

THE IMPACT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES' THRIVING IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

Abstract

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Purpose – In the fiercely competitive tourism industry, hotel management must cultivate passionate frontline employees (FLEs) who perceive their roles as more than routine tasks, aiming to enhance guest satisfaction. This study examines how transformational leadership fosters FLEs' thriving at work in Indonesian tourist hotels. Specifically, using the multiple mediation model, this research investigates the mediating effects of a sense of calling, acceptance of change, and friendship-based knowledge sharing (FKS).

Methodology/Design/Approach – Data were collected between January and February 2024 through a cross-sectional survey of 275 FLEs from 12 tourist hotels in Yogyakarta. SmartPLS was used to test the hypotheses.

Findings – Transformational leadership positively influences thriving at work with sense of calling, acceptance to change, and FKS as mediators. In addition, sense of calling and acceptance to change sequentially enhance FKS, further strengthening thriving at work. This serial mediation shows how transformational leadership indirectly enhances thriving through multiple pathways.

Originality of the research – This research addresses gaps in previous studies by demonstrating how transformational leadership drives FLEs' thriving at work through fostering a sense of calling, acceptance to change, and friendship knowledge sharing in the context of tourist hotels.

Keywords Transformational leadership, Sense of calling, Acceptance to change, Friendship knowledge sharing, Thriving at work.

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INTRODUCTION

The success of tourist hotels heavily relies on frontline employees, who act as guests' first point of contact. FLEs play a pivotal role in shaping the overall guest experience by creating strong initial impressions and catering to the diverse preferences of international tourists. However, FLEs often face burnout due to long hours and demanding service conditions, such as handling high-maintenance guests or addressing service failures during peak seasons (Kosnin et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2024). Poor frontline service can trigger guest complaints that adversely affect hotel ratings and reputation (Boukis et al., 2024; Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen, 2025). In contrast, thriving FLEs are more resilient, maintaining high energy and providing consistent service even under stress (Chang et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2023). They handle guest complaints efficiently and personalize services. Thriving FLEs demonstrate exceptional service that significantly improve the overall guest experience (Xu et al., 2023). Therefore, it is crucial for hotel managers to promote FLEs' thriving to exceed guest expectations and foster long-term loyalty.

Thriving at work is defined as an individual's psychological state reflected by a sense of vitality and learning (Porath et al., 2012). Employees who thrive feel energized and are continually developing new skills. Previous research shows that thriving at work leads to higher creativity (Christensen-Salem et al., 2021), job satisfaction (Okros & Virgă, 2022), innovative work behavior (Usman et al., 2022), and job performance (Okros & Virgă, 2022). In the hotel service context, Wu et al. (2023) found that thriving employees perform change-oriented OCB, which enhances adaptability and supports service innovation. Similarly, Chang et al. (2024) concluded that thriving FLEs deliver higher service performance. The socially embedded model of thriving (SEMT) conceptualizes thriving as a process that occurs through social interactions rather than in isolation, meaning that vitality and learning occur through interactions with others (such as leaders or colleagues) at work. (Cullen et al., 2015; Goh et al., 2022). Therefore, creating a supportive work environment is critical to cultivating thriving employees and achieving organizational success.

Studies on leadership theory support the idea that leaders play a crucial role in shaping employee emotions, attitudes, and behavior (Nguyen et al., 2022). Transformational leaders motivate followers to achieve greater success by creating a shared vision and promoting collaboration (Kohan et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2022). In the hospitality industry, research has shown that transformational leadership positively impacts organizational outcomes, including work engagement (Aftab et al., 2023), organizational citizenship behavior (Barkat et al., 2024), employee creativity (Mahmoud et al., 2024), knowledge sharing (Nguyen, 2023), and pro-environmental behavior (Zheng et al., 2023).

This research aims to investigate the role of transformational leadership in promoting FLEs thriving at work. Scholars have argued that transformational leadership positively influences thriving at work (Hildenbrand et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2020).

However, limited empirical studies have scrutinized the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work (Shahid et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2020), particularly in the tourist hotel context. Furthermore, existing empirical evidence has yielded contradictory findings. For instance, Kleine et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of thriving at work and found that transformational leadership was only weakly associated with employee thriving. Niessen et al. (2017) and Parveen and Adeinat (2019) found that transformational leadership may have limited effectiveness in fostering thriving, particularly under stressful conditions. They argue that transformational leadership can be challenging and demanding regarding skill improvement, which may elevate job-related stress. In the hospitality industry, Khan et al. (2020) surveyed 374 employees across 12 tourist hotels in China. Surprisingly, their research found that thriving at work failed to mediate the link between transformational leadership and civic virtue behavior. Similarly, Rabiul et al. (2023) studied frontline employees in tourist hotels, revealing that servant leadership was more effective than transformational leadership in fostering psychological safety, supporting thriving at work, and enhancing employee engagement. Nguyen (2023) also reported that intellectual stimulation by transformational leaders had an insignificant impact on the FLEs due to the repetitive and monotonous nature of frontline work. Therefore, these inconsistent findings highlight the need for further investigation to clarify the link between transformational leadership and thriving at work (Shahid et al., 2021).

