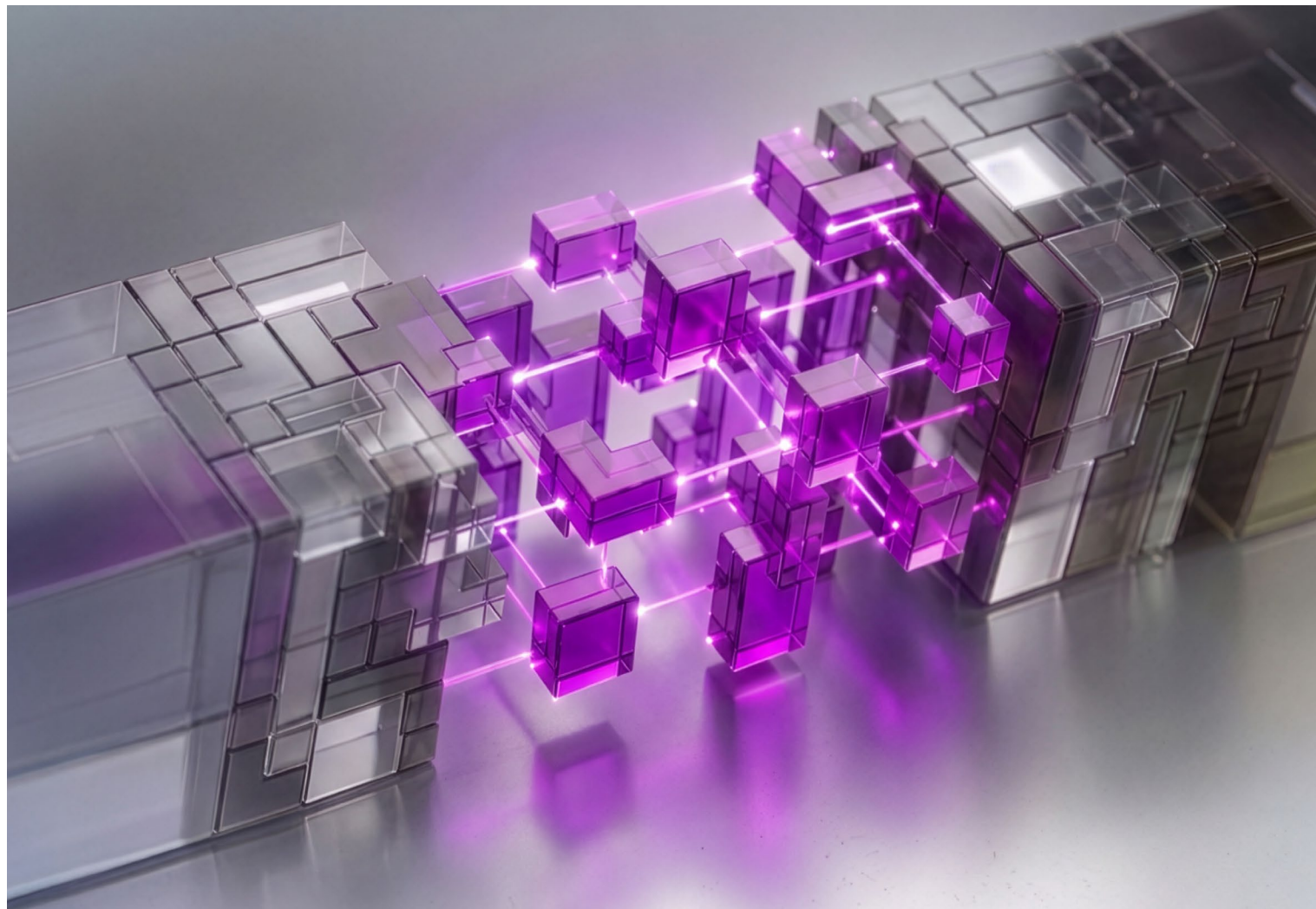




The capital projects execution gap

New research from 1,050 leaders and frontline workers shows where leadership ambition loses force on the way to the site, and the execution model that closes the distance

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Voices from the field

Standardized systems help in keeping records consistent, but they don't always capture informal agreement.

Property Coordinator, Manufacturing Plant Project, United States

Scheduling tools provide a good structure for planning, but actual sequencing changes frequently due to subcontractor delays and site constraints.

Planner, Manufacturing Facility Project, Ireland

Digital tools don't connect well, and there is not enough AI training for daily pipeline tasks.

