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EFFECT OF COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP ON ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE IN KTDA-MANAGED TEA FACTORIES IN RIFT VALLEY KENYA

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Abstract

Organisational resilience matters for agricultural firms facing climate swings, price volatility and operational shocks. This study tested the effect of cooperative leadership on organisational resilience in KTDA-managed tea factories in Kenya's Rift Valley. Four practices were examined: participatory decision-making, knowledge-sharing systems, cross-departmental teams, and conflict-resolution training. Transformational Leadership Theory and Organisational Resilience Theory guided the work. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used. Structured questionnaires were distributed to 360 managers, heads of department, and supervisors, of which 311 were returned (86.4 percent response rate). Twenty semi-structured interviews supplied qualitative depth. Simple linear regression in SPSS 27 showed cooperative leadership

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predicted organisational resilience (B = 0.825, β = .621, p < .001) and explained 38.6 percent of the variance (R^2 = .386). Thematic analysis in NVivo 14 produced five linked themes: technical preparedness, social capital, financial discipline, stakeholder coordination and improvisation. Cooperative leadership is positively associated with resilience in these factories. Management should make cross-departmental teams routine for strategic work, deliver conflict-resolution training evenly across shifts and strengthen knowledge systems. The results provide evidence from a smallholder cooperative setting and point to practical steps to improve sustainability.
Keywords: Cooperative leadership, organisational resilience, tea factories, Kenya, cross-departmental teams, conflict resolution

INTRODUCTION

Organisations that operate under uncertainty must be able to predict disruptions, respond when they occur, and bounce back while maintaining essential functions (Duchek, 2020). Resilience is no longer just about 'bouncing back'. It contains learning, adaptation, and transformation as circumstances change.

The tea industry is facing climate change variability, which affects yield and quality, drives price fluctuations, increases production costs, and sometimes leads to conflicts over governance. These pressures directly affect the leaf-processing factories operated by KTDA, which smallholder owners control. Farmers hold assets within the cooperative framework of KTDA Holdings Limited, the manufacturer of the products. The factories are operated within a cooperative framework owned by the farmers under the company name KTDA Holdings Limited, which is the manufacturer of the products. Boards and professional managers/supervisors need to work together on a day-to-day basis and take responsibility to the owners. In such circumstances, the importance of sustaining production and maintaining farmer incomes in the face of shocks becomes critical.

One way to develop that ability is through cooperative leadership practices. Participatory decision-making brings more eyes and experience to address emerging problems. Knowledge-sharing systems rapidly transmit vital information between units. Teams are established across departments to eliminate silos and facilitate coordinated responses. Conflict resolution training ensures that focus isn't squandered on internal strife during times of greater external challenge. These practices can work together to tap into existing abilities and networks within the factory and farmers themselves.

Prior studies have linked leadership behaviours that promote interaction and collective problem-solving to higher resilience (Barasa et al., 2018). Leadership styles are also positively

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associated with resilience in Kenyan SMEs (Njaramba & Olukuru, 2025). Sustainable leadership relates to resilience through control mechanisms (Baird et al., 2023). Yet limited empirical work has examined the specific cooperative practices listed above inside Kenya's smallholder tea factories. The distinctive governance arrangement of farmer ownership, factory boards, managers and supervisors creates a setting that has received little direct attention.

This study, therefore, examined the effect of cooperative leadership on organisational resilience in KTDA-managed tea factories in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. The specific objective was to determine the effect of cooperative leadership on organisational resilience. The study hypothesised that cooperative leadership has no significant effect on organisational resilience. Findings add evidence on leadership-resilience links in agricultural cooperatives and offer concrete guidance for factory managers and KTDA policy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two theories support the study. Transformational Leadership theory (TLP) (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) emphasises bringing members of an organisation to focus beyond their own interests into shared objectives. Bass identified four dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Idealised influence occurs when leaders serve as role models and inspire trust. Inspirational motivation is the transmission of a clear direction and energising people to pursue it. Intellectual stimulation promotes alternative solutions to problems. Individualised consideration involves paying attention to the needs and capacities of individual members.

Cooperative leadership isn't the same as transformational leadership, but the theory provides a valuable tool. Involving people in decision-making exposes them to a variety of perspectives, fostering intellectual engagement. Knowledge-sharing systems facilitate collective learning. Cross-departmental teams establish the basis for coordination of action. Conflict resolution training is a component of building a relational foundation to help people collaborate in stressful situations. It's a theory that when people see these behaviours consistently modelled, it creates shared expectations about what the organisation should do when disruptions occur.

