



Transformational Leadership and Project Team Performance of the Kigali Innovation City (KIC) Project in Rwanda

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Abstract: This study examined the effect of transformational leadership on project team performance in the Kigali Innovation City (KIC) project managed by the Rwanda Development Board (RDB). Guided by Bass and Riggio's Transformational Leadership Theory, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach using descriptive and correlational research designs. The target population comprised 379 individuals involved in the KIC project. Using Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample of 194 respondents was selected. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained from eight key informant interviews. Of the 194 questionnaires distributed, 185 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 96.36%. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, whereas qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that transformational leadership had a strong positive influence on project team performance, with an overall mean score of 4.23 ($SD = 0.79$) across visionary guidance, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and role modelling. Regression analysis identified transformational leadership as the strongest predictor of project team performance ($\beta = 0.482, p < 0.001$). Together, transformational, transactional, and democratic leadership styles explained 81.3% of the variance in project team performance ($R^2 = 0.813$), with the overall model being statistically significant ($F = 248.5, p < 0.001$). Qualitative findings reinforced these results, showing that transformational leadership enhanced creativity, commitment, collaboration, and productivity. The study concludes that transformational leadership is essential for improving project team performance and recommends strengthening leadership development programs and embedding visionary leadership practices within project governance to advance Rwanda's Vision 2050 and National Innovation Policy.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Project team performance, Leadership styles, Kigali Innovation City, Rwanda.

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1. Introduction

The effectiveness of leadership in driving project outcomes has gained increasing recognition within development management scholarship, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where public sector development agencies play a central role in implementing national transformation agendas. Leadership styles shape team motivation, coordination, and performance, and are thus

critical determinants of whether ambitious national projects meet their objectives or succumb to delays and inefficiencies.

The Kigali Innovation City (KIC) project, a flagship initiative of the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), represents one of Rwanda's most strategic investments in innovation-led economic growth. Covering approximately 60–61 hectares within the Kigali Special

Economic Zone, KIC is estimated to require US\$300 million in investment and is projected to create over 50,000 jobs, attract more than US\$300 million in foreign direct investment, generate approximately US\$150 million annually in ICT export earnings, and produce about 2,600 STEM graduates per year (RDB, 2024; Africa50, 2024). Given these ambitious targets, effective project leadership becomes indispensable.

Despite substantial public investment in Rwanda's development agenda, leadership effectiveness in enhancing project team performance remains a pressing concern. The Rwanda Development Board (RDB) 2023 Annual Report indicated that only 67% of government projects were completed on schedule, while 21% experienced significant delays attributed largely to leadership inefficiencies and weak team coordination (RDB, 2023). The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR, 2022) further found that 45% of public sector workers felt disengaged as a result of inflexible and hierarchical leadership structures. Empirical evidence from Uwizeyimana (2023) suggests that projects run by transformational leaders had a 23% higher success rate compared to those under transactional or authoritarian leadership models.

Transformational leadership, characterized by visionary guidance, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence (Bass & Riggio, 2021), has been widely associated with enhanced innovation, commitment, and team performance. However, most empirical evidence originates from Western or private-sector contexts. The present study addresses this gap by empirically examining the specific effect of transformational leadership on the performance of the KIC project team a complex, multidisciplinary public sector initiative in Rwanda.

This paper is guided by the following specific objective: To assess how transformational leadership affects the Kigali Innovation City (KIC) project team's performance. The paper proceeds through a review of related literature, a description of the methodology, a presentation of empirical findings, and a discussion of their implications for theory and practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global Perspective on Transformational Leadership and Project Team Performance

Transformational leadership theory, originally proposed by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), describes a leadership style through which leaders inspire followers to exceed self-interest in favour of collective organizational goals. Bass (1985) identified the four core dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration popularly

referred to as the '4 I's'. Subsequent scholarship has consistently demonstrated the positive effects of these dimensions on organizational performance.

