

The Impact of Team Leadership on Construction Project Performance

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Article History

Received: 06.08.2026

Accepted: 30.09.2026

Published: 08.10.2026

Abstract: Team leadership influences construction performance by shaping how project participants interpret priorities, coordinate work, resolve disagreement and respond to emerging risks. Technical plans and contractual controls remain essential, but their implementation depends on decisions made across temporary teams and organisational boundaries. This paper presents a critical narrative review of leadership and project-management literature, supported by a proposed framework for construction practice. It examines transformational, transactional, participative and shared leadership, connecting observable behaviours to communication, trust, accountability, learning and adaptation. The analysis treats project performance as multidimensional, encompassing cost, schedule, quality, safety and stakeholder outcomes. Selected construction studies support relationships between leadership and project success, while broader project research helps explain possible team mechanisms. However, survey-based associations and statistical mediation do not establish the size of a causal leadership effect. A performance-monitoring framework is therefore proposed to connect leadership interventions with independently recorded project outcomes. The paper concludes that effective team leadership requires both supportive relationships and disciplined delivery controls, adjusted to project phase, task uncertainty and decision authority. Future longitudinal research should test these relationships across comparable construction projects and distinguish leadership effects from resources, procurement arrangements and external disruption.

Keywords: Team Leadership, Construction Project Performance, Teamwork, Transformational Leadership, Project Coordination, Safety, Project Success.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Construction projects combine specialised work under changing physical and organisational conditions. Designers, contractors, suppliers and client representatives frequently depend on information controlled by other parties. A drawing clarification can determine whether a work area becomes available, while a delayed inspection can affect several subsequent activities. Leadership matters because these interfaces require people to make commitments, communicate constraints and

take responsibility for decisions that extend beyond their immediate task.

Project performance is often evaluated through cost, time and quality. These measures remain necessary, yet an apparently successful handover can conceal unresolved defects, unsafe work practices or poor operational readiness. A broader evaluation considers worker safety, stakeholder acceptance and the ability to respond to change. This makes leadership assessment more demanding: a manager who accelerates visible

Citation: Zoboun, H. (2026). The Impact of Team Leadership on Construction Project Performance; *Glob Acad J Econ Buss*, 8(5), 1620-1627. <https://doi.org/10.36348/gajeb.2026.v08i05.049>

progress through excessive pressure may improve one indicator while worsening another.

Team leadership is defined here as the process of establishing direction, coordinating contributions and enabling responsible collective action within and across project teams. It includes the formal authority of project and site managers, as well as influence exercised by supervisors and technical specialists. Leadership differs analytically from administrative control, although the two overlap in practice. Preparing a programme is a management activity; securing realistic commitments and resolving competing priorities are leadership activities that determine whether the programme can guide delivery.

The central research problem is therefore not simply whether leadership matters, but how its influence becomes visible in construction outcomes. Broad statements about motivation offer limited guidance when the immediate problem is an unresolved design interface or repeated inspection failure. This paper connects leadership behaviours to identifiable team processes and proposes measures that can test whether those processes improve project performance.

2 AIM OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim is to critically examine how team leadership can influence construction project performance and to develop a practical framework for evaluating that influence.

The objectives are to distinguish leadership approaches relevant to construction; identify the team processes linking leadership to performance; assess the limitations of the available evidence; develop a balanced set of performance indicators; and propose implementation and research priorities for construction organisations.

The review addresses three questions. Which leadership behaviours are most relevant to coordination and delivery in construction teams? Through what mechanisms might these behaviours affect cost, schedule, quality and safety? How can organisations evaluate leadership interventions without attributing every project outcome to the project manager?

3 REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a selective critical narrative review rather than a systematic review or an empirical field study. Publicly accessible publisher pages, article abstracts, available full texts and university research records were consulted on 21

September 2026. Targeted searches addressed construction leadership, project success, teamwork, shared leadership, team resilience and performance measurement. Reference lists helped identify foundational concepts and related project studies. No comprehensive subscription-database search, exhaustive screening count or pooled statistical analysis is claimed.

Sources were selected for their relevance to leadership behaviours, team mechanisms, construction delivery or interpretation of performance evidence. Construction-specific research received priority when discussing industry outcomes. Research from other project settings was retained where it explained a transferable mechanism, such as team-building or psychological empowerment, but was not treated as direct proof of construction effects. Foundational work supports the treatment of psychological safety, leadership measurement and survey bias. The reference list contains twenty-five selected publications.

