

## Article

# Perceived Leadership Styles and Job Satisfaction in Croatian Hotels: A Competitive Modelling Approach

Lorena Dadić Fruk <sup>1,\*</sup> , Helga Maškarin Ribarić <sup>1</sup>  and Andrea Vulić <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Rijeka, 51410 Opatija, Croatia; helgam@fthm.hr

<sup>2</sup> Independent Researcher, Od Nuncijate 21, 20000 Dubrovnik, Croatia; vulicandrea11@gmail.com

\* Correspondence: lorenad@fthm.hr

## Abstract

This paper examines how employees in Croatian hotels relate their direct supervisors' leadership behaviors to job satisfaction. Survey data were collected from 153 hotel employees across departments and hotels of different sizes. Leadership was assessed through five styles (autocratic, laissez-faire, democratic, transformational, and transactional), while job satisfaction was measured across six dimensions. The hypothesized relationships were tested using competitive regression models in which all leadership styles were entered simultaneously, complemented by a moderation test and relative-importance analysis. The results show a differentiated pattern. Transformational leadership is positively related to staff development and management satisfaction and also shows a positive association with salary satisfaction. Transactional leadership is most strongly linked to salary satisfaction, while it relates negatively to staff development satisfaction when other styles are controlled. Democratic leadership is positively associated with management satisfaction, but its unique association with staff development satisfaction is contingent on hotel size: it is negative in small hotels and attenuates to non-significance in medium-sized and large hotels. Autocratic leadership is generally associated with lower satisfaction in key domains, whereas laissez-faire leadership does not show meaningful unique effects in the competitive models. These findings provide evidence from the Croatian hotel sector and suggest that leadership development and HR support systems should be aligned with the specific satisfaction domains hotels seek to improve.

**Keywords:** leadership styles; job satisfaction; Croatian hotels; hotel employees; competitive regression; hotel size moderation



Academic Editor: Lewis Ting  
On Cheung

Received: 18 February 2026

Revised: 10 March 2026

Accepted: 17 March 2026

Published: 20 March 2026

**Copyright:** © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

## 1. Introduction

Hotels operate under constant service pressure, and much of the guest experience is delivered through day-to-day employee behavior. This is particularly true for front-line roles, where staff interact with guests throughout the shift while managing time pressure and emotional demands. In such settings, job satisfaction is not a peripheral concern. It shapes how employees approach their work, how reliably they follow service standards, and how consistently they sustain the quality of interactions that guests remember. Leadership is one of the most visible workplace influences in this process. Through routine communication, feedback, and everyday decisions, supervisors shape how employees evaluate key aspects of their work, whether rewards feel fair, whether learning and development are supported, whether the work atmosphere is constructive, and whether management

practices are experienced as competent and respectful. For that reason, leadership style remains a relevant topic in both hospitality research and management practice.

At the same time, empirical findings on leadership and job satisfaction are not always straightforward. Job satisfaction is often treated as a single global score, even though employees may be satisfied with some domains (e.g., work content) and dissatisfied with others (e.g., pay or development opportunities). Aggregating these experiences into one index can obscure the specific areas in which leadership matters most. Leadership styles are frequently examined in isolation. In real organizations, however, managerial behavior rarely reflects one “pure” style; elements of different styles often coexist. Testing each style separately therefore risks overstating its importance and makes it difficult to identify which leadership behaviors have unique relevance when other styles are taken into account.

The hospitality setting further underscores the importance of context. Hotels vary not only in labor intensity and seasonal dynamics, but also in organizational structure. Employees’ daily contact with supervisors, the degree of formalization in HR practices, and the availability of development opportunities can differ markedly between smaller and larger properties. These differences suggest that leadership effects may not be uniform across hotels and that hotel size may shape how employees experience participative leadership in particular. This contextual perspective is particularly relevant in Croatia. The Croatian hotel sector operates within a highly seasonal tourism economy, with tourist accommodation demand concentrated very unevenly across the year, and with accommodation and food service activities accounting for a particularly large share of seasonal employment (Eurostat, 2024; Croatian Employment Service, 2020). At the same time, tourism employers in Croatia have reported persistent difficulties in attracting and retaining suitable staff, which places additional pressure on supervisors and day-to-day people management (OECD, 2020; Eurofound, 2024). Under such conditions, leadership may matter not only as a general interpersonal influence, but also as a mechanism through which employees interpret fairness, support, communication quality, and access to development in a setting marked by staffing instability and uneven organizational resources. These features are especially relevant when comparing smaller and larger hotels, since formal HR practices, training opportunities, and managerial specialization are less likely to be equally developed across properties.

The present study does not approach the positive association between transformational leadership and job satisfaction as a theoretically new finding in itself. Rather, its contribution lies in offering a more precise understanding of how this relationship operates in hotel settings. Instead of examining leadership styles in isolation, the study considers them simultaneously, making it possible to distinguish their unique associations once the overlap between different leadership behaviors is taken into account. It also moves beyond a single overall measure of job satisfaction by focusing on several dimensions that are more closely connected to managerial practice. In addition, the analysis considers whether these relationships vary depending on organizational context, particularly hotel size. Viewed in this way, the study is less concerned with proposing a new universal link between leadership and job satisfaction and more with refining existing theory by showing that leadership effects in hotels are differentiated across satisfaction domains and shaped by organizational conditions.

Against this background, the study examines the associations between five leadership styles (autocratic, laissez-faire, democratic, transformational, and transactional) and six dimensions of job satisfaction among employees in Croatian hotel companies, namely working hours, salary, staff development, work atmosphere, satisfaction with management, and satisfaction with work activities. The analysis adopts a competitive modelling approach in which leadership styles are entered simultaneously in order to estimate their unique

contribution to each satisfaction dimension. It also tests whether hotel size moderates the relationship between democratic leadership and satisfaction with staff development. In doing so, the study seeks to clarify which leadership behaviors matter most for specific employee outcomes in the Croatian hotel context and to identify implications for management development and HR priorities.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. *Job Satisfaction in Hospitality: Concept and Dimensions*

Job satisfaction is an important topic in organisational behaviour because it shows how employees experience their work and is often linked to outcomes that matter for organisations. A classic definition describes job satisfaction as a positive emotional state that results from an individual's appraisal of their job experiences (Locke, 1976). Research shows that job satisfaction is associated with job performance (Judge et al., 2001) and with employees' decisions and intentions to stay with or leave an organisation (Griffeth et al., 2000).

In hospitality, this issue is particularly sensitive. Service delivery largely depends on employees' day-to-day behaviour, often under time pressure and emotionally demanding working conditions, while employee turnover remains a long-term management challenge (Baum, 2007; Kusluvan et al., 2010). More recent research on turnover in the hotel sector further emphasises that reasons for leaving are strongly related to working conditions, development opportunities, and the quality of the work environment (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022). In addition, employee satisfaction in hotels is not only important for employees themselves; it is also often linked to guest satisfaction and, ultimately, to financial performance (Chi & Gursoy, 2009).

How job satisfaction is measured is also important. In practice, job satisfaction is not just a single overall rating, because an employee may be satisfied with, for example, their team and their supervisor, but dissatisfied with pay or scheduling. For this reason, the literature often uses a well-established multidimensional approach that views job satisfaction across multiple dimensions (e.g., pay, supervision, communication and the nature of work), which enables a more precise understanding of what exactly satisfies or dissatisfies employees (Spector, 1997). This is supported by research showing that, in hospitality, supervisor relationships, roster adherence, and development opportunities are among the strongest drivers of job satisfaction (Heimerl et al., 2020).

Based on the above, the present study treats job satisfaction as a multidimensional construct. In this study, job satisfaction is measured across six dimensions: working hours, salary, staff development, work atmosphere, management, and work activity. However, the theoretical model and hypotheses focus on three dimensions (salary, staff development and management) because these are most directly linked to leadership behaviours and managerial practices in hotels.

