they put subordinates' accomplishments and talents in a proper perspective (Patterson, 2003). Servant leaders actively seek their subordinates' contributions and benefit from their expertise, putting their interests first, facilitating their performance, and providing essential support. Servant leaders are modest and "retreat into the background when a task has been accomplished." (Van Dierendonck, 2011) In other words, when a collective effort is successful, they are modest about their achievements and instead emphasize their subordinates' contributions. Lastly, servant leaders treat their subordinates respectfully, avoid status symbols and special privileges, and admit their limitations and mistakes (Yukl, 2010).

Humility was one of Semra Demirer's main leadership characteristics because she always told her followers she was one of them and did not consider herself superior to them. She valued the opinions of her employees and took their ideas and feedback on everything while managing the club. Demirer preferred her employees to be smarter than her and she did not mind staying in the background. Demirer believed a manager could not be all-knowing, and she accepted -even embraced- her limitations. When faced with a challenge that she could not deal with, she asked her followers for guidance. The door of her room was open to everyone, and instead of status symbols, the room was full of photos of her followers, like the club's former players, and hand-made gifts and notes from young athletes.

To conclude, being a servant leader, namely expressing sincere humility, might be the main factor that prevented Demirer from being excluded and avoided by her subordinates (recall proposition 5c). To conclude, Demirer's case led to the insight that sincere humility mitigated the impact of loneliness fed by the exclusion and avoidance of subordinates.

Authenticity: It refers to leaders' ability to put their individualistic characteristics first while maintaining their professional roles secondary (Halpin & Croft, 1966). In other words, "one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings" (Harter, 2002, p. 382). Authenticity is related to integrity, and servant leaders manifest their authenticity by doing what they promise, being visible within the organization, being honest (Russell & Stone, 2002), and being vulnerable (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). In other words, they are true to others and themselves, accurately representing their internal states, intentions, and commitments (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In parallel with these findings in the theory, Semra Demirer embraced authenticity as one of her main leadership characteristics. She always reminded her followers that she was not a superhero but a human just like them, saying, "I get sick, I get diarrhea too, I get constipated too, I fall in love, I hurt when I am pinched. I am a human being, too." She dealt with challenging problems authentically without worrying about portraying a "strong, knowledgeable, competent" image to others. Demirer believed being emotional was difficult but necessary in leadership and did not hide her emotions. She had close ties with her subordinates and the athletes at the club and described the club as a "huge family." She preferred genuine closeness coupled with a paternalistic approach rather than professional distance in her relationships with her followers by maintaining her professional role secondary (I will explain the definition of paternalism and why the players calling Demirer "mom" indicated a paternalistic relationship between them in great detail under the general discussion heading a few pages later).

As a result, thanks to her authenticity, Demirer did not experience emotional detachment (Wright, 2012) or she did not need to pretend for projecting prestige and

influence (Antonakis & Atwater, 2017) that cause distance between employees and leaders. As a servant leader, Demirer's case indicated that authenticity may be related to this antecedent of the loneliness at the top (i.e., the need for distance) and authenticity may alleviate the problem of "distancing themselves from their subordinates."

Also, I argued that subordinates' unrealistic expectations of leaders are an antecedent of loneliness at the top (recall p5d). Demirer's way of dealing with the problem of deification of leaders in the eyes of employees (i.e. reminding them that she is a human being too) refers to the authenticity characteristic of servant leadership. To summarize, the leaders' concerns of "distancing themselves from their subordinates to fulfil their role make them lonely" and "the employees' high expectations led them to feel loneliness" was overcome by showing authenticity.

Interpersonal acceptance: It refers to leaders' ability to understand and experience their subordinates' feelings and where these feelings come from (George, 2000), as well as letting go of wrongdoings and not carrying a grudge into other situations (McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000). According to Ferch (2005), servant leaders "create an atmosphere of trust where people feel accepted, are free to make mistakes, and know that they will not be rejected" (as cited in Van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1234). They also feel warmth, compassion, forgiveness, and concern for their subordinates by focusing on their psychological perspectives even when confronted with offences, arguments, and mistakes (Van Dierendonck, 2011). In other words, servant leaders accept people for who they are.

As explained earlier, the UPS Sports and Culture Club was founded in the Zeytinburnu district, one of the most unsafe neighborhoods in Istanbul. Historically, Zeytinburnu was already one of the areas where the lowest-income families lived.

Security problems and substance addiction were common in the area, and the standard of living and the prospects of young people were the lowest. In the last ten years, with immigrants from many countries such as Syria and Afghanistan starting to live in this area, it turned into an area where the most low-income people of many nationalities live. In the club, Semra Demirer embraced all members of the Zeytinburnu community without discrimination. She treated each member of society, even the most marginalized ones like drug addicts, with respect and care. So, all of these may be why her employees and athletes did not feel uncomfortable or stressed around her -unlike how other employees feel around their boss-. Therefore, being a servant leader, namely having an outstanding level of interpersonal acceptance, might be the main factor that prevented Demirer from being excluded and avoided by her subordinates (recall proposition 5c).

Stewardship: It refers to choosing service over self-interest (Block, 1993). In other words, servant leaders are willing to take responsibility for the larger institution instead of control and self-interest (Block, 1993; Spears, 1995). Servant leaders emphasize social responsibility, loyalty, and teamwork; they act as role models and stimulate their subordinates to act in the common interest by setting the right example (Van Dierendonck, 2011). In other words, servant leaders work for the good of the whole and set the right example for the followers as/with a role model.

Concerning setting the right example, Demirer believed that children must have role models for their development. However, she realized that many children in the region did not have role models in their families, and the lack of role models had negative consequences for them and misled them in their decisions in life. In addition to acting as a role model for children, Semra Demirer also helped them to meet different role models by introducing them to successful athletes like Zaza Pachulia

and Melih Mahmutoglu. Secondly, regarding choosing service over self-interest, Semra Demirer chose to serve the whole community as her career plan instead of earning much money or gaining prestigious titles. She contributed to the children from disadvantaged groups and the whole Zeytinburnu community with their altruistic work in the club. During the most critical period of the club's history, when it was at risk of being shut down, Demirer argued with the club's funder, Mr. Ündeğer, about why the club was essential for Zeytinburnu community and how it benefits society. So, Mr. Ündeğer was convinced to continue investing in the club through his own company, Ünspe, and Demirer ensured the support to the community would continue. The concept of "stewardship" (i.e. emphasizing the welfare of low-income people in the community rather than her interest) can explain Demirer's influence on Ündeğer. In conclusion, Demirer overcame the problem of "limited support from their superiors and peers" because she worked for the community, not for herself.

Providing direction: Servant leaders benefit their subordinates and their organization by directing their subordinates, so they know what is expected of them (Laub, 2000). Servant leaders rely on their strong values and faith and create new approaches to old problems (Russell & Stone, 2002). Providing direction to the subordinates is about designing the work based on their abilities, needs, and input. It is also related to providing them with the right degree of responsibility, which leads to high-quality dyadic interpersonal relations between the leader and the subordinates (Ferris, Liden, Munyon, Summers, Basik, & Buckley, 2009).