In Asian contexts, Okada and Yamashita (2020) found that Japan's consensus-based, participative leadership, which shares characteristics with transformational practice, led to 85% of public sector projects exceeding performance expectations over a decade. Similarly, Gupta et al. (2021) found that while authoritative leadership dominated Indian public development projects, the introduction of transformational elements improved long-term innovation and team engagement. More directly, Jabbour and Al Maalouf (2025) demonstrated in a study of 150 employees in small and medium enterprises that transformational leadership had a strong positive relationship with innovation and performance outcomes, with 82% of employees reporting higher performance under inspirational and individualized leadership.

2.2 African and Regional Perspectives

In sub-Saharan Africa, scholarly attention to transformational leadership in public project management has grown substantially. Kaneza (2024) found that transformational leadership significantly enhanced team performance in Rwandan project settings by fostering innovation, creativity, and organizational goal commitment, with 85% of respondents affirming its positive impact. Umuganwa (2021) corroborated these findings in a case study at Africa New Life Ministries, showing that transformational leadership improved project performance by aligning team members' values with organizational objectives. 78% of surveyed staff perceived their transformational leaders as instrumental in this alignment.

Muriuki and Njeru (2022) reported that 76% of employees in African public institutions experienced increased engagement and satisfaction under participatory and transformational leadership practices, underscoring the positive spillover of visionary and people-centred leadership into project performance. Alharbi (2021) similarly found that 80% of survey respondents in a descriptive survey confirmed that transformational leadership enhanced team cooperation and mutual learning. In Rwanda specifically, the Rwanda Development Board (2021) reported that over 75% of RDB-initiated projects had been successful under transformational leadership practices, with an 85% on-time completion rate.

2.3 Theoretical Framework: Transformational Leadership Theory

The theoretical anchor of this study is Bass and Riggio's Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2021). Within this framework, transformational leaders create compelling visions that motivate teams to transcend immediate self-interest, engage in creative

problem-solving, and sustain high commitment to organizational goals. Violi (2023) further articulates that transformational leaders acknowledge the need for change, craft visionary direction, and implement change through follower commitment.

In the context of public project management, this theory is particularly relevant because of the complex, multidisciplinary, and high-stakes nature of flagship national projects such as KIC. The theory predicts that transformational leadership will improve team creativity, commitment, collaboration, and productivity all of which constitute key dimensions of project team performance. Organizational culture and policy frameworks at RDB are recognized as moderating the expression and effectiveness of transformational leadership (Alidu, 2022; Schein, 2010).

2.4 Study Gap Identification

Most existing studies in Rwanda rely on qualitative or single-case designs (Kamugisha, 2023; Umuganwa, 2021), limiting statistical generalization. Quantitative evidence linking transformational leadership specifically to measurable project team performance indicators within RDB-managed flagship projects such as KIC is limited. Furthermore, most prior studies have not examined performance within the specific context of large-scale, government-led innovation infrastructure projects in Rwanda. This study addresses these gaps by providing empirical quantitative data on transformational leadership's effect on KIC project team performance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive and correlational research design to examine how transformational leadership affects project team performance within the KIC project at RDB. The descriptive component provided comprehensive profiles of leadership practices, team dynamics, and performance characteristics. The correlational component measured the strength and direction of the relationship between transformational leadership and project team performance (Kothari, 2021). A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative questionnaires with qualitative interviews, enabling triangulation and richer contextual understanding.

3.2 Location and Population

The study was conducted at the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), headquartered in Kigali, which oversees the Kigali Innovation City project. RDB was selected for its central role in national development project management and its structured, project-based operational model. The target population comprised 379

RDB personnel actively engaged in the KIC project across managerial, supervisory, and operational levels, as documented in the Kigali Innovation City Project Report (2025).

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling

A sample of 194 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e)^2] = 379 / [1 + 379(0.05)^2] \approx 194$$

Stratified random sampling was used to proportionally select respondents from five departments: Project Management (54), Operations (46), Strategic Planning (33), Team Leadership (31), and Project Support & Administration (30). Convenience sampling supplemented the process for respondents actively engaged in live projects.