Site Manager, Energy Infrastructure Project, Canada

These are not isolated complaints about tools or processes. They point to something deeper: the difficulty of turning enterprise intent into timely decisions at the workplace. The gap between leadership decisions and site execution has always existed because different teams bring different responsibilities, perspectives and priorities to the same project. Leaders see portfolios, risk, cost and governance. Site teams see sequencing, labor, materials, tools and the daily constraints that determine whether work can actually move. As projects become larger, more complex and more data-intensive, however, that challenge is becoming increasingly difficult to manage using traditional coordination models. Organizations often find that signals from the field are delayed, filtered or lost before reaching leadership, while also lacking a reliable and consistent mechanism to turn changing field reality into decisions fast enough to matter.

Digital technology, including AI, can help close that distance, but only when it is built into the workflows, data and decision rights that govern how work moves on site. Without that bridge, digital investment becomes one more layer of reporting optics, providing a clearer view of slippage, but doing very little to prevent it.

To better understand where this leadership-to-site disconnect occurs and how organizations can address it, we analyzed insights from two surveys, one reflecting senior leadership perspectives and one capturing field experience. Together, they show where execution breaks down and what it takes for project leaders who sit between senior leadership and field teams, such as construction managers, delivery leads and project control leads, to help reduce friction, improve coordination and keep daily work aligned with project goals.

About the research

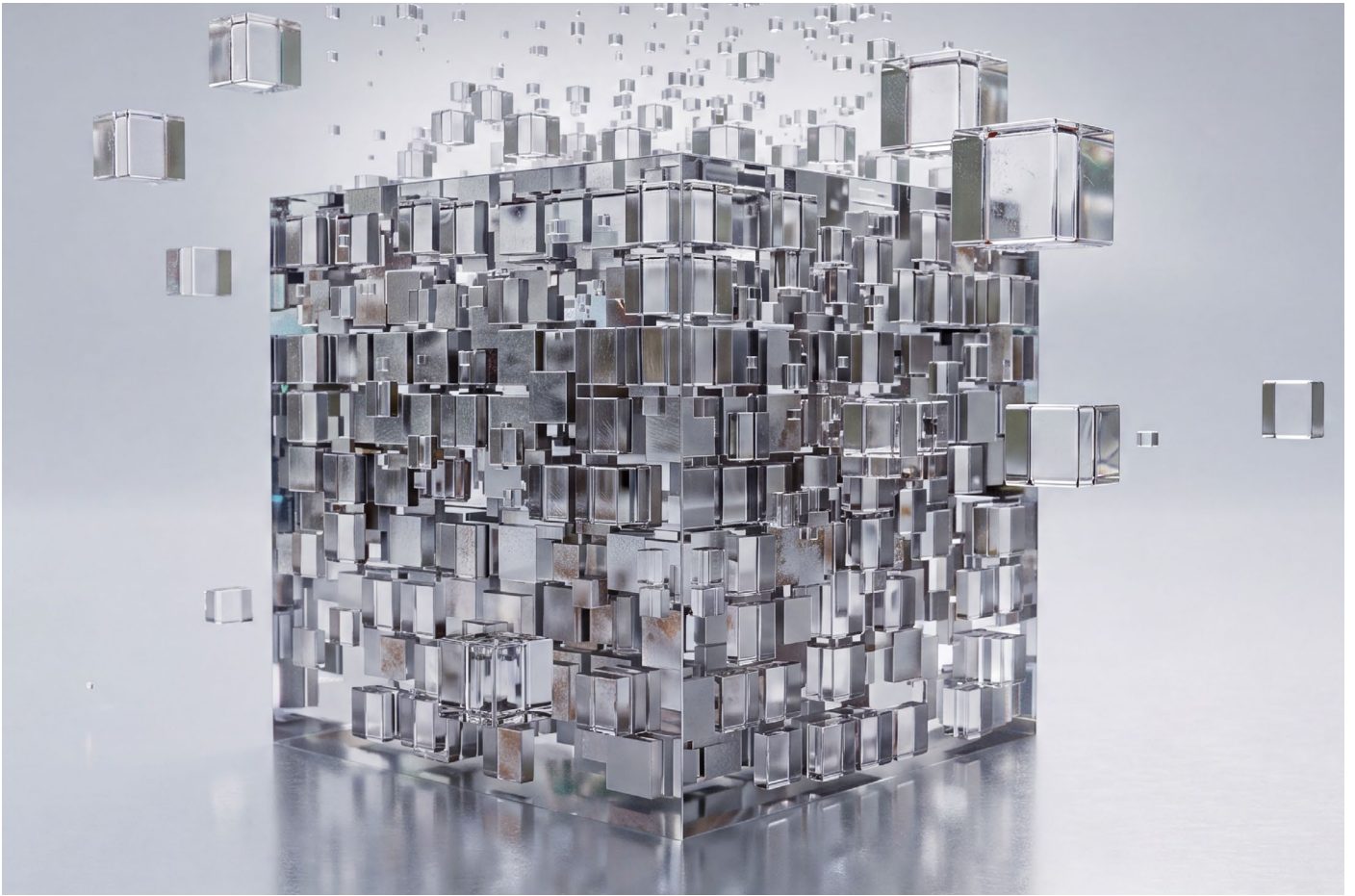
This report is based on findings from two proprietary Accenture Research surveys. **Voices from the Field** captures the perspective of 350 frontline and site-based workers across data centers, energy, manufacturing, mining and public infrastructure. **Blueprint for Success** captures the perspective of 700 senior leaders across the industries that own, engineer and deliver capital projects. For more details on the survey methodology, see “Research methodology” at the end of the report.

