



Beyond Command and Control: How Clarity and Feedback Shape Operational Efficiency, Evidence from Albanian Managers

Marsela Çengeli* and Mimoza Manxhari

Department of Management, Faculty of Economy, University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

Situated in the Albanian managerial context, this study examines how distinct delegation practices are associated with organizations' ability to meet operational deadlines. The study is set in Albania, a high power-distance and post-communist context where centralized authority and personalized coordination remain important features of managerial practice. The main aim is to move beyond the general advice to "delegate more" by analyzing delegation as a set of distinct practices. The study focuses on three delegation mechanisms: task clarity, authority and support, and continuous feedback. The theoretical framework treats delegation as a multidimensional managerial practice and draws on goal-setting theory, job-characteristics theory, contingency theory, empowerment perspectives, and time-based competition theory. The research uses an exploratory, cross-sectional correlational design. Survey data were collected from 109 managers, with 107 complete responses included in the final analysis. Respondents came from services, finance and banking, manufacturing, technology and other sectors. Each variable was measured using a single five-point Likert-scale item adapted from validated delegation scales. The analysis relies on descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and standardized OLS regression with bootstrap-based inference. The estimates are corroborated by ordinal logistic and heteroskedasticity-consistent specifications, by a sensitivity check addressing the ceiling effect in the ratings, and by a specification adjusting for organizational sector and managerial experience. The findings show that the timeline-related value of delegation is mainly linked to structured guidance. Task clarity is the strongest unique predictor of timeline efficiency and continuous feedback also shows a strong positive association. Authority and support do not show a unique association once task clarity and feedback are controlled. The study concludes that operational efficiency in the Albanian managerial context depends more on clear goals and regular progress alignment than on autonomy alone.

Keywords: task clarity; continuous feedback; time-based performance; high power-distance; Albania

1. Introduction

Operational speed is increasingly important for organizations working in dynamic and competitive markets. In transition economies such as Albania, this issue is especially relevant. Client expectations are becoming more immediate and firms in sectors such as banking and services are increasingly compared with international standards. As a result, the ability to complete tasks and processes within agreed deadlines has become an important indicator of organizational performance.

Managers are often encouraged to “delegate more” in order to improve efficiency. However, this advice is too general. Delegation includes several different managerial actions, such as setting clear goals, giving decision-making authority, providing support and monitoring progress. These actions may not contribute to operational efficiency in the same way.

Both classical and contemporary management literature view delegation as a multidimensional practice rather than a single managerial act (Leana, 1987; Yukl & Fu, 1999). For this reason, it is important to examine the specific elements of delegation separately. This study focuses on three delegation practices: task clarity, authority and support, and continuous feedback. It investigates which of these practices is most closely associated with timeline-driven operational efficiency among Albanian managers.

Albania provides a relevant context for this study for two main reasons. First, its high power-distance and post-communist background have contributed to centralized and hierarchical management practices. In such contexts, informal and personal relationships often remain important in organizational coordination (Clark & Soulsby, 1999; Hofstede et al., 2010). Second, sectors such as banking and services, which are strongly represented in the sample, combine modern managerial practices with traditional expectations about authority and control. Therefore, the benefits of delegated authority cannot be assumed. The key question is not only whether authority is delegated, but whether delegation is supported by the conditions needed to improve operational efficiency.

Accordingly, this article has three main objectives. First, it examines whether task clarity is associated with meeting operational deadlines. Second, it assesses whether the transfer of decision-making authority is linked to faster execution. Third, it evaluates the role of continuous feedback in keeping work on schedule. By doing so, the study provides a more precise and evidence-based understanding of which delegation practices matter most for timeline-driven operational efficiency in a high power-distance economy.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework and develops the hypotheses. Section 3 describes the research design, sample, measures and analytical approach. Section 4 reports the descriptive, correlation and regression results. Section 5 discusses the findings and their theoretical and practical implications. Section 6 presents the limitations and directions for future research, and Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. Framework and Hypotheses

2.1 Delegation as a Multidimensional Performance Lever

Delegation has long been viewed as an important managerial practice through which organizations distribute tasks, authority, and responsibility. In classical management theory, delegation was mainly understood as a formal process of assigning work and decision rights from a superior to a subordinate. This view emphasized hierarchy, coordination, and control. However, later management research showed that delegation is not only a technical transfer

of authority. It also depends on the relationship between managers and employees, the clarity of expectations, the level of support provided and the employee's readiness to take responsibility.

Previous studies suggest that delegation should be understood as a multidimensional practice rather than a single managerial act. Leana (1987) distinguished delegation from participation, arguing that delegation involves the transfer of responsibility and authority, while participation refers more broadly to involvement in decision-making. Yukl and Fu (1999) also showed that managers' decisions to delegate depend on several factors, including subordinate competence, task importance, trust and the manager's need to retain control. These findings indicate that delegation cannot be reduced to the simple instruction to "delegate more."

The present study therefore focuses on three specific delegation practices: task clarity, authority and support, and continuous feedback. Task clarity refers to the extent to which managers define objectives, expected results, priorities and deadlines before assigning work. Goal-setting theory argues that clear and specific goals improve performance because they guide attention, reduce uncertainty and focus effort (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Authority and support refer to the extent to which managers give employees the authority and practical backing needed to complete delegated tasks. Empowerment theory suggests that authority can improve motivation and performance when employees feel competent, trusted and able to influence outcomes (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995). However, authority alone may not be sufficient. In contexts where employees are less accustomed to autonomous decision-making, delegated authority may create uncertainty rather than speed. For this reason, authority needs to be examined together with clarity, support and feedback.