### 2.2. *Leadership Styles in Hotels: Theoretical Frameworks and Analytical Approach*

Leadership is often seen as an important driver of employee satisfaction because supervisors, through communication, feedback, and everyday decisions, shape employees' perceptions of support, fairness, and expectations. One of the most widely used frameworks for leadership styles is the Full-Range Leadership Model (FRLM), which distinguishes laissez-faire (passive and avoidant), transactional (exchange-based) and transformational (developmental and visionary) leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Meta-analytic findings show a typical pattern: transformational leadership is, on average, positively associated with employee satisfaction; contingent reward (as a core part of transactional leadership) is also often positively associated; while laissez-faire leadership is negatively associated with satisfaction and effectiveness (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

However, hotel managers rarely apply only one style. Under operational pressure, they often combine behaviours; for example, they may be directive in some situations, involve employees in discussion in others, or rely on rewards and clear expectations when needed. For this reason, it is methodologically useful to apply competitive modelling (testing multiple styles simultaneously), because it more realistically reflects practice and shows which style retains a unique contribution once overlap between styles is controlled (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Since leadership styles often blend in practice, results should be interpreted carefully, especially when several similar styles are tested within the same model (Anderson & Sun, 2017). From a theoretical perspective, this approach is equally important because it moves beyond asking whether a given leadership style is generally associated with higher job satisfaction. Instead, it allows a more differentiated assessment of whether particular styles matter for specific satisfaction domains once competing leadership behaviours are considered simultaneously. This is especially relevant in hotel settings, where supervisory behaviour is often situational, mixed, and shaped by operational pressures.

In addition to transactional, transformational and laissez-faire leadership, which form the core of the FRLM, hospitality research also often distinguishes democratic (participative) and autocratic leadership because these styles clearly capture the extent to which employees are involved in decision-making (Bass, 1985; Lewin et al., 1939; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Democratic leadership generally implies greater inclusion and shared decision-making, whereas autocratic leadership implies more unilateral decision-making and less room for employee input. Recent research continues to show that participative leadership and opportunities to take part in decision-making are typically associated with more positive employee attitudes, including higher job satisfaction (Pacheco & Webber, 2016; Chan, 2019; Guinot et al., 2021). Democratic leadership is also described as an approach that deliberately encourages inclusion and structures discussion and shared decision-making within a group (Woods, 2021; Gastil, 1994). Recent systematic reviews in hospitality further indicate that transformational leadership and approaches focused on employee empowerment are among the most prominent research directions in the field (Elkhwesky et al., 2022).

### 2.3. Theoretical Model and Research Hypotheses

Because this study treats job satisfaction as multidimensional, the following section derives expectations from the literature regarding which leadership styles are most strongly related to specific satisfaction dimensions. Although six dimensions of job satisfaction are measured in the study, the hypotheses are formulated for three dimensions (salary, staff development, and management). The remaining dimensions (working hours, work atmosphere, and work activity) are reported and discussed in the Section 4, but they are not central to the hypothesised relationships in the theoretical model.

For example, transformational leadership, which motivates employees and supports their development, is particularly relevant to development satisfaction because it involves individual support, mentoring, and encouragement of learning (Avolio & Bass, 2002). In hospitality, transformational leadership has long been associated with positive employee attitudes (Hinkin & Tracey, 1994; Tracey & Hinkin, 1994), and more recent literature reviews confirm that it remains one of the dominant leadership styles studied in hospitality and is often linked to positive employee outcomes (Elkhwesky et al., 2022). Therefore, transformational leadership is expected to make a unique positive contribution to development satisfaction even when other leadership styles are included in the analysis. Based on this, Hypothesis H1 is proposed:

**H1.** *Transformational leadership is uniquely positively associated with staff development satisfaction when controlling for other leadership styles.*

Transactional leadership is based on exchange and is most clearly reflected in contingent reward; that is, clear expectations and rewards tied to performance (Bass, 1985). For this reason, it is theoretically closely linked to pay satisfaction, because employees evaluate pay not only in terms of amount but also in terms of fairness, transparency, and administration (Heneman & Schwab, 1985). Classic findings on leader reward behaviours and subordinate satisfaction support this logic (Podsakoff et al., 1982), and meta-analytic evidence also shows that contingent reward is generally positively associated with satisfaction (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Therefore, transactional leadership is expected to show a unique positive association with pay satisfaction even when other leadership styles are considered. Based on this, Hypothesis H2 is proposed:

**H2.** *Transactional leadership is uniquely positively associated with pay satisfaction when controlling for other leadership styles.*

Satisfaction with management reflects employees' perceptions of management competence, fairness, communication, and interpersonal treatment. Transformational leadership should be positive in this domain because it is linked to trust, supportive communication, and more favourable evaluations of leaders (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Tracey & Hinkin, 1996). Democratic leadership should also have a positive effect because it gives employees a voice and often improves perceptions of decision processes and the relationship with management (Gastil, 1994; Wagner, 1994). Autocratic leadership is expected to be negative because it reduces employee voice and may undermine perceived procedural fairness and respect (Lewin et al., 1939). Therefore, transformational and democratic leadership are expected to be positively related to management satisfaction, while autocratic leadership is expected to be negatively related. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H3a.** *Transformational leadership is uniquely positively associated with satisfaction with management.*

**H3b.** *Democratic leadership is uniquely positively associated with satisfaction with management.*

**H3c.** *Autocratic leadership is uniquely negatively associated with satisfaction with management.*

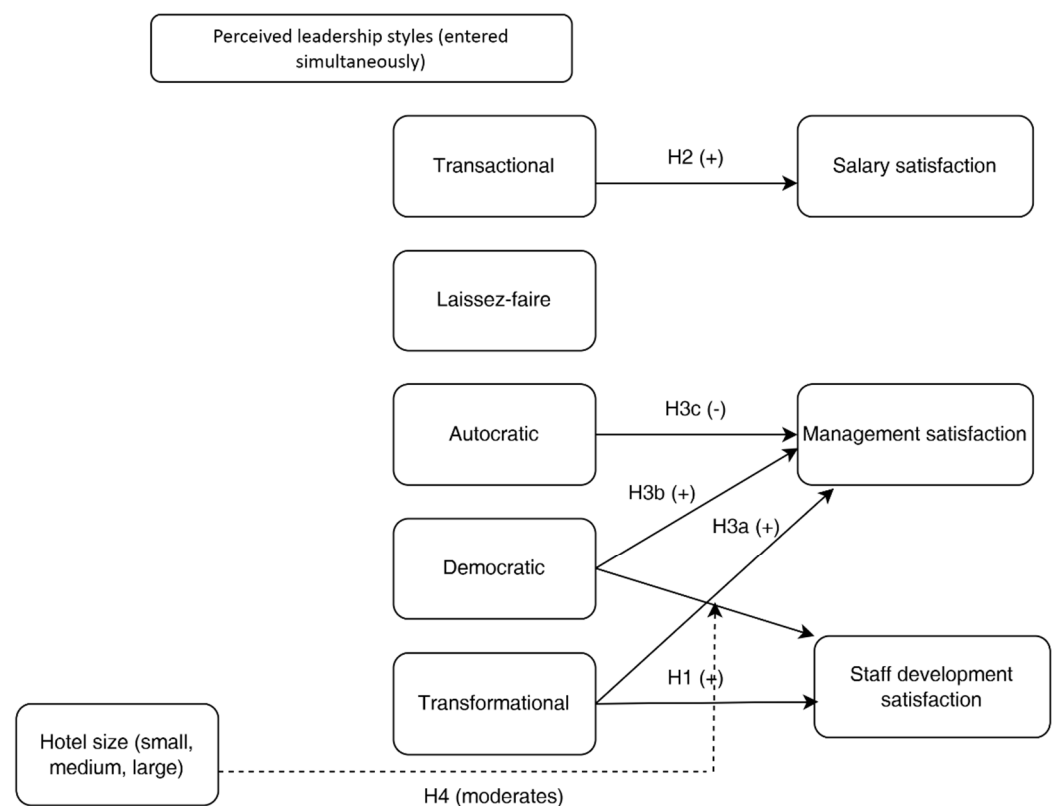
Democratic leadership is relevant to staff development satisfaction because participative decision-making facilitates employees' expression of development needs, the proposal of learning activities, and agreement about opportunities that support competence growth. In tourism and hospitality, empowerment-oriented leadership and empowering practices have been linked to a range of positive employee outcomes (Namasivayam et al., 2014), and a systematic review highlights employee development as a key theme in this literature (Hoang et al., 2021). Because the present study estimates unique effects in a competitive model, the key question is whether democratic leadership explains additional variance in staff development satisfaction beyond other leadership styles. However, participative behaviours may also raise employees' expectations regarding training and career progression. When development practices are informal or constrained by limited resources, particularly in less formalised organisational contexts, heightened expectations may not be matched by actual opportunities, which could reduce perceived staff development satisfaction. The relationship between democratic leadership and staff development satisfaction is therefore treated as context-sensitive and examined empirically rather than formulated as a strictly directional hypothesis.

