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The impact of leadership styles on project success: The mediating role of team collaboration

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CIRONICLE ADSTRACT

Article history: Received: April 10, 2024 Received in revised format: June 15, 2024 Accepted: July 2, 2024 Available online: July 3, 2024 Keywords: Leadership Styles Project Success Team Collaboration Transformational Leadership Transactional Leadership Laissez-Fear Leadership This study investigates the impact of different leadership styles on project success, specifically examining the mediating role of team collaboration. This study utilized a diverse sample of 202 respondents representing five distinct national contexts: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, China, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates. PLS-SEM were employed to analyze the relationships between transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, team collaboration, and project success. Our findings reveal that both transformational and transactional leadership demonstrated a negative relationship with team collaboration but did not directly predict project success. Importantly, team collaboration was found to mediate the relationship between both transformational leadership and project success, as well as between transactional leadership and project success was not supported. These findings underscore the critical role of leadership style and team collaboration in achieving project success, offering valuable insights for organizations and project managers seeking to optimize leadership practices and foster collaborative work environments.

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1. Introduction

In today's increasingly complex and interconnected business landscape, effective project management has become paramount to organizational success (Ekemezie & Digitemie, 2024). While numerous factors contribute to project outcomes, leadership styles and team dynamics are consistently identified as critical elements (Siddiqui et al., 2023). The success of any project hinges on a multitude of factors, with effective leadership being paramount among them (Sethole, 2020; Hanandeh et al., 2021). Leadership style, referring to the approach and behaviors a leader adopts when directing and motivating their team, can significantly influence project outcomes (Rehman et al., 2020; Mansour et al., 2024). This research goes deeper into understanding the relationship between leadership styles, team collaboration, and project success, aiming to investigate the mechanisms through which leadership influences project outcomes.

Despite extensive research on leadership and project management, a clear understanding of how specific leadership styles impact project success through the mediating effect of team collaboration remains limited (Dartey-Baah, 2022; Yang et al., 2020). This study addresses this gap by examining the direct influence of various leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, on project success, measured through objective metrics like meeting deadlines and achieving budget targets.

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Furthermore, this research investigates the mediating role of team collaboration, exploring how different leadership styles foster or hinder collaborative behaviors within project teams. By analyzing the interplay between leadership, collaboration, and project outcomes, this study aims to provide valuable theoretical contributions by enriching existing leadership and project management literature. From a practical standpoint, this research offers actionable insights for organizations seeking to enhance project success rates. By identifying the leadership styles that effectively promote team collaboration and ultimately drive positive project outcomes, this study equips organizations with the knowledge to develop targeted leadership development programs and implement effective team-building strategies. Ultimately, this research strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice, providing a roadmap for cultivating leadership excellence and fostering collaborative environments that pave the way for project success.

2. Hypotheses Development

2.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, characterized by its emphasis on inspiration, motivation, and individualized consideration, has been widely studied in relation to organizational outcomes (Khan et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2024). Transformational leaders foster a shared vision, encourage intellectual stimulation, and empower followers to achieve collective goals (Abualoush et al., 2022; Altaher et al., 2018; Al-Qudah et al., 2019). This leadership style has been consistently linked to enhanced team performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Hussain & Khayat, 2021).

Empirical evidence strongly supports the positive impact of transformational leadership on project success (Zhao et al., 2021; Nauman et al., 2022; Doan et al., 2020). For instance, Iqbal et al. (2019) found that transformational leadership, particularly its team-building aspect, significantly predicted project success in development projects. Furthermore, research by Ali et al. (2020) demonstrated that team collaboration, specifically psychological empowerment, mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and project success. These findings suggest that transformational leaders, by fostering a collaborative and empowering environment, indirectly contribute to project success through enhanced team dynamics (Ahmad et al., 2022). Therefore:

H1: Transformational leadership positively affects project success.

H4: Team collaboration mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and project success.

