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Managing Creative Conflict in Collaborative Fashion Design Teams: An Interpretive Study

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Abstract: Creative conflict is an inherent and often productive element within collaborative fashion design teams, where diverse aesthetic visions, cultural influences, and professional perspectives converge. This study explores how creative conflict is managed within such teams through an interpretive qualitative approach based on secondary data analysis. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks including social constructivism, conflict management theory, and creative collaboration models, the research examines how conflict shapes innovation, decision-making, and team dynamics in fashion design contexts. Secondary data from academic literature, industry reports, and documented case studies are analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in conflict emergence, negotiation strategies, and outcomes. Findings reveal that while unmanaged conflict can disrupt workflow and interpersonal relationships, structured and constructive conflict often enhances creativity, leading to more innovative design outputs. Leadership style, communication practices, and organisational culture play critical roles in mediating these outcomes. The study contributes to both academic discourse and industry practice by offering insights into balancing tension and collaboration in creative environments.

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study, qualitative research, conflict management, design innovation

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1. Introduction

The contemporary fashion industry operates within a highly dynamic and competitive global environment characterised by rapid product cycles, technological innovation, and shifting consumer preferences. At the heart of this industry lies the process of design, which is inherently creative, collaborative, and iterative. Fashion design teams typically consist of individuals from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including designers, merchandisers, textile specialists, marketers, and product developers, who collectively contribute to the conceptualisation and realisation of fashion collections (Kawamura, 2005). While such diversity enriches the creative process, it also introduces complexity in team interactions, often giving rise to creative conflict.

Creative conflict, defined as disagreements arising from differing ideas, perspectives, or aesthetic visions, is a natural outcome of collaborative creative processes (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Unlike interpersonal or relational conflict, which is rooted in emotional or personal differences, creative conflict is typically task-oriented and can be constructive when managed effectively (Jehn, 1995). In fashion design teams, where innovation and originality are paramount, such conflict is not only inevitable but also potentially beneficial. It can stimulate critical thinking, encourage exploration of alternative ideas, and ultimately enhance the quality of design outcomes (Amabile, 1996).

However, the dual nature of creative conflict presents a significant managerial challenge.

On one hand, conflict can catalyse innovation; on the other hand, if poorly managed, it can escalate into destructive interpersonal tensions, disrupt workflow, and undermine team cohesion (De Dreu, 2006). This paradox is particularly pronounced in the fashion industry, where time pressures, market demands, and organisational constraints intensify the stakes of collaboration. Designers often work under tight deadlines and must reconcile their individual creative identities with collective goals, making the management of conflict a critical factor in team performance.

The growing emphasis on collaboration in fashion design has been further amplified by globalisation and digital transformation. Global supply chains and cross-cultural teams require individuals to navigate not only creative differences but also cultural and communicative variations (Craik, 2009). Digital tools, such as collaborative design software and virtual communication platforms, have enabled new forms of interaction but have also introduced challenges related to coordination and misunderstanding (McRobbie, 2016). In this context, understanding how creative conflict is managed becomes increasingly important for both academic inquiry and practical application.

Despite the relevance of this topic, existing research on conflict management has largely focused on traditional organisational settings, with limited attention to creative industries such as fashion. While studies in organisational behaviour have established the importance of distinguishing between task and relationship conflict (Jehn, 1995; De

Dreu & Weingart, 2003), there is a need to contextualise these insights within the unique dynamics of fashion design teams. Fashion design is not merely a functional process but also a cultural and symbolic practice, where meaning is constructed through aesthetic choices and social interactions (Kawamura, 2005). As such, conflict in this context is deeply intertwined with issues of identity, creativity, and power.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how creative conflict is managed in collaborative fashion design teams through an interpretive qualitative approach based on secondary data analysis. The interpretive paradigm is particularly suitable for this research, as it emphasises understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals within their social contexts (Schwandt, 1994). By analysing existing literature, case studies, and industry reports, the study aims to uncover patterns and themes that illuminate the dynamics of creative conflict and its management.