Finally, leadership effects may depend on organisational context. Hotels differ in complexity and HR infrastructure, and hotel size is a practical marker of these differences. Prior research suggests that small- and medium-sized hotels more often rely on informal

HR practices and face difficulties in formalising training and development (Çetinel et al., 2009). More recent work also indicates that, in SME hotels, training and development often combine formal and informal practices and that decisions about development are strongly shaped by resources and operational constraints (Ansari, 2024). In such conditions, participative leadership may raise employees' expectations for development; however, if resources or programmes are limited, the relationship between democratic leadership and development satisfaction may be weaker or different than in larger hotels where development pathways are more formalised. Therefore, hotel size is expected to influence the strength of this relationship. Based on this, Hypothesis H4 is proposed:

**H4.** *Hotel size moderates the relationship between democratic leadership and staff development satisfaction, such that the strength of the relationship differs across small, medium-sized, and large hotels.*

Figure 1 summarizes the proposed conceptual model and hypotheses.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model linking leadership styles and job satisfaction dimensions. Source: Authors' elaboration.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Sample and Data Collection

The empirical part of this study adopts a quantitative survey design to examine how five perceived leadership styles uniquely relate to multiple dimensions of job satisfaction among employees in Croatian hotel enterprises, and to test whether hotel size moderates the association between democratic leadership and staff development satisfaction. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to employees in hotels of different sizes and categories (small, medium-sized, and large hotels). To reduce evaluation apprehension and socially desirable responding, participation was anonymous and confidential; respondents were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and that responses would not be shared with hotel management. The target population included

employees from various organizational units (front office, food and beverage department, housekeeping, sports and wellness and horticulture), thereby capturing a wide range of job roles and professional perspectives. A total of 153 valid questionnaires were collected in the period from 21 January to 10 May 2025.

3.2. Measures

All measurement scales were adapted to the Croatian hotel context. The original English items were translated into Croatian by a bilingual researcher and back-translated into English by an independent bilingual translator. The back-translation was compared with the original, and minor wording adjustments were made to ensure semantic equivalence and suitability for hotel employees. Content validity and clarity were further checked through expert review and a small pre-test with hotel staff using brief probing questions, after which minor linguistic refinements were introduced while preserving the original constructs. The questionnaire consisted of statements adapted from relevant scientific literature, as shown in Table 1. Leadership was measured using five dimensions (autocratic, laissez-faire, democratic, transformational and transactional). Leadership items asked employees to rate the behaviours of their immediate supervisor/direct manager. Styles were measured as separate subscales; potential overlap is reflected in their intercorrelations and further addressed through CFA and discriminant validity evidence.

Table 1. Sources of variables in the questionnaire.

| Construct        | Variable          | Number of Items | Source of Variable                       |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------|
| Leadership style | Autocratic        | 6               | Northouse (2009)                         |
|                  | Laissez-faire     | 6               |                                          |
|                  | Democratic        | 6               |                                          |
|                  | Transformational  | 6               | Alban-Metcalfe and Alimo-Metcalfe (2000) |
|                  | Transactional     | 7               | Jensen et al. (2019)                     |
| Job satisfaction | Working hours     | 5               | Heimerl et al. (2020)                    |
|                  | Salary            | 2               |                                          |
|                  | Staff development | 4               |                                          |
|                  | Work atmosphere   | 4               |                                          |
|                  | Management        | 6               |                                          |
|                  | Work activity     | 3               |                                          |

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

Job satisfaction was measured across six dimensions (working hours, salary, staff development, work atmosphere, management, and work activity). For the analyses, composite scale scores were computed for each dimension by averaging item responses within the respective construct (higher values indicate higher perceived leadership behaviour/satisfaction).

Table 1 summarises the number of items used for each dimension and the literature sources on which the measurement scales were based.

The questionnaire was organised into three parts. The first part gathered basic demographic and job-related information, including age, gender, education level, tenure in the hotel sector, current position, and hotel size. These variables were used to describe the sample and were also considered as potential controls when interpreting the results.

In the second part, respondents rated 31 statements describing leadership behaviour across five styles: autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transformational, and transactional. To reduce response bias, the items were mixed so that participants could not easily recognise which statements belonged to a particular leadership style. The third part assessed job satisfaction using 24 items grouped into six dimensions: working hours, salary, staff

development, work atmosphere, management, and work activity. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

### 3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. First, descriptive statistics were computed for all study variables. Statistical significance was evaluated at the conventional level ( $p < 0.05$ ). Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumptions for multiple regression were examined in SPSS, including inspection of residual distributions (normality), linearity and homoscedasticity (via residual plots), and multicollinearity (using tolerance and VIF indicators). Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated that overlap among leadership styles was present but not severe, with VIF values ranging from approximately 1.1 to 1.7 and tolerance values remaining within acceptable limits. However, because the predictors were still meaningfully interrelated, LMG relative weights were calculated to complement the regression coefficients and provide a more nuanced view of their relative importance within the model. Categorical variables were dummy-coded where applicable.

Hypotheses were tested using hierarchical multiple regression. Models were estimated in steps: control variables were entered first, followed by the main effects (leadership dimensions), and finally the interaction term where moderation was hypothesized. For moderation analyses, continuous predictors were mean-centred to reduce multicollinearity, and interaction terms were computed as the product of the centred predictor and moderator. Significant interactions were interpreted using simple slope analyses by estimating conditional effects at low and high levels of the moderator ( $-1$  SD and  $+1$  SD).

In addition to regression coefficients, a relative importance analysis was conducted to complement the regression results. Relative weights were computed using the LMG approach (Lindeman–Merenda–Gold) to estimate each predictor's contribution to explained variance ( $R^2$ ), accounting for intercorrelations among predictors. Together, hierarchical regression, simple slope analysis, and relative weights provided a comprehensive assessment of the proposed direct and conditional relationships.

## 4. Research Results

### 4.1. Sample Profile

This section summarises the sample characteristics (e.g., gender, age, education and work experience) to clarify who participated in the study and to support the interpretation of the results that follow.

Table 2 summarises the respondents' demographic profile ( $N = 153$ ). Most participants were between 25 and 34 years old (29.41%). The next largest groups were aged 35–44 (28.76%) and 45–54 (23.53%). Participants under 25 accounted for 18.3% of the sample. Overall, 39.86% of the participants were men and 60.14% were women. In terms of education, 30.07% of respondents had completed secondary school education, 31.36% held an undergraduate degree, 30.07% had completed graduate studies, and 8.5% held a postgraduate degree.

Regarding work experience in the hotel sector, the largest proportions of respondents had between 1 and 3 years and 7–10 years of experience (each 28.10%), followed by those with 4–6 years (26.15%), and less than 1 year (17.65%). The highest proportion of respondents were employed in operational positions (26.14%), followed by those in the front office (23.53%) and the food and beverage department (24.19%). Smaller proportions worked in the sports and wellness department (14.38%) and horticulture (11.76%). With respect to hotel size, the largest proportion of respondents were employed in medium-sized hotels with 51–150 rooms (37.25%), followed by those in small hotels with up to 50 rooms (33.33%) and large hotels with more than 150 rooms (29.42%).

