Understanding
People Leadership
in the Construction
and Infrastructure
Sector

This document is the first in a four-part series exploring People Leadership within the Construction and Infrastructure Sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. It was born out of recurring themes identified across 13 Workforce Development Plans produced by Waihanga Ara Rau, where people leadership consistently stood out as a vital element in overcoming sector challenges and driving meaningful change. The research was undertaken by Waihanga Ara Rau kaimahi, in partnership with ConCOVE Tūhura. We gratefully acknowledge George Makapatama for his expert insights and kōrero, which have significantly shaped and guided this work.

Series Overview:

- Understanding People Leadership in the Construction & Infrastructure Sector
- People Leadership in Practice: Tackling Workforce Challenges
- People Leadership: Strategic Insights and Recommendations
- The People Leadership Toolkit: Practical Tools for Stronger Teams

Contents

Introduction

The Construction and Infrastructure (C&I) sector in Aotearoa New Zealand plays a pivotal role in the nation's economic and social fabric, serving as a cornerstone for growth and development.

Contributing approximately 8% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)[1] the sector encompasses a wide array of activities, from residential and commercial building to critical infrastructure projects. It is the third largest employing industry in New Zealand accounting for approximately 10% of the country's total workforce[2].

However, the C&I sector is highly exposed to boom-and-bust cycles, economic volatility, natural disasters, and shifting government investment priorities. These pressures not only disrupt employment and training pathways, but also intensify workforce challenges, exacerbate skill shortages, and create uncertainty for businesses of all sizes.

In this turbulent environment, strong leadership emerges as a stabilising force. Effective leaders are not merely managers of projects but architects of resilience, guiding organisations through uncertainty by fostering innovation, prioritising employee wellbeing, and building inclusive cultures that attract and retain talent.

Yet despite its importance, leadership in the C&I sector remains underexplored and underinvested, with persistent gaps in training, diversity and formal pathways. This report addresses this critical need by exploring what leadership looks like across the sector: what we've heard from stakeholders, what's proving effective in practice, and where the gaps are.

---

1   New Zealand Infrastructure Commission. (2022). *Economic performance of New Zealand's construction industry.*
2   Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE). (2023). *Building and Construction Sector Trends: Annual Report 2023.*

What are the goals of the project?

The primary goal of this project is to synthesise current practices, challenges and opportunities for enhancing leadership capability within New Zealand's Construction and Infrastructure (C&I) sector.

Drawing on comprehensive data gathered through stakeholder engagement, interviews, a targeted industry survey, and document review, this report forms part of a broader series of deliverables designed to provide industry stakeholders with a clear understanding of the value and impact of investment in leadership development. The project seeks to deliver evidence-based recommendations to support organizations in strengthening their leadership frameworks. Ultimately, this initiative serves as a call to action for industry associations, educators, policymakers, and business leaders to prioritise leadership development.

Why is leadership important?

In understanding the importance of leadership for the C&I sector, leadership sets the tone for workplace culture, wellbeing, productivity, and safety.

Effective leaders build engaged and supportive teams, improve workplace collaboration and enhance team productivity. In contrast poor leadership contributes to high turnover, burnout, and underperforming teams. This is particularly critical in C&I, where demanding schedules, physical nature of the work and complex project delivery can challenge staff and their wellbeing. Examples across the sector demonstrate that effective leadership produces tangible benefits, which include higher retention, increased productivity, high attractiveness of an organisation and improved wellbeing. These examples of how organisations are adapting to the changing New Zealand C&I environment are important to communicate and share with the wider sector to address long-term challenges and build a more resilient future workforce.

Effective leadership is paramount within the New Zealand C&I sector, playing a decisive role in the successful execution of projects, encouraging innovation, enhancing the wellbeing of the workforce, and driving overall sector productivity. The implementation of modern construction methodologies, such as Lean Construction[3], is centred on strong leadership to improve efficiency and productivity[4].

Furthermore, a significant relationship exists between leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, and worker performance within the New Zealand C&I sector, indicating a direct impact on tangible project outcomes[5].

---

3   Lean construction is an end-to-end, collaborative approach that aims to decrease time, effort and waste. Its goal is to maximise the value and productivity of a project while minimising the costs normally incurred during planning, design, building and maintenance.

4   Thilakarathna, N. (2024). *Improving Lean Construction Implementation in the Construction Industry: Framework for Addressing the Human Capital Related Barriers.* Retrieved from **https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/items/b3edf7c3-4e54-42d2-b689-77a8ed0dba55**

5   Rotimi, J., Witton, F. & Rasheed, E. (2021). *The predictive power of managers' leadership attributes on workers' performance: a case of New Zealand construction industry.* Retrieved from **https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353964615_The_predictive_power_of_managers'_leadership_attributes_on_workers'_performance_a_case_of_New_Zealand_construction_industry**

What have we heard from our sectors?

Since 2022, Waihanga Ara Rau have conducted more than 200 interviews with business owners and industry leaders across a wide range of industries within the C&I sector. These interviews informed the creation of 11 industry-focused and 2 community-focused Workforce Development Plans (WDPs).

These plans identified the skills, knowledge and competencies required to meet current and future industry needs. They also highlighted the key challenges and barriers that hinder workforce development and the acquisition of these capabilities. Following the production of the workforce development plans, cross-cutting themes were analysed to identify common issues and challenges that reoccurred across multiple industries. This analysis revealed that people leadership is a critical, sector-wide challenge.

To explore this theme further, a number of methodologies were utilised. First, the workforce development plans were reviewed to extract challenges specifically related to people leadership. Next, strategic reference groups (SRGs)[6] – made up of industry leaders, business owners, educators, regulators, and experts – were engaged to provide qualitative insights and validate how these challenges were experienced in practice. Finally, a short industry survey was distributed via LinkedIn to capture broader perspectives and gather additional evidence on the leadership issues identified.

Workforce development plans

The review of 13 workforce development plans reveals that leadership challenges are a widely shared issue across industries (Table 1). Gaps in supervisory and senior leadership capability were consistently identified, alongside weak mentoring systems and unclear pathways into leadership roles. Many sectors emphasised that leadership development is too often informal, under-resourced, and inconsistently applied, leaving progression into supervisory, senior, or ownership positions ambiguous.

Barriers to progression, particularly for Māori, Pacific peoples, and women, were also frequently highlighted, with structural and cultural factors such as racism, bias, and poor inclusion practices undermining equitable advancement. At the same time, industries strongly valued culturally grounded leadership, recognising the strengths of Māori and Pacific leadership approaches, but noted that these are seldom embedded outside of Māori and Pacific-owned organisations. Concerns about diverse leadership representation remain widespread.

Finally, succession planning and knowledge transfer emerged as a growing risk, especially in Civil, On Site Construction, and Plumbing, Gasfitting & Drainlaying (PGD) sectors, where an ageing workforce threatens continuity and productivity. Without stronger processes to retain and transfer institutional knowledge, many industries fear a significant loss of capability, safety, and wellbeing.

---

6   Further information on Waihanga Ara Rau's Strategic Reference Groups see https://www.waihangaararau.nz/strategic-reference-groups/

Table 1: Leadership challenges identified by sector in WDPs

Sector	Succession & Knowledge Transfer	Mentoring & Pathways	Leadership Capability	Diverse Leadership Representation	Culturally Grounded Leadership	Barriers to Progression
Access Trades	●	●	○	●	●	●
Electro-technology	—	○	●	○	○	—
Finishing Trades	○	●	●	●	○	○
Offsite Construction	●	●	●	●	●	●
On Site Construction	—	●	●	○	●	○
Plumbing, Gasfitting, Drainlaying (PGD)	●	●	●	●	○	●
Civil Infrastructure	—	—	○	○	○	○
Electricity Supply Industry (ESI)	○	●	●	●	●	●
Gas Infrastructure	●	●	●	●	○	●
Water Services	●	●	●	○	●	●
Construction & Infrastructure: Services	○	○	●	●	○	●
Kaitaka Paepaeroa: Māori WDP	—	●	●	○	●	●
Unleashing Pacific Talent: Pacific WDP	○	●	○	○	●	●

● Strong focus or clearly identified in the WDP
○ Mentioned or emerging focus;
— Not identified or absent

Leadership capability

Leadership capability was the most consistently identified issue, strongly highlighted in 10 of the 13 industries. Gaps at supervisory and senior levels were widespread, with many sectors reporting a lack of core leadership skills. This was particularly evident in Offsite Construction, On Site Construction, Plumbing/Gasfitting/Drainlaying (PGD), Electrotechnology, and Finishing Trades, where strengthening leadership capability was described as critical to sector growth and resilience.