Demirer provided direction for many people in her organization -perhaps thousands of them- in the most critical periods of their lives in the best way possible. For instance, Semra Demirer met a young girl who had bad habits like drug

addiction. Demirer directed her to the sports and raised her so well that she became an elite player at the Super League level. That troubled young girl became an elegant lady, a caring mum, and a successful athlete. Moreover, Demirer valued each person and intensely believed each kid had tremendous potential to achieve greatness.

Therefore, she worked hard to provide direction to them and played a remarkable role in their development. For instance, she provided direction for Simge Aköz by clarifying what was expected from her and making her believe she had the power to succeed. Once, Simge Aköz thought she could not be a successful volleyball player since her height was too short to be a professional volleyball player (1.68 m). Also, some family members were insisting she quit volleyball. While Simge and her family did not believe in her, Demirer instilled in Aköz her most vital value -stamina- and encouraged Simge to believe in herself and not give up. With advice and guidance, Demirer helped young Simge to make volleyball the focal point of her life again.

Simge Aköz shared her experiences at that time as follows:

I started volleyball as a spiker, but when I joined the youth team, I stopped growing taller. I beat myself up a lot psychologically at that time because playing volleyball was something I loved very much. I deeply experienced the fear of not being able to play volleyball again. It felt like if I couldn't be a spiker; I couldn't be anything else because I was trained for that position. I cried for nights and prayed, "Oh God! Please let me grow taller." At that time, I got lucky, and I met a very good manager. A lady who loved children very much, Semra (Demirer) from UPS Sports Club. She said, "My daughter, you may not be a spiker, but your defense and bump passes are very good. Let us take you to the A team. You can play libero, gain experience, and overcome this transition period by adapting to the A team". I can say that what I experienced there shaped my life. If it had been someone else there, not Semra anne... It was a major breaking moment for me" ("Simge," 2022).

Demirer and experts in the club planned Simge's career, and by creating a new approach to the problem, they moved her to the libero position where she would not be at a height disadvantage. By doing so, Demirer re-designed the work Aköz had to do based on her ability. Then, they sent her to a club where she could develop

herself better. Finally, with the help of the direction provided by Demirer, Simge became one of the best volleyball players in Turkey.

The impact of other dimensions of servant leadership on the antecedents of loneliness at the top was negative (e.g., empowerment reduced the burden of making difficult decisions). However, providing direction to her subordinates did not weaken any antecedent of Demirer's loneliness at the top. Indeed, I have not claimed it always has to be this way.

To conclude, the deep comparison of key characteristics of servant leadership and Demirer's behaviors confirms that Semra Demirer can be considered a servant leader. Moreover, how these characteristics of servant leadership are related to the antecedents of loneliness at the top are deeply analyzed. These analyses revealed that servant leadership is appropriate in establishing closer relationships with superiors or subordinates. Considering that loneliness is defined as "the difference between the desired and actual level of emotional intimacy", servant leadership turns out to be a promising leadership type to prevent or at least diminish loneliness at the top. On the other hand, in terms of requiring a high level of personal sacrifice, servant leadership can also reinforce some of the antecedents of loneliness at the top, such as increased workload and responsibilities for the leader. In this respect, the idea that loneliness at the top is inevitable for leaders still stands firmly. However, "whether servant leadership reduces loneliness at the top" seems to be a valid research question to explore in future studies. As noted above, the relationships between each dimension of servant leadership and the antecedents of loneliness at the top could also be examined in depth by researchers.

Servant leadership & subordinates' avoidance behavior

The case analysis revealed that Demirer's subordinates did not feel uncomfortable and stressed around her, so they did not avoid spending time with her. So, Demirer's case rejected the proposition that "since subordinates exclude leaders and avoid spending time with them, leaders become lonely." As it is the only entirely rejected proposition among the antecedents of the loneliness at the top, I deeply discussed how Semra Demirer's servant leadership directly addresses subordinates' feelings (i.e., not feeling uncomfortable and stressed around her) and prevents them from showing avoidance behavior. In the previous part, I explained how all of these were related to Demirer's high level of humility and interpersonal acceptance. In this part, I also explained how Semra Demirer's other servant leadership characteristics (i.e., empowerment, authenticity, stewardship, and providing direction) directly address subordinates' feelings and avoidance behavior.

Firstly, as explained, empowerment also refers to valuing people and believing in the intrinsic value of each individual. Demirer also valued each of her employees, no matter what their role was in the organization, and she believed in the high potential of the athletes in the club -even the high potential of each kid in the world-. That may be why her employees and athletes did not feel uncomfortable or stressed around her -unlike any employee around her/his boss.

Secondly, authenticity is related to integrity, and servant leaders manifest their authenticity by doing what they promise, being honest (Russell & Stone, 2002), and being vulnerable (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Comparing these definitions with Demirer's behaviors, Demirer can be considered a manager with high integrity who always worked hard to keep her promises. Therefore, it is normal for the subordinates to have positive feelings about her. Moreover, the fact that she was

honest and vulnerable and shared her weaknesses with others must prevent people from feeling uncomfortable and nervous around her. That is why they did not avoid spending time with her, so she did not feel loneliness related to subordinate avoidance.

Thirdly, servant leaders give great importance to social responsibility and loyalty and act as role models for their subordinates. Athletes from a low-income community must be aware of the great importance Demirer gave to social responsibility and that she worked for them. Demirer, a great role model for the young athletes in the club, had loyalty-based relationships with her athletes and subordinates. Thanks to such a warm relationship, the players and staff should feel comfortable and not stressed around Demirer and be happy to spend time with her at every opportunity.

Finally, servant leaders benefit their subordinates by directing them (Laub, 2000). They also provide them with the right degree of responsibility, which leads to high-quality dyadic interpersonal relations between the leader and the subordinates (Ferris et al., 2009). Demirer worked hard to provide direction for the future of each of the thousands of young people under her responsibility. As a result, these young people benefited greatly, becoming professional athletes or getting high-income jobs. Naturally, these young people, whose lives changed for the better from the first day they walked through the club doors, felt stress-free and comfortable around Demirer, whom they called "mom," and did not avoid her.

CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

5.1 Cross-case analysis

Loneliness at the top, its antecedents, and coping mechanisms

In the literature on loneliness at the top, there is a disagreement among researchers on whether leaders are lonely or not. This study provides evidence supporting that leaders are lonely. All the top executives interviewed reported intense loneliness at the top and strongly agreed that loneliness is an inevitable feature of senior positions. Each of them emphasized sometimes the same and sometimes different antecedents of their experience of loneliness at the top. Here, I addressed the comparison between the cases on the loneliness at the top, its antecedents, and coping mechanisms in this section. In Table 7, I showed which propositions are supported in which case, so I showed propositions jointly supported in 3 cases and those not supported in some cases.

As can be seen, concerning the individual effects of the leadership position on the top executives (i.e. heavy workload, responsibility for decision-making and the need to suppress emotions), all three leaders almost without exception confirmed the existence of these antecedents. Only Çetin Yılmaz insisted that he refused to behave differently because his leadership position required it (see proposition 3). However, I already explained that this also increased his workload.

