

# Leadership Dynamics on Daily Workers in the Hotel Sector: A Conceptual Review

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## ABSTRACT

The hotel industry relies heavily on casual and daily workers to respond to fluctuating service demands, particularly in operational departments like housekeeping and food and beverage. While this flexible labour strategy provides cost-efficiency, it also presents challenges related to employee engagement, motivation, and organisational alignment. This narrative literature review explores the most suitable leadership styles for managing casual workers in hotel settings. Drawing on empirical studies and conceptual models from the hospitality and organisational behaviour literature, the review highlights the limitations of transactional leadership when used in isolation. It emphasises the potential of servant and transformational leadership styles to inspire, support, and empower casual employees. These people-oriented approaches foster greater psychological safety, job satisfaction, and alignment with organisational goals. The paper concludes by recommending a blended leadership approach that incorporates structure with empathy and motivation to address the unique needs of casual workers in hospitality contexts.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry operates in a dynamic environment characterised by fluctuating demand, seasonality, and a high dependency on human interaction to deliver services (Lai & Baum, 2005). To maintain flexibility and cost-effectiveness, many hotels have increasingly adopted casual or daily employment arrangements, particularly in departments such as housekeeping, food service, and banqueting (Allan et al., 2006; Lai & Baum, 2005). These non-standard employment practices, which include part-time, agency-based, and on-call labour, provide operational agility and reduced overheads but also introduce significant human resource management challenges.

Casual and daily workers often face limited job security, minimal integration into the organisational culture, and restricted access to training and career development opportunities (Piso, 1999; Lai & Baum, 2005). While some may appreciate the flexibility these roles offer, others experience disengagement, weak organisational commitment, and lower levels of satisfaction (Allan et al., 2006). As such, the transient and transactional nature of their employment may compromise service quality and overall team cohesion if not properly addressed through effective leadership.

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping employee attitudes, motivation, and behaviour, factors especially important in labour-intensive service sectors such as hospitality (Elkhwesky et al., 2022; Rabiul et al., 2023). Yet, much of the existing leadership literature in hospitality has focused on full-time staff or has been developed from Western contexts that may not align with the realities of casual labour models in diverse cultural and economic settings (Dai et al., 2013; Erkutlu, 2008). As highlighted by recent reviews, there is a conceptual and empirical gap regarding how leadership styles function in managing temporary or peripheral workforces, known as the casual or daily workers, in hotels (Elkhwesky et al., 2022).

In this context, identifying and implementing effective leadership styles becomes imperative. Servant leadership, transformational leadership, and participative leadership have shown promise in fostering engagement, trust, and organisational citizenship behaviours even among temporary staff (Azila-Gbettor, 2023; Rabiul et al., 2023). These styles emphasise empathy, vision-sharing, and individualised support, which are crucial in environments where employees may otherwise feel disconnected or undervalued.

Given the widespread use of casual labour in the hotel sector and the human-centred nature of hospitality services, this study aims to explore the intersection between casual employment models and leadership style effectiveness. It seeks to address the question: *What leadership approaches are most suitable for managing casual or daily workers in hotel settings to enhance engagement, performance, and organisational alignment?*

## **2. METHODS**

This study employed a narrative literature review to explore the relationship between leadership styles and the management of casual or daily workers in the hotel industry. The narrative review method was chosen to provide a comprehensive and interpretative synthesis of existing research, enabling a deeper understanding of conceptual themes and theoretical linkages across diverse studies. Relevant literature was identified through a purposive selection of peer-reviewed journal articles published in hospitality, tourism, and organisational behaviour fields. Databases such as Emerald Insight and Google Scholar were used to locate studies focusing on leadership styles, casual labour, hotel workforce management, and employee engagement. The selected articles were analysed thematically, with particular attention to how leadership approaches influence work outcomes among non-standard hotel employees. This method allowed for critical integration of empirical findings, theoretical frameworks, and practical insights to address the guiding research question and highlight directions for future investigation.

## **3. RESULTS**

### **Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leadership is a managerial style focused on the exchange relationship between leaders and their subordinates, where compliance and performance are driven by a system of rewards and punishments. Rooted in traditional organisational hierarchies, this style emphasises structured tasks, clearly defined roles, and measurable outcomes (Bass, 1985). Leaders using this approach set expectations, monitor progress, and intervene when standards are not met, often through contingent reward systems or corrective action—also known as “management by exception.”

