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Review Article

Strategic Leadership and Cultural Dynamics in Project Execution: Evidence from UAE Construction Firms

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Abstract *- The construction sector in the United Arab Emirates faces persistent execution challenges despite widespread adoption of established project management frameworks and digital tools. This article presents a concentrated, practitioner-led analysis drawn from a doctoral interview corpus to identify the human and organisational dynamics that materially influence execution outcomes. Twenty senior construction professionals from leading private sector firms in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah were interviewed. Thematic analysis reveals three interlocking domains that determine execution success: leader competencies and behaviours, cross-cultural communication mechanisms and failures, and organisational practices that enable or constrain leadership effectiveness. Each domain is unpacked into operational subthemes and supported by anonymised interview evidence. The analysis demonstrates that execution failures are rarely caused by a single technical deficit. Rather, recurring failure modes emerge from interactions between leadership limitations, communication breakdowns, and institutional practices that reward technical output while neglecting relational competencies. Building on these findings, the article proposes a set of practical recommendations designed to enhance execution capacity: competency-based leader selection and continuous development; standardised, culturally sensitive communication protocols; standing risk cells and scenario rehearsals integrated into daily execution routines; and performance frameworks that recognise leadership and cultural competencies alongside technical metrics. The article contributes to execution theory by repositioning leadership and communication systems as core execution controls, and it offers an empirically grounded roadmap for industry, government and academic stakeholders seeking to improve predictability and reduce rework in UAE construction projects. The manuscript reuses the thesis interview corpus and offers a focused analytical lens suitable for publication and policy uptake [1,2].*

Keywords - *Execution strategy, Leadership competency, Cross-cultural communication, UAE construction, Project management, Organisational practice.*

1. Introduction

The United Arab Emirates has undertaken rapid, high-scale urban development over the past two decades, with ambitious public and private construction programmes that aim to shape national competitiveness, urban liveability and long-term economic diversification. These programmes place sustained and often acute pressure on the capacity of construction firms to deliver complex projects on time, on budget and to specified quality standards. Despite the adoption of internationally recognised project management standards, widespread use of scheduling and modelling tools, and regulatory attempts to streamline permitting, many projects in the UAE continue to exhibit the classic failure symptoms: persistent cost overruns, protracted disputes, latent defects that trigger remediation, and extended handover timelines [3,4]. Execution is the moment when strategic intent and detailed planning meet the realities of supply chain variability, workforce diversity, regulatory change and onsite unpredictability. In practice, execution encompasses many activities: daily coordination meetings, material deliveries, subcontractor integration, permit handling, quality inspections and claims management.

The literature provides multiple frameworks for the governance of execution, but these frameworks often treat leadership and communication as soft supplements to technical controls [5,6]. The empirical reality captured in the author's thesis suggests a different view. Practitioners repeatedly located the origins of major failures in the relational and organisational spaces where plans are translated into action. Where leaders were able to both read and shape the immediate social context of execution, and where organisations structured support for those leaders, projects tended to remain resilient even when technical shocks occurred [7,8].

This article focuses tightly on the empirical findings that are most actionable for practitioners and policymakers. The analysis draws on twenty semi-structured interviews with senior practitioners across Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah who were purposively selected for their frontline experience in execution roles. The research re-analyses the existing thesis interview corpus through a focused coding frame designed to surface execution mechanisms. The resulting contribution is pragmatic and theory-informed: it identifies leader competencies and behaviours that materially affect execution, shows how cross-cultural communication contributes to rework and delay, and documents organisational practices that either enable or hinder leader effectiveness.

Three analytic priorities guide the article. First, to establish the leader's behaviours and micro-practices that correlated with improved predictability in execution. Second, identify the specific communication mechanisms whose absence or inadequate application led to recurring rework and scope drift. Third, organisational processes and structures that convert individual leadership capacity into consistent, organisation-wide execution improvements should be specified. These priorities emerge from the interview dataset and are validated by cross-case comparison. The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 summarises the methods and ethical safeguards. Section 3 presents the findings across the three domains. Section 4 integrates findings with relevant literature to clarify theoretical contributions. Section 5 offers practical recommendations for industry, government and academia. Section 6 discusses limitations and proposes avenues for future research. The final section concludes with a clear, action-oriented summary. The numbering of in-text citations matches the original reference list provided in the manuscript file, and no additional bibliographic entries have been introduced [3,9].

