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Beyond the Chef: An Examination of Leadership Types in the Field of Gastronomy

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Abstract

Leadership should be considered a multi-layered and dynamic concept that goes beyond organizational management functions, encompassing historical, cultural, and ethical dimensions. In the gastronomy sector in particular, the understanding of leadership has evolved from traditional authoritarian models to transformative, interactive, servant, and authentic leadership approaches. In this study, leadership theories and their applications in the gastronomy field have been systematically examined within a theoretical framework. The findings reveal that the leader's communication style, visionary approach, and ethical stance have a decisive impact on performance indicators such as team commitment, creativity, job satisfaction, and operational success. Additionally, it emphasizes that current factors such as digitalization and sustainability shape leadership practices and that inclusive, multidimensional leadership approaches in gastronomy contribute to organizational success and employee satisfaction. The study makes significant contributions to the literature by explaining the effects of leadership behaviors on the culinary sector, both from a theoretical perspective and in practice.

Keywords: *Gastronomy, Gastronomy sector, Leadership approaches, Types of Leadership*

Introduction

Gastronomy, which encompasses everything related to human nutrition, aims to produce the best dishes by managing everyone who researches, procures, and prepares food within strict rules (Brillat-Savarin, 1854, p. 76). Based on this foundation, food culture, which has evolved and developed throughout history, has undergone significant and profound changes from the 16th century to the present day. It is said that the culinary field has also developed technologically, socially, politically, philosophically, and artistically in accordance with changing world conditions (Aksoy and Üner, 2016, p. 3).

In particular, with the industrialization process, which saw the most significant developments, certain rules have emerged in areas such as cooking techniques and work organization in kitchens, which have been passed down to the present day and are still in use. During this period, Escoffier introduced innovations to the kitchen, including new stoves, ovens, and cooling methods, as well as developing the hierarchical order among kitchen staff (Beaugé, 2012, p. 8; Ganter, 2004, p. 446).

Escoffier, who laid the foundations of the modern kitchen concept, not only introduced new techniques but also pioneered professional kitchen leadership by establishing a hierarchy that ensured discipline in the kitchen (Trubek, 2000). In light of these developments, the concept of leadership in the field of gastronomy has gained importance. Especially considering the complexity and fast-paced nature of kitchen organizations, the presence of an effective leader is crucial for ensuring internal coordination and a balanced distribution of tasks.

This study aims to examine the historical evolution of leadership theories from a conceptual perspective and to evaluate the effects of these transformations on the field of gastronomy within a theoretical framework. The research involved a comprehensive literature review, and leadership theories and their applications in the field of gastronomy were analyzed from a theoretical perspective. This conceptual study aims to establish a theoretical framework by examining the different dimensions of the relationship between leadership and gastronomy based on existing academic sources.

Overview of Leadership Theories

Classical Leadership Theories

Leadership approaches have been classified within various periods over time. First, the period from the 1800s to the mid-1940s is considered the trait approach period. Subsequently, the period from the mid-1940s to the early 1970s is considered the behavioral approach period. Finally, from the 1960s to the present day, situational approaches to leadership have come to the fore (Bayram, 2013; Benmira and Agboola, 2021; Navahandi, 2015).

Trait Theory

One of the oldest theoretical approaches to leadership, the trait approach, attempts to explain leadership through the innate qualities of the individual. According to this understanding, a person's acceptance as a leader and ability to manage a community is explained by their distinct physical and personal characteristics (Beydilli et al., 2025, p. 56). Within this approach, the individual qualities, abilities, and value judgments of the leader come to the fore (Yukl, 2013, p. 135). The individual qualities of leaders, such as personality, motivation, values, and skills, have been taken as a basis, and leadership has been considered to be directly related to these characteristics (Yukl, 2013, p. 12).

The trait approach is theoretically simpler than other approaches because it focuses solely on the leader; however, it is limited in that it does not take into account followers or the circumstances in which they find themselves (Northouse, 2013, pp. 29-30). The prevailing belief about leadership during this period was that some individuals were born with leadership traits and that these qualities determined leadership independently of context (Navahandi, 2015, pp. 87–88). However, numerous studies conducted in the 1930s and 1940s produced inconsistent results regarding whether these traits guarantee leadership success, and it was observed that other factors in the leadership process were overlooked (Yukl, 2013, p. 12). Therefore, by the 1950s, a common and valid set of traits could not be identified, and the approach lost its validity and significance (Benmira and Agboola, 2021, p. 3).

