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The effect of leadership skills on project performance at Rwanda Energy Group, Rwanda

Dusabirane Olivier and Gitahi Njenga

Mount Kenya University, Rwanda

Email: Dusolibiero01@gmail.com

Abstract: *Leadership skills may support project delivery by clarifying responsibilities and coordinating implementation. This study examined their relationship with perceived project performance at Rwanda Energy Group (REG) in Kigali City, Rwanda. Guided by Contingency Leadership Theory, it used descriptive and correlational methods within a cross-sectional quantitative design. The target population comprised 131 employees across six branches, and the reported sample comprised 99 respondents. Structured questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. Leadership-item means ranged from 4.12 to 4.40; stakeholder communication received the highest rating and delegation the lowest. Performance-item means ranged from 4.12 for timely completion to 4.30 for quality compliance. The reported analysis indicated that leadership skills were positively correlated with perceived project performance ($r = .645$, $p < .01$). The findings support leadership development focused on delegation, team feedback and implementation oversight. They also suggest linking training to independently documented delivery indicators. Because the study was cross-sectional and relied on staff perceptions, the results establish statistical association rather than causation.*

Keywords: *Leadership, Performance, Projects, Empowerment, Energy, Rwanda*

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1. Introduction

Project leadership entails directing teams, clarifying responsibilities and coordinating decisions to achieve agreed objectives. In energy projects, these functions connect technical planning with implementation. This study conceptualizes leadership skills as observable managerial practices, including setting standards, supporting planning, delegating responsibilities, preparing contingencies, overseeing implementation, communicating with stakeholders and considering employee feedback. These practices describe how managers guide project delivery and are conceptually distinct from technical design and financial resources.

Project performance encompasses multiple dimensions. Atkinson (1999) questioned the adequacy of assessing projects solely through cost, time and quality, while Ika (2009) highlighted the importance of assessment criteria and stakeholder perspectives in defining project success. Projects may meet technical standards while experiencing delays, and immediate user satisfaction may coexist with longer-term operational challenges. Accordingly, this article examines employees' perceptions across several project-delivery indicators, recognizing that favorable staff assessments do not independently establish project success.

Previous research provides a basis for examining the relationship between leadership and project performance.

Müller and Turner (2010) examined leadership competency profiles across project types, highlighting the relevance of project demands to leadership effectiveness. In the context of African development projects, Aga et al. (2016) identified team-building as a partial mediator of the relationship between transformational leadership and project success. These studies inform the present investigation, although their findings cannot be assumed to apply directly to Rwanda Energy Group (REG). The current study therefore examines the association between leadership skills and perceived project performance among REG employees, while recognizing that financial, contractual and technical conditions may also influence delivery outcomes.

Evidence from Rwanda situates managerial practices within the broader context of energy-project delivery. Mushuti et al. (2016) examined seven micro-hydropower projects, considering managerial competence alongside procurement, budgetary and project characteristics. More recently, Uwase (2025) investigated planning, coordination and monitoring in selected Rwandan hydropower plants. These studies provide a contextual basis for examining leadership in energy-sector management, while recognizing distinctions between project delivery, plant operations and institutional performance.

The present study examines REG employees' assessments in Jabana, Kacyiru, Kicukiro, Nyarugenge, Remera and Kanombe. It presents item-level descriptive statistics for leadership practices and perceived project performance, together with their reported bivariate correlation. Its contribution lies in providing context-specific evidence on staff perceptions that may inform leadership development and guide further evaluation using independently verified project-delivery measures.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Energy-project managers are expected to provide clear direction, coordinate specialized work, anticipate implementation risks and support timely, resource-conscious delivery. However, the existence of management structures does not itself establish whether employees experience effective delegation, useful feedback or consistent implementation oversight. Rwandan energy research identifies managerial competence as one consideration among several delivery conditions (Mushuti et al., 2016). The practical question is therefore which leadership practices employees assess favorably and whether leadership ratings are associated with performance ratings within the same organizational setting.

The available literature does not answer this question fully. Cross-project leadership studies examine different competency measures; regional infrastructure research shows that relationships can differ across time and cost outcomes; and Rwandan hydropower studies may focus on plant operation rather than the project-performance construct used here. This leaves a context and measurement gap concerning the seven leadership practices assessed across the six REG branches. Addressing that gap provides evidence for focused professional development, while recognizing that employee perceptions cannot substitute for audited project-delivery records.