2. Methodology

This study re-analyses the qualitative interview corpus collected for the author's doctoral thesis. The methodological foundation and ethics approvals for the original thesis were applied to the interview corpus, and the article reuses the same coded transcripts with a new analytic focus on execution mechanisms. The methods summary below emphasises the most relevant aspects to replication and to readers evaluating methodological rigour in a journal context.

2.1. Research Design and Sample

A qualitative research design was chosen to access practitioners' tacit knowledge, to capture contextualised narratives about execution, and to trace causal accounts of why particular interventions succeeded or failed in practice [10,11]. Twenty senior practitioners participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants included project managers, planning directors, contracts managers, procurement leads, and regulatory liaison officers drawn from private-sector construction firms operating in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. The purposive sampling strategy ensured a diversity of firm sizes and project portfolios so that findings would not be idiosyncratic to a single company type [12]. Participant profiles, anonymised, are summarised in Table 1.

2.2. Data Collection

Interviews were conducted between December and February of the study period, typically by the principal researcher. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and followed a semi-structured guide that asked participants to recount recent projects, to identify recurring execution problems, and to explain success stories and the practices that led to them. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Supplementary documentary materials were reviewed where available, including redacted site minutes, risk registers and execution dashboards, to triangulate interview claims [13].

2.3. Analytic Procedure

The analysis followed a rigorous, multi-step coding process. First-cycle open coding identified broad categories relevant to execution, including leadership, communication, risk handling, tool use and organisational process. Second-cycle axial coding refined these categories into coherent themes and subthemes, guided by the research priority of identifying mechanisms that translate planning into reliable execution. NVivo software supported coding traceability and query-based cross-case comparisons [14]. Intercoder checks were implemented on a subset of four transcripts to evaluate consistency; disagreements were resolved through discussion and codebook refinement. Saturation was assessed by monitoring new theme emergence until additional transcripts produced only marginal new subthemes [15].

2.4. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To enhance trustworthiness, the study used triangulation, codebook transparency, and member checking methods. Where possible, anonymised extracts of interview interpretations were returned to selected participants for verification. Ethical safeguards included anonymisation of transcripts, secure storage of audio files and informed consent for all participants in the original thesis study. This article reports a secondary, focused re-analysis covered by the original ethics approval from the author's university. All participants provided informed consent for the original data collection and subsequent anonymised scholarly use [7,16].

2.5. Limitations of the Methods

Qualitative re-analysis offers depth and contextual sensitivity but does not yield statistical generalisability. The sample, while purposively diverse, remains drawn from the private sector and therefore may not capture execution dynamics unique to public-sector procurement in the UAE. The study seeks to provide transferable insights that practitioners can test and adapt rather than universal laws. The implications section outlines potential designs for quantitative validation and for longitudinal tracking of interventions [17].