This study re-examines the link between transformational leadership and thriving at work by exploring the mediating roles of sense of calling, friendship-based knowledge sharing, and acceptance to change. Grounded in social exchange theory (SET), this research views transformational leadership as a reciprocal process where leaders provide psychological resources, including emotional support and knowledge sharing opportunities, which foster employee growth (Shafi et al., 2020). From the SET perspective, transformational leadership fosters a high-quality exchange relationship by providing psychological resources such as emotional support, empowerment, and growth opportunities, which employees reciprocate through increased engagement, adaptability, and knowledge sharing (Khan et al., 2020; Wulansari et al., 2021). Friendship knowledge sharing is employees' willingness to actively share knowledge driven by friendship values (Helmy, 2020). Sense of calling refers to a deep personal meaning and purpose at work (Duffy et al., 2018), while acceptance to change refers to the willingness to embrace new ideas and adapt to changing circumstances (Park & Park, 2021). In this context, both sense of calling and acceptance to change serve as valuable individual resources that enhance the social dynamics within the workplace, contributing to an environment that encourages employees to thrive (Hirschi et al., 2018; Kassa & Tsigu, 2022).

Indonesia's hospitality industry is recovering after a severe decline during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sastri et al., 2025). Eased travel restrictions and growing traveler confidence boosted international arrivals in January 2024 to 927,750, a 16.19% increase (Statistics Indonesia). Star-rated hotel occupancy rose to 46.72%, up 1.86 percentage points year-on-year. This growth challenges hotel employees to adapt to diverse international guest needs and enhance satisfaction and loyalty. This study highlights how transformational leadership fosters workplace thriving by cultivating a sense of calling, promoting acceptance to change, and encouraging friendship-based knowledge sharing, offering valuable insights for tourist hotel management.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Transformational Leadership and Thriving at Work

Leadership plays a crucial role in influencing employee motivation and performance (Stavrinoudis et al., 2022). Past studies suggest that understanding organizational behavior in the hospitality industry requires examining leadership styles (Sobaih et al., 2020; Tran, 2017). Bass (1990a) proposes that transformational and transactional leadership are the two common leadership styles. Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and developing employees and fostering creativity and change. On the other hand, transactional leadership emphasizes rewarding performance and maintaining standards through monitoring and corrective actions (Bass, 1990b). From a leadership perspective, transformational leaders inspire a shared vision, making employees feel that the organization's goals align with their personal interests, thus reducing conflicts of interest (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Transformational leadership has gained significant attention over the years as a leadership style linked to subordinates' moral values (Li et al., 2023) that suits for the complex and dynamic hospitality environment (Stavrinoudis et al., 2022). Grounded in social exchange theory (Lee & Chon, 2021), transformational leadership fosters reciprocal relationships between leaders and employees, where positive leadership behaviors encourage employees to reciprocate with enhanced motivation and engagement (Khan et al., 2020). Through this exchange, employees feel valued and supported, fostering a sense of purpose and commitment that contributes to their ability to thrive at work (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Leaders with a transformational style optimally transform an organizational members to achieve their goals and objectives (Chan, 2020). Transformational leadership focuses more on the leader-follower interaction that positively influences the thoughts and actions of followers (Stock et al., 2022). According to Bakker et al. (2023), transformational leaders empower their employees by providing autonomy, resources, and support to achieve their goals. Similarly, Teetzen et al. (2022) stated that working under a transformational leader increases motivation and engagement, improving employee well-being. Previous studies have investigated the impact of transformational leadership in the tourism and hospitality sectors. For instance, Sharif et al. (2024) studied transformational leadership involving 403 frontline hotel employees in Pakistan. The study revealed that transformational leadership positively influences knowledge sharing and voice behavior. Another study also claimed that frontline employees working under transformational leaders experience a sense of community and belonging, which positively enhances their well-being and development (Chen & Wu, 2020; Kim et al., 2023). Based on previous studies, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Transformational leadership is positively related to thriving at work.

1.2. Transformational Leadership and Sense of Calling

Sense of calling has evolved beyond religious contexts, turning attention to the internal drive, the pursuit of a professional purpose, and the quest for individual fulfillment (Ahn et al., 2017; Esteves et al., 2018). In the workplace, it reflects a deep passion for one's job, a belief in its significance, and alignment with individual values and goals (Duffy et al., 2018). Employees with a sense of calling view serving others as more than just a job, which strongly correlates with transformational leadership (Wu et al., 2023). Research highlights its positive impact, such as enhancing career satisfaction, knowledge sharing, and performance, while reducing turnover intention (Davras & Manap, 2024; Lee, 2016). Moreover, based on self-determination theory (SDT), individuals who can pursue their occupational calling experience greater work engagement and job satisfaction due to the fulfillment of their autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, while those with an unanswered calling face higher stress and withdrawal intentions (Gazica & Spector, 2015). In the hotel context, transformational leaders foster environments that promote trust, collaboration, and meaning (Sobaih et al., 2020). Similarly, Park & Hai (2024) found that transformational leaders in hotels promote a work environment that empowers employees to take ownership of their work and view their contribution as meaning. Based on past studies, this study proposes a hypothesis:

H2: Transformational leadership is positively related to sense of calling.

