



Effective Leadership Styles in Project Management: A Literature Analysis of Their Impact on Project Success

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Abstract

Effective leadership is a key factor in the success of project management. This paper analyzes various leadership styles applied in project management through a literature review. The primary focus of this study is on transformational, transactional, and situational leadership styles and their impact on team performance and project outcomes. The findings suggest that selecting an appropriate leadership style depends significantly on the project context, team characteristics, and challenges faced. Transformational leadership is particularly effective in projects requiring innovation and high collaboration, while transactional leadership is more suited for structured projects with clear procedures. Additionally, situational leadership, which allows leaders to adjust their style based on the project's dynamic nature, is highly flexible and adaptive. Other contributing factors to project success include emotional intelligence, effective communication skills, and adapting to organizational culture and team diversity. These findings offer valuable insights for project management practitioners in selecting and developing leadership styles best suited to achieve optimal results in various project contexts.

Keywords: Leadership; Project Management; Transformational Leadership; Transactional Leadership; Situational Leadership.

Introduction

Project management is a complex and multidimensional discipline requiring practical technical, communication, and leadership skills (Thomas & Mengel, 2008). In practice, the success or failure of a project often depends on how the project is managed and how the team involved in the project can work synergistically to achieve the goals set (Laufer et al., 1996; Mallarangan et al., 2024). According to (Belout & Gauvreau, 2004), leadership is one of the key factors influencing project success, which includes the ability to lead and manage group dynamics and proper decision-making.

In this ever-evolving world, project managers face increasingly diverse challenges. Globalization, technological advances, and the need to respond quickly to change have created

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a highly dynamic environment (Kaur, Reddy, et al., 2024; Narayanti et al., 2024). On the other hand, the demands to complete projects on time, within budget, and with high quality are increasing. Therefore, the ability of project leaders to adapt their leadership style to the existing situation becomes increasingly important (Thamhain, 2004).

The thesis (Kariuki, 2015) shows that the leadership style applied in project management can affect team performance and the project's final results. Various leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, and situational leadership, have been discussed in the literature as factors that can improve project efficiency and effectiveness (Baze, 2024; Udin & Arfanaldy, 2025). However, few studies deeply explore the relationship between specific leadership styles and project success in diverse contexts, especially in projects involving cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary teams (Sârbu Bărar, 2023).

However, the theory and practice of leadership in project management are not always aligned (Arfanaldy, 2024). Project leaders often face difficult decisions about the most appropriate leadership approach for a given situation (Nixon et al., 2012). For example, a more authoritarian leadership style may be effective in a highly structured and defined environment. In contrast, a more collaborative style may be more successful in a team based on creativity and innovation (Somech, 2006). A deeper understanding of how different leadership styles can be applied in diverse contexts is needed (Rifky, Saudale, et al., 2024).

In addition, although much research has been done on leadership in general, there is still a gap in the literature linking leadership styles to specific dynamics and characteristics in project management (Anwer et al., 2022). Many factors influence the interaction between leadership style and project performance, including organizational culture, team experience level, and the nature of the project itself (Morgan Tuuli et al., 2012). Therefore, a more comprehensive study is needed to understand the most effective leadership styles in project management.

The need to identify best practices that can be used by project managers worldwide reinforces the importance of better understanding the relationship between leadership and project success. Effective project leaders manage resources and deadlines and motivate and guide their teams to achieve common goals harmoniously and productively (Liphadzi et al., 2015; Makarevich, 2024).

Thus, this article analyzes various effective leadership styles in project management through a literature review. This study is expected to provide valuable insights for project management practitioners in choosing the most appropriate leadership style to create optimal results in various project situations.

Literature Review

Research on leadership styles in project management has shown that the leadership style adopted by project leaders significantly impacts project success. Different leadership styles,

such as transformational, transactional, and situational, have advantages and relevance in different contexts.