2.2 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership centers around a system of clear expectations, defined roles, and performance-based rewards (Nyamota et al., 2024). Leaders employing this style prioritize monitoring and controlling processes, ensuring adherence to established standards, and addressing deviations promptly (Olasunkanmi et al., 2023; Parker & Partridge, 2021). This approach fosters a structured and predictable work environment, which can be particularly effective in projects with well-defined tasks and outcomes.

While some research suggests a more moderate impact of transactional leadership on project success compared to transformational leadership (Abbas & Ali, 2023; Hammouri et al., 2022), other studies highlight its positive contributions. For instance, projects requiring strict adherence to procedures and timelines might benefit from the clarity and control offered by transactional leadership (Oswald et al., 2022). However, the mediating role of team collaboration in this relationship requires further investigation. While transactional leadership can facilitate coordination through clear task allocation and reward systems, its emphasis on individual accountability might not always foster strong team cohesion and synergistic collaboration (Wankhade et al., 2020; Subramanian & Banihashemi, 2024). Hence:

H2: Transactional leadership positively affects project success.

Hs: Team collaboration mediates the relationship between transactional leadership and project success.

2.3 Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership, characterized by a lack of active involvement from the leader, represents a hands-off approach to management (Jin & Men, 2023). Leaders adopting this style provide minimal guidance, delegate decision-making authority, and often avoid intervening in team processes (Razavi et al., 2022). While this approach might be suitable for highly autonomous and experienced teams, research suggests it can be detrimental to project success in many contexts (Radhakrishnan et al., 2022; Imam & Zaheer, 2021). Empirical evidence consistently highlights the negative consequences of laissez-faire leadership (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2022; Ahsan & Khalid, 2023). The laissez-faire leadership was positively correlated with workplace stressors like role ambiguity and conflict, ultimately hindering team effectiveness (Salin et al., 2022). Similarly, Hassan and Basit (2024) demonstrated that laissez-faire leadership negatively impacted employee commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors, crucial elements for project success. Furthermore, based on the previous studies, the mediating role of team collaboration in this relationship appears to be negative (Yin et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2020). The absence of clear direction and support from laissez-faire leaders can lead to confusion, lack of coordination, and diminished team cohesion, ultimately hindering collaborative efforts and jeopardizing project success (Kapeller, 2023).

H3: Laissez-faire leadership negatively affects project success.

H₆: Team collaboration mediates the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and project success.

3. Methodology

This research employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a structured questionnaire to gather data from key actors within the industrial project landscape. To evaluate the proposed theoretical framework and test the research hypotheses, data was gathered from a diverse, international participant pool. Project managers, team members actively involved in project execution, and key stakeholders (including clients and sponsors) were recruited from five countries: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, China, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates. This global sample ensured representation of varying project management practices and cultural influences. Participants accessed the questionnaire conveniently through a dedicated Google Drive link, facilitating a streamlined data collection process. Out of 234 individuals invited to participate, 212 engaged with the survey, yielding a 90% response rate. After excluding 10 incomplete responses, the final dataset comprised 202 valid questionnaires, deemed sufficient for robust analysis. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the demographic characteristics of the participating sample.

The demographic profile of the respondents revealed a predominantly male participation rate, with men comprising 67.8% of the sample compared to 32.2% female representation. 28.2% of the majority respondents were in Saudi Arabi. Age-wise, the study attracted a considerable proportion of mid-career professionals, with the largest segment (30.2%) falling within the 34-41 age bracket. Conversely, the youngest group (18-25 years) constituted the smallest portion of respondents at 20.3%. In terms of educational qualifications, a bachelor's degree emerged as the most prevalent, held by 64.4% of the participants. Examining respondent categories, project stakeholders formed the largest category (38.7%), followed by team members (34.1%). Project managers represented the smallest respondent group at 27.2%.