The theory may overestimate the influence of individual leaders and minimise structural and institutional limitations (Chandranathan, 2025). Existing norms of hierarchy, trust and authority are among those constraints in tea factories. Depending on the local culture of communication and decision rights, participatory mechanisms can succeed or fail at the hands of managers. Hence, this study considers leadership practices as interacting with context and not operating in isolation.

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Organisational Resilience Theory provides the second pillar. According to Sutcliffe and Vogus (2007), resilience is the ability to sustain an organisation during difficult times. They identified situation awareness, vulnerability management and adaptive capacity. According to Duchek (2020), resilience is a dynamic process, which has three successive stages: anticipation (identification and preparation for possible disruption), coping (organisation of resources and responses during the event), and adaptation (learning from the event and adapting practices after the event).

This type of framing is appropriate to the Rift Valley tea factories' operating environment. Climate variability, market fluctuations, machinery breakdowns, transport disruptions, stakeholder tensions, and financial pressures are among the challenges factories face. Resilience is not just the ability to get back to normal after a crisis. It involves being aware of the early indicators, maintaining key processes, adapting to changes, and absorbing lessons for next time.

Resilience is a social phenomenon as well. Technical plans only come to fruition when disruption happens, if there is good communication in terms of: who needs to know what and when, who is in charge of what, who is doing what, as well as good coordination in terms of: who does what and who does what next, and shared learning in terms of: what is learned from what? (Georgescu et al., 2024). A culture that encourages the sharing of information increases awareness of new risks. A teamwork-oriented culture leads to a coordinated response. An education-focused culture facilitates adaptation post-event. While contingency plans and backup systems are important, they are ineffective if the social processes that trigger them are weak.

The two theories suggest that cooperative leadership can impact resilience in some ways. Participatory processes have the potential to enhance the anticipation process by contributing additional perspectives to risk identification. The use of Knowledge systems can help to improve coping by ensuring that the right information is delivered to the right persons at the right time. Teams that span departments can coordinate activities more effectively when they minimise functional barriers. Collective action relies on relational capacity, which conflict-resolution skills can safeguard. The study tested the overall claim that cooperative leadership is positively associated with organisational resilience and used qualitative data to examine how the association operates in daily practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership behaviours that foster interaction and collective problem-solving appear consistently in reviews of organisational resilience (Barasa et al., 2018). Facilitative leadership sets the stage for cooperation among organisational actors in the face of change. In the Kenyan context, Njaramba and Olukuru (2025) found that both leadership styles (transformational and

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directive) were positively related to organisational resilience, with employees' psychological capital in between. Baird et al. (2023) found that sustainable leadership mediates the relationship between resilience and Australian middle managers' organisational control mechanisms. These studies show that leadership plays a role, but they focus on a general leadership style rather than on specific cooperative skills.

Resilience is based on the ability to learn, reconfigure resources, and preserve social capital (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). The most resilient organisations continuously learn from challenges and incorporate those lessons into their future responses. Wulandhari et al. (2022) revealed that social capital mechanisms, such as trust, reciprocity, and shared norms, also play an important role in fostering cooperative resilience, alongside physical capital. This is particularly important for tea factories because farmer relations, leaf supply, and factory coordination rely on social connections.

Participatory decision-making increases the information available to decision-makers, boosts commitment to the decisions made, and can uncover vulnerabilities not revealed by hierarchical processes (Bell & Reed, 2022; Shafizadeh, 2024). It will be effective depending on the "substantiveness" of the participation. Power differences can be significant, such that structures can be paper tigers when stakeholders do not have real influence over them. The intentions of workers, boards and smallholder farmers, and tea factory managers are not necessarily aligned, and the level of participation is indeed a practical matter in tea factories.

Knowledge-sharing systems are useful for a quick interpretation of changing conditions. Physical venues can be as important as cultural openness to exchange (Raziq et al., 2024). If information is restricted within departments or at managerial levels, then there is a delay in response. Limited employee engagement and poor communication have been shown to reduce knowledge sharing, which, in turn, negatively impacts the capacity of Kenyan healthcare organisations to respond to disruption (Curvey, 2025). The same scenarios can happen in tea factories if supervisors don't have timely access to operational or financial data.

