

Social Loafing and Job Performance in Hotels: Does Transactional Leadership Matter?

Abstract

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Employees are crucial resources for organizations, and their job performance is highly important for their success, especially in the hotel industry. The study investigated the impact of social loafing (SL) on hotel employees' job performance (EJP), considering transactional leadership (TL) as a moderator. A total of 390 responses were gathered from full-time employees employed at 5-star hotels in Egypt. The data was analyzed using PLS-SEM software by WarpPLS 7.0. The study found that a negative effect exists between social loafing and employee job performance. In addition, transactional leadership has a negative effect on SL and a positive effect on EJP. Furthermore, TL has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between SL and EJP, the study indicates that TL weakens the negative relationship between SL and EJP. The study contributes to transactional leadership by recognizing and regulating negative job behaviors in modern organizational contexts, such as levels of workplace social loafing. The study highlights the importance of hotel premises in reducing social loafing in the workplace, highlighting the importance of incorporating ethical concepts with transactional leadership in fostering a healthy environment and improved job performance.

Keywords Social loafing, employee job performance, transactional leadership, hotels

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Introduction

Human resource management has a significant role in enhancing hotel competitiveness in the face of globalization and international competition (Nadiri & Tanova, 2010). However, the nature of the hotel industry that relies on delivering quality services to guests cooperatively begets certain harmful behaviors such as social loafing. Social loafing refers to an individual's tendency to exert less effort when working in a group compared to working individually (Simms & Nichols, 2014). Social loafing is more common in-service organizations "i.e. hotel industry" due to intangibility or low task visibility, as individuals often struggle to identify their contribution to team performance (Luo et al., 2013). Social loafing negatively impacts an organization's success by reducing employee work efficiency, lowering expectations for success, and resulting in less group commitment and job performance (Tan et al., 2008; Hildreth, 2015; Khan et al., 2020). Therefore, identifying its roots and relationships is crucial for the hotel industry. Leadership in the hotel industry is crucial for increasing competitiveness and aligning resources, people, and timing to achieve organizational goals, forming a strong relationship between a leader and followers (Keskes et al., 2018; Akhtar & Nazarudin, 2020; Khairy et al., 2023). Leaders, particularly top managers, have a central position in directing followers' behavior, which can significantly influence organizational performance (Dlamini et al., 2017; Jia et al., 2018; Eviana et al., 2022). Transactional leaders consider the agreed-upon context for praise, rewards, resources, or avoidance of disciplinary actions among followers, distinguishing them from other types of leaders (Alrowwad et al., 2020). This concept makes it a highly influential leadership style that effectively mitigates the negative impact of harmful behaviors, such as social loafing, within organizations. Research indicates transactional leadership positively impacts employee work outcomes, but not all employees respond positively to this leadership style (Burke et al., 2007; Khattak et al., 2020). In addition, social loafing is rarely studied in Eastern cultures (Luo et al., 2013), with cultural differences between Egypt and Western countries challenging existing theories (Hofstede, 1984). Therefore, understanding individualism-collectivism cultures' effects in understanding social loafing behaviors is desirable. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the effect of social loafing on hotel employees' job performance, focusing on the role of transactional leadership as a moderator. The study significantly contributed to the literature by incorporating essential variables for work environments aiming for high employee job performance. The current study is a unique endeavor that explores the link between social loafing and job performance in Egyptian culture, focusing on transactional leadership as a moderator to mitigate its negative effects. This study is the first to explore the indirect effect of social loafing on employees' job performance through transactional leadership, contributing to existing literature.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Modern workplaces, especially in the hotel industry, often involve teamwork and networking activities, impacting efficiency and productivity (Chang et al., 2020; Hyusein & Eyupoglu, 2023). In a team, both executives and employees must possess the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve objectives and some challenging goals may necessitate instrumental efforts to improve performance. Social loafing, a behavior where team members contribute less effort and contribute individually, can

be a result of unclear organizational processes (Chang et al., 2020). Social loafing is a common issue in workplaces where individual processes are not clearly defined or ethically blended, hence, it is a significant contributor to productivity loss in teams (Hyusein & Eyupoglu, 2023). Social loafing as a negative behavior common in unhealthy workplace environments, causing decreased motivation and productivity, and potentially affecting commitment to tasks and the organization (Wilhau, 2021). Consequently, the following hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: Social loafing negatively impacts hotel employees' job performance.

