



# 2026 Safety & Culture Leadership Insights

## Comprehensive Summary Report





# Table of Contents

Executive Overview	04
Who Responded	05
Current Culture Snapshot	06
Psychological Safety & Collaboration	07
Collaboration Across Stakeholders	08
Biggest Industry Challenges – Detailed Breakdown	09
What Keeps People Long-Term	11
Leadership Under Pressure – Detailed Capability Insights	12
What Would Improve Safety & Culture – Direct Industry Themes	13
Key Strategic Insights – What This Means for 2025 and Beyond	14
Priority Recommendations for Construction Leaders in 2025	15
Closing Comment	17
How LeadershipHQ Can Help Strengthen Safety, Culture & Leadership Capability in 2025	18



# Table of Contents

Leadership Capability Programs (Emerging, Mid-Level & Senior)	19
Safety & Culture Diagnostics (LeadershipHQ Pulse Tools)	20
On-Site Leadership Coaching & Shadowing	21
Psychological Safety & Mental Health Leadership Training	21
Culture Transformation & Leadership Alignment Workshops	22
Executive Coaching for Senior Leaders	23
LeadershipHQ Membership & Ongoing Support	23
Why LeadershipHQ?	24
Final Message	25



# 1. Executive Overview

Across Australia, construction leaders are navigating an environment where project complexity is increasing, client expectations are tightening, and talent shortages are intensifying. The survey results signal an industry that is rich in values-driven leadership, yet facing structural pressures that directly undermine safety, well-being, and culture.

## Three issues dominate the landscape:

### 1. Chronic time and cost pressure

Programs are compressed, variations and redesigns are common, and workforce shortages are driving unsustainable delivery expectations.

### 2. Fatigue and burnout affecting safety and retention

Long hours have become normalised, with multiple respondents referencing a “6 am–6 pm culture” that is eroding wellbeing and decision-making quality.

### 3. Leadership inconsistency, not leadership intention

Leaders care deeply – but capability, confidence, and bandwidth vary. High-pressure environments magnify any skill gaps, particularly in communication, conflict resolution, and people management.

## The result:

Safety is maintained – but it is maintained through sheer individual effort, not through a system that consistently supports safe, sustainable work.





## 2. Who Responded

A diverse cross-section of the industry contributed insights:

### Roles Represented



Construction Managers



Project Directors



Senior Engineers & Site Engineers



Safety & Risk Leaders



Human Resources / People & Culture Leaders



Executives & General Managers



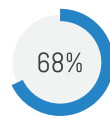
Project and Executive Assistants



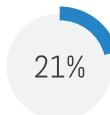
### Sector Spread

- Tier 1 & Tier 2 contractors
- Civil, infrastructure, utilities, and building sectors
- Government / local council project partners
- Specialist contractors and consulting partners

### Experience Levels



68% 10+ years in construction



21% 5-10 years



10% 0-5 years

This provides a credible, experienced sample that reflects on-the-ground realities and senior leadership insights.

# 3. Current Culture Snapshot

## How would you describe your organisation's culture right now?

Many leaders described their organisational culture as values-driven, safety-focused, and people-first.

### What's Working Well

- Strong commitment to safety as a non-negotiable
- Deep camaraderie across teams
- Passionate, hardworking leaders
- Pride in project outcomes and community impact

### Key Challenges Identified

- Cultural inconsistency across sites and supervisors
- Variability in how "safety first" is executed when under pressure
- Emerging burnout and emotional fatigue
- Leadership is stretched too thin to be present or proactive.



### Leadership "walk the talk" data:

This reveals that **personal values are strong**, but **execution is inconsistent under pressure**.

**Always:**

**Often:**

40-45%

40-45%

**Sometimes:**

**Rarely:**

40-45%

40-45%

# 4. Psychological Safety & Collaboration

On your sites, do leaders walk the talk when it comes to safety and culture?

Psychological safety is situational, not systemic; strong in pockets, fragile under pressure.