One of the important studies that discusses the relationship between leadership style and project success is the work of (Turner & Müller, 2005) who found that choosing the right leadership style can determine project success. They identified that the transformational leadership style, which involves empowering and motivating the team to achieve greater goals, is often more effective in dynamic projects that require high collaboration. On the other hand, the transactional leadership style, which focuses more on rewards and monitoring performance, is more suitable for projects with more structured procedures and measurable goals. This study underlines the importance of choosing a leadership style that is appropriate to the context and characteristics of the project (Lategan & Fore, 2015)

In further research, (Kaur, Haque, et al., 2024) highlighted the impact of leadership style on project success. They found that transformational leadership positively influences project success, especially in creating a collaborative and innovative work environment. Leaders who apply a transformational approach can encourage team members to work beyond expectations, while transactional leadership styles are more effective in projects that require tight control and structure. This research provides further insight into how leadership styles can be tailored to the type of project being managed (Blaskovics, 2014).

(Aga et al., 2016) their study on transformational leadership also found that this style is important in improving project performance. Leaders who inspire and empower team members to achieve common goals more effectively tend to achieve better project outcomes. Transformational leadership is considered a style that allows teams to adapt to changes that occur in a project, which is especially relevant in the context of projects that focus on innovation and change (Zhao et al., 2021).

Another study by (Liphadzi et al., 2015) also confirmed that the characteristics of the project greatly influence the relationship between leadership style and project success. They stated that leaders who can adapt their style to the dynamics of the ongoing project, such as rapid change or high complexity, will be more effective in ensuring the project achieves its goals. Situational leadership, which allows leaders to adapt to the team's and the project's needs, has proven particularly relevant (Abbas & Ali, 2023).

Emotional intelligence has also been identified as influencing leadership effectiveness in project management. (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) Leaders with high emotional intelligence can be more effective in managing interpersonal relationships and handling conflicts in project teams. Recognizing and managing team members' feelings allows leaders to create a more harmonious and productive work environment, improving project performance (Morgeson et al., 2010; Rifky, 2024). This study supports the importance of leadership, which focuses on managerial techniques and the human aspects of the team being managed.

While various studies have identified the influence of leadership style on project success, this article makes a deeper contribution by analyzing the relationship between adaptive leadership style and dynamic project context and emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence and communication skills as key elements in supporting project success, especially

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in projects with high levels of complexity and high uncertainty. In addition, this article also explores in more detail how leadership style can be applied flexibly in a more modern and multicultural project management context.

Research Method

In this article, the author uses a qualitative approach through a literature review to analyze effective leadership styles in project management (Senthamizh Sankar & Anandh, 2024). This study explores various perspectives in the related literature, focusing on leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, and situational, and their relationship to project success (Isopeskul' & Ponomarenko, 2019). The main data sources used are scientific articles, books, and journals published in the last 10 years. The author conducted a literature search through academic databases such as Scopus, EBSCO, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, and Books with selection criteria involving topic relevance, journal quality, and focus on empirical research.

The analysis used thematic analysis techniques, where the author identified and compared the main themes from the reviewed studies (Neuendorf, 2018). The synthesis of findings will provide an overview of the most effective leadership styles based on the project context and team characteristics (Matthew B & Huberman, 1984). Although this study relies on secondary literature, this limitation is offset by using internationally accredited and peer-reviewed sources to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The author will suggest recommendations based on the findings of the existing literature, taking into account external and internal factors that affect project performance.

Result

Based on the literature review, leadership style plays an important role in the success of project management (Anantatmula, 2010). The leadership style the project leader applies significantly impacts team performance, decision-making, and the achievement of project goals (Limsila & Ogunlana, 2008). An effective leadership style can motivate the team to work more productively, while a style that does not follow the project's needs can cause tension, conflict, and failure (Lewis et al., 2002). Therefore, choosing the right leadership style is crucial to achieving optimal results.

One leadership style often mentioned in the literature is transformational leadership (Arfanaldy et al., 2024). This leadership focuses on the leader's ability to inspire and motivate team members to achieve greater goals and exceed expectations (Hacker & Roberts, 2004). Transformational leaders have a clear vision, can provide clear direction, and support the personal development of team members (Bass, 1990). Several studies have shown that this leadership style is effective in projects that require innovation and change because transformational leaders can encourage creativity and flexibility in dealing with project challenges (Keegan & Den Hartog, 2004).

On the other hand, transactional leadership, which focuses more on managing and monitoring team performance with rewards or punishments, has also been found to be effective in the context of routine and structured project management (Sané & Abo, 2021). Transactional leaders set clear goals, monitor task execution, and provide incentives based on measurable achievements (Jawah & Alagha, 2021). This style tends to be more effective on projects with strict procedures and schedules, such as construction or engineering projects requiring adherence to established standards and budgets (Muriithi & Crawford, 2003).