Cross-departmental teams address the challenge of most disruptions spanning functional teams. The problem of leaf intake can impact processing, packing, finances, and farmer payments, in that order. People from different units work together, enhancing interaction, joint problem definition and adaptive learning (Hingorani & Swami, 2025; Yang & Wang, 2023). The exchange of knowledge across functional areas also provides an opportunity for diverse knowledge sets to come together, which in turn can enhance risk assessment and solution design.

Conflict resolution training is about developing relational skills that facilitate coordinated action when stressed. Unresolved conflict consumes energy that could be used for crisis

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response (Jenei et al., 2025). Whilst training cannot solve structural inequalities or competing interests, it can be a good lever in the right hands and in an environment where the wider culture values fairness and open communication. If coverage is inconsistent from shift to shift or department to department, its effectiveness is diminished.

There are three clear gaps in the literature. First of all, most studies focus on leadership in general rather than on co-operative leadership behaviour, including participation, knowledge sharing, cross-departmental teams, and conflict resolution training. Second, little research examines these practices in smallholder tea factories in Kenya. Third, the use of multiple design methods, combining statistical tests with contextual explanations, remains relatively rare. This research aims to fill those gaps and test the overall effect of cooperative leadership on organisational resilience by means of the mechanisms (qualitative accounts).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design collected quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, analysed them separately and integrated them at the interpretation stage (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative strand tested the hypothesised relationship between cooperative leadership and organisational resilience. The qualitative strand supplied contextual explanations of how the practices operated during actual disruptions.

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. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling selected 20 participants: 4 managers, 8 department heads, and 8 supervisors. Participants were selected based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in matters related to cooperative leadership and organisational resilience within their factories.

Instruments

A structured questionnaire was developed using validated scales from earlier studies. Cooperative leadership was measured using 32 items across four dimensions (8 items each for participatory decision-making, knowledge-sharing systems, cross-departmental teams, and conflict-resolution training). Organisational resilience was measured with 8 items adapted from established resilience scales. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

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Semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide that explored the interplay between cooperative leadership practices, organisational processes and responses to disruption. Interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes and were audio-recorded with participant consent.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity rested on expert review by academic supervisors. Construct validity was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis. Convergent and discriminant validity were examined through factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted values (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was further checked with the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio; values below 0.85 confirmed that the constructs were distinct.

A pilot study was conducted in two non-KTDA tea factories in Nandi County. Of the 40 participants invited, 35 completed the questionnaire. Reliability assessment of the original 59-item instrument yielded Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.794 to 0.927 across the four cooperative leadership dimensions, and minor revisions were made before the main survey.

Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages) were computed. Mean ranks were examined with Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance. Preliminary tests for linear regression assumptions covered normality (Normal P-P plots), linearity (scatter plots), multicollinearity (Variance Inflation Factor) and homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan test). Simple linear regression tested the hypothesis that cooperative leadership has no significant effect on organisational resilience. Composite scores were formed as the mean of items for each construct. Model summaries, ANOVA results and regression coefficients were reported.

Qualitative data were analysed thematically in NVivo version 14 following the six-phase procedure of Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Verbatim excerpts illustrate the themes and supply context for the quantitative findings.

Ethics

The research conformed to ethical guidelines governing the use of human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents through written consent forms that explained the research purpose, data uses, and the risks and benefits of participation. Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time and of the measures taken to

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ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was strictly voluntary. The institutional ethics committee reviewed the research instruments and protocols before field deployment.

RESULTS

Response Rate and Sample Profile

Of the 360 questionnaires distributed, 311 were returned, yielding a response rate of 86.4%. Before analysis, the data were screened for missing values and outliers, and measures of central tendency were computed. No missing values were identified in the returned questionnaires. Outliers were assessed using boxplots and standardised residuals, and no influential outliers were detected. Means and standard deviations were computed for all items. Most respondents were male (55.9%), aged 26-45 years (69.4%), held undergraduate degrees (38.6%) or diplomas (35.4%), and had 6-15 years of work experience (55.0%). Supervisors, heads of department, and managers accounted for 42.4%, 38.9%, and 18.6% of the sample, respectively. These characteristics provide an overview of the respondent profile.