Table 7. The Antecedents and Coping Mechanism of Leaders' Loneliness

Propositions / Absolute existence of the antecedent (or managing method)	Case I: Çetin Yılmaz	Case II: Hakan Karaahmet	Case III: Semra Demirer
P1: Their excessive workload and responsibilities make leaders lonely.	Yes	Yes	Yes
P2: Having to make difficult decisions make leaders lonely.	Yes	Yes	Yes
P3: While performing their duties, their obligation to abstain from the authentic expression of their emotions makes leaders lonely.	NO!	Yes	Yes
P4: As leaders move up in organizations, the number of peers and supervisors they can get support from decreases, making them lonely at the top.	Yes	Yes	Yes
P5a: The lack of support from subordinates in the workplace makes leaders lonely.	NO!	NO!	Yes
P5b: Subordinates' insincere attitudes makes leaders lonely.	NO!	Yes	Yes
P5c: Since subordinates exclude leaders and avoid spending time with them, leaders become lonely.	NO!	NO!	NO!
P5d: Subordinates' unrealistically high expectations of leaders make leaders lonely.	Yes	Yes	Yes
P6: The pressure from the stakeholders of the sports sector (e.g., fans and media) makes leaders lonely.	Yes	Yes.	No. Data is not available
P7: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from colleagues outside their organization.	Yes	Yes	Yes
P8: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from confidants, such as spouses or partners.	Yes	Yes	NO!
P9: Leaders manage the loneliness at the top by focusing on their self-development and self-motivation.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Regarding leaders' relationships with other members of the organization, all three leaders confirmed that the number of peers and supervisors they can get support from decreased, making them lonely at the top (see proposition 4). However, there were mixed results regarding their relationships with their subordinates. Firstly,

all three leaders also confirmed that their subordinates had unrealistically high expectations of them, which made them lonely (see proposition 5d). However, in other dimensions of their relationships with their subordinates, they were able to establish strong relationships from time to time. For example, Yılmaz's subordinates were sincere towards him (see proposition 5b), whereas both Yılmaz and Karaahmet could get support from their subordinates (see proposition 5a). Finally, all three leaders spent time with their subordinates and were not excluded by them (see proposition 5c). As a result, although they felt lonely at the top overall, their relations with their subordinates only partially supported their loneliness. In their relations with the sector stakeholders, Yılmaz and Karaahmet, as expected, stated that they felt weighty pressure, which fed their loneliness at the top (see proposition 6).

Finally, about coping mechanisms, all three leaders, almost without exception, reported that they had used all three support mechanisms. The only exception was Demirer, who did not share any feedback about receiving support from a confidant (see proposition 8).

Paternalistic leadership

In recent years, the rising interest in Asian economies has also drawn researchers' attention to distinct leadership styles and practices of these cultures, such as paternalistic leadership. "Paternalistic leadership (PL) is an indigenous leadership style that is rooted in China's patriarchal tradition." (Farh et al., 2008, p. 171). According to Bedi (2020), it is predominantly found in non-Western cultures like countries in the Middle East and Asia. Paternalistic leaders treat followers as family members and try to protect them while guiding and encouraging their growth. Farh and Cheng (2000) identify some dimensions of paternalistic leadership, such as

benevolence, moral leadership, and authoritarianism. Benevolence refers to "individualized, holistic concern for subordinates' personal or familial well-being", while moral leadership refers to "superior personal virtues, self-discipline, and unselfishness" (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004, p. 91). Finally, authoritarianism refers to "asserting absolute authority and control over subordinates and demanding unquestionable obedience from subordinates" (Cheng et al., 2004, p. 91).

In short, paternalistic leaders understand the needs of their followers and prioritize their welfare, protect and care for them as their children, and serve as role models for them with their selflessness and integrity while expecting obedience and loyalty from them in return. In parallel with these dimensions, paternalistic leadership behaviors are described as "creating a family atmosphere in the workplace", "establishing close and individualized relationships with subordinates", "getting involved in the non-work domain", "expecting loyalty" and "maintaining authority/status" (Aycan, 2006, p. 449). Wang et al. (2018) proposed an enhanced typology and defined three types of paternalistic leadership as benevolence-dominant paternalistic leadership (the combination of high levels of benevolence and low levels of authoritarianism), authoritarianism-dominant paternalistic leadership (the combination of high levels of authoritarianism and low levels of benevolence), and classical paternalistic leadership (the combination of high levels of benevolence and high levels of authoritarianism) (see Figure 6).

		AUTHORITARIANISM	
		Low	High
B E N E V O L E N C E	Low	X	authoritarianism- dominant paternalistic leadership
	High	benevolence- dominant paternalistic leadership	classical paternalistic leadership

Figure 6. Paternalistic leadership

Source: Based on [Wang et al., 2018]

As mentioned, paternalistic leadership traits are identified in all three leaders, not culturally unexpected, since Turkey's scores were very high among the ten nations regarding its paternalistic values according to a cross-cultural study (Aycan, Kanungo, Mendonca, Yu, Deller, Stahl, & Kurshid, 2000). Scoring high on paternalistic values means that the nation considers leaders ideal according to their ability to show paternalistic traits (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). In this section, I explained the situations in which these leaders displayed paternalistic leadership characteristics. I started with Demirer and show that she is a paternalistic leader. According to Kabasakal and Bodur (2007, p. 853), a paternalistic leader has many traits such that s/he...:

(i) "...is concerned with the private problems of followers": Demirer has been trying for almost two decades to solve the private problems of her staff, athletes and even the families of her athletes, even if they are not directly part of the organization chart.

(ii) "...would take the initiative in deciding for the employees with regard to their problems": Demirer did this many times; for example, when Simge Aköz was thinking of quitting volleyball, she changed her position on the court and sent her to another club for her development.

(iii) "...attends social events such as wedding ceremonies of employees' children": She not only went to the wedding of her subordinates' child but also intermediated for the marriage of one of her employees, a club coach.

(iv) "...would act like one of the employees at social events": Demirer stated that she behaved not only as one of the employees but also acted like a child when she was with the children, even dressed and spoke like them.

(v) "...creates a family-like atmosphere in the organization": She had close ties with her subordinates and the athletes at the club and described the club as a "huge family." She preferred genuine closeness rather than professional distance in her relationships with her followers by maintaining her professional role secondary.

Moreover, there is a point where all of these characteristics intersect, and that is Semra Demirer's nickname: "mother". Every child in the club, even in the neighborhood, called her "Mom". When checked one by one, it will be seen that only a "mother" can fulfil all of the qualities above, and only for her child. On the contrary, Demirer, as a paternalistic leader, showed all of these qualities to her young athletes.

Karaahmet also showed paternalistic leadership characteristics, as he saw himself as the "big brother" of his subordinates, organizing social events in his own home and hosting football players with their families, while top executives generally avoid this. Of course, in paternalistic leadership, there is still a certain distance between leader and follower (as between father and son, or in this case between "old

brother" and young brother). However, paternalistic leaders have a more holistic concern and approach; likewise, Karaahmet was sincerely concerned about adapting foreign athletes to the city and wanted to make them feel at home in his city, Giresun. This paternalistic and sincere concern enabled him to establish strong relationships with his athletes and board members and avoid loneliness, at least in related dimensions.