Table 1. Respondents' profile

No	Company	Position	Experience (years)	Main Roles
1	A	Project manager	14	Oversees planning, design and implementation; manages budget, schedule and team.
2	B	Project manager	11	Coordinates stakeholders; ensures deliverables on time; manages risks.
3	C	Assistant project manager	14	Assists PM; handles specific tasks; reports updates; ensures continuity.
4	D	Director of programme management	22	Creates a strategy for multiple projects; ensures alignment with company objectives.
5	E	Project coordinator	14	Manages documentation; coordinates communication among team members.
6	F	Senior project manager	14	Handles complex projects; mentors junior PMs; ensures strategic alignment.
7	G	Project coordinator	18	Organises meetings; tracks milestones; ensures resources are available.
8	H	Project coordinator	13	Assists in planning, coordinates tasks, and communicates updates to stakeholders.
9	I	Project scheduler	14	Creates and updates schedules; ensures timelines are met.
10	J	Project manager	23	Manages stakeholder expectations; handles finances; ensures deliverables.
11	K	Director of programme management	16	Oversees a portfolio of projects; aligns with business goals; sets standards.
12	L	Senior project manager	13	Directs multiple teams; ensures projects are on track; manages high-level risks.
13	M	Assistant project manager	24	Assists with budgeting and scheduling; monitors progress; communicates with stakeholders.
14	N	Project manager	18	Defines scope; plans lifecycles; manages resources.
15	O	Project coordinator	18	Ensures clear communication; updates documentation; tracks deliverables.
16	P	Project scheduler	17	Monitors timelines; keeps project on track; updates stakeholders.
17	Q	Project manager	25	Leads initiation, planning and closure; manages scope, budget and team.
18	R	Assistant project manager	20	Handles specific tasks; collaborates with PM; ensures continuity.
19	S	Project scheduler	14	Allocates resources; manages calendars; anticipates scheduling issues.
20	T	Project manager	24	Ensures alignment with business goals; leads evaluation; manages deliverables.

3. Findings

The findings are organised into three primary domains that emerged consistently across the interview corpus: leadership competencies and behaviours that predict better execution; cross-cultural communication mechanisms that lead to or prevent rework; and organisational practices that either enable or constrain leader effectiveness. Each domain is unpacked into subthemes, illustrated with anonymised interview evidence, and accompanied by operational implications that inform the practical recommendations in Section 5.

3.1. Leadership Competencies for Effective Execution

Leadership was the most frequently cited determinant of execution performance. Practitioners described a cluster of behaviours and skills that distinguished effective execution

leaders from those who struggled. These fall into three interrelated competency groups: emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, adaptive operational decision making, and integrative stakeholder management.

3.1.1. Emotional Intelligence and Relational Skills

Emotional intelligence surfaced as central to managing the multicultural, often transient teams typical of UAE construction sites. Interviewees described leaders who demonstrated self-awareness, controlled emotional reactions under pressure, and showed empathy towards diverse workforce backgrounds. One senior planning director noted that leaders who took time to understand subcontractor pressures and who provided clear, respectful feedback reduced defensive behaviours and increased collaborative problem solving [15,18].

Vignette A (Project manager, 14 years): "Two crews refused to work together after a clash at a toolbox talk. I split them for the day, met the two foremen separately, reframed the dispute around shared quality goals, then brought them into a five-minute joint huddle to agree on a restart checklist. We lost half a shift but avoided a week of rework." The incident illustrates how emotion regulation and reframing can convert conflict into procedural clarity, preventing latent defects from propagating.

Vignette B (Planning director, 18 years): "A supplier was late for the third time. Instead of escalating, I asked for a five-minute WhatsApp call with their dispatch lead and our stores supervisor. We mapped their choke points, agreed to batch deliveries twice a week, and set a simple on-delivery sign-off. Delays dropped within a fortnight." The emphasis here is relational leverage: the leader widened the conversation to include operational actors who controlled the bottleneck, then paired a behavioural reset with a light governance tweak [14,28].

3.1.2. Adaptive Operational Decision Making

Adaptive leadership describes the capacity to switch between directive control and participative problem solving according to situational demands. Participants emphasised that fast-moving projects require leaders who can make firm decisions when swift action is needed, yet are willing to broaden consultation when situational complexity demands multiple perspectives. Interviewees contrasted leaders who rigidly adhered to plan updates with those who treated plan data as inputs for pragmatic adjustments on site. Effective leaders combined clear accountability with operational flexibility to reallocate labour and materials in real time.

Vignette C (Senior PM, 16 years): "We had a corridor with a hold point on MEP inspections and a glazing team idle. I got verbal clearance from QA for a limited work-ahead on non-interfering bays and created a two-hour micro-schedule. QA signed off in the afternoon; the glazing crew stayed productive." The micro-schedule, backed by a named approver and a narrow scope, preserved critical path integrity while absorbing inspection latency [3,7].