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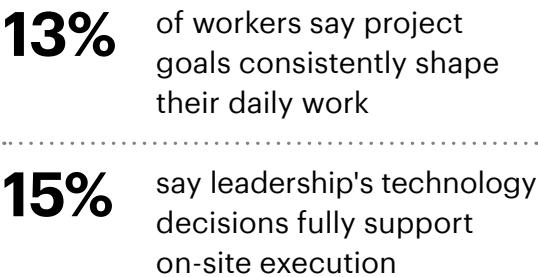
Section 1

Why strategy loses force before it reaches the site

Our research points to a persistent breakdown in how strategy translates into worksite execution.

Senior leaders believe they are having a meaningful impact on the fundamentals of project performance: 73% to 77% report a positive influence on cost, planning and schedule adherence. But that confidence is not reaching the field.

The execution gap shows up most plainly here, in the distance between what leaders believe they are influencing and what site teams live every day. Only 13% of workers say project goals consistently shape their daily work, and only 15% say leadership’s technology decisions fully support on-site execution.



By the time data updates, the site situation has already changed.

Field Supervisor, Data Center, Saudi Arabia

The investments, especially in digital technology and tools, are there, but they do not always change how work happens on site. The gap opens when leadership intent, field conditions and digital systems fail to connect in time to change outcomes. Real-time updates from the field may not reach decision-makers because the system can reward teams for regular reporting rather than for surfacing risks early. Project goals may be clear at the top, but they lose force as site conditions, labor availability and priorities shift. And digital tools, though widely deployed, can add friction when they support leadership oversight more than field execution. Together, temporary teams, fragmented delivery and filtered reporting make misalignment predictable and difficult to correct once work is underway. This is why more frequent reporting cannot solve the problem. Organizations should change what they treat as valuable information.



Project leaders who sit between senior leadership and the field can play a critical role in closing the gap between strategy and execution. To maximize the impact of their efforts, they need an execution model around them that turns field signals into decisions the organization acts on. Their value lies in translating between the portfolio and the site, making field intelligence visible to senior leaders, keeping teams aligned on what value means as conditions change and directing technology investment toward the places where it can have the greatest execution impact. That requires using field insight to understand where failures originate and what workers need to get the job done.

When project leaders translate goals, data and tools into practical guidance at the point of work, teams can act faster and with greater confidence. They spend less time reconciling reports, reduce rework and use technologies like AI to improve delivery rather than add complexity. Our research points to substantial potential gains, including faster response times, more accurate forecasting, quicker schedule processing, fewer delays, higher productivity, fewer unexpected stoppages and greater annual savings.

When project leaders translate goals, data and tools into practical guidance at the point of work, teams can act faster and with greater confidence.



Section 2

Where execution breaks down

The gap between strategy and execution tends to surface in three places: signal failure, when field reality is delayed or filtered; value failure, when leaders and site teams optimize for different outcomes and workflow failure, when technology does not match how work unfolds on site.

01 Signal failure

Reporting replaces field intelligence

Many organizations still reward reporting over reality. Workers may feel pressure to show that milestones are on track, even when emerging risks, design issues, tool limitations or changing site conditions suggest otherwise. When reporting becomes the primary measure of success, teams naturally focus on compliance instead of proactive problem-solving. Over time, this creates blind spots. Problems remain hidden until they become larger issues. Opportunities for learning are missed and the same execution challenges repeat across projects. As visibility into on-site reality declines, organizations also struggle to keep strategic priorities connected to day-to-day decisions.

Systems are tracking the data points, but real execution depends on daily labor availability and material flow.

