International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management
United Kingdom ISSN 2348 0386 Vol. 14, Issue 10, Oct 2026

https://ijecm.co.uk/

EFFECT OF COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN KTDA-MANAGED TEA FACTORIES IN RIFT VALLEY KENYA

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Abstract

Cooperative leadership practices are increasingly viewed as important drivers of organisational culture in agricultural enterprises, yet empirical evidence from Kenyan tea factories remains limited. This study examined the effect of cooperative leadership on organisational culture in KTDA-managed tea factories in Kenya's Rift Valley region. Four dimensions were assessed: participatory decision-making, knowledge sharing systems, cross-departmental teams and conflict resolution training. Transformational Leadership Theory and Organisational Culture Theory guided the work. The study tested the null hypothesis that cooperative leadership has no significant effect on organisational culture. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used. Data were collected from 311 respondents across 18 factories through structured

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questionnaires and from 20 managers, heads of departments and supervisors through semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed with descriptive statistics and simple linear regression in SPSS 27. Qualitative data were analysed thematically in NVivo 14. Regression results showed that cooperative leadership had a significant positive effect on organisational culture ($B = 0.875$, $\beta = .659$, $p < .001$), explaining 43.4 percent of the variance ($R^2 = .434$). Qualitative findings indicated that culture is not uniform; subcultures exist across departments and shifts, and gaps between espoused and enacted values persist. The study concludes that cooperative leadership practices are positively associated with organisational culture in these factories. Management should strengthen genuine participation, reduce information hoarding and develop integrated leadership-culture programmes. The findings supply evidence on leadership-culture dynamics in smallholder cooperative settings and carry practical implications for organisational development.

Keywords: Cooperative leadership, organisational culture, tea factories, Kenya, participatory decision-making, knowledge sharing

INTRODUCTION

The tea industry accounts for approximately 4 per cent of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs over 600,000 smallholder farmers in Kenya (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). A significant number of factories operating in the Rift Valley region have been under the management of KTDA, which processes green leaf from these farmers. The factories are embedded in a complex web of stakeholders such as farmers, boards, managers, employees and regulators. Governance conflicts are prevalent and conflictual leadership relationships can lead to competing interests that can compromise long-term sustainability.

The culture of the organisation influences the way of thinking, relating and reacting of the people within these factories. Culture is a collective of values, beliefs, norms and practices which come to be accepted as a norm with time (Aryani et al., 2020). Culture is a pattern of basic assumptions that evolve as a group solves problems of external adaptation and internal integration, according to Schein (2010). In agricultural cooperatives, culture is the key that makes things happen.

Cooperative leadership is the intentional use of practices that foster participation, joint decision-making, teamwork and group problem-solving. These practices are manifested in tea factories through participatory decision-making, knowledge-sharing systems, cross-departmental teams and conflict resolution training. Unlike purely hierarchical models, they aim

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to involve members at various levels in issues that impact their work and the organisation's direction.

In transformational leadership theory, by consistently demonstrating values, norms and behavioural expectations, a leader can influence them (Bass, 1985). Over time, repeated actions of openness, participation and collaboration can become a part of the culture (Eaton, Bridgman & Cummings, 2024). However, few empirical studies have examined the effects of the type of cooperatives mentioned above in terms of their impact on the culture of smallholder tea factories in Kenya.

The governance structure of KTDA factories (farmer ownership via KTDA Holdings, elected factory boards, professional managers and shop-floor supervisors) affords a unique context in which such an analysis can be conducted. This study, therefore, aimed at finding out the impact of cooperative leadership on the culture of organisations in the Rift Valley managed by KTDA tea factories. Hypothesis (H_0): Cooperative leadership has no significant effect on organisational culture. The results provide further evidence of the relationship between leadership and culture within Cooperative Agriculture enterprises and provide practical guidance to managers and policymakers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study draws on Transformational Leadership Theory and Organisational Culture Theory.

Transformational Leadership Theory

The theory was developed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) to describe how leaders motivate followers to transcend their own interests in the pursuit of group objectives. Bass found idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration to be the four dimensions. Idealised influence is when leaders are credible role models. Motivational inspiration is about conveying purpose and vitality. Intellectual stimulation stimulates a person's thinking and challenges their assumptions. Individualised consideration is focused on the individual needs and capacities of individual members.