Mentoring and pathways

Mentoring and structured career pathways were the next most prominent theme, strongly noted in 10 industries. Mentoring was widely recognised as a key mechanism for building leadership capability, but its delivery was inconsistent. It was often undertaken informally, under-resourced, and lacked senior leadership oversight. In sectors such as Access Trades, Offsite Construction, Gas Infrastructure, and Electricity Supply Industry (ESI) mentoring was identified as especially valuable, yet frequently absent. Clearer pathways into supervisory and leadership roles were repeatedly called for, with progression into leadership or business ownership described as ambiguous and poorly supported by qualifications or defined career structures.

Barriers to progression

Barriers to leadership progression were identified in 9 industries. These barriers were both structural and cultural, including racism, bias, and exclusionary practices. Māori, Pacific peoples, and women were most affected, with limited opportunities to move into leadership roles despite demonstrated capability. Sectors such as Access Trades, Civil Infrastructure, Gas Infrastructure, and PGD were particularly vocal about these challenges.

Culturally-grounded leadership

Seven industries strongly emphasised the value of culturally grounded leadership, with a further 6 recognising it to some extent. Māori and Pacific leadership principles were consistently acknowledged as highly relevant and impactful, but they were poorly supported outside Māori and Pacific-owned organisations. This was especially noted in Access Trades, Offsite Construction, On Site Construction, ESI, and Gas Infrastructure, where respondents saw opportunities to embed culturally informed practices more widely.

Diverse leadership representation

Diverse leadership representation was also raised in 7 industries, with a further 6 identifying it as a concern. While many sectors valued the benefits of inclusive leadership, practical progress has been limited. Offsite Construction, Finishing Trades, and Gas Infrastructure highlighted persistent underrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities in leadership roles.

Succession and knowledge transfer

Finally, succession and knowledge transfer were a significant issue for 5 industries, and noted to some extent in 4 others. The ageing workforce has heightened concerns about the risk of critical knowledge loss. Formalised processes for transferring institutional and sector-specific expertise were inconsistent or absent altogether. This challenge was especially acute in Civil Infrastructure, On Site Construction, and PGD, where workforce continuity and business sustainability are at risk without stronger succession planning.

Direct industry feedback

The review of the workforce development plans revealed the top concerns related to people leadership. Strategic reference groups – comprised of industry leaders, business owners, and experts – were consulted regarding leadership shortages, their current leadership development approach, and barriers to progression. This was followed up by a short survey to industry to seek wider responses and further insight into the key issues.

This direct feedback provides a clear picture of the challenges and opportunities facing leadership development in construction and infrastructure. This evidence highlights the lived realities of employers, workers, and industry representatives, and demonstrates how leadership issues are being experienced on the ground.

Capability and capacity gaps

Across SRGs and survey respondents, there was strong agreement that leadership shortages are evident in almost every sector. Employers consistently reported difficulties filling supervisory and middle-management roles, with capability gaps in people management, communication, and decision-making. Feedback suggested that individuals are often promoted into leadership positions based on technical skills or reliability, rather than preparedness for people leadership. This results in uneven capability and contributes to high stress levels among both leaders and teams.

Progression pathways and mentoring

A recurring theme was the lack of clear, structured pathways into leadership. SRGs described leadership development as ad hoc, typically reliant on informal mentoring, role modelling, or learning through experience. Survey participants reinforced this, noting that while mentoring is valued, it is inconsistently supported with time, resources, or organisational commitment. Both groups emphasised that without better-defined progression routes, emerging leaders struggle to see leadership as an attainable and sustainable career step.

Inclusion and equity challenges

Industry feedback highlighted systemic barriers to progression, particularly for Māori, Pacific peoples, and women. SRG discussions pointed to structural biases and limited representation at senior levels, while survey responses revealed that leadership opportunities are not equally accessible across the workforce. Employers recognised that more diverse leadership would strengthen teams, but few described robust systems in place to support this.

Culturally grounded leadership approaches

Several SRGs expressed a strong preference for leadership models that reflect Māori and Pacific values, such as collective responsibility, whānau-based decision-making, and community leadership. While these approaches were viewed as highly effective in some contexts, they are not widely embedded across mainstream businesses. The survey responses also indicated appetite for more culturally relevant training options, tailored to the realities of diverse workforces.

Training and qualifications

Both the survey and SRG discussions raised concerns that leadership training currently available is too generic and does not adequately address sector-specific realities. While some employers make use of external short courses or management programmes, these were often described as detached from the pressures of construction and infrastructure work. Participants stressed the need for training designed "by industry, for industry," combining technical expertise with practical leadership capability.

Succession and knowledge transfer

Industry representatives expressed deep concern about succession planning, particularly in trades and infrastructure services with ageing workforces. Employers noted that knowledge transfer processes are often informal or non-existent, creating a risk of capability loss when experienced staff leave. Civil, On Site Construction, and PGD sectors were especially vocal about the urgent need to capture and pass on critical expertise before it is lost.

Key takeaways

Direct feedback confirms that leadership challenges are not abstract or future risks; they are being felt across worksites, businesses, and industries today. Stakeholders are clear that leadership development must move beyond informal mentoring and generic courses toward structured, culturally responsive, and industry-specific solutions. Without action, gaps in capability, succession, and inclusion will continue to limit sector resilience and growth.

Leadership models in the C&I sector

Why an understanding of leadership models is important for the construction and infrastructure sector?

Understanding the various leadership models is becoming more important than ever, especially given the shifting workforce demographics in the C&I sector. The modern workforce, particularly in New Zealand and similar developed nations, is shaped by an aging and increasingly diverse population, rapid technological advancements, and the impacts of climate change. For the C&I sector, these pressures are intensified by long-term skills and labour shortages[7]. This new reality means that a single, 'one size fits all' leadership approach is no longer the most effective strategy. Future leaders need to be adaptable, human-centred and strategic.

The leadership models addressed in this report provide valuable frameworks to guide workforce engagement and talent recruitment. They help current leaders better understand diverse teams, adapt approaches to different situations, and connect more effectively with their staff. It can also help identify leadership talent, latent within their organisations.

Leadership and diversity

By drawing on various leadership models, decision-makers can better identify potential leaders within their diverse workforce. Understanding how leadership traits manifest differently across cultural groups provides valuable insights for talent identification. By creating targeted leadership pathways for these individuals, organisations can expand their leadership talent pool and unlock potential that often remains untapped.

Focusing on talent identification, internal development pathways, and recruiting for diversity in leadership ultimately enables companies to cultivate leaders who embody traits that are highly valued but frequently overlooked.

These leadership models also offer insights into the traits and effectiveness of different approaches. For instance, transactional leadership may be most effective in contexts where safety or compliance is the primary focus. In contrast, transformational or Māori leadership models are well suited to building organisational culture, while servant leadership excels in fostering community engagement.

What becomes evident is that there is no single "best" leadership model. The most effective approach depends on context. Leaders who are adaptable and possess a strong understanding of different leadership styles hold a significant competitive advantage. Different leadership models offer unique strengths, particularly people-centred approaches such as transformational leadership, which, when implemented effectively, deliver substantial benefits and are especially relevant for the C&I sector.

7   Waihanga Ara Rau. (2025). *Workforce Information Platform – Workforce Gaps.* https://www.wip.org.nz/workforce-gaps?pipeline_view=unadjusted

Prominent leadership models relevant to the sector

Traditional western leadership theories provide a foundational understanding of leadership in various contexts, and the C&I sector is no exception. Though as the demographics of the C&I sector diversify due to an aging workforce, sector downturns, and a growing diversity in the NZ population[8] it is now more than ever, important for the sector to prioritise attracting and retaining talent for the current and future workforce, in which leadership plays a critical role. Understanding the main leadership models in the C&I sector is therefore a key step in understanding key factors that impact the sector.

There is limited data available on the most commonly used leadership models within the C&I sector. However, from engagements and anecdotes, it is possible to infer that the most prominently used leadership models are derived from Western leadership theories. In particular, the transactional and transformational leadership models. Many Māori owned businesses within the C&I sector adopt a leadership approach grounded in a Te Ao Māori worldview. Similarly, Pacific-owned businesses often adopt an approach grounded in servant leadership known as Tautua. These four models demonstrate different approaches to leadership and are explored below.

Transactional leadership: A leader based on exchange and rules

Transactional leadership is characterised by an exchange process where leaders reward subordinates based on their effort and adherence to rules. This type of leadership often involves setting clear expectations and providing tangible or intangible rewards for achieving them. It is characterised by the following two main components:

Key characteristics:

- Contingent reward: Where a leader offers rewards for performance. This exchange is the primary tool used by this type of leader to motivate their team to achieve their goals.