Continuous feedback is another key component of effective delegation. Hackman and Oldham (1976) identified feedback as an important feature of work design because it helps employees understand how well they are performing. In delegation, feedback allows managers to monitor progress without returning to strict control. It also helps identify problems early, correct deviations and keep work aligned with deadlines. Therefore, feedback can function as a coordination mechanism, especially when tasks are complex or time sensitive.

This multidimensional view is particularly relevant in high power-distance and post-communist contexts such as Albania. In such environments, hierarchical authority, centralized decision-making and lower levels of generalized trust may shape how delegation is understood and practiced. Previous research on Central and Eastern European management has shown that institutional legacies can influence leadership behavior and limit the direct transfer of Western managerial models (Clark & Soulsby, 1999; Meyer & Peng, 2016; Puffer et al., 2010). As a result, the effectiveness of delegation may depend less on autonomy alone and more on the structural conditions that make delegated work clear, supported, and aligned.

Recent evidence reinforces this contingency perspective. Meta-analytic and review studies demonstrate that the performance effects of empowering leadership are heterogeneous, depending on follower characteristics and contextual conditions (Cheong et al., 2019; A. Lee et al., 2018), with weaker or less consistent benefits where employees are less receptive to greater discretion. Comparative institutional research similarly argues that transition and other understudied economies exhibit distinctive institutional configurations that shape the transferability of Western management practices (Fainshmidt et al., 2018; Meyer & Peng, 2016). At the same time, studies on performance management and agile coordination show that frequent, timely supervisor feedback independently enhances performance (Kuvaas et al.,

2017), while short-cycle, feedback-intensive coordination routines foster proactive and timely task execution (Junker et al., 2022; Rigby et al., 2016). Collectively, these findings suggest that in high power-distance Central and Eastern European contexts, the operational benefits of delegation are more likely to derive from structured guidance and continuous alignment than from the devolution of formal decision authority alone.

2.2 Timeline-Driven Operational Efficiency

Timeline-driven operational efficiency refers to an organization's ability to complete tasks, projects, and processes within established deadlines. This form of efficiency is especially important in dynamic and competitive markets, where delays can reduce service quality, client satisfaction and organizational performance. Time-based competition theory argues that the ability to reduce delays and complete work quickly can become an important source of competitive advantage (Stalk, 1988; Stalk & Hout, 1990).

Operational speed is not only a matter of working faster. It also depends on the quality of coordination inside the organization. Eisenhardt (1989) showed that effective performance in high-velocity environments depends on fast but well-coordinated decision-making. In this sense, timeline-driven efficiency is closely connected to the way managers define tasks, distribute responsibility and monitor progress. When objectives are unclear, employees may lose time asking for clarification, repeating work or waiting for approval. When feedback is missing, small delays may grow into larger operational problems.

For this reason, timeline-driven operational efficiency is a suitable outcome for studying delegation. Delegation practices directly affect the day-to-day coordination of work. Task clarity can reduce ambiguity at the beginning of the process. Continuous feedback can keep tasks aligned during execution. Authority and support can potentially reduce approval delays, but only when employees have the confidence, competence, and support to use that authority effectively.

This relationship is especially important in transition economies such as Albania. In post-communist and high power-distance settings, organizational processes may still be influenced by centralized authority and personalized coordination. Employees may be less likely to act independently when goals are unclear or when authority is not supported by trust and guidance. As a result, operational efficiency may depend more strongly on clear direction and regular alignment than on autonomy alone.

Therefore, this study examines timeline-driven operational efficiency as a specific and measurable outcome of delegation. It investigates whether task clarity, authority and support, and continuous feedback contribute differently to the timely completion of organizational work.

2.3 Delegation Mechanics and Operational Speed: Hypothesis Development

2.3.1 Task Clarity

Task clarity refers to the extent to which a manager clearly defines the objectives, expected results, priorities, and milestones of a task before assigning it. This practice is important because employees can work more efficiently when they understand what is expected from them and how their performance will be evaluated.

Goal-setting theory provides strong support for this argument. Locke and Latham (2002) show that clear and specific goals improve performance because they reduce uncertainty, guide attention and focus effort. In the context of delegation, clear task instructions can reduce the need for repeated clarification and allow employees to begin work more

confidently. Previous studies on delegation also suggest that clarity in task assignment is associated with more effective managerial delegation (Leana, 1986; Yukl & Fu, 1999).

This relationship may be especially important in high power-distance contexts. In such environments, employees may be less willing to act independently when expectations are unclear or when explicit authorization is missing. Clear task definition can therefore reduce hesitation and support faster execution. Based on this reasoning, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1. Task clarity is positively associated with timeline-driven operational efficiency.

2.3.2 Authority and Support

Authority and support refer to the extent to which a manager gives employees the authority, resources and backing needed to complete delegated tasks. From an empowerment perspective, giving employees more authority can improve motivation, initiative, and performance because it allows them to act without waiting for constant managerial approval (Spreitzer, 1995; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

However, the relationship between delegated authority and performance is not always straightforward. Previous research suggests that the effects of delegated authority depend on employee readiness, trust, task conditions and organizational context (Leana, 1987; Yukl & Fu, 1999). In high power-distance or low-trust settings, employees may not be fully comfortable using broad decision-making authority. Instead of accelerating execution, autonomy may create uncertainty, hesitation, or additional deliberation.