Behavioral Leadership

The behavioral leadership approach focuses on the concrete behaviors exhibited by the leader in the leadership process rather than on the leader's personal characteristics. This approach argues that behaviors such as the leader's decision-making style, communication with subordinates, delegation practices, and goal-setting processes determine leadership success (Çetin and Beceren, 2007, p. 126). While emphasizing what the leader does and the observability of these behaviors, the environmental conditions in which the leader operates are largely ignored (Benmira and Agboola, 2021, p. 3). Therefore, behavioral theory focuses on the actions that managers exhibit in their daily practices (Beydilli et al., 2025, p. 49).

Both the relationship the leader establishes with his followers and the activities he carries out to achieve his goals are evaluated within the framework of this approach. The leader's interaction with his subordinates, his use of authority, and the decisions he makes within the organization are among the main factors that determine his leadership style (Karadoğan Doruk, 2006, p. 130). In this context, the behavioral approach asserts that leadership is a developable skill, forming the basis for many contemporary leadership training programs (Benmira and Agboola, 2021, p. 3).

Situational Leadership

The situational leadership approach argues that leadership is shaped not only by the leader's personal characteristics or behavior, but also by the situation in which they find themselves. According to this understanding, effective leadership emerges from the combined assessment of the characteristics of followers, the qualities of the leader, the leadership style applied, and the conditions in which the leader finds themselves (Erçetin, 2000, p. 36).

Who the leader will be or how leadership will be exercised is determined not so much by the characteristics a person is born with, but rather by the requirements of the current situation. According to this approach, great leaders emerge from a combination of specific times, places, and conditions; in this context, the success of task- or relationship-oriented leaders also varies depending on the situation (Karadoğan Doruk, 2006, p. 131). The situational approach emphasizes the importance of leaders carefully analyzing the context in which they operate and selecting the leadership style most appropriate to the situation. Thus, leadership is evaluated as a situation-specific process (Benmira and Agboola, 2021, p. 3).

Modern Leadership Theories

Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership approach is based on trust in the interaction between the leader and followers. These leaders try to direct the efforts of employees toward a shared vision rather than concrete goals. By bringing out the talents of employees, they aim to increase their self-confidence and support their development in order to achieve long-term goals (Beydilli et al., 2025, p. 56). In addition, transformational leaders appeal to the moral values of their followers and mobilize their energy and resources to create reform in organizations by raising their ethical awareness. As a result of this interaction, followers develop trust, respect, and loyalty toward their leaders and are motivated to perform beyond expectations. The leader transforms and motivates followers by encouraging them to understand the importance of task outcomes, prioritize organizational interests over individual interests, and activate their higher-level needs (Yukl, 2013, p. 321-322).

The leader's clear vision and defined goals motivate the team and encourage creativity. These leaders, who contribute to the development of each individual, have developed emotional intelligence and effective communication skills, pioneer the implementation of positive changes and support the formation of collective identity (Kuzior et al., 2023, p. 306). In today's rapidly changing technological environment, the transformational leadership model plays a critical role in organizations' renewal and change processes (Benmira and Agboola, 2021, p. 4). These leaders aim to achieve significant increases in organizational performance beyond short-term goals (Karadoğan Doruk, 2006, p. 132).

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is based on the leader actively involving team members in the process by sharing tasks rather than taking sole responsibility. The main goal of this leadership style is to encourage employees to participate in the process of completing the task (Beydilli et al., 2025, p. 56). In this leadership approach, also known as transactional leadership, employees are motivated by their personal interests, and interaction is based on mutual benefit. However, this interaction may be insufficient to create a strong commitment or enthusiasm for task success (Yukl, 2013, pp. 321-322).

This leadership approach requires the existence of a clear hierarchical structure and the maintenance of control over subordinates, while also necessitating the establishment of certain standards to ensure efficiency and product quality. Leaders emphasize planning and control practices through formal rules and standard procedures in the management of processes (Kuzior et al., 2023, p. 302). In this type of leadership, performance is evaluated through centralized decision-making processes in line with defined goals, which relies more on vertical structuring and motivation provided through incentive mechanisms (Kuzior et al., 2023, p. 306). In advanced organizations with a clear structure and defined goals, this leadership approach is seen to be effective in maintaining the existing order and ensuring stability (Benmira and Agboola, 2021, p. 4).

