

Leadership in hospitality and tourism: An integrative review of positive and negative leadership perspectives, mechanisms, and outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism industry represents one of the most labor-intensive and people-centered sectors of the global economy (Yang et al., 2021). Service encounters are characterized by close interpersonal interaction, emotional labor, and real-time value co-creation between employees and customers (Ozturk et al., 2021). Within this context, leadership plays a decisive role in influencing how employees perceive their work, regulate their emotions, and respond to operational and relational demands (Hoang et al., 2021). Frontline employees must simultaneously adhere to service standards, display emotional warmth, and respond flexibly to diverse customer expectations (Safavi & Bouzari, 2020). These demands render hospitality employees particularly sensitive to leadership behaviors, managerial support, and organizational climate (Ozturk et al., 2021).

Despite substantial progress, leadership research in hospitality remains conceptually fragmented (Hoang et al., 2021). Positive and negative leadership streams are rarely integrated, psychological mechanisms are underexplored, and theory-driven reviews across levels of analysis are lacking (Ozturk et al., 2021). To address these limitations, this review systematically synthesizes leadership research in hospitality and tourism with three primary objectives: (1) consolidating dominant leadership styles and theoretical foundations, (2) examining mediating and moderating mechanisms, and (3) proposing an integrative framework and future research agenda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Theoretical Foundations of Leadership Research in Hospitality and Tourism

Leadership research in hospitality and tourism is informed by social exchange theory, conservation of resources theory, and social cognitive theory (Hoang et al., 2021). Social exchange theory posits that workplace relationships are governed by reciprocal exchanges of resources; when leaders provide support, fairness, and developmental opportunities, employees reciprocate through positive attitudes, work engagement, and discretionary service behaviors (Blau, 1964; Ozturk et al., 2021). Conservation of resources theory focuses on stress and resource depletion, explaining how exploitative leadership triggers emotional exhaustion and withdrawal behaviors (Hobfoll, 1989; Wang et al., 2021). Social cognitive theory emphasizes self-efficacy and observational learning, explaining how transformational and empowering leadership foster creative self-efficacy and service innovation (Bandura, 1986; Yang et al., 2021).

2. Positive Leadership Styles in Hospitality and Tourism

Servant Leadership: Rooted in serving others, servant leadership prioritizes follower development, ethical behavior, and community building, resonating strongly with hospitality's service ethos (Ozturk et al., 2021; Safavi & Bouzari, 2020). Empirical studies confirm that servant leadership enhances work engagement, job satisfaction, and performance among hotel employees, primarily by energizing employees and building psychological capital (hope, optimism, resilience, self-efficacy) through person-supervisor and person-group fit (Ozturk et al., 2021; Safavi & Bouzari, 2020).

Ethical Leadership: Focuses on normatively appropriate conduct, integrity, and moral management (Wood et al., 2021). In hospitality, ethical leadership indirectly promotes employee green behavior through organizational trust, well-being, and responsibility-taking, while establishing a moral climate (Wood et al., 2021).

Empowering Leadership: Involves delegating authority, encouraging participation in decision-making, and fostering autonomy, thereby enhancing employee creativity, innovation, service performance, and psychological empowerment (Hoang et al., 2021).

Transformational and Spiritual Leadership: Transformational leadership operates through developmental culture at the team level and creative self-efficacy at the individual level (Yang et al., 2021). Spiritual leadership emphasizes meaning, altruistic love, and faith, enhancing psychological empowerment and intrapreneurial behavior (Usman et al., 2021).

3. Negative Leadership in Hospitality and Tourism

In contrast to positive leadership, negative leadership styles undermine employee well-being (Wang et al., 2021). Exploitative leadership, characterized by excessive self-interest and manipulation, increases emotional exhaustion and reduces green innovative behavior (Wang et al., 2021). Importantly, perceived organizational support buffers these negative effects, highlighting the critical role of organizational context in mitigating leadership harm (Wang et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic literature review methodology (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). Articles were identified from leading academic journals in hospitality and tourism (e.g., *Tourism Management*, *IJHM*, *IJCHM*, *TMP*) focusing on empirical studies investigating leadership styles and employee outcomes (Hoang et al., 2021). Studies were systematically coded by leadership style, theoretical framework, study design, mediators, moderators, and outcome variables (Snyder, 2019).