3.1.3. Integrative Stakeholder Management

Execution depends on integrating procurement, design clarifications, client expectations and regulatory inspections. Successful leaders actively managed relationships across these boundaries. Practised leaders built early rapport with permit officials and arranged pre-inspection briefings that prevented late instruction changes. They also institutionalised briefs and daily check-ins with procurement and contracts so that upcoming material shortfalls could be flagged and rerouted. Participants described this as the cumulative effect of disciplined everyday coordination rather than one-off heroics.

Vignette D (Contracts manager, 20 years): "We added a fifteen-minute 07:30 huddle with procurement and site controls. Three weeks later, claims fell because surprises fell. The biggest gain was visibility on items stuck in customs." The routine produced a predictable cadence for risk surfacing, which in turn reduced decision latency [11,21].

3.1.4. Competency Development And Selection

Several firms had begun implementing competency matrices that evaluated candidates on technical and relational skills, with explicit developmental pathways for weaker scores. Practitioners argued that technical competence without people skills produced brittle execution regimes that could not absorb shocks. Cases in the thesis show that succession planning combining technical mentorship with supervised leadership exposure built a resilient pipeline of capable managers [24].

Operational implications for leadership: Evaluate and develop leaders on three dimensions — emotional and interpersonal skill, adaptive decision making, and integrative stakeholder management. Development initiatives combining scenario-based training, mentoring and in-situ coaching were reported as the most effective means of translating leadership training into execution performance [14,28].

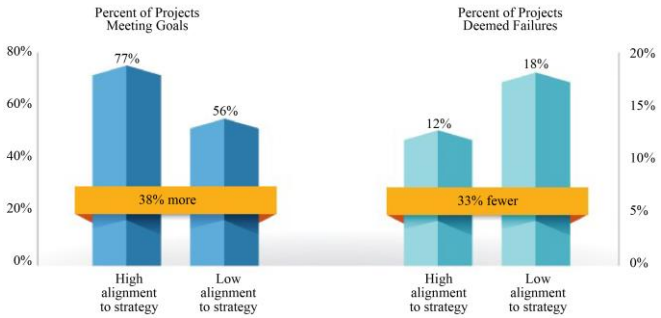

Figure 1: Impact of Strategic Enterprise Project Management Offices

3.2 Cross-cultural communication and its operational consequences

Communication was framed by interviewees as an operational control. It is the mechanism by which plans are transmitted into action, and communication failures were cited as a recurring root cause of rework, delay and cost escalation. The cross-cultural composition of UAE construction workforces amplifies the risk of ambiguity, inconsistent reporting norms and implicit assumptions regarding instruction format and timing.

3.2.1 Sources of communication friction

Three primary sources of friction emerged. First, linguistic and terminological ambiguity led to divergent interpretations of the same instruction, particularly where technical English terms were used inconsistently across subcontractor groups. Second, cultural norms concerning indirectness and face-saving contributed to late-stage reporting. Junior staff from some backgrounds preferred to avoid reporting potential problems upward, allowing minor issues to compound. Third, differences in expectations about documentation and confirmation resulted in critical steps being executed without adequate written confirmation, which later became contested during claims [19,21].

3.2.2 Communication routines that prevent rework

Interviewees described routines that materially reduced ambiguity: mandatory written confirmations for critical instructions; a three-step briefing–confirmation–acknowledgement protocol for daily tasking; structured handover forms for shift changes; and the use of visual coordination tools, notably BIM views and annotated drawings, to minimise reliance on text alone. Participants highlighted the importance of disciplined meeting management: short, focused daily stand-ups with clear agendas, a named action owner for each task and a documented follow-up mechanism [20,21].

Vignette E (Site engineer, 13 years): "Our façade crew kept misreading the tolerance call-outs. We printed an annotated elevation, laminated it, and used a dry-erase pen in the toolbox talk. Rework vanished the same week."

Vignette F (HSE lead, 17 years): "After a crane near-miss, we required written confirmations for critical lifts plus a two-minute verbal read-back. It sounded bureaucratic, but near-misses dropped to zero for the remaining six months."