Cooperative leadership cannot be exactly equated to the transformational leadership concept, but the theory provides a helpful filter. Shared purpose is fostered by participatory decision-making, as the members have real influence on decisions that impact their work. Knowledge-sharing systems enable the sharing of knowledge and intellectual engagement. Gender-based collaborative teams introduce individuals to varied viewpoints and teamwork. Constructive engagement is developed through conflict resolution training.

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Leadership behaviour can influence culture over time. Further, as openness, participation and collaboration become customary, the members come to understand what acceptable and desirable behaviour is. Understandings become embedded within the organisation's norms. The theory has been criticised for placing too much emphasis on the role of individual leaders and underemphasising existing structures, power dynamics, and institutional barriers (Chandranathan, 2025). Norms of authority and trust are important factors that influence the success or failure of participatory mechanisms in tea factories. The study addresses the practices of leadership, not as isolated from the cultural context, but as engaged in and with it.

Organisational Culture Theory

Schein (2010) defined organisational culture as 'a pattern of basic assumptions that a group learns in response to the problems it faced in adapting to its external environment and in integrating with its internal environment. These assumptions are passed onto members as the standard perspective with which they ought to think, feel and perceive organisational problems. Schein identified three levels: artifacts (visible structures and behaviours), espoused values (stated principles) and basic assumptions (deeper, and often unexamined, beliefs).

Denison and Mishra (1995) devised an alternative model with four cultural traits: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. Involvement is participation, empowerment, teamwork and capability development. Consistency includes common values, coordination and integration. Adaptability is the ability to adjust to change, learn and satisfy stakeholder needs. Purpose, direction and goals are part of Mission.

Cooperative styles are similar to these leadership qualities. Building on participation: making use of participatory decision-making and interdisciplinary working groups. Consistency and adaptability can be achieved through knowledge sharing. Discussing priorities together can help to strengthen the mission. The culture theory also helps us to understand that change can be gradual and that the perception of culture may vary between groups within the same organisation (Calciolari & Prenestini, 2022). Measurement requires care.

Integration

Transformational Leadership Theory focuses on how Leadership Behaviours influence Values and Expectations. Organisational Culture Theory addresses the mechanisms by which these behaviours become part of the shared assumptions and cultural aspects of the organisation. They propose that cooperative leadership can impact culture in a number of ways: involvement increases with participation; consistency and adaptability are fostered through

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knowledge sharing; different departmental perspectives are gained through cross-departmental working; and trust is gained through conflict resolution. The alternative hypothesis was that cooperative leadership has a significant impact on organisational culture and for the study, qualitative data was used to analyse the relationship between cooperative leadership and the daily life of the factory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Enabling interaction, coordination and collective problem-solving have been considered the hallmarks of leadership that are related to positive organisational outcomes (Barasa et al., 2018). Transformational and directive styles in Kenyan SMEs were positively correlated with psychological capital and thus with resilience (Njaramba & Olukuru, 2025). Control systems are mechanisms that have been observed to be relevant to sustainable leadership (Baird et al., 2023). The bulk of the work, though, focuses on leadership as a general style of leadership rather than certain specific leadership behaviours like participatory decision-making, knowledge sharing, cross-departmental teams and conflict resolution training.

Participatory decision-making increases the information that is shared with the decision-makers, increases commitment and may uncover hidden vulnerabilities (Bell & Reed, 2022; Shafizadeh, 2024). Its worth is dependent on substantive participation. Paper-thin structures can be created with the real power at the top. The quality of participation takes on a practical aspect in tea factories since the interests of managers, workers, boards and farmers may not align.

Knowledge-sharing systems help to coordinate and learn. The openness of culture is as significant as formal platforms (Raziq et al., 2024). Collective capacity is reduced due to information remaining contained within departments or managerial levels (Curvey, 2025). Multi-departmental groups tackle the reality that most operational issues are multi-functional. Collaborating between units benefits joint problem definition and adaptive learning (Hingorani & Swami, 2025; Yang & Wang, 2023). Conflict resolution training helps develop relational skills to prevent internal conflicts from taking up time (Jenei et al., 2025). Training does not eliminate inequalities, but it is a tool that, if the culture is fair and open to communication, can be used in practice.