1.3. Transformational Leadership and Acceptance to Change

The success of organizational change depends on employees' readiness to adapt (Khaw et al., 2023). Acceptance of change is defined as the willingness to embrace change and believe in its benefits (Choi, 2011; Shaik et al., 2023). Key factors include alignment of values, job significance, and employee involvement (Idogawa et al., 2023). In tourist hotels, frontline acceptance is critical to maintaining service quality amid rapid changes in technology, policies, and guest expectations (Al-Kumaim et al., 2023; González-González et al., 2025). Transformational leaders inspire employees through vision, reduce resistance with support, and foster adaptability (Henricks et al., 2020; Jiatong et al., 2022). In the hotel industry, transformational leadership has been shown to be effective in increasing frontline adaptability, which is essential for maintaining service quality in a changing environment (Vargas-Sevalle et al., 2020). Thus, this study proposes a hypothesis:

H3: Transformational leadership is positively related to acceptance to change.

1.4. Transformational Leadership and Friendship Knowledge Sharing

Scholars have emphasized the importance of a benevolent atmosphere that supports knowledge sharing in organizations to increase vitality and continuous learning (Rodríguez-Aceves, 2022; Tsai et al., 2015). Friendship knowledge sharing refers to the willingness of individuals to share knowledge based on friendship values, such as voluntariness, informality, socio-emotional support, communal norms, and trust (Helmy, 2020). Individuals engaged in friendship knowledge sharing are sincerely share knowledge (Zhuang et al., 2020), without expecting anything in return and without fear of losing competitiveness (Sias et al., 2020). They also emphasize the value of togetherness and trust as key elements in knowledge-sharing activities (Sias & Gallagher, 2009). Transformational leaders play a crucial role in fostering a knowledge sharing culture by cultivating open communication and creating a secure environment for knowledge sharing (Kim & Park, 2020). This is achieved through the development of strong interpersonal relationships with their followers. By prioritizing personal connections and building friendships, transformational leaders create a sense of trust and mutual respect that encourages knowledge sharing (Curado & Vieira, 2019). Based on these insights, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Transformational leadership is positively related to friendship knowledge sharing.

1.5. Sense of Calling, Acceptance to Change, and FKS

Individuals who feel a sense of calling are motivated to share knowledge with friends, as they feel responsible for positively contributing to the organization. Lee (2016) stated that individuals with a strong sense of calling exhibit self-awareness and intrinsically motivated actions guided by internal values. This intrinsic motivation manifests as a drive to cultivate their abilities, engage in learning, and explore their potential (Chang et al., 2021). Moreover, a sense of calling provides intrinsic meaning in work, strengthening motivation for personal development and knowledge sharing, which aligns with self-determination theory (Lee, 2016). In addition, Yue et al. (2019) revealed that employees who accept change are more likely to engage in open communication. It makes individuals feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas. Individuals who accept change can collaborate effectively in teamwork (Alarifi et al., 2024). Thus, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H5: Sense of calling is positively related to friendship knowledge sharing.

H6: Acceptance to change is positively related to friendship knowledge sharing.

1.6. Sense of Calling, FKS, Acceptance to Change and Thriving at Work

Sense of calling significantly influences thriving at work by providing employees with a deep sense of purpose and intrinsic motivation, which encourages them to invest greater effort and commitment in their roles (Lee, 2016). This intrinsic motivation fosters thriving by aligning personal values with work tasks (Davras & Manap, 2024). Employees with a strong sense of calling are more likely to view challenges as opportunities for growth, enhancing their capacity to thrive even in high-pressure environments (Lee, 2016). Similarly, friendship knowledge sharing plays a critical role in promoting thriving at work. When employees willingly share knowledge driven by friendship values, it fosters a supportive and collaborative workplace environment (Helmy et al., 2023; Mai et al., 2023). This knowledge exchange enhances problem solving and innovation while strengthening interpersonal connections (Galeznik, 2021), which are essential for sustaining vitality and learning (Riaz et al., 2018). By cultivating a culture of mutual respect and trust, friendship knowledge sharing creates an environment where employees feel empowered and energized. In addition, acceptance to change positively impacts thriving at work by enhancing employees' adaptability and openness to new ideas (Choi, 2011). This willingness to embrace change fosters growth and resilience, enabling employees to thrive in dynamic environments and contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and innovation (Tayal et al., 2018). Based on prior studies, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

H7: Sense of calling is positively related to thriving at work.

H8: Friendship knowledge sharing is positively related to thriving at work.

H9: Acceptance to change is positively related to thriving at work.

1.7. Transformational Leadership, Sense of Calling, and Thriving at Work

Research has suggested that a sense of calling can mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work. Specifically, when transformational leaders fostering a sense of calling among their employees, employees are more likely to feel fulfilled and engaged in their work (Chang et al., 2018). This leadership style can increase levels of job satisfaction, well-being, and thriving at work (Lin et al., 2020). Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring and motivating employees to achieve their full potential while fostering a sense of calling within the organizational members. By promoting a culture of purpose and meaning, transformational leaders can help their employees feel fulfilled and engaged in their work, contributing to their overall sense of well-being and thriving at work (Hannah et al., 2020). Based on past studies, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H10: Sense of calling mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work

1.8. Transformational Leadership, Acceptance to Change, and Thriving at Work

Acceptance of change is the willingness of individuals to embrace and adapt to new circumstances to enhance performance (Cai et al., 2018). High levels of acceptance foster flexibility, innovation, and a propensity to take on new challenges and responsibilities (Alarifi et al., 2024). Research suggests that acceptance of change mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work (Tayal et al., 2018). When transformational leaders cultivate an environment that encourages change acceptance, employees feel empowered and motivated to tackle new challenges, leading to increased job engagement (Hulshof et al., 2020). In essence, this study predicts that transformational leadership can foster FLEs' acceptance to change, which in turn improves thriving at work. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H11: Acceptance to change mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work

