LEADERSHIP STYLES AND ORGANISATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TEAMWORK

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of leadership styles on organizational performance in the tourism and hospitality sector and the mediating role played by teamwork in this relationship. Due to the sector's interaction-based nature, leadership becomes a determining factor in employee motivation, service quality, and ultimately, productivity and profitability. The literature demonstrates that transformational, participative, servant, and shared leadership styles, in particular, foster team communication, trust, and a sense of shared purpose, leading to higher employee performance and a superior customer experience. Conversely, transactional leadership is more effective in routine, standardized tasks, while authoritarian leadership provides only short-term benefits during times of crisis. Research based on secondary data analysis reveals that teamwork is the primary mechanism that translates leadership practices into tangible performance outcomes. Recent approaches, such as AI-enabled leadership and green leadership, demonstrate the integration of digital transformation and sustainability goals into the sector's leadership landscape. However, the literature highlights the limited number of studies measuring direct relationships between financial indicators (RevPAR, ROA, customer loyalty, etc.) and leadership. The study suggests that this gap should be addressed in future research and that leadership development programs for practitioners should center on teamwork.

Keywords: Tourism, Leadership Styles, Teamwork Mediation, Organizational Performance.

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TURİZM ALANINDA LİDERLİK STİLLERİ VE ÖRGÜTSEL VERİMLİLİK: EKİP ÇALIŞMASININ ARACI ROLÜ

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, turizm ve konaklama sektöründe liderlik tarzlarının örgütsel performans üzerindeki etkisini ve bu ilişkide ekip çalışmasının oynadığı aracılık rolünü incelemektedir. Sektörün etkileşim temelli yapısı nedeniyle liderlik, çalışan motivasyonu, hizmet kalitesi ve nihayetinde verimlilik ve karlılıkta belirleyici bir faktör haline gelmektedir. Literatür, özellikle dönüşümsel, katılımcı, hizmetkar ve paylaşılan liderlik tarzlarının ekip iletişimini, güveni ve paylaşılan amaç duygusunu teşvik ederek daha yüksek çalışan performansına ve üstün bir müşteri deneyimine yol açtığını göstermektedir. Tersine, işlemsel liderlik rutin, standartlaştırılmış görevlerde daha etkilidir; otoriter liderlik ise kriz zamanlarında yalnızca kısa vadeli faydalar sağlar. İkincil veri analizine dayalı araştırmalar, ekip çalışmasının liderlik uygulamalarını somut performans sonuçlarına dönüştüren birincil mekanizma olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Yapay zeka destekli liderlik ve yeşil liderlik gibi son yaklaşımlar, dijital dönüşüm ve sürdürülebilirlik hedeflerinin sektörün liderlik ortamına entegre edildiğini göstermektedir. Ancak literatür, finansal göstergeler (RevPAR, ROA, müşteri sadakati vb.) ile liderlik arasındaki doğrudan ilişkileri ölçen sınırlı sayıda çalışma olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Çalışma, bu boşluğun gelecekteki araştırmalarda ele alınması gerektiğini ve uygulayıcılara yönelik liderlik geliştirme programlarının ekip çalışmasına odaklanmasının ne kadar önemli olduğuna vurgu yapmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Turizm, Liderlik Stilleri, Takım Çalışması Arabuluculuğu, Örgütsel Performans.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership stands as one of the most critical determinants of organizational performance, a phenomenon that becomes particularly salient in people-intensive sectors such as tourism and hospitality (Northouse, 2025). Unlike mechanistic or production-driven industries, the tourism and hospitality sectors are grounded in strong human connections, high service quality, and the capacity to deliver memorable guest experiences (Lashley, 2024). Within this context, leadership transcends the boundaries of a managerial function to emerge as a strategic force that shapes employee behavior, team attitudes, and ultimately, organizational productivity and profitability (Yukl et al., 2019).

The inherently intangible nature of service production, characterized by simultaneity of production and consumption and high-contact customer interactions, amplifies the importance of leadership approaches in hotel management. Diverse leadership styles—transformational, transactional, participative, servant, and shared—produce varying effects on team dynamics, employee motivation, and service quality (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Greenleaf, 2002; Pearce & Conger, 2002).