Khan et al. (2020) and Dastane (2020) noted that effective leadership boosts employee self-confidence, leading to improve performance within an organization. As per studies by Howladar et al. (2018) and Abdelwahed et al. (2023), job performance is influenced by the behaviors of employees within an organization. Transactional Leadership is a strategy that involves setting objectives and implementing rewards to achieve them (Shields, 2010). It promotes fairness and equality by facilitating accurate information exchange between leaders and subordinates, fostering trust and commitment (Nazarian et al., 2022), and ultimately increasing job performance through a strong leader-subordinate relationship. Furthermore, transactional leaders utilize disciplinary control and clear motives to motivate and enhance employee performance. Transactional leadership involves leaders discussing tasks and duties, and defining conditions and rewards for followers, while transaction leaders identify actions and rewards for task completion (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Alrowwad et al., 2020). The principle of transactions involves the exchange of rewards for work, strengthened through punishment, and is developed to promote desired followers' behaviors and eliminate unwanted ones, such as social loafing, through rewards and penalties (Bass & Bass, 2009). Therefore, a leader who rewards exceptional work leads to higher team performance (Raziq et al., 2018), reduces social loafing, and improves job performance. In other words, transactional leaders evaluate employees based on their performance, rewarding them for meeting required tasks and punishing them for unsatisfactory performance (Abdelwahed et al., 2023). Consequently, the following hypotheses are formulated as follow:

H2: Transactional leadership negatively impacts social loafing behavior.

H3: Transactional leadership positively impacts hotel employees' job performance.

H4: Transactional leadership negatively moderates the relationship between social loafing behavior and hotel employees' job performance; transactional leadership dampens the negative relationship between social loafing behavior and hotel employees' job performance.

The conceptual framework is presented in Figure (1) below.