3.2.3 Cultural competency as an enabling factor

Standardised routines were most effective when combined with cultural competency training. Teams trained in cultural awareness were better able to solicit candid feedback from subcontractors, reduce defensive behaviours and encourage early reporting of risks. Low-cost modules that included role play, simple cross-cultural do-and-don't guidance and language simplification techniques were described as high impact. Properly implemented, cultural competency is an operational multiplier that increases the efficacy of routine communication protocols [14,29].

Operational implications for communication: Institutionalise simple, mandatory protocols; invest in visual coordination tools and training; and embed cultural competency as part of induction and ongoing professional development. Combined, these measures create redundancy in information flows and reduce the probability that small miscommunications will metastasise into costly rework [21,22].

3.3 Organizational practices that enable or constrain leaders

Even highly capable leaders require an enabling institutional context to translate skills into improved execution. Three categories of practice were prominent: leadership development and succession systems, decision-making and escalation pathways, and performance and reward frameworks.

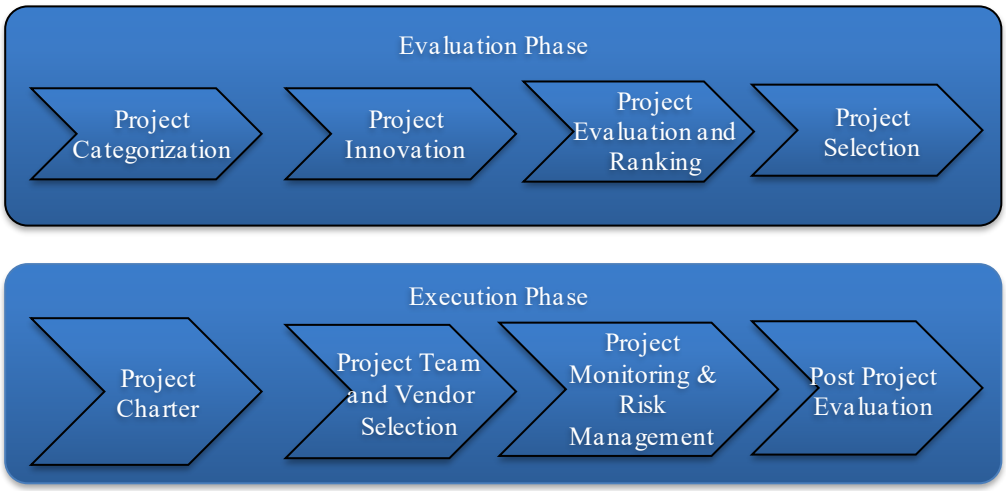

Fig. 2 Project management framework

3.3.1. Leadership Development and Succession

Firms that invested in systematic leadership programmes reported greater execution resilience. Effective approaches combined formal curricula on negotiation, conflict resolution, and digital tools with practical apprenticeships in which emerging leaders shadowed experienced managers in control-room settings. Mentorship was repeatedly highlighted as a low-cost, high-value intervention. Succession planning that matched candidates to project complexity helped maintain execution capacity during peak pipelines [11,23].

3.3.2. Decision-Making and Escalation Pathways

Clarity in decision responsibilities and escalation pathways was cited as a critical control. Interviewees recounted episodes where multi-day debates over approvals created critical-path delays. Firms that reduced decision latency by predefining approval thresholds and delegating authority to named roles at the project level consistently reported fewer schedule interruptions. Codified decision matrices that specify who may approve which class of deviation — and the timeframes for decision — were most effective when coupled with transparent logs that make decisions and rationales auditable [3,11].

3.3.3. Performance and Reward Frameworks

Performance frameworks shape behaviour. Reward systems that incentivise on-time completion while neglecting quality or relational competencies created perverse outcomes. Managers are rewarded primarily on schedule, and sometimes, activities are accelerated in ways that create latent defects or compromise safety. Conversely, frameworks that included indicators such as subcontractor relationship health and communication compliance produced different behaviours: managers invested in early problem reporting and cooperative solutions because these behaviours were recognised and rewarded [16,27].