3.4 Research Instruments and Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) covering eight transformational leadership indicators, an interview guide for key informants, and a focus group discussion guide. Instruments were pre-tested at the Rwanda Information Society Authority (RISA) with 10 participants and refined for clarity and relevance. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) framework guided item development (Bass & Avolio, 2020). Secondary data were drawn from policy documents, project reports, and institutional records.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Content and construct validity were ensured through expert review by academics and project management professionals. Convergent and criterion validity were tested by correlating theoretically related constructs. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (α), with a threshold of 0.7. Test-retest and split-half reliability procedures were also applied to ensure consistency across measurement conditions.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS through descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and inferential statistics including Pearson correlation, multiple regression analysis, and ANOVA. The regression model was:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where Y = Project Team Performance; X_1 = Transformational Leadership; X_2 = Transactional Leadership; X_3 = Democratic Leadership; α = constant;

β_{1-3} = coefficients; ε = error term. Qualitative interview data were analysed using thematic analysis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Mount Kigali University, and official permission was secured from RDB management before data collection. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

A sample of 194 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula. Of the 194 questionnaires distributed, 185 were successfully completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 96.36%.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents were aged 26–35 (42.70%), male (60.54%), and held bachelor's degrees (44.86%). Operational staff comprised the largest occupational group (36.22%), followed by team leaders (22.16%) and project managers (15.68%). Most respondents had 4–6 years of work experience (29.19%), and 52.43% were permanent employees. This profile reflects the active, mid-career project workforce at RDB most directly engaged in KIC project delivery.

4.3 Effect of Transformational Leadership on KIC Project Team Performance

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the eight transformational leadership indicators measured against project team performance.

Table 1: Effect of Transformational Leadership on KIC Project Team Performance

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	SD
Visionary guidance that motivates employees	2 (1.08)	5 (2.70)	14 (7.57)	97 (52.43)	67 (36.22)	4.20	0.79
Inspire employees toward shared goals	1 (0.54)	6 (3.24)	12 (6.49)	94 (50.81)	72 (38.92)	4.24	0.77
Individualized consideration of employee needs	3 (1.62)	7 (3.78)	16 (8.65)	91 (49.19)	68 (36.76)	4.15	0.83
Enhances team innovation and creativity	2 (1.08)	6 (3.24)	13 (7.03)	89 (48.11)	75 (40.54)	4.24	0.80
Communicates clear organizational vision	1 (0.54)	5 (2.70)	15 (8.11)	92 (49.73)	72 (38.92)	4.23	0.78
Encourages creative and strategic thinking	2 (1.08)	6 (3.24)	14 (7.57)	88 (47.57)	75 (40.54)	4.23	0.81
Acts as role model for positive employee behavior	1 (0.54)	4 (2.16)	13 (7.03)	95 (51.35)	72 (38.92)	4.26	0.75
Increases collective team commitment	2 (1.08)	5 (2.70)	11 (5.95)	90 (48.65)	77 (41.62)	4.27	0.78
Average						4.23	0.79

The findings reveal that all eight transformational leadership indicators recorded mean scores between 4.15 and 4.27 with standard deviations ranging from 0.75 to 0.83, indicating strong and consistent agreement among respondents that transformational leadership practices positively influence KIC project team performance. The highest-rated item was 'Increases collective team commitment' (mean = 4.27, SD = 0.78), followed closely by 'Acts as role model for positive employee behavior' (mean = 4.26, SD = 0.75). The overall average mean of 4.23 (SD = 0.79) reflects broad consensus across the sample that transformational leadership is an effective driver of team performance at KIC.

Disaggregating the responses confirms the direction of this effect: combined agree and strongly agree proportions ranged from 85.03% to 90.27% across indicators, while combined strongly disagree and disagree proportions never exceeded 5.40% for any single item. The narrow standard deviations (0.75–0.83) further indicate low dispersion, suggesting that respondents held consistently positive views about transformational leadership regardless of their departmental role or seniority level.