However, several studies have also shown that situational leadership has great potential to improve project effectiveness under various conditions (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). Situational leadership requires leaders to adjust their leadership style based on the situation, team characteristics, and project needs. Leaders who use this style can adapt quickly to changing project conditions and adjust their approach to maximize team performance (Lee-Kelley, 2002). This leadership style is especially relevant in dynamic and uncertain projects, such as information technology projects or projects involving multiple stakeholders.

In addition, many studies emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence for project leaders (Afrizal et al., 2024; Pryke et al., 2015). Leaders with high emotional intelligence can manage interpersonal relationships better, understand the needs and feelings of team members, and handle conflicts constructively (Schlaerth et al., 2013). Research shows that leaders with good emotional intelligence tend to be more successful in managing diverse teams and creating a positive work environment, which improves project performance.

Communication skills are also important in determining the effectiveness of leadership styles in project management (Yudiawan et al., 2017). Leaders who can communicate clearly and openly can ensure that team members have the same understanding of project goals and expectations (Hirst & Mann, 2004). Good communication allows leaders to convey a vision, listen to team input, and provide constructive feedback. Conversely, poor communication can lead to task confusion and decreased team morale, leading to project failure.

In terms of the relationship between leadership style and organizational culture, several studies have shown that leaders who adapt their style to the project's organizational culture can be more successful (Hosseini et al., 2020). For example, an authoritarian or transactional leadership style may be more effective in organizations with a highly hierarchical culture. In contrast, in organizations with a more flexible and collaborative culture, a transformational or participative leadership style may be more successful (Tang, 2019). This adjustment of leadership style is important to create harmony within the team and ensure that the project can run smoothly according to the goals set (Rifky & Farihin, 2024).

Furthermore, diversity in the project team also affects leadership style effectiveness. Leaders must manage these differences well in projects involving cross-cultural teams or with members from various disciplinary backgrounds (Booyesen, 2013). Inclusive leadership prioritizes openness to various perspectives, avoids discrimination, and can create a healthier and more productive work environment (Ahyani et al., 2024; Roberson & Perry, 2022). Leaders who pay attention to the diversity aspect of the team will be able to utilize existing strengths to create more effective innovative solutions for the project.

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Studies (Ng & Walker, 2008) also show that leaders with extensive experience and knowledge in the project field tend to choose the appropriate leadership style more effectively. Experience allows leaders to recognize signs of problems that may arise in the project and determine the right approach to deal with them (Rifky, Paling, et al., 2024; Shepherd et al., 2011). Experienced leaders can more accurately judge whether a transactional or transformational approach is more appropriate, depending on the situation at hand, thereby increasing the chances of project success.

However, this study also shows that no single leadership style can be applied universally in all types of projects. Project success is greatly influenced by a combination of factors, including the characteristics of the project itself, organizational culture, and team dynamics (Arifudin et al., 2024; Khan & Ahmed, 2024). Therefore, project leaders must adjust their style flexibly based on existing conditions (Nutt, 1993). Leaders who can adapt their leadership style quickly will be more successful in managing projects, especially those facing challenges and uncertainty (Rifky, Nasution, et al., 2024).

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that the effectiveness of leadership styles in project management is highly dependent on various factors, including the nature of the project, team characteristics, and organizational culture. Transformational and transactional leadership can be effective in certain contexts, while situational leadership offers high flexibility in dealing with change. Therefore, project leaders must understand the various leadership styles and be able to choose the most appropriate one for the project's needs and adapt to changes that occur throughout the project cycle.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal that leadership style plays a very important role in the success of project management. Although various leadership styles have been identified as factors influencing project performance, no single leadership style can be relied upon universally in all situations (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Therefore, a project leader needs to have a deep understanding of the project context, team characteristics, and challenges faced in order to be able to choose and adapt the right leadership style (Turner & Müller, 2005). This aligns with findings in the literature stating that effective leadership can adapt to project dynamics and team needs.

One of the main findings from this literature review is the effectiveness of transformational leadership style in projects requiring innovation and change. Transformational leaders inspire teams to achieve greater goals and exceed expectations through a clear vision and support for individual development (Bass, 1990). On the other hand, the transactional leadership style, which focuses more on structure, procedures, and performance-based rewards, is more effective in projects that are more structured and predictable, such as construction or manufacturing projects (Ansari et al., 2024). This suggests that project success depends on how much the leadership style can support the project's specific characteristics.