1.9. Transformational Leadership, FKS, and Thriving at Work

This research tests friendship knowledge sharing as a mediating variable that connects transformational leadership and thriving at work. This study predicts that transformational leadership can nurture a work environment that encourages knowledge sharing with friendship values (Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). This, in turn, positively increases FLEs' thriving at work. Prior studies have highlighted that a transformational leader who facilitates a benevolent knowledge sharing environment tends to have more enthusiastic, productive, and competitive employees (Birasnav et al., 2019; Kim & Park, 2020). Transformational leaders can foster open communication and create an environment where employees feel secure sharing their knowledge (Yue et al., 2019). By building strong interpersonal relationships with their followers, transformational leaders establish personal connections that foster harmony and trust (Kammerhoff et al., 2019). Based on previous studies, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H12: Friendship knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work.

1.10. Serial Mediation of Sense of Calling, FKS, and Acceptance to Change.

This study has highlighted that sense of calling and acceptance to change play key roles in explaining how transformational leadership helps employees thrive at work. Employees who develop a sense of calling tend to share knowledge with colleagues based on trust, shared values, and a sense of community (Chang et al., 2018). Likewise, employees who embrace change are more open to sharing knowledge, as they recognize its benefits in adapting to new situations and improving their work (Hulshof et al., 2020). Building on these ideas, there is a reason to expect that when transformational leaders inspire employees' sense of calling and acceptance to change, those employees become more engaged in friendship and knowledge sharing, which ultimately enhances their ability to thrive. Therefore, this study proposes serial mediation hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 13: Sense of calling and friendship knowledge sharing serially mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work.

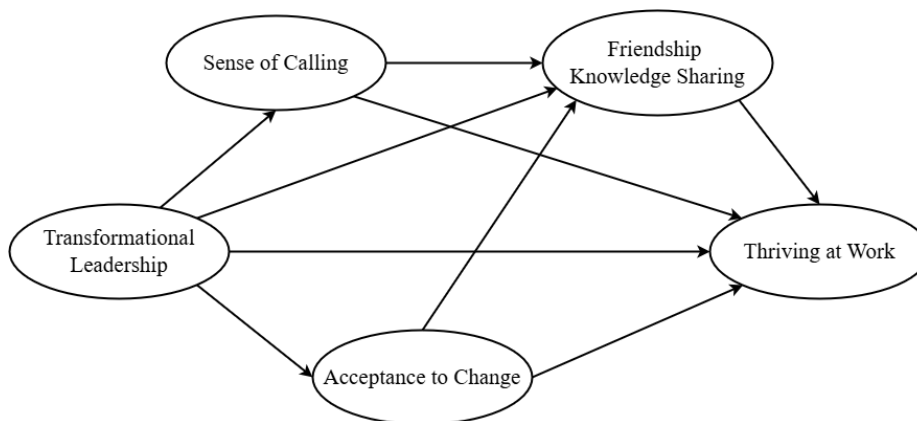
Hypothesis 14: Acceptance to change and friendship knowledge sharing serially mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work.

2. METHOD

2.1. Procedures and Participants

This study involved frontline employees from hotels in Yogyakarta, a province in Indonesia known for its rapid expansion in the creative and tourism sectors. The hotels selected are located near well-known tourist spots, such as Malioboro, Parangtritis, and Bantul. Participants were specifically those frontline employees who engage directly with guests, including positions at the front desk, handling room service, and serving food and beverages. Before initiating data collection, the research team sought approval from the HR managers at each hotel. Of the fifteen hotels invited, three declined to participate due to confidentiality policies. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to FLEs through the hotels' HR departments, and hotel managers coordinated the process. To ensure accuracy and clarity, the researchers briefed the managers on the questionnaire content beforehand. The data collection process lasted about three months, from January to March 2024. A total of 310 questionnaires were distributed. However, only 275 questionnaires were returned and properly completed, resulting in a response rate of 88.7%. The sample consisted of 67.27% male and 32.73% female, with 55.25% aged between 18 and 25 years. Educational backgrounds included 27.64% with high school diplomas, 49.09% with associate degrees, and 23.72% with bachelor's degrees. Experience levels varied: 8.36% had less than one year, 27.27% had 2 to 4 years, 27.64% had 5 to 7 years, and 36.73% had over 7 years. Most (76%) of the FLEs were permanent and full-time employees.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



2.2. Measurement

This research used a self-reported questionnaire with a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Transformational leadership was measured using a 7-item scale developed by Carless et al. (2000). The focus of this study is to investigate thriving at work as a joint experience that integrates vitality and learning dimensions (Goh et al., 2022; Guan & Frenkel, 2020; Walumbwa et al., 2018). This study used an integrated 11-item scale developed by Li & Liu (2023) to measure thriving at work. Sense of calling was measured using a 5-item scale modified by Lee (2016). Acceptance of change was measured using an 8-item pro-change behavior scale developed by Giangreco (2002). This study measured friendship knowledge sharing using 11-item scale adapted from Helmy (2020) and Casimir et al. (2012).