This diversity demonstrates that leadership functions not merely as a managerial approach but as an organizational lever that directly shapes institutional outcomes. While some leadership styles emphasize performance monitoring, efficiency, and compliance, others foster creativity, innovation, and the development of distinctive customer experiences (Burns, 1978; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Teamwork, consequently, emerges as an indispensable component of organizational success in service-oriented industries. It involves not only collaborative task execution but also the cultivation of mutual trust, shared goals, collective responsibility, and effective communication—elements that underpin high-performing teams (Kozlowski & Bell, 2013). According to Salas, Reyes, and McDaniel (2018), teamwork acts as a mediating mechanism through which leadership practices translate into tangible performance outcomes. Effective leadership nurtures collaboration, transparent communication, and a shared sense of purpose, thereby enhancing employee engagement, strengthening team cohesion, and ultimately improving service quality and profitability (Loor-Zambrano et al. 2021). Conversely, ineffective leadership fosters fragmented service delivery, low morale, and increased employee turnover, all of which pose significant risks to organizational competitiveness in the tourism industry (Wang, Chou & Jiang, 2005; Jordan and Troth, 2011).

This study aims to critically examine the interplay among leadership styles, teamwork, and organizational performance within the tourism and hospitality context. By synthesizing empirical findings, theoretical perspectives, and industry-specific practices, it seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of how leadership influences productivity and profitability through the mediating role of teamwork. The discussion is organized around three key themes: (1) Leadership Styles and Their Impact on Productivity and Profitability, (2) The Mediating Role of Teamwork in Leadership Effectiveness, and (3) Implications and Future Directions for the Tourism and Hospitality Sector. Beyond contributing to academic discourse, this analysis intends to offer actionable insights for managers, policymakers, and stakeholders committed to fostering sustainable organizational growth in the service economy.

1. LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THEIR IMPACT ON PRODUCTIVITY AND PROFITABILITY

Leadership is one of the most widely examined yet complex constructs in organizational behavior, often understood as the process of influencing people toward achieving a shared goal. In sectors where human interaction, emotional labor, and frontline service quality are fundamental—such as hospitality and tourism—leadership assumes an especially critical role. Scholars have developed a range of typologies to conceptualize and classify leadership behavior. Among the most extensively studied and applied models in the hospitality context are transformational, transactional, servant, democratic/participative, autocratic, shared, and, more recently, green and AI-driven leadership styles.

Transformational Leadership

The concept of transformational leadership was first introduced by Burns (1978) and later developed theoretically by Bass and Avolio (1994). This leadership style seeks to motivate employees to transcend their individual interests in pursuit of the organization's collective goals. Transformational leadership comprises four key dimensions: idealized influence (charisma), intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration. Within the tourism and hospitality industry, transformational leaders are those who articulate an inspiring vision for high service quality, encourage creative problem-solving in service delivery, recognize individual contributions, and invest in employee development.

Empirical evidence supports the role of transformational leadership in enhancing employee outcomes and organizational performance. Romawati et al. (2022), in their study of the Ijen Suites Resort & Convention Hotel, found that transformational leadership significantly increases employee motivation and job satisfaction. Furthermore, job satisfaction was identified as a mediating factor linking transformational behaviors to employee performance, and thus to overall productivity (Prabowo et al., 2018). Considering the industry's diversity of guests, fluctuating demand, and service uncertainties, transformational leadership is particularly suitable for fostering creativity and strengthening organizational commitment. By cultivating psychological safety, such leaders also promote team learning and knowledge sharing—critical components for driving service innovation.

Transactional Leadership

Contrasting with the transformational model, transactional leadership focuses on structured exchanges between leaders and subordinates, primarily through a reward–punishment mechanism. This approach comprises two core components: contingent reward and management-by-exception (active or passive). In hospitality organizations, transactional leaders are characterized by their close performance monitoring, correction of service deviations, and reinforcement of compliance and efficiency. This leadership style is particularly effective in units where routine and procedural consistency are crucial—such as housekeeping, food preparation, or front-desk operations.

