


A Study on the Individual Determinants of Inertia: Meaning in Life and Trust

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Citation: Çankaya, I., Sağlam, A. S., and Bek, H. (2025). A Study on the Individual Determinants of Inertia: Meaning in Life and Trust, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(2), 926-934. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i2.1715>

Published: November 13, 2025

ABSTRACT

In this study, the effects of trust and meaning in life on inertia in university students were determined. The study is a relational survey model. The study group consisted of senior students (530) attending Uşak University Faculty of Education in the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. "Trust scale" developed by Uymaz, "Meaning in Life scale" developed by Steger, et al. and "Inertia scale" developed by Liao, Fei & Liu were used as data collection tools. There is a significant and positive correlation between trust, meaning in life and inertia. Meaning in life and trust are highly significant predictors of inertia. Meaning in life has a greater impact on inertia than trust. Inertia is shaped by the meaning given to life. Trust and meaning in life are two powerful determinants of inertia. Inertia in individuals varies depending on trust and meaning in life.

Keywords: Inertia, trust, meaning in life, prospective teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Inertia comes from the Latin word lazy, meaning sluggish. Inertia refers to idle or unused potential. Inertia, which means inaction, is explained as a state of stasis in social sciences (Sekman & Utku, 2017). Inertia is also used to denote slowness, sluggishness, inaction and procrastination (Sekman, 2009). According to Newton's theory of inertia, every object is in the same motion unless acted upon by an external force. For this reason, social scientists consider inertia, which is used in physical science, as a condition that prevents organizational change (Huang, et al., 2013). Inertia has a broad meaning to include laziness, passivity, inactivity, monotony, monotony, laziness, which starts in the behavior of employees and manifests itself in the entire organization. Inertia is one of the main problems that hinder productivity. The existence of inertia negatively affects the performance of individuals and organizations (Çankaya & Demirtaş, 2010). Inertia results from the fact that individuals and organizations do not change as fast as their social environment (Pfeffer, 1997). Routine actions, established patterns of behavior, institutionalized structures and bureaucracy create "habits of mind" in individuals and institutions (Louis & Sutton, 1991). Innovation, thinking differently and making different decisions is the opposite of inertia (Collinson & Wilson, 2006). There are two important factors that magnify inertia. One is low or excessive trust and the other is uncertainty (Van der Steen, 2009). The causes of inertia are grouped under two headings: individual and organizational. According to Soysal (2010), personality traits, procrastination, indifference, perfectionism, inadequacy, uncertainty, indecision, job dissatisfaction and fear of failure are among the reasons that lead employees to inertia. There are some beliefs and thoughts that cause inertia in individuals over time. The meanings

given to life such as the thought of immutability, the thought of ineffectiveness, the thought of perfectionism, the thought of redundancy, the thought of procrastination, the thought of meaninglessness, the thought of lack of control, the thought of inadequacy are some of them (Sekman, 2019). Inertia can result from aimlessness, perfectionism, passive resistance, learned helplessness, physical inactivity, internal conflicts, ego, and overconfident attachment. Inertia comes in three forms: personal, institutional and social. Although opposite personality traits, extreme perfectionists and sloppy people are also prone to inertia. The most common danger that feeds inertia is low and over trust (Sekman, 2019).

Trust

Trust is broadly defined as a phenomenon based on truthfulness and not lying (Ceylan & Demircan, 2003). Contrary to popular belief, trust is one of the most difficult themes to understand and express (Taylor, 1989). Trust is the willingness of an individual to believe in the actions and words of another and to act accordingly. (McAllister, 1995). Trust is a very important factor in making sense of people's behavior (Driscoll, 1978). Trust is an individual's belief that another individual will benefit or, at worst, will not be harmed (İşcan & Sayın, 2010). Over trust may result from accepting oneself as one is and being aware of one's lines. In addition, in order to feel a sense of trust in another person, one needs to know that person's outlook on life, their wishes, decisions and the risks they take in life (Asunakutlu, 2002).