**Table 2.** Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

| <b>Age</b>                          | <b><i>n</i></b> | <b>%</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| <25 years                           | 28              | 18.3     |
| 25–34 years                         | 45              | 29.41    |
| 35–44 years                         | 44              | 28.76    |
| 45–54 years                         | 36              | 23.53    |
| Total                               | 153             | 100.0    |
| <b>Gender</b>                       | <b><i>n</i></b> | <b>%</b> |
| Male                                | 61              | 39.86    |
| Female                              | 92              | 60.14    |
| Total                               | 153             | 100.0    |
| <b>Level of Education</b>           | <b><i>n</i></b> | <b>%</b> |
| Secondary school education          | 46              | 30.07    |
| Undergraduate study                 | 48              | 31.36    |
| Graduate study                      | 46              | 30.07    |
| Postgraduate study                  | 13              | 8.5      |
| Total                               | 153             | 100.0    |
| <b>Work Experience</b>              | <b><i>n</i></b> | <b>%</b> |
| Less than 1 year                    | 27              | 17.65    |
| 1–3 years                           | 43              | 28.10    |
| 4–6 years                           | 40              | 26.15    |
| 7–10 years                          | 43              | 28.10    |
| Total                               | 153             | 100.0    |
| <b>Current position</b>             | <b><i>n</i></b> | <b>%</b> |
| Operational staff                   | 40              | 26.14    |
| Front office (Reception) department | 36              | 23.53    |
| Food and Beverage (F&B) department  | 37              | 24.19    |
| Sports and Wellness department      | 22              | 14.38    |
| Horticulture department             | 18              | 11.76    |
| Total                               | 153             | 100.0    |
| <b>Hotel size</b>                   | <b><i>n</i></b> | <b>%</b> |
| Small hotel (up to 50 rooms)        | 51              | 33.33    |
| Medium-sized hotel (51–150 rooms)   | 57              | 37.25    |
| Large hotel (more than 150 rooms)   | 45              | 29.42    |
| Total                               | 153             | 100.0    |

Source: Authors' elaboration.

#### 4.2. Measurement Model (CFA) and Construct Validity

To assess the adequacy of the measurement model prior to hypothesis testing, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. Table 3 presents the CFA results for the five-factor leadership model and the six-factor job satisfaction model, followed by the full eleven-factor measurement model. To demonstrate construct distinctiveness and address concerns about common-method bias, the hypothesised structure was also compared with more parsimonious alternative models (two-factor and one-factor solutions).

As shown in Table 3, the five-factor leadership model and the six-factor job satisfaction model demonstrate acceptable fit (CFI/TLI close to or above 0.90; RMSEA and SRMR within commonly accepted ranges). The full eleven-factor measurement model also shows satisfactory fit. Importantly, the alternative two-factor and one-factor models perform substantially worse (lower CFI/TLI; higher RMSEA/SRMR), providing evidence that the constructs are empirically distinguishable and not adequately represented by a single common factor.

**Table 3.** Confirmatory factor analysis: model fit indices for the hypothesised and alternative measurement models.

| Measurement Model                                   | $\chi^2$ | df   | <i>p</i> | $\chi^2/\text{df}$ | CFI   | TLI   | RMSEA | 90% CI RMSEA   | SRMR  |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------|------|----------|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|-------|
| Leadership (5-factor)                               | 612.34   | 424  | <0.001   | 1.44               | 0.953 | 0.948 | 0.054 | [0.046, 0.061] | 0.052 |
| Job satisfaction (6-factor)                         | 487.90   | 237  | <0.001   | 2.06               | 0.944 | 0.936 | 0.071 | [0.062, 0.080] | 0.058 |
| Full measurement model (11-factor)                  | 1712.58  | 1007 | <0.001   | 1.70               | 0.937 | 0.931 | 0.063 | [0.058, 0.068] | 0.060 |
| (Alt.) 2-factor model (Leadership vs. Satisfaction) | 2568.11  | 1062 | <0.001   | 2.42               | 0.861 | 0.850 | 0.089 | [0.085, 0.093] | 0.096 |
| (Alt.) 1-factor model                               | 3890.45  | 1082 | <0.001   | 3.59               | 0.742 | 0.728 | 0.121 | [0.116, 0.126] | 0.131 |

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual. Source: Authors’ elaboration.

After establishing the overall model fit, internal consistency reliability and convergent validity are assessed for each construct. Table 4 reports Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) for the leadership styles and the job satisfaction dimensions.

**Table 4.** Reliability and convergent validity for leadership styles and job satisfaction dimensions.

| Construct                      | Number of Items | Cronbach’s $\alpha$ | CR   | AVE  |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------|------|
| Autocratic leadership          | 6               | 0.707               | 0.87 | 0.53 |
| Laissez-faire leadership       | 6               | 0.725               | 0.88 | 0.55 |
| Democratic leadership          | 6               | 0.684               | 0.87 | 0.52 |
| Transformational leadership    | 6               | 0.672               | 0.90 | 0.59 |
| Transactional leadership       | 7               | 0.686               | 0.89 | 0.53 |
| Working hours satisfaction     | 5               | 0.691               | 0.86 | 0.54 |
| Salary satisfaction            | 2               | 0.763               | 0.70 | 0.50 |
| Staff development satisfaction | 4               | 0.682               | 0.77 | 0.46 |
| Work atmosphere satisfaction   | 4               | 0.779               | 0.84 | 0.56 |
| Management satisfaction        | 6               | 0.699               | 0.88 | 0.55 |
| Work activity satisfaction     | 3               | 0.735               | 0.77 | 0.53 |

Note. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted. Source: Authors’ elaboration.

Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for each construct and its subdimensions. Table 4 summarizes the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement scales used in the study. The leadership style subscales show acceptable internal consistency, with  $\alpha$  values ranging from 0.672 (transformational leadership) to 0.725 (laissez-faire leadership). In line with commonly used guidance for exploratory studies, all values exceed 0.60 (George & Mallery, 1995). For job satisfaction dimensions, Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  ranges from 0.682 (staff development satisfaction) to 0.779 (work atmosphere satisfaction), indicating adequate reliability for subsequent analyses.

Beyond alpha, composite reliability (CR) values are consistently satisfactory (0.70–0.90), supporting robust construct reliability. Average variance extracted (AVE) meets or is close to the 0.50 benchmark for most constructs (0.50–0.59), suggesting adequate convergent validity. The only slightly lower result appears for staff development satisfaction (AVE = 0.46), which is marginal but acceptable given its adequate reliability. Overall, the results indicate that the scales are sufficiently reliable and largely demonstrate convergent validity, supporting further hypothesis testing. Standardized factor loadings for all retained items are presented in Appendix B, providing additional item-level support for the adequacy of the measurement model.

To further examine discriminant validity among the latent constructs, the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) is applied. Table 5 presents an excerpt of the HTMT matrix for the leadership styles.

**Table 5.** Discriminant validity (HTMT).

|        | AUTOCR | LF   | DEM  | TRANF | TRANS |
|--------|--------|------|------|-------|-------|
| AUTOCR | —      | 0.41 | 0.38 | 0.29  | 0.46  |
| LF     |        | —    | 0.44 | 0.37  | 0.58  |
| DEM    |        |      | —    | 0.52  | 0.49  |
| TRANF  |        |      |      | —     | 0.43  |
| TRANS  |        |      |      |       | —     |

Note. AUTOCR = Autocratic; DEM = Democratic; LF = Laissez-faire; TRANF = Transformational; TRANS = Transactional. Source: Authors' elaboration.

In Table 5, the HTMT values fall below commonly used thresholds (e.g., 0.85 or 0.90), indicating adequate discriminant validity among the leadership constructs. Together with the CFA fit comparisons reported in Table 3, these results support the distinctiveness of the measured leadership styles.

#### 4.3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Before testing the hypotheses, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were examined to provide an initial overview of the distributions and bivariate associations among leadership styles and job satisfaction dimensions.