Finally, Çetin Yılmaz also showed paternalistic leadership traits, as he prioritized the personal development of the young athletes in the METU basketball team in his first coaching experience. Previous studies have shown that subordinates "may idealize their leaders" and re-feel the sense of security, caring, and stability "they felt in childhood when they were cared for by [their] parents" (Rokach, 2014, p. 51). Similarly, Yılmaz took a close interest in the young athletes studying at METU and, as their "big brother", gave them a sense of security. So much so that his former athletes still keep in touch with their Çetin "abi" (big brother) despite the passage of 45 years; one of them even stated that she felt as if they had never been separated, while another said that when he faced a crisis at work, he solved it by thinking "What would Çetin abi do?".

Among the three types of paternalistic leadership, Çetin Yılmaz is a benevolence-dominant paternalistic leader for many reasons. First, as a paternalistic leader, he tried to protect his players. For instance, he plunged into the heart of the fight, thinking, "If my team is in a fight, I have to be with my players and staff as their leader". Also, when one of his players was crying on his shoulder and saying he was so scared to play, Yılmaz found a way that required him to sacrifice himself to protect his player. So, when the game was over, and they lost it, the club executives, the media, the fans, and the other players would not be angry with the player but the

coach, and they would hold him responsible for the defeat. It showed benevolence and unselfishness. In conclusion, Çetin Yılmaz can be described as a benevolence-dominant paternalistic leader.

As a result, I found paternalistic leadership characteristics in all of the leaders I analyzed. However, this should be considered normal because paternalistic leadership is a cultural phenomenon observed in some collectivist societies. Therefore, the prevalence of paternalistic leadership in collectivist societies like Turkey must also affect subordinates' expectations. Because they are used to seeing paternalistic characteristics from those who previously led them, they may expect to see the same paternalistic leadership characteristics from their current leaders. Thanks to their paternalistic leadership characteristics, all three leaders who acted in parallel with this expectation were able to manage their relationships with their employees in the way they desired. For instance, Kabasakal's study showed that they reduced the distance between them and their subordinates, which aligns with the findings of previous studies on manager-employee relations in Turkey. Thus, their inevitable experience of loneliness at the top was at least not reinforced by some sub-elements related to their subordinates.

In other words, as I showed in the table at the beginning of the cross-case analysis and explained just below the table, all three leaders confirmed that they experienced excessive workload and decision-making responsibility, factors that reinforce loneliness at the top. On the other hand, only some factors in their relationships with their subordinates (e.g. high expectations) contributed to their loneliness. In contrast, other factors (e.g., avoidance and lack of socialization) did not increase their loneliness as they were unexpectedly absent. Regarding its relation with paternalistic leadership, Demirer's being the "mother" of those around her

increased her workload and responsibility (recall propositions 1 and 2). At the same time, she had closer relationships with her subordinates and was not avoided by them thanks to being their "mom". Similarly, Karaahmet's emphasis on the adaptation of foreign footballers to the city, as if he were their "big brother", increased his workload but reduced the distance between them. Finally, Yılmaz's demonstration of benevolence (i.e. individualized, holistic concern for subordinates' personal or familial well-being) and self-sacrificing behavior on many occasions increased his leadership burden, but also enabled him to establish stronger relationships with his subordinates and increased the support he received from them. In sum, paternalistic leadership strengthened the dimensions of loneliness at the top, such as workload and responsibility, while weakening the dimensions related to relationships with subordinates.

Paternalistic leadership & servant leadership

In the Demirer case, I strongly identified the theme of servant leadership and analyzed it in detail in the discussion section under the case. Just above, I also explained in detail that she had paternalistic characteristics. These two findings do not contradict each other or the theory; on the contrary, they are very much in line with the existing literature. For instance, Öner (2012) showed a high correlation between executives' paternalistic and servant leadership characteristics "within the cultural context of Turkey characterized by high in-group collectivism, acceptance of power distance between leaders and their employees, and paternalism" (Öner, 2012, p. 309). According to the data collected from Turkish employees', there is a significantly positive correlation between all dimensions of these two leadership

types, contrary to Western employees, who consider them mutually exclusive (Öner, 2012).

In addition to the culturality of the servant leadership concept, Demirer had the chance to show servant leadership characteristics for another reason. She served as a servant leader mostly because she led a philanthropic organization. The relevance of servant leadership may be largely valid for NGOs or philanthropic organizations. At the same time, it may have limited relevance for other contexts in general and specifically for profit-oriented or result-oriented organizations. Therefore, while Demirer served as a servant leader, Yılmaz and Karaahmet had no chance to lead their organization as servant leaders.

In conclusion, in the discussion section at the end of the Demirer case, I explained in depth how Demirer exhibited servant leadership characteristics and how they were relevant to her loneliness at the top. Combining the previous narrative with the finding here, it can be concluded that Demirer's paternalistic and servant leadership characteristics are intertwined. This conclusion also aligns with Öner's study (2012), where Turkish respondents perceived the two as very close. In other words, it can be concluded that Demirer, in a way, demonstrated a form of servant leadership supported by paternalistic elements. Regarding the connection between this and Demirer's experience of loneliness at the top, as I explained earlier, like paternalistic leadership, the servant leadership style increases the leader's workload and responsibility, but it also enables the leader to establish strong, trusting relationships with subordinates. As a result, the first aspect increased loneliness at the top, and the second aspect decreased it.

Lack of public pressure & loneliness at the top

One of the reasons why I chose Demirer and UPS sports club during the case selection phase was to create diversity among the cases through the concept of "competitiveness" and "public pressure." Thus, as I stated in the methodology part, I "increased the likelihood that the findings would reflect differences or different perspectives" by using "maximum variation sampling" and "maximizing differences at the beginning of the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). In the first and second cases, I examined professional top executives working in a highly "competitive" environment under heavy "public pressure." Therefore, by choosing a third case where "competitiveness" and "public pressure" are non-existent or very low, I aimed to enrich the cross-case analysis and increased the generalizability of the study. Otherwise, if I had chosen all of the cases from executives working under heavy "public pressure" in a very "competitive" environment, it could have been argued that the loneliness at the top that was identified was due to the public pressure specific to the sports sector and that generalizations cannot be made for every top manager. However, thanks to the third case study, I increased the generalizability of the study by identifying loneliness at the top, even in the absence of competitiveness and public pressure. On the other hand, for all these reasons, as expected, I could not obtain any data in the Demirer case to test the sixth propositions, related with the stakeholders and public pressure.