Site Manager, Manufacturing Plant Project, Saudi Arabia

02 Value failure

Leaders and site teams optimize for different outcomes

Even when senior leaders communicate strategic goals clearly, those goals can lose force as conditions shift. Most workers, 67%, say project goals are mostly clear, but only 13% say those goals consistently guide their daily decisions. In other words, clarity at the top does not always translate into guidance at the point of work. As priorities, labor availability, material flow and sequencing change, teams adapt locally. Over time, senior leaders and site teams can end up solving different versions of the same project.

03 Workflow failure

Technology creates visibility but does not match how work actually happens

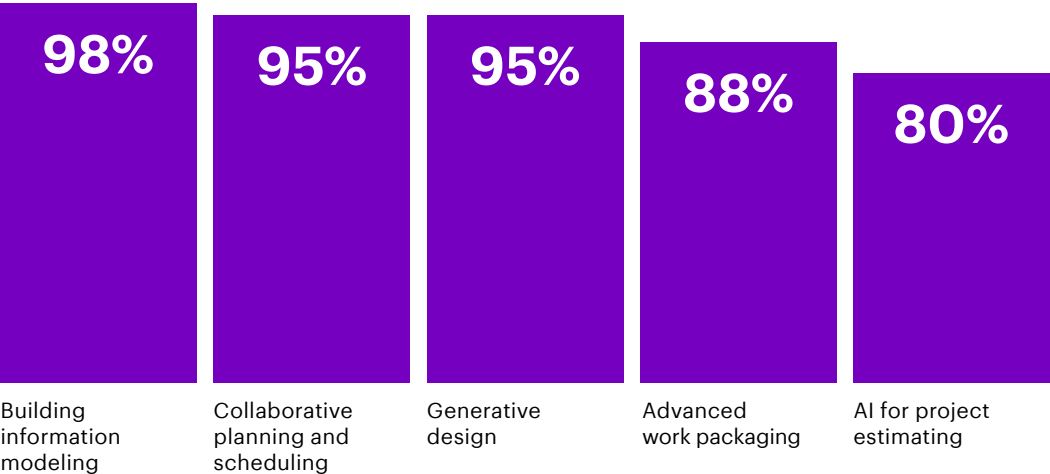
Technology can help project teams in multiple ways. AI shows what is possible. Among workers with access to AI planning and scheduling tools, 83% report a positive impact on their work, and among those receiving formal training, 48% say it helps significantly. That points to a clear opportunity to scale digital tools in ways that move beyond leadership visibility to improve execution. Too often, however, organizations use technology to track metrics that matter to senior leadership rather than to help teams work better. The result is more data, but not always better delivery.

The disconnect is evident. Leaders report high deployment of the tools they have funded (Figure 1). But on site, workers describe a different experience: 57% cite unreliable tools as a top delivery barrier, 57% cite poor system integration and 55% cite workflows that do not reflect how work happens in practice. Among workers already using AI, 70% identify data quality as their primary adoption challenge. The result is a familiar pattern where field teams manage duplicate data entry, conflicting data sets and manual reconciliation, without enough operational value in return. In fact, 38% say the technology does not fit on-site realities.

Planning outputs depend on assumptions, and when ground reality differs, tool recommendations are less useful.

Planner/Scheduler, Manufacturing Facility Project, United States

Figure 1: Leaders report widespread tool deployment



Note: The figure reflects the share of organizations that report basic deployment, developing competence or advanced utilization. Organizations that have not considered the tool or plan only for future deployments are excluded.

Source: Blueprint for Success Survey, 2024 (n=700).