Tran (2017) demonstrated that transactional leadership has a strong positive relationship with return on assets (ROA) in hotels, where operational efficiency directly drives profitability. However, excessive reliance on transactional behaviors may restrict creativity and autonomy, reducing intrinsic motivation—especially among younger generations such as Millennials and Gen Z employees. The inflexible nature of this approach may also hinder personalized service delivery, interdepartmental collaboration, and innovation, which are vital in modern hospitality operations.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, first conceptualized by Greenleaf (1970), reverses the traditional hierarchical paradigm by positioning the leader as a servant to their employees. Its fundamental principles include empathy, active listening, foresight, humility, and a commitment to employee growth. Given the people-centered nature of the hospitality industry, servant leadership aligns closely with its ethos, as employee satisfaction is strongly correlated with guest satisfaction. Ho (2016) highlighted that the ethical foundation and stakeholder-oriented philosophy of servant leadership align with sustainability principles, promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) in tourism enterprises. Servant leadership is particularly effective in service contexts that emphasize close guest interaction, such as boutique hotels, wellness centers, and spas. By enhancing employee well-being and fostering organizational citizenship behaviors, it indirectly contributes to productivity and profitability.

Democratic and Participative Leadership

Democratic or participative leadership is grounded in open communication, shared decision-making, and employee empowerment. Leaders practicing this style involve employees in goal setting, problem-solving, and strategic planning processes. This approach is particularly effective in cross-departmental project teams, service innovation groups, and guest experience design units where active participation is critical. Ukabuilu and Igbojekwe (2015) found that in Nigerian hotels, democratic leadership, collaboration, and employee participation were positively correlated with organizational profitability, though the effect was moderated by communication quality and conflict management.

An important outcome of participative leadership is the cultivation of psychological ownership among employees. When workers perceive themselves as co-creators of organizational success, they are more likely to exert discretionary effort, engage in extra-role service behaviors, and contribute to the culture of innovation—key drivers of long-term organizational performance.

Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership is characterized by centralized authority and top-down control, with leaders making unilateral decisions. While such a style can be effective in high-risk situations—such as crises, security threats, or severe compliance breaches—it is generally associated with negative outcomes in hospitality settings, including low employee morale, high turnover, and deteriorating service quality.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Phob-Udom et al. (2025) found that directive leadership temporarily stabilized performance among airline cabin crews; however, sustaining productivity over time required complementing this approach with empathy, open communication, and emotional regulation. Given the hospitality industry's dependence on creativity, guest interaction, and personalized service, autocratic leadership is widely regarded as unsustainable in the long term.

Shared and Distributed Leadership

Shared leadership represents a contemporary paradigm in which leadership responsibilities are distributed among team members rather than concentrated in a single individual. Roles rotate based on expertise, situational demands, and task requirements. Fu et al. (2020) found that shared leadership in hotel teams enhances team reflexivity and proactive behavior—key factors for adaptive performance in dynamic service environments. This approach is particularly well-suited for modern hospitality organizations characterized by flatter hierarchies, agility, and the need for rapid responses to changing guest expectations (Ji et al., 2022).

AI-Driven and Green Leadership

The increasing emphasis on digital transformation and sustainability in tourism has given rise to new leadership paradigms. Radic et al. (2024) introduced the concept of AI-driven servant leadership, arguing that artificial intelligence complements rather than replaces human-centered leadership by enhancing ethical decision-making and empowerment. When combined with human empathy and accountability, AI-supported leadership has been shown to improve employee resource utilization and motivation (Jabeen et al., 2022.)

Parallel to this, the green transformational leadership model has gained prominence, integrating environmental consciousness with transformational behaviors. Chen et al. (2024) demonstrated that leaders who combine pro-environmental awareness with transformational attributes foster team creativity and eco-innovation, contributing to long-term profitability in sustainability-oriented hotels.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a literature-based research design, also referred to as a systematic secondary data review, to examine the interrelationships among leadership styles, teamwork, productivity, and profitability in the tourism and hospitality sector. Unlike empirical studies that rely on primary data collection through surveys, interviews, or experiments, literature-based research involves the systematic identification, evaluation, and synthesis of existing scholarly work. This approach is particularly suitable for theory development, conceptual integration, and cross-contextual comparison in complex and service-intensive industries such as tourism and hospitality (Snyder, 2019; Webster & Watson, 2002). Accordingly, the present study synthesizes published research on leadership styles and organizational outcomes, with a specific focus on the mediating role of teamwork in linking leadership to productivity and profitability. Literature-based research offers several advantages: it enables the identification of consistent patterns across studies, facilitates critical evaluation of contradictions and gaps, and supports the development of conceptual frameworks that advance both theory and managerial practice (Tranfield et al., 2003).