3.3.4. Organizational Digital Governance

Digital investments without governance generated fragmented datasets and eroded trust. Governance practices that define role-based data responsibilities, update frequencies, and audit trails increased the utility of digital systems. Integration of supplier portals with scheduling dashboards produced measurable reductions in procurement-related stoppages where governance was strong [11,21].

Operational implications for organizational design: Align leadership development, decision matrices and performance frameworks so that institutional incentives support the relational and communicative behaviours required for resilient execution. Accompany digital investments with governance rules and accountability for data quality. When these elements align, leaders convert individual competencies into sustained execution performance [23,24].

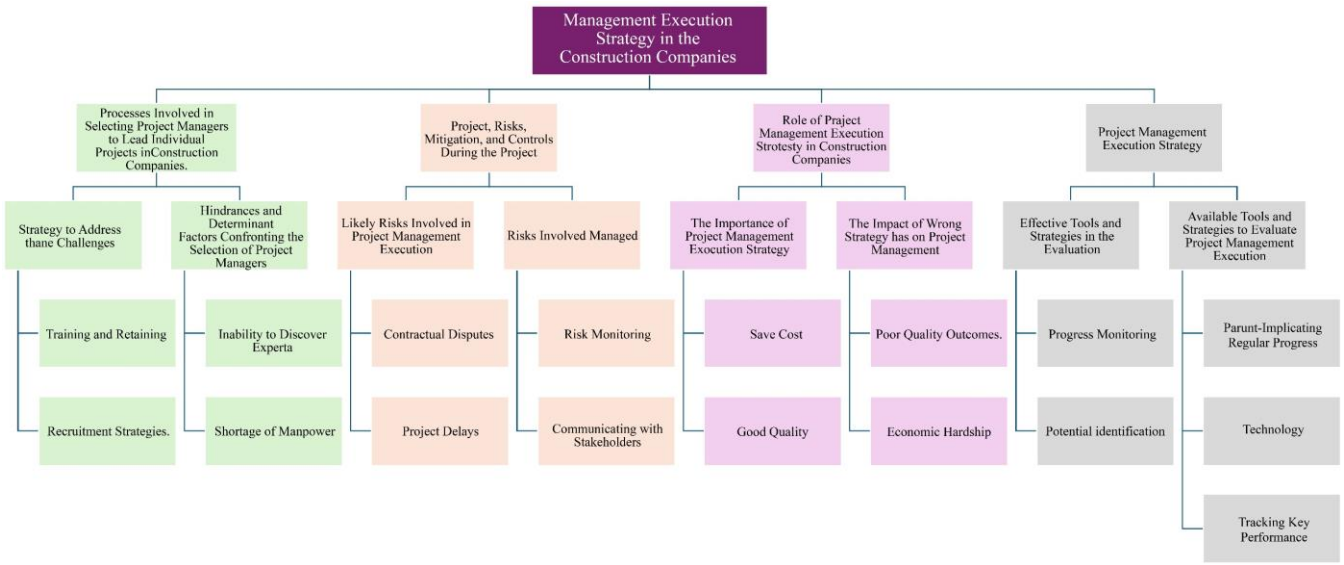

Fig. 3 Thematic Map of Project Management Execution Strategy

3.4. Cross-Domain Synthesis

The three domains interact in non-linear ways. Disciplined communication routines amplify the effect of emotionally intelligent leadership because they provide leaders with high-quality signals for timely intervention. When performance frameworks reward relational metrics, leaders are incentivised to invest in cultural competency training and rigorous handover protocols. Conversely, weak digital governance undermines lifecycle risk processes because unreliable data delays escalation decisions. The thematic map in Figure 3 summarises these interdependencies and highlights causal pathways described by interviewees, including amplification loops in which small governance failures cascade into substantial execution breakdowns.

4. Discussion

This paper reframes execution as an emergent organisational capability rather than a sequence of discrete technical tasks. Execution quality depends on the dynamic alignment of leadership competencies, communication systems and organizational processes. The empirical data extend existing literature in three ways.