3. RESULT

3.1.Measurement Model Assessment (outer model)

This study used structural equation modeling with SmartPLS 4.0 tools to analyze the data. According to Table 1 and Figure 2, the measurement model test shows that the factor loadings of all variables exceed 0.7, supporting construct validity (Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha (CA) for all variables is exceed 0.6, and the composite reliability (CR) value for all variables exceed 0.7, indicating construct reliability (Helmy et al., 2020). Common method bias is a potential issue in self-reported measures and must be tested to ensure data validity. The results of the full collinearity test indicate that the VIF values for all variables range between 1.310 and 2.716, which are below the threshold of 3.3 (Kock, 2015). This confirms that common method bias is not a concern in this study.

Table. 1: **Measurement Model Evaluation Result**

No Items.	Items of Construct	Loading Factor
Transformational Leadership (TL) CA= 0.816; CR= 0.886; AVE= 0.684		
<i>Leader at hotels:</i>		
TL1	communicates a clear and positive vision of the future.	0.705
TL2	treats staff as individuals, supports and encourages their development.	0.720
TL3	gives encouragement and recognition to staff.	0.754
TL4	fosters trust, involvement and cooperation among organizational members.	0.727
TL5	encourages thinking about problems in new ways and questions assumptions.	0.725
TL6	is clear about his/her values and practices what he/she preaches.	0.752
TL7	instils pride and respect in others and inspires me by being highly competent.	0.775
Sense of Calling (SC) CA= 0.822; CR= 0.918; AVE= 0.591		
SC1	By doing my job, I serve the common good.	0.714
SC2	I am passionate about doing my job.	0.826
SC3	By doing my job, I can realize my full potential.	0.772
SC4	If I were financially secure, I would continue with my current line of work.	0.823
SC5	My work is one of the most important things in my life.	0.732
Thriving at Work (TR) CA= 0.836; CR= 0.817; AVE= 0.543		
TR1	I am active and energetic in my work.	0.783
TR2	I have plenty of energy to complete my work.	0.765
TR3	My energy can last the whole day.	0.760
TR4	I have enough energy to complete the day's work successfully.	0.775
TR5	When I go to work in the morning, I have enough energy to start a new day's work.	0.815
TR6	When I work, I am in a state of mental invigoration.	0.812
TR7	The work I do can bring me positive energy.	0.765
TR8	I am able to maintain an energetic state at work.	0.771
TR9	I can learn many new things at work.	0.768
TR10	The new things I learn at work are helpful to my life.	0.783
TR11	The new things I learn at work make my life more exciting.	0.765
Friendship Knowledge Sharing (FK) CA= 0.798; CR = 0.698; AVE= 0.515		
FK1	It is essential to share information with colleagues voluntarily.	0.763
FK2	I am open to voluntarily sharing work methods or approaches with colleagues.	0.875
FK3	I am willing to share experiences with colleagues voluntarily.	0.865
FK4	I enjoy sharing information in a casual (informal) atmosphere at work.	0.892

No Items.	Items of Construct	Loading Factor
FK5	I appreciate learning from colleagues in a casual (informal) atmosphere at work.	0.753
FK6	I value sharing experiences with colleagues in a casual (informal) atmosphere at work.	0.787
FK7	I take pleasure in informing colleagues about my work.	0.747
FK8	I find happiness in learning from the experiences of my colleagues.	0.766
FK9	I am interested in discussing methods or ways of working with colleagues.	0.745
FK10	It is important to share knowledge with colleagues honestly.	0.787
FK11	It is essential to share knowledge with colleagues openly.	0.795
Acceptance to Change (AC) CA= 0.917; CR= 0.904; AVE= 0.669		
AC1	I am doing much more of what is required from me to help this organization.	0.755
AC2	through the numerous changes.	0.740
AC3	I co-operate actively to realize the change.	0.807
AC4	I encourage actions to support the realization of the change.	0.749
AC5	I promote the change with enthusiasm.	0.738
AC6	I try to convince others of the opportunity of the change.	0.700
AC7	I sustain with vigour the change in public discussions.	0.798
AC8	I make considerable effort so that my colleagues understand the change.	0.717

Note: CA= Cronbach's Alpha, CR= Composite Reliability, AVE =Average Variance Extracted

Furthermore, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was employed to assess discriminant validity. The diagonal values in italics represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct, while the off-diagonal values represent the correlations between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity is achieved when the square root of AVE (italic values) is greater than the correlations between constructs. The AVE values, shown in italics and diagonally, indicate discriminant validity, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The Result of Mean, Standard Deviation and Discriminant Validity

Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation	TL	TR	AC	SC	FK
Transformational Leadership (TL)	3.421	0.545	<i>0.827</i>				
Thriving at Work (TR)	3.725	0.449	0.573	<i>0.788</i>			
Acceptance to Change (AC)	3.214	0.878	0.492	0.584	<i>0.818</i>		
Sense of Calling (SC)	3.116	0.923	0.587	0.509	0.728	<i>0.807</i>	
Friendship Knowledge Sharing (FK)	3.494	0.745	0.223	0.226	0.043	0.101	<i>0.698</i>

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) was also tested to support the discriminant validity assessment. The criterion requires HTMT values to be below 0.85 (conservative) or 0.90 (relaxed) for discriminant validity to be established (Henseler et al., 2009). The results (table 3) indicate that all HTMT values are below 0.85, confirming that there are no issues with discriminant validity.