The synthesis distinguishes reported associations, theoretical explanations and the paper's own proposed applications. Accessible information on research design and sector was used to assess interpretation, particularly whether leadership and success were rated by the same respondents. Detailed effect sizes were not combined because measures and contexts differ. Tables and figures are original conceptual syntheses; they contain neither invented field results nor claimed experimental effects. The review's selective coverage and uneven full-text availability limit its completeness.

4 Leadership Approaches in Construction Teams

4.1 Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Transformational leadership concerns shared purpose, encouragement, development and reconsideration of established assumptions. Construction applications can include explaining why an interface matters to the overall project and inviting workable alternatives when the original sequence becomes impractical. Its proposed value lies partly in mobilising knowledge held by different team members. An inspirational message alone does not resolve a missing approval or a resource shortage; it must be connected to decisions and support.

Transactional leadership places greater emphasis on clear expectations, monitoring and the consequences of meeting or missing commitments. This approach can support inspection readiness, document control and compliance with agreed methods. However, narrowly designed rewards may encourage teams to optimise measured output while

concealing unfinished work. The analytical distinction between the two approaches should not imply that a project must select only one. Shared purpose and consistent accountability can operate together.

4.2 Participation and Shared Leadership

Participative leadership involves seeking relevant input before a decision, while shared leadership allows influence to move between members according to expertise. A commissioning specialist may lead readiness discussions even when a construction manager retains overall accountability. The practical advantage is access to

information that a single formal leader cannot possess. The corresponding risk is ambiguity about who can approve changes or commit resources.

Shared leadership therefore requires explicit boundaries. Consultation should identify the decision owner, required contributors and escalation route. Participation is useful when the problem benefits from multiple perspectives, but urgent site control may require immediate direction by a competent authorised person. Delayed decisions cannot be justified merely by describing the process as collaborative. Table 1 summarises the relevant choices and their limits.

Table 1: Leadership approaches and their construction applications

Leadership approach	Useful construction application	Main limitation
Transformational	Shared goals, development and improvement proposals	Inspiration without resources or follow-through
Transactional	Clear commitments, inspection criteria and monitoring	Narrow targets may reward incomplete output
Participative	Cross-trade input on interfaces and work sequencing	Consultation can delay time-sensitive decisions
Shared	Technical specialists lead within their expertise	Unclear decision rights can dilute accountability

4.3 Leadership as a Contextual Capability

Leadership requirements change between design development, procurement, construction and handover. Early coordination may require open exploration of alternatives, whereas a critical inspection requires clarity about acceptance criteria and evidence. A leader must recognise both the task and the team's readiness. Extensive delegation to an inexperienced team can create uncertainty; unnecessary intervention in an experienced team can slow decisions and weaken ownership.

Project-manager competency research also cautions against treating one profile as universally optimal. In practice, leadership capability includes recognising when a problem exceeds personal expertise. Access to a strong technical team, realistic budgets and timely client decisions changes what leadership can achieve. These conditions should be recorded in performance evaluations rather than left as invisible explanations for success or failure.

5 Mechanisms Linking Leadership and Performance

5.1 Coordination and Decision Clarity

Leadership can affect schedule reliability by improving the quality of coordination before work starts. A useful coordination meeting confirms dependencies, identifies unresolved constraints and assigns a person with authority to address each issue. The relevant output is an actionable decision or commitment, not the number of meetings held.

Where responsibility remains unclear, information may circulate without producing a change at the workplace.

This mechanism can be examined through the age of unresolved requests, the completeness of work packages and the proportion of commitments completed as agreed. These measures are closer to leadership action than final completion dates, which also depend on design changes and external events. Even so, rapid decisions are not necessarily good decisions. Response time must be considered alongside correctness, approval status and subsequent rework.

5.2 Trust and Psychological Safety

Trust influences whether participants share information before a difficulty becomes a formal dispute. Psychological safety concerns whether people believe they can raise concerns or acknowledge mistakes without interpersonal punishment. Broader team research provides a foundation for examining this relationship, while project studies connect trust and related team conditions with success. These concepts concern the availability of useful information; they do not eliminate accountability for performance.

For construction practice, the proposed mechanism is straightforward: a supervisor who receives an early warning about an installation conflict has more opportunity to respond than one

who learns about it after concealment. Leaders can support this process by acknowledging reports, explaining decisions and ensuring that concerns receive a response. More reported concerns may initially indicate greater willingness to speak rather than worsening conditions. Reporting volume alone is therefore an unreliable leadership score.