Table 6 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations among the five leadership style dimensions and six job satisfaction dimensions. On average, respondents reported relatively low levels of autocratic leadership ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) and higher levels of democratic ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ), transactional ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ), and especially transformational leadership ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ), while laissez-faire leadership was moderate ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ). Job satisfaction ratings were generally high across domains ( $M \approx 3.99$ – $4.30$ ), with the highest mean observed for work activity satisfaction ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) and the lowest for management satisfaction ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ).

**Table 6.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables.

| Variable             | M    | SD   | 1     | 2     | 3    | 4     | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   | 11   |
|----------------------|------|------|-------|-------|------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Autocratic        | 2.17 | 0.62 | 1.00  |       |      |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 2. Laissez-faire     | 3.07 | 0.65 | 0.12  | 1.00  |      |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 3. Democratic        | 3.85 | 0.64 | −0.20 | 0.05  | 1.00 |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 4. Transformational  | 4.28 | 0.48 | −0.07 | −0.14 | 0.25 | 1.00  |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 5. Transactional     | 3.72 | 0.60 | −0.29 | 0.45  | 0.18 | 0.14  | 1.00 |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 6. Working hours     | 4.19 | 0.55 | −0.25 | 0.31  | 0.21 | 0.15  | 0.19 | 1.00 |      |      |      |      |      |
| 7. Salary            | 4.21 | 0.73 | −0.21 | 0.24  | 0.14 | 0.16  | 0.20 | 0.22 | 1.00 |      |      |      |      |
| 8. Staff development | 4.15 | 0.58 | −0.35 | 0.15  | 0.24 | −0.27 | 0.33 | 0.38 | 0.27 | 1.00 |      |      |      |
| 9. Work atmosphere   | 4.10 | 0.62 | −0.37 | 0.28  | 0.12 | −0.14 | 0.34 | 0.24 | 0.34 | 0.08 | 1.00 |      |      |
| 10. Management       | 3.98 | 0.63 | −0.24 | 0.14  | 0.05 | 0.24  | 0.20 | 0.24 | 0.42 | 0.15 | 0.06 | 1.00 |      |
| 11. Work activity    | 4.30 | 0.55 | 0.24  | 0.05  | 0.15 | 0.21  | 0.34 | 0.12 | 0.24 | 0.37 | 0.26 | 0.24 | 1.00 |

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The correlation pattern indicates that autocratic leadership is negatively related to most job satisfaction dimensions ( $r = -0.21$  to  $-0.37$ ), suggesting lower satisfaction when autocratic behaviours are more pronounced. In contrast, laissez-faire leadership shows small-to-moderate positive correlations with several satisfaction dimensions, particularly working hours ( $r = 0.31$ ), work atmosphere ( $r = 0.28$ ), and salary satisfaction ( $r = 0.24$ ).

Democratic leadership is positively associated with working hours ( $r = 0.21$ ) and staff development satisfaction ( $r = 0.24$ ), while transformational leadership shows generally small correlations, including a positive association with management satisfaction ( $r = 0.24$ ) and a negative association with staff development satisfaction ( $r = -0.27$ ). Transactional leadership exhibits the most consistent positive relationships with job satisfaction, partic-

ularly with work atmosphere ( $r = 0.34$ ), staff development ( $r = 0.33$ ), and work activity satisfaction ( $r = 0.34$ ). Overall, these bivariate associations provide preliminary evidence for the proposed relationships and motivate the subsequent regression analyses.

#### 4.4. Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesised relationships are then tested using hierarchical regression models. For staff development satisfaction (STAFDEV), three models are estimated (Table 7): Model 1 includes only the control variables; Model 2 adds all leadership styles entered simultaneously along with the main effects of hotel size and Model 3 examines moderation by introducing interaction terms between democratic leadership and hotel size (with small hotels as the reference group and democratic leadership mean-centred).

**Table 7.** Hierarchical regression predicting staff development satisfaction (STAFDEV) (Standardized  $\beta$ ,  $p$ -values; small hotel reference; DEMOC centred).

| Predictors                    | Model 1 $\beta$ | Model 2 $\beta$ | Model 3 $\beta$ |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Gender (1 = Female)           | 0.06            | 0.04            | 0.04            |
| Work experience (ordinal 1–4) | 0.18 *          | 0.12            | 0.11            |
| Medium (vs. Small)            |                 | 0.10            | 0.08            |
| Large (vs. Small)             |                 | 0.16 *          | 0.14            |
| Autocratic                    |                 | −0.24 **        | −0.23 **        |
| Laissez-faire                 |                 | 0.05            | 0.04            |
| Democratic (centred)          |                 | −0.31 **        | −0.28 **        |
| Transformational              |                 | 0.29 **         | 0.30 **         |
| Transactional                 |                 | −0.19 *         | −0.18 *         |
| Democratic $\times$ Medium    |                 |                 | 0.17 *          |
| Democratic $\times$ Large     |                 |                 | 0.26 **         |
| $R^2$                         | 0.04            | 0.29            | 0.35            |
| $\Delta R^2$                  |                 | 0.25 **         | 0.06 **         |

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Source: Authors' elaboration.

As shown in Table 7, transformational leadership is positively and significantly related to staff development satisfaction when the other leadership styles are controlled for (Model 2:  $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 3:  $\beta = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), consistent with H1. Democratic leadership shows a significant unique association with staff development satisfaction in the competitive model (Model 2:  $\beta = -0.31$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 3:  $\beta = -0.28$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The moderation model further indicates that hotel size moderates this relationship: both interaction terms are significant (Democratic  $\times$  Medium:  $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; Democratic  $\times$  Large:  $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), consistent with H4. The positive interaction coefficients, combined with the negative main effect of democratic leadership, suggest that the negative democratic development association weakens as hotel size increases. Finally, adding the interaction terms improves model explanatory power ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.06$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating incremental variance explained by the moderation effects. Importantly, the main (negative) effect of democratic leadership represents the conditional effect for the reference group (small hotels), whereas the interaction terms indicate how this effect changes in medium-sized and large hotels.

To interpret the interaction, conditional effects (simple slopes) of democratic leadership on staff development satisfaction were estimated at each level of hotel size. These results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8 shows that the negative association between democratic leadership and staff development satisfaction is strongest in small hotels ( $\beta = -0.28$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), weaker and not statistically significant in medium-sized hotels ( $\beta = -0.11$ ,  $p = 0.180$ ), and near zero in large hotels ( $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $p = 0.820$ ). This pattern indicates that the democratic leadership development link is context-dependent: participative leadership does not translate

into development-related satisfaction uniformly across hotel sizes, consistent with the moderation hypothesis (H4).

**Table 8.** Conditional effects (simple slopes) of Democratic leadership → Staff development by hotel size.

| Hotel Size | Slope ( $\beta$ )      | <i>p</i> |
|------------|------------------------|----------|
| Small      | −0.28                  | 0.004    |
| Medium     | −0.11 (= −0.28 + 0.17) | 0.180    |
| Large      | −0.02 (= −0.28 + 0.26) | 0.820    |

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Competitive regression models are then estimated for the remaining core job satisfaction dimensions. Table 9 reports the results for salary satisfaction (SAL), with department dummy variables and work experience included as controls and all leadership styles entered simultaneously. Table 10 reports the results for management satisfaction (MAN), controlling for gender and work experience.

**Table 9.** Regression predicting Salary satisfaction (SAL) (Controls: department dummy variables and work experience; leadership styles entered simultaneously).

| Predictors                              | $\beta$ |
|-----------------------------------------|---------|
| Work experience                         | 0.09    |
| Dept: Front office (vs. Operational)    | 0.14    |
| Dept: F&B (vs. Operational)             | 0.05    |
| Dept: Sports/Wellness (vs. Operational) | 0.18 *  |
| Dept: Horticulture (vs. Operational)    | −0.12   |
| Autocratic                              | −0.16 * |
| Laissez-faire                           | 0.03    |
| Democratic                              | 0.07    |
| Transformational                        | 0.19 *  |
| Transactional                           | 0.21 ** |
| R <sup>2</sup>                          | 0.24    |

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Source: Authors' elaboration.

