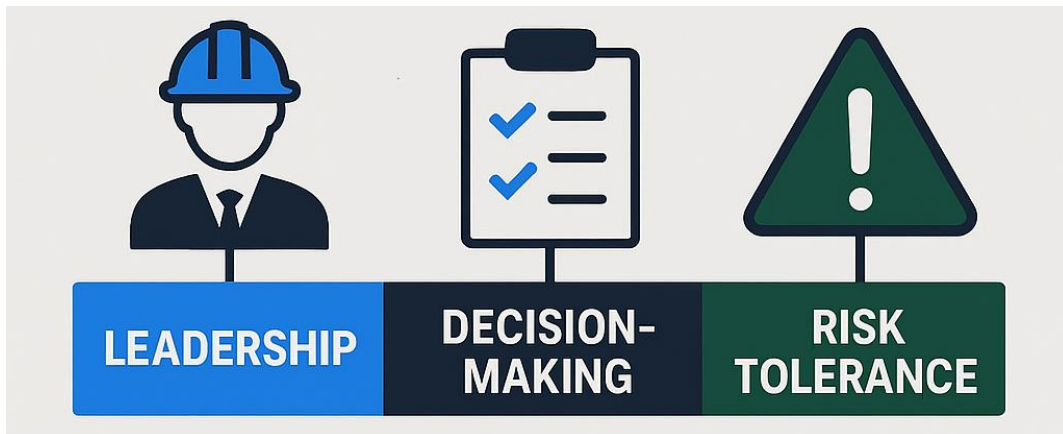

FRONTLINE SAFETY: LEADERSHIP, DECISION-MAKING, AND RISK TOLERANCE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Frontline supervisors play a critical role in construction safety performance. Foremen, superintendents, and other site leaders directly influence worker behavior, hazard recognition, and risk-related decision-making on construction projects. Their leadership traits, communication practices, and tolerance for risk help shape the safety culture experienced by workers in the field. Recognizing the importance of these factors, this study examined how leadership behaviors and decision-making among construction supervisors influence safety practices and worker perceptions of risk.

This research study was conducted as part of the OSU Construction Safety Research Partnership (CSRP). The study used a mixed-methods approach that combined a literature review, an industry survey, and semi-structured interviews with experienced construction leaders. The survey collected responses from construction professionals representing a range of organization types, leadership roles, and levels of industry experience. Survey responses were analyzed to identify patterns in leadership behaviors, communication practices, and safety management approaches. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide additional insights into how construction leaders perceive risk, communicate safety expectations, and balance safety responsibilities with production demands.

The research findings suggest that frontline supervisors are widely recognized as key drivers of safety culture on construction projects. According to the survey respondents, supervisory leadership behaviors—including communication, visibility in the field, and consistent enforcement of safety expectations—strongly influence worker safety outcomes. Supervisors serve as the primary link between organizational safety policies and day-to-day work activities, making their leadership practices critical to effective safety management.

Communication is perceived as one of the most important leadership behaviors influencing safety performance. Daily safety meetings, pre-task planning discussions, and informal jobsite conversations are commonly described as mechanisms for reinforcing safety expectations and identifying hazards before work begins. Interview participants also emphasized the importance of creating an environment where workers feel comfortable reporting hazards and exercising stop-work authority when unsafe conditions arise.

The study also found that leadership development and training programs play an important role in supporting effective safety leadership. While many organizations provide some form of leadership or safety training for supervisors, the structure and consistency of these programs vary widely. Industry leaders interviewed for the study emphasized that training is most effective when it combines classroom instruction with field-based mentoring and practical problem-solving experiences.

Overall, the findings reinforce the importance of investing in leadership development for frontline supervisors. Organizations that strengthen supervisory skills in communication, hazard recognition, and safety decision-making may improve safety culture and reduce risk across construction projects.

FRONTLINE SAFETY

LEADERSHIP, DECISION-MAKING, AND RISK TOLERANCE



LEADERSHIP

- Leaders set the tone for safety culture
- Guide teams through clear communication
- Provide support



DECISION- MAKING

- Assess hazards and weigh options
- Choose actions that minimize risk



RISK TOLERANCE

- Determines acceptable uncertainty or danger
- Influences safety protocols and responses

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- Together, these elements shape a proactive safety environment
 - Reduce incidents
 - Empower frontline workers to act confidently and responsibly