- Active or Passive Management by Exception: The leader actively monitors performance and takes correction action when issues or standards are not met. Alternatively, Passive Management is where the leader is hands off and only intervenes when an issue becomes serious or significant.

Transformational leadership: A leader by example

Transformational leadership, often described as mentors or role models, focuses on inspiring followers to exceed expectations and pursue higher goals for the organisation by aiming to motivate team members through a shared vision and by fostering trust, respect, and loyalty. Transformational leadership encompasses the following attributes:

Key characteristics:

- Idealised Influence: A leader's ability to serve as a role model and inspire followers through their actions and values by setting the example.

- Inspirational Motivation: Improve performance by motivating a team and clearly articulating a compelling vision for the team to commit to achieving.

- Intellectual Stimulation: Transformational leaders create a diverse and open environment, encouraging innovation and problem solving.

- Individualised Consideration: Creates a diverse and supportive environment, where individual differences are respected and celebrated and will act as mentors to develop and empower their team members.

---

8   Stats NZ. (2024). *Census results reflect Aotearoa New Zealand's diversity.* https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/census-results-reflect-aotearoa-new-zealands-diversity/

Māori leadership: A leader guided by Te Ao Māori

*"On the marae, you will hear Māori leaders exclaim, "Tihei mauri ora!"
This can have many interpretations: one is that the 'life force is alive'. It can
mean 'I am alive.' It can also mean 'attention, I am going to talk.' Like these
meanings, Māori leadership is diverse. It is as diverse as the marae in the
country. It can be as diverse as the workplace itself. At a fundamental
level, however, leadership styles for Māori are driven by the Māori belief
of mauri or the energy force of the organisation."*[9]

Māori leadership models offer a culturally distinct perspective grounded in core values
and principles that emphasise holistic wellbeing, community, and sustainability. Key Māori
leadership values relevant to the workplace include Manaakitanga, which embodies caring
for people, customers, and the wider community by fostering respect and prioritising
wellbeing; Kaitiakitanga, the guardianship of the environment, promoting sustainable
practices and environmental consciousness; Whanaungatanga, the building of strong
relationships and a sense of belonging within the workplace as an extended whānau;
Rangatiratanga, which encompasses leadership and self-determination, empowering
individuals to take ownership and contribute to the business's success; and Kotahitanga,
the principle of unity around a common purpose and shared values to create strong and
resilient teams.[10] These values are deeply embedded in Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview),
tikanga Māori (customs and protocols), and wairua (spirituality), forming the foundation of
interactions and operations within Māori organisations. The purpose of Māori-led businesses
often extends beyond profit to focus on community benefit and collective wellbeing.[11]

Recent work by Waihanga Ara Rau into Māori leadership further elaborates on principles
that underpin Māori leadership. The five key values highlighted are:

1. *Whakaiti* – **Humility:**
   Leading by enabling others and guiding from behind the scenes, without seeking
   personal credit or self-promotion

2. *Ko tau rourou and manaakitanga* – **Altruism:**
   This theme is one of generosity, giving for long-term or future benefit and taking care
   of others. Manaakitanga is a related concept that reflects the importance of caring for
   another person, doing the right thing for them, and ensuring their wellbeing. Ko tau rourou
   can be described as generosity of spirit, but it also has a number of other dimensions.
   It can refer to offering assistance in a way that creates a sense of wealth (non-material,
   usually). Essentially, this is a form of cooperation that enables development through giving.

3. *Whanaungatanga* – **Others:**
   This concept is central and is mentioned in almost all literature on the importance of
   others in Māori leadership. Broadly, it has touch points with the concept of collectivism
   but also refers to the span of relationships with current, future and past generations.
   It also refers to the closeness (whānau means family) and depth of relationships.

4. *Tāria te wā and kaitiakitanga* – **Long-term thinking, guardianship:**
   The notion of the long journey, with a clear direction but the need for patience when
   waiting for results, is new to the literature for Māori leadership. However, long-term
   orientation is also reflected in the concept of kaitiakitanga, which refers to the need
   for sustainable guardianship and protection. Māori hold a great connection to past
   generations, environmental preservation and care for the collective future generations.

9   Thorpe, H. (n.d.). *Tihei mauri ora! Māori Leadership in a Changing World.* https://www.exec.auckland.ac.nz/tihei-mauri-ora-maori-leadership-in-a-changing-world/
10 Waihanga Ara Rau. (2024). *Using Māori concepts to lift workplace culture.* https://www.waihangaararau.nz/maori-concepts-lift-culture/
11 Muka Tangata. (2024). *A literature review of Māori leadership.* https://mukatangata.workforceskills.nz/assets/Documents/Maori-Leadership-Literature-Review.pdf

5. *Tikanga Māori* – **Cultural authenticity:**
   While not commonly discussed as a leadership value, this concept also underpins almost all literature on Māori leadership. Tikanga Māori is viewed as a fundamental guideline for how Māori leaders behave. We found that "the Māori way of doing things" was a guiding value.

In addition to these values, three key competencies were consistently identified as crucial for Māori entrepreneurs, which include:

a. Cultural competency: This involves a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of te reo Māori (the Māori language), tikanga (Māori customs, protocols, and cultural practices), and hītori (Māori history), coupled with the ability to apply this understanding effectively and appropriately in various contexts.

b. Relational competency: This is demonstrated by the significant time, effort, and sincerity invested in building, nurturing, and maintaining strong, respectful, and reciprocal relationships, particularly with other Māori entrepreneurs, communities, and stakeholders.

c. Technical competency: This refers to the practical ability to reliably and effectively deliver on promises, commitments, and responsibilities, thereby demonstrating capability, expertise, and trustworthiness in one's specific field or area of work.

Māori leadership also draws upon specific concepts like Te Whare Tapa Whā, a holistic model of wellbeing that considers the interconnectedness of physical health (taha tinana), spiritual health (taha wairua), family health (taha whānau), and mental health (taha hinengaro)[12]. This model can be used to evaluate the wellbeing of individuals, teams, and departments within the C&I sector, offering insights into potential causes and remedies for challenges but also ensuring that workers preparedness to operate at their best. Another relevant concept is Tuakana-Teina, a reciprocal mentorship model that pairs more experienced workers (Tuakana) with those new to the team (Teina), fostering skill development and strong supportive and inclusive relationships. This is critical to the success of enabling new entrants to better fit into a new organisation or mentoring capability within the organisation for future leaders.

Traditionally, whakapapa (genealogical connections) and mana (authority and prestige, both inherited and earned) played crucial roles in Māori leadership. While these remain important, contemporary Māori leadership in the C&I sector also increasingly values business acumen and strategic thinking. Leadership in te ao Māori is often viewed as a dynamic interplay within a community, where individuals may step forward to lead at different times based on their expertise and the needs of the collective, rather than a rigid hierarchy.[13] Incorporating these Māori leadership principles can lead to more inclusive and culturally sensitive project management, enhanced stakeholder engagement, and a greater emphasis on long-term sustainability within the NZ C&I sector.

Pacific leadership: The pathway to leadership is through service

In New Zealand, contemporary Pacific leadership models are evolving and characterised by core values such as service to others ('tautua'), a strong sense of community, collectivism, humility, empathy, and collective responsibility.[14] These values emphasise the leader's role as one who serves the needs of the group or community and prioritises collective decision making and wellbeing over individual gain. The Polynesian concept of "Tauhi Va," (Tongan) or "Teu le Va" (Samoan)[15] which underscores the importance of mutual respect and reciprocity in relationships, is particularly relevant in fostering thriving and safe environments for Pacific individuals within the workplace.

---

12   Ministry of Health. (2023). *Te Whare Tapa Whā model of Māori Health.* https://www.health.govt.nz/maori-health/maori-health-models/te-whare-tapa-wha

13   Wolfgramm, R., Henry, E., Pouwhare, R., & Spiller, C. (2020). Māori Leadership and Decision-Making. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341386485_Maori_Leadership_and_Decision_Making_May_2020_V2

14   Waihanga Ara Rau. (2024). *Construction and Infrastructure Workforce Development Plan for Pacific Peoples.* https://www.workforce.nz/pacific-wdp

15   Simati-Kumar, B. (2021). 'The Potential of the Vā Part 2: Theoretical Frameworks of the Vā'. *Te Kaharoa,* 14(1). Retrieved from https://www.tekaharoa.com/index.php/tekaharoa/article/view/365

Rooted deeply in Samoan culture, the concept of 'Tautua' provides a powerful framework for servant leadership that resonates across many Pacific communities. It is encapsulated in the Samoan proverb, "O le ala i le pule o le tautua" – the pathway to leadership (pule) is through service (tautua).[16] This principle reframes leadership not as a position of inherited right or individual power, but as a role earned through a demonstrated commitment to the wellbeing of the collective.