The central research question guiding this study is:

How is creative conflict managed within collaborative fashion design teams, and what implications does this have for creativity, innovation, and team performance?

To address this question, the study integrates insights from social constructivism, conflict management theory, and creative collaboration theory. These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding how conflict emerges, how it is negotiated, and how it influences creative

outcomes. In particular, the study examines the role of communication, leadership, and organisational culture in shaping conflict dynamics.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, it advances the understanding of conflict as a constructive force in creative processes, challenging the traditional view of conflict as inherently negative. From a practical perspective, it offers insights for fashion organisations seeking to enhance collaboration and innovation by effectively managing creative conflict.

In conclusion, as the fashion industry continues to evolve in response to technological, cultural, and economic changes, the ability to navigate creative conflict becomes increasingly important. By examining this phenomenon through an interpretive lens, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how conflict can be harnessed as a resource for creativity rather than a barrier to collaboration.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of creativity, collaboration, and conflict has been a subject of considerable interest in organisational and management studies. However, within the context of fashion design, these dynamics remain relatively underexplored. This literature review synthesises key theoretical and empirical contributions related to creative conflict, collaborative design processes, and conflict management

strategies, with a particular focus on their relevance to fashion design teams.

2.1 Conceptualising Creative Conflict

Creative conflict is commonly understood as a form of task conflict that arises from differences in ideas, perspectives, and approaches to problem-solving (Jehn, 1995). Unlike relationship conflict, which involves emotional tension and personal incompatibility, creative conflict is primarily cognitive and can contribute positively to team outcomes when managed effectively (De Dreu, 2006).

De Dreu and Weingart (2003) highlight the importance of distinguishing between task and relationship conflict, noting that while task conflict can enhance performance under certain conditions, relationship conflict is generally detrimental. In creative contexts, task conflict often manifests as debates over design concepts, materials, or aesthetic directions. Such debates can stimulate critical evaluation and lead to more refined and innovative solutions (Amabile, 1996).

However, the boundary between task and relationship conflict is not always clear. Research suggests that task conflict can easily escalate into relationship conflict if not managed properly (De Dreu, 2006). This underscores the importance of effective conflict management practices in maintaining the constructive nature of creative conflict.

2.2 Creativity and Collaboration in Teams

Creativity is increasingly recognised as a collaborative process rather than an individual endeavour. Sawyer (2007) argues that innovation emerges from group interactions, where individuals build upon each other's ideas in a process of "collaborative emergence." This perspective challenges the traditional notion of the solitary designer and emphasises the importance of teamwork in creative industries.

In the context of fashion, collaboration is essential due to the complexity of the design and production process. Kawamura (2005) conceptualises fashion as a system involving multiple actors, including designers, manufacturers, marketers, and consumers. This system requires coordination and communication, making collaboration a central aspect of fashion design.

Sonnenburg (2004) further emphasises the role of communication in creative collaboration, suggesting that open and constructive dialogue is crucial for integrating diverse perspectives. However, such dialogue often involves disagreement and conflict, which must be managed to ensure positive outcomes.

2.3 Conflict Management Theories

Conflict management theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals and teams respond to conflict. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) identifies five primary conflict-handling

styles: avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration.

Among these, collaboration is often considered the most effective approach in creative contexts, as it seeks to integrate diverse perspectives and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes (De Dreu, 2006). However, the effectiveness of different strategies depends on situational factors, including the nature of the conflict, team dynamics, and organisational culture.

Rahim (2002) expands on this framework by emphasising the importance of integrating conflict management styles, suggesting that effective conflict management requires flexibility and adaptability. In fashion design teams, where conflicts are often complex and multifaceted, a combination of strategies may be necessary.

2.4 Leadership and Organisational Culture

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping how conflict is managed within teams. Transformational leadership, characterised by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, has been shown to foster a positive environment for creative collaboration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Such leaders encourage open communication, value diverse perspectives, and help mediate conflicts constructively.