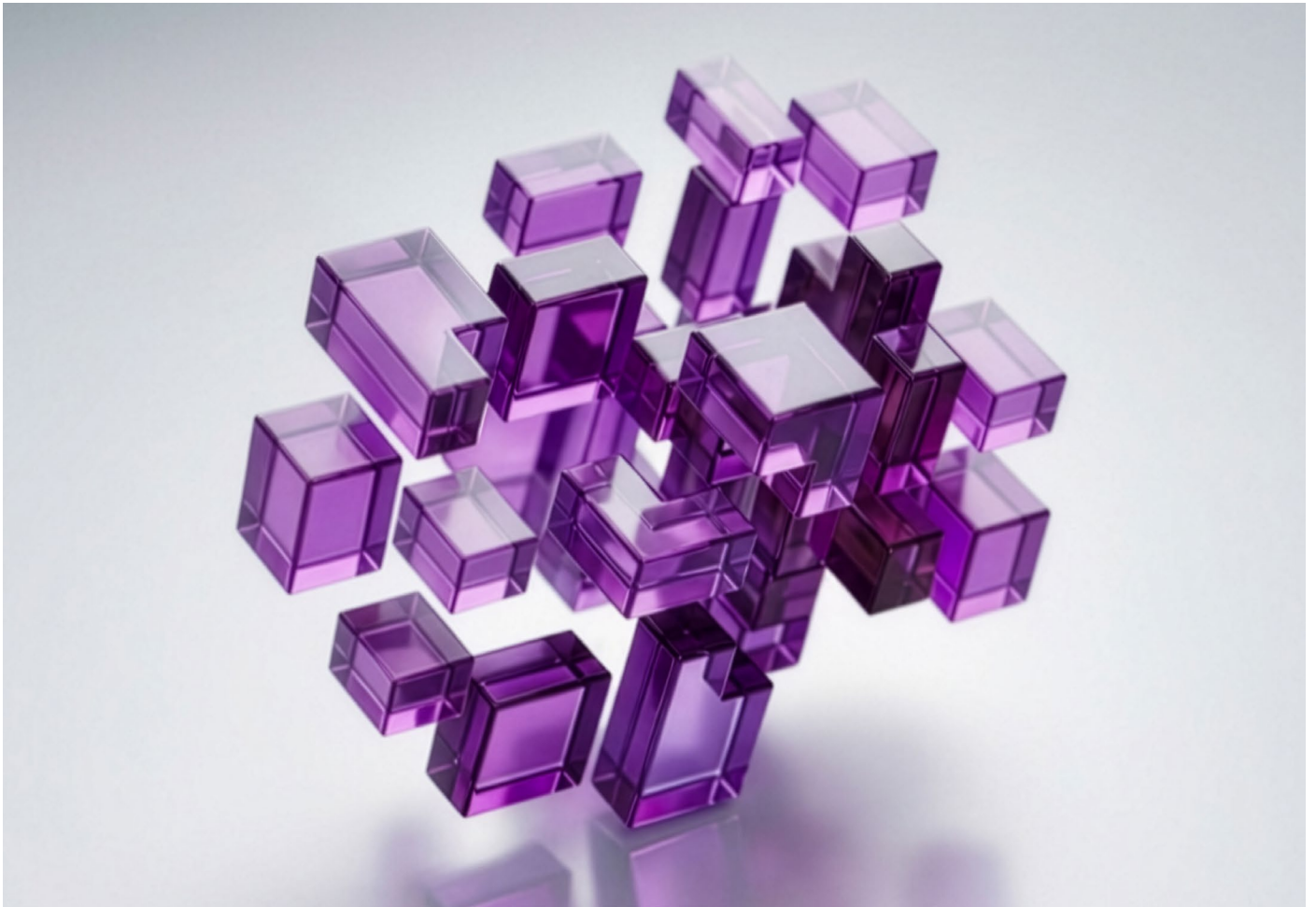
More reporting, governance and technology will not close the gap on their own. Capital projects need an execution discipline that turns field intelligence into decisions while there is still time to act, one that brings leadership priorities, field signals and daily decision-making into closer contact.

Leadership tools often reflect office priorities more than field constraints and workflow realities.

Project Manager, Energy Infrastructure Project, Germany

Project leaders who sit between senior leadership and frontline teams are best positioned to create that rhythm. They can help teams decide what to continue, what to adapt and what to stop as conditions change.





Section 3

Building the execution model that makes ambition work on site

Project directors, construction managers, delivery leads and project control leads are critical in bridging portfolio ambition and field reality. They are close enough to understand where teams are struggling, and influential enough to shape the leadership choices that determine whether teams can respond.

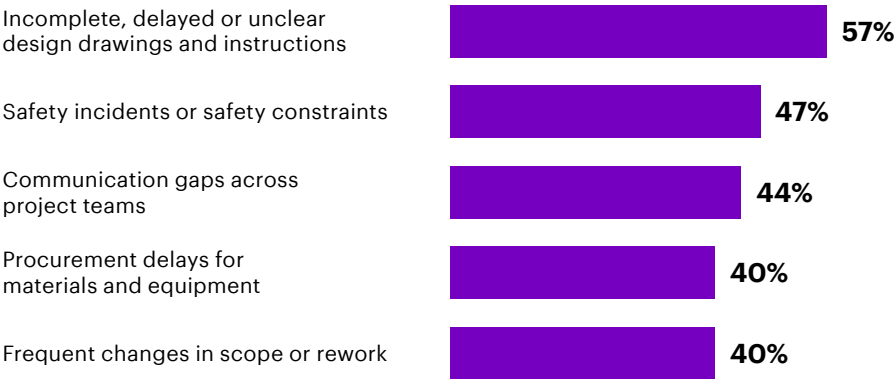
Three actions matter most: turning field intelligence into better decisions, keeping leaders and site teams aligned as conditions change and ensuring digital investments translate into practical improvements on site.