Key characteristics:

- **Earned Authority:**
  Leadership is not a given. It is earned and validated by the community through consistent acts of service, respect, and contribution. A leader must be willing to perform the humble tasks required by the family or community before they can be entrusted with authority.

- **Reciprocity and Responsibility:**
  Tautua is a reciprocal process. Service to the family, church, or community builds social cohesion and creates a network of mutual obligation. A leader serves the people, and in turn, the people support and give mandate to the leader.

- **Collective Focus:**
  The primary motivation for a leader is the advancement and welfare of the group, not personal gain. Decisions are made with the collective good in mind, ensuring that the community – be it family, village, or organisation thrives.

- **Humility and Respect:**
  True leadership within the tautua framework is exercised with humility *(loto maulalo)* and respect *(fa'aaloalo)* for all members of the community, especially elders.

- **The Tautua Lifecycle Model**
  Contemporary research has articulated a "tautua lifecycle" to illustrate how this principle is cultivated and expressed across generations. This model highlights a developmental journey of leadership:

1. *Tautua ia Tautua* **(Serve to Serve):**
   This initial stage, often associated with youth, is where individuals learn the fundamentals of service[17]. It is a period of observation, listening, and carrying out duties for the family and community. This foundational phase instils the core values of respect, obedience, and the importance of contributing to the collective without expectation of reward.

2. *Tautua ia Pule* **(Serve to Lead):**
   As individuals mature, they move into a phase where their service becomes more about taking on responsibility and demonstrating nascent leadership. They begin to represent their families, manage resources, and contribute to decision making, all while continuing to serve. This stage is a critical test of one's commitment and capability.

3. *Pule ia Tautua* **(Lead to Serve):**
   Having earned their position through dedicated service, leaders at this stage exercise their authority (*pule*) with the primary purpose of continuing to serve. Their leadership is now about stewardship – guiding, protecting, and empowering the community. They draw upon their accumulated wisdom and experience to uplift the collective, thus completing the cycle by enabling the next generation to begin their own journey of tautua.

16   Fa'aea, A. & Enari, D. (2021). *The pathway to leadership is through service: Exploring the Samoan tautua lifecycle*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349727263_The_pathway_to_leadership_is_through_service_Exploring_the_Samoan_tautua_lifecycle

17   Fa'aea, A. & Enari, D. (2021). The pathway to leadership is through service: Exploring the Samoan tautua lifecycle. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349727263_The_pathway_to_leadership_is_through_service_Exploring_the_Samoan_tautua_lifecycle

Other leadership models

There is a much wider range of leadership models however, their application to the sector is unknown. The larger set of leadership models, and details regarding their characteristics and values, can be found in Appendix A.

Comparison of key leadership models

Understanding the leadership models most relevant to the New Zealand context plays a critical role in supporting inclusive talent acquisition. By recognising how leadership is expressed across different cultural frameworks, organisations are better positioned to identify leadership potential within a diverse workforce. This awareness not only broadens the pool of emerging leaders but also challenges traditional assumptions about what leadership looks like. Applying culturally responsive models enables more equitable recruitment processes and ensures that individuals are supported with appropriate development opportunities, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and capable leadership pipeline across the construction and infrastructure sector.

Table 2: Comparison of Leadership Models

Leadership Model	Key Values/ Principles	Emphasis	Potential Strengths in C&I Sector
Māori	Manaakitanga, Kaitiakitanga, Whanaungatanga, Rangatiratanga, Kotahitanga, Wairuatanga	Collective/ Holistic	Inclusivity, sustainability, strong relationships, community engagement, cultural sensitivity
Pacific (Tautua)	Service, community, collectivism, humility, empathy, reciprocity	Collective/ Service	Supportive environments, team cohesion, strong interpersonal connections, fostering loyalty
Transformational	Inspiration, motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration	Vision/People	Motivating teams, fostering innovation, developing individuals, achieving ambitious goals
Transactional	Rewards for effort, clear expectations, task focus	Task/ Compliance	Ensuring tasks are completed, maintaining standards, and providing clear direction

The leadership models outlined in Table 2 vary in their alignment with a people leadership approach, defined here as leadership that focuses on empowering and developing teams rather than solely driving output. Models such as Transformational Leadership, and culturally grounded frameworks like Māori and Tautua (Pacific) leadership emphasise relationship-building, mentorship, empathy, and long-term collective growth. These are highly aligned with the ethos of people leadership, as they prioritise the development, wellbeing, and cohesion of teams. In contrast, the Transactional model tends to focus more on compliance, task execution, and hierarchical authority, offering less scope for bottom-up leadership development. As the sector seeks to grow its leadership capability, especially at the operational level, models that centre people rather than processes may offer more sustainable and inclusive pathways for leadership development.

Distinguishing leadership from management in the C&I Sector

Although often used interchangeably, leadership and management involve distinct yet complementary functions in the construction and infrastructure sector. Understanding this distinction is crucial to developing effective leadership pathways, as not all managers are leaders, and not all leaders occupy formal management positions.

Management in the C&I context primarily refers to the planning, coordination, and execution of construction and infrastructure tasks. Managers are tasked with ensuring that projects are delivered on time, within scope, and on budget. Their role involves organising resources, enforcing processes, and mitigating risk. This aligns with a transactional leadership style, where clear instructions and reward-based performance are emphasised.

Leadership, by contrast, involves influencing and motivating people towards a shared vision. In construction and infrastructure, this may include inspiring workers to adopt safer practices, supporting innovation, or navigating organisational change. Leadership is not confined to formal authority but is often demonstrated by individuals at any level who foster trust, model behaviours, and uplift team morale.

Table 3 provides a comparison of the primary functions of management and leadership. The difference can be noted as follows:

- **Management** is about coping with complexity.
- **Leadership** is about coping with change.

In the fast-evolving C&I environment marked by digital transformation, regulatory shifts, and workforce diversification, leadership is increasingly vital. Effective leaders foster collaboration, promote psychological safety, and drive performance not through control, but through influence and credibility.

Construction specific research reinforces this view. A 2021 study in New Zealand found that project success was more closely correlated with leaders' emotional intelligence and transformational behaviours than with technical or administrative competence alone.[18]

Table 3: Comparison of Management and Leadership Functions

Function	Management	Leadership
Focus	Tasks, processes, efficiency	People, culture, vision
Authority	Formal role based	May be informal or emergent
Style	Directive, structured	Inspiring, supportive
Outcome	Project delivery	Workforce engagement, innovation

Recognising and developing both sets of skills especially among emerging leaders can strengthen the sector's capacity to deliver complex projects while maintaining a resilient and inclusive workforce.

Going forward, as noted by business leaders in the survey, growing the pool of leaders in the C&I sector directly addresses the shortage of leaders. By diversifying talent identification and creating developmental pathways, the C&I sector can increase its pool of effective leaders into the future. By focussing on people centred leadership, retention and attraction into the sector can be positively impacted.

---

18   Potter, E. (2015). *Emotional intelligence and transformational leadership in the NZ and UK construction industry.* Retrieved from https://mro.massey.ac.nz/items/f9d7f46e-a510-436a-b87b-1630f99dba77

What attributes make an effective leader?

The New Zealand construction and infrastructure sector requires leaders who possess a diverse range of attributes to navigate its complexities and achieve success.

- Effective communication stands out as a fundamental attribute, ensuring clear understanding among diverse teams and stakeholders.[19]

- Strategic thinking, the ability to step back from daily tasks and envision long term goals and anticipate future challenges, is also crucial for guiding projects from inception to completion.[20]

- Problem solving skills are essential for C&I leaders who frequently encounter unexpected issues and must make quick, effective decisions to keep projects on track. Integrity, characterised by honesty and ethical behaviour, builds trust within teams and with clients.

- Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, fosters stronger relationships and improves team cooperation.

- Adaptability is vital in the dynamic C&I environment, where leaders must respond effectively to changing conditions and challenges.

- Accountability, taking responsibility for one's actions and outcomes, sets a positive example for the team and enhances trust.

- A clear vision, the ability to see the completed project and inspire others towards it, is fundamental for aligning teams towards a common mission.[21]

- Finally, the capacity to inspire and motivate team members is a hallmark of effective leadership, driving efficiency and morale.

