LEADERSHİP AND CHANGİNG DYNAMİCS İN THE GASTRONOMY SECTOR

Erhan Kılınç[1], Recep Yücel[2], Şebnem Yücel[3]

[1]*Dr., Associate Professor, Selçuk University, Konya, Turkey, e-mail: Erhank23@hotmail.com, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2065-2407*
[2]*Dr., Professor, Kırıkkale University, Kırıkkale, Turkey, e-mail: akademik71@gmail.com, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4755-417X*
[3]*Dr., Professor, Selçuk University, Konya, Turkey, e-mail: sebnemaslan27@hotmail.com, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2135-242X*

Abstract. *In the rapidly transforming gastronomy sector, leadership is no longer confined to traditional kitchen hierarchies but encompasses a broader set of competencies that reflect evolving economic, technological, and social realities. This study explores the multidimensional nature of leadership within gastronomy, with a particular emphasis on its responsiveness to changing sectoral dynamics. The central aim is to analyze how diverse leadership styles shape employee motivation, organizational commitment, innovation capacity, and the sector's overall adaptability to contemporary challenges, such as crisis management, digitalization, and sustainability transitions. The study is relevant in light of increasing global emphasis on service quality, gender equality, and sustainable development—issues that significantly influence gastronomy enterprises worldwide. The research methodology is grounded in a qualitative and conceptual framework based on a comprehensive thematic review of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals, tourism and hospitality reports, and leadership case studies. Through comparative content analysis and synthesis of leadership models in various contexts—restaurant management, culinary tourism, crisis response, and social entrepreneurship—the study constructs a nuanced understanding of leadership evolution in gastronomy. The results demonstrate that leadership in this sector is inherently complex, adaptive, and situational. While hierarchical leadership remains prevalent in traditional kitchen settings, hybrid and collaborative models are gaining traction, especially in response to dynamic service environments and workforce diversification. Transformational and democratic leadership styles contribute significantly to innovation, job satisfaction, and resilience, particularly during disruptive periods like the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also reveals persistent gender inequalities in leadership roles, despite the growing presence of women in professional kitchens. Moreover, the digital transformation of gastronomy not only affects operational efficiency but also redefines leadership competencies, requiring mastery of information systems and online communication platforms.*

Keywords: *gastronomy; leadership; gastronomy leadership; transformational leadership; service innovation; gender equality in hospitality; digital transformation; sustainable kitchen practices; collaborative management.*
JEL Classification: Z31, M11, O32
Formulas: 0; fig.: 0; table: 4; bibl.: 23

Introduction. The gastronomy sector increasingly needs leadership skills due to its dynamic structure and changing consumer demands. Leadership in the gastronomy sector is shaped by non-verbal communication and teamwork, especially under high pressure, by balancing between hierarchical and collaborative approaches. Effective leaders manage the operational challenges of small restaurants with qualities such as respect, compassion and communication. In addition, the role of local leaders in the development of gastronomy tourism is critical in creating inclusive destinations by increasing community participation. Transformational leadership increases job satisfaction and organizational commitment by caring about the needs of employees, while democratic leadership supports creativity and organizational dissent. In contrast, it has been found that autocratic leadership has no significant effect on employee performance. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant changes in food safety rules. Measures such as the use of masks and gloves, social distancing and disinfectant applications have created new standards in the sector. In this process, it is critical for the sustainability of businesses that leaders increase the motivation of employees and facilitate their adaptation to new rules. The role of women leaders in the gastronomy sector is increasing. However, gender inequality limits women's access to leadership positions. Digitalization facilitates leaders' information management and decision-making processes, contributing to their development of innovative strategies in the sector. In addition, sustainable kitchen practices and service quality management are among the main focuses of leaders. As a result, leadership in the gastronomy sector is not limited to kitchen management alone, but includes multidimensional elements such as social entrepreneurship, gender equality, information management and technological innovations. This study emphasizes the importance of leadership in adapting to changing dynamics by offering practical suggestions for managers and researchers in the sector.