For this reason, authority and support may contribute to operational efficiency but this effect cannot be assumed to be automatic. The hypothesis is therefore stated in a positive form, while recognizing that the empirical result may be context-dependent:

H2. Authority and support are positively associated with timeline-driven operational efficiency.

2.3.3 Continuous Feedback

Continuous feedback refers to the regular process through which managers monitor progress, provide information and guide employees during task execution. Feedback is a central element of effective work design because it helps employees understand whether their work is on track and what adjustments are needed (Hackman & Oldham, 1976).

In delegated work, feedback allows managers to maintain alignment without returning to strict control. Regular progress checks can identify problems early, correct deviations and prevent small delays from becoming larger operational issues. Eisenhardt (1989) also emphasizes the importance of timely information and rapid coordination in high-velocity environments.

Continuous feedback may be particularly valuable in contexts where formal coordination systems are weak or where employees expect managerial guidance. In such cases, feedback can function as a practical mechanism for keeping work aligned with deadlines. Therefore, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3. Continuous feedback is positively associated with timeline-driven operational efficiency.

2.4 The Albanian High Power-Distance Context

Albania provides an important context for understanding the main hypotheses of this study because its institutional and cultural history strongly influences workplace behavior. Rather

than being only a geographic setting, Albania's historical and social environment actively shapes how employees and managers interact inside organizations.

After decades under a highly centralized communist system, Albania moved suddenly into a market economy instead of changing gradually (Kume & Llaci, 2000). During communism, decision-making power was concentrated at the top of the hierarchy, while individual initiative was discouraged and often considered risky. Research shows that many of these management patterns still continue today, even in private and international companies operating in Albania (Llaci et al., 2003). Similar patterns have also been found in other Eastern European countries after the communist period (Clark & Soulsby, 1999).

These institutional legacies are strengthened by Albania's cultural characteristics. According to the GLOBE study, Albania belongs to the Eastern European cultural cluster, which is associated with high power distance and strong in-group loyalty (House et al., 2004). In practice, this means that organizations rely more on personal relationships, trust and hierarchical guidance than on formal rules and procedures. Studies also show that high power distance continues to influence professional relationships in Albania (Hofstede et al., 2010). Traditional cultural values, such as *besa* (keeping one's word) and loyalty to family or close groups, further strengthen trust between individuals rather than trust in formal systems or institutions.

These institutional and cultural conditions explain the logic behind the study's hypotheses. In a work environment where employees have historically not been encouraged to act independently, simply giving employees more decision-making authority may not automatically improve speed or efficiency. Employees may hesitate, seek additional approval or discuss decisions with colleagues in order to avoid blame. This reflects the weaker support for participative leadership styles often found in Eastern European cultures (House et al., 2004).

Recent evidence from beyond the region converges on the same expectation. A comprehensive review of the empowering leadership literature identifies the boundary conditions shaping its effectiveness and highlights important unresolved research questions (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). Consistent with this perspective, a meta-analysis of 55 independent samples finds that empowering leader behaviours exhibit their weakest associations with subordinates' behavioural and performance outcomes relative to other outcome domains (Kim et al., 2018). Evidence from explicitly hierarchical organizational contexts further suggests that the effectiveness of empowering leadership depends on how employees interpret greater discretion within prevailing cultural norms (M. C. C. Lee et al., 2017). Direct evidence from the Western Balkans remains scarce, although recent Albanian data indicate that delegation strengthens trust in the manager without translating into improved downstream outcomes, and that intensive managerial communication weakens rather than reinforces that trust-building effect (Manxhari et al., 2026). The Albanian context examined in this study therefore offers a valuable setting for extending and testing these theoretical expectations.

At the same time, these conditions make supportive management practices especially important. Clear instructions help employees feel more secure because they provide clear boundaries and direction in a high power-distance environment. Continuous feedback is also essential because it allows managers to maintain coordination and trust through personal communication instead of relying only on formal systems.

For these reasons, Albania is an especially useful context for examining whether the success of task delegation comes mainly from giving employees autonomy, or from providing the

clear guidance and continuous feedback that make delegated work feel safe, coordinated, and manageable.

2.5 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model of this study examines three delegation practices as predictors of timeline-driven operational efficiency. These practices are task clarity, authority and support, and continuous feedback.

The model assumes that each practice may contribute differently to the timely completion of organizational tasks and processes. Task clarity is expected to reduce ambiguity at the beginning of the work process. Continuous feedback is expected to maintain alignment during execution. Authority and support are expected to reduce unnecessary approval delays, although its effect may depend on the organizational and cultural context.

The model is additive, meaning that all three delegation practices are examined at the same time. This allows the study to identify the unique contribution of each practice while controlling for the others. In this way, the model moves beyond a general view of delegation and provides a more precise analysis of which delegation mechanisms are most closely associated with timeline-driven operational efficiency among Albanian managers.