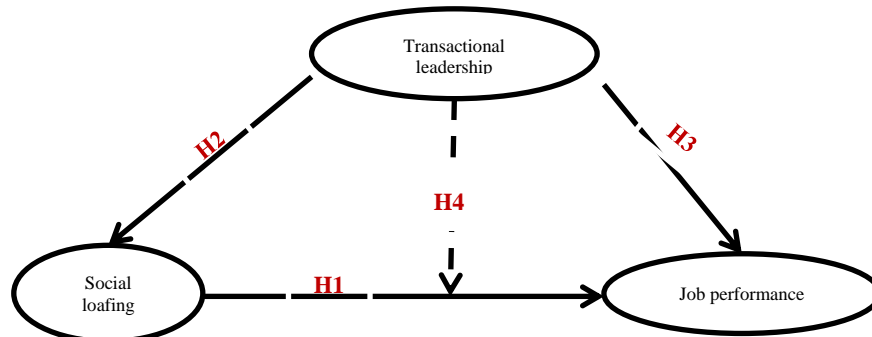


Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the study

Research methodology

This study utilized a quantitative survey methodology to test the suggested research model. Relying on a 5-point Likert scale, the survey assessed employees' perceptions of three variables, namely, social loafing, job performance, and transactional leadership with 16 items. It also considers factors like gender, age, education, and tenure. The study used a 4-item scale from Price et al. (2006) to measure social loafing. For example, "I left my work to others to do" and "I claimed there were other things to do when others need help". In addition, an 8-item scale developed by Rodwell et al. (1998) was utilized to measure job performance. For instance, "I am currently working at the highest level of performance" and "I set quite high standards for my job". Furthermore, Alrowwad et al.'s (2020) 4-item scale evaluated transactional leadership was used. Sample items include: "My manager precisely records any of my mistakes" and "My manager gives me what I want to exchange for my hard work". Between August and September 2023, the research model was evaluated utilizing data from full-time employees in five-star hotels in Greater Cairo, Egypt. In 2018, Egypt had 158 five-star hotels, with 34 in the Greater Cairo Region, according to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism. The study utilized a convenience sample strategy, distributing 450 questionnaires to 22 agreed-upon hotels for research purposes due to the large population and limited resources. The survey got 390 valid responses, with an 86.7% response rate. Hair et al. (2010) suggest calculating the appropriate sample size based on the number of variables explored, with a minimum acceptable ratio of "variable: sample = 1:10". For the current study, a sample size of 390 employees was enough for a 16-component research model used in the study. Hair et al. (2020) utilized PLS-SEM in tourism and

hospitality research, analyzing measurement, structural model, and testing hypotheses. Therefore, this approach was adopted using WarpPLS software version 7.0.

Results

Participant's profile

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the participants. The study involved 390 employees, with 292 (74.87%) being men and 98 (25.13%) being women. Slightly over half of the respondents, (n=202, 51.79%), were aged between 30 and less than 45 years. The majority of the respondents (264 out of 390, 67.69%) had a bachelor's degree. The majority of employees (n=177, 45.38%) had three to six years of experience, while 126 (32.31%) had less than three years of work experience.

Table 1. Participant's profile (N=390)

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	292	74.87
	Female	98	25.13
Age group	18:< 30 years	146	37.44
	30: < 45 years	202	51.79
	≥45 years	42	10.77
Educational level	High schools/institute	94	24.10
	Bachelor	264	67.69
	Master/PhD	32	0.08
Working Experience	1:< 3 years	126	32.31
	3 to <6 years	177	45.38
	6 to ≥9 years	87	22.31

Research model's reliability and validity

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) presented in Table 2 revealed acceptable item loadings between 0.696 and 0.957, as per Hair et al. (2010). The study's reliability is confirmed by Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), and AVE values, with a variance inflation factor of ≤3.3 indicating pathological collinearity and common method bias. For all variables, CA and CR values were above 0.7 and AVE values were above 0.5.

Table 2. Factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, CR, AVE, and VIF

	Item loading	CR	CA	AVE	VIF
Social Loafing (SL)	-	0.893	0.838	0.678	1.751
"SL.1. I left my work to others to do.	0.720**				
SL.2. I claimed there were other things to do when others need help.	0.761**				
SL.3. I avoided work and responsibility.	0.879**				
SL.4. I loafed on my share of tasks."	0.918**				
Employee Job Performance (EJP)	-	0.958	0.949	0.744	2.167
"EJP. 1. I am currently working at the highest level of performance.	0.860**				
EJP.2. It is my right to use my medical leave.	0.869**				
EJP.3. Employees should only do enough work.	0.957**				
EJP.4. I try to be at work as often as possible.	0.917**				
EJP.5. I am one of the best in the work I am doing.	0.900**				
EJP.6. I set quite high standards for my job.	0.847**				
EJP.7. My work is always of high quality.	0.828**				
EJP.8. I am proud of my job performance."	0.696**				
Transactional Leadership (TL)	-	0.909	0.865	0.717	1.477
"TL.1. When I am unable to complete my work, my manager reprimands me.	0.905**				
TL.2. My manager precisely records any of my mistakes.	0.909**				
TL.3. My manager gives me what I want to exchange for my hard work.	0.841**				
TL.4. My manager tells me that I can get special rewards when I show."	0.717**				
"CR: Composite reliability; CA: Cronbach's alpha; AVE: average variance extracted; VIF: variance inflation factors"					
** P value for item loading (<0.001)					

The research model's discriminant validity is also confirmed by the results in Table 3, which show a significant correlation between latent variables and an AVE value that is greater than the greatest common value (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019).