4.4 Inferential Analysis

4.4.1 Model Summary

Table 2: Presents The Regression Model Summary for The Collective Prediction of Project Team Performance by All Three Leadership Styles.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.902	0.813	0.810	0.691

Predictors: (Constant), Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Democratic Leadership | Dependent Variable: Project Team Performance

The model produced a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = 0.902$, indicating a strong positive relationship between the three leadership styles combined and project team performance. The coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.813$ shows that 81.3% of the variance in project team performance is explained by the combined influence of

transformational, transactional, and democratic leadership styles. The adjusted $R^2 = 0.810$ confirms model stability with minimal overfitting. The standard error of estimate of 0.691 reflects high predictive accuracy.

4.4.2 ANOVA

Table 3: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	355.609	3	118.536	≈248.5	.000
Residual	81.992	181	0.477		
Total	437.601	184			

The ANOVA table confirms the overall statistical significance of the regression model. The F-statistic of approximately 248.5 with a significance value of $p < 0.001$ indicates that leadership styles collectively and significantly predict project team performance at KIC, thus rejecting the null hypothesis (H_{01}) that

transformational leadership has no significant effect on KIC project team performance.

4.4.3 Regression Coefficients

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Model	B (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.512	0.218	—	2.35	0.020
Transformational Leadership	0.438	0.049	0.482	8.94	0.000
Transactional Leadership	0.291	0.046	0.301	6.33	0.000
Democratic Leadership	0.356	0.052	0.347	6.85	0.000

The regression equation derived from Table 4 is:

$$Y = 0.512 + 0.438X_1 + 0.291X_2 + 0.356X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.482$, $t = 8.94$, $p < 0.001$) exerted the strongest positive and statistically significant effect on project team performance among the three leadership predictors. Holding other variables constant, a one-unit increase in transformational leadership practices is associated with a 0.438-unit improvement in project team performance. Democratic leadership ($\beta = 0.347$) was the second strongest predictor, followed by transactional leadership ($\beta = 0.301$). All three predictors were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

4.5 Qualitative Interview Findings

Qualitative findings from key informant interviews reinforced the quantitative results. Interviewees described transformational leadership as a dominant and positively influential practice at RDB, consistently emphasizing leaders' ability to articulate clear visions, inspire team ownership, and foster creativity aligned with KIC's strategic goals. Respondents noted that inspirational motivation strengthened team commitment and collaboration, while individualized consideration made staff feel valued and enabled to contribute meaningfully. As one respondent stated: 'Transformational leadership encourages us to take ownership of our tasks and innovate solutions that align with the KIC project's strategic goals.'

These qualitative narratives corroborate the quantitative findings and confirm that transformational leadership practices at KIC are perceived as effective enablers of team creativity, goal alignment, and sustained commitment.

4.6 Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis of KIC's governance and policy frameworks further contextualizes these findings. RDB's leadership approach aligns with Rwanda's Vision 2050, the Digital Acceleration Agenda, the Five-Year FinTech Strategy (2024–2029), and the National Innovation Policy, all of which emphasize visionary, innovation-oriented, and people-centred leadership. The Implementation Agreement between RDB, the Government of Rwanda, and Africa50 formalizes governance commitments to strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and defined performance milestones—institutional structures that reinforce transformational leadership effectiveness.

4.7 Discussion of Findings

The finding that transformational leadership significantly and most strongly predicts project team performance at KIC ($\beta = 0.482$, $p < 0.001$) is consistent with a broad body of empirical literature. Kaneza (2024) reported that 85% of respondents in Rwandan project teams agreed that transformational leadership enhanced innovation and creativity. Umuganwa (2021) found that 78% of Africa New Life Ministries staff perceived transformational leaders as instrumental in aligning team objectives with organizational goals. Jabbour and Al Maalouf (2025) observed that 82% of employees in SMEs reported higher performance outcomes under inspirational and individualized leadership.