Organisational culture also influences conflict dynamics. A culture that supports experimentation and tolerates failure is more likely to view conflict as an opportunity for learning and innovation (Schein, 2010). In contrast, hierarchical or rigid cultures may suppress conflict, limiting creative potential.

In fashion organisations, where brand identity and creative vision are central, leadership and culture play a particularly important role in balancing individual expression with collective goals (McRobbie, 2016).

2.5 Conflict in Creative Industries and Fashion

Creative industries, including fashion, are characterised by high levels of uncertainty, subjectivity, and emotional investment (Bilton, 2007). These characteristics make conflict both inevitable and complex. Unlike in traditional industries, where decisions may be based on objective criteria, fashion design often involves subjective judgments about aesthetics and trends.

McRobbie (2016) highlights the precarious nature of creative labour in the fashion industry, noting that designers often face intense pressure to innovate while conforming to commercial constraints. This tension can exacerbate conflict within teams.

Case-based research suggests that successful fashion design teams are those that embrace conflict as part of the creative process while maintaining strong communication and mutual respect (Sonnenburg, 2004). These teams can navigate disagreements constructively, leading to more innovative outcomes.

2.6 Digital Collaboration and Emerging Challenges

The increasing use of digital tools in fashion design has transformed collaboration practices. Technologies such as computer-aided design (CAD), virtual prototyping, and

online communication platforms enable geographically dispersed teams to work together (McRobbie, 2016).

While these tools facilitate collaboration, they also introduce new challenges, including reduced face-to-face interaction and potential misunderstandings. Digital communication may lack the richness of in-person interaction, making it more difficult to interpret tone and intent (Hinds & Bailey, 2003).

As a result, managing creative conflict in digital environments requires new strategies, including clear communication protocols and the use of collaborative platforms that support visual and interactive engagement.

2.8 Research Gap

Despite extensive research on conflict and collaboration, there is a notable gap in understanding how these dynamics operate within fashion design teams. Most studies focus on general organisational settings, with limited attention to the unique characteristics of creative industries.

This study addresses this gap by adopting an interpretive approach to explore the lived experiences and practices of fashion design teams, drawing on secondary data to provide a comprehensive analysis of creative conflict management.

3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the dynamics of creative conflict in collaborative fashion design teams requires a multidimensional theoretical approach that captures the interplay between social interaction, conflict processes, and

creative collaboration. This study integrates social constructivism, conflict management theory, and creative collaboration theory to provide a comprehensive analytical lens. These frameworks collectively explain how conflict emerges, how it is negotiated, and how it contributes to creative outcomes within team-based design environments.

3.1 Social Constructivism

Social constructivism, rooted in the work of Vygotsky (1978), posits that knowledge is not an objective entity but is co-constructed through social interaction and shared experiences. This perspective emphasises the role of language, communication, and cultural context in shaping meaning. In collaborative fashion design teams, ideas are rarely developed in isolation; rather, they emerge through continuous dialogue, critique, and reinterpretation among team members.

From a constructivist standpoint, creative conflict can be understood as a discursive process through which competing interpretations are negotiated and reconciled. When designers disagree over aesthetic choices, materials, or conceptual directions, they engage in a process of meaning-making that refines and reshapes ideas. This aligns with the notion that learning and innovation occur within the “zone of proximal development,” where individuals expand their understanding through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

Moreover, social constructivism highlights the importance of contextual and cultural influences in shaping creative conflict. In global fashion teams, members may bring

diverse cultural perspectives that influence their interpretations of style, symbolism, and consumer preferences (Craik, 2009). These differences can lead to conflict, but also enrich the creative process by introducing new perspectives. Thus, conflict becomes not merely a disruption but a mechanism for generating shared understanding and innovation.

3.2 Conflict Management Theory

Conflict management theory provides a structured framework for analysing how individuals and teams respond to disagreements. The foundational model developed by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) identifies five primary conflict-handling styles: avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration. Each style reflects varying degrees of assertiveness and cooperativeness.