Measure	Category	Count	Percentage %
	18 - 25	41	20.3
A = -	26 - 33	47	23.3
Age	34 - 41	61	30.2
	Age > 41	53	26.2
	Diploma	21	10.4
Education	Bachelor	130	64.4
	Postgraduate	51	25.2
	Male	137	67.8
Gender	Female	65	32.2
Category	Project Manager	55	27.2
	Team Member	69	34.1
	Project Stakeholder	78	38.7
	Jordan	31	15.3
Country	Saudi Arabia	57	28.2
	Chain	49	24.3
	Australia	20	9.9
	UAE	45	22.3

Table 1 Demographic Profile

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Measurement Model

The study evaluated the outer model's reliability and validity employing a multi-faceted statistical approach. Adhering to established methodological guidelines (Hair et al., 2020), the assessment encompassed composite reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Table 2 presents the comprehensive results of these analyses. Notably, Cronbach's alpha (α) values consistently exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold, ranging from 0.792 to 0.915, signifying strong internal consistency within the scales. Similarly, composite reliability scores, spanning 0.784 to 0.894, further affirmed the scales' reliability. Convergent validity was well-established, with all factor loadings surpassing 0.70 and AVE values exceeding the 0.50 benchmark. Discriminant validity assessment, employing both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios, provided robust evidence that the latent variables exhibited distinct constructs. Specifically, diagonal AVE values consistently surpassed inter-variable correlation coefficients, and all HTMT values remained below

the 0.90 threshold, confirming discriminant validity. Having established a reliable and valid measurement model, the study proceeded to analyze the structural outer model to rigorously test the proposed research hypotheses.

Table	2
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Convergent Validity Test

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
T	TFL1	0.712		0.795	0.814
	TFL2	0.749	0.839		
Transformational Leadership	TFL3	0.768			
	TFL4	0.814			
	TAL1	0.836		0.894	
Transactional Landarshin -	TAL2	0.781	0.871		0.837
Transactional Leadership	TAL3	0.839	0.871		
	TAL4	0.784			
	LFL1	0.774	0.792	0.784	
Laissez-Faire Leadership	LFL2	0.798			0.854
Laissez-Faire Leadership	LFL3	0.806			
	LFL4	0.833			
	TC1	0.894	0.915	0.832	
Team Collaboration	TC2	0.882			0.809
	TC3	0.903			
	PS1	0.845	0.880	0.821	
Project Success	PS2	0.891			0.791
	PS3	0.876			

Table 3

(HTMT) - Matrix

TFL	TAL	LFL	тс	PC
0.415				
0.501	0.287			
0.324	0.367	0.394		
0.299	0.249	0.319	0.467	
0.514	0.407	0.271	0.506	0.391
	0.415 0.501 0.324 0.299	0.415 0.501 0.287 0.324 0.367 0.299 0.249	0.415 0.501 0.287 0.324 0.367 0.394 0.299 0.249 0.319	IFE IFE IEE IC 0.415 0.501 0.287 0.324 0.367 0.394 0.299 0.249 0.319 0.467

4.2 Structural Model Test

The research investigated six distinct hypotheses, encompassing both direct and indirect relationships, to comprehensively examine the factors influencing project success. Table 4 provides a detailed overview of these hypotheses. Empirical findings revealed two statistically significant positive relationships between leadership styles and project success. Specifically, transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.314$, t-value = 2.057) and transactional leadership ($\beta = 0.417$, t-value = 3.428) demonstrated a significant positive impact, providing robust support for hypotheses H1 and H2. Conversely, a significant negative association emerged between laissez-faire leadership and project success ($\beta = -0.327$, t-value = -1.873), confirming the hypothesized detrimental effect proposed in H3.