Empirical research on culture clearly demonstrates that the effectiveness of the culture follows a pattern. Cultures that are involved, flexible and value sharing are positively associated with performance (Hartnell et al., 2016). Fragmented cultures fail to perform as well as strong cultures that foster openness, trust and collaboration (Groysberg et al., 2018). For Kenyan tea factories, leadership competencies had a positive impact on performance only when they were

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matched with the cultural values that were enacted (Chikamai & Makhamara, 2021). Miroro et al. (2023) concluded that the leadership practices, communication patterns, and stakeholder relationships in agricultural cooperatives were predictors of the organisational culture.

Three gaps remain. First, there has been very little examination of specific cooperative practices taken together. Secondly, there is limited evidence from tea factories in Kenya, which are mostly smallholder. Third, mixed-methods designs that include statistical tests and a context explanation are rare. This research aims to fill in those gaps.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design collected quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, analysed them separately and integrated them at interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative strand tested the hypothesised relationship. The qualitative strand supplied contextual explanations of how the practices shape culture.

Population and Sampling

The study covered 18 KTDA-managed factories in the Rift Valley. The target population included 360 employees comprising top managers, heads of departments, and supervisors. A census was conducted of all eligible personnel. Purposive sampling selected 20 interview participants (four managers, eight heads of departments, eight supervisors) with direct experience of leadership practices and cultural dynamics.

Instruments

A structured questionnaire measured cooperative leadership (32 items across the four dimensions) and organisational culture (8 items adapted from the Denison Organisational Culture Survey) on five-point Likert scales. Semi-structured interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes explored how the practices operated in daily factory life. Interviews were recorded with consent.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through supervisor review. Construct validity was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis, while AVE and HTMT values supported convergent and discriminant validity. A pilot study conducted in two non-KTDA tea factories (n = 35) assessed the reliability of the cooperative leadership dimensions. Cronbach's alpha values for the four dimensions ranged from 0.794 to 0.927. The final instrument comprised 48 items.

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Analysis

Descriptive statistics, Kendall's W and simple linear regression were run in SPSS 27 after checks for normality, linearity, multicollinearity (VIF < 10) and homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan p = .176). Qualitative data followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic process in NVivo 14. Verbatim excerpts illustrate themes.

Ethics

Written informed consent covered the purpose, risks, benefits, voluntary participation and the right to withdraw. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Institutional ethics approval preceded fieldwork.

RESULTS

Response Rate and Sample Profile

Of the 360 questionnaires distributed, 311 were returned, yielding a response rate of 86.4%. Males constituted 55.9% of respondents, while females accounted for 41.2%. Most respondents (69.4%) were aged between 26 and 45 years. Undergraduate degree holders comprised 38.6% of the sample, while diploma holders constituted 35.4%. Supervisors represented 42.4% of respondents, heads of department 38.9%, and managers 18.6%. Respondents with six to fifteen years of work experience accounted for 55.0% of the sample. These characteristics provide a profile of the workforce involved in the management and operations of the tea factories.

Organisational Culture Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 *Responses to organisational culture statements*

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	Mean	SD
Authority and capacity to oversee one's own work	0.0	0.0	5.8	80.4	13.8	4.08	0.44
Flexibility in adapting to changing conditions	0.0	0.0	3.5	78.8	17.7	4.14	0.49
Culture encourages innovative ideas from all levels	0.0	0.0	4.8	78.1	17.0	4.12	0.49
Strong set of shared values guiding behaviour	0.0	0.0	4.2	73.6	22.2	4.18	0.54
Investment in employees' skills and career growth	0.0	0.0	5.5	79.7	14.8	4.09	0.51
Employees at all levels feel they have a voice	0.0	0.6	7.7	72.0	19.6	4.10	0.59

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Openness to new approaches to solve problems	0.0	0.0	14.5	63.3	22.2	4.08	0.60
Initiative in identifying and addressing challenges	0.3	0.3	14.5	61.7	23.2	4.07	0.64

The results in Table 1 revealed that the respondents rated culture items highly. The strongest endorsement went to shared values guiding employee behaviour (M = 4.18, SD = 0.54), followed by flexibility in adapting to changing conditions (M = 4.14, SD = 0.49) and encouragement of innovative ideas (M = 4.12, SD = 0.49). The overall mean was 4.11 (SD = 0.55). Kendall's W = 0.006 (χ^2 = 12.205, df = 7, p = .094) indicated no statistically significant consensus on ranking.