When new rules are not compatible with existing rules, anxieties generate existential insecurity (Tykocinski, Pittman & Tuttle, 1995). In studies on trust, researchers emphasize that trust is a psychological phenomenon. Trust is a phenomenon with limits. Trust is only possible when the individual includes other individuals in his/her private sphere (Özbek, 2004). Trust is the foundation of social relations. Goodwill is essential for trust. Goodwill is defined as one person treating and protecting another person with good thoughts and feelings (Yılmaz & Kabadayı, 2002). Trust is an exchange of emotions. It is the return of one's interest in the other person from the other person. Trust is the right to express one's wishes, feelings and thoughts (Poussard, 2006). Trust has a profound impact on the quality of interpersonal relationships. Because trust is the basic condition for interpersonal relationships. When relationships are going on, trust is not felt so much, but when trust is lost, relationships end (Erdem, 2019). Trust determines the extent to which cooperation takes place in the work environment. Trust is the foundation of healthy teamwork. Therefore, the secret to successful work in work teams is trust. Trust has a very important impact on work motivation. Lack of trust in organizations reduces the efficiency of the working environment (Arı, 2003). There are three dimensions of trust: trust in oneself and trust in others. Trust varies depending on the meaning given to life and also directly affects the meaning given to life (Baltaş, 2001).

Meaning in Life

Human is a complex being due to his psycho-social nature. He has a strong desire to understand himself and the world around him. Human beings engage in different cognitive and behavioral activities to support their desire to understand life (Epstein, 1985; Heine, et al., 2006; Higgins, 2000; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Biological, physical and psychological studies try to explain the meaning of life. For this reason, mental health is as important as physical health and its value is increasing day by day (Pawelski, 2003).

Adler (2016) states that meaning determines one's life and the more people there are, the more meaning there is to life. The meaning of life cannot be distinguished as wholly true or wholly false. The meaning of life should contribute to oneself and other people throughout life. Life can be considered meaningful as long as it makes a contribution. Life can be considered meaningful as long as it makes a contribution. In order to achieve the meaning of life, people need to overcome three tasks. The first task is to develop in order to sustain life, the second task is to live together with other people, and the last task is that humans are made up of two different sexes and this has to be accepted. For meaning to exist, interpersonal relations must exist. (Adler, 2016). Existential psychology tries to understand people by focusing on the meaning of life. According to existential psychology, people live with the stress of death, loneliness, freedom and meaninglessness. When there is no meaning, purpose, aspiration, ideals, values in one's life, one may experience intense stress. According to Yalom (2001), the meaning of life can be categorized as cosmic meaning and worldly meaning. The cosmic meaning implies the existence of a universal order that is independent of the individual and above the individual.

The meaning of life is revealed by one's achievements, contributions and attitude towards unchanging situations (Esping, 2011). The domains of health, trust, social relationships, help and faith are used to express the meaning of life (Ebersole & Depaola, 1986). The meaning of life emerges with a feeling. This feeling exists when life has significance and purpose beyond momentary events (King, et al., 2006). It is a basic need for life to have meaning. People who are able to fulfill this need can more easily overcome difficult life circumstances and have a high level of motivation (Schnell, 2009). The meaningfulness of life reveals that the person is not only happy but also unique (Ward & King, 2016). On the other hand, trust, attachment and meaning in life are among the main factors that feed the inertia of the individual (Sekman, 2019).

Problem Status

In the studies conducted in the literature, the relationship between inertia and low motivation, university climate, security, entrepreneurship, hope, accountability, teamwork, organizational support, working climate, communication skills, management by values, organizational flexibility, adaptation to the environment, burnout has been examined (Türkmenoğlu, 2023; Bakan, et al., 2017; Çankaya & Demirtaş, 2010; Aksoy & Türk, 2015; Dorman, 2003; Farber, 2000; Mykletun & Mykletun, 1999; Hansenne, etc. 1999; Shimizu & Hitt, 2005; Mauer, 2005; Lam, 2000; Larsen & Lomi, 1996; Boyer & Robert, 2003; Godkin, 2008; Zander & Kogut, 1995; Geisler, 1997; Fukuyama, 1998; Kotter, 1995; Österlund & Loven, 2005; Allen, 2003; Rumelt, 1995). In the studies conducted in the literature, it is seen that researchers have conducted limited studies on the individual origins of inertia, but more studies have been conducted on its relationship with organizational variables. Conducting detailed studies on the personal variables and predictors of inertia reveals the real factors that feed inertia. In this context, this study examined the effect of trust and meaning in life variables, which are considered as two important predictors of inertia, on inertia. The following questions were sought to be answered in the study:

- ✓ Is there a significant relationship between inertia, trust and meaning in life?
- ✓ Do trust and meaning in life significantly predict inertia?