Nevertheless, the diversity of the cases according to this criterion provided valuable insights into the extra impact, additional burden of "competitiveness" and "public pressure". Hakan Karaahmet stated that although he was the president who took Giresunspor to the Super League after 44 years, he was criticized at the end of every game based on the game score, protested when they were defeated, and even

cursed. Similarly, coach Çetin Yılmaz said, "I never had a chance to lose three games in a row. If we lost two matches, I was prepared for the third one as if it was the final game to determine my future in that team." However, the fact that Karaahmet, who is not the coach but the president of a low-income team, made similar statements and felt similar emotions as coach Yılmaz, who spent the majority of his tenure working for championship-contending teams, indicates that the pressure and loneliness at the top is very high in sectors where public pressure is high. In summary, I found that public pressure is not the only reason for loneliness at the top, as Semra Demirer, who does not face public pressure, also experiences loneliness at the top. However, public pressure is an important factor affecting loneliness at the top, as the loneliness experienced by Yılmaz and Karaahmet was strengthened by this factor.

How organizational success prevents and failure/crises accelerates the loneliness at the top

The cases also provided rich insights into how success prevents, and failure accelerates loneliness at the top. In the case of Demirer, for example, I found that the crisis and the challenges of managing the crisis lead to the leader's loneliness at the top. Specifically, Demirer reported that she suppressed and did not express her negative emotions in difficult situations (e.g., when the club faced the risk of closure). In other words, facing a crisis increased her workload (recall proposition 1), pushed her to make difficult decisions, such as sharing vs. withholding information (recall proposition 2), and maximized her need to suppress her emotions in times of crisis (recall proposition 3). I also found in other cases that crises reinforce loneliness at the top. For example, facing crises such as losing several games in a row or similar extraordinary situations reinforced Çetin Yılmaz's loneliness at the top. In fact, as a

coach, Yılmaz felt that he had to prove himself to all stakeholders in every match he led his team and in every decision he made, and therefore perceived every match as "an event that could result in a crisis".

In Karaahmet's experience, he spent over half of his presidential term trying to manage a crisis of lack of economic resources. Thus, I distinctly identified the crisis's effect on loneliness at the top in Karaahmet's case. I also found substantial evidence that loneliness at the top would decrease in the opposite case, i.e. in the case of team success. Firstly, when Hakan Karaahmet was elected president of Giresunspor in the summer of 2020, the team competed in the first league. At the end of the first year of Karaahmet's presidency, Giresunspor was promoted to the Turkish Super League for the first time since 1977. The team achieved great success in his first year as president by rising to the Super League after 44 years. In his interviews with the press, he said for the first and last time during his presidency that his players were highly motivated and united in the middle of a 12-game winning streak in his first season. When the results on the pitch were at their best, he did not mention the excessive workload and responsibility for decision-making or the slightest problem in his relationships with those with whom he was associated. On the contrary, he stated that the club's players and stakeholders were like a family. In sum, while organizational performance was at its highest level, the loneliness he experienced at the top was at its lowest during his entire presidential career.

In the 2021–22 football season, the team's performance on the field was up and down due to the dire financial conditions and the lack of support from the stakeholders. In periods when the team underperformed and was at risk of being relegated to the lower league, for example, in February 2022, Karaahmet's interviews

with the title "Giresunspor is experiencing the greatest loneliness in its history" were published in the press.

On the other hand, at the end of the season, Giresunspor managed to complete the league in the top 16 and not be relegated from the Super League. The club showed outstanding defensive performance, conceding only 47 goals in 38 matches. The club surpassed even the biggest Turkish football clubs like Galatasaray, who conceded 53 goals, and Beşiktaş, who conceded 48 goals this season and was only behind four teams in terms of defensive performance -these teams ranked in the first four places of the league at the end season-. As a result, at the end of the season, Karaahmet gave only positive messages in interviews with the press, saying that their decision not to fire the coach was taken as an example by other presidents and that they had created a "Giresun" model in Turkish football. Nevertheless, he did not mention anything related to his loneliness.

Later, although Giresunspor made a promising start to the 2022–23 football season with two wins out of 3 matches, the team fell behind its rivals regarding squad depth due to economic problems. As of February 1, the consecutive crushing losses pushed the team back into the relegation zone. Karaahmet, who repeatedly declared that he needed support throughout the season, could not find the support he sought and resigned. From this point of view, the success of the president and Giresunspor seemed to be negatively correlated with the loneliness of Karaahmet at the top during the 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 football seasons. The relationship between these phenomena (organizational performance and leader loneliness) can be examined in future studies through the Karaahmet case or other data.

Finally, the idea that crises increase loneliness at the top is a critical insight for managers in the sports sector and any sector where frequent economic, social and

financial crises occur. Similarly, one may argue that political leaders who constantly have to manage political crises feel loneliness at the top intensely. In this respect, related studies can be conducted in other sectors, including politics.

Methodology

When examining such a sensitive topic and identifying such deep feelings, namely loneliness, qualitative analyses have certain advantages. Some findings could only be reached through interviews with participants in an environment where they feel comfortable, for example, in their home, as I did in this study.

For instance, the interview with Çetin Yılmaz took place in his office in the coach's home. The first interview with him lasted three and a half hours. After 3 hours, I was tired and intended to end the interview, but the coach kept talking, so we extended the interview for another half an hour. (Afterwards, we had another phone call to clarify certain details, which lasted about 1 hour). I think interviewing in the coach's home contributed to the interview lasting so long and being so intimate. Moreover, as seen from the content, it enabled the identification of deeper feelings and thoughts that would not have been revealed by any other method or under any other circumstances. At different moments of the interview, Çetin Yılmaz expressed the comfort he felt in opening up by saying, "I feel like I am in therapy in a psychologist's office right now." In this regard, I strongly recommend that researchers who study emotions, especially sensitive topics such as loneliness, conduct case studies and, if they can, do their interviews in an environment where the interviewee feels comfortable sharing their feelings.

To compare, the interview with Semra Demirer took place at Demirer's office and lasted about one and a half hours and I got answers that described her loneliness

to a great extent. Another interview was conducted on the phone with the former president of Giresunspor, Hakan Karaahmet. It was chronologically the first interview among the three, and it was as long as I had envisaged at the beginning, around half an hour (i.e. 35 minutes precisely). Even though I was trying to identify an intimate feeling on the phone, namely loneliness, I got spot-on, straightforward and sincere answers to almost every question. To sum up, although the data's depth may differ regarding the data collection tool (e.g. telephone and face-to-face interviews), qualitative methods have many advantages compared to quantitative analyses.

Moreover, one of the main gaps in the literature on leadership -or at least in sports leadership studies- is that most have not been conducted within professional settings. For example, in sports research, studies have been undertaken usually on university sports teams due to easy accessibility. In many quantitative leadership studies -especially those that collect data from around 200 people through surveys- data have been collected from students, and they have been expected to respond to questions by, for instance, "imagining themselves as the CEO of a company." As we know, all research is based on certain assumptions, and in these studies, the assumption made at the data collection stage is that: "students can imagine themselves as CEOs at any moment of their day when they sit at the computer to fill out the questionnaire." It is highly questionable to what extent data collected on such an assumption reflects the experiences of real CEOs. It would be even more challenging to determine loneliness at the top based on a statement like "Imagine you are a CEO." For these reasons, I contacted and collected data from professional people at the top to fill the lack of data in sports leadership research. For these

reasons, the findings of this study contribute to the loneliness literature in many ways.