FINDINGS

1. Overview of Publication Trends

Publication trends reveal substantial growth over the past decade, predominantly focusing on hotel contexts using quantitative survey-based designs, structural equation modeling, and multilevel analysis (Hoang et al., 2021; Ozturk et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Cross-sectional designs remain prevalent, reflecting ongoing challenges in establishing causal inferences over time (Hoang et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019).

2. Dominant Leadership Styles and Research Focus

Positive leadership styles dominate hospitality research, with servant leadership being the most extensively studied, followed by ethical, empowering, and transformational leadership (Hoang et al., 2021; Ozturk et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Studies on dark leadership center on exploitative leadership and exhibit strong theoretical coherence grounded in conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Wang et al., 2021).

3. Mediating Mechanisms Linking Leadership to Employee Outcomes

Work engagement and psychological capital serve as primary mediators for positive leadership, driving vigor, resilience, and extra-role performance (Ozturk et al., 2021; Safavi & Bouzari, 2020). For dark leadership, emotional exhaustion acts as the central mediating mechanism reflecting resource depletion (Hobfoll, 1989; Wang et al., 2021). Other mediators include organizational trust, employee well-being, creative self-efficacy, and developmental culture (Blau, 1964; Wood et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021).

4. Moderating Conditions and Contextual Factors

Moderating factors shaping leadership effectiveness include organizational culture (collectivist culture, culture of innovativeness), individual differences (work centrality, perceived organizational support), and team-level factors such as group diversity and openness (Hoang et al., 2021; Usman et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021).

5. Integrative Conceptual Framework

Positive leadership styles operate through motivational and resource-building mechanisms (engagement, psychological capital, trust) to enhance performance and sustainability (Ozturk et al., 2021; Safavi & Bouzari, 2020; Wood et al., 2021). Dark leadership operates through resource-depleting mechanisms (emotional exhaustion) resulting in disengagement and reduced innovation (Wang et al., 2021; Hobfoll, 1989). Contextual and individual factors moderate these processes (Usman et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Figure 1 presents the proposed integrative conceptual framework of leadership in hospitality and tourism.

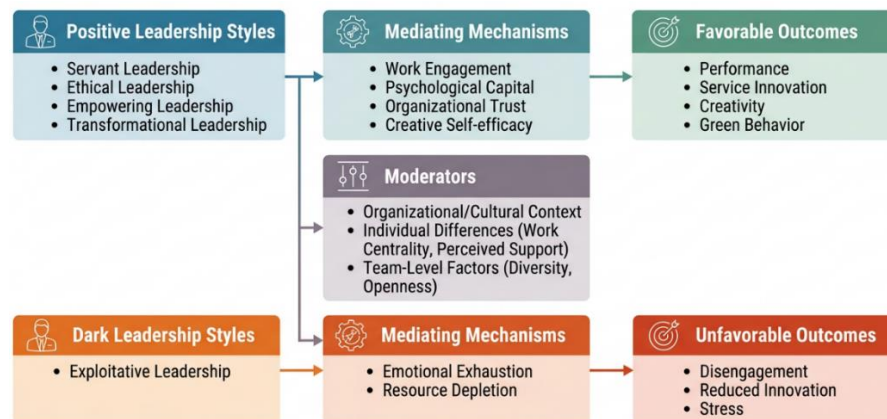


Figure 1. The Integrative Conceptual Framework of Leadership in Hospitality and Tourism

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

1. Conclusion

Leadership remains a critical determinant of employee behavior in hospitality and tourism (Ozturk et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Positive leadership enhances engagement, psychological resources, innovation, and sustainability, while dark leadership undermines outcomes through resource depletion and emotional exhaustion (Hobfoll, 1989; Wang et al., 2021). Integrating bright-side and dark-side perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for advancing hospitality leadership scholarship (Hoang et al., 2021).

2. Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on: (1) Methodological Advancement (longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-method designs); (2) Integration of Coexisting Leadership Styles; (3) Cross-Cultural Perspectives; (4) Leadership in Crisis and Digital Service Contexts; and (5) Employee Diversity and Inclusion (Hoang et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003).

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