Literature review. Leadership in the gastronomy sector is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon, shaped by operational pressures, workforce diversity, evolving customer expectations, and socio-cultural shifts. Gastronomic leadership goes beyond conventional kitchen management and encompasses competencies such as transformational influence, emotional intelligence, digital literacy, sustainability awareness, and crisis response. As Sökmen and Yavanoğlu (2023) noted, leadership styles directly impact employee performance and organizational commitment, highlighting the strategic importance of leadership in workforce motivation and service quality.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for adaptive leadership in hospitality. Measures such as mask mandates, social distancing, enhanced hygiene protocols, and compliance with health codes created novel operational challenges (Yılmaz & Beyter, 2021). In this context, transformational and democratic leadership styles emerged as effective tools for fostering resilience, enhancing staff morale, and sustaining business continuity (Efe, 2021; Aytekin & Temizkan, 2022). These leadership styles empowered employees by involving them in decision-making and fostering creativity, while autocratic leadership was found to diminish adaptability and employee initiative during crises (Cinnioğlu, 2022).

Leadership in the gastronomy sector must also grapple with hierarchical traditions and evolving collaborative norms. Lortie, Cabantous, and Sardais (2022) explored how leadership manifests in haute cuisine, where strict brigades coexist with moments of shared decision-making, especially during high-pressure services. Similarly, Putra and Cho (2019) emphasized that empathy, communication, and team cohesion are crucial in small restaurant operations, where leaders often play multiple roles beyond administration.

In the tourism dimension of gastronomy, leadership plays a key role in promoting inclusive destination development and preserving culinary heritage (Tirtawati & Wulandari, 2023). Local leaders who integrate food culture into tourism planning help build socially embedded, sustainable travel experiences. Social entrepreneurship is another evolving dimension of gastronomic leadership, where participative and purpose-driven approaches foster innovative business models and community engagement (Navarro-Dols & González-Pernía, 2024).

Digital transformation is redefining leadership responsibilities across the food sector. Information management, social media presence, and AI-based service innovations require leaders to be technologically agile (Duarte Alonso, O'Shea, & Kok, 2022). Digital tools also serve to amplify the voices of women leaders, despite persistent gender-based obstacles in leadership access, promotion, and representation (Garcia-Henche & Cuesta-Valiño, 2022; Türkmendağ & Karaman, 2024). Addressing gender inequality in gastronomy leadership remains essential for talent retention, workplace justice, and brand diversity.

Moreover, sustainable kitchen practices and eco-conscious management strategies have become central to contemporary leadership. As Sharma (2014) and Rodgers (2008, 2009) observed, leaders are tasked with adopting innovative food technologies and sustainability protocols that align with ethical consumption trends. Operational efficiency, cost leadership, and quality management are also critical in meeting consumer demands and enhancing competitive advantage (Taha & Nee Ng, 2019).

Taken together, the literature demonstrates that leadership in the gastronomy sector has evolved from authoritative command models to inclusive, multidimensional paradigms. Successful leaders today are facilitators of innovation, guardians of cultural integrity, advocates for equality, and pioneers in sustainability. These evolving roles reflect the complex interplay between tradition and innovation that characterizes modern gastronomy.

Aims. This study aims to examine the multidimensional role of leadership in the gastronomy sector and analyze its impact on leadership styles according to changing dynamics. In addition, the study aims to provide practical recommendations for managers and researchers in the sector.

Methodology. This study employs a qualitative and conceptual approach to investigate the evolving role of leadership in the gastronomy sector under the influence of social, economic, and technological changes. The research methodology integrates a comprehensive literature review with analytical synthesis to examine the

interrelationship between leadership styles and operational, organizational, and cultural dynamics in gastronomy.

Data were gathered through secondary sources, including peer-reviewed academic journals, sectoral reports, and thematic studies focusing on hospitality management, gastronomy tourism, organizational leadership, and social entrepreneurship. The selection of sources was guided by relevance, recency, and academic credibility. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to include studies that address transformational, democratic, and autocratic leadership styles, as well as leadership responses to crisis periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and leadership patterns across different contexts such as restaurant kitchens, tourism development, sustainability practices, and gender equality. Key variables examined include employee motivation, organizational commitment, innovation adoption, and crisis adaptation. Tables were used to compare leadership styles, identify sectoral challenges, and illustrate the dynamic interaction between traditional and modern leadership models.