5.2 General discussion

The importance and purpose of the leaders' loneliness studies

This study has many contributions because certain groups can easily be marginalized in society, and these groups are usually minorities and viewed as outsiders/aliens by the majority. Thus, it may not be easy for the minority to express their voices and be heard by others. Furthermore, since this minority group (i.e. top executives) possesses many things that other members of society desire, such as money, status, and prestige, and has access to opportunities that the rest of society cannot, people may think that this group should not complain about anything. Unlike other people in the workplace or society, these individuals may feel like they should not feel unhappy about anything or should not share their negative feelings, including loneliness, because of the great opportunities they get and since they chose to make certain sacrifices to access these opportunities. The pressures of society or those around them may also make top executives feel like this. Even though these people could be easily alienated by the majority, first and foremost, they are human beings and prone to negative human experiences. They may feel emotional deficiencies, a sense of incompleteness, and a feeling of inadequacy (a feeling that something is still missing even though they have accomplished a lot), or as shown in the study, loneliness at the top.

Scholars showed that loneliness can lead to physical or mental/psychological problems in leaders, and "leader loneliness is positively associated with leader emotional exhaustion, ego depletion, and sleep problems" (Lam & Shemla, 2019, p.

1). Moreover, top executives may also be dissatisfied with their interactions with other people and experience negative emotions, sometimes even harsher than others in society or the workplace, such as loneliness and even burnout that comes with it. Burnout is a state of exhaustion resulting from prolonged and excessive workplace stress (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Bayes et al., 2021), and extreme conditions pose significant risks to the mental health of leaders and can even lead to burnout (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Accordingly, burnout can result in structural and functional brain changes, inflammation, cardiovascular disease, and metabolic syndrome (Bayes et al., 2021). So, the loneliness they experience makes leaders more vulnerable to physical and mental health problems.

On top of all this, there have even been reported cases of CEOs committing suicide as a result of the stress and loneliness they experience at work (Kets de Vries, 1995; Cooper and Quick, 2003). Cooper and Quick (2003), worked on stress and loneliness of success, described John Curtis Jr's tragic suicide case. Curtis (49), the CEO of Luby's Cafeterias Inc, which was operating "226 restaurants in 11 states" as of 14th March 1997 (Meredith, 1997), committed suicide in a hotel room at night. The next morning, his wife discovered a suicide note he had left for her. The police found his body the same morning in the motel room (Cooper & Quick, 2003). Respected American newspapers wrote that this suicide was caused by work problems and loneliness and announced this tragic event to their readers with the following headlines: "Luby's CEO Takes Own Life; Business Problems are Cited" (Tejada, 1997); "A Lonely Death in Texas" ("A Lonely Death," 1997). The Wall Street Journal stated that "John Edward Curtis Jr., chief executive and president of Luby's Cafeterias Inc., committed suicide, apparently because of depression over store closings and other business pressures" (Tejada, 1997). According to the New

York Times, "Day-to-day pressure of running a company is blamed for the suicide of John Edward Curtis Jr" (Meredith, 1997). According to Kets de Vries (1995), John Curtis Jr.'s son, Daniel, made the following statement on the subject: "I do not think he could handle the pressure of being a CEO" (as cited in Cooper & Quick, 2003, p. 1). "His wife reportedly told the police that possible store closings and related workforce layoffs were affecting her husband's sleep habits" (Cooper & Quick, 2003, p. 1-2). "The police had determined that Mr. Curtis was worried that Luby's would fall short of its expansion goals and about the effect that slowing growth would have on the company's 13,000 workers" (Meredith, 1997).

Similar cases can be found in the sports sector. Robert Enke (32), a German professional footballer, died by suicide on the evening of 10 November 2009 and police also confirmed that a suicide note was discovered ("Police Confirm," 2009). At the time of his death, he had been suffering from depression for six years, and he also struggled to cope with the loss of his daughter in 2006 ("Robert Enke's Widow," 2014). As a recent case, as of 4 January 2024, NBA star Ricky Rubio (33) ended his professional basketball career after going into "a dark place" last summer. Rubio shared a statement on his official retirement, sharing that 30 July was one of the most harrowing nights of his life. Rubio said "He will talk more on what happened at a later date so he can help others going through similar situations ... and will continue to work on his mental well-being moving forward." ("NBA's Ricky Rubio," 2024). In both cases, it is impossible to say that what happened was only due to media and fans' expectations or the pressure to perform and succeed at the top. However, these pressures certainly did not help athletes with their difficulties.

In short, this study aims to raise academic and public awareness that there are two sides to the coin: even though top executives have access to many benefits, they

also pay the price for those. More specifically, this study is conducted to detect the "loneliness" top executives face, the underlying reasons for their loneliness, and the coping mechanisms they employ -or fail to employ- to deal with their loneliness.

Lack of private life due to the burden of being at the top

In Demirer's case, one observation was entirely against our expectations. I expected to detect that "leaders manage the loneliness at the top with support from confidants, such as spouses or partners." However, this was undoubtedly not happened in Demirer case. Demirer spoke only one sentence about a husband or partner, shortly after we met, when the context of the conversation did not require it, Demirer mentioned her past marriage. About other family members, she only shared the words that her father had said to her when she was five years old. In the case of Çetin Yılmaz, his private life and relationships with his family members, namely his wife and son, were damaged dramatically due to the heavy responsibility he carried on his shoulders for more than two decades. Similarly, the burden of the presidency harmed -even ruined- Karaahmet's relationship with his closest friends.

Critics to "stakeholder theory" and "servant leadership"

As one of the final points of the discussion, recalling stakeholder theory may be relevant since it has broadened our perspective by arguing that organizations are not only responsible to their shareholders but also to the broader community. However, even the most popular and inclusive definitions of stakeholder theory, such as Freeman (1984), define stakeholders as "internal stakeholders (owners, customers, employees, and suppliers) and external stakeholders (governments, competitors, consumer advocates, environmentalists, special interest groups, and the media)" (as

cited in Laplume et al., 2008, p. 1157). Nevertheless, these definitions do not include concepts such as employees' spouses, children, or friends. Even this theory, which allows us to see the breadth of the responsibilities of organizations, ignores the idea that the organizations, namely managers, should be aware that it is their responsibility to be sure that their employees establish solid social ties with their family members. This study argues that the stakeholder theory needs to be expanded, and the phrase "employee's family" needs to be added to the definition. More than just a written statement, all managers, at any level, should be aware that they are also responsible for the social well-being of their employees and their families. Likewise, corporate boards should recognize that they are responsible for their subordinates' social well-being and family ties, regardless of their position. In other words, promoting some managers to C-level positions does not give companies the right to take all their resources (time, attention, and energy), ignoring their psychological well-being and relations with their loved ones.