## Detailed themes:

### Where it works well

- Teams with strong supervisors
- Sites with proactive safety leadership
- Environments where issues are addressed quickly

### Where it breaks down

- When programs are behind schedule
- With difficult clients or consultants
- When people fear “slowing the job down”
- When inexperienced leaders are unsure how to respond

# 5. Collaboration Across Stakeholders

How well do teams collaborate across contractors, departments, or sites?

Mostly rated 3–4/5, but heavily influenced by:

## Barriers

- Siloed project teams
- Misaligned expectations between contractors
- Reactive redesigns from clients
- Communication breakdowns across disciplines
- Tension between commercial and delivery priorities

## Enablers

- Strong pre-start alignment
- Clear, consistent communication channels
- Leadership presence
- Shared understanding of project risks



# 6. Biggest Industry Challenges – Detailed Breakdown

How well do teams collaborate across contractors, departments, or sites?



## 1. Time & Cost Pressures (Most cited)

- Aggressive programs
- Unrealistic milestones
- Insufficient resourcing
- Late design changes
- Pressure from clients to “just make it work” This is the number one cultural and safety risk identified.



## 2. Fatigue, Long Hours & Burnout

- Leaders working 60–70+ hour weeks
- “Always on” expectations
- Emotional exhaustion from constant issue management
- Safety risk from impaired cognitive function
- Reduced creativity and problem-solving



## 3. Retaining Great People

Drivers of turnover include:

- Unsustainable workloads
- Poor work-life balance
- Limited career pathways
- Leadership inconsistency
- Salary competition from other sectors

**The research is clear: fatigue decreases attention, increases mistakes, and erodes psychological safety.**





#### 4. Trust & Communication Gaps

- Mixed messages from senior leadership
- Poor coordination between the site and the office
- Inconsistent performance management
- Low transparency during difficult periods



#### 5. Leadership Capability Gaps

- Particularly in:
- Managing conflict confidently
- Influencing clients
- Coaching and developing junior staff
- Holding difficult conversations
- Communicating under pressure



#### 6. Technology & Change Fatigue

- Digital tools are not adopted consistently.
- Systems perceived as administrative burdens
- Varied tech capability across generations



#### 7. Pay & Conditions

While important, most respondents indicated culture, workload, and leadership matter more for long-term retention.



#### 8. Work-Life Balance

A critical issue – many stated current practices feel “unsustainable long-term.”





## 7. What Keeps People Long-Term

Which of the following challenges are most present in your organisation?

Across all responses, retention is anchored in human leadership and sustainable work practices.

### Top Retention Drivers

- Supportive, approachable leaders
- Reasonable expectations and realistic programs
- Work-life balance that doesn't damage career progression
- Fair pay, conditions & recognition
- Ethical, respectful, solutions-focused clients
- Clear growth pathways and development
- Teams that feel respectful, safe, and collaborative