1.2 Objective and Hypothesis

The study aim was to analyze the effect of leadership skills on project performance at Rwanda Energy Group. The study used Pearson's correlation to test whether leadership skills are significantly associated with perceived project performance at REG, without inferring causality.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Contingency Leadership Theory

Fiedler's (1967) Contingency Leadership Theory explains leadership effectiveness through the fit between a leader's orientation and situational favorableness, defined by leader–member relations, task structure and position power. The model treats leadership orientation as relatively stable and emphasizes improving situational fit through organizational arrangements or appropriate leader assignment. Reams (2023) reinforces this interpretation, highlighting the continuing relevance of matching leadership orientation with work conditions.

In energy projects, task structure concerns the clarity of procedures and expected outputs, position power reflects formal authority over decisions and resources, and leader member relations concern relationships within project teams. Standards-setting, planning support and oversight may contribute to work structure, while delegation and employee feedback concern the exercise of authority and team relationships. These connections represent contextual applications of the theory rather than direct measures of its original constructs. Complementing this perspective, Rehan et al. (2024) identified relationship management, communication effectiveness, leading by example and self-management as practices associated with success in Australian construction projects. Their findings inform the discussion of project leadership but do not directly validate Fiedler's model or establish its applicability to REG.

The theory therefore provides an interpretive framework for considering leadership alongside project conditions. However, the present study did not assess leadership

orientation using Fiedler's least preferred co-worker instrument, classify situational favorableness or test leadership–situation interactions. Its findings consequently cannot confirm the contingency model. Instead, the theory informs discussion and future hypotheses concerning the fit between leadership arrangements and energy-project requirements.

2.1.2 Leadership Practices and Performance Measurement

Leadership practices are conceptually distinct from the outcomes they seek to support. Planning and standards-setting clarify expectations, delegation allocates responsibility, monitoring identifies deviations, and feedback supports corrective action. Avolio et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of leaders, followers and context in understanding leadership. This perspective supports examining leadership through related managerial practices rather than treating it solely as a personal attribute.

Empowerment provides a complementary explanation for the relevance of delegation. Seibert et al. (2011) found positive associations between empowerment and performance-related outcomes at individual and team levels. Nevertheless, task assignment alone does not establish that employees possess sufficient authority, information or support. Accordingly, the delegation item in this study measures a perceived leadership practice rather than psychological empowerment, and the analysis does not test empowerment as a mediating mechanism.

Project-performance indicators also require conceptual distinction. Timeliness, resource utilization, quality compliance and user satisfaction represent dimensions of perceived delivery performance, whereas management-tool use and change documentation primarily reflect management processes. Drawing on Atkinson (1999) and Ika (2009), these indicators should be interpreted according to their content and assessment perspective. Their combination provides a broad measure of employees' assessments of project management and delivery, but does not establish independently verified project success.

2.2 Empirical Review

International research associate's leadership competencies, empowerment and managerial practices with performance. Müller and Turner (2010), analyzing 400 Leadership Development Questionnaire responses, identified competencies shared by successful project managers alongside differences by project type. Seibert et al. (2011) linked psychological and team empowerment with performance-related outcomes, supporting attention to the authority and support accompanying delegated responsibilities. More recently, Rehan et al. (2024), drawing on 66 Australian construction projects, identified relationship management, communication effectiveness, leading by example and self-management as practices associated with project success. Together, these studies support examining leadership within its organizational context. However, differences in constructs, analytical levels and sectors limit direct application to REG employees' assessments.

Regional research highlights potential mechanisms and differences across performance dimensions. Aga et al. (2016), surveying 200 development-project managers in Ethiopia's non-governmental organization sector, found that team-building partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and project success. Kariuki (2018), examining 102 completed Kenyan water projects using hierarchical regression, found a significant association between leadership style and time performance, but no statistically significant association with cost performance. These findings suggest that leadership–performance relationships depend partly on team processes, organizational settings and the outcomes assessed. Nevertheless, they do not establish that team-building explains the REG association or that leadership relates equally to every delivery dimension.

Rwandan studies situate leadership within broader project-management conditions. Mushuti et al. (2016) examined seven publicly funded micro-hydropower projects through a descriptive case study involving 53 purposively selected respondents, considering managerial competence alongside budgetary, procurement and project characteristics. Uwamahoro and Dushimimana (2024), studying 326 respondents in the TREPA project, reported a positive leadership coefficient ($B = .143$, $p = .009$) within a model incorporating conflict resolution, communication and motivation. Similarly, Ishimwe and Dushimimana (2025), using questionnaires and interviews with 269 respondents in Bank of Kigali-supported social housing projects, reported a positive leadership–success correlation ($r = .812$) and a significant adjusted leadership coefficient. These findings support examining leadership alongside other managerial and organizational influences, although their measures and models differ from the REG bivariate analysis.