**Table 10.** Regression predicting Management satisfaction (MAN) (Controls: gender + experience).

| Predictors          | $\beta$ |
|---------------------|---------|
| Gender (1 = Female) | 0.08    |
| Work experience     | 0.11    |
| Autocratic          | −0.12   |
| Laissez-faire       | −0.05   |
| Democratic          | 0.17 *  |
| Transformational    | 0.23 ** |
| Transactional       | 0.06    |
| R <sup>2</sup>      | 0.21    |

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Source: Authors' elaboration.

As reported in Table 9, transactional leadership is positively and significantly related to salary satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) in the competitive model, consistent with H2. Transformational leadership also shows a positive association with salary satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that both reward-focused and broader motivational leadership behaviours may be relevant for pay-related satisfaction, although the hypothesis specifically targets transactional leadership.

As shown in Table 10, transformational leadership is positively associated with satisfaction with management ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting H3a. Democratic leadership is also

positively associated with satisfaction with management ( $\beta = 0.17, p < 0.05$ ), supporting H3b. Autocratic leadership shows a negative coefficient ( $\beta = -0.12$ ) but is not statistically significant; therefore, H3c is not supported at conventional significance levels and should be interpreted with caution.

To complement the regression coefficients and better capture the relative contribution of each leadership style under multicollinearity among predictors, relative importance metrics (LMG relative weights) are estimated for the core outcomes. Table 11 presents the proportionate contribution of each leadership style to the explained variance (Total  $R^2$ ) in staff development, salary and management satisfaction.

**Table 11.** Relative importance of leadership styles for core job satisfaction outcomes (LMG relative weights).

| Outcome                     | AUTOOCR | LF   | DEM  | TRANF | TRANS | Total $R^2$ |
|-----------------------------|---------|------|------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Staff development (STAFDEV) | 0.19    | 0.05 | 0.22 | 0.38  | 0.16  | 0.30        |
| Salary (SAL)                | 0.21    | 0.06 | 0.08 | 0.25  | 0.40  | 0.23        |
| Management (MAN)            | 0.14    | 0.06 | 0.21 | 0.36  | 0.23  | 0.20        |

Source: Authors' elaboration. Note. Relative weights (LMG) were computed using only the leadership style predictors (main effects). Therefore, the total  $R^2$  reported in this table may differ slightly from the  $R^2$  values in the hierarchical regression models that additionally include control variables and/or interaction terms. Note. AU-TOOCR = Autocratic; DEM = Democratic; LF = Laissez-faire; TRANF = Transformational; TRANS = Transactional.

As reported in Table 11, transformational leadership accounts for the largest share of explained variance in staff development and management satisfaction, whereas transactional leadership contributes most to salary satisfaction. This pattern aligns with a facet-matching interpretation: development and management-related satisfaction is more strongly tied to transformational behaviours, while pay-related satisfaction is more strongly tied to transactional behaviours. Supplementary regression results including demographic control variables for the focal outcomes are provided in Appendix A.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined how hotel employees in Croatia connect their direct supervisors' leadership behaviours with different dimensions of job satisfaction. Rather than treating satisfaction as a single overall feeling, the analysis follows the widely used view that job satisfaction is multidimensional, meaning that leadership may matter more for some facets than for others (Spector, 1997). Because leadership behaviours also tend to co-occur in real workplaces, leadership styles were analysed simultaneously to identify which behaviours show a unique contribution to each satisfaction domain (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Anderson & Sun, 2017).

The theoretical value of the findings lies not primarily in showing that transformational leadership is positively associated with job satisfaction, since this general pattern is already well established, but in demonstrating that leadership effects in hotels are differentiated across satisfaction domains and are not equivalent once multiple styles are considered together. More specifically, the results suggest a differentiated pattern in which transformational leadership is most consistently associated with management and staff development satisfaction, transactional leadership is more closely tied to salary satisfaction, and democratic leadership shows a context-dependent relationship with staff development satisfaction that varies by hotel size. Taken together, these findings refine existing hospitality leadership research by suggesting that leadership is better understood as a set of overlapping behaviours whose relevance depends on both the satisfaction domain examined and the organisational context.

Overall, transformational leadership shows the most consistently positive pattern of association, particularly in relation to satisfaction with management and staff development. This is in line with the broader evidence base showing that transformational leadership is typically related to positive employee attitudes, including job satisfaction (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), and with hospitality studies that emphasise the value of supportive and motivating supervision in hotel settings (e.g., Hinkin & Tracey, 1994; Tracey & Hinkin, 1996; Chen & Wu, 2017). What is especially notable here is that the strongest links appear in dimensions that are directly shaped by everyday supervisory interaction, how employees evaluate management quality and whether they feel encouraged and supported in their development. In service-intensive hotel work, these day-to-day signals of support, direction, and recognition are likely to carry particular weight.

Transactional leadership shows a more specific relationship: it is most clearly tied to salary satisfaction. Conceptually, this fits well with transactional leadership's exchange-based logic and with established views of pay satisfaction, where clarity of expectations and the perceived connection between performance and rewards play a central role (Podsakoff et al., 1982; Heneman & Schwab, 1985; Bass, 1985). Meta-analytic work also suggests that contingent reward tends to relate positively to satisfaction outcomes (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). At the same time, the results indicate that transactional leadership does not show a unique association with staff development satisfaction once other leadership behaviours are taken into account. Put simply, practices that make pay feel clearer and more predictable are not necessarily the same practices that employees interpret as genuine investment in learning, mentoring, and career growth.

Democratic leadership is positively associated with satisfaction with management, which fits with participation and voice research suggesting that involvement in decision-making can improve how employees evaluate management and decision processes (Gastil, 1994; Wagner, 1994; Pacheco & Webber, 2016; Chan, 2019; Guinot et al., 2021). The more nuanced finding concerns staff development satisfaction: here, hotel size changes the picture. In smaller hotels, more democratic leadership is linked with lower development satisfaction, whereas in medium and larger hotels this relationship weakens and becomes non-significant. Democratic leadership explains unique variance in staff development satisfaction beyond other leadership styles; however, the direction is negative in small hotels and attenuates as hotel size increases. This pattern is consistent with the moderation hypothesis (H4) and suggests a boundary condition for participative leadership in hotels: participation may raise employees' expectations about growth and development. When development systems are weak or informal, as is often the case in smaller properties, those expectations may remain unmet, which can translate into lower development satisfaction. In this sense, democratic leadership is most likely to be associated with more favourable development-related evaluations when it is matched with adequate HR infrastructure. One plausible interpretation is a "participation–infrastructure gap". Participation can raise expectations about growth and development, but smaller properties may have less formalised HR structures and fewer stable development pathways. This reading is consistent with evidence that training and development practices in smaller hotels can be more informal and constrained by operational demands (Çetinel et al., 2009; Ansari, 2024). More broadly, this finding suggests that participative leadership should not automatically be assumed to generate positive employee evaluations across all organisational domains. In service settings, where operational demands are high and organisational resources may be uneven, participation can function as a double-edged mechanism: it may increase voice and involvement, but it can also raise expectations that organisations are not equally able to fulfil. The present results therefore point to a more contingent understanding of democratic leadership, in which its effects depend on whether participative signals are matched by credible

developmental support. Conceptually, this implies that participative leadership may be most effective when employee involvement is accompanied by organisational structures capable of translating voice into concrete learning and development opportunities.

Autocratic leadership shows the expected negative tendency, especially for pay and development-related satisfaction. This is consistent with classic descriptions of autocratic leadership as unilateral decision-making with limited employee voice (Lewin et al., 1939; Northouse, 2009), and with the broader argument that reduced voice and perceived unfairness are likely to undermine satisfaction.