Table 3: The Result of Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)

Constructs	TL	TR	AC	SC	FK
Transformational Leadership (TL)					
Thriving at Work (TR)	0.674				
Acceptance to Change (AC)	0.559	0.734			
Sense of Calling (SC)	0.754	0.626	0.828		
Friendship Knowledge Sharing (FK)	0.554	0.513	0.443	0.401	

3.2. Structural Model Assessment

Table 4 shows the report of the structural model analyses. The results demonstrated that transformational leadership significantly affects thriving at work ($\beta=0.484$; $p= 0.039$; $LL=0.027$; $UL=0.941$). Thus, H1 is supported. Transformational leadership also had a positive influence on a sense of calling ($\beta= 0.803$; $p= 0.000$; $LL=0.525$; $UL=1.081$), acceptance to change ($\beta= 0.313$; $p= 0.001$; $LL=0.139$, $UL=0.487$), and friendship knowledge sharing ($\beta=0.334$; $p= 0.030$, $LL=0.034$, $UL=0.634$), confirming that H2, H3, and H4 are supported. In addition, this study also examines the relationship between a sense of calling and acceptance of change on friendship knowledge sharing. The results indicated that a sense of calling ($\beta= 0.330$; $p= 0.001$, $LL=0.128$; $UL=0.532$) and acceptance to change ($\beta= 0.113$; $p= 0.028$; $LL=0.013$; $UL=0.213$), positively affects friendship knowledge sharing, supporting H5 and H6. Furthermore, the findings reveal that both sense of calling ($\beta= 0.952$; $p= 0.012$; $LL=0.213$; $UL=1.691$), friendship knowledge sharing ($\beta=0.402$; $p= 0.042$; $LL=0.016$; $UL=0.788$), and acceptance to change ($\beta= 0.328$; $p= 0.013$; $LL=0.071$; $UL=0.585$) significantly related to thriving at work, confirming H7, H8, H9.

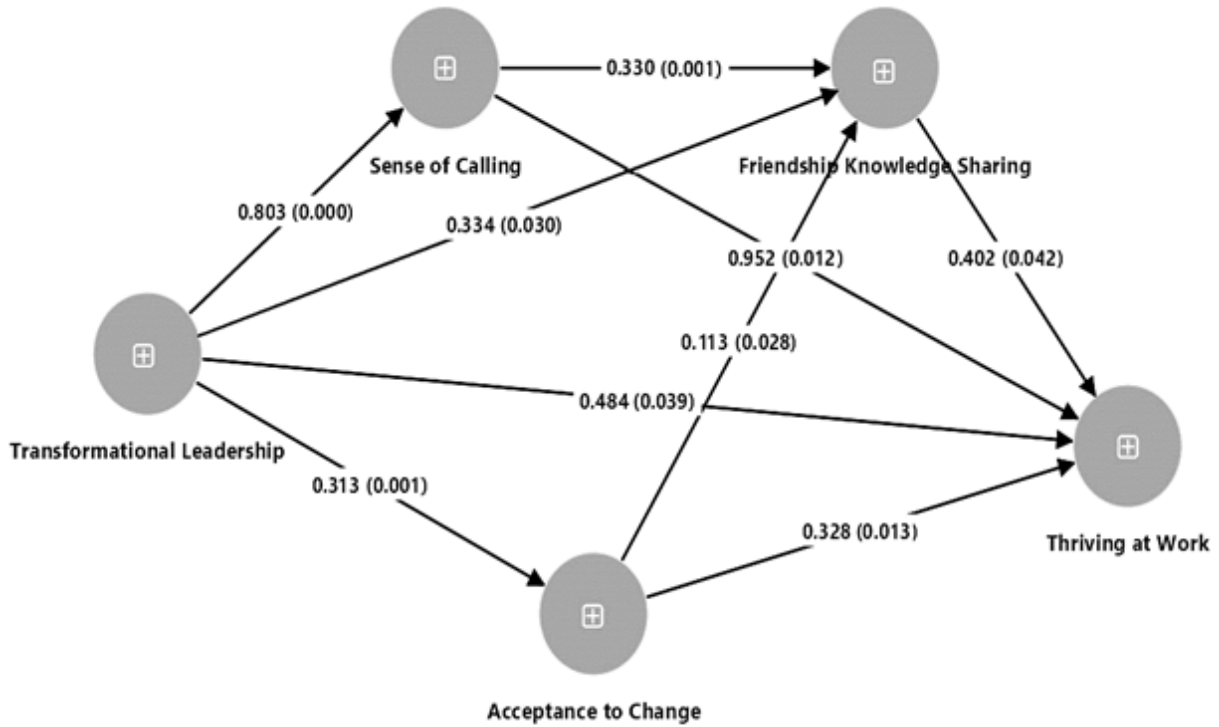
Table 4: The Result of Structural Model Assessment