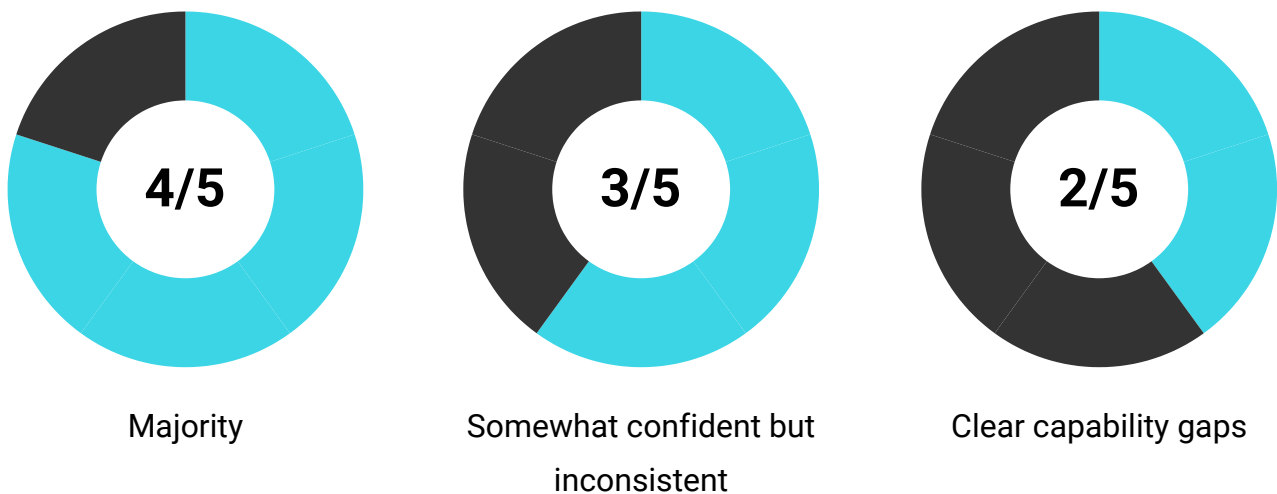


### People stay when they feel they can:

- Do great work
- Have a life outside work.
- Be themselves
- Speak up without fear.
- Feel valued and respected.

# 8. Leadership Under Pressure – Detailed Capability Insights

Leaders rated their confidence in handling conflict and pressure as:



## Common Situations Where Leaders Struggle

- Escalating issues with clients
- Calling out poor behaviour or unsafe actions
- Balancing productivity vs. safety
- Managing underperformers
- Staying composed during high-stress moments
- Having difficult conversations with senior stakeholders

## Leadership Strengths Observed

- Values-driven mindset
- Strong technical competence
- Commitment to people and safety
- Desire to grow, learn, and lead better

## Emerging Capability Needs

- Emotional intelligence
- Coaching and mentoring
- Boundary-setting with clients
- Psychological safety leadership
- Time and energy management
- Strategic communication

# 9. What Would Improve Safety & Culture – Direct Industry Themes

## 1. Workload, Hours & Fatigue Management

- Reduced standard day lengths
- Better resourcing and scheduling
- Realistic program negotiations
- Fatigue monitoring and enforced reset points

## 2. Better Client Relationships

- Clients who respect safety commitments
- Fewer redesigns and late changes
- Better upfront planning
- Reduced interference and micro-management

## 3. Communication Improvements

- Clearer pathways for escalation
- More transparent project updates
- Better alignment between commercial, engineering, and delivery teams
- More consistent messaging from senior leadership

## 4. Leadership Visibility & Consistency

- Leaders asked for:
- More time on-site
- More proactive leadership, less reactive fire-fighting
- Leaders who role-model behaviours consistently
- Leaders who step in early on toxic behaviours

## 5. Wellbeing & Mental Health Support

- Leaders want:
- Mental health conversations are normalised
- No stigma attached to seeking help
- Wellbeing check-ins as standard practice
- Predictable rosters and time-off cycles

# 10. Key Strategic Insights – What This Means for 2026 and Beyond

## 1- Program pressure is the #1 cultural and safety threat.

It drives fatigue, reduces collaboration, weakens psychological safety, and increases mistakes.

## 2- Leadership has strong intent, but capability gaps limit impact.

Especially in communication under pressure, conflict management, and coaching younger staff.

## 3- Communication is the backbone of safe, high-performing sites.

When it fails, trust, alignment, and psychological safety all suffer.

## 4- Retention is directly tied to leadership behaviour and workload.

People do not leave jobs – they leave exhaustion, poor behaviour, and inconsistent leadership.

## 5- Client behaviour is an unspoken but powerful cultural force.

Client alignment is essential to safety performance and sustainable work practices.

# 11. Priority Recommendations for Construction Leaders in 2026



## 1- Reset the Work Model

- Shorter, safer shifts
- Fatigue risk assessments
- Earlier negotiation of realistic timelines
- More buffers are built into programs

## 2- Design Work with Well-Being at the Core

- Predictable rosters
- Support for mental health and resilience
- Clear recovery time structures
- Data-driven wellbeing monitoring

## 3- Invest in Leadership Capability Development

- Focus areas:
- Psychological safety & empathy
- Conflict resolution
- Feedback and performance conversations
- Coaching for capability uplift
- Strategic communication
- Leading under high pressure