Beyond synthesis, this methodology provides a robust foundation for theory building (Fink, 2019). The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in reconceptualizing teamwork as a central mediating mechanism, rather than a peripheral or contextual variable, in the leadership–performance relationship. The empirical basis of this conceptualization draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, meta-analyses, sectoral reports, and conference proceedings within tourism, hospitality, and service management research. Given the contemporary challenges facing the tourism industry—including digital transformation, sustainability imperatives, and post-pandemic recovery—priority was given to peer-reviewed studies published after 2018 (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Radic et al., 2024). Seminal works were retained where necessary to establish theoretical continuity (e.g., Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Greenleaf, 2002). Synthesizing international case studies and applied research enhances both the academic rigor and the practical relevance of the findings.

The literature search was conducted using major academic databases and explicit inclusion criteria required that studies (a) focus on leadership within tourism or hospitality contexts, (b) incorporate team-level processes or dynamics, and (c) link leadership to organizational outcomes such as productivity, service quality, innovation, or profitability. Studies focusing solely on individual traits without reference to teamwork, or lacking analytical depth, were excluded. The analytical process employed a thematic synthesis and pattern-matching strategy, focusing on recurring causal mechanisms, mediating pathways, contextual contingencies, and unresolved gaps. Leadership styles were systematically examined in relation to teamwork dimensions—trust, communication quality, psychological safety, collective efficacy, and shared accountability—allowing for the development of an integrated mediation framework.

Table 1 summarizes the historical evolution of leadership approaches in hospitality research, illustrating the shift from leader-centric models toward teamwork-centered explanations and from short-term efficiency toward sustainable profitability.

Table 1: Evolution of Leadership Approaches, Teamwork Perspectives, and Performance Focus in the Hospitality and Tourism Sector

Period	Dominant Leadership Approaches	Conceptualization of Teamwork	Primary Performance Focus	Key Contributions in the Literature
1970–1980	Transformational Leadership (Burns, 1978)	Teamwork implicit; secondary to leader influence	Task efficiency, motivation	Leadership framed as a source of inspiration and performance
1990–2000	Transactional & Transformational Leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994)	Teams recognized as operational units	Service quality, operational efficiency	Initial empirical testing of leadership–performance relationships

Period	Dominant Leadership Approaches	Conceptualization of Teamwork	Primary Performance Focus	Key Contributions in the Literature
2000–2010	Servant & Democratic Leadership (Greenleaf, 2002)	Emphasis on trust, communication, collaboration	Employee and customer satisfaction	Shift toward people-centered leadership in service contexts
2010–2015	Participative & Shared Leadership	Teamwork explicitly modeled as a mediating variable	Innovation, organizational commitment	Recognition of teamwork as an explanatory mechanism
2016–2019	Multiple and Hybrid Leadership Styles	Psychological safety and collective efficacy emphasized	Sustainable competitiveness	Deepening analysis of team dynamics and performance
2020–2022	Crisis & Situational Leadership (COVID-19)	Team resilience and adaptability	Continuity, crisis management	Contextual and adaptive leadership highlighted
2023–Present	Green & AI-Driven Leadership (Li et al., 2024; Radic et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025)	Digitally enabled, sustainability-oriented teams	Long-term profitability, sustainability	Integration of technology, ethics, and leadership paradigms

3. DISCUSSION

The findings derived from this literature-based review provide a holistic understanding of the relationships among leadership, teamwork, productivity, and profitability in the tourism and hospitality industry. Across the reviewed studies, leadership styles rarely exert direct and sustained effects on organizational outcomes. Instead, leadership influence is largely transmitted through the quality of teamwork, supporting the central proposition that teamwork functions as a critical mediating mechanism.