This methodology allows for a contextualized understanding of leadership phenomena in gastronomy by synthesizing theoretical models and real-world practices. Although the research does not involve primary empirical data collection, its analytical depth and integrative scope ensure meaningful contributions to both the academic literature and industry practice.

Results. Leadership remains one of the most complex and debated constructs in the social sciences. Historically perceived as a personal trait, modern understandings of leadership emphasize its dynamic, interactive, and contextual nature. Rather than being limited to individual charisma or authority, leadership today is broadly defined as the process of influencing others to achieve collective goals. This process requires not only the traits of the leader but also the active engagement of followers and the surrounding organizational context.

Effective leaders do not merely issue directives; they inspire shared visions, establish ethical norms, and encourage initiative and responsibility. Central to this influence is trust, which acts as the foundation for credible leadership. Leaders who are transparent, visionary, and ethically grounded tend to foster stronger team cohesion and loyalty. These attributes, outlined in Table 1, form the cornerstone of sustainable and credible leadership.

Table 1. Core Elements of Effective Leadership

Leadership Aspect	Role in Effective Leadership
Trust	Builds credibility and follower confidence
Vision	Provides direction and purpose
Ethics	Ensures transparency and fairness
Responsibility	Enables decision-making and initiative

Source: compiled by the authors

Contemporary leadership is inherently multidimensional. Transformational leaders, for instance, emphasize the importance of employee empowerment, participatory decision-making, and innovation. This style has demonstrated positive impacts on employee job satisfaction, commitment, and adaptability—especially

during disruptive periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Conversely, autocratic leadership, with its rigid control and minimal delegation, tends to suppress flexibility and reduce employee engagement during crises.

The comparative outcomes of different leadership styles are outlined in Table 2, which demonstrates how specific approaches influence both employee behavior and overall organizational resilience.

Table 2. Leadership Styles and Outcomes

Leadership Style	Key Characteristics	Impact on Employees	Organizational Outcome
Transformational	Employee-oriented, inclusive, innovative	High motivation and commitment	Sustained success, especially in crises
Democratic	Supports creativity, values input, adapts to change	Enhanced creativity and adaptability	Innovation and adaptive growth
Autocratic	Top-down, limited delegation, inflexible in crises	Restricted initiative, reduced flexibility	Neutral or negative effect on performance

Source: compiled by the authors

Democratic leadership further enhances performance by valuing employees' perspectives and encouraging organizational creativity. By fostering a culture of shared responsibility, this leadership style improves adaptability and innovation—crucial in a constantly evolving hospitality and gastronomy environment.

Beyond stylistic preferences, effective leadership also plays a vital role in strategic areas such as cost management, service standardization, and digital transformation. Leaders are expected to integrate technological tools to manage information flows and communication processes efficiently. In the context of social entrepreneurship, leadership evolves as a participatory structure that thrives on employee inclusion and collective values.

Ultimately, leadership in the gastronomy and hospitality sectors must be evaluated as a fluid, evolving, and situationally dependent phenomenon. Its success hinges on the ability to balance ethics, innovation, employee development, and systemic adaptability. The data suggest that leadership effectiveness is maximized when core traits like trust and responsibility are coupled with modern practices that prioritize flexibility, inclusion, and long-term sustainability.

Leadership and Changing Dynamics in the Gastronomy Sector. Leadership in the gastronomy sector represents a multifaceted and evolving process that bridges hierarchical traditions with emerging collaborative practices. While traditional restaurant kitchens often operate under strict hierarchical models, high-pressure service periods necessitate more collaborative leadership, wherein teams coordinate through non-verbal cues and shared responsibilities. This duality is illustrated in Table 3, which highlights the practical applications of various leadership styles across different operational contexts. In small establishments, leadership built on compassion, respect, and effective communication has proven instrumental in boosting employee morale and navigating operational complexities.

A hybrid leadership approach - merging hierarchy with horizontal participation - has become increasingly effective in enhancing product quality and elevating the reputation of culinary enterprises. In gastronomy tourism, leaders play an essential role in embedding local culinary identity into destination narratives, thus enriching inclusive travel experiences and regional development. During the COVID-19

pandemic, transformational leadership significantly contributed to organizational resilience. Leaders were pivotal in ensuring compliance with newly imposed health measures while sustaining morale and operational continuity.