In the context of creative teams, particularly in fashion design, the collaborative style is often considered the most effective, as it seeks to integrate diverse viewpoints into a cohesive solution (De Dreu, 2006). However, the applicability of each style depends on situational factors, such as time constraints, power dynamics, and the nature of the conflict. For instance, under tight deadlines, teams may resort to compromise or even competition to expedite decision-making.

De Dreu (2006) further argues that the relationship between conflict and performance follows an inverted U-shaped curve, where moderate levels of task conflict enhance performance, while very low or very high levels are detrimental. This insight is particularly relevant to fashion design teams,

where a certain degree of tension is necessary to stimulate creativity, but excessive conflict can lead to fragmentation and inefficiency.

Another important dimension of conflict management theory is the distinction between task conflict and relationship conflict (Jehn, 1995). While task conflict can be constructive, relationship conflict is generally harmful, as it involves emotional tension and personal animosity. In creative environments, the challenge lies in maintaining the cognitive focus of conflict while preventing it from escalating into personal disputes (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Rahim (2002) expands on these ideas by emphasising the importance of integrative conflict management, which involves combining multiple strategies to address complex conflicts. This approach is particularly relevant in fashion design teams, where conflicts often involve both creative and interpersonal dimensions.

3.3 Creative Collaboration Theory

Creative collaboration theory emphasises that innovation is a collective process arising from interaction among individuals with diverse skills and perspectives (Sawyer, 2007). Rather than viewing creativity as an individual trait, this perspective conceptualises it as a socially distributed phenomenon, where ideas evolve through iterative exchanges.

Sawyer (2007) introduces the concept of “group genius,” suggesting that breakthrough innovations often emerge from collaborative interactions rather than solitary efforts. In fashion design teams, this is evident in the

iterative process of sketching, prototyping, and refining designs, where team members continuously build upon each other's contributions.

Conflict plays a central role in this process by introducing cognitive diversity, which is essential for creativity. Diverse perspectives challenge assumptions, stimulate critical thinking, and lead to more innovative solutions (Amabile, 1996). However, for conflict to be productive, it must be managed within a supportive and open environment that encourages experimentation and risk-taking.

Sonnenburg (2004) further highlights the importance of communication in creative collaboration, noting that effective dialogue enables teams to integrate conflicting ideas into cohesive outcomes. This aligns with the constructivist view of knowledge creation as a social process and underscores the interdependence of collaboration and conflict.

3.4 Integrative Conceptual Framework

By integrating these three theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualises creative conflict in fashion design teams as a dynamic and socially constructed process. Social constructivism explains how conflict contributes to meaning-making and idea development; conflict management theory provides tools for understanding how conflict is handled; and creative collaboration theory highlights the role of interaction in generating innovation.

Together, these frameworks suggest that the outcomes of creative conflict depend on:

- The quality of communication among team members
- The conflict management strategies employed
- The organisational and cultural context in which teams operate

This integrative framework guides the analysis of secondary data, enabling a nuanced understanding of how creative conflict can be both a challenge and a resource in collaborative fashion design.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretive methodology based on secondary data analysis. By synthesising existing literature, case studies, and industry reports, the research aims to construct a nuanced understanding of creative conflict in fashion design teams. The interpretive approach allows for exploration of meanings, experiences, and contextual factors that shape conflict dynamics.

4.1 Research Paradigm

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative research paradigm, which seeks to understand social phenomena through the meanings and experiences of individuals (Schwandt, 1994). Unlike positivist approaches that emphasise objective measurement, interpretive research focuses on subjective interpretation and contextual understanding.

The interpretive paradigm is particularly appropriate for this study because creative conflict in fashion design teams is a complex and context-dependent phenomenon. It

involves not only observable behaviours but also underlying perceptions, emotions, and cultural influences. By adopting an interpretive approach, the study aims to capture the rich, nuanced nature of conflict dynamics in creative settings.

4.2 Research Design: Secondary Data Analysis

The study employs a qualitative secondary data analysis design, which involves the systematic examination of existing data sources to generate new insights (Johnston, 2014). Secondary data analysis is particularly useful for exploratory research, as it allows researchers to draw upon a wide range of materials, including academic literature, case studies, and industry reports.