Variables	β	Standard Deviation	t-stat	p-values	LL	UL	Decision
Direct Effect							
TL → TAW	0.484	0.233	2.077	0.039	0.027	0.941	H1: Supported
TL → SC	0.803	0.142	5.655	0.000	0.525	1.081	H2: Supported
TL → AC	0.313	0.089	3.517	0.001	0.139	0.487	H3: Supported
TL → FKS	0.334	0.153	2.183	0.030	0.034	0.634	H4: Supported
SC → FKS	0.330	0.103	3.203	0.001	0.128	0.532	H5: Supported
AC → FKS	0.113	0.051	2.216	0.028	0.013	0.213	H6: Supported
SC → TAW	0.952	0.377	2.526	0.012	0.213	1.691	H7: Supported
FKS → TAW	0.402	0.197	2.040	0.042	0.016	0.788	H8: Supported
AC → TAW	0.328	0.131	2.503	0.013	0.071	0.585	H9: Supported
Mediation Effect							
TL → SC → TAW	0.764	0.145	5.269	0.000	0.005	0.263	H10: Supported
TL → FKS → TAW	0.134	0.066	2.034	0.043	0.480	1,048	H11: Supported
TL → AC → TAW	0.103	0.048	2.139	0.009	0.009	0.197	H12: Supported
Serial Mediation Effect							
TL → SC → FKS → TAW	0.107	0.045	2.367	0.018	0.195	0.018	H13: Supported
TL → AC → FKS → TAW	0.015	0.005	2.500	0.013	0.003	0.027	H14: Supported

Note: TL= Transformational leadership; FKS= Friendship knowledge sharing; SC= Sense of Calling; AC= Acceptance to Change; TAW= Thriving at Work; β = Path coefficient; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit (95% Confidence Interval), relationship is considered significant if the 95% confidence interval (LL-UL) does not include zero.

In order to analyze the significance of the mediating effect, this study has performed a specific indirect effect analysis. The result indicates that sense of calling ($\beta= 0.764$; $p= 0.000$; $LL=0.005$; $UL= 0.263$), friendship knowledge sharing ($\beta= 0.134$; $p= 0.043$; $LL=0.480$; $UL=1,048$) and acceptance to change ($\beta= 0.103$ $p= 0.033$; $LL= 0.009$; $UL= 0.197$) have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between transformation leadership and thriving at work, thereby supporting H10, H11, and H12. The results of the analysis show that transformational leadership influences thriving at work through two significant serial mediation pathways. The first pathway involves sense of calling and friendship knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.107$, $p = 0.018$; $LL= 0.195$; $UL= 0.018$), while the second pathway involves acceptance to change and friendship knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.015$, $p = 0.013$; $LL=0.003$; $UL=0.027$). Both pathways are significant, confirming that H13 and H14 are supported.

Figure 2: Structural Model Evaluation Result



Furthermore, this study conducted a PLS-predict test to assess the model’s ability to predict out-of-sample data (Shmueli et al., 2019). The results showed that all Q^2 values for the key target construct (thriving at work) were positive (see Table 5). Additionally, the PLS-SEM model’s root mean square error (RMSE-PLS SEM) was lower than the linear model (RMSE-LM) for all indicators, resulting in negative Δ RMSE values. These findings confirm that the PLS-SEM model has a high predictive power (Damberg et al., 2022; Shmueli et al., 2019).

Table 5: PLS Predict Result

Indicators	Q^2_{predict}	RMSE _{PLS-SEM}	RMSE _{LM}	Δ RMSE
TR1	0.414	0,653	0,688	-0,035
TR2	0.475	0,707	0,709	-0,002
TR3	0.511	0,589	0,591	-0,002
TR4	0.586	0,517	0,524	-0,007
TR5	0.482	0,605	0,617	-0,012
TR6	0.393	0,650	0,656	-0,006
TR7	0.264	0,771	0,793	-0,022
TR8	0.397	0,801	0,836	-0,035
TR9	0.249	0,802	0,816	-0,014
TR10	0.274	0,786	0,816	-0,030
TR11	0.265	0,781	0,804	-0,023

Note: **RMSE**= Root mean square error; **LM**= Linier model; **TR**= Thriving at work.

In the final step, this research conducts a model comparison using the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and R^2 values to assess model fit and explanatory power (Hair et al., 2019). Table 6 shows that model 3 (serial mediation effect) is the most optimal, with the lowest BIC value (-101.785) among the competing models. Model 3 also displays the highest R^2 (0.629), ensuring an explanatory power of endogenous construct. Thus, the predictive validity of model 3 is confirmed and considered the most suitable model.

Table 6: **Model Comparison**

Model	Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)	R ²	Adjusted R2
Model 1 (Direct effect)	-73.669	0.482	0.478
Model 2 (Indirect effect)	- 96.766	0.617	0.608
Model 3 (Serial mediation)	-101.785	0.629	0.612

4. DISCUSSION

The present study aims to examine the connection between transformational leadership and FLEs thriving in Indonesian tourist hotels. This research also develops a serial mediation model that investigates the role of a sense of calling, friendship knowledge sharing, and acceptance of change as a mediating variable. Based on social exchange theory, this study explores how positive interactions between transformational leaders and employees contribute to their thriving at work (Khan et al., 2020). Social exchange theory helps explain how these reciprocal relationships promote motivation, collaboration, and personal development among employees (Chen & Wu, 2020).

First, this research reveals that transformational leadership positively influences thriving at work. These results suggest that transformational leaders can inspire FLEs by providing constructive feedback that fosters a culture of continuous learning. Frontline employees (FLEs) feel supported by transformational leaders who inspire and encourage their personal development. Leaders actively provide specific and relevant feedback on FLEs' performance, such as suggestions for improving customer service quality or handling guest complaints more effectively. This feedback is delivered in a supportive atmosphere, making employees feel valued and motivated to learn and grow. This aligns with previous studies by Sharif et al. (2024) and Chen & Wu (2020), which highlight the positive impact of transformational leadership on hotel employees in challenging work environments.