Finally, laissez-faire leadership does not show meaningful unique effects once other leadership styles are included. This suggests that passive leadership may share variance with more active leadership behaviours and does not add much explanatory power in a competitive framework. In that sense, the result supports the decision to analyse styles simultaneously when leadership behaviours overlap in practice (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Anderson & Sun, 2017).

The weaker and non-significant findings are also theoretically informative. Not all leadership styles retained unique associations across all satisfaction dimensions once they were examined simultaneously. For instance, autocratic leadership showed the expected negative tendency in relation to satisfaction with management, but this association was not statistically significant. Transactional leadership also did not show a unique association with staff development satisfaction, while laissez-faire leadership did not retain meaningful unique effects once other leadership styles were taken into account. Taken together, these results suggest that leadership effects in hotels may be more selective and domain-specific than broad theoretical expectations sometimes assume. They also underline the importance of competitive modelling, as associations that may appear salient in simpler models do not necessarily remain distinctive when overlapping leadership behaviours are considered simultaneously.

### 5.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study adds to the hospitality leadership literature in several ways. By analysing leadership styles simultaneously, it provides a more realistic assessment of their unique associations with job satisfaction, separating effects that remain once shared variance across styles is taken into account. The findings also underscore the value of a facet-based approach to job satisfaction in hospitality: leadership appears more strongly linked to some domains (particularly perceptions of management and staff development) than to others (Spector, 1997). In addition, the moderation results highlight an important contextual boundary condition: hotel size shapes how democratic (participative) leadership relates to staff development satisfaction, suggesting that leadership effects depend not only on supervisor behaviours but also on the organisational capacity and HR infrastructure needed to support development (Çetinel et al., 2009; Ansari, 2024). Finally, the relative importance (LMG) analysis reinforces this differentiated perspective by showing which leadership styles account for the largest relative share of explained variance in each outcome, complementing regression estimates when predictors are interrelated. These estimates are interpreted here as indicators of relative statistical contribution within the model rather than as direct measures of substantive influence.

From a practical standpoint, the results point to a balanced leadership approach. Transformational behaviours appear particularly relevant for employees' evaluations of management quality and development support, suggesting that supervisor training should emphasise coaching, recognition, and supportive day-to-day communication. Transactional behaviours appear particularly relevant for salary satisfaction, indicating that clear expectations and transparent reward administration matter; however, they should comple-

ment, not replace, development-oriented leadership. The moderation finding is especially relevant for smaller hotels: participative practices are most likely to be associated with higher development-related satisfaction when they are backed by credible development opportunities such as structured training, mentoring, and clear progression criteria. Without such support, participation may raise expectations without improving employees' actual development experience. Importantly, these implications resonate with the service-profit logic in hospitality, which links employee satisfaction to customer satisfaction and hotel performance (Chi & Gursoy, 2009).

Taken together, these points suggest that the study contributes to the leadership and hospitality literature in a more modest but clearer way than by claiming a wholly new relationship between leadership and job satisfaction. Its contribution lies in showing that, in hotel settings, leadership styles should not be treated as isolated predictors, that job satisfaction should not be reduced to a single aggregate outcome, and that organisational context conditions at least some of these relationships. The findings therefore extend prior research by offering a more fine-grained and context-sensitive account of how leadership styles relate to employee satisfaction in hotels.

### *5.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

The study is cross-sectional, so causal interpretations should be avoided. Although the reported CFA and structural model fit indices were acceptable, the sample size of 153 respondents remains relatively modest given the complexity of the measurement model, which includes eleven latent constructs. Accordingly, parameter estimates should be interpreted with caution, particularly with regard to their stability, and the findings would benefit from replication on larger samples and in additional settings. Some subscales showed modest internal consistency and relatively short scales (e.g., pay satisfaction) may have limited reliability, so the results for these dimensions should be interpreted with caution. Data were collected over several months in a seasonally dynamic industry, so future research could better account for timing and seasonality by using more comparable time windows. The sample also includes variation across hotel departments, organisational roles, and hotel sizes. However, given the overall sample size, the study could not explore these internal organisational differences in greater depth. Future research should investigate whether leadership effects vary across departmental settings, job roles, and other within-hotel organisational contexts. The study also relies on employee self-reports collected at one point in time, which may increase common-method and perceptual bias; despite procedural remedies (e.g., anonymity and reduced evaluation apprehension), some common-method variance may remain.

Future work should combine multiple sources (e.g., supervisor ratings, HR records, or other organisational data). Finally, because employees are nested within hotels, within-hotel dependence may lead to underestimated OLS standard errors. As the dataset does not include a hotel identifier, standard errors could not be clustered and multilevel models could not be estimated. Future research should collect hotel-level identifiers to enable clustered or multilevel modelling.

## **6. Conclusions**

This study shows that the relationship between leadership and job satisfaction in Croatian hotels is not uniform, but differentiated across satisfaction domains and shaped by organisational context. Transformational leadership displays the most consistently positive pattern of association, particularly for satisfaction with management and staff development, which aligns with prior evidence linking transformational leadership to favourable employee attitudes. Transactional leadership is most clearly tied to salary satisfaction,

consistent with its exchange-based logic and the role of contingent reward. Democratic leadership is associated with higher satisfaction with management, but its relationship with development satisfaction depends on hotel size, highlighting that participative leadership is linked to development satisfaction primarily when organisational structures can deliver real growth opportunities. Overall, the findings suggest that hotels should align leadership development with the specific dimensions of employee experience they aim to improve and ensure that participative practices are backed by credible HR development pathways, particularly in smaller properties.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, L.D.F. and A.V.; methodology, L.D.F. and A.V.; software, L.D.F.; validation, L.D.F.; formal analysis, L.D.F. and H.M.R.; investigation, L.D.F. and A.V.; resources, A.V.; data curation, H.M.R.; writing—original draft preparation, L.D.F.; writing—review and editing, H.M.R. and A.V.; visualization, A.V.; supervision, H.M.R.; project administration, L.D.F. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Rijeka (protocol code 2156-18-26-01-01 and date of approval: 17 January 2025).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy restrictions.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A. Additional Regression Results with Demographic Control Variables

Table A1. Supplementary regressions including demographic controls (focal outcomes).

| Predictor             | Salary $\beta$ ( <i>p</i> ) | Staff Development $\beta$ ( <i>p</i> ) | Management $\beta$ ( <i>p</i> ) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Gender (0 = M, 1 = F) | 0.10 (0.372)                | 0.01 (0.902)                           | 0.05 (0.541)                    |
| Age                   | −0.06 (0.463)               | 0.04 (0.594)                           | 0.06 (0.397)                    |
| Education level       | 0.04 (0.621)                | 0.00 (0.990)                           | 0.03 (0.686)                    |
| Work experience       | 0.09 (0.183)                | 0.12 (0.129)                           | 0.15 (0.077)                    |
| Autocratic            | −0.30 (0.011) *             | −0.13 (0.032) *                        | 0.11 (0.375)                    |
| Laissez-faire         | 0.29 (0.284)                | 0.39 (0.155)                           | 0.11 (0.702)                    |
| Democratic            | −0.45 (0.165)               | −0.50 (0.014) *                        | 0.32 (0.026) *                  |
| Transformational      | 0.47 (0.017) *              | 0.47 (0.014) *                         | 0.53 (0.021) *                  |
| Transactional         | 0.23 (0.016) *              | −0.25 (0.036) *                        | −0.22 (0.362)                   |

Note. The table reports standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) and *p*-values from supplementary models that include demographic controls. \* *p* < 0.05.