METHOD

This study is a quantitative research method and a survey modeled study.

Study Pattern

The design of this study, which aims to determine the level and direction of the relationship between inertia, confidence and meaning in life according to the perceptions of pre-service teachers, is relational survey. The relational survey model is a research model that aims to describe a past or current situation as it exists (Aypay, 2022).

Data Collection Tools

Meaning in Life Scale: The scale was developed by Steger, et al. (2006). The scale consists of 10 items. The scale has two sub-dimensions: “The existence of meaning in life” and “The search for meaning in life”. The sub-dimension of the presence of meaning in life consists of five items (items: 1, 4, 5, 6, 9). The 9th item of the scale is reverse scored. The dimension of seeking meaning in life consists of five items (items: 2, 3, 7, 8, 10). The scale is graded on a 7-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the scale was $\alpha = 0.88$ for the presence of meaning in life sub-dimension and $\alpha = 0.93$ for the search for meaning in life sub-dimension. It was adapted to Turkish culture by Demirbaş (2010) on university students. In this study, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the construct validity of the scale. According to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) [$\chi^2/sd=2.82$, NFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.93, IFI = 0.93, RFI = 0.93, GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.93, RMSEA = .079, and SRMR = .054,] goodness of fit values were determined. It was determined that the goodness of fit values were high according to the literature (Hair, et al, 1998; Hoyle, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). The internal consistency of the presence of meaning in life sub-dimension of the scale was 0.87 and the internal consistency of the search for meaning in life sub-dimension was 0.88.

Expected Trust Scale: The scale was developed by Uymaz (2021). It consists of 15 statements and aims to measure the level of cognitive-based trust that individuals show to the other party. The scale has two dimensions. The first one is the 10-item “Expected bad intentions” dimension and the second dimension is the 5-item “Expected good intentions” dimension. There are no reverse scores in the scale items. The scale is a five-point Likert-type scale. As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis of the scale for construct validity [$\chi^2/sd=2.82$, NFI = 0.93, NNFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.90, IFI = 0.90, RFI = 0.91, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.90, RMSEA = .080, and SRMR = .059,] goodness of fit values were found to be high (Hair, et al., 1998; Hoyle, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996).

Inertia Scale: The scale was developed by Liao, Fei & Liu (2008). It was adapted into Turkish by Çankaya & Demirtaş (2010). The scale has 2 dimensions: knowledge inertia and experience inertia. 7 items belong to the knowledge inertia section and 7 items belong to the experience inertia section. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .741 and the KMO score was .761. According to confirmatory factor analysis [$\chi^2/sd=3.01$, NFI = 0.91, NNFI = 0.90, CFI = 0.89, IFI = 0.90, RFI = 0.90, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.90, RMSEA = .080, and SRMR = .060], the scale has good fit values according to the literature. (Hair, et al., 1998; Hoyle, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996).

Study Group

The study group consisted of senior students attending Uşak University Faculty of Education in the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. A link was sent to all senior students via Google Form. A total of 530

scales completed by the students were analyzed in the SPSS AMOS 24 program. Of those in the study group, 299 were girls and 231 were boys.

Data Analysis

In the study, Kolmogorov - Smirnov test score was taken into consideration to determine whether the scales showed normal distribution. As a result of the Kolmogorov- Smirnov test, it was determined that the data of the meaning in life scale (.211, $p > .05$), expected confidence scale (.175, $p > .05$) and inertia scale (.169, $p > .05$) were normally distributed.

RESULT

This section presents the measurement model for the study and the results of path analysis with latent variables.

