

Exploring the Leadership Styles to Foster Sustainability in Construction Projects: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The construction industry faces sustainability challenges due to its significant resource consumption and environmental impact. This necessitates a shift to sustainable practices, emphasizing the 'circular economy' and balancing environmental, social, and economic sustainability (Shan et al., 2017; Afzal & Lim, 2022). Leadership is pivotal in this transformation (Tayal et al., 2018). Traditional leadership models focused on economic gains are insufficient for contemporary sustainability challenges. This research explores the leadership styles that enhance sustainability in construction through a systematic literature review. The review intends to analyse existing literature, present current insights, and suggest future research avenues.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Following Page et al. (2021), the PRISMA method was used to systematically review leadership styles in sustainable construction projects in May 2023 via Scopus. Initially, 4,238 documents were identified, narrowed down to 1,855 by filtering peer-reviewed articles in English without publication year restrictions. Screening titles and abstracts for relevance to leadership in sustainable construction reduced the pool to 72 articles. Further full-text analysis for eligibility led to 31 articles being selected for detailed bibliometric and content analysis. This process focused on identifying and analysing studies specifically addressing leadership styles in the context of sustainable construction project practices.

Findings/Results: The content analysis identified five key themes in sustainable construction leadership, highlighting the evolution of leadership roles in recent decades. Tabassi et al. (2016) noted the need for leaders to possess intellectual, managerial, and transformational skills, focusing on sustainable development goals and integrating the triple bottom line. These skills include critical analysis, strategic vision, effective communication, and inspirational leadership, which are essential for achieving sustainability in construction. Leadership styles in construction must be diverse and adaptable. While transformational leadership is beneficial, no single style is universally suitable due to the dynamic nature of construction projects. Leaders should be flexible, employing styles like autocratic for critical decisions and democratic in more stable situations to integrate sustainability practices effectively. Among various leadership styles reviewed, transformational leadership was the most discussed (39%), indicating its significant role in sustainable construction. This style contributes to various aspects of sustainability, including green innovation (Huong et al., 2021), sustainable project performance (Silvius & Schipper, 2020), innovation promotion (Zhang et al., 2018), knowledge sharing, and green organizational citizenship behaviour (Khan & Khan, 2021). This underscores the need for adaptable leadership approaches in construction projects, recognizing that a single style cannot meet all needs.

Practical Implications: This research emphasizes the critical role of effective leadership in advancing sustainability in construction projects, which is crucial for meeting the SDGs and net-zero targets by 2050. Developing leadership competencies in construction managers is challenging, necessitating comprehensive training programs. These include delegating leadership responsibilities and workplace training, which are key in fostering necessary skills. Project-based organizations should tailor training programs to craft leadership styles that align with

organizational values and project requirements. Continuous professional development and targeted training based on professional levels and project sizes are recommended. Human resources management in construction should create objective schemes, while activities like analytical tasks and brainstorming sessions can enhance leaders' vision and creativity. This study sets the groundwork for further research on leadership in sustainable construction projects.

Originality/Value: Underpinned by the resource-based view (RBV), this study research fills the gap in the knowledge by providing a systematic literature review on leadership styles for fostering sustainability in construction projects.

Keywords: *Transformational leadership, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Construction industry*