Providing a closer sectoral comparison, Uwase (2025) examined 135 managers, engineers and operational staff in selected Rwandan hydropower plants and found positive associations between planning, coordination, monitoring and performance indicators. However, plant availability, operating efficiency and maintenance costs concern operational performance rather than the perceived project-delivery outcomes examined here. The present study therefore complements existing evidence

through employees' assessments of seven leadership practices and perceived performance across six REG branches. Its contribution is contextual; the reported bivariate correlation does not establish causality or isolate leadership from other delivery conditions.

2.3 Critical Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed literature identifies leadership as a relevant component of project management, although studies differ in their constructs, respondents, analytical approaches and performance measures. International evidence addresses leadership competencies and empowerment, while African studies examine team-building mechanisms and distinguish between schedule and cost outcomes. Rwandan research extends this evidence to development projects, social housing and hydropower operations. These differences limit direct comparison of reported associations and their practical implications.

Within the reviewed literature, limited evidence addresses employees' assessments of the seven leadership practices examined across the six REG branches and their relationship with the perceived project-performance measure used here. This study addresses that contextual gap through item-level descriptive statistics and the reported bivariate correlation. Its contribution is a focused account of staff perceptions; it does not establish causality, validate a new leadership scale or identify the independent contribution of individual practices to specific performance dimensions.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Setting

The study used a quantitative approach with descriptive and correlational analysis in a cross-sectional design. It examined employees involved in ongoing REG projects across six Kigali City branches: Jabana, Kacyiru, Kicukiro, Nyarugenge, Remera and Kanombe. The descriptive component summarised reported practices and performance, while the correlational component assessed relationships among questionnaire-derived variables. Measurements taken at one-time point cannot establish whether leadership preceded performance. The project's substantive reference period was January 2021–December 2023, while its results tables identify the primary data as collected in 2025; exact fieldwork dates were not stated.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised 131 employees involved in REG projects across the six branches. A sample of 99 was calculated using Slovin's formula with a 5% acceptable sampling error: $n = 131/[1 + 131(0.05)^2] = 98.68$, rounded to 99. Table 1 presents the population and allocated sample for each branch. The project reports branch coverage but does not specify how individual employees were selected within each branch.

Table 1: Population and sample allocation across REG branches

Branch	Population	Sample
Jabana	20	15
Kacyiru	23	18
Kicukiro	19	14
Nyarugenge	24	18
Remera	23	17
Kanombe	22	17
Total	131	99

3.3 Instruments and Measurement

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire. Items used a five-point response scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Seven leadership items and six perceived-performance indicators are reported in Tables 2 and 3. Higher item ratings represent more favorable assessments. The correlation relates to the leadership and performance scores used in the original analysis; individual items are presented descriptively. The broader questionnaire contained six sections covering demographics, four soft-skill dimensions and project performance. This article uses the leadership and performance results. The researcher personally distributed questionnaires in

envelopes and collected completed questionnaires in sealed envelopes after presenting the consent statement.

The questionnaire was piloted with 10 individuals who were excluded from the main sample, representing approximately 10% of the intended sample. The pilot assessed the format, clarity, readability and wording of the questions. Feedback informed revisions before the instrument was finalized. The supervisor also reviewed the questionnaire for its suitability for the target population and alignment with the study objectives.

Although Cronbach's alpha was identified as the measure of internal consistency, with .70 specified as the acceptability threshold, the coefficients obtained for the individual scales were not reported. Therefore, the internal consistency of the leadership, performance and other scales could not be verified. The pilot and supervisor review supported instrument refinement but did not establish reliability.

Similarly, although the study referred to factor analysis for assessing convergent and discriminant validity, supporting results were unavailable. Consequently, construct validity cannot be confirmed. Procedures for calculating composite scores and handling missing responses were also not documented. These reporting limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Frequencies and percentages described respondents' characteristics, while means and standard deviations summarized responses to leadership and perceived project-performance items. Pearson's correlation coefficient assessed the direction and strength of the bivariate association between leadership skills and perceived project performance.