Research in the NZ construction industry underscores the significance of transformational leadership attributes in predicting positive outcomes. Idealised Influence and Inspirational Motivation have been shown to correlate strongly with improved worker performance and the achievement of organisational objectives. Conversely, a lack of engagement and responsiveness from managers can significantly hinder worker performance, highlighting the importance of active and supportive leadership.

Emotional intelligence plays a critical role in effective leadership within the sector. Studies indicate a strong positive relationship between project managers' emotional intelligence and their adoption of a transformational leadership style. The ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and to perceive and influence the emotions of others is a key factor in fostering trust, building strong relationships, and ultimately driving successful project outcomes through inspirational and supportive leadership.

19   Graham, J. (2023). *6 must-have leadership qualities for effective construction site management*. Retrieved from https://www.planradar.com/sg/6-leadership-qualities-construction-site-management/

20   Frahnd, A. (2025). *Building Your Leadership Skills in Construction*. Retrieved from https://www.criterionhcm.com/blog/leadership-in-construction-building-skills-for-the-new-economy

21   CMiC. (n.d.) *4 Traits that the Best Construction Leaders Share*. Retrieved from https://cmicglobal.com/resources/article/4-traits-that-strong-construction-leaders-cultivate

Table 4: Key Leadership Attributes in the NZ Construction and Infrastructure Sector

Leadership Attribute	Importance in NZ C&I Sector
Communication	Facilitates collaboration, ensures clear understanding, reduces stress, improves project cohesion.
Strategic Thinking	Guides projects from inception to completion, anticipates future challenges, supports long term planning.
Problem Solving	Enables quick and effective decision making in response to unexpected issues, keeps projects on track.
Integrity	Builds trust within teams and with clients, fosters an ethical work environment.
Empathy	Fosters stronger relationships, improves team cooperation, enables leaders to understand and respond to team needs.
Adaptability	Allows leaders to respond effectively to changing conditions, navigate challenges, and embrace new technologies.
Accountability	Sets a positive example for the team, enhances trust and ownership of tasks.
Vision	Aligns teams towards a common mission, provides a clear direction for projects and the organisation.
Inspiration	Motivates team members to achieve higher performance and contribute to project success, fosters a positive work environment.
Emotional Intelligence	Enables transformational leadership, fosters trust, builds strong relationships, improves team dynamics, and contributes to positive project outcomes.

Leadership attributes can be developed through a combination of experiential learning (70%), coaching and mentoring (20%), and formal training (10%), which is referred to as the 70-20-10 model.[22] Experiences such as leading complex construction projects facilitate the development of decision-making and adaptability in trainee leaders, whilst personalised coaching and mentoring builds emotional intelligence and self-awareness.[23] Formal programmes, such as site supervision, target specific skills needed for leaders in the sector and are critical to ensure compliance with a range of regulations including safety.

22 McCall, M., Lombardo, M. & Morrison, A. (1988). *The Lessons of Experience: How Successful Executives Develop on the Job.* Lexington, MA; Lexington Books

23 Jones, J. & Livorsi, E. (2019). *Executive coaching: Driving real results for leaders in the built environment.* Retrieved from https://fmicorp. com/reports/executive-coaching-driving-real-roi-for-leaders-in-engineering-and-construction

Pathways into leadership roles

Career progression in the New Zealand C&I sector often follows traditional routes where individuals advance through experience and skill development. The most common pathway involves starting in a trade, such as carpentry, plumbing, heavy machine operation or electrical work, and progressing to roles with increasing responsibility like foreman or supervisor.

From these supervisory positions, individuals may then move into project management roles, overseeing the planning, execution, and completion of construction projects. Further advancement can lead to senior management positions, where leaders are responsible for strategic decision-making and overall organisational performance. This progression typically requires a combination of practical, hands-on experience and the acquisition of relevant technical and management skills.

While these pathways are well-established, feedback from Strategic Reference Groups (SRGs) and survey participants indicates that formal leadership pathways remain poorly defined and inconsistently supported across the sector. Many employers described leadership progression as informal, often relying on "learning by doing" or being identified by supervisors for reliability or technical competence. This reliance on informal recognition means leadership development is often unstructured, with limited visibility of how to move from technical to people leadership roles. Survey participants reinforced this, noting that mentoring, when it occurs, is typically ad hoc and not resourced or supported by senior management.

Formal programmes like apprenticeships, cadetships, and graduate entry roles also provide structured pathways for aspiring leaders in the sector. Apprenticeship programmes, often supported by organisations like BCITO and Connexis, offer a blend of on-the-job training and theoretical learning in various trades. This provides a solid technical foundation, but industry feedback suggests that a focus on leadership capability generally begins too late, often only at the supervisory level. SRG members emphasised the need to embed leadership development earlier, ideally within trade training, to prepare individuals not just to manage tasks, but to lead teams effectively.

Feedback from various industries noted that developing and supporting leaders was critical to the growth of the sector, particularly among Māori and Pacific business owners.[24] Cadetship programmes, such as those offered by Fulton Hogan, Livingstone Building, and Naylor Love, provide opportunities for individuals interested in quantity surveying, project management, and site management to gain practical experience and mentorship from experienced professionals. Graduate entry roles also exist for individuals with relevant tertiary qualifications in construction management, engineering, or related fields, offering a faster track into project management and leadership positions.

---

24   Waihanga Ara Rau. (2025). On Site Construction – Workforce Development Plan 2025. https://www.workforce.nz/_files/ugd/a0b742_9fc3134ff0a14125908256b4b747c33c.pdf

Regardless of the entry point, upskilling and obtaining relevant qualifications remain key pathways for career advancement in New Zealand. However, survey responses showed that while two-thirds of organisations provide some form of in-house leadership training, most rated it as only 'somewhat effective,' citing a lack of industry relevance and practical application. Employers emphasised that leadership training needs to be tailored to sector realities, integrating technical expertise with people management skills.

There are also many examples of experienced and competent practitioners who have advanced into leadership roles without formal qualifications, particularly in smaller businesses. This reinforces the need for flexible recognition of skills and experience, alongside structured learning opportunities. Continuous learning and professional development not only enhance an individual's skill set but also signal commitment to the industry and potential for leadership.

Barriers to leadership progression

Several interconnected barriers can hinder progression into leadership roles within the C&I sector. At the organisational level, many encounter limited opportunities for professional development, a lack of upskilling initiatives, and internal structures that may not facilitate upward mobility. These challenges are especially pronounced within the smaller businesses that form the backbone of the sector. Given that 85 percent of C&I companies have fewer than three employees (and 95 percent have fewer than ten),[25] many lack the resources, dedicated HR support, or expertise to implement comprehensive leadership pathway initiatives, potentially creating unintentional obstacles for career development.

Industry feedback from SRGs echoed this constraint, noting that smaller firms often rely heavily on informal learning and short-term project pressures, leaving little time for structured leadership development. Survey participants also cited time, cost, and a lack of clear leadership models as key barriers, particularly for employers wanting to promote workers into supervisory roles but unsure how to support their development.

Historic underinvestment in workforce training has limited the flow of new talent into the sector and, as a result, constrained the development of future leaders. The persistent shortage of skilled workers paradoxically means there is a smaller pool of experienced individuals ready for promotion into leadership positions. Survey data reinforced this concern; many respondents indicated that while technical training is abundant, leadership capability development is often treated as secondary or optional.

Adding another layer to this challenge is a significant perception barrier. As highlighted in 2024 research from Waihanga Ara Rau and IPSOS, the sector is often misperceived as requiring only physical attributes or narrow technical skills.[26] This view was echoed in open survey comments, where respondents noted that leadership potential is frequently overlooked among those who do not fit traditional moulds or communication styles.

Underrepresented groups, particularly women and Māori and Pacific individuals, often face specific and significant barriers to leadership progression in the NZ C&I sector. Industry feedback has emphasised that leadership potential is strong across communities, but opportunities are constrained by systemic bias, limited mentoring, and a lack of culturally aligned pathways. Women and Māori and Pacific workers were often acknowledged to be underrepresented at higher levels, despite contributing significantly at operational stages.

Women in the industry frequently encounter sexism, both benevolent and hostile, which can manifest as stereotyping, pressure to prove oneself, and a lack of respect. The male-dominated culture prevalent in the C&I sector can also be intimidating and create an environment where women feel pressured to conform to masculine norms. Survey insights support this, with respondents calling for more visible role models and flexible leadership models that accommodate diverse work styles and life responsibilities.