Replace reporting optics with real field intelligence

The execution discipline starts here, with what the organization counts as valuable information. Clean milestone reports are not enough. Many capital projects still reward clean reporting over early warning. Site teams know when conditions are changing, but if the system values milestone compliance more than proactive flagging, those signals are filtered before they reach the people who can act. Project leaders who treat deviations as intelligence, not noise, effectively connect site signals directly to portfolio decisions.

In practice, that means surfacing procurement delays, labor constraints, design issues, tool failures, safety risks and sequencing changes in near real time, alongside traditional cost and schedule indicators. Some of these issues, including design, safety and procurement barriers, are among the top barriers workers cited in our survey (Figure 2). The signals often already exist in the systems organizations use every day. What is missing is a clear process for making them visible and empowering teams to act before problems escalate.

Figure 2: Design and safety challenges are among the top barriers field workers face



Note: Respondents selected up to five barriers from a list of 16. Figures show the share selecting each factor among their top five.

Source: Accenture **Voices from the Field** survey, April 2026 (n=350).



Align leaders and site teams around one definition of value

Alignment becomes real only when enterprise priorities are translated into the tradeoffs teams make as field conditions change. Leaders and field teams often measure value differently. Leaders track cost, compliance, governance and portfolio performance. Site teams focus on task completion, labor availability, material flow, sequencing, safety and whether the plan is executable under current conditions. Both views are valid. The problem is that organizations rarely translate them into one working definition of value.

Closing that gap requires defining value at every level, including the portfolio, the project team and the site. It also means making tradeoffs explicit when priorities change. If schedule takes precedence this week, what does that mean for procurement, crew allocation or quality review? If safety takes precedence, what work slows down? Alignment becomes real only when teams know how to act when conditions shift. That requires governance rhythms, feedback loops and clear decision rights, so teams solve toward the same outcome instead of adapting in isolation.

The most effective teams agree on a single hierarchy of value and write the tradeoff rules down before they are needed. In practice, that means one governed view of schedule, cost, contracts and risk, with competing priorities resolved by agreed rules instead of left to whoever argues hardest. The value comes not just from shared data, but from shared decision rules. Otherwise, each layer of the project optimizes locally rather than against a common set of priorities.

The most effective teams agree on a single hierarchy of value and write the tradeoff rules down before they are needed.

Case study

A leading steel producer's capacity expansion illustrates what that discipline delivers in practice. As the company ramped up plant capacity, project execution and coordination grew increasingly complex. To bring order to that complexity, the company established a digitally enabled project management office. This gave leadership and site teams real-time visibility into scope, schedule, cost, change and risk. Standardized ways of working across scope, schedule, cost, change and risk — backed by an integrated project schedule, cash-flow forecasting and improved governance and logistics management — turned fragmented project data into a single, trusted view that teams could act on.

As a result, schedule overruns on critical packages fell from more than eight months to under two, with all critical packages delivered on time; location-based worker tracking helped lift site productivity 15% to 20%; progress-based invoicing and real-time vendor insight cut additional claims by 18%; and tag-based incident reporting with video surveillance reduced site safety incidents by up to 20%.

15-20% rise in site productivity	18% drop in vendor claims	20% reduction in site safety incidents
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Design technology for execution reality rather than leadership visibility

Leaders should judge the next wave of digital investment less by how much is deployed and more by whether it takes friction out of the work. Technology should help teams solve execution problems before they become outcomes to report. Applied to procurement data, AI can flag lead-time risk weeks before a critical-path dependency is affected. In engineering coordination, it can surface drawing conflicts before they reach the release queue. The practical path is to run two tracks in parallel, with a fast lane that deploys high-value use cases where data is already reliable and a foundation lane that strengthens data architecture, integration and engineering records to support AI at scale.

That work also requires designing tools around the conditions workers actually face, including time pressure, intermittent connectivity, parallel workstreams and systems that do not share data. Designing for that reality means automating status reporting where data already exists, eliminating manual reconciliation through better integration and designing inputs for the site rather than the project office.

Digital workflows sometimes assume ideal sequences, but on site, multiple activities run in parallel.

Site Engineer, Energy Infrastructure Project, Germany

Case study

A global data center operator took that approach upstream, using generative AI and machine learning in scheduling and planning, where many execution failures originate. Expanding rapidly across several regions, the operator shifted its focus from managing disruptions on site to preventing them earlier. It embedded readiness checks into the planning baseline, used AI-driven scenario simulations to flag resource misalignments and critical-path risks before they reached the field and used machine learning to reduce activity volume from 3,000 to 1,000. This helped remove complexity that can blur accountability between planning and site execution.