Organisational Resilience Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 *Responses to organisational resilience statements*

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	Mean	SD
Factory adapts operations to unexpected changes	0.0	0.0	0.0	90.4	9.6	4.09	0.42
Bounces back from disruptions quickly	0.0	0.0	4.5	81.0	14.5	4.10	0.45
Proactive risk identification and mitigation	0.0	0.0	4.8	80.4	14.8	4.10	0.45
Employees empowered for business continuity	0.0	0.0	3.9	82.6	13.5	4.10	0.53
Mobilises resources for unexpected challenges	0.0	0.3	5.8	78.5	15.4	4.09	0.48
Clear contingency plans for crises	0.0	0.0	8.0	66.2	25.8	4.18	0.56
Learns from past disruptions	0.0	0.0	6.8	70.4	22.8	4.16	0.57
Systematically learns from past challenges	0.0	0.0	5.5	66.2	28.3	4.23	0.54

Respondents rated resilience items highly. The strongest endorsement went to systematic learning from past challenges (M = 4.23, SD = 0.54), followed by clear contingency plans (M = 4.18, SD = 0.56) and learning from past disruptions (M = 4.16, SD = 0.57). The overall mean was 4.13 (SD = 0.50). The low standard deviation indicates that perceptions clustered tightly around the mean.

Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance was 0.017 ($\chi^2 = 37.374$, df = 7, $p < .001$). The coefficient is statistically significant yet small, indicating weak consensus on the relative ranking of the individual statements.

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High means and low standard deviations show that respondents generally perceive their factories as resilient, especially in learning and planning. Variation is limited, which is consistent with a shared operational culture across the sampled factories. The ranking places systematic learning and contingency planning at the top, while resource mobilisation and operational adaptation sit slightly lower yet still well above the scale midpoint.

Preliminary Assumption Checks

Normality was assessed with Normal P-P plots. Residuals closely followed the diagonal line. Linearity was assessed using scatter plots of standardised residuals versus standardised predicted values; the residuals scattered randomly around the zero line. Multicollinearity was assessed with the Variance Inflation Factor. All VIF values were below 10 (cooperative leadership VIF = 1.77). Heteroscedasticity was tested with the Breusch-Pagan procedure ($\chi^2(1) = 1.83$, $p = .176$). The null hypothesis of homoscedasticity could not be rejected. The data, therefore, met the assumptions required for simple linear regression.

Hypothesis Testing

Simple linear regression was applied to test the effect of cooperative leadership on organisational resilience. Table 2 presents the results. Linear regression of cooperative leadership on organisational resilience

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

Component	Value
R	0.621
R^2	0.386
Adjusted R^2	0.384
Std. Error	0.26080
F	194.393
Df	1, 309
P	<.001
Constant B	0.741
Cooperative Leadership B	0.825
B	0.621
T	13.942
P	<.001

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The model produced R = 0.621, R^2 = 0.386 and adjusted R^2 = 0.384. The ANOVA result was F(1, 309) = 194.393, p < .001. The unstandardized coefficient for cooperative leadership was B = 0.825 (SE = 0.059), standardized beta = .621, t = 13.942, p < .001. A one-unit increase in cooperative leadership is associated with a 0.825-unit increase in organisational resilience. The null hypothesis is rejected.

Cooperative leadership accounts for 38.6 percent of the variance in resilience scores. The standardised beta of .621 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 resilience in the sampled factories.

Qualitative Findings

Five interconnected themes emerged from the interviews.

Technical preparedness

Respondents repeatedly described preventive maintenance, standby generators and written contingency plans as essential for keeping operations running.

The factory has a contingency plan in place to quickly respond to unexpected changes or disruptions. (HOD02)

We have standby generators and alternative suppliers for critical inputs. (M08)

These accounts align with the resilience literature, which treats situation awareness and the management of key vulnerabilities as core capabilities (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2007).

Social capital

Teamwork and pre-existing relationships proved decisive under pressure. One manager described how a pre-prepared list of retired drivers allowed the factory to restore transport capacity within two days when COVID-19 removed half the regular drivers.

Teamwork and good communication are what save us when things go wrong. (HOD11)

When COVID hit, we lost half our transport drivers. But we already had a backup list of retired drivers. We called them in within two days. (production manager)

Herbane (2019) noted that organisational resilience in agricultural settings extends beyond operational capabilities to stakeholder commitment and social cohesion. The interview data illustrate that point directly.

Financial discipline

Tight cost control buffered the factories against market drops.