## 4- Improve Cross-Team & Cross-Contractor Alignment

- Consistent pre-start alignment
- Shared project culture agreements
- Transparent risk discussions
- Improved commercial–delivery communication loops

## 5- Increase Leadership Presence & Trust

- Regular site visits
- Walking the floor
- Structured check-ins
- Recognition of safety and culture champions

## Summary: What is the ONE Thing We Need to Change

- The industry must leave **ego** at the door and prioritise teamwork, trust, and collaboration.
- Leadership must be about **people skills**, not just technical expertise.
- Leaders need to do what they say they will do, with **transparency and accountability**.
- **Unrealistic targets** and aggressive programs to win work are damaging outcomes and well-being.
- **Open, honest communication** with no politics is essential.
- Red tape, bureaucracy, and **overly complex contracts** should be reduced.
- Experienced **female leaders** should be appointed on merit, not as token appointments.
- **Leadership development** must focus on managing people in today's environment.
- **Safety** must never be compromised by conflicting productivity pressures.
- **Work-life balance** requires a genuine industry-wide shift, including reduced working hours.
- Employees should feel **safe** to speak up, ask questions, and be respected.
- **Planning and scheduling** should create a sense of achievement, not constant pressure.
- Leaders must be **present**, consistent, and engaged at every level.
- Clients need **realistic expectations** and must understand the risks contractors manage.
- **Procurement and government** expectations must align with delivery realities.
- **Contractors and consultants** need collaborative, not adversarial, relationships.
- Strong people leadership is grounded in **kindness, empathy, and listening**.
- Leaders must take personal ownership and **call out poor behaviour**.
- Ethical suppliers and inclusive, **diverse workplaces** must be the norm.
- **Real leadership** engagement must go beyond project management and connect with people.



# Closing Comment

This report highlights an industry filled with hardworking, committed, values-led people who are doing their absolute best within an increasingly challenging system.

The opportunity for 2026 is clear:

**Build leaders who are consistent, aligned, present, capable and supported by a system designed for sustainable, safe, human-centred work.**

Construction doesn't lack courage.

It lacks capacity, consistency, and realistic expectations.

By elevating leadership capability, strengthening communication, prioritising wellbeing, and partnering with clients more effectively, the industry can build **safer, healthier, high-performing cultures that attract and retain great people for the long term.**

LeadershipHQ is ready to support that journey.



# 12. How LeadershipHQ Can Help Strengthen Safety, Culture & Leadership Capability

LeadershipHQ has more than 30 years of experience partnering with construction, engineering, infrastructure and government organisations to build capable, confident, human-centred leaders who lift safety, culture, and performance.

Your survey findings align strongly with what we see across the industry:

**Great people under great pressure. Systems that strain even the strongest leaders. Capability gaps that grow when workloads intensify. And cultures that need consistency, alignment, and support.**

LeadershipHQ can help organisations tackle these challenges through **end-to-end leadership development, culture diagnostics, and practical tools grounded in neuroscience, psychology and real-world construction experience.**

Below is an expanded overview of how we support the industry to lead better and build better.



# 13. Leadership Capability Programs (Emerging, Women, Mid-Level & Senior)

We design programs that directly target the capability gaps highlighted in the survey:

## Capabilities we build:

- Conflict resolution & difficult conversations
- Psychological safety leadership
- Coaching & performance development
- Communication under pressure
- Leading through change & ambiguity
- Resilience, wellbeing & sustainable leadership
- Client management and stakeholder influence
- Strategic decision-making and prioritisation

## All programs include:

- ✓ Leadership certificate
- ✓ LeadershipHQ toolkit
- ✓ Pre & post assessments
- ✓ Sonia's book Leadership Attitude
- ✓ A leadership journal + tote bag
- ✓ Access to a private group inside The Leadership Association
- ✓ Ongoing readings, templates & reinforcement modules

Our programs create leaders who are more confident, capable, empathetic, consistent, and future-ready.



## Program formats include:



- Teams with strong supervisors
- Sites with proactive safety leadership
- Environments where issues are addressed quickly



## 14. Safety & Culture Diagnostics (LeadershipHQ Pulse Tools)

To create consistent improvement, organisations need to measure what matters.