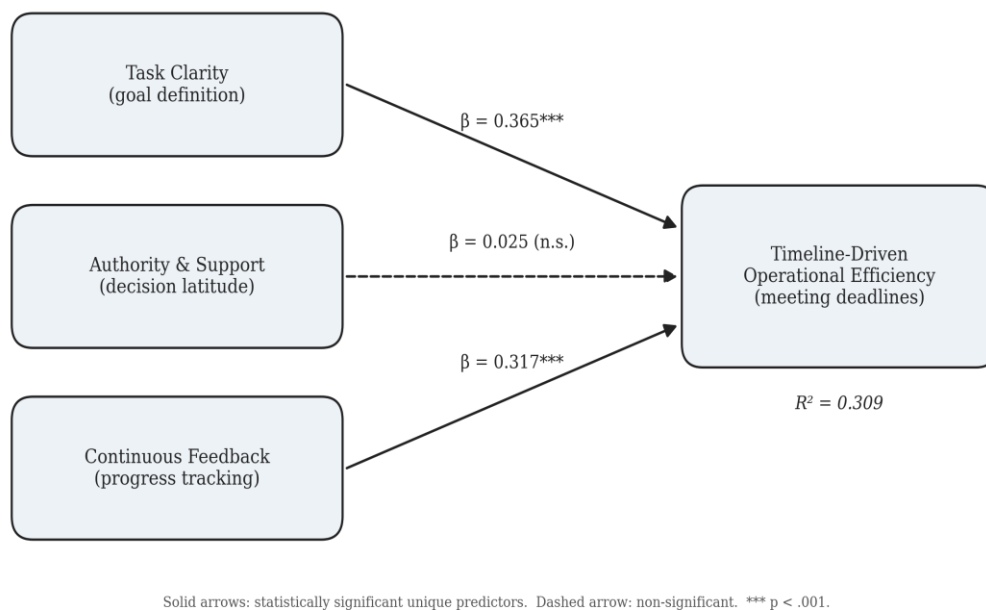


Figure 1. Conceptual model of delegation practices predicting timeline-driven operational efficiency. Coefficients shown are the standardized regression estimates reported in Section 4. Source: authors' own calculations from survey data.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study uses a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional correlational design to explore the relationship between delegation practices and timeline-driven operational efficiency. This means the research examines how these variables are connected without changing or controlling any conditions. Since the study is based on data collected at one point in time and relies on participants' self-reported answers, the findings can show relationships

and predictions between variables, but they cannot prove cause and effect. This approach is consistently followed throughout the analysis and discussion.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

A total of 109 managers participated in the survey. Participants were chosen intentionally based on their managerial roles and some additional participants were included through recommendations from other respondents. This approach was suitable because it was difficult to directly access managers and internal organizational information. During the analysis, missing data were handled carefully. Only 2 responses with missing information on the main study variables were removed, resulting in a final sample of 107 complete responses for the main analysis.

The respondents came from different sectors, including services, finance and banking, manufacturing, technology, and other industries. Many participants had significant managerial experience, which increased the value and reliability of the responses related to delegation and operational efficiency. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

3.3 Measures

All study variables were measured using single-item indicators on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The three independent delegation practices, task clarity, authority and support, and continuous feedback, were adapted from the established delegation measure developed by Schriesheim et al. (1998).

To ensure suitability for the Albanian organizational context, the questionnaire was carefully reviewed and validated by academic experts in management. The instrument was then translated and back-translated following the back-translation procedure of Brislin (1970) to preserve semantic and conceptual equivalence between versions. A pilot test was conducted before the final stage of data collection to confirm clarity and contextual appropriateness. Following the procedural recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2003), multiple ex ante measures were adopted to reduce the risk of common method variance. Specifically, respondents were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, no identifying information was collected, questionnaire items were designed to be concise and behaviorally specific and were refined through expert review and pilot testing, and predictor and criterion measures were separated into distinct sections of the questionnaire.

Timeline-driven operational efficiency served as the dependent variable and was measured through a single perceptual indicator assessing the respondent's evaluation of the extent to which effective delegation has enabled the organization to complete projects and operational processes within, or ahead of, the established deadlines. The exact wording of the four items, in the Albanian original with an English rendering, is reported in Appendix A.

The decision to use single-item measures was intentional and supported by previous research. Studies have shown that single-item indicators can produce reliable and valid results when the construct being measured is concrete, specific and easily understood by respondents (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Wanous et al., 1997). In this study, managerial behaviors such as providing clear instructions, granting decision-making authority and offering continuous feedback represent practical and behavior-based constructs that can be effectively captured with concise measures. In addition, the use of single-item indicators reduces questionnaire length, lowers respondent fatigue and minimizes the likelihood of careless responses. Single-item measures are considered most defensible precisely when the attribute being rated is concrete, singular, and uniformly understood by respondents, a condition that the four

behaviorally specific indicators used here are designed to satisfy (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007).

Nevertheless, this approach also involves certain limitations. Unlike multi-item scales, single-item measures do not allow the assessment of internal consistency reliability or more advanced forms of construct validity, such as convergent and discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Consequently, the study adopts a cautious and exploratory analytical perspective, and these methodological limitations are acknowledged in the discussion section.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in five main stages using statistical software. First, descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values and skewness were calculated to better understand the distribution of the variables. Because single-item survey measures can sometimes produce uneven distributions, bootstrap analysis with 5,000 resamples was used to improve the reliability and accuracy of the statistical results.

Second, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the variables and to check whether the independent variables were too strongly related to each other. Correlations above 0.70 were considered potentially problematic.

Third, a multiple regression analysis using the ordinary least squares (OLS) method was performed to examine how the three delegation practices predict timeline-driven operational efficiency. All three practices were included in the model at the same time to identify the individual effect of each one while controlling for the others. Organizational sector and managerial experience were examined descriptively (Table 1) and, in keeping with the exploratory scope of the analysis and the constraints of the sample size, were not entered in the primary model; they were, however, added as parsimonious controls in a supplementary specification reported in Section 4.4. Before interpreting the results, important regression assumptions such as linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors and multicollinearity were carefully tested.