5.3 Team-Building and Collective Ownership

Project research has examined team-building as a pathway between leadership and success. Relevant activities include clarifying roles, agreeing goals and improving joint problem-solving. Evidence from non-construction projects helps explain the mechanism, but sector differences matter. A temporary construction coalition includes contractual boundaries that are less prominent in some internal organisational teams. Shared commitment cannot replace the authority required for formal instructions.

Construction-specific research on site managers reports a relationship between transformational leadership and project success, with support for a team-building pathway. The same research did not support every proposed mechanism: team innovation did not mediate the relationship in the design-bid-build setting examined. This is an important qualification. Encouraging ideas may improve discussion, yet implementation depends on design authority, procurement constraints and approval procedures.

5.4 Learning Adaptation and Resilience

Recent construction research has examined team reflexivity and resilience as pathways linking leadership with project success. Reflexivity involves reviewing objectives and working methods; resilience concerns the capacity to anticipate, contain and recover from disruption. These findings support

attention to team processes, although observational relationships do not prove that a leadership intervention will produce a specified improvement on another project.

The paper proposes that structured reviews should focus on recurring constraints and decisions that can be changed. After repeated inspection failures, for example, a team could examine prerequisite checks, interpretation of drawings and responsibility for readiness. Adaptation is then visible in a revised process and subsequent results. Repeatedly asking workers to absorb disruption through overtime is not sufficient evidence of resilience, because it may transfer costs to fatigue and future performance.

5.5 Safety Quality and Ethical Consistency

Safety and quality require leaders to reconcile production demands with accepted work conditions. Construction safety research identifies multiple interacting influences, so leadership should be considered within a wider system of planning, competence and resources. The proposed managerial implication is to assess what leaders do when priorities conflict. A stated commitment to safety has limited operational meaning if reporting a hazardous condition consistently results in blame or pressure to continue.

Similarly, a quality process depends on the willingness to reject incomplete work before it becomes expensive to correct. Leaders should connect production targets with acceptance requirements and ensure that corrections are verified. This does not imply that every defect indicates poor leadership. Material faults, incomplete design and technical uncertainty can also contribute. Figure 1 sets out the proposed relationships while explicitly retaining these contextual influences.

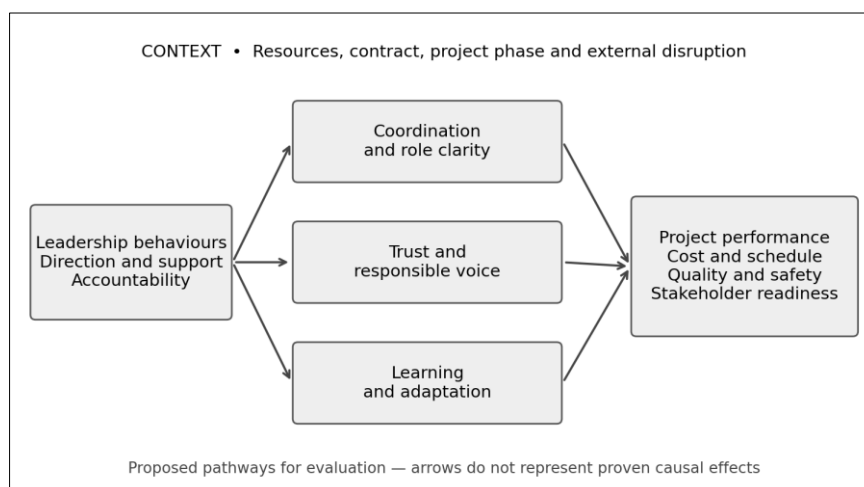


Figure 1: Proposed pathways linking leadership to construction performance. Original conceptual synthesis; not an estimated causal model

6 Evaluating the Impact on Project Performance

6.1 A Balanced Measurement Approach

Leadership evaluation should connect observable behaviour with team processes and independently recorded outcomes. Behaviour can be assessed through specific questions about role clarity, accessibility and responses to concerns. Process measures can examine decision closure and coordination reliability. Outcome measures should use approved baselines, cost records, inspections and documented acceptance. Relying solely on a

manager's description of personal effectiveness would provide a weak basis for attribution.

Table 2 proposes a compact monitoring set. Indicators should be defined before implementation, including their denominator, recording period and responsible owner. Projects should preserve the history of approved baseline changes so that favourable results cannot be manufactured by silently revising the target. Comparisons between work packages also require attention to scope, trade, complexity and stage of completion.