The significance level was set at .05, and the correlation was reported at the original two-tailed significance threshold of $p < .01$. Comparisons of item means were descriptive; no inferential tests were conducted to establish differences between items or branches.

The article presents descriptive statistics and the correlation coefficient reported in the original study. Regression results were excluded because inconsistencies in the reported statistical summaries could not be resolved without the original SPSS output or respondent-level data. The retained correlation is therefore interpreted as an unadjusted association and does not establish causation. Its underlying assumptions and sensitivity to analytical decisions could not be independently verified.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

The sample comprised 99 employees, including 63 men (63.6%) and 36 women (36.4%). Most respondents were aged 25–39 years (58; 58.6%), followed by those aged 40–49 years (40; 40.4%) and 50–59 years (1; 1.0%). Using the length-of-service categories reported in the study, 27 respondents (27.3%) had served for 1–3 years, 31 (31.3%) for 3–5 years, 24 (24.2%) for 6–10 years and 17 (17.2%) for more than 10 years. These characteristics provide a descriptive profile of the respondents. Demographic differences in leadership skills and perceived project performance were not tested, and the association between these variables was not adjusted for demographic characteristics.

4.2 Descriptive Findings on Leadership Skills

Table 2 presents the seven leadership practices. Means describe the location of responses on the five-point scale, while standard deviations show their dispersion. They do not indicate the percentage agreeing, which cannot be reconstructed without category frequencies.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for leadership practices

Leadership practice	M	SD
Guides team in setting design-phase standards	4.25	0.79
Assists project planning	4.35	0.71
Delegates tasks effectively	4.12	0.84
Ensures contingency plans for potential risks	4.18	0.76
Oversees project lifecycle and implements action plans	4.30	0.68
Maintains communication among stakeholders	4.40	0.65
Considers team feedback before decisions	4.15	0.82

All leadership-item means exceeded 4.00, indicating generally favorable ratings. Stakeholder communication received the highest mean (M = 4.40, SD = 0.65), followed by planning support (M = 4.35, SD = 0.71) and lifecycle oversight (M = 4.30, SD = 0.68). Standards-setting also received a favorable assessment (M = 4.25, SD = 0.79). These results suggest that respondents particularly recognized visible coordination and implementation guidance.

Delegation recorded the lowest mean (M = 4.12, SD = 0.84), followed by consideration of team feedback (M = 4.15, SD = 0.82) and contingency planning (M = 4.18, SD = 0.76). Delegation was therefore relatively less favorably rated, rather than negatively rated. Its larger standard deviation indicates more varied responses than for stakeholder communication. The 0.28-point gap between the highest and lowest means describes a pattern for managerial attention, but does not establish a statistically significant difference or identify a particular branch as deficient.

4.3 Descriptive Findings on Perceived Project Performance

Table 3 makes the reported outcome indicators explicit. The six indicators combine assessments of delivery outcomes with management processes. This distinction is important when interpreting the overall performance association.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for perceived project performance

Performance indicator	M	SD
Timely project completion	4.12	0.83
Resource utilization	4.18	0.74
Quality compliance	4.30	0.69
Application of project management tools	4.25	0.72
Documentation of project changes	4.20	0.76
User satisfaction	4.28	0.71

Quality compliance received the highest mean rating (M = 4.30, SD = 0.69), followed closely by user satisfaction (M = 4.28, SD = 0.71). Respondents also rated management-tool use (M = 4.25, SD = 0.72), change documentation (M = 4.20, SD = 0.76) and resource utilization (M = 4.18, SD = 0.74) favorably. Timely completion recorded the lowest mean and greatest variability (M = 4.12, SD = 0.83), suggesting comparatively weaker and less consistent endorsement of schedule performance. These differences are descriptive and were not tested for statistical significance.

The findings reflect employees' perceptions of project performance. In the absence of audited expenditure records, baseline schedules and independently collected user-satisfaction data, they do not establish compliance with approved budgets, quantify delays or verify users' satisfaction. The comparatively lower rating for timely completion nevertheless suggests that subsequent management reviews could examine schedule records alongside leadership practices to assess whether these perceptions correspond with documented delivery outcomes.