Fourth, to assess the robustness of the OLS estimates, three supplementary checks were specified. First, because the dependent variable is a five-point ordinal rating, the model was re-estimated as an ordinal logistic regression. Second, OLS inference was repeated using heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC3) standard errors. Third, a supplementary OLS specification added controls for organizational sector (dummy-coded) and managerial experience; organization size was not recorded in the survey and could therefore not be included as a covariate. The results of these checks are reported in Section 4.4.

Finally, because both the independent and dependent variables were collected from the same respondents, Harman's single-factor test was used to examine the possible presence of common method variance (CMV). All statistical tests were evaluated using a significance level of $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed).

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents.

Category	Sub-category	No	%
Sector	Services	42	39.3
	Finance and banking	26	24.3
	Other	21	19.6
	Manufacturing	12	11.2
	Technology	6	5.6

Category	Sub-category	No	%
Managerial experience	Less than 1 year	10	9.6
	1–5 years	29	27.9
	6–10 years	17	16.3
	More than 10 years	48	46.2

Note. Percentages are calculated on the valid responses available for each specific demographic variable among all 109 survey participants (sector: $n = 107$ valid, 2 unspecified; experience: $n = 104$ valid, 5 unspecified). These item-specific missing demographic values were preserved to maximize data utility and were not subjected to the listwise deletion applied to the main analytic sample ($N = 107$). Managerial role was collected through an open-response field and captured a wide range of titles (e.g., director, branch manager, department head, specialist); it is therefore reported descriptively rather than as a fixed category.

Source: authors' own calculations from survey data.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics for the four indicators on the analytic sample. Consistent with expectations for single-item attitudinal measures, mean ratings are uniformly high (4.38 to 4.58 on the five-point scale) and all distributions are negatively skewed (skewness between -1.24 and -1.97), indicating a pronounced ceiling effect and restricted variance; this pattern underlies the bootstrap procedure adopted for the regression inference. The implications of this distributional pattern for the attenuation of observed associations, together with the sensitivity analyses undertaken to address it, are examined in Section 4.4.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the single-item indicators ($N = 107$).

Variable	Mean	SD	Min–Max	Skewness
Task clarity (TC)	4.44	0.90	1–5	-1.83
Authority and support (AS)	4.45	0.80	1–5	-1.97
Continuous feedback (FB)	4.58	0.66	3–5	-1.29
Timeline efficiency (TE)	4.38	0.80	2–5	-1.24

Note. Means and standard deviations computed on the analytic sample.

Source: authors' own calculations from survey data.

4.2 Bivariate Correlations

Table 3 reports the Pearson correlations among the four indicators. The largest inter-predictor correlation, between task clarity and authority and support ($r = .57$), remains comfortably below the conservative 0.70 threshold and all variance inflation factors are low (1.15 to 1.60, well under even the stricter conventional cut-off of 5), confirming that severe multicollinearity does not threaten the regression.

Table 3. Pearson correlation matrix of the four indicators ($N = 107$).

Variable	TC	AS	FB	TE
Task clarity (TC)	1.00			
Authority and support (AS)	.57**	1.00		
Continuous feedback (FB)	.25**	.36**	1.00	
Timeline efficiency (TE)	.46**	.35**	.42**	1.00

Note. Coefficients below the diagonal. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Source: authors' own calculations from survey data.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Table 4 reports the standardized OLS regression of timeline-driven operational efficiency on the three delegation practices entered simultaneously. The overall model is significant, $F(3, 103) = 15.34$, $p < .001$, and accounts for 30.9% of the variance in timeline-driven operational efficiency ($R^2 = 0.309$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.289$). Task clarity is the strongest unique predictor ($\beta = 0.365$, $p < .001$; bootstrap 95% CI [0.131, 0.616]), and continuous feedback also contributes strongly ($\beta = 0.317$, $p < .001$; bootstrap 95% CI [0.058, 0.518]). Authority and support show no unique association with timeline efficiency once the other two practices are controlled ($\beta = 0.025$, $p = .809$; bootstrap 95% CI [-0.213, 0.303], spanning zero). The pattern indicates that the speed-relevant contribution of delegation in this sample is concentrated in structural guidance—clear goals and regular alignment—rather than in the transfer of decision latitude.

Table 4. Standardized OLS regression predicting timeline-driven operational efficiency ($N = 107$).

Predictor	β	SE	t	p
Task clarity (TC)	0.365***	0.100	3.66	< .001
Authority and support (AS)	0.025	0.104	0.24	.809
Continuous feedback (FB)	0.317***	0.088	3.61	< .001
R^2	0.309			
Adjusted R^2	0.289			
F (3, 103)	15.34			
p (F)	< .001			

Note. Standardized coefficients reported. *** $p < .001$. Predictors entered simultaneously; standard errors and t-values are from the OLS estimation, with the significance of each path corroborated by bootstrap resampling (5,000 replications). All VIF ≤ 1.60 . Durbin-Watson = 2.058, indicating no autocorrelation of residuals.

Source: authors' own calculations from survey data.