Table 3. Research model's discriminant validity

	SL	TL	EJP
Social Loafing (SL)	0.823	-0.406	-0.651
Transactional Leadership (TL)	-0.406	0.847	0.566
Employee Job Performance (EJP)	-0.651	0.566	0.862

The research model's quality indices

The research model proposed in the current study, as presented in Table 4, has achieved all ten "model fit and quality indices" suggested by Kock (2021).

Table 4: Model fit and quality indices

	Assessment	Criterion	Supported/Rejected
Average path coefficient (APC)	0.380, P=0.006	P<0.05	Supported
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.453, P=0.002	P<0.05	Supported
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	0.414, P=0.003	P<0.05	Supported
Average block VIF (AVIF)	1.570	acceptable if ≤5, ideally ≤3.3	Supported
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.604	acceptable if ≤5, ideally ≤3.3	Supported
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.596	small ≥0.1, medium ≥0.25, large ≥0.36	Supported
Symptom's paradox ratio (SPR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥0.7, ideally = 1	Supported
R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥0.9, ideally = 1	Supported
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥0.7	Supported
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥0.7	Supported

Structural model and testing hypotheses

The study tested four hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, and H4) as shown in Figure 2. The study found that a negative effect exists between social loafing (SL) and employee job performance (EJP) ($\beta=-0.31$, $P=0.04$). The data suggests that as SL increases, EJP tends to be low, thus supporting H1. In addition, transactional leadership (TL) has a negative effect on SL ($\beta=-0.35$, $P<0.01$) and a positive effect on EJP ($\beta=0.37$, $P=0.01$). As TL increases, SL tends to be low, while EJP tends to be high, supporting H2 and H3. Furthermore, TL has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between SL and EJP ($\beta=-0.31$, $P=0.03$). The study indicates that TL weakens the negative relationship between SL and EJP, thus supporting H4. Figure 2 also shows that TL interprets 28% of the variance in SL ($R^2=0.28$), while TL and SL interpret 62% of the variance in EJP ($R^2=0.62$).