The overall mean of 4.23 (SD = 0.79) across transformational leadership indicators closely mirrors findings from comparable African public institutions where participation and engagement scores exceeded 4.0 (Muriuki & Njeru, 2022). The model's R^2 of 0.813 exceeds comparable regression models in Sub-Saharan African public sector studies, where explained variance in team performance through leadership styles has ranged from 60% to 75% (Ingabire, 2025; Usengumuremyi et al., 2025), suggesting that RDB's enabling institutional environment amplifies the effect of leadership on performance.

Theoretically, these results validate Bass and Riggio's (2021) Transformational Leadership Theory in the specific context of a large-scale public innovation project in Rwanda. The four dimensions of transformational leadership idealized influence (role modelling), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation (creative thinking), and individualized consideration each registered consistently high mean scores, confirming their collective contribution to team performance. These findings also align with Schein's

(2010) organizational culture theory: RDB's institutional culture and policy orientation amplify the expression of transformational leadership, creating conditions under which visionary and motivational leadership translates into measurable team productivity and goal achievement.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study provides robust empirical evidence that transformational leadership significantly and positively affects the performance of the Kigali Innovation City (KIC) project team managed by the Rwanda Development Board. Quantitative analysis demonstrated that all eight transformational leadership indicators yielded strong agreement among respondents (mean range 4.15–4.27; overall mean = 4.23, SD = 0.79), while regression analysis identified transformational leadership as the most influential predictor of project team performance ($\beta = 0.482$, $p < 0.001$). Collectively with transactional and democratic leadership, these three styles explained 81.3% of the variance in project team performance ($R^2 = 0.813$). These findings reject the null hypothesis (H_{01}) and confirm that transformational leadership characterized by visionary guidance, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and role modelling is a critical driver of team creativity, commitment, and productivity within KIC.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Recommendations for Practice

(i) To RDB and KIC Project Management Authorities:

- Institutionalize structured transformational leadership training programs that enhance project managers' competencies in visionary communication, inspirational motivation, and individualized team member development.
- Integrate transformational leadership performance criteria into staff appraisal systems to incentivize and reinforce visionary and motivational leadership behaviours at all team levels.
- Establish formal mentorship and coaching programs that allow experienced transformational leaders to transfer visionary guidance and creative problem-solving skills to mid-level managers and team leaders.

(ii) To Project Team Members and Staff:

- Actively engage with leadership development opportunities and feedback channels to enhance individual contributions to team creativity and commitment.
- Support a culture of knowledge sharing, collaborative innovation, and ownership of

project objectives in alignment with KIC's vision and Rwanda's national development goals.

(iii) To Partner Organizations and Stakeholders:

- Provide mentorship support and technical guidance to RDB leadership teams to strengthen transformational leadership capacities for multidisciplinary project environments.
- Contribute to capacity-building initiatives that embed transformational leadership principles within KIC's project governance arrangements.

5.2.2 Recommendations for Policy

- Develop national public sector policies that institutionalize leadership development programs focused on transformational leadership competencies and their measurement in project delivery contexts.
- Ensure that Rwanda's national project management frameworks incorporate transformational leadership indicators alongside performance measurement, participatory governance, and reward-based accountability.
- Align RDB's leadership development strategy with Rwanda's Vision 2050, the Digital Acceleration Agenda, and the National Innovation Policy to ensure that transformational leadership capacity-building contributes directly to innovation-driven national development objectives.

5.2.3 Recommendations for Further Research

- Conduct longitudinal studies to track the sustained effects of transformational leadership on project team performance across multiple RDB-managed projects over time.
- Examine the mediating role of organizational culture, motivation, and employee engagement in the relationship between transformational leadership and project team performance at RDB.
- Investigate whether the strong effect of transformational leadership found at KIC generalizes across other sectors of Rwanda's public service, including health, education, and infrastructure development.
- Explore the influence of emerging leadership approaches such as digital, agile, and servant leadership on team performance within innovation-driven public projects in sub-Saharan Africa.

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