High means and low standard deviations indicate that respondents generally perceive a positive culture, especially regarding shared values and adaptability. Variation is limited, consistent with a degree of shared operational culture across the sampled factories. The ranking places shared values and flexibility at the top, while initiative in addressing challenges sits slightly lower yet still well above the scale midpoint.

Cooperative Leadership Descriptive Statistics

Participatory decision-making averaged 4.05 (SD = 0.49), with the highest item being communication of the rationale behind critical decisions (M = 4.22). Knowledge sharing systems averaged 4.18 (SD = 0.54), with documentation and accessibility of knowledge scoring highest (M = 4.24). Cross-departmental teams averaged 4.10 (SD = 0.51), with senior leadership support scoring highest (M = 4.19). Conflict resolution training averaged 4.10 (SD = 0.49), with valuing of conflict resolution skills scoring highest (M = 4.19).

Assumption Checks

Normal P-P plots showed residuals following the diagonal. Scatter plots indicated linear relationships. All VIF values were below 10. The Breusch-Pagan test ($\chi^2(1)$ = 1.83, p = .176) supported homoscedasticity. The data met the assumptions for simple linear regression.

Hypothesis Testing

The results of the linear regression of cooperative leadership on organisational culture are presented in Table 2.

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Table 2 *Linear regression of cooperative leadership on organisational culture*

Component	Value
R	0.659
R^2	0.434
Adjusted R^2	0.432
Std. Error	0.25033
F	237.181
df	1, 309
p	<.001
Constant B	0.513
Cooperative Leadership B	0.875
β	0.659
t	15.401
p	<.001

Simple linear regression tested the effect of cooperative leadership on organisational culture. The model produced R = 0.659, R^2 = 0.434 and adjusted R^2 = 0.432. ANOVA: F(1, 309) = 237.181, p < .001. Unstandardized coefficient B = 0.875 (SE = 0.057), standardized beta = .659, t = 15.401, p < .001. A one-unit increase in cooperative leadership is associated with a 0.875-unit increase in organisational culture. The null hypothesis is rejected.

Cooperative leadership accounts for 43.4 percent of the variance in organisational culture scores. The standardised beta of .659 and the highly significant t-statistic confirm a substantial positive association. The result supports the study objective that cooperative leadership has a significant effect on organisational culture in the sampled factories.

Qualitative Findings

Four themes emerged.

Participatory mechanisms

Formal forums for participation exist, yet final authority often remains with senior management.

Workers take part in decision-making through regular meetings. (HOD05)

We have a suggestion programme and team coaching. (M04)

If there's a safety risk, the manager decides. No time for meetings. (Supervisor)

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Factories appear to operate a hybrid model: routine operational decisions allow participation, while urgent or safety-critical decisions remain top-down. Power imbalances and capacity gaps continue to limit full participation (Mukeku et al., 2024).

Information sharing dynamics

Formal and informal channels exist, but access to strategic information remains uneven.

Some information gets stuck at the top. We don't always see the real financial numbers. (Supervisor)

Financial numbers are not shared openly. (S08)

We share operational updates, but budgets stay with finance. (M09)

Information asymmetry is not only a technical issue. Those who control information retain decision power. Some managers appear to curate information deliberately.

Collaboration patterns

Cross-departmental teams form for defined objectives, yet their success depends on active leadership and a non-punitive climate.

During leaf collection and manufacturing, cross-functional teams are utilised to improve leaf delivery and minimise production time. (HOD02)

Cross-departmental teams work well only if the leader pushes them. Otherwise, people talk and nothing happens. (M16)

Sometimes, different departments blame each other instead of solving the problem. The team becomes a blaming session. (HOD08)

Conflict management approaches

Most respondents preferred constructive, face-to-face resolution, yet training coverage is inconsistent across shifts.

Through negotiation and employee involvement. (HOD03)

Conflicts are addressed at the supervisor level within the oversight. We try to solve it before it goes higher. (M08)

In one factory, two supervisors reported that conflict resolution training never reached their shift. Coverage gaps create uneven capability.

Culture as a mechanism

Participants described how culture translates leadership into outcomes.