4.4 Robustness and Sensitivity Analyses

The supplementary analyses corroborate the OLS results. In the ordinal logistic specification, task clarity ($b = 0.89$, $p = .001$) and continuous feedback ($b = 0.92$, $p = .006$) retain positive and statistically significant coefficients, whereas authority and support remains non-significant ($b = 0.21$, $p = .494$). Inference based on heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC3) standard errors leaves the pattern of significance unchanged (task clarity, $p = .006$; continuous feedback, $p = .016$; authority and support, $p = .872$). When organizational sector (dummy-coded) and managerial experience are added as controls ($n = 104$), the coefficients for task clarity ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < .001$) and continuous feedback ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < .001$) remain

positive and significant, the authority-and-support coefficient remains statistically indistinguishable from zero ($\beta = -0.01$, $p = .967$), and no control variable attains significance; the substantive conclusions therefore persist under this augmented specification. Because the technology and manufacturing categories are thinly populated ($n = 6$ and $n = 12$, respectively; Table 1), the sector coefficients should be read as indicative rather than precisely estimated.

Two sensitivity considerations address the pronounced negative skew documented in Table 2. First, the model was re-estimated with timeline efficiency dichotomized at the scale maximum using logistic regression; in this deliberately coarser specification, continuous feedback remains significant ($b = 0.53$, $p = .035$), task clarity retains a positive coefficient of comparable size that narrowly misses the conventional threshold ($b = 0.52$, $p = .063$) owing to the information discarded by dichotomization, and authority and support remains null ($b = 0.31$, $p = .307$). Second, because ceiling effects and restricted variance typically attenuate correlations and regression coefficients rather than inflate them, the estimates reported in Table 4 are, if anything, conservative lower bounds on the underlying associations; restricted variance cannot manufacture the strong clarity and feedback paths observed here.

Table 5 sets the four supplementary specifications alongside the baseline model.

Table 5. Robustness and sensitivity checks for the three delegation practices.

Specification	Task clarity	Authority and support	Continuous feedback
Baseline OLS (N = 107)	$\beta = 0.365$, $p < .001$	$\beta = 0.025$, $p = .809$	$\beta = 0.317$, $p < .001$
Ordinal logistic regression (N = 107)	$b = 0.89$, $p = .001$	$b = 0.21$, $p = .494$	$b = 0.92$, $p = .006$
OLS with HC3 standard errors (N = 107)	$\beta = 0.365$, $p = .006$	$\beta = 0.025$, $p = .872$	$\beta = 0.317$, $p = .016$
OLS with sector and experience controls ($n = 104$)	$\beta = 0.40$, $p < .001$	$\beta = -0.01$, $p = .967$	$\beta = 0.32$, $p < .001$
Logistic regression, outcome dichotomized at the scale maximum (N = 107)	$b = 0.52$, $p = .063$	$b = 0.31$, $p = .307$	$b = 0.53$, $p = .035$

Note. Coefficients are reported on the scale native to each estimator: β denotes standardized OLS coefficients and b denotes unstandardized logit coefficients. The HC3 row re-tests the baseline point estimates under heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors and therefore differs from the baseline row in inference only. Managerial experience is entered as a single ordered covariate and organizational sector as a set of dummy variables with services as the reference category.

Source: authors' own calculations from survey data.

4.5 Common Method Variance

Because the three predictors and the outcome were reported by the same respondents at a single point in time, the potential for common method variance was assessed using Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). An unrotated factor solution across the four indicators yielded a first factor accounting for 55.3% of the total variance, marginally above the 50% benchmark sometimes applied as a threshold. This result warrants caution rather than reassurance; two considerations, however, temper the concern. First, Harman's test is widely regarded as a relatively insensitive diagnostic—particularly when applied, as here, to only four single-item indicators—and is treated as indicative rather than definitive. Second, and more substantively, common method variance tends to inflate observed associations in a broadly uniform manner, which would yield a comparatively even profile of coefficients. The markedly heterogeneous pattern obtained here—two strong, highly significant paths (task clarity and continuous feedback) alongside one essentially null path (authority and support, β

= 0.025)—is difficult to reconcile with a single dominant method factor and is instead consistent with genuine discriminant validity among the predictors. Common method variance is nonetheless retained as a limitation, and multi-source or temporally separated designs are recommended for confirmatory work. As a further consideration, no marker variable was embedded in the instrument ex ante, so the marker-variable technique (Lindell & Whitney, 2001) could not be applied post hoc; the procedural remedies implemented at the design stage, described in Section 3.3, therefore constitute the principal ex ante protection against method variance. Future administrations of the instrument will include a theoretically unrelated marker item to permit a direct statistical estimate of method variance.

4.6 Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Table 6 consolidates the outcome of each hypothesis test against the regression evidence.

Table 6. Summary of hypothesis testing.

H	Statement	Evidence	Decision
H1	Task clarity is positively associated with timeline efficiency.	$\beta = 0.365^{***}, p < .001$	Supported
H2	Authority and support are positively associated with timeline efficiency.	$\beta = 0.025, n.s.$	Not supported
H3	Continuous feedback is positively associated with timeline efficiency.	$\beta = 0.317^{***}, p < .001$	Supported

Source: authors' own calculations from survey data.

5. Discussion

This study examined how three delegation practices relate to operational speed in a high power-distance economy. Because the data are cross-sectional and rely on single-item measures reported by managers, the interpretations that follow are presented as plausible readings of the observed associations rather than as evidence of cause and effect. With this caveat in mind, the overall pattern is clear. The general prescription to “delegate more” proves insufficient: of the three practices examined, task clarity and continuous feedback are each independently associated with the timely completion of work, whereas the delegation of decision-making authority is not, once the other two practices are taken into account.