4.1. Reframing Leadership as an Execution Control

Traditional project management models emphasise planning, scheduling and control systems as primary levers for on-time delivery [3,7]. The interview evidence suggests leadership is not an adjunct to these controls; it functions as a meta-control that shapes how technical systems are used.

Emphasising leadership shifts attention from artefacts such as schedules to the social processes that translate schedule data into decisions, aligning with views that conceptualise capabilities as collective routines embedded in social relations [18,28].

4.2. Operationalising Cultural Communication

The study contributes by specifying how cultural communication failures convert into rework and claims. Multicultural teams generate coordination complexity; linguistic ambiguity, indirectness in reporting and inconsistent documentation standards create information gaps that increase latent defects and late-stage remediation costs [19,21]. The implication is that communication protocols and cultural competency are central to quality assurance and risk mitigation, not peripheral training items [14,29].

4.3. Organizational Design as Enabling Architecture

Leadership development, decision matrices and reward frameworks are interdependent. Without clear escalation pathways and incentives that value relational work, leadership capacity is underutilised. When organizations support leaders by delegating authority, codifying decisions and auditing communication compliance, execution teams convert tactical efforts into sustained capability. This aligns with calls for socio-technical integration in construction management and provides empirical detail on the micro-practices that operationalise such integration [11,23].

4.4. Practical and Theoretical Integration

Execution improvement requires a system-level programme: competency-based leader selection and development; standardised, culturally attuned communication routines; standing risk teams that integrate with daily execution; and governance of digital tools with role-based accountability. To operationalise the fit between strategic characteristics and appropriate execution modes, Figure 4 presents the Strategic Project Management Matrix mapping four archetypes against recommended execution postures and the leadership behaviours each requires [24,27].

Purposes	Methods		
	Market Share & Strategic Intent (Fern 2004)	Project Product or End Result (Archibald 2004)	Other Project Attributes or Characteristics
STRATEGIC PM			
Project selection	X	?	
Prioritize selected projects	X	?	
Define Portfolios		X	
Manage project portfolios	X	X	
Allocate resources to portfolios and projects within portfolios	X	X	
Other:			

Fig. 4 Strategic project management matrix

5. Practical Recommendations

5.1. For Industry Practitioners

Adopt competency matrices for project manager selection and promotion. Define observable indicators for emotional intelligence, adaptive decision making and stakeholder integration, and use scenario-based assessments during selection. Pair promotions with formal mentoring assignments to accelerate capability transfer. Implementation steps: (1) draft a role-specific competency matrix; (2) pilot an assessment centre with three scenarios; (3) assign a mentor with a six-month plan; (4) review behavioural evidence quarterly. Indicative KPIs: percentage of PMs with assessed relational competency level B or higher; reduction in rework incidents per 10,000 labour hours; decision latency (median hours from issue raised to decision recorded) [16,30].

Institutionalise communication protocols. Implement mandatory written confirmation for critical instructions, structured daily stand-ups with named action owners, standardised handover templates and routine use of visual coordination tools such as BIM views and annotated drawings. Ensure protocols are part of induction and audited during performance evaluations. Implementation steps: (1) publish a one-page protocol; (2) train supervisors via toolbox talks; (3) add protocol compliance to weekly audits; (4) close non-compliances within five working days. KPIs: handover form compliance rate; proportion of critical instructions with written confirmation; number of communication-related rework tickets [20,21].

Create standing risk cells and integrate scenario rehearsals into mobilisation. Risk cells provide continuity and institutional memory; rehearsals prepare teams for permit shocks or supply disruptions. Ensure risk teams have access to schedule and procurement dashboards and the authority to reallocate resources within defined delegation limits. Implementation steps: (1) name a three-person cross-functional risk cell; (2) schedule a fortnightly one-hour risk clinic; (3) run one scenario rehearsal per month; (4) publish a two-column risk log (issue and action owner). KPIs: average age of open risks; percentage of risks with named owners and due dates; number of schedule interruptions prevented by pre-emptive actions [11,23].