Transformational, servant, participative, and shared leadership styles demonstrate the strongest associations with productivity and profitability when teamwork variables—such as trust, communication, mutual accountability, and collective efficacy—are explicitly incorporated into analytical models (Prabowo et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2020; Romawati et al., 2022). In contrast, studies that neglect these mediating processes tend to report weak, inconsistent, or context-dependent leadership effects, suggesting that leadership alone is an insufficient explanatory factor.

Transactional leadership plays a more limited yet functional role. While effective in structured, routine-based environments and short-term efficiency objectives, it remains constrained in fostering innovation and sustainable profitability due to its limited engagement with collaborative team dynamics. Autocratic leadership, similarly, appears primarily as a situational response during crisis periods rather than as a viable long-term strategy.

A second key insight concerns the role of contextual and generational dynamics. The literature consistently indicates that Millennial and Generation Z employees respond more positively to participative, empowering, and value-driven leadership approaches, whereas directive or transactional styles are more acceptable under conditions of uncertainty or operational instability (Tran, 2017; Phob-Udom et al., 2025). These findings underscore the necessity of context-sensitive and flexible leadership development programs.

A third major contribution of the reviewed literature is the expansion of leadership discourse to include AI-driven and green transformational leadership. AI-driven leadership introduces an "augmented leadership" model, in which artificial intelligence enhances managerial decision-making, workforce optimization, and service personalization without replacing human judgment (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Jabeen et al., 2022; Radic et al., 2024). Performance gains from AI are realized only when technological tools are embedded within psychologically safe and collaborative team environments. Similarly, green transformational leadership links leadership effectiveness to environmental stewardship and sustainability outcomes. Leaders who integrate ecological values into their leadership behaviors promote eco-innovation, team learning, and pro-environmental creativity, thereby connecting profitability to sustainability indicators such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and community engagement (Li et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025). These developments represent a reinterpretation of classical leadership theories through digital and environmental lenses. Despite these advances, the literature reveals a persistent limitation: the scarcity of objective financial performance measures. The limited use of indicators such as RevPAR, ROA, or customer loyalty indices constrains the empirical validation of leadership–profitability relationships and highlights an important avenue for future research.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the systematic synthesis of the literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework in which leadership styles influence organizational productivity and profitability indirectly through teamwork mechanisms. Leadership styles—including transformational, servant, participative, shared, transactional, AI-driven, and green leadership—serve as antecedent variables shaping team processes. Teamwork, conceptualized as a multidimensional mediator (trust, communication, psychological safety, collective efficacy, shared accountability), transmits leadership effects to organizational outcomes such as productivity, service innovation, and profitability. Contextual factors, including generational composition, crisis conditions, and digital and sustainability orientation, moderate these relationships.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is subject to several limitations. First, its reliance on secondary data precludes direct empirical testing of the proposed mediation framework. Second, the reviewed studies employ heterogeneous measures of leadership, teamwork, and performance, limiting cross-study comparability. Third, the underrepresentation of objective financial indicators restricts conclusions regarding profitability outcomes.

Future research should adopt mixed-method and longitudinal designs, employ structural equation modeling to test mediation effects, and integrate objective financial performance metrics. Cross-cultural comparative studies would further enhance the generalizability of the framework.

CONCLUSION

Leadership in the tourism and hospitality sector is a multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon that cannot be fully explained by a single leadership model. This study demonstrates that leadership styles influence productivity and profitability primarily through the teamwork they enable, rather than through direct effects. Transformational, servant, participative, and shared leadership styles emerge as particularly effective in dynamic, service-intensive environments, while transactional and autocratic leadership serve more limited, situational functions.

Emerging paradigms such as AI-driven and green leadership are reshaping hospitality management by integrating digital intelligence and sustainability into leadership practice. By repositioning teamwork as a central mediating mechanism, this study bridges fragmented literature and offers a coherent theoretical framework that advances both academic understanding and managerial practice. Future research grounded in empirical validation will further strengthen the link between leadership theory and sustainable competitiveness in the global hospitality industry.

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