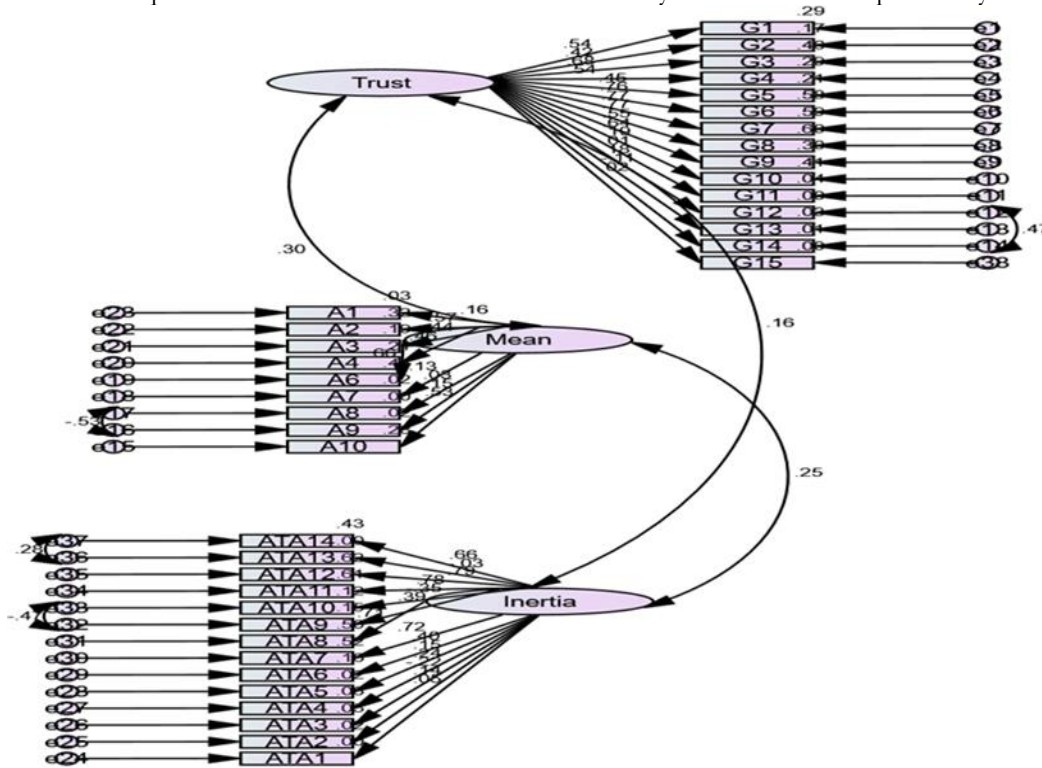


Figure 1. Measurement model for variables

According to the results of the analysis conducted in SPSS Amos 24 program, it was determined that there was a significant and positive relationship between trust, meaning in life and inertia. Inertia increases as confidence increases and the certainty of the meaning given to life increases. The fact that there is a significant relationship between the three variables can be considered as an indicator that different path analyses can be conducted on these three variables [$\chi^2/sd=2.90$, NFI = 0.89, NNFI = 0.89, CFI = 0.87, IFI = 0.87, RFI = 0.87, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.90, RMSEA = .075, and SRMR = .056].