5.1 Task Clarity as the Primary Correlate of Operational Speed

Task clarity emerges as the strongest unique predictor of timeline efficiency ($\beta = 0.365$). This result is consistent with goal-setting theory, which holds that clear and specific objectives direct attention and reduce the delay that often precedes action (Locke & Latham, 2002). In a high power-distance and low-trust context, the association is readily interpretable. Where employees are reluctant to act under uncertainty without explicit authorization, clearly defined instructions remove a culturally specific source of hesitation and allow work to begin without repeated cycles of clarification. Clarity therefore functions less as a means of motivation than as a coordinating mechanism that structures the initial phase of the work process. The pattern accords with research on goal specificity and with delegation studies that associate clarity of assignment with effective delegation (Leana, 1986; Yukl & Fu, 1999); at the same time, it departs from the autonomy-centered emphasis of much empowerment research, since the benefit for speed here derives from clear direction rather than from discretion.

5.2 Why authority Shows no Independent Association with Speed

The absence of an independent association between authority and support and timeline efficiency ($\beta = 0.025$, n.s.) constitutes the study's most theoretically significant result. It does not indicate that delegated authority is unimportant; the empowerment literature documents its value for a range of other outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Rather, it suggests that, within this context, decision-making latitude is not in itself associated with faster work. One interpretation, consistent with the contingency perspective, is that the benefit of authority is conditional upon the readiness and support that enable it to be exercised with confidence; in their absence, expanded latitude may invite additional deliberation rather than reduce it.

This reading aligns with the high power-distance character of the setting, in which employees, less accustomed to autonomous decision-making, may hesitate when granted discretion. Recent Albanian evidence is consistent with this reading: delegation accompanied by intensive managerial communication was associated with a weaker rather than a stronger trust effect, which suggests that discretion in this setting may be interpreted as continued control rather than as genuine empowerment (Manxhari et al., 2026). The implication is not that managers should withhold authority, but that authority alone is an unreliable instrument for operational speed and is most effective when combined with the structural guidance that clarity and feedback provide.

A second interpretation is advanced here as a proposition for future research rather than as an established finding. It concerns the distribution of accountability in transition-economy organizations. In high power-distance and low-trust cultures, broad decision-making latitude may be perceived less as an empowering opportunity than as a transfer of operational risk from the manager to the employee—an accountability gap in which discretion is granted without a corresponding assurance against blame should outcomes prove unfavorable. Under such conditions, authority delegated without clear direction may lead employees to defer, to deliberate at length, or to seek informal reassurance rather than act, since the consequences of an autonomous error are perceived to fall upon them. Task clarity may attenuate this dynamic: by specifying objectives and expected results in advance, the manager retains visible ownership of the standard against which performance will be evaluated, which may enable employees to proceed without fear of being held responsible for an ambiguous mandate. Because the present data are reported by managers and collected at a single point in time, this proposition cannot be tested here; it is offered as a mechanism that multi-source and longitudinal designs could examine directly.

5.3 Continuous Feedback as a Mechanism of Ongoing Alignment

The association between continuous feedback and timeline efficiency ($\beta = 0.317$) is consistent with the conceptualization of feedback as a corrective feature of effective work design (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Regular monitoring of progress can identify deviations at an early stage and permit the minor adjustments that keep work on schedule before delays accumulate. Where formal coordination systems are weak, frequent managerial contact may serve as a functional substitute, helping to sustain momentum throughout the execution phase rather than only at its outset. This interpretation accords with evidence that the rapid circulation of operating information distinguishes faster organizations in high-velocity environments (Eisenhardt, 1989) and with the recognition, within the job-design tradition, of feedback as a performance-relevant property of work. Considered together, clarity and feedback appear complementary: the former structures the beginning of the work process, while the latter maintains alignment as the work proceeds.

5.4 Theoretical Implications

The findings reinforce a conception of delegation as a set of distinct practices with non-uniform effects and caution against treating it as a single, undifferentiated act. They further speak to time-based competition theory (Stalk, 1988) by identifying the managerial behaviors most closely associated with deadline performance in this setting and by specifying a boundary condition under which the conventional empowerment expectation, that authority hastens execution, does not appear to hold. Whereas much of the empowerment literature reports positive authority–performance associations in Western, lower power-distance settings (Spreitzer, 1995; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), the null authority path observed here suggests that such findings may not transfer directly to high power-distance, transition contexts, echoing the contingency view that the value of delegated authority is conditional (Leana, 1987). The result also sits comfortably with more recent syntheses: meta-analytic evidence places the empowerment–performance association at the lower end of the outcome families examined (Kim et al., 2018), and reviews of the field stress that empowering practices operate under identifiable boundary conditions rather than uniformly (Cheong et al., 2019; A. Lee et al., 2018; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). In this respect, the study offers context-sensitive evidence from a high power-distance, post-communist economy that remains under-represented in the delegation literature.

5.5 Practical Implications

For managers in Albanian organizations seeking to improve operational speed, the evidence suggests that timely delivery is more closely associated with structural guidance than with the transfer of decision rights. The unambiguous definition of objectives and milestones prior to task assignment, together with regular monitoring of progress thereafter, represents the set of practices most consistently associated with meeting deadlines in this sample. The delegation of authority in the absence of such support does not, in itself, appear to be associated with faster execution. Managers may therefore regard clarity and feedback as the principal instruments of operational agility, extending authority incrementally as employees demonstrate their readiness to exercise it. Table 7 translates these findings into a brief checklist that managers can apply when delegating time-critical work.