Table 2: Proposed measures linking team processes and project outcomes

Performance dimension	Proposed indicator	Interpretation safeguard
Coordination	Median age of unresolved decisions; overdue actions	Include unresolved cases and decision complexity
Schedule	Milestone variance; completed weekly commitments	Preserve approved baselines and scope changes
Cost	Forecast final cost; recorded rework expenditure	Separate approved scope growth from inefficiency
Quality	First-pass acceptance; repeated nonconformities	Use consistent inspection and defect definitions
Safety	Verified hazard-action closure; exposure-based incident rates	Check severity and reporting completeness
Team conditions	Confidential role-clarity and speak-up feedback	Use multiple respondents and protect anonymity
Handover	Closed acceptance actions and verified test records	Distinguish physical progress from operational readiness

6.2 Attribution and Alternative Explanations

A leadership programme introduced during a troubled project may coincide with additional funding, a revised design or replacement subcontractors. Improved performance afterwards would not, by itself, identify the programme as the cause. Conversely, a capable leader assigned to an unusually difficult project could receive worse outcome scores than a less capable leader on a straightforward project. Evaluation must therefore consider both initial conditions and subsequent changes.

A stronger assessment would collect repeated observations from several comparable teams before and after an intervention. A matched comparison group can help distinguish general project trends from intervention effects. Researchers should examine whether changes in team processes precede changes in outcomes, while recording staffing, resources and client decisions. Such a design remains imperfect, but it provides more informative evidence than a single retrospective satisfaction survey.

6.3 Interpreting Quantitative Indicators

Different indicators should not be combined into a single score without examining what the

combination conceals. Better schedule performance cannot automatically compensate for a serious safety failure. Rework cost may fall because fewer defects occur, or because defects have not yet been recorded. Survey scores may improve because respondents feel pressure to support a manager. Triangulation across records, observations and confidential feedback is therefore essential.

The proposed dashboard should present trends and uncertainty rather than assert a universal leadership return on investment. Any cost-benefit estimate should include training time, additional coordination effort and the cost of implementing agreed changes. Claimed benefits should be tied to documented avoided or reduced expenditure using a stated comparison. This paper does not estimate a savings percentage because the consulted evidence does not justify a common causal effect across construction settings.

7 DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The review suggests that leadership's most useful contribution is often indirect: it improves conditions under which technical expertise and project controls can work. This interpretation avoids

treating charisma as a substitute for planning. It also explains why a manager may receive favourable personal ratings while a project continues to experience unresolved interfaces. The relevant question is whether supportive behaviour produces decisions, reliable commitments and timely correction.

The literature includes supportive findings, but differences in setting and method limit simple generalisation. Evidence based on perceived project success is not equivalent to independently verified cost or schedule records. Statistical mediation identifies relationships consistent with a proposed mechanism; it does not establish that the mechanism operates in the stated sequence. Measures of trust, leadership and teamwork may also overlap, making their separate contributions difficult to determine.

For contractors, the practical priority is to develop a small set of repeatable leadership routines. At mobilisation, the project team should agree decision rights, interfaces and escalation arrangements. During delivery, managers should review unresolved constraints and follow through on commitments. At handover, they should reconcile physical completion with testing, documentation and user readiness. These routines make leadership observable and reduce reliance on impressions about an individual's personality.

Client organisations also shape the leadership environment. A project manager cannot resolve a decision that remains outside delegated authority. Clients can support performance by making approval responsibilities clear, maintaining accessible decision makers and responding consistently to escalations. Consultant and contractor

leaders should agree how technical disagreement will be documented and resolved. Cooperation becomes more credible when participants understand how decisions affect contractual obligations.

For Saudi construction projects, the proposed framework is relevant wherever teams span organisations, disciplines or languages. Briefings should confirm understanding rather than assume that attendance demonstrates comprehension. Role definitions and escalation routes should remain clear across subcontracting tiers. These are suggested applications of the framework, not findings from a Saudi field study. Local evaluation is necessary before claiming that the framework improves national project outcomes.

Digital coordination tools can support these routines by preserving issue ownership, due dates and decisions. However, software does not ensure that an issue reaches a person with authority to act. Leaders must maintain the quality of the information and prevent parallel unofficial records from undermining accountability. Adoption should be judged through decision completeness and project outcomes rather than the volume of uploaded information.