25   Waihanga Ara Rau. (2025). *Workforce Information Platform – Business Demographics.* https://wip.org.nz/business-size?data_breakdown=Owned+Businesses&year=2023&graph_view=Percentage&x=employment_num_group&legend=employment_num_group

26   Ipsos. (2024). *Career perceptions of the construction & infrastructure industries.* Commissioned by Waihanga Ara Rau. https://www.waihangaarararau.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Waihanga-Ara-Rau-Construction-Careers-Research-Report.pdf

Challenges in achieving work–life balance, often exacerbated by long working hours and inflexible work arrangements, can disproportionately affect women, particularly those with family responsibilities. The scarcity of role models who are women, and gender bias in recruitment and promotion, further hinder advancement.[27] More recently, progress has been made to address these issues through entities like National Association of Women in Construction New Zealand (NAWIC) and individual leadership programmes within companies themselves such as Fletchers Women to Leadership initiative.

Māori and Pacific learners are underrepresented in higher-level leadership roles, often citing challenges within systemic education and training structures, cultural preferences, and unclear progression pathways. In recent engagements, Pacific business owners highlighted examples of Pacific people thriving in leadership without formal credentials thus reinforcing that capability exists, but systems are not built to recognise it.

Educational and career paths for Pacific peoples are often shaped by family and community expectations, sometimes favouring tertiary education over vocational trades. This perception can pose a challenge for attracting Pacific talent into leadership roles within the sector, which often requires trade qualifications and practical experience. Understanding these cultural influences is crucial for developing targeted initiatives to promote the viability and value of vocational trades within Pacific communities.[28]

Workplace culture and unconscious bias also play a significant role in impeding leadership progression for diverse groups.[29] Implicit biases can influence hiring, promotion, and development decisions, creating invisible barriers for women and other underrepresented individuals. Survey and SRG feedback alike highlighted that while inclusion is increasingly valued, few organisations have formal strategies or training to translate these values into practice.

27 Rotimi, F., Brauner, M., Burfoot, M, Naismith, N., Silva, C. & Mohaghegh, M. (2024). 'Challenges Faced by Women in New Zealand's Construction Industry and the Impact of Demographic Factors'. *Construction Economics and Building,* 24(4/5), 114-141. https://doi.org/10.5130/AJCEB.v24i4/5.8911

28 Waihanga Ara Rau. (2024). *Construction and Infrastructure Workforce Development Plan for Pacific Peoples.* https://www.workforce.nz/pacific-wdp

29 Rotimi, F., Brauner, M., Burfoot, M., Naismith, N., Silva, C. & Mohaghegh, M. (2024), 'Work environment challenge and the wellbeing of women in construction industry in New Zealand – The mediating role of work morale'. *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management,* 31(11), 4417–4438, doi: https://doi.org/10.1108/ECAM-02-2023-0152

Successful leadership examples

The New Zealand C&I sector has a limited number of case studies of successful leadership development programmes. This could be because 85 percent of business in the C&I sector employ 3 or less staff, and that usually only larger businesses are able to deliver leadership programmes for new entrants or their staff.

Fletcher Construction, recognising the importance of developing future leaders, has developed a number of in-house leadership programmes such as 'Step Up Programme', 'Whakatupu' (Māori leadership programme), and 'Women to Leadership programme'.[30] The company's Safety Leadership Programme further exemplifies a commitment to creating safer work environments by equipping operational leaders with the principles and tools to promote safety onsite. Fletcher Construction's support for MATES in Construction, a charity focused on reducing suicide rates within the industry, highlights a leadership approach that extends to addressing critical mental health challenges.

Scafit, a scaffolding business, underwent a significant transformation by adopting a people centric approach to staff wellbeing and development. By investing in leadership training, providing comprehensive wellbeing programmes (including access to physiotherapy and psychology services), and fostering a supportive company culture, Scafit achieved improved staff retention, increased productivity, and enhanced commercial returns.[31][32] This case study underscores the profound impact that prioritising employees can have on the overall success of a business in the sector.

The Civil Contractors New Zealand (CCNZ) Training Awards recognise organisations that demonstrate exceptional leadership in workforce development. Winners like Fulton Hogan, Isaac Construction, and Austin Contracting demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning and upskilling their staff, contributing to a more skilled and competent workforce for the industry.[33] Such examples highlight the importance of leaders championing training and professional growth within their companies.

30   Fletcher Construction. (2025). Training Opportunities. https://www.fletcherconstruction.co.nz/work-with-us/internal-communications/training-opportunities

31   Manawatu NZ. (2022). *Infrastructure & Construction | Scarfit | Sector Case Study*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJpBpD8bWWA

32   Helm, N. (2023). 'Transformation case studies'. *Build Magazine*, 197, 58–61. Retrieved from https://www.buildmagazine.org.nz/assets/PDF/Build-197-58-Feature-System-Transformation-Transformation-Case-Studies.pdf

33   CCNZ. (2022). *Leadership, dedication and civil construction training celebrated in Christchurch*. https://civilcontractors.co.nz/leadership-dedication-and-civil-construction-training-celebrated-in-christchurch/10912-13a52b1e-41c1-48ad-bad7-b59d78d36a83/

How are leaders trained in the C&I sector?

Employees within the C&I sector have a wide range of options should they wish to engage in training to develop leadership capability.

These training options include formal qualifications that are specific to the sector (see Appendix B), formal qualifications that are generic and open to learners from any sector (see Appendix C), and training programmes that do not result in a formal qualification but are designed for employees within the C&I sector (see Appendix D).

Many organisations in the sector deliver leadership training either in-house or through third-party providers. While these programmes provide valuable opportunities to build leadership capability and equip learners with practical skills and knowledge, they do not always lead to a formal qualification. The absence of a recognised credential can create several challenges:

- In-house training may be difficult to transfer outside of company

- The quality of training can vary significantly between organisations

- Non-credentialed training may not contribute to recognised career pathways, limiting career progression opportunities

In contrast, formal pathways offer several advantages:

- Formal qualifications are nationally recognised and portable across employers and regions

- They promote consistent standards of learning across the country

- They form part of structured career ladders, providing clarity and direction for career progression

Survey findings highlight both the prevalence and perceived value of leadership training in the sector. Eighty-one percent of business leaders reported participating in leadership programmes, with 61 percent rating the training as extremely or very valuable, and a further 38 percent finding it moderately valuable. However, only one-third (33 percent) of these programmes resulted in a formal qualification. Additionally, 66 percent of participants noted that their organisations offered in-house training, though its effectiveness varied; 77 percent considered it only somewhat effective. This indicates a need for more consistent, structured and impactful leadership development opportunities across the sector.

Looking ahead, the C&I sector must ensure that leadership programmes are fit for purpose and aligned with the evolving needs of the workforce. Developing future leaders with the right skills, mindsets, and capabilities will be critical to building a sector that is productive, attractive to talent, and equipped to meet New Zealand's future needs.

Data gaps in measuring leadership training outcomes

Efforts were made to assess whether leadership capability in the C&I sector could be evaluated using national datasets, such as New Zealand's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI). While the IDI enables valuable insights into workforce participation, demographics, and qualifications, it lacks the capacity to measure the development of leadership skills, identify specific capability gaps, or evaluate the impact of diverse leadership approaches, including culturally-grounded frameworks. Specifically, attempts to link the attainment of qualifications with other markers such as retention or further study in the future returned incomplete analyses which did not allow clear insights, or a robust evidence base from which to draw conclusions.

This is a finding in itself highlighting that existing national data systems are not well equipped to measure leadership dynamics in the C&I sector. Consequently, there is a clear need for sector-specific, industry-led approaches to better track leadership development and support more effective pathways for building capability.

Existing training pathways, such as those offered through vocational qualifications, provide some insight into how leadership is currently supported in the sector.

Credentialed training programmes

Industry training organisations play a crucial role in providing credentialed training within the sector. BCITO, NZMA, and Manukau Institute of Technology are amongst many who offer a wide range of qualifications across various construction trades and has a focus on developing leaders, including the *New Zealand Certificate in Construction Trades Supervision (Level 5)*, which is suitable for qualified tradespeople aiming for supervisory positions. These programmes often combine practical, on-the-job training with theoretical learning, ensuring that graduates possess the skills and knowledge required to have a solid foundation for leadership roles within the construction industry.

Aspiring and current leaders in the C&I sector also have access to a range of credentialed training programmes offered by various educational institutions and industry training organisations. Several universities and institutes of technology provide diplomas and degrees in construction management. Degree level qualifications include master's degrees in construction management, catering to professionals seeking advanced knowledge and specialisation in areas like project management, sustainable built environments, and quantity surveying. For those seeking supervisory roles, Builders Academy NZ offers the *NZ Certificate in Residential Construction Supervisor (Level 5), and Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) provides the New Zealand Certificate in Construction Trades Supervision (Level 5)*.