Table 7. A delegation checklist for timeline-critical work.

Practice	Checklist elements
Goal clarity – before assignment	Define the objective and the expected deliverable in writing; specify priorities among competing tasks; set explicit milestones and the final deadline; state the standard against which the work will be evaluated; confirm the employee's understanding before work begins.
Feedback cadence – during execution	Agree a fixed progress-review rhythm (for example, a brief weekly check-in for routine tasks and shorter, more frequent stand-ups for urgent or complex tasks); review progress against milestones rather than activity; surface obstacles early and re-align priorities as needed; close each review with confirmation of the next steps.
Authority – as readiness develops	Extend decision latitude incrementally as employees demonstrate readiness; pair any transfer of authority with clear boundaries and assured managerial backing, so that discretion is not experienced as a transfer of blame.

Note. The goal-clarity and authority elements follow directly from the regression evidence reported in Section 4. The feedback cadences given as illustrations are drawn from research on feedback frequency and short-cycle coordination (Kuvaas et al., 2017; Rigby et al., 2016); the present instrument measured the regularity of feedback rather than any specific interval, and no particular cadence is established by these data.

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the study findings.

5.6 Policy Implications

At the policy level, the findings bear, tentatively, on the cultivation of managerial capability in transition economies. Because operational speed in this sample is associated more strongly with managers' capacity to set clear objectives and sustain structured feedback than with the devolution of authority, management-development and professional-certification programmes, including those administered by employer associations, chambers of commerce and the training functions of sectors such as banking, may yield greater returns by emphasizing goal-setting, milestone definition, and progress-review competencies than by general encouragement to empower.

For regulators and human-resource policymakers in rapidly digitalizing sectors such as banking, the results are consistent with the view that formal decentralization measures may produce limited efficiency gains unless they are accompanied by investment in the structural-guidance capabilities that allow delegated authority to be exercised with confidence. These implications are offered with caution. They derive from a single, exploratory, cross-sectional study employing single-item measures and a non-probability sample; moreover, the relatively modest proportion of banking respondents means that sector-specific inferences should be regarded as provisional, pending confirmation from larger, multi-sector research.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations qualify these findings and, in doing so, define an agenda for confirmatory work. First, each construct was measured with a single indicator, which precludes the assessment of latent reliability and validity and constrains the strength of the inferences that can be drawn; future studies should employ established multi-item instruments. Second, the cross-sectional design and the reliance on self-report mean that the analysis supports association rather than causation and may be susceptible to common-method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003); longitudinal or multi-source designs would permit stronger causal inference. Relatedly, the outcome item asks respondents to judge deadline attainment in relation to effective delegation (Appendix A), so the overall magnitude of the delegation–efficiency association may be inflated by that attribution; the differential pattern across the three practices, which carries the study's substantive contribution, is not accounted for by such contamination, but a criterion measure formulated independently of the delegation frame is required in confirmatory work.

Third, the purposive, referral-based sample limits generalizability and should be complemented by probability sampling across a broader range of sectors and organization sizes. Fourth, the pronounced ceiling effects and the restricted variance in the predictors may attenuate the observed associations, a concern examined through the sensitivity analyses reported in Section 4.4. Fifth, although a supplementary specification adjusting for organizational sector and managerial experience left the results unchanged (Section 4.4), organization size was not recorded in the survey, and other unmeasured background differences may remain a source of unexplained variation; future studies with larger samples should incorporate a fuller set of covariates. Finally, the study models additive relationships only; future work should examine whether task clarity moderates the authority–efficiency relationship, as the contingency reading of the non-significant authority path would predict.

7. Conclusion

This study disaggregated delegation into three core mechanics and examined their association with timeline-driven operational efficiency among Albanian managers. Task clarity and continuous feedback were each uniquely associated with the meeting of deadlines, whereas the transfer of decision authority was not, once the other practices were controlled. The evidence indicates that, even in a high power-distance economy, operational speed is more closely tied to structured guidance—clear goals and regular alignment—than to autonomy alone. Offered as an exploratory contribution in light of its single-item, cross-sectional design, the study provides a calibrated alternative to the generic prescription to delegate more and establishes a clear direction for confirmatory research employing multi-item measures and stronger inferential designs.

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Appendix A. Item wordings (Albanian original with English translation)

Task clarity. “Delegimi i detyrave tek stafi përfshin përcaktimin e qartë të objektivave dhe rezultateve të pritshme.” (English: “Delegating tasks to staff includes clearly defining the objectives and the expected results.”)

Authority and support. “Kur delegoj, siguroj autoritetin e nevojshëm dhe mbështetjen e vazhdueshme për realizimin e detyrës.” (English: “When I delegate, I provide the necessary authority and continuous support for carrying out the task.”)

Continuous feedback. “I komunikoj rregullisht ekipit progresin dhe jap feedback në lidhje me performancën e detyrave të deleguara.” (English: “I regularly communicate progress to the team and give feedback on the performance of the delegated tasks.”)

Timeline-driven operational efficiency. “Delegimi efektiv na ka mundësuar përfundimin e projekteve/proceseve brenda ose përpara afateve të përcaktuara.” (English: “Effective delegation has enabled us to complete projects/processes within, or ahead of, the established deadlines.”)

Note. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The items were administered in Albanian, following the translation and back-translation procedure described in Section 3.3; the English renderings above are provided for the reader.