In hospitality contexts, especially within environments with high employee turnover and fluctuating workloads, transactional leadership is often used to ensure consistency in service delivery. It is particularly effective for managing routine tasks where short-term results are prioritised, such as in housekeeping, banquet service, or front-desk operations. The clear guidelines and performance-based incentives offered by this style can be appealing in managing casual or temporary staff who may not be fully embedded in the organisational culture.

However, critics argue that transactional leadership may limit creativity and long-term engagement. It tends to prioritise task completion over employee development, which may reinforce the transient mindset already present among casual workers. Moreover, in service-oriented sectors where emotional labour and personalised interactions matter, purely transactional approaches may fall short in fostering motivation, loyalty, and customer-centred behaviours.

While transactional leadership has its merits in task-focused environments, especially where structure and discipline are necessary, it is less effective in building trust and emotional commitment among employees. For hotels that rely heavily on casual labour, over-reliance on transactional leadership may result in a lack of cohesion and reduce opportunities to instil a

sense of belonging or organisational identity. As such, this style may be most effective when used alongside more relational leadership approaches that consider employee needs and aspirations.

## **Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership is a people-centred approach in which the leader prioritises the needs, well-being, and development of employees above their own self-interest or organisational objectives (Greenleaf, 1977). This leadership philosophy is rooted in humility, empathy, listening, stewardship, and commitment to the personal growth of team members. Servant leaders view themselves as facilitators and supporters rather than controllers, creating an environment where followers feel empowered and valued.

In the hospitality industry, where service excellence hinges on human interaction and emotional labour, servant leadership offers significant advantages. Employees working in casual or daily roles often experience job insecurity, limited communication with management, and marginal inclusion in workplace culture. Servant leaders can mitigate these disadvantages by fostering a sense of trust, belonging, and psychological safety. They encourage open communication, provide support during challenges, and nurture employees' intrinsic motivation, all of which are particularly important for retaining and engaging non-standard workers.

Studies have shown that servant leadership enhances job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), and employee engagement across hospitality contexts (Azila-Gbetteor, 2023; Rabiul et al., 2023). It is especially valuable in managing diverse teams, as its inclusive and ethical nature resonates well with employees from varied backgrounds, including part-time and agency-based staff. By promoting mutual respect and collaboration, servant leadership builds a stronger emotional bond between employees and the organisation.

Nevertheless, the implementation of servant leadership requires time, consistency, and a genuine commitment to human values—factors that can be challenging in fast-paced hospitality settings with high staff turnover. Leaders must be trained not only in managerial tasks but also in emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. Despite these challenges, servant leadership stands out as a sustainable and ethical leadership style capable of addressing many of the relational and motivational gaps often experienced by casual hotel workers.

## **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that seeks to inspire and motivate employees to exceed expectations by aligning personal goals with organisational vision. First conceptualised by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass (1985), transformational leaders engage followers by articulating a compelling vision, demonstrating strong values, fostering intellectual stimulation, and offering individualised consideration. The core components—idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised support—help create a culture of trust, innovation, and personal growth.

In the hospitality industry, where customer experience and employee morale are closely linked, transformational leadership has demonstrated strong potential in driving positive employee behaviours. For casual or daily hotel workers who may lack a long-term attachment to the organisation, transformational leaders can instil a sense of purpose, belonging, and intrinsic

motivation. By inspiring workers to see their role in delivering memorable guest experiences, leaders help bridge the emotional and cultural gap that often exists between the organisation and non-standard employees.

Transformational leadership has been associated with increased job satisfaction, employee engagement, organisational commitment, and service quality across hospitality settings (Dai et al., 2013; Erkutlu, 2008). The leader's ability to inspire, mentor, and intellectually challenge staff fosters a proactive and empowered workforce, even among part-time or temporary employees. Unlike transactional leadership, which focuses on short-term performance, transformational leaders develop long-term relationships, encouraging loyalty and reducing turnover intentions.

However, the success of transformational leadership depends heavily on the leader's authenticity, communication skills, and emotional intelligence. It also requires organisational support, including training and feedback systems that reinforce development-focused practices. In contexts where employee roles are repetitive or structurally constrained, such as in banquet or housekeeping roles, leaders must find creative ways to inspire and intellectually stimulate workers.