Appendix B. Constructs, Indicators, and Standardized Factor Loading Values

Table A2. Standardized factor loadings.

| Construct             | Indicator | Factor Loading |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Autocratic leadership | autocr_1  | 0.684          |
|                       | autocr_2  | 0.745          |
|                       | autocr_3  | 0.713          |
|                       | autocr_4  | 0.770          |
|                       | autocr_5  | 0.695          |
|                       | autocr_6  | 0.757          |

Table A2. *Cont.*

| Construct                      | Indicator  | Factor Loading |
|--------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Democratic leadership          | democr_1   | 0.675          |
|                                | democr_2   | 0.747          |
|                                | democr_3   | 0.771          |
|                                | democr_4   | 0.706          |
|                                | democr_5   | 0.688          |
|                                | democr_6   | 0.752          |
| Laissez-faire leadership       | lf_1       | 0.742          |
|                                | lf_2       | 0.731          |
|                                | lf_3       | 0.782          |
|                                | lf_4       | 0.709          |
|                                | lf_5       | 0.724          |
|                                | lf_6       | 0.761          |
| Transactional leadership       | transac_1  | 0.694          |
|                                | transac_2  | 0.733          |
|                                | transac_3  | 0.753          |
|                                | transac_4  | 0.695          |
|                                | transac_5  | 0.738          |
|                                | transac_6  | 0.701          |
|                                | transac_7  | 0.792          |
| Transformational leadership    | transf_1   | 0.711          |
|                                | transf_2   | 0.756          |
|                                | transf_3   | 0.801          |
|                                | transf_4   | 0.763          |
|                                | transf_5   | 0.748          |
|                                | transf_6   | 0.819          |
| Working hours satisfaction     | wh_1       | 0.697          |
|                                | wh_2       | 0.746          |
|                                | wh_3       | 0.788          |
|                                | wh_4       | 0.714          |
|                                | wh_5       | 0.738          |
| Salary satisfaction            | sal_1      | 0.671          |
|                                | sal_2      | 0.742          |
| Staff development satisfaction | staffdev_1 | 0.605          |
|                                | staffdev_2 | 0.654          |
|                                | staffdev_3 | 0.742          |
|                                | staffdev_4 | 0.698          |
| Work atmosphere satisfaction   | workatm_1  | 0.715          |
|                                | workatm_2  | 0.767          |
|                                | workatm_3  | 0.780          |
|                                | workatm_4  | 0.742          |
| Management satisfaction        | mansat_1   | 0.694          |
|                                | mansat_2   | 0.746          |
|                                | mansat_3   | 0.772          |
|                                | mansat_4   | 0.736          |
|                                | mansat_5   | 0.715          |
|                                | mansat_6   | 0.764          |
| Work activity satisfaction     | workact_1  | 0.688          |
|                                | workact_2  | 0.735          |
|                                | workact_3  | 0.754          |

Source: Authors' elaboration.

## References

- Alban-Metcalfe, R. J., & Alimo-Metcalfe, B. (2000). The transformational leadership questionnaire (TLQ-LGV): A convergent and discriminant validity study. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 21, 280–296. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Anderson, M. H., & Sun, P. Y. T. (2017). Reviewing leadership styles: Overlaps and the need for a new “full-range” theory. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 19(1), 76–96. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ansari, E. T. Z. (2024). Talent training practices in SME hotels. *Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management*, 17, 261–274. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Avolio, B. J., & Bass, B. M. (2002). *Developing potential across a full range of leadership: Cases on transactional and transformational leadership*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. Free Press.
- Baum, T. (2007). Human resources in tourism: Still waiting for change. *Tourism Management*, 28(6), 1383–1399. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. Harper & Row.
- Chan, S. C. H. (2019). Participative leadership and job satisfaction: The mediating role of work engagement and the moderating role of fun experienced at work. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 40(3), 319–333. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chen, T.-J., & Wu, C.-M. (2017). Improving the turnover intention of tourist hotel employees: Transformational leadership, leader-member exchange, and psychological contract breach. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(7), 1914–1936. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chi, C. G., & Gursoy, D. (2009). Employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and financial performance: An empirical examination. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(2), 245–253. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Croatian Employment Service. (2020). *Yearbook 2020*. Croatian Employment Service.
- Çetinel, F., Yolal, M., & Emeksiz, M. (2009). Human resources management in small- and medium-sized hotels in Turkey. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 8(1), 43–63. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Elkhwesky, Z., Elbayoumi Salem, I., Ramkissoon, H., & Castañeda-García, J.-A. (2022). A systematic and critical review of leadership styles in contemporary hospitality: A roadmap and a call for future research. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 34(5), 1925–1958. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Eurofound. (2024). *Company practices to tackle labour shortages*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Eurostat. (2024). *Tourism industries—Employment*. Statistics explained. European Commission.
- Gastil, J. (1994). A definition and illustration of democratic leadership. *Human Relations*, 47(8), 953–975. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- George, D., & Mallery, P. (1995). *SPSS/PC+ step by step: A simple guide and reference*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Griffeth, R. W., Hom, P. W., & Gaertner, S. (2000). A meta-analysis of antecedents and correlates of employee turnover: Update, moderator tests, and research implications for the next millennium. *Journal of Management*, 26(3), 463–488. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Guinot, J., Monfort, A., & Chiva, R. (2021). How to increase job satisfaction: The role of participative decisions and feeling trusted. *Employee Relations*, 43(6), 1397–1413. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Heimerl, P., Haid, M., Benedikt, L., & Scholl-Grissemann, U. S. (2020). Factors influencing job satisfaction in the hospitality industry. *SAGE Open*, 10(4), 1–14. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Heneman, H. G., III, & Schwab, D. P. (1985). Pay satisfaction: Its multidimensional nature and measurement. *International Journal of Psychology*, 20(2), 129–141. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hinkin, T. R., & Tracey, J. B. (1994). Transformational leadership in the hospitality industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 18(1), 49–63. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hoang, G., Wilson-Evered, E., Lockstone-Binney, L., & Luu, T. T. (2021). Empowering leadership in hospitality and tourism management: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 33(12), 4182–4214. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Jensen, U. T., Andersen, L. B., Bro, L., & Bøllingtoft, A. (2019). Conceptualizing and measuring transformational and transactional leadership. *Administration & Society*, 51(1), 3–33. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Judge, T. A., & Piccolo, R. F. (2004). Transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic test of their relative validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(5), 755–768. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Judge, T. A., Thoresen, C. J., Bono, J. E., & Patton, G. K. (2001). The job satisfaction–job performance relationship: A qualitative and quantitative review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(3), 376–407. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kusluvan, S., Kusluvan, Z., Ilhan, I., & Buyruk, L. (2010). The human dimension: A review of human resources management issues in the tourism and hospitality industry. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 51(2), 171–214. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lewin, K., Lippitt, R., & White, R. K. (1939). Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created “social climates”. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 10(2), 271–299. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Locke, E. A. (1976). The nature and causes of job satisfaction. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 1297–1349). Rand McNally.
- Michael, N., & Fotiadis, A. (2022). Employee turnover: The hotel industry perspective. *Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing*, 8(1), 38–47. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Namasivayam, K., Guchait, P., & Lei, P. (2014). The influence of leader empowering behaviors and employee psychological empowerment on customer satisfaction. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 26(1), 69–84. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Northouse, P. G. (2009). *Introduction to leadership: Concepts and practice*. SAGE Publications.
- OECD. (2020). *OECD tourism trends and policies 2020*. OECD Publishing.
- Pacheco, G., & Webber, D. J. (2016). Job satisfaction: How crucial is participative decision making? *Personnel Review*, 45(1), 183–200. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Podsakoff, P. M., Todor, W. D., & Grover, R. A. (1982). Effects of leader contingent and noncontingent reward and punishment behaviors on subordinate performance and satisfaction. *Academy of Management Journal*, 25(4), 810–821. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Spector, P. E. (1997). *Job satisfaction: Application, assessment, causes, and consequences*. SAGE Publications. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Tracey, J. B., & Hinkin, T. R. (1994). Transformational leaders in the hospitality industry. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 35(2), 18–24. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Tracey, J. B., & Hinkin, T. R. (1996). How transformational leaders lead in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 15(2), 165–176. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Wagner, J. A., III. (1994). Participation's effects on performance and satisfaction: A reconsideration of research evidence. *Academy of Management Review*, 19(2), 312–330. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Woods, P. A. (2021). Democratic leadership. In R. Papa (Ed.), *Oxford encyclopedia of educational administration*. Oxford University Press. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.