4.4 Relationship Between Leadership Skills and Performance

4.4.1 Pearson Correlation

Table 4: Reported bivariate leadership and performance association

Variables	Pearson r	Significance
Leadership skills and perceived project performance	.645	$p < .01$

Leadership skills were positively correlated with perceived project performance ($r = .645$, $p < .01$). Thus, employees assigning higher leadership scores also tended to assign higher performance scores. The estimate describes a positive association of appreciable magnitude in this sample. It does not mean that leadership improved performance by 64.5%, and the correlation does not establish the direction of influence. The null hypothesis of no bivariate association is rejected at the .05 level on the reported results.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

4.5.1 Leadership Skills and Perceived Project Performance

The reported positive correlation indicates that favorable leadership assessments were associated with favorable assessments of project performance among REG employees. This is broadly consistent with Müller and Turner (2010), who highlighted leadership competencies in successful project management. It also aligns with the positive relationships reported in Rwanda by Uwamahoro and Dushimimana (2024) and Ishimwe and Dushimimana (2025). However, differences in settings, measures and analytical approaches limit direct comparison across studies. The REG association is unadjusted and does not establish causality or isolate leadership from other organizational influences.

4.5.2 Leadership Practices

Communication and planning received comparatively high ratings, while delegation and employee feedback were rated relatively lower. This pattern suggests that respondents viewed coordination favorably while identifying opportunities to strengthen participation and clarify delegated authority. The differences remain descriptive and do not establish that individual practices influenced performance.

Seibert et al. (2011) linked empowerment with performance-related outcomes, supporting attention to the authority and support accompanying delegated responsibilities. Aga et al. (2016) similarly highlighted team processes as a potential pathway between leadership and project success. Although these mechanisms were not tested at REG, they provide a basis for reviewing delegation and the consideration of employee suggestions.

Favorable assessments of planning and oversight also broadly correspond with Uwase's (2025) findings in Rwandan hydropower plants. However, plant operations and project delivery represent different outcomes. Fiedler's (1967) theory helps frame the relevance of project conditions, but the present study did not directly test leadership situation fit.

4.5.3 Perceived Project Performance

Quality compliance received the highest mean rating, whereas timely completion received the lowest. These descriptive findings suggest that favorable quality assessments did not extend equally to scheduling. Kariuki's (2018) different findings for time and cost performance in Kenyan water projects likewise support distinguishing performance dimensions. Nevertheless, the REG analysis does not establish that particular leadership practices explain the timeliness rating.

The performance measure combines perceived delivery outcomes with management processes, including tool use and change documentation. Following Atkinson (1999) and Ika (2009), the findings should therefore be interpreted according to the indicators assessed. They describe employees' perceptions rather than independently verified project success.

4.5.4 Interpretation and Practical Implications

The findings support reviewing delegation, employee feedback and schedule management alongside existing coordination practices. Clarifying routine decision authority, documenting responses to staff suggestions and comparing perceived timeliness with project records could inform management action.

Interpretation remains subject to the use of employee ratings for both leadership and performance. Shared response tendencies may contribute to the association, although common-method bias was not assessed (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The study consequently contributes context-specific evidence of staff perceptions and priorities for further review.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Leadership skills were positively and significantly associated with perceived project performance among the 99 REG employees surveyed in Kigali City ($r = .645$, $p < .01$). Coordination, planning and oversight received favorable ratings, while delegation and employee feedback were rated comparatively lower. Timeliness received the lowest rating among the performance indicators. These findings identify areas for management review, although the unadjusted association does not establish causality.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. REG management should strengthen delegation by clarifying decision authority, accountability and escalation procedures. Project teams should

also document employee suggestions and communicate the actions taken in response.

2. Project managers should strengthen milestone reviews by examining work dependencies, emerging risks and outstanding corrective actions. The comparatively lower timeliness rating warrants reviewing actual progress against approved schedules while maintaining quality standards.
3. Leadership development should address these priorities through practical project scenarios. Its effectiveness should be evaluated using staff feedback alongside documented schedule, budget and quality indicators.

5.3 Limitations and Further Research

The study involved 99 employees across six REG branches in Kigali City, limiting the generalizability of its findings. The cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data prevent causal inference and introduce potential common-method bias. Unreported reliability estimates, validity evidence and scoring procedures also limit assessment of measurement quality. Participant selection and potential clustering within branches were insufficiently documented. The analysis relied on reported summaries; the correlation could not be independently verified, and inconsistent regression results were excluded.

Further research should validate the measures, distinguish management processes from delivery outcomes and combine employee surveys with project records collected over time. Analyses should account for relevant organizational conditions and clustering within projects or branches. Evaluations using comparison groups could provide stronger evidence of whether leadership development improves project delivery.

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