The operator also created a unified milestone repository and real-time dashboard that gave field teams and leadership a single trusted reference, replacing the competing versions of the plan that often lead to coordination failures.

10-15% Improvement in forecasting accuracy	5-10% Reduction in rework	30% Increase in use of milestone framework by field teams
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The results were clear. Forecasting accuracy improved by 10% to 15%, rework fell by 5% to 10% and schedule processing became three times faster. Field teams also increased use of the milestone framework by 30%, showing they trusted the plan for day-to-day execution. The greatest value came from addressing failures upstream in planning, engineering and procurement rather than simply reporting disruptions downstream.



What capital project leaders can stop and start



Replace reporting optics with real field intelligence

Stop		Start
Managing through polished milestone reports	→	Acting on unfiltered field signals
Treating deviations as noise or local execution issues	→	Treating deviations as early intelligence
Rewarding teams for reporting that work is on track	→	Rewarding teams for surfacing risks early enough to act
Escalating only after problems affect cost or schedule	→	Escalating when leading indicators show conditions are changing
Separating site signals from portfolio decisions	→	Connecting site constraints to planning, funding and sequencing decisions



Align leaders and site teams around one definition of value

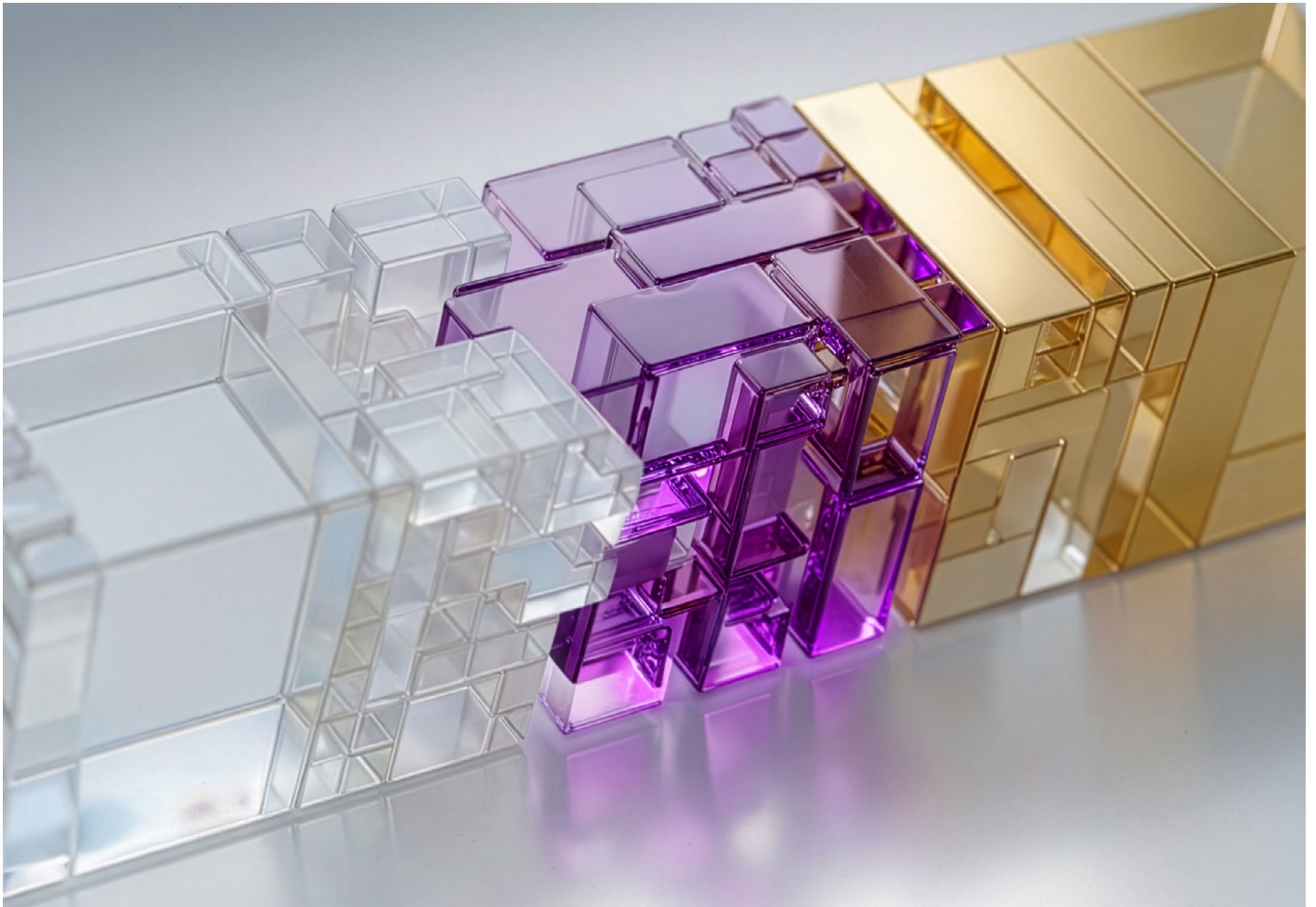
Stop		Start
Assuming goals are aligned because they are communicated	→	Testing whether goals guide daily site decisions
Measuring value only through cost, compliance and governance	→	Linking enterprise metrics to field execution tradeoffs
Treating site adaptations as exceptions	→	Recognizing site adaptations as signals that priorities need translation
Letting each layer optimize locally	→	Setting shared decision rules for tradeoffs across cost, schedule, safety and quality
Reviewing performance after the fact	→	Building feedback loops that adjust priorities as conditions change