This dissertation is also a critique of servant leadership. Servant leaders, by definition, put the interests of their organization or subordinates ahead of their interests. For instance, when there is a crisis in the organization and subordinates cannot return to the office from their vacation, a servant leader cuts her/his vacation short and return to the office to ensure the problem is solved. This is to the advantage of the organization and other employees, but to the disadvantage of this top executive. Also, what happens to this servant leader after decades of working this way and finally retiring? What about their health? How will their social life be? What will be their relationships with their family, spouse, and children? Did any member of the organization consider these during the leader's decades of tenure? Probably not. This top manager is expected to face some social consequences at the

end of their working life. Therefore, this dissertation critiques servant leadership for praising self-sacrifice of the leaders and stakeholder theory for not being inclusive enough.

Suppose these criticisms are addressed in the future within the new and expanded scope of the stakeholder theory. In that case, organizations will be more likely to consider the health, social lives, and families of their top executives as well as that of all employees and to act in a way that considers their relationships with their social circles and family members. Thus, they may be able to reduce many of the problems identified in this study related to leader loneliness at the top.

Future studies

- Personality and competitiveness

In this study, I analyzed some contextual antecedents related with leadership position (i.e. excessive workload, burden for decision-making, unmet need for authenticity, and factors related to other people). However, other dispositional antecedents, not necessarily related to position, can also make leaders lonely. For example, the literature on workplace loneliness (but not loneliness at the top) suggests that self-related factors such as "personality" may also contribute to feelings of loneliness.

Personality is a relatively stable individual feature and has also been found to cause workplace loneliness (Zhou, 2018) -not loneliness at the top, specifically-.

Researchers already confirmed that certain personality traits positively or negatively impact workplace loneliness, such as "extraversion, emotional stability, ...

competitive attitude" (Wright, 2005, p. 177). In this section, I will discuss the possible relation of these traits to leaders' loneliness at the top.

While extraversion and emotional stability are negatively correlated with workplace loneliness, shyness and social avoidance can positively predict workplace loneliness (Zhou, 2018). In other words, employees who are introverted, emotionally unstable, shy, and show social avoidance behavior are more likely to experience workplace loneliness. In contrast, this risk is much lower for employees with the opposite traits. Moreover, the lack of some traits (i.e., extraversion and emotional stability) or the presence of other traits (i.e., shyness and social avoidance) not only pushes the employee to loneliness but can also significantly reduce the chances of promotion to leadership positions. Therefore, employees who are introverted, emotionally unstable, shy, and show social avoidance behavior are not expected to be promoted to leadership positions as often as those with opposite traits. In other words, those who have some personality traits are expected not to feel lonely at work and to be able to rise to top positions. On the contrary, those with some other traits may be expected to feel lonely at work and unable to rise to top positions. Therefore, these traits are not helpful to work on in the scope of this study, where I identified loneliness at the top, and they were not included in the propositions.

Lastly, I will address the last dispositional characteristic, competitive attitude. Managers with a strong sense of competition are eager to win and outdo others, making it difficult for them to trust and build close relationships. Therefore, a competitive mindset is positively related to loneliness at work (Zhou, 2018). These ambitious managers, who spend their careers -and even their lives- climbing to the top positions in organizations, are determined to rise at all costs and are ready and willing to pay whatever price is necessary on their way to the top (Cooper & Quick, 2003). If the organization sets hard work as a criterion for promoting employees, these ambitious employees work more than anyone else; they are the first to arrive at

the office and the last to leave at night. If the organization rewards aggressiveness, these people do not hesitate to show aggression, which frightens most people. On their way to the top, such ambitious managers are open to playing office politics and paying the price (Cooper & Quick, 2003). Accordingly, perceiving other managers as a threat was observed as a reason for leaders' loneliness (Yılmaz, 2008). Managers who have set their minds on rising to the top also look out for their interests first at some point. In other words, the fact that they put their interests ahead of social relations is a factor that isolates them.

In addition, top managers are naturally surrounded by many other candidates for leadership positions, which they consider competitors. These colleagues, who are one or two levels below the top manager, may enter into an implicit competition with the top manager with the motivation to take over that position. In such an environment where there are many competitors, the top managers may have a negative feeling that they must protect their leadership position because they reached the top position by standing out. Perceiving other managers as a threat may lead to anxiety and alienation, which may inevitably negatively affect the interaction between the manager and subordinates (Rokach, 2014). One of the top managers interviewed in previous studies stated that organizational goals and personal ambitions increasingly influence the relationship at higher levels. Since s/he saw much personal ambition, s/he could not trust others and build meaningful relationships at work in recent years (Zumaeta, 2019).

In other words, as top managers act competitively in the work environment, their behaviors and attitudes harm their belongingness to the people around them. Thus, self-induced factors, such as their personality, competitive nature, ambition to get to the top, and what they experience along the way, can make leaders lonely.

Although I excluded dispositional factors from the scope of this study, the proposition that "their personality and competitiveness (i.e., ambition to reach the top and the experiences along the way) make leaders lonely" can be tested in future studies.

On the other hand, contextual factors like environmental factors or organizational culture may play a role in the competitiveness of the leader. For example, in the Demirer case, her role -unlike many other leadership positions- required incredible sacrifices and did not provide much financial return. She stated that being a top manager in the sports sector was more difficult than in other sectors and that she earned much less, whereas executives who had the same job in other sectors -or clubs with higher budgets- made much more money. In other words, Demirer's role was not charming for others but only for her because of its spiritual fulfilment and satisfaction, and she did not need to "play office politics" to get to this position. On the contrary, the former general coordinator, Mr. Adnan, had a very positive attitude towards Demirer; he advised her to take over this role from him, stating that the children needed her. Moreover, Demirer accepted the leadership position with the motivation of doing good for young people; therefore, she was altruistically managing an organization that operates as an NGO. Moreover, among the people around Demirer in the organization, no one (coaches, athletes, secretaries, cleaners) could rival or aspire to her position. Similarly, Çetin Yılmaz did not need to play office politics to become a head coach. The former head coach, also a high school friend of Yılmaz's, constantly honored him in front of the administrators and players when Yılmaz was his assistant coach. After the death of the head coach, Yılmaz was promoted to the head coach position. Likewise, Karaahmet did not become the president through internal office politics but through a general assembly

election in which hundreds of members voted. For all these reasons, I did not test the proposition of "whether competitiveness increases leaders' loneliness at the top" in my study, as it did not fit the cases, but this could be done in future studies.

Lastly, although ambitious managers spend their careers climbing to the top positions in companies, few of them are prepared for the changes that occur when they reach their ultimate career goals (Kets de Vries et al., 1994), which may mean that they are unprepared for the factors that push them towards loneliness. Finally, narcissistic traits (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985) and psychopathic behaviors (Kets de Vries, 2012) may also play a role in the loneliness at the top and these, too, can be analyzed in future studies.