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Cost control at every stage, quality is the focus to defend the price. Even when the market drops, we survive because we keep costs low. (M21)

Respondents treated cost discipline as a standing capability rather than a crisis response. The practice kept margins viable when external prices fell.

Stakeholder coordination

Monthly forums that included farmer representatives kept leaf supply and pricing aligned. *We have monthly board meetings where farmers' representatives and factory management both have a seat. We align on leaf prices and delivery schedules.* (HOD10)

These meetings provided a regular channel for joint problem-solving and reduced the risk of supply disruptions arising from misaligned expectations.

Improvisation

When formal plans fell short, workers adapted on the spot. Several respondents described modifying available parts when the exact spare was unavailable.

We don't always have the right spare part. Sometimes we modify a different part to fit. It's not perfect, but it works. (S18)

Formal contingency plans do not capture this improvisational capacity, yet appear critical in practice. It rests on local knowledge, technical skill and a willingness to act with imperfect resources.

DISCUSSION

This regression result ($\beta = .621$; $R^2 = .386$) shows that a higher score on the factories' cooperative practices is associated with a higher score on resilience. This finding is consistent with Transformational Leadership Theory, which suggests that sharing expectations for coordinated action is a result of consistent modelling of participation, openness and collaboration (Bass, 1985). This aligns with previous research conducted in Kenya and globally, which has also demonstrated a relationship between leadership styles and resilience (Baird et al., 2023; Njaramba & Olukuru, 2025; Waidyaratne, 2022).

Respondents who score descriptively above 4.0 on all the resilience items are already seeing their factories as fairly resilient, particularly in learning and planning for contingencies. Those qualitative themes further flesh out that picture. Material base is provided by technical readiness and financial discipline. Plans survive if they have social capital and are prepared to be flexible and go with the flow. Improvisation is not the subject of the survey items very often.

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The data collected in the interview is an ability that formal resilience frameworks do not usually capture.

The quantitative and qualitative results complement each other, enhancing the interpretation. The regression provides a general association. The themes illustrate the ways in which the association functions: by improving anticipation through participation and knowledge sharing, by improving coping through cross-departmental coordination and conflict management, and by improving adaptation through formal learning and improvisation on the spot.

In practice, these findings suggest three levers for action. Ineffective cross-departmental teams are not good for tackling longer-term challenges like climate adaptation and market diversification. Conflict resolution training should be consistent across shifts and departments. Inequality in delivery results in gaps in capability that only become clear when the pressure is applied. Knowledge systems that share, with supervisors and heads of department, financial and operational data limit information asymmetry and facilitate early collective reaction.

From a theoretical point of view, the study contributes to the possible integration of models of transformational leadership and the ability of resilience in agricultural cooperation. The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal claims. Further detailed follow-up of individual episodes of disruption would help to infer the direction of the relationship and the progression of resilience over time.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study, therefore, indicates that the cooperative leadership practices have a positive correlation with organisational resilience for the sample factories of KTDA. Fertilities that report high levels of participatory decision-making, knowledge exchange, cross-departmental collaboration and conflict resolution training experience higher levels of resilience. The association is not only substantial ($R^2 = .386$) but also statistically strong. Resilience is a technical and social concept. Plans for contingencies, backup systems and cost discipline count. As much as anything else, it is the interpersonal skills, communication patterns and improvisation that enable others to take action when plans don't go as planned.

Management should create a cross-departmental team for both strategic and operational activities in the institution. Standing teams can discuss climate adaptation, technology uptake and market diversification as opposed to only after disruption. All shifts and departments should be taught conflict-resolution skills on a regular basis. As the coverage is uneven, there are pockets of capacity and there are pockets of vulnerability. Financial and operational data should

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be available to supervisors and department heads to enable more people to be involved in cost control and problem-solving.

These practices can be promoted by policy by KTDA and factory boards. A baseline level of training in conflict resolution and documented factory-wide contingency plans would increase the network's overall capability. Further strengthening the system would be achieved if compliance were monitored and "best practices" shared among factories.

Further studies are needed to unpack the four leadership practices into their respective contributions. The study of factories that follow them on a longitudinal basis would help determine how they "get better over time." Current survey instruments would largely fail to capture this aspect of improvisational ability, which is what would be achieved with measures of improvisational capability. Research into power and information control would shed light on why knowledge can be limited and the impact of limited knowledge on resilience.

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