### LeadershipHQ provides:

-  **CultureMark™ – Culture & Values Survey**
-  **LeaderMark™ Certification – Leadership Capability Assessment**
-  **Leadership Pulse™ – Safety, wellbeing & alignment pulse**
-  **360° Feedback Assessments – Strengths & development opportunities**

### These tools help organisations:

- Identify “pressure points” across teams and projects
- Benchmark psychological safety
- Map leadership strengths and risks
- Understand retention drivers
- Evaluate client impact on culture.
- Track progress over time.

LeadershipHQ’s diagnostics create **clarity, alignment and actionable insight** for senior leadership teams.



## 15. On-Site Leadership Coaching & Shadowing

- Identify “pressure points” across teams and projects
- Benchmark psychological safety
- Map leadership strengths and risks
- Understand retention drivers
- Evaluate client impact on culture.
- Track progress over time.

This helps leaders apply capability exactly where pressures are highest; staff meetings, pre-starts, high-stress conversations, and client escalations.

## 16. Psychological Safety & Mental Health Leadership Training

- Given that psychological safety was rated only moderately
- In the survey, we offer dedicated programs to strengthen:
  - Speak-up culture
  - Managing stress & emotional fatigue
  - Team well-being leadership
  - How to respond when someone is struggling
  - Reducing stigma & improving early intervention
  - Building communication habits that support mental health
  - Managing pressure with clarity, empathy, and consistency

This training is practical, evidence-based, and tailored to the realities of construction sites and project delivery environments.

# 17. Culture Transformation & Leadership Alignment Workshops



To tackle cultural inconsistency across sites and teams, Best Mondays and LeadershipHQ deliver:

- Leadership alignment workshops
- Values-in-action sessions
- Zero-tolerance behaviour standards
- Reset sessions for underperforming teams
- Client–contractor alignment workshops
- Project and team charters, as well as communication agreements

These workshops build collective ownership, create shared expectations, and reset cultural norms.

## 18. Executive Coaching for Senior Leaders

Senior leaders often face the greatest pressure with minimal support.

We offer confidential coaching for:

- Managing client expectations
- Leading through ambiguity
- Resetting team culture
- Protecting teams from unrealistic demands
- Increasing leadership presence
- Building influence, clarity, and composure
- Developing high-performing leadership teams

This supports **calm, courageous, consistent leadership** across the organization.

## 19. LeadershipHQ Membership & Ongoing Support

Every leader who works with LeadershipHQ gains access to:

- The Leadership Association – articles, videos, tools
- Webinars & development events
- Leadership journals and reflection tools
- A network of leaders across Australia
- Continuous learning and support beyond training

This ensures **leadership development is not a one-off event but a year-round capability system.**

# 20. Why LeadershipHQ?

- ✓ Deep expertise in construction, infrastructure & government
- ✓ Neuroscience-backed, evidence-based leadership development
- ✓ Programs designed for real-world pressure, not theory
- ✓ High engagement, practical tools, and immediate behavioural change
- ✓ A reputation for building courageous, capable, confident leaders
- ✓ Over 20+ years leading transformation in high-pressure industries
- ✓ Human-first leadership with measurable cultural impact

**Our mission is simple:**  
To help leaders show up with courage, kindness, clarity and consistency, especially when pressure is high. That is exactly what the construction industry needs in 2025.



# 21. Final Message

The findings from this report are clear:

**The industry has outstanding people.  
What they need now is exceptional support.**

LeadershipHQ is committed to helping construction organisations:

- Reduce burnout
- Strengthen capability
- Improve communication
- Build psychologically safe teams.
- Retain great people
- Lead with confidence and clarity.
- Create a sustainable, human-centred workplaces
- Lift safety and culture across every level.

If you're ready to build a culture where leaders thrive, and teams feel supported, safe, and valued, we're ready to partner with you.

**LeadershipHQ**  
**Safer Workplaces. Stronger Leaders. Better Culture**