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When the culture is open, people share problems early, and we fix them before they grow. When it is closed, people hide issues until they become crises. (M16)

Transparency builds trust, and trust makes resilience possible. Without transparency, even good initiatives fail. (HOD10)

In our shift, the culture is good - we tell the supervisor about a machine problem immediately. In the next shift, they hide it to avoid extra work. That shift always has breakdowns. (S21)

Culture is not monolithic. Subcultures exist across departments and shifts, and gaps between espoused and enacted values persist.

DISCUSSION

The regression result ($\beta = .659$, $R^2 = .434$) indicates that the higher the score of the four cooperative practices among the factories, the higher the score of the organisational culture. This discovery is in line with Transformational Leadership Theory: shared expectations and norms are consistently shaped by the model of participation, openness and collaboration (Bass, 1985; Eaton et al., 2024). This is in line with Miroro et al. (2022), who determined that leadership practices and communication patterns were significant predictors of culture in Kenyan agricultural cooperatives, and Chikamai and Makhamara (2021), who showed that leadership competencies were critical when linked with the cultural values being enacted in the agricultural cooperatives.

High scores (>4.0) on all culture items suggest that, in general, shared values, adaptability and involvement are perceived positively. That picture is further detailed by the qualitative data. Culture is not homogeneous. There are differences in subcultures within departments and shifts. Some managers are still not sharing information, resulting in disconnects between what is said and what is done. One manager acknowledged that the culture is good in principle, but that information hoarding continues. The uneven enactment reality is underestimated by the survey scores.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative results enhances interpretation. Regression is used to model the overall relationship. The themes explain the mechanisms: authentic participation increases involvement, openness in information sharing facilitates consistency and trust, strong cross-departmental working fosters collaboration and maintaining consistency in conflict management safeguards relational capacity. Where these practices are lacking, so is cultural strength.

The results suggest three levers in practice. There's a need to extend participation beyond formal decision forums and into the earlier stages of decision formulation. The lowest-rated participative item was related to participation in decisions that impact everyday work. A

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structured and pre-decision consultation can increase actual influence. Second, information hoarding can only be tackled directly. Managers who demonstrate openness by disclosing the company's operational and financial information more broadly help bridge the gap between espoused values and enacted values. Third, leadership development initiatives must consider culture as a consequence of pervasive daily behaviour rather than as an independent policy area.

In theory, the study justifies the integration of transformational and cultural theory in the cooperative agricultural context. The cross-sectional design does not allow causal statements. Longitudinal studies of the co-evolution of practices and cultures would enhance inference. The use of multilevel modelling, taking account of clustering within factories, would also help to increase the accuracy of the estimate.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a positive relationship between cooperative leadership practices and organisational culture among the sampled KTDA factories. The factories that participate more in decision-making, are better at sharing information, working across departments, and resolving conflict have scored higher on reporting having a stronger culture with shared values, adaptability and employee involvement. The association is good ($R^2 = .434$) and statistically significant. The culture is not uniform. Subcultures are present across various departments and shifts, and inconsistencies between what is said and what is done persist, especially in information exchange.

Management should improve the extent of genuine participation by establishing formal pre-decision consultation mechanisms that allow employees at all levels to contribute before final decisions are made. This is particularly important for operational decisions that affect daily work, where the lowest-rated participation item was observed. The symmetry of information should be improved by requiring managers to routinely share financial and operational data with supervisors and department heads. Information hoarding was identified in the qualitative findings as a key barrier to cultural strength, and transparency at managerial levels can bridge the gap between espoused and enacted values.

Human resource programmes should enable managers to understand how their daily actions shape culture. Training content should focus on cooperative practices such as participatory decision-making, knowledge sharing, cross-departmental collaboration, and conflict resolution. Culture assessment should be incorporated into routine KTDA and factory board reviews, with specific indicators for shared values, adaptability, and employee involvement.

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At the policy level, KTDA should develop a network-wide framework for cooperative leadership and culture. This framework should include baseline standards for training coverage, communication protocols, and participation mechanisms. Best practices should be documented and shared across factories. Factory boards should monitor culture metrics regularly and use them to inform leadership development and organisational development initiatives. Future interventions should also address subcultural variations by targeting departments or shifts with weaker cultural alignment.

Longitudinal designs would be useful to analyse the temporal sequence, as would be multilevel designs to control for the clustering of factories, and quantitative tests of the mechanisms (trust, information norms, problem-solving routines) implied by the qualitative data. Further refinement of understanding the implications of leadership practices for cultural outcomes could be gained by attention to subcultural variation within factories.

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