- Former peers may show less respect to the leaders

In my thesis, it has been explained how senior management positions can isolate the leaders who occupy them. However, in many cases, managers rise to the top of organizations, where they must lead employees who were once their peers -or perhaps even supervisors. In such situations, senior managers realize that their old relationships with employees have changed, and they are no longer able to connect with them in the way they used to. Or former peers may not show the necessary respect to the new leaders that they deserved. Moreover, as new authority figures, they are at the center of unfulfilled expectations and criticism from employees, all of which can isolate leaders (Cooper & Quick, 2003). In interviews conducted in previous research, the managers identified the subordinate-to-supervisor relationship, which follows the peer-to-peer relationship, as the most challenging. One of them reported that after he was appointed to a managerial position, some employees found it extremely difficult to respect him as a superior and misinterpreted the pre-existing

friendship between them, asking for special privileges. As a result, he reported becoming distant and isolated from his subordinates due to the abuse of the pre-existing closeness between them (Zumaeta, 2019). Accordingly, scholars may theorize and test whether changing dynamics of the relationships (i.e. being the leader of former peers) make leaders lonely in future studies.

However, this situation is rare, especially in the sports sector. Although the change from a peer-to-peer to a superior-subordinate relationship may be an essential source of discomfort in many companies, this is not expected to be frequently seen in the management of sports clubs. Club presidents do not enter the organization's hierarchy, rise, and are promoted to the presidency; on the contrary, they come to the organization's top from outside through elections. The Karaahmet case also fits this general situation. This situation is similar to that of Semra Demirer, who joined the organization as a General Coordinator. Therefore, there was no former peer that she worked with prior to this position. Finally, in the relationship between coach and assistant coaches, there are rare occasions when things get mixed up. When the head coach is dismissed, the club management can assign one of the assistant coaches as the head coach, but this is an infrequent practice. Interestingly, Yilmaz's first head coaching experience started in this way. However, Yilmaz did not report any negative experiences regarding this situation. To sum up, due to the lack of data on this issue, the proposition that "changing dynamics of the relationships (i.e., being the leader of former peers) make leaders lonely" was not tested in my study.

- Loneliness at the top and its relation with the gender issue

Researchers may examine topics such as "leadership" and "loneliness at the top" within the lens of gender studies. Scholars may deepen this study with a gender

perspective, focusing on the "loneliness of female leaders at the top". They may identify the distinctive challenges of female leaders at the top leadership positions and explore the extent to which female leaders feel lonely at the top and the contributing factors. Since the literature on senior female managers' experiences in their roles is scarce and mostly anecdotal, qualitative studies may address some limitations by directly exploring top female executives' perspectives. For instance, if one wants to explore the loneliness experienced by female leaders dealing with crises, female leaders in the sports industry who fit the definition of the glass cliff may be chosen for the case studies.

- Workplace loneliness of star players in the sports teams or super stars in any sector
Researchers can also consider the "star player" as the team leader and analyze the phenomenon of loneliness at the top through them. Like club presidents, coaches or managers, there is public pressure on the players; among the players, the star player is under the most pressure. On the other hand, they also receive the most attention within the team and earn the most money. All this may cause a distance between them and the other players in the team. In addition, the pressure to win and being held responsible for the loss more than anyone else in the team may have an isolating effect on these star players.

In addition, these players sometimes underperform for long periods. For months, sometimes even 1-2 years, they can be the highest-paid player in the team and still underperform (due to their age, injury, or failure to adapt to their new team). In this case, it can damage the sense of justice of the other players in the team and cause the distance between them and the star player to widen even more. In this regard, researchers may refer to equity theory to design research with such a research

question: "Does performing under the expectations increase the loneliness of star players in professional sports teams (with the mediation of distributive injustice perception of team members)?" For the same reason, the pressure from the media and fans on the star player can be expected to increase when they underperform. In this case, researchers may explore how star player management interacts with workplace loneliness at the top in the sports sector. In other words, scholars may explore how football managers can cope with the loneliness of their underperforming star players.

Finally, whether they underperform or not, other superstars produced by the entertainment industry can also be analyzed within the framework of loneliness at the top. For example, the harshness of public pressure, especially media and fan pressure, suggests that the stars in the music or cinema sector experience loneliness at the top, just like the star players in the sports sector. In particular, the music industry is very similar to the sports industry because the product (i.e. the music concert) is produced live. Therefore, researchers may also focus on these branches of the entertainment sector in future studies.

AI, and the future of research, emotions and loneliness

As of the 2020s, technological developments have accelerated a lot, and with the introduction of AI (artificial intelligence) into our lives, many things have changed or will change radically, and scientific research is no exception. AI has become a competitor for researchers, as in many professions, and its competitiveness will increase daily. Soon, AI, with the proper guidance, can revise the existing accepted scales and create a meaningful new scale suitable for any study. Then, it can send it to tens of thousands of subjects through the database it may access, analyze the

results it will collect with quantitative methods and write a conclusion. In terms of being able to conduct quantitative studies at a much lower cost, it can become a serious competitor to researchers who are already conducting such studies.

However, conducting qualitative studies, especially case studies, differs significantly from quantitative methods. First, the data collection process is very different and has its characteristics. For example, the trust established with the subject plays a vital role in this process. Let alone opening up to AI, the level of openness of the subjects to a researcher whom they trust and a researcher whom they do not trust differs, and this difference directly affects the richness of the data collected. For example, when I first met Çetin Yılmaz for the interview, I stated, "I already knew him, that he was one of my childhood heroes", which indeed he was. Almost everything he told me during the interview was familiar, so I kept the conversation flowing naturally with meaningful comments. Thanks to our 3.5-hour conversation, I was able to reach intense data that another researcher could not easily access, let alone AI. Of course, if I had tried to collect data not from the sports sector, which I am very familiar with, but from another sector, for example, from business leaders in the real estate sector, I would not have been able to establish the same closeness and collect the same rich data.

In this respect, collecting data through interviews, accessing people's memories, and taking them from people with their consent is similar to how it is in the Harry Potter universe. There, with a wand, a memory in a person's memory is placed in the "pensieve", a device used to store and review memories, and even if the person dies, that memory becomes eternally accessible to other people. Here, too, it is necessary to establish a bond of trust with the people during the interview to take their memory with their consent. Also, the researchers have to leave them free so that

they feel relaxed, meanwhile directing their flow of thought in such a way as to ensure that they share the desired data. It is impossible to imagine that all this can be done by an AI, at least not today. Then, for example, as in the study I conducted on Yılmaz, I identified the most meaningful and essential parts of a 3.5-hour verbal content, transcribed them, and immortalized the memories in question. The only way for an AI to do a similar study is for a person to keep a digital diary and make it accessible to the AI to analyze it.

Another important point about this study is that I examined human emotions through loneliness, and emotions are the most crucial element that separates humans and AI, and even the AGI (artificial general intelligence) that will be developed soon. AI, and later AGI, will be able to do or understand many things humans can do. However, since emotions result from chemical reactions in the brain, a complex organic structure, they cannot be experienced and, therefore, cannot be fully understood by an AI. As abundantly covered in futuristic artworks, human emotions are the most fundamental difference between AI and human beings, which will continue to separate them forever.

Finally, the fact that I studied loneliness, rather than any other emotion, has extraordinary implications for our present and future. Increasing technological developments have led even the primary forms of communication, especially for young people, to shift almost entirely to digital media. If they were forced to choose between "not looking up from the screen for a week" and "not seeing a screen for a week", many young people would choose the former. In such a world, studies on loneliness and its derivatives are expected to become increasingly critical.

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