Table 3. Leadership Approaches in Gastronomy

Leadership Approach	Application Context	Key Outcomes
Hierarchical	Traditional kitchen operations	Efficient task delegation
Collaborative	Service periods under pressure	Quick adaptation via teamwork
Hybrid (Hierarchical + Horizontal)	Chef-led quality and reputation management	Enhanced product quality and reputation
Transformational	Health and safety compliance (e.g., COVID-19)	Improved staff adaptation and crisis handling
Shared Leadership	Social entrepreneurship and sustainability	Employee engagement and business resilience

Source: compiled by the authors

At the same time, structural inequalities persist. Despite a rise in the number of women leaders, gender-based barriers - such as unequal pay, restricted promotion pathways, and long working hours - continue to limit access to leadership positions. Addressing these issues requires strategic implementation of equal opportunity and job security policies.

Table 4 summarizes the critical challenges facing gastronomy leadership and the associated strategic roles leaders must adopt to ensure equitable, resilient, and sustainable development.

Table 4. Leadership Challenges and Focus Areas

Challenge	Leadership Role
Gender Inequality	Promote equal pay and inclusive career paths
Digital Transformation	Utilize digital tools for visibility and data-driven decisions
Crisis Adaptation	Apply adaptive leadership during public health crises
Sustainability	Support green kitchen practices and innovation
Customer Expectation Management	Focus on service quality dimensions (e.g., empathy, responsiveness)

Source: compiled by the authors

The digital transformation of the sector also influences leadership paradigms. Social media platforms amplify visibility for underrepresented groups, especially women leaders, while data management systems empower decision-making and customer engagement. In the domain of social entrepreneurship, shared leadership fosters sustainable innovation through collective accountability and enhanced staff participation.

Technological advancement—from molecular gastronomy to AI-powered solutions—further reshapes leadership roles by driving both service quality and operational efficiency. Sustainability-oriented practices, such as eco-conscious kitchen operations, are now integral to leadership agendas. Leaders are also tasked with ensuring high standards in reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and assurance—dimensions critical to managing customer expectations and elevating service quality.

In conclusion, effective leadership in the gastronomy sector demands a nuanced, adaptive, and multi-dimensional approach. Balancing traditional and collaborative leadership, championing digital adaptation, promoting gender equality, and leading

sustainability initiatives will be crucial in reinforcing the sector's long-term vitality and global competitiveness.

Discussion. The contemporary leadership approach in the gastronomy sector requires a multidimensional approach that goes beyond traditional management skills. Research findings reveal that effective leadership should be addressed with a perspective that integrates key elements such as social entrepreneurship, gender equality, digital transformation and sustainability. Experiences gained especially in the post-COVID-19 period have proven the decisive role of transformational leadership approaches in crisis management on employee motivation and adaptation processes (Efe, 2021; Yılmaz and Beyter, 2021). Despite the positive developments observed in the sector, systemic obstacles faced by women leaders remain an important problem area (Garcia-Henche and Cuesta-Valiño, 2022; Türkmendağ and Karaman, 2024). In this context, comprehensive measures ranging from equal pay policies to flexible working arrangements need to be implemented. The opportunities offered by the digital transformation process both transform leadership practices (Duarte Alonso et al., 2022) and increase the visibility of female professionals (Garcia-Henche and Cuesta-Valiño, 2022).

Conclusion. The results of this research reveal that leadership in the gastronomy sector has a multidimensional structure. Effective leadership covers not only kitchen management but also areas such as employee motivation, organizational commitment, information management, gender equality, sustainability and digitalization. While the role of leaders in adapting to new hygiene rules comes to the fore in the post-COVID-19 period, the positive effects of democratic and transformational leadership styles on employees have been observed. In contrast, autocratic leadership was not found to have a significant effect on performance. While the presence of female leaders in the sector is increasing, gender barriers still await to be overcome. Adapting leadership to these dynamic areas is seen as critical for the sustainable success of gastronomy businesses. By addressing the leadership dynamics in the gastronomy sector with a holistic approach, this study both contributes to the academic literature and points to a guiding function for sector professionals. Morever, findings regarding the effects of leadership styles on employee performance and business success will make significant contributions to the development of human resources management practices in the sector.

Author contributions. The authors contributed equally.