Charismatic Leadership

Charismatic leaders have an attractive personality that exerts a powerful influence on group members and draws them in; therefore, their effectiveness is quite high. These leaders make their own decisions and their words are generally accepted as commands. Despite the obvious distance between them and their employees, the leader's instructions are obeyed (Çetin and Beceren, 2007, p. 122). Essentially, charismatic leadership is a method of directing the behavior of others through effective communication, persuasion, and the use of personal power. These leaders motivate their followers to perform certain tasks or improve processes (Beydilli et al., 2025, p. 57). Common characteristics of charismatic leaders include a strong desire for power, high self-confidence, and unwavering

commitment to their beliefs. Their behaviors include presenting an inspiring vision, communicating that vision through strong communication, taking personal risks to achieve goals, setting high expectations, instilling confidence and optimism in followers, demonstrating consistent behavior, managing follower perceptions, ensuring group identification, and delegating authority (Yukl, 2013, p. 312).

On the other hand, charismatic leaders are often inclined to take risky decisions, and when they fail, this can become an opportunity for rivals seeking to overthrow them (Yukl, 2013, p. 318). Their most prominent qualities are their superior abilities, high self-confidence, power to influence people, courage to take risks, ability to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their beliefs, consideration for the needs of their subordinates, ability to develop radical solutions in crises, continuous development of their abilities, and willingness to incur high costs to achieve their goals (Yeşilyurt, 2007, p. 39).

Servant Leadership

The servant leadership approach supports the formation of high-performing teams that are flexible, able to adapt quickly to changing conditions, and integrate innovations into business processes (Kuzior et al., 2023, p. 305). This leadership style prioritizes the needs of followers and focuses on the behaviors leaders should exhibit to support their personal development. Servant leaders consider the consequences of their attitudes and approaches toward their subordinates and strive to increase the positive effects of these interactions (Northouse, 2013, p. 223). Thus, in the leadership process, the development of followers and the formation of flexible, innovative teams become fundamental goals.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership is a theoretical approach that encompasses much more than simple formulas, explaining the true nature of a leader and the elements that constitute it. According to this perspective, the effectiveness of authentic leaders is made possible by their high level of self-awareness, their actions in line with internalized moral values, their balanced processing of information, and their transparency in relationships. These characteristics are the result of a continuous maturation process that develops over time through the influence of important and transformative experiences in leaders' lives. Additionally, the literature indicates that, in addition to positive psychological characteristics, moral reasoning also plays a critical role in the behavior of authentic leaders (Northouse, 2013, p. 267). Thus, authentic leadership is approached with a holistic understanding based not only on the leader's individual characteristics but also on the lifelong development of these characteristics.

Leadership Dynamics in the Gastronomy Sector

The intensification of global competition has led to the growth of organizations and the increasing complexity of their operations. These developments have forced businesses to downsize, divide their work into smaller parts, and adopt a team-based approach. Considering the modern-day requirements of being customer-focused, ensuring total quality, and remaining open to continuous improvement and change, teamwork and team management have become fundamental elements for the sustainability of businesses. (Güner, 2013, p. 99).

It is said that teamwork is important for the sustainability of businesses, and that the team must be managed in a coordinated manner in order to be productive and ensure job satisfaction. At this point, it is emphasized that the team leader's competencies, such as raising employee motivation or solving problems, have a direct impact on teamwork (Ercan Taban et al., 2024, pp. 145; Güner, 201, p: 112; Serinkan and Bardakçı, 2007, pp. 160-161). Effective team management not only increases productivity and job satisfaction but also paves the way for creativity. Indeed, creativity is considered an important factor in the development of businesses. It is stated that businesses that have acquired a creative identity stand out strategically in areas such as new product development, gaining competitive advantage, and growth (Samen, 2008, p. 368). On the other hand, it is noteworthy that time management is also an important factor in these processes. Therefore, time is one of the valuable resources of a team. It is seen that it is the manager's responsibility to use this time effectively for employees and to make it a resource that they can benefit from (Yılmaz and Aslan, 2002, p. 27).

All these elements show that effective team management directly affects not only organizational success but also individual employee behavior and job satisfaction. In this regard, it is said that when individuals' perceptions of job satisfaction increase, they work more motivated in their professional lives (Köse, 2019, p. 142). It has also been

observed that there are many positive or negative factors that influence this situation (Ada et al., 2013, pp. 158-159; Doğan, 2020, pp. 31-34). It is also stated that individuals' intentions to leave their jobs decrease due to improved working conditions or cooperation (Yıldız et al., 2014, p. 242). At the same time, it is emphasized that leaders in senior positions at workplaces influence employee motivation and work performance based on how they respond to employees (Wardetzki, 2022, p. 24). In this context, findings indicating that managers' attitudes and behaviors consistent with ethical values have positive effects on employees' motivation and job satisfaction are noteworthy (Aksu, 2012, pp. 12-13; Sökmen and Ekmekçioğlu, 2021, pp. 96-97; Yücel Batmaz and Gürer, 2016, p. 487).