In this study, secondary data were selected to provide diverse perspectives on creative conflict in fashion design teams. These sources include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles on conflict management and creativity
- Books on fashion studies and organisational behaviour
- Documented case studies of fashion brands and design teams
- Industry reports and interviews with designers

This approach enables the study to triangulate multiple sources of evidence, enhancing the depth and credibility of the analysis.

4.3 Data Collection and Sampling

The data collection process involved a systematic search of academic databases such

as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science, using keywords including “creative conflict,” “fashion design teams,” “collaboration,” and “conflict management.” Inclusion criteria were established to ensure relevance and quality:

- Publications from peer-reviewed journals or reputable publishers
- Studies focusing on creative industries, particularly fashion
- Sources addressing collaboration, conflict, or team dynamics

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select sources that provide rich and relevant insights into the research topic (Patton, 2002). This approach prioritises depth over breadth, aligning with the interpretive nature of the study.

4.4 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The study employs thematic analysis, a widely used method for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed a six-phase process:

- **Familiarisation with the data** through repeated reading
- **Generating initial codes** to capture key concepts
- **Searching for themes** by grouping related codes
- **Reviewing themes** to ensure coherence and relevance
- **Defining and naming themes**
- **Producing the report**

Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for the

identification of recurring patterns and meanings across diverse data sources. It also supports the integration of theoretical perspectives into the analysis.

4.5 Ensuring Trustworthiness

To enhance the rigour and credibility of the research, several strategies were employed:

Triangulation: Multiple data sources were used to cross-validate findings, reducing the risk of bias (Denzin, 1978).

Reflexivity: The researcher engaged in reflexive practices to acknowledge and critically examine personal assumptions and interpretations (Finlay, 2002).

Thick Description: Detailed descriptions of context and findings were provided to enable readers to assess the transferability of the results (Geertz, 1973).

Audit Trail: A transparent record of data collection and analysis procedures was maintained to ensure dependability.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

As the study relies on secondary data, it does not involve direct interaction with human participants. However, ethical considerations were addressed by Mannan & Farhana (2026):

- Ensuring proper citation and acknowledgement of all sources
- Avoiding misrepresentation of original data
- Maintaining academic integrity in analysis and interpretation

4.7 Limitations of the Methodology

While secondary data analysis offers several advantages, it also has limitations. The study is constrained by the availability and quality of existing data, which may not fully capture the specific experiences of fashion design teams. Additionally, the interpretive nature of the analysis introduces a degree of subjectivity.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a robust framework for exploring creative conflict in a comprehensive and theoretically informed manner.

5. Findings and Analysis

The thematic analysis of secondary data reveals that creative conflict in collaborative fashion design teams is a multidimensional phenomenon, shaped by cognitive, social, and organisational factors. The findings are organised into five major themes: sources of creative conflict, conflict as a driver of innovation, communication and negotiation practices, leadership and power dynamics, and consequences of mismanaged conflict.

5.1 Sources of Creative Conflict

5.1.1 Divergent Aesthetic and Conceptual Visions

One of the most prominent sources of conflict in fashion design teams is the presence of divergent aesthetic visions. Designers often interpret trends, inspirations, and cultural symbols differently, leading to disagreements over design direction. These conflicts are particularly evident in the early stages of the design process, where ideas are still fluid and open to interpretation.

This aligns with Jehn's (1995) conceptualisation of task conflict, which arises from differences in viewpoints related to work tasks. In fashion design, such differences are not only inevitable but also necessary for fostering originality. However, when team members become overly attached to their ideas, conflict can intensify and become difficult to resolve (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

5.1.2 Role Ambiguity and Overlapping Responsibilities

Another significant source of conflict is role ambiguity, particularly in teams where creative responsibilities overlap. For instance, designers, creative directors, and merchandisers may all influence design decisions, leading to confusion and competition.

According to Rahim (2002), unclear role definitions can exacerbate conflict by creating uncertainty about authority and accountability. In fashion teams, this ambiguity often leads to power struggles, especially when individuals seek recognition for creative contributions.