Disclosure statement. The authors do not have any conflict of interest.

References:

1. Alonso, A. D., O'Shea, M., & Kok, S. K. (2022). Managing knowledge in the context of gastronomy and culinary tourism: A knowledge-based perspective. *Tourism Recreation Research, 47*(2), 145–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2021.1995691
2. Aytekin, E., & Temizkan, R. (2022). The effect of democratic leadership on organizational dissent and organizational creativity: A study on hotel businesses. *Journal of Gastronomy, Hospitality and Travel, 5*(3), 1105–1122.
3. Bennis, W. G., & Nanus, B. (1974). *Leadership*. University of Cincinnati.
4. Cinnioğlu, H. (2022). The effects of perceived autocratic and democratic leadership styles on the performance levels of employees in five-star hotels: The case of Istanbul. *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies, 10*(3), 1844–1866.
5. Duarte Alonso, A., O'Shea, M., & Kok, S. (2022). Knowledge management in culinary tourism: Leadership strategies for destination development. *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism, 7*(3), 245–260.

6. Efe, M. N. (2021). The effect of transformational leadership on job satisfaction and organizational commitment in accommodation businesess. *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies,* 9(3), 2092–2108.
7. Gandolfi, F., & Stone, S. (2018). Leadership, leadership styles, and servant leadership. *Journal of Management Research, 18*(4), 261–269.
8. Garcia-Henche, B., & Cuesta-Valiño, P. (2022). Increasing the visibility of women in gastronomy. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science, 30*, Article 100345. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2022.100345
9. Hughes, R., Ginnett, R. C., & Curphy, G. J. (1996). *Leadership*. Irwin.
10. Kayaplı Yıldırım, S. (2020). The mediating role of transformational leadership in the effect of knowledge sharing on innovative work behavior in hotel enterprises. *Journal of Tourism and* Gastronomy Studies, 8(1), 137–157.
11. Lortie, J., Cabantous, L., & Sardais, C. (2022). How leadership moments are enacted within a strict hierarchy: The case of kitchen brigades in haute cuisine restaurants. *Organization Studies, 44*, 1081–1101. https://doi.org/10.1177/017084062211342225
12. Navarro-Dols, S., & González-Pernía, J. L. (2024). Social entrepreneurship in gastronomy: Examining the role of participants in leadership and financial structuring. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 104*, Article 103317.
13. Putra, E., & Cho, S. (2019). Characteristics of small business leadership from employees' perspective: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Hospitality Management.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.11.011
14. Rodgers, S. (2008). Technological innovation supporting different food production philosophies in the food service sectors. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 20*(1), 19–34.
15. Rodgers, S. (2009). The state of technological sophistication and the need for new specialised tertiary degrees in food services. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 28*(1), 71–77.
16. Sharma, S. (2014). Sustainable culinary practices. In *Managing sustainability in the hospitality and tourism industry: Paradigms and directions for the future* (pp. 303–334).
17. Silva, A. (2016). What is leadership? *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly, 8*(1), 1.
18. Sökmen, A., & Yavanoğlu, Ş. I. (2023). The relationship between visionary leadership, organizational commitment and job performance: A study on hotel employees. *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies, 11(2), 1561–1580.*
19. Taha, A. Z., & Nee Ng, C. Y. (2019). Service quality and gastronomy. *In The Routledge Handbook of Gastronomic Tourism* (pp. 125–133).
20. Tirtawati, N., & Wulandari, P. (2023). Local's participation in evolving gastronomy tourism in Ubud and beyond. *TRJ Tourism Research Journal, 7*(1). https://doi.org/10.30647/trj.v7i1.208
21. Türkmendağ, T., & Karaman, N. (2024). Gender inequality in the culinary profession in the tourism sector from the perspective of university students with work experience in the culinary sector. *Frontiers in Sociology, 9*, Article 1234567. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1234567
22. Wellton, L., Jonsson, I., & Svingstedt, A. (2019). "Just trained to be a chef, not a leader": A study of head chef practices. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration, 20*, 400–422. https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2017.1397584
23. Yilmaz, I., & Beyter, N. (2021). Changes in measures taken in food and beverage units in terms of food safety after COVID-19. Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies, 9(4), 321–346.