The impact of this type of leadership approach is not limited to office environments, but is also evident in professional kitchens, which are notable for their traditional structure and strict hierarchy. The hierarchy and traditional chef-manager figure in kitchens have a long history, dating back to the hierarchical system integrated into kitchens by Escoffier, which originated in the homes of the nobility and spread to professional kitchens (Beaugé, 2012, p. 8; Ganter, 2004, p. 446; Özer and Atay, 2022; Trubek, 2000, p. 33). In kitchen life, there is a hierarchy in which head chefs have the highest status, section chefs have a lower status, and those below them have an even lower status (Fine, 1996, pp. 92-95). Another important aspect of leadership within this structure is operational coordination and time management. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges for professional chefs is synchronization. Cooking to order is a professional challenge that requires the skillful application of a series of temporal routines and the ability to synchronize; to this end, leaders ensure the effective functioning of this complex structure by coordinating the process (Fine, 1990, p. 100). Therefore, the role of leaders in the gastronomy sector is not only to manage the process but also to effectively manage multidimensional dynamics such as developing creative solutions under time pressure and maintaining team motivation.

Reflections of Leadership Theories in Gastronomy

Past to Present: From Authoritarian to Transformational

The concept of leadership in the kitchen began to take shape as an aristocratic authority in the 19th century with figures such as Carême; Carême is considered a pioneer who carried the heritage of the palace cuisine of the period to modern hotel and restaurant kitchens (Smith, 1990, p. 26). Escoffier, who followed him, established a permanent order in the kitchen not only with his culinary mastery but also with the systematic understanding he established through written sources; especially his Guide Culinaire became one of the fundamental sources of gastronomy (Smith, 1990, p. 29). The "brigade system" developed by Escoffier laid the foundation for a leadership model based on authority, in which tasks in the kitchen are divided according to a hierarchical order (Ganter, 2004, p. 444). The large hotel kitchens where this system was applied were also compatible with the industrial production logic of the period. However, with the reshaping of tourism and transportation around the automobile in the first half of the 20th century, small restaurant culture based on individual dining experiences became widespread (Ganter, 2004, p. 443).

In this process, when the French tire company Michelin started to add recommendations for restaurants in 1926 and transformed the rating system into a three-star structure in 1933, restaurants became not only places where food was served but also prestigious stages where symbols of chefs' leadership and creativity were exhibited (Ganter, 2004, p. 446). Michelin stars became an indicator of leadership, reflecting not only the chef's skill in the kitchen, but also his vision, team management and stability. While the authority of the chefs was still strong during this period, success was now dependent not only on hierarchy but also on external evaluation systems. The mid-20th century Nouvelle Cuisine movement emphasized creative presentation, individual style and aesthetics; the chef's signature on the plate became an artistic expression of leadership (Deroy, 2014, p. 5).

With the avant-garde movements after the 1960s and the questioning of traditional culinary rules from the 1980s onwards, authoritarian structures began to gradually dissolve and multipolar, free culinary approaches came to the fore in the 1990s (Beaugé, 2012, p. 13; Aksoy and Üner, 2016, p. 10). In this transformation, gastronomy literatures have shaped not only recipes but also leadership styles; thus, the role of the chef has become a cultural actor that extends beyond the kitchen (Ferguson, 1998, p. 600). It is observed that this transformation throughout the historical process is also reflected in the leadership styles adopted in kitchens and the role of the chef has begun to gain different dimensions.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership Examples

Transformational leadership is defined as a form of leadership that goes beyond the personal interests of followers and directs them to higher goals, increasing their motivation and potential (Bass, 1985, pp. 11-32; Northouse, 2016, p. 161). Transactional leadership, on the other hand, is accepted as an approach that is based on mutual communication and trust and supports cooperation and teamwork within the team (Yukl, 2013, p. 321).

In the field of gastronomy, Ferran Adrià's leadership approach is considered as a successful example of transformational leadership. Adrià pioneered gastronomic innovation by making creativity a systematic process in El Bulli restaurant and brought a new vision to culinary leadership by integrating creative dynamism in the kitchen with team organization (Parreira, 2016, pp. 54-56; Svejenova et al., 2007, pp. 544-547). This approach contributes to the development of gastronomy as a creative and intellectual process rather than just a technical field of cooking.