5.1.3 Time Pressure and Market Constraints

The fast-paced nature of the fashion industry introduces time pressure as a critical factor in conflict dynamics. Seasonal deadlines and rapid production cycles limit the time available for discussion and negotiation, often forcing teams to make quick decisions.

Under such conditions, teams may resort to less collaborative conflict management strategies, such as compromise or

competition (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). While these strategies can expedite decision-making, they may also suppress creative exploration and lead to suboptimal outcomes.

5.1.4 Cultural and Interpersonal Differences

Globalisation has led to increasingly diverse design teams, where members bring different cultural backgrounds and communication styles. While diversity enhances creativity, it can also lead to misunderstandings and conflict (Craik, 2009).

Cultural differences influence how individuals express disagreement, interpret feedback, and negotiate solutions. Without effective communication, these differences can escalate into relationship conflict, which negatively impacts team performance (De Dreu, 2006).

5.2 Creative Conflict as a Catalyst for Innovation

Despite its challenges, the analysis strongly indicates that creative conflict plays a crucial role in fostering innovation within fashion design teams. Moderate levels of conflict encourage critical evaluation of ideas, preventing groupthink and promoting originality (Amabile, 1996).

Sawyer (2007) emphasises that innovation emerges from collaborative interactions, where ideas are continuously refined through dialogue and debate. In fashion design, this process is evident in iterative practices such as sketch reviews, prototyping, and fittings.

Furthermore, conflict introduces cognitive diversity, which enhances problem-solving by bringing multiple perspectives to the table.

Teams that embrace this diversity are more likely to produce innovative and market-relevant designs (De Dreu, 2006).

However, the benefits of conflict depend on maintaining a balance. Excessive conflict can lead to fragmentation, while insufficient conflict may result in conformity and a lack of creativity.

5.3 Communication and Negotiation Practices

5.3.1 Open and Transparent Communication

Effective communication is a critical factor in managing creative conflict. Teams that engage in open and transparent dialogue are better able to articulate their perspectives and understand others' viewpoints (Sonnenburg, 2004). Such communication fosters trust and reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings. It also enables teams to focus on ideas rather than personal differences, maintaining the constructive nature of conflict.

5.3.2 Negotiation and Compromise

Negotiation is a central component of conflict management in fashion design teams. Given the subjective nature of design decisions, reaching consensus often requires compromise. However, the analysis suggests that collaborative negotiation, rather than simple compromise, leads to better outcomes. Collaborative approaches involve integrating multiple ideas into a cohesive solution, rather than sacrificing elements of each perspective (De Dreu, 2006).

5.3.3 Feedback and Iterative Processes

Feedback mechanisms play a crucial role in managing conflict. Regular design reviews and critiques provide structured opportunities for discussion, enabling teams to address disagreements constructively. The iterative nature of the design process allows for continuous refinement, reducing the intensity of conflict by spreading it across multiple stages (Sawyer, 2007).

5.4 Leadership and Power Dynamics

Leadership emerges as a key factor in shaping how creative conflict is managed. Transformational leaders, who encourage open dialogue and value diverse perspectives, are particularly effective in fostering constructive conflict (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Leaders act as mediators, ensuring that conflict remains focused on ideas rather than personal issues. They also play a role in balancing power dynamics, preventing dominant individuals from overshadowing others.

Power dynamics are especially prevalent in fashion design teams, where hierarchical structures may influence decision-making. When power is concentrated, conflict may be suppressed, limiting creativity. Conversely, more egalitarian structures encourage participation and idea-sharing.

5.5 Consequences of Mismanaged Conflict

While creative conflict can be beneficial, mismanagement can lead to negative outcomes, including:

- Reduced team cohesion
- Decreased productivity
- Emotional stress and burnout

Relationship conflict, in particular, has been shown to have detrimental effects on team performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). When disagreements become personal, they undermine trust and collaboration. Moreover, unresolved conflict can lead to fragmented design outcomes, where the final product lacks coherence due to unresolved differences.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of creative conflict as both a challenge and a resource within collaborative fashion design teams. By integrating insights from social constructivism, conflict management theory, and creative collaboration theory, this discussion interprets the findings in relation to existing literature and highlights their theoretical and practical implications.