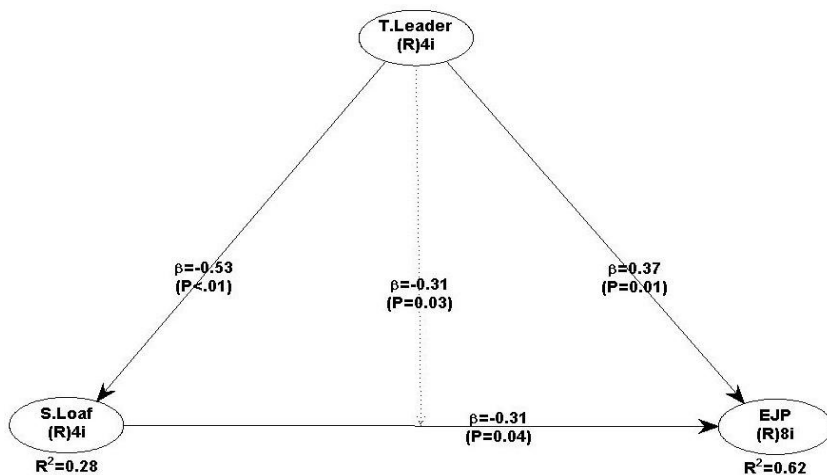


Figure 2: final model of the study

Discussion

This study explores the effect of social loafing on employees' job performance in five-star hotels in the Egyptian culture context, taking the moderating role of transactional leadership into account. The theoretical model tested four hypotheses, with all proposed hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, and H4) being supported by the findings. Findings revealed that social loafing negatively impacts hotel employees' job performance (H1). This result is consistent with other research by Wilhau (2021) and Hyusein & Eyupoglu (2023) who claimed that social loafing is a detrimental behavior that can lead to decreased job performance in an unhealthy workplace environment. Social loafers in the hotel industry are responsible for low performance and reduced productivity (Azur et al., 2019). Social loafing, where individuals contribute less to group efforts than if solely responsible, can pose a significant risk to hotels, as it can hinder effective coordination and goal achievement (Azur et al., 2019). Employees may also withhold effort due to fear of group involvement, group jealousy, or fear of individual effort being exploited by others (Hyusein & Eyupoglu, 2023). Findings also revealed that transactional leadership negatively impacts social loafing behavior (H2), positively impacts hotel employees' job performance (H3), and negatively moderates the relationship between social loafing behavior and hotel employees' job performance (H4). These results are consistent with other studies by Alrowwad et al. (2020), Nazarian et al. (2022), and Abdelwahed et al. (2023) which argued that transactional leadership has been found to significantly reduce harmful behaviors like social loafing and enhance job performance. Transactional leadership involves leader-follower interactions, with leaders directing tasks and rewarding struggles, while followers perform tasks according to their direction (Meisam et al., 2013). Hotel premises set objectives for leadership, and employees must achieve these objectives to receive awards. Transactional leadership also emphasizes ethical standards, as employees anticipate receiving justified awards in return for their work (Daouk et al., 2021). In addition, transactional leadership involves leaders and followers exchanging opinions, rewarding desired behaviors with rewards, and punishing undesirable ones with punishments (Dai et al., 2013). "Rewards include promotions, salaries, and benefits, while penalties include demotions, pay cuts, and terminations. This style boosts corporate performance by rewarding excellence and punishing failure (Abdelwahed et al., 2023).

Theoretical and practical implications

The study has significant implications for the theoretical understanding of social loafing, transactional leadership, and hotel employees' job performance literature. The hotel industry faces increasing competition, necessitating hotel managers to identify sources of competitive advantage. Human resource management is crucial for enhancing performance effectiveness. However, there is a lack of research outside of Western and Far Eastern regions (Nazarian et al., 2022), leaving uncertainty about the relationships between factors affecting organizational performance. Research on transactional leadership also focuses primarily on Western communities (Arar & Abu Nasra, 2019). The current study enhances transactional leadership by identifying and managing harmful work behaviors in modern organizational settings, including workplace social loafing levels. The study suggests that transactional leadership can effectively control workplace social loafing levels, potentially enhancing job performance by minimizing employee social loafing. Transactional leaders motivate employees by rewarding good performance and punishing bad ones, promoting optimal job performance, and reducing harmful behaviors like loafing.

Furthermore, the study reveals that transactional leadership plays a moderating role in the relationship between social loafing and job performance among hotel employees. Transactional leaders strategically incorporate rewards and punishments into organizational settings, aiming to eliminate individual social loafing intentions by strategically implementing a rewards-based perspective. The study emphasizes the significance of hotel premises in managing the social loafing levels of the workplace by regulating and addressing employee negative behaviors. The hotel management should incorporate ethical strategies into their transactional leadership. Embracing ethics in employee behavior can lead to reduced loafing, a healthy workplace environment, and ultimately, higher job performance.

Limitations and further research

This study collected data during a specific time frame within the Egyptian cultural context. Future research should use a longitudinal study design to examine the impact of social loafing on employees' job performance through transactional leadership over time. The study's generalizability may be limited due to its focus on the five-star hotel segment in Egypt. The research could have been more effective if it was conducted across various sectors, such as other hotel segments or restaurants, and in different regions of MENA or Europe. In addition, the self-reporting approach was adopted in this study to investigate the three factors included in the research model; therefore, a response bias may occur. This could, in turn, potentially lead to "deliberate falsification for social desirability". Future researchers should consider collecting data from various sources, including supervisors. Lastly, this research tends to discover the impact of transactional leadership in mitigating the negative effect of social loafing on employees' job performance. Future studies should explore the impact of transactional leadership on negative employee outcomes, such as cyberloafing. Other moderating variables would also be investigated such as organizational justice and mindfulness.

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