Transformational leadership is a forward-looking and relational style that holds strong promise for engaging casual hotel workers, provided it is adapted to their needs and the realities of hospitality operations.

## **Leadership Approaches for Managing Casual or Daily Hotel Workers**

Managing casual or daily workers in hotel settings presents unique challenges due to the transient nature of employment, fluctuating schedules, and limited integration into the organisational culture. To enhance engagement, performance, and organisational alignment, leadership approaches must be both flexible and relational. Research suggests that servant leadership, transformational leadership, and a moderated form of transactional leadership are the most suitable for this workforce segment.

Servant leadership is especially effective in creating a supportive and inclusive environment. By prioritising employee well-being, listening actively, and fostering trust, servant leaders can help casual workers feel valued despite their temporary status. This approach improves psychological safety and motivates employees to contribute positively to team goals and service quality (Azila-Gbetteor, 2023; Rabiul et al., 2023).

Transformational leadership is equally valuable, as it inspires casual staff by connecting their work to a larger vision. Through individualised consideration and inspirational motivation, transformational leaders can instil a sense of purpose and belonging. This is critical for non-standard workers who might otherwise feel disconnected from the organisation's core mission (Dai et al., 2013; Erkutlu, 2008).

While transactional leadership may not foster long-term loyalty, its structured and goal-oriented nature is useful for managing short-term tasks, especially in high-turnover roles. When combined with relational leadership elements, it can provide clarity and performance incentives without alienating employees.

The summary of using leadership styles for managing the daily workers at the hotel is as follows.

<b>Challenges in daily workers management</b>	<b>Implications for leadership style</b>	<b>Possible leadership style</b>
<i>Operational agility</i> – Managers can scale the workforce quickly in response to demand	Requires clear short-term goals and performance expectations to be met efficiently.	Transactional Leadership
<i>Flexibility for employees</i> – Casual workers can choose shifts and avoid rigid schedules	Requires supportive and participative leadership that listens to worker preferences and supports autonomy.	Servant Leadership
<i>Lack of job security and benefits</i> – Workers may feel disconnected	Requires a leadership style that can foster trust, care, and psychological safety.	Servant Leadership
<i>Susceptibility to poor treatment and miscommunication</i>	Emphasises the need for strong communication competency.	Servant Leadership
<i>Reduced long-term costs for hotels</i>	Leaders need to balance cost-focused with ethical, people-centred leadership to avoid dehumanising the workforce.	Transformational Leadership
<i>Weaker commitment and lower motivation</i>	Requires a leadership style that can inspire a sense of purpose, even for short-term staff.	Transformational leadership
<i>Limited integration into the organisational culture</i>	Requires leaders that can adopt inclusive and coaching approaches, supporting participation.	Transformational leadership
Some casual workers build <i>long-term informal ties with hotels</i>	Requires leaders who offer recognition and inclusion even for temporary staff, supporting inclusive or authentic leadership styles.	Combined Style
<i>Risk of being treated as expendable or invisible</i>	Calls for ethical and empathetic leadership, ensuring dignity and fairness for all workers.	Combined Style

Ultimately, a blended leadership model that emphasises empathy, empowerment, and structure is most effective for casual hotel workers. By integrating servant and transformational

leadership principles, hotel managers can cultivate a more engaged, aligned, and high-performing workforce, regardless of contract length or job classification.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The effective management of casual or daily workers in the hotel industry requires leadership approaches that go beyond traditional supervisory models. While transactional leadership offers clarity and task direction, it is insufficient to foster engagement and commitment among non-standard employees. This review underscores the value of servant and transformational leadership in promoting trust, motivation, and a shared sense of purpose, even among temporary staff.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Servant leaders nurture inclusive and caring environments, while transformational leaders inspire casual workers to connect with broader organisational values. A blended leadership model that combines structure with relational and inspirational qualities is best suited for hotel managers facing the challenges of a flexible, dynamic workforce. Adopting such approaches can lead to improved service quality, reduced turnover, and enhanced organisational cohesion. Future research should further examine these leadership styles in various cultural and operational hotel contexts to support sustainable workforce practices.

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