Outside of sector specific qualifications, there are a number of leadership qualifications aimed at learners from any sector looking to build capability. Qualifications such as the *New Zealand Certificate in Leadership* (available at Level 3 and Level 4) and culturally-grounded qualifications like the *New Zealand Certificate in Māori Business and Management* (available at Level 3 and Level 4) provide learners with relevant leadership skills and knowledge to lead people and manage processes efficiently and effectively.

Enrolments in C&I specific leadership qualifications have fluctuated from 1390 learners in 2018, peaking at 4,830 in 2021 before declining to just over 3,000 in 2023. These figures were likely impacted by training incentives offered post-pandemic. While enrolments in generic leadership qualifications were consistently higher across this period, they steadily declined from over 31,000 in 2018 to 18,000 in 2023. These figures provide a useful benchmark for the uptake of leadership qualifications overall, however it is important to note that these samples are not directly comparable; the generic dataset spans multiple industries, whereas the C&I cohort represents a much narrower occupational group.

Survey findings highlight that 90% of respondents were aware of leadership training offerings, with 83% having undertaken training themselves or accessed training for employees within their business which implies familiarity with the offerings available. When prompted, many were able to provide a list of qualifications suggesting good awareness of vocational, credentialed options tied to the sector.

Non-credentialed training programmes

In addition to formal qualifications, the C&I sector offers a range of non-credentialed leadership training programmes through industry associations, private training providers, and consultancies. These range from in-house training programmes at larger organisations like Fletchers' *Women in Leadership* or Downer New Zealand's *Te Ara Whanake* – a Māori leadership programme aimed at developing leadership capabilities within their Māori workforce. Providers also deliver specialist areas related to leadership and management in the C&I sector such as Constructing Excellence who provide *Lean Construction Leadership* courses aimed at improving efficiency and reducing waste in construction processes. Adeption New Zealand offers tailored leadership development programmes utilising a digital platform, workshops, and coaching to address specific organisational challenges.

New Zealand Institute of Management (NZIM) offers the *Essential Skills* course as part of their Team Leader Series, focusing on fundamental leadership skills for new supervisors. These non-credentialed programmes offer targeted skill development, flexibility, and often focus on practical application within the C&I context, providing valuable opportunities for individuals and organisations to enhance their leadership capabilities without necessarily pursuing formal qualifications.

Summary of findings from sector-based research on leadership

Sector-based research consistently highlights the crucial role of leadership in achieving positive outcomes within the C&I sector.

Studies indicate that transformational leadership is a particularly effective and preferred style in larger organisations, leading to enhanced worker performance and the successful completion of project goals. This style, characterised by inspiration, motivation, and a focus on the collective good, fosters a positive and productive work environment. Conversely, leadership styles marked by a lack of engagement and responsiveness can significantly hinder worker performance and retention.

Effective leadership also has a direct and substantial impact on project outcomes, influencing factors such as time management, cost control, and overall quality. Leaders who communicate effectively, plan strategically, and foster collaboration among diverse teams are more likely to deliver projects successfully. Authoritarian leadership styles, however, have been shown to negatively affect project management success, ownership, and investment.[34]

Productivity and efficiency within the sector are also closely linked to leadership effectiveness. Effective leadership is essential for driving the adoption of new technologies, efficiency enhancing methodologies like Lean Construction and for fostering a motivated and engaged workforce to adapt to rapidly changing world. Effective communication, collaboration, and the creation of a high-trust environment by leaders contribute significantly to improved productivity and project outcomes.

Despite the clear benefits of effective leadership, the C&I sector faces challenges in developing wellbeing and productivity through leadership. These challenges include deeply entrenched traditional cultures, resistance to adopting new methodologies, skills shortages in leadership and management, and ineffective communication. Economic pressures and the fragmented nature of the industry can further complicate efforts to foster a consistent and positive leadership culture across the sector.

---

34 Nguyen, L. (2024). 'The Impact of Leadership Behaviour on Management Effectiveness in Public Construction Project Organisations'. *Public Works Management & Policy*, 30(1) 58–79. **https://doi.org/10.1177/1087724X241237985**

Conclusion

The C&I sector in Aotearoa New Zealand is at a pivotal moment, navigating ongoing challenges including skill shortages, economic uncertainty, and barriers to leadership progression and diversity. Findings from stakeholder engagement, workforce development plans, and survey responses have consistently highlighted the urgency of strengthening leadership capability across the sector.

Whilst often seen as a critical stabilising factor for building resilience, nurturing innovation and promoting inclusive, high-performing workplace cultures, the evidence also highlights several areas of improvement. This includes limited access to formal leadership pathways, underinvestment in training, and scarce integration of culturally grounded approaches such as Māori and Pacific leadership models, which emphasise collective wellbeing and service to community.

Despite these challenges, the sector has significant opportunities to create lasting impact. Organisations that adopt transformational, people-centred leadership practices are better positioned to enhance productivity, workforce retention, and project outcomes – issues that systemically challenge the sector. Initiatives led by companies such as Fletcher Construction and Scafit demonstrate the value of inclusive programmes that deliver tangible benefits like stronger safety cultures, to intangible benefits like improved worker wellbeing.

Realising the sectors potential will require a collaborative approach. Policymakers, industry bodies, education providers, and employers all have a role to play in embedding structured, sector-specific leadership development. This includes data collection to better measure outcomes, expanding access to culturally relevant training, and removing barriers that limit participation by underrepresented groups.

By investing in adaptive, diverse leaders, the C&I sector can build a resilient and future-ready workforce that supports New Zealand's construction and infrastructure ambitions while contributing to a more equitable future.

Appendices

Appendix A: Additional Leadership Models

Autocratic Leadership: A directive approach

Autocratic leadership is often described as a top-down or directive style that focuses on leaders making decisions unilaterally, with little input from team members. This approach centres on control, authority, and efficiency, where the leader sets expectations and closely monitors compliance. While it can limit creativity and collaboration, autocratic leadership is effective in high-pressure environments, during crises, or where strict adherence to safety and deadlines is critical. Autocratic leadership encompasses the following attributes:

Key characteristics:

- **Centralised Authority**
  The leader maintains full control over decisions, policies, and directions, ensuring compliance and minimising ambiguity in processes.

- **Clear Expectations**
  Autocratic leaders provide explicit instructions and defined roles, leaving little room for misinterpretation or deviation.

- **Close Supervision**
  Performance and output are closely monitored to ensure standards, deadlines, and safety requirements are consistently met.

- **Efficiency in Urgency**
  This leadership style excels in situations requiring fast decisions, such as emergencies or high-risk environments, where consultation could delay action.

Laissez-Faire Leadership: A hands-off approach

Laissez-faire leadership, often described as a delegative or hands-off style, focuses on giving team members a high level of autonomy and decision-making power. Leaders provide minimal direct supervision, trusting individuals to manage their own work, solve problems, and drive outcomes. While this approach can encourage creativity and independence, it may also lead to confusion or lack of direction if applied inappropriately. Laissez-faire leadership encompasses the following attributes:

Key characteristics:

- **High Autonomy**
  Leaders step back and allow team members to make their own decisions, taking ownership of tasks and processes.

- **Minimal Supervision**
  Oversight is limited, with leaders intervening only when necessary or when issues arise that require attention.

- **Empowerment of Expertise**
  This style works best when team members are highly skilled, experienced, and motivated, enabling them to innovate and perform without constant guidance.

- **Risk of Ambiguity**
  Without clear direction, teams may experience uncertainty, inconsistent outcomes, or disengagement, especially where staff are less experienced or require more support.

Servant Leadership: A leader through service

Servant leadership centres on the principle that effective leaders serve their people first. Rather than exercising power through authority, servant leaders prioritise the needs, growth, and wellbeing of their team members. In doing so, they create environments of trust, respect, and mutual support. This leadership style is rooted in humility and selflessness, with the belief that empowering individuals and removing obstacles will lead to better team outcomes. In the construction and infrastructure sector – where collaboration, safety, and worker morale are critical – servant leadership can contribute to stronger team cohesion and improved long-term performance.

Key characteristics:

- **Empathy and Listening**
  Servant leaders actively listen and seek to understand their team members' perspectives, responding with compassion and care to personal and professional concerns.

- **Empowerment and Growth of Others**
  Focused on the development of their people, servant leaders coach and mentor individuals to realise their potential, supporting both their technical skills and personal growth.

- **Stewardship**
  They take responsibility for the wellbeing of the team and organisation, acting as custodians who protect team culture, resources, and shared values.