Figure 2 translates the analysis into an implementation cycle. It begins with baseline assessment, introduces targeted routines and checks whether both behaviour and results change. Where the evidence does not support improvement, the response should be to reconsider the intervention or its operating conditions. The cycle is a proposal for application and testing rather than a validated management standard.

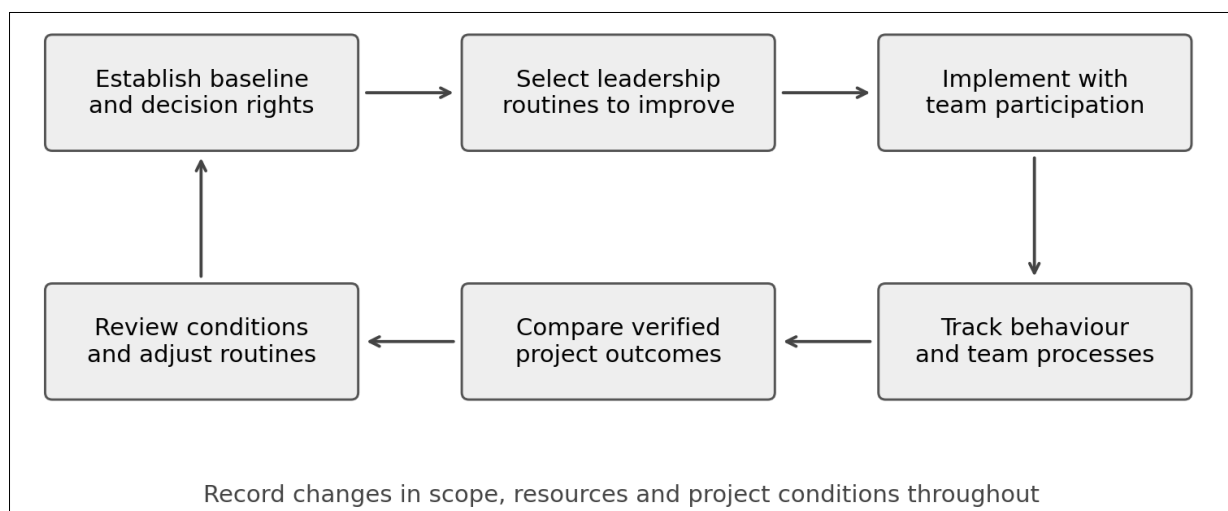


Figure 2: Proposed implementation and evaluation cycle. Original conceptual synthesis requiring project-level validation

8 Limitations and Future Research

This review is selective and does not establish the full distribution of findings across the leadership literature. Some sources concern projects outside construction and provide theoretical support rather than direct industry evidence. Accessible abstracts constrain the detail with which some study designs can be evaluated. The bibliography should therefore be understood as the paper's selected reference base, not an exhaustive evidence inventory.

The proposed framework has not been tested with original project data. Its indicators require adaptation to contract arrangements, project phase and available records. Relationships may operate in both directions: effective leadership can support team performance, while an already successful team can influence how members rate its leader. Unmeasured organisational culture, resources and client capability may affect both.

Future studies should combine repeated team surveys with contemporaneous project records and independent observations. Sampling several teams within each project would help separate individual perceptions from collective conditions. Researchers should also examine negative and inconsistent outcomes, including excessive consensus seeking, dependence on a single leader and pressure created by ambitious performance messages.

Further work should compare leadership arrangements across project phases and procurement methods. Shared leadership may be useful where expertise is distributed, but its value may depend on decision rights and interdependence. Multilingual teams and subcontractor relationships deserve particular attention in Saudi applications. Leadership development trials should report implementation quality, costs and sustained outcomes, making it possible to distinguish an ineffective programme from a programme that was never implemented as intended.

9 CONCLUSION

Team leadership can influence construction project performance by improving coordination, clarifying responsibility and enabling teams to share concerns, learn and adapt. The available literature supports attention to these mechanisms, but it does not justify a universal leadership style or a fixed percentage improvement in project outcomes. Effective practice combines supportive relationships with clear authority, technical competence and consistent delivery controls. The proposed framework links leadership routines to balanced measures of cost, time, quality, safety and stakeholder readiness. Its contribution is to make the

expected pathways explicit and testable. Construction organisations should evaluate leadership through observed behaviour and verified project evidence, while recognising the resources, contractual arrangements and external conditions that also shape performance.

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