Second, this study demonstrates that transformational leadership enhances thriving at work through a sense of calling. Transformational leaders encourage employees to perceive their work as a meaningful calling. Employees feel inspired by their leaders, who help them recognize that the service they provide significantly influences guest experiences and, ultimately, the hotel's reputation. Employees with a strong sense of calling exhibit greater enthusiasm and higher levels of thriving at work. This result is consistent with the findings of Davras & Manap (2024), Sobaih et al. (2020), and Wu et al. (2023). They highlight the critical role of transformational leadership in enhancing personal fulfillment that promotes thriving at work.

Third, the results also found that friendship knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work. Transformational leaders foster open communication, which encourages knowledge sharing and collaboration among employees. Align to previous research, transformational leader promotes a supportive work environment (Kim & Park, 2020) and trust (Mai et al., 2023) that encourage benevolent knowledge sharing process. Friendship knowledge sharing not only improves the quality of service but also enhances the connection with the team and ultimately boosting their thriving at work (Helmy, 2022).

Fourth, Shaik et al. (2023) stated that in the fast-paced hotel service industry, leaders are critical in supporting employees to accept the changes. The present study found that transformational leaders foster FLEs acceptance of change, which in turn improves thriving at work. Transformational leaders who are clear about their values and lead by example (practicing what they preach) help FLEs align with organizational changes. Additionally, transformational leaders instill pride and respect in their staff by demonstrating competence and inspiring confidence. As a result, FLEs feel more competent and energized, improving their ability to adapt and tackle new challenges in delivering exceptional guest service.

Moreover, this study highlights a serial mediation effect, where sense of calling and acceptance to change sequentially enhance friendship knowledge sharing, which further strengthens thriving at work. Employees with a strong sense of calling feel intrinsically motivated to share their knowledge with peers, as they see their work as meaningful and valuable to the team's overall performance (Lee, 2016). As they internalize this sense of purpose, they also become more open to change, recognizing that adaptability is crucial in delivering excellent service. This increased acceptance of change, in turn, leads to more proactive knowledge sharing, fostering a collaborative work environment that ultimately enhances their ability to thrive. These findings align with prior studies (Lee, 2016; Sánchez-Prieto et al., 2019; Tayal et al., 2018), which emphasize the importance of personal meaning and adaptability in driving knowledge sharing behavior.

CONCLUSION

The study explores how transformational leadership influences FLEs' thriving in the hotel industry. Findings show that transformational leaders positively impact FLEs' thriving by enhancing sense of calling, promoting friendship knowledge sharing and improving acceptance to change. Moreover, the study reveals that sense of calling, friendship knowledge sharing, and acceptance to change mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and thriving at work. Specifically, the

results highlight a serial mediation effect, where sense of calling and acceptance to change sequentially enhance knowledge sharing, further strengthening employees' thriving at work. In conclusion, these findings underscore the pivotal role of transformational leadership in shaping an environment where employees feel a strong sense of purpose, adaptability, and collaboration, ultimately driving their ability to thrive in the hotel industry.

Implication

This empirical study offers both theoretical and practical insights. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on transformational leadership and thriving at work in the hotel industry by introducing a serial mediation model that clarifies the underlying mechanisms through which transformational leadership influences thriving. This study provides strong empirical support for social exchange theory by demonstrating that transformational leadership fosters a reciprocal relationship in which frontline employees develop a sense of calling, become more accepting of change, and engage in friendship knowledge sharing, ultimately enhancing thriving at work. Additionally, this study advances transformational leadership theory by highlighting its indirect influence on employees' psychological and social processes. It addresses inconsistencies in prior research by empirically validating the sequential pathways through which leadership fosters thriving, reinforcing its broader impact beyond direct interactions.

In practice, this finding reveals that transformational leadership can inspire and engage FLEs by clearly defining team goals, roles, and responsibilities. This approach helps employees find meaning in their work and become more receptive to the dynamic changes in the hotel industry. It also fosters a supportive and collegial work environment driven by friendship knowledge sharing. Therefore, hotel management should adopt transformational leadership by providing constructive feedback, such as specific tips for handling guest complaints, and by inspiring employees through discussions on their role in creating exceptional guest experiences. Recognition programs can strengthen employees' sense of calling, while mentoring sessions and experience-sharing forums encourage knowledge sharing among colleagues. To help employees adapt to change, leaders should offer clear communication and training before introducing new service systems. By implementing these strategies, hotels can enhance motivation, foster growth, and support FLEs in thriving at work.

Limitations and suggestion for future research

The findings of our research evidently have limitations in multiple aspects. First, the statistical analysis employed did not demonstrate the causal sequence. We recommend that future research either adopts a longitudinal design. Additionally, this study did not test respondent characteristics (such as age, tenure, and education level) as control variables, which may have affected the outcomes. Future studies could include these demographic factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the findings. Second, the cultural difference in social exchange relationships between Indonesia and Western countries. In Indonesia, employees focus on social roles and relationships, while in the West, they emphasize independence and aligning values. Further research could explore these dynamics in different cultural contexts.

Declaration of generative ai and AI-assisted technologies in the writing proces

In writing this manuscript, the authors have used ChatGPT, a generative AI tool, to assist in improving the readability and language of the text. All results generated by ChatGPT have been thoroughly reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy and completeness. The authors acknowledge that the use of this technology does not replace the role of the human author, and take full responsibility for the content of this manuscript.

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