In contrast, René Redzepi's removal of barriers between the kitchen and service team is a reflection of the interactional leadership approach in practice. By encouraging chefs to communicate directly with guests, Redzepi strengthens trust and loyalty within the team, thus improving the quality of the gastronomic experience through a leadership model based on teamwork (Heinzelmann, 2010, p. 97). These examples show that leadership in the gastronomy sector supports sectoral innovation and quality both in terms of vision setting and increasing interaction within the team. The diversity of leadership practices in the field of gastronomy has led to the importance of leadership approaches that focus on the development of employees and prioritize sustainability and ethical values.

Servant and Authentic Leadership Practices

Leadership approaches in the gastronomy sector are shaped within a framework that prioritizes not only productivity but also employee happiness and corporate responsibility. In this context, it has been revealed that the perception of authentic leadership has positive effects on workplace happiness and the sub-dimensions of this leadership style similarly support the happiness of employees (Kılınç and Akdemir, 2019, pp. 805-807). An authentic leader is defined as a figure who is empowered by value judgments, prioritizes knowledge and has a developed ability to direct (Başer, 2023, p. 72).

On the other hand, the servant leadership model stands out as an important approach that supports employee development in the field of gastronomy. The trust-based aspect of this leadership style contributes to employees in hotel kitchens to feel more competent, effective and meaningful (Zorlu et al., 2021, pp. 516-517). Servant leadership is directly associated with the psychological empowerment of employees and has significant effects on their performance (Burak, 2025, p. 1002; Özer, 2019, p. 110).

Moreover, it is considered a requirement of ethical leadership that leaders in the food industry should consider not only economic efficiency but also the socio-cultural impacts of automation and artificial intelligence on employees (Bujor, Ene and Sisu, 2023, p. 211). Sensitivity towards sustainability and social responsibility is also increasing in the sector. As a matter of fact, a significant portion of restaurant businesses attach importance to environmental sensitivities such as waste separation, recycling and implementation of quality standards (Cankül, 2019, p. 235; Albayrak, 2017, p. 63). These approaches show that leadership models integrated with ethical production and social responsibility are increasingly being recognized in the gastronomy sector.

Conclusion

In this study, which aims to examine the historical development of leadership theories in a conceptual framework and to evaluate the reflections of these theories in the field of gastronomy, it has been revealed that leadership in the gastronomy sector is not only an authoritarian position in the kitchen, but also transformed to include creative, ethical and participatory approaches. Traditional authoritarian leadership, shaped by figures such as Carême and Escoffier, has started to be replaced by transformational, interactional, servant and authentic leadership approaches since the late 20th century (Bass, 1985; Kılınç and Akdemir, 2019; Smith, 1990; Yukl, 2013). This change has made gastronomy leadership both a management model and a field of cultural representation.

This study reveals that leadership is not only an organizational management tool but also a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by historical process, cultural structures and ethical responsibilities. In the gastronomy sector, the leader's communication style, visionary approach and ethical stance have a direct impact on critical performance indicators such as team commitment, creativity, job satisfaction and operational success. The findings show that

effective leadership behaviors make a difference in culinary organizations. In this context, the study reveals the multi-layered nature of leadership theories in a sectoral context, while in practice, it has also concretized the impact of manager behaviors on employee performance with examples (Ercan Taban et al., 2024; Fine, 1990; Samen, 2008).

Today, factors such as digitalization and sustainability are influential in shaping leadership styles; in these processes, the importance of leadership models that adhere to ethical values and have a high sense of social responsibility increases (Bujor, Ene and Şişu, 2023; Cankül, 2019). The adoption of inclusive and multidimensional leadership approaches in the gastronomy sector is decisive in increasing both organizational success and employee satisfaction.

Transformational and transactional leadership models have been observed to increase performance and quality by creating a more collaborative and creative working environment in kitchens. Servant and authentic leadership approaches, on the other hand, have strengthened the psychological empowerment of employees and the understanding of ethical management. At this point, the importance of multidimensional leadership approaches clearly emerges.

It is suggested that future research should focus on areas such as the tangible effects of digitalization on leadership in the gastronomy sector, post-pandemic leadership practices and the comparison of leadership styles in different gastronomy sub-sectors. In addition, in-depth examination of issues such as the relationship between leadership and employee psychology and the integration of sustainability practices into leadership practices will contribute to the development of the sector.

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Ethics Statement

The writing process of the study titled 'Beyond the Chef: An Examination of Leadership Types in the Field of Gastronomy' adhered to scientific rules, ethical and citation rules; no alterations were made to the collected data, and this study has not been submitted for evaluation to any other academic publication medium.