Table 4

Hypotheses Results (Direct Effect)

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Нуро. No	Path	Path Coefficient	T-value	P-value	Result
H1	$TFL \rightarrow PS$	0.314	2.057	0.000	Yes
H2	$TAL \rightarrow PS$	0.417	3.428	0.000	Yes
Н3	$LFL \rightarrow PS$	-0.327	-1.873	0.001	Yes

The study also examined the mediating role of team collaboration. Specifically, the study investigated whether team collaboration served as a supporter through which transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership exerted their influence on project outcomes.

Result

Yes Yes

NO

Table 5	
Hypotheses Resul	1

Hypotheses Results (Indirect Effect)						
Нуро. No	Path	Path Coefficient	T-value	P-value		
H2	$TRL \rightarrow TC \rightarrow PS$	0.412	2.662	0.001		
H4	$TRA \rightarrow TC \rightarrow PS$	0.394	3.195	0.000		
H6	$LFL \rightarrow TC \rightarrow PS$	0.488	3.013	0.302		

Table 5 presents the detailed findings of this mediation analysis. Notably, the indirect effects of both transformational leadership and transactional leadership on project success, as mediated by team collaboration, were positive and statistically significant. These results confirm the proposed mediating role of team collaboration, supporting hypotheses H2 and H4. However, the study did not find support for the mediating role of team collaboration in the relationship between laissezfaire leadership and project success. This suggests that the detrimental impact of laissez-faire leadership on project outcomes may not operate through its influence on team collaboration, leading to the rejection of hypothesis H6.

5. Discussion

The findings supported the study hypotheses that transformational leadership (Aga et al., 2016) and transactional leadership positively influence project success. Hence, H1 and H2 were supported. This suggests that both leadership styles, though different in their approach, can contribute to positive project outcomes. Transformational leaders, through their inspirational and motivational approach, likely support team members' enthusiasm and commitment towards project goals. Transactional leaders, on the other hand, ensure clarity in roles, expectations, and reward structures, fostering a sense of accountability and driving performance.

Interestingly, while not directly impacting project success, laissez-faire leadership was found to have a negative relationship with team collaboration. This suggests that a hands-off approach from the leader can hinder effective teamwork, likely due to a lack of direction, support, and communication. Thus, H3 was supported. Importantly, the findings highlight the crucial role of team collaboration in mediating the relationship between leadership styles and project success. Specifically, team collaboration mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and project success. This underscores that regardless of the leadership style employed, fostering a collaborative team environment is essential for achieving project goals. Therefore, H4 and H5 were supported. However, it is noteworthy that team collaboration did not mediate the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and project success. Thus, H6 was not supported. This suggests that even with strong team collaboration, the lack of leadership involvement inherent in a laissez-faire approach may hinder overall project success.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates the relationship between leadership styles, team collaboration, and project success. Specifically, we examined the impact of transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership on project success, investigating the mediating role of team collaboration in these relationships. The findings provide evidence that both transformational and transactional leadership styles are positively associated with project success. This underscores the importance of active and engaged leadership in driving positive project outcomes through different approaches.

While laissez-faire leadership did not directly predict project success, it demonstrated a negative relationship with team collaboration. This suggests that a hands-off approach from leaders, while potentially suitable in specific contexts, may hinder teamwork and indirectly impact project success. Significantly, the study highlights the crucial role of team collaboration as a mediating mechanism. We found that team collaboration mediates the positive relationship between both transformational and transactional leadership and project success. This emphasizes that regardless of the specific leadership style employed, fostering a collaborative team environment is paramount for achieving project goals.

In addition, the hypothesized mediating role of team collaboration between laissez-faire leadership and project success was not supported. This suggests that even with strong team collaboration, the lack of guidance and support inherent in a laissez-faire approach may ultimately limit project success. However, this study provides valuable insights for enhancing leadership effectiveness in project-based contexts. While both transformational and transactional leadership styles can contribute to project success, the findings emphasize the critical role of fostering team collaboration as a key mediating factor. Organizations and project managers should prioritize strategies that promote teamwork, open communication, and a shared sense of purpose to maximize the positive impact of leadership on project outcomes.

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