6.1 Creative Conflict as a Socially Constructed Process

From a social constructivist perspective, creative conflict is not merely a disruption but a process of meaning-making. As team members engage in dialogue and debate, they co-construct shared understandings of design concepts (Vygotsky, 1978).

The findings support this view, showing that conflict arises from differing interpretations of aesthetic and conceptual elements. Through negotiation and communication, these differences are reconciled, leading to

more refined and innovative outcomes. This perspective challenges traditional views of conflict as inherently negative, emphasising its role in facilitating learning and creativity.

6.2 Balancing Task and Relationship Conflict

The distinction between task and relationship conflict is central to understanding the dual nature of creative conflict (Jehn, 1995). The findings confirm that task conflict can be beneficial, while relationship conflict is generally harmful.

However, the transition from task to relationship conflict is a critical risk. When disagreements become personal, they undermine trust and collaboration (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). This highlights the importance of maintaining a professional and respectful communication environment. Effective conflict management involves preserving the cognitive focus of conflict while minimising emotional escalation.

6.3 The Role of Leadership in Mediating Conflict

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping conflict dynamics. Transformational leaders create an environment that encourages open dialogue and values diverse perspectives (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The findings suggest that leaders act as facilitators of constructive conflict, guiding discussions and ensuring that all voices are heard. They also help prevent the escalation of conflict by addressing issues early and promoting mutual respect. In fashion design teams, where creativity and individuality are

highly valued, leadership must strike a balance between autonomy and coordination.

6.4 Communication as a Mediating Mechanism

Communication emerges as a central mechanism in managing creative conflict. Open and transparent dialogue enables teams to navigate disagreements and integrate diverse perspectives (Sonnenburg, 2004).

The findings highlight the importance of structured communication practices, such as design reviews and feedback sessions. These practices provide a platform for constructive debate and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings. In digital collaboration environments, communication becomes even more critical, as the absence of face-to-face interaction can hinder the interpretation of tone and intent (Hinds & Bailey, 2003).

6.5 Implications for Creative Collaboration Theory

The study reinforces the idea that creativity is a collective process shaped by interaction and conflict (Sawyer, 2007). Creative conflict introduces cognitive diversity, which enhances innovation by challenging assumptions and encouraging exploration.

However, the effectiveness of this process depends on the ability of teams to manage conflict constructively. This suggests that conflict management is an integral component of creative collaboration, rather than a separate or secondary concern.

6.6 Practical Implications for Fashion Design Teams

The findings offer several practical insights for fashion organisations:

- **Encourage constructive conflict** by creating a culture that values diverse perspectives
- **Invest in leadership development** to enhance conflict management skills
- **Establish clear communication practices** to facilitate dialogue
- **Define roles and responsibilities** to reduce ambiguity

By implementing these strategies, organisations can harness the benefits of creative conflict while minimising its risks.

6.7 Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited by its reliance on secondary data. Future research could involve primary data collection, such as interviews or ethnographic studies, to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of fashion design teams. Additionally, exploring cross-cultural differences and the impact of digital tools on conflict dynamics would further enhance understanding.

7. Conclusion, Implications, and Future Research

This study demonstrates that creative conflict is an integral component of collaborative fashion design processes. Rather than being inherently negative, conflict can serve as a powerful driver of innovation when managed

effectively. The findings emphasise the importance of communication, leadership, and organisational culture in mediating conflict outcomes.

The study contributes to the literature by integrating conflict management theory with creative collaboration in a fashion context, highlighting the constructive potential of conflict. Fashion organisations should:

- Encourage open dialogue
- Provide conflict management training
- Foster collaborative leadership styles

Future studies could:

- Conduct primary empirical research with fashion teams
- Explore cross-cultural differences in conflict management
- Examine the role of digital collaboration tools

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