Govern digital tool adoption. Define role-based responsibilities for updating datasets, update frequencies, and data quality audits. Integrate supplier portals with scheduling to create early warnings for procurement risks. Implementation steps: (1) assign data stewards per module; (2) implement weekly data quality checks; (3) automate import from supplier portals; (4) publish a dashboard with exception alerts. KPIs: data freshness (median days since last update); number of procurement stoppages per quarter; audit pass rate for data fields [21].

Align performance metrics with relational competencies. Extend KPIs beyond schedule and cost, including subcontractor relationship health, communication compliance and leadership development progress. Implementation steps: (1) add two relational KPIs to PM scorecards; (2) calibrate thresholds with historical data; (3) review quarterly with HR and PMO; (4) publicise success cases. KPIs: subcontractor satisfaction index; proportion of PMs completing leadership modules; rate of early risk reporting [27,30].

5.2. For Government and Regulators

Standardise permit service-level agreements. Clear, enforceable SLAs for permit processing reduce uncertainty and permit shock. Publish permit timelines and escalation contacts so firms can plan contingencies. KPIs: percentage of permits processed within SLA; average days to decision.

Support data interoperability standards. Mandate or endorse simple protocols that reduce friction when integrating supplier portals, BIM repositories and schedule dashboards. KPIs: number of agencies adopting the standard; integration success rate for pilot projects [21].

Facilitate public–private scenario planning. Convene regulatory and industry actors to run joint rehearsals for major regulatory transitions and sustainability mandates to negotiate workable transition timelines. KPIs: number of rehearsals conducted; post-rehearsal policy adjustments adopted.

5.3. For Academia and Training Providers

Develop executive short courses on execution governance combining emotional intelligence, cross-cultural communication and digital adoption for practising project managers. Create practicum risk clinics where students rotate through project control rooms and learn the lifecycle risk loop and escalation processes. Build research–practice pilots with industry to evaluate interventions using quasi-experimental designs and longitudinal tracking, thereby building an evidence base for scaling [22,24].

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study's strengths derive from the depth of practitioner narratives and the focused re-analysis of an existing, well-documented corpus. Limitations remain. First, the data are qualitative and drawn from private-sector firms in selected emirates. While purposive sampling achieved coverage across firm sizes and project types, the findings are not statistically generalisable. Future work should operationalise the competency and communication constructs into survey instruments for validation across additional emirates and in public-sector contexts [17,19]. Second, the analysis is cross-sectional, capturing practitioner experience during a particular period. Execution capabilities and organizational responses evolve; longitudinal studies are needed to evaluate the durability of recommended interventions and to detect lagged effects of training and governance changes. Third, converting interview claims into operational recommendations implies some inference about causality. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs are required to establish the extent to which particular interventions produce measured improvements in schedule adherence or reduced claim volumes. Fourth, the article reused the doctoral interview corpus. While this enabled efficient and rigorous re-analysis, it constrains novelty claims related to data collection. Future research could combine new interviews with controlled pilot interventions and pre-post measurements to strengthen causal inference [27,28]. Despite these limitations, the study provides a robust practitioner-grounded roadmap for action, and it identifies specific constructs and measurement approaches that can be used in quantitative follow-ups.

7. Conclusion

Execution is the crucible in which project plans are tested against the complexity of real-world delivery. The findings demonstrate that leadership, communication and organizational design are not peripheral issues; they are central execution controls determining whether projects convert plans into value or costly rework and disputes. Leaders who combine emotional intelligence, adaptive decision making and integrative stakeholder management reduce friction and enable teams to absorb shocks. Standardised communication protocols and cultural competency training materially reduce ambiguity and the likelihood of latent defects. Organizational structures that align leadership development, decision matrices and reward frameworks create the enabling conditions for these competencies to produce durable improvements in execution capacity. The recommended interventions are actionable and scalable: competency-based selection and development, structured communication routines, standing risk cells with scenario rehearsals, governance rules for digital adoption and performance frameworks that recognise relational competencies. By repositioning leadership and cultural communication as core execution controls, the UAE construction sector can reduce rework, shorten handover times and improve cost predictability, supporting the nation's broader development goals.

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