- **Community Building**
  By fostering belonging and strong interpersonal relationships, servant leaders build a sense of shared purpose and collective responsibility within their teams.

- **Humility and Self-Awareness**
  Servant leaders model humility by leading without ego, remaining open to feedback, and being willing to share credit and admit mistakes.

Democratic Leader: a leader who listens and collaborates

Democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership, is characterised by a collaborative decision-making style where leaders actively seek and value input from their team members. Rather than making decisions unilaterally, democratic leaders facilitate discussion, encourage team participation, and promote a sense of shared ownership and accountability. This leadership style is particularly effective in construction and infrastructure environments that require coordination across diverse roles, where leveraging frontline knowledge can improve project outcomes and foster innovation.

Key characteristics:

- **Consultative Decision-Making**
  Democratic leaders regularly involve team members in discussions and decisions, recognising the value of their expertise and perspectives in achieving project goals.

- **Transparency**
  They ensure open communication and share information honestly, which helps build trust and encourages a culture of openness and integrity.

- **Team Empowerment**
  By distributing authority and encouraging input, democratic leaders empower individuals to take initiative and feel ownership over their contributions.

- **Collaboration and Inclusion**
  They foster an inclusive environment where diverse voices are respected and encouraged, promoting mutual respect and stronger team cohesion.

- **Accountability and Shared Responsibility**
  Team members are more committed to outcomes when they have been involved in shaping decisions, leading to stronger accountability and higher engagement.

The "Big Man" of Melanesia: A leader forged through influence

The "big man" system is a form of leadership where authority is not inherited but achieved through personal skill, charisma, and the strategic distribution of wealth. This model is most prominent in societies across Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.

Key characteristics:

- **Achieved Status:**
  A "big man" is not born into his position. He earns it through his ability to accumulate and generously redistribute resources, traditionally pigs and valuable shells. His influence is directly tied to his reputation for generosity and his skill in oratory, warfare, and ceremonial exchanges.

- **Reciprocity and Obligation:**
  The foundation of a "big man's" power lies in his ability to create a network of followers who are indebted to him through his acts of giving. These followers, in turn, provide their support, which enhances the "big man's" prestige and enables him to host even larger feasts and ceremonies.

- **Fluid and Competitive:**
  Leadership is often temporary and subject to challenge. A "big man" must constantly work to maintain his status, as rivals are always seeking to surpass him in generosity and influence. If a "big man" fails to deliver on his obligations or is outdone by a competitor, his followers may shift their allegiance.

- **Consensus-Based Decision Making:**
  While a "big man" is influential, he does not wield absolute authority. Decision making within the community often involves lengthy discussions and the building of consensus among various groups.

The primary role of a "big man" is to act as a facilitator of community life. He organises, mediates disputes, and represents his group in dealings with others. His success is measured by the prosperity and prestige of his community.

The Hereditary Chief of Polynesia: A leader by divine right

In contrast to the Melanesian "big man," the leadership model in Polynesia – encompassing societies in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands, and New Zealand (with the Māori *ariki* and *rangatira*) – is typically based on heredity and a more formalised system of chieftainship.

Key Characteristics:

- **Recognised Status:**
  Chiefs are born into their roles, inheriting their titles and authority through established genealogical lines. This lineage is often traced back to founding ancestors or even gods, bestowing a sacred dimension upon their leadership.

- **Formal and Hierarchical:**
  Polynesian societies are often characterised by more rigid social structures with a clear hierarchy of chiefs and sub-chiefs. The paramount chief holds the highest authority, which is delegated to lesser chiefs who oversee specific districts or kinship groups.

- **Guardians of Tradition and Land:**
  The primary responsibility of a chief is to act as a guardian of the community's traditions, culture, and, most importantly, their ancestral lands. They are seen as the living embodiment of the group's history and identity.

- **Spiritual Authority:**
  The authority of a Polynesian chief is not just political; it is also spiritual. The concept of mana is central, representing a supernatural force or efficacy that is inherent in the chiefly lineage and validates their right to rule.

The role of the Polynesian chief is to ensure the wellbeing and continuity of their people. They preside over important ceremonies, manage the distribution of resources, and act as the ultimate arbiters in disputes. Their authority is respected and rarely challenged, as it is deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual fabric of the society.

Paternalistic Leadership: authority, benevolence, and morality

Paternalistic leadership is arguably the most widely researched and discussed model in an Asian context, particularly in Confucian-influenced societies. It is a hierarchical style that integrates three strong core dimensions, which are authority, fatherly benevolence, and moral integrity.

Key Characteristics:

- **Authoritarianism:**
  A leader asserts strong authority and control, expecting obedience and deference from subordinates. The leader makes final decisions, maintains social distance, and commands respect.

- **Benevolence:**
  A leader demonstrates holistic and individualised concern for the personal and professional wellbeing of their subordinates, much like a father figure. This can include taking an interest in an employee's family life and offering personal support during crises.

- **Moral Leadership:**
  A leader demonstrates superior virtue, integrity, and self-discipline, acting as a role model for subordinates. This moral authority is considered essential to legitimise their authority and benevolent behaviour.

The effectiveness of this model hinges on the balance of these three elements. When benevolence and morality are high, the authoritarian aspect is often accepted by employees, leading to high levels of trust, loyalty, and performance.

Nurturant-Task Leadership: a developmental approach

Developed in the Indian context by J.B.P. Sinha, the Nurturant-Task (NT) model proposes that for a leader to be effective, they must first focus on the task and then nurture their subordinates in a contingent manner.

Key Characteristics:

- **Task-Oriented Focus**:
  The leader clearly defines roles, provides direction, and is focused on discipline and high productivity. This forms the initial foundation of the leader-subordinate relationship.

- **Contingent Nurturance:**
  The leader shows care for subordinates and takes a personal interest in their wellbeing, but this "nurturance" is contingent on the subordinate's performance and commitment to the task. As employees work hard and achieve results, the leader reinforces this with warmth and support.

- **Developmental Progression:**
  The model is inherently developmental. As subordinates become more skilled and self-reliant, the leader transitions from a directive style to a more participative and empowering one, reducing control and fostering autonomy.

Appendix B: C&I Sector–specific (Credentialed) Leadership Training Qualifications

Qualification	Level	NZQA Ref
New Zealand Certificate in Workplace Health and Safety Practice	3	3533
New Zealand Certificate in Construction Related Trades (Supervisor)	4	2381
National Certificate in Construction Trades (Supervisor) (Level 4) with an optional strand in Business Management	4	1661
New Zealand Certificate in Infrastructure Works (Single Site Supervision)	4	2617
New Zealand Certificate in Workplace Health and Safety Practice	4	3534
New Zealand Certificate in Construction Related Trades (Main Contract Supervision)	5	2382
National Certificate in Construction Trades (Main Contract Supervision)	5	1662
National Certificate in Infrastructure Works Supervision	5	1659
New Zealand Certificate in Construction Trades Supervision	5	4237
New Zealand Certificate in Commercial Road Transport (Operations Management)	5	3092
New Zealand Certificate in Infrastructure Works Contract Management	5	2618
New Zealand Diploma in Workplace Health and Safety Management	6	3645

Appendix C: Generic (Credentialed) Leadership Training Qualifications

Qualification	Level	NZQA Ref
New Zealand Certificate in Business (Introduction to Team Leadership)	3	2453
New Zealand Certificate in Business (Introduction to Small Business)	3	2454
New Zealand Certificate in Leadership	3	5304
New Zealand Certificate in Māori Business and Management	3	3501
New Zealand Certificate in Business (First Line Management)	4	2456
New Zealand Certificate in Business (Small Business)	4	2457
New Zealand Certificate in Project Management	4	2462
New Zealand Certificate in Leadership	4	5306
New Zealand Certificate in Māori Business and Management	4	3502

New Zealand Certificate in Business (Māori Business and Management)	5	2712
New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 5) with strands in Accounting, Administration and Technology, Human Resource Management, Leadership and Management, Marketing and Sales, and Project Management	5	2459
New Zealand Diploma in Business	6	2460
Graduate Diploma in Leadership and Management	7	3830

Appendix D: C&I Sector-specific (Non-Credentialed) Leadership Training Options

Programme Name	Provider
Lean Construction Leadership	Constructing Excellence
Leadership Development Programmes	Adeption NZ
Construction Leadership Training	NPL
Active Manager Programme	The Breakthrough Co
Essential Skills	NZIM
Te Ara Whanake	Downer NZ
L.E.A.D.R. for Life	Crestcom
Leadership & Management Courses	Training.co.nz
Leadership Courses	Advanced Safety
Whakatupu Māori Leadership	Fletcher Building