Design technology for execution reality rather than leadership visibility

Stop		Start
Deploying tools primarily for leadership dashboards	→	Designing tools around the site team workflow
Asking workers to enter the same data across multiple systems	→	Automating status capture and reducing reporting drag
Applying AI to poor-quality or delayed data	→	Strengthening data quality at the source
Focusing only on downstream field stoppages	→	Targeting upstream failure points in planning, engineering and procurement
Measuring digital success through deployment	→	Measuring digital success by reduced rework and better execution flow





Section 4

Returns come when investment delivers value on site

Capital projects improve when organizations close the distance between portfolio ambition and site reality through a repeatable execution model.

Leaders already have strategy, investment and governance. Site teams already have practical knowledge of what is working, what is slipping and what is blocking progress. The opportunity is to connect those two views before delays, rework and stoppages take hold.

Project directors, construction managers and delivery leads can play a big role in bridging the disconnect between senior leadership and field teams, helping deliver fewer stoppages, less rework, schedules people can trust and faster action when risks emerge.

The next era of capital project performance will belong to the organizations that can act on what is happening on site early enough to change how it ends.

How Accenture can help

As capital projects grow in complexity, scale and expectation, the distance between what leadership decides and what happens on site is where performance is won or lost.

We manage capital programs end to end, sitting on the owner's side of the table where accountability is highest and the hard decisions land. More than 5,000 dedicated practitioners, recognized by Engineering News-Record and Building Design and Construction among the top program managers in the world, operate inside live project environments where schedule, cost and risk are real consequences rather than reporting categories.

The complexity and pace of modern capital programs have outpaced the human capacity to manage them on instinct and spreadsheets. Accenture's **Blueprint for Success** found that only 6% of organizations consistently deliver their capital projects on time and budget, meaning fragmentation wins for the other 94%. Closing that gap requires not just better tools but a different model, with one accountable partner at the owner's table from concept to commissioning, orchestrating across the full delivery chain.

That is the model Accenture is building toward—at a scale the industry has not had access to before. We will have more to say on this shortly.

For capital project leaders ready to act, the starting point is a conversation. The ambition is something larger.

Research methodology

This report draws on two proprietary Accenture Research surveys of the people who shape and deliver capital projects.

The primary survey, **Voices from the Field**, captures the perspective of the people doing the work on site. Accenture Research surveyed 350 frontline and site-based professionals across seven countries (Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States) in April 2026. Respondents worked across five sectors: data centers, energy, manufacturing, mining and public infrastructure. The sample spans the roles that run day-to-day execution, including site and construction managers, field supervisors and foremen, planners and schedulers, project managers, site and field engineers, resident engineers, quality inspectors, HSE and safety managers, commercial and quantity surveyors, and risk managers. The questionnaire examined how project goals, decisions and technology reach the site, where day-to-day execution breaks down, and how field conditions compare with the intent set at senior levels.

The second survey, **Blueprint for Success**, captures the perspective of senior leaders. Accenture Research surveyed 700 senior leaders across 23 countries in 2024, with fieldwork completed in April 2024. Respondents held senior roles including chief executive, operating, information, technology, digital, procurement and supply chain officers, alongside project and program directors and managers, across the industries that own, engineer and deliver capital projects. The questionnaire examined leadership priorities, governance, investment and the levers leaders believe shape project performance

The two surveys differ in respondent role, year and question framing, so comparisons between them are directional rather than statistically equivalent. Where both are referenced together, the intent is to contrast what leadership reports with what site teams describe, not to present a like-for-like statistical match. Unless otherwise stated, all figures in this report are drawn from these two surveys.

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About Accenture

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