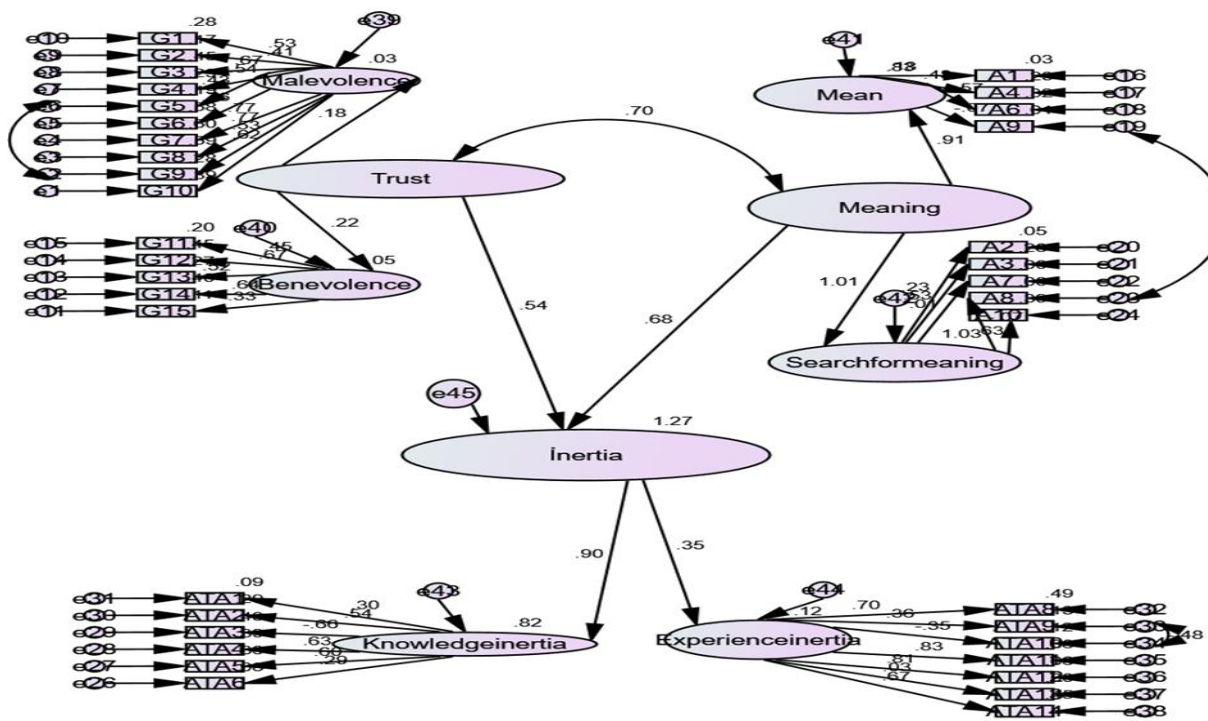


Figure 2. Path analysis with latent variables

Meaning in life and trust together predict inertia at a high and significant level [$\chi^2/df=2.91$, NFI = 0.90, NNFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.88, IFI = 0.87, RFI = 0.89, GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.92, RMSEA = .077, and SRMR = .058]. Meaning in life (.68) and trust (.54) predict inertia. Trust and meaning in life have a decisive influence on individual inertia. The difference in the inertia level of pre-service teachers is largely due to the difference in the sense of trust and the meaning given to life. Inertia in individuals varies depending on the high level of trust and the certainty of meaning in life.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

When evaluated within the framework of the literature, it is seen that inertia is a situation arising from both individuals and organizational factors. This study examined the effects of trust and meaning in life on inertia. According to the results of the analysis conducted in line with the sub-problems of the study; it was determined that there was a significant and positive correlation between trust, meaning in life and inertia. As trust increases and the meaning given to life becomes more certain, inertia also increases. Confidence and the meaning given to life motivate individuals on the one hand and limit them on the other.

According to the path analysis with latent variables, meaning in life and trust together explain inertia at a high and significant level. Meaning in life predicts inertia at a higher level than trust. Together, confidence and meaning in life are strong determinants of individual inertia. Compared to the results of different studies in the literature, Ehrlich (2016) found that there is a strong relationship between trust and commitment and inertia. Mauer (2005) found in his research that the inertia of employees in private sector organizations that are closed to change and have a sharp world view is high. Schein (1993) found that inertia stems from individuals' unwillingness to change their old habits, thoughts and worldviews. In different studies, it has been determined that public officials who have mistrust towards the organization they work for have higher levels of inertia (Kafchehi, et al., 2012; Shimizu & Hitt, 2005; Hoon & Tan, 2008; Madjid & Samsudin, 2021).

As a result, meaning and confidence in life both shape individuals' perceptions of life and lead to increased inertia. In order to manage this process effectively for individuals; flexible thinking techniques should be given as a common course to all students in higher education. Critical thinking should be a common compulsory course for all majors in universities. Lifelong learning centers of universities should organize activity-oriented certificate trainings on perception management techniques. "Philosophy of education" should be a common course in education, social, natural, health and engineering sciences and all other branches. Flexible thinking techniques can be taught as a common course to all students in higher education to help individuals develop self-confidence, trust in others, and perceive life as meaningful, thus reducing inertia.

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