However, the results of this study also suggest that the situational leadership style may be the most flexible and adaptive approach in the context of project management. Leaders who use a situational leadership style can adjust their approach based on the needs of the team and changes that occur throughout the project (Owusu-Manu et al., 2021). This style of adjustment allows leaders to remain relevant in the face of challenges that arise, be it uncertainty, changes in the team, or changes in project objectives (Thomas & Mengel, 2008). This leadership style is especially relevant for dynamic and complex projects, where situations can change quickly and demand a quick response from the leader.

In addition, emotional intelligence and good communication skills are important supporting factors in project management (Lima & Silva, 2020). Leaders who have high emotional intelligence can build better relationships with team members, manage conflicts effectively, and motivate the team to work more harmoniously (Chang et al., 2012). Good communication skills enable leaders to resolve misunderstandings and provide clear direction to the team (Rosen et al., 2007). In many studies reviewed, open and transparent communication was important in creating a collaborative and productive work environment, supporting project success.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that organizational culture and diversity factors in the team also influence the success of leadership styles. Leaders who can adapt their style to the organizational culture can create harmony and efficiency in the team (Yilmaz & Ergun, 2008). For example, a more authoritarian or transactional leadership style may be more acceptable in highly hierarchical organizations. In contrast, in more egalitarian organizational cultures, a more transformational or participative leadership style is likely to be more effective. In addition, diverse teams require an inclusive and diversity-sensitive leadership approach, which can foster creativity and improve overall team performance.

Although the situational leadership style offers flexibility, the main challenge for project leaders is recognizing the situation at hand and determining the appropriate style. A project leader must understand the nature of the project and be sensitive to team dynamics and the challenges faced (Cullen & Leavy, 2017). This study shows that leaders who recognize changes in the project environment and adjust their style quickly will have an advantage in creating optimal results. Therefore, developing leadership skills that can adapt to changing situations is a very important aspect of the education and training of project managers.

In addition, it is important to note that while different leadership styles offer certain advantages in specific contexts, a good leadership style depends not only on the theory applied but also on the leader's experience, interpersonal skills, and empathy (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2005). Experienced project leaders are more likely to recognize situations that require a particular leadership style and can apply it effectively. This experience also allows leaders to be more confident in making decisions that can affect the course of the project.

A limitation of this literature review methodology is that the researcher only relies on secondary sources without collecting primary data from practicing project managers directly involved in the project. This may reduce the ability to explore practical experiences and deeper insights into how leadership styles are applied in real-world situations. Therefore, further

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research involving interviews with project managers or surveys of project teams may provide a more practical and contextual perspective on applying leadership styles in diverse projects.

Finally, it is important to underline that project managers must continue to learn and develop their leadership skills. Ongoing education and training are essential to prepare project leaders for the more complex challenges of modern project management. By combining various relevant leadership styles and extensive knowledge of the project context, project leaders will be better able to lead teams toward successful project goal achievement.

Conclusion

Based on the literature review conducted in this article, leadership plays a very important role in the success of project management. Various leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, and situational leadership, each have advantages and disadvantages, depending on the context and characteristics of the project. Effective leaders in project management can adjust their leadership style to the existing situation, be it a project that requires innovation and change or a more structured project requiring strict management. Transformational leadership is effective in dynamic projects requiring high collaboration, while transactional leadership suits projects with clear procedures and measurable goals.

Emotional intelligence, good communication skills, and the ability to adapt to organizational culture and team diversity have also been important factors in project management success. Situational leadership, which allows leaders to adjust their approach according to changes in the project, is a very flexible and adaptive option in various project contexts. Although this study is based on a literature review, the findings provide useful insights for project managers to understand better how leadership styles can be applied effectively in real-world situations. Therefore, project leaders need to continue developing their leadership skills to face increasingly complex managerial challenges in the future.

Declarataion of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare no relevant conflicts of interest related to this research. All findings and opinions expressed in this article are based on an objective literature analysis. They are not influenced by personal or commercial relationships with any party that could influence the research results. This research was conducted independently without any financial support or resources from third parties that could create a potential conflict of interest.

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