

International Research Journal of Business and Social Science

Volume: 12 Issue: 3

April-June, 2026

ISSN:2411-3646



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64907/xkmf.v12i3.irjbss.9>

Research Article

<http://irjbss.net/>

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Leadership Styles and Designer Performance in Luxury Fashion Houses: A Narrative Approach

Kaniz Salmoon Chowdhury Sura^{1*}; Md. Salman Kobir¹; Kazi Abdul Mannan²

¹Department of Fashion Design & Technology

²Department of Business Administration

Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology, Uttara, Dhaka, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping creative performance within luxury fashion houses, where innovation, brand identity, and artistic expression are central to organisational success. This study investigates the relationship between leadership styles and designer performance through a qualitative narrative approach based on secondary data. Drawing on Transformational Leadership Theory, the Componential Theory of Creativity, and Social Exchange Theory, the research analyses documented narratives from fashion industry case studies, interviews, and scholarly literature. The findings indicate that transformational and creative leadership styles significantly enhance designer creativity, intrinsic motivation, and innovation, while transactional leadership contributes to operational efficiency but may constrain creative autonomy when overapplied. Additionally, emotional intelligence and collaborative leadership emerge as essential competencies for managing creative teams effectively. Organisational culture is identified as a key mediating factor that shapes the impact of leadership on designer performance. The study contributes to the literature by providing a context-specific understanding of leadership in luxury fashion and offers practical implications for fostering creativity and sustaining competitive advantage in design-driven industries.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 May 2026

Revised 25 June 2026

Accepted 30 June 2026

KEYWORDS

Transformational leadership, designer performance, luxury fashion, creative leadership, organisational culture, narrative analysis, emotional intelligence

CONTACT Kaniz Salmoon Chowdhury Sura, Email:

surachowdhury2@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The global luxury fashion industry represents a distinctive intersection of creativity, craftsmanship, and commercial strategy. Unlike many traditional industries, luxury fashion houses rely heavily on the intellectual and artistic contributions of designers, whose creative work shapes brand identity, consumer perceptions, and competitive positioning. In this context, leadership plays a critical role in fostering an environment in which creativity can flourish while ensuring alignment with organisational objectives. Consequently, understanding how leadership styles influence designer performance has become an increasingly important area of inquiry in fashion management and organisational studies.

Luxury fashion houses operate in highly competitive, dynamic environments characterised by rapid trend cycles, evolving consumer preferences, and a constant need for innovation. Designers are expected to produce original collections that simultaneously reflect brand heritage and contemporary relevance. This dual expectation creates a complex organisational setting in which leadership must balance creative autonomy with strategic direction. Scholars have argued that leadership in creative industries differs fundamentally from that in more structured sectors, as it requires managing ambiguity, nurturing innovation, and supporting artistic expression (Amabile et al., 2004; Mumford et al., 2002).

Historically, leadership within luxury fashion houses has often been associated with strong,

centralised authority embodied by iconic creative directors. Figures such as Coco Chanel and Yves Saint Laurent exemplify a leadership model in which a singular vision drives the brand's creative direction. While such leadership can produce highly cohesive and distinctive brand identities, it may also limit collaborative creativity and constrain other designers' contributions. In contrast, contemporary fashion organisations increasingly emphasise collaborative and team-based approaches, reflecting broader shifts in organisational leadership paradigms (Northouse, 2021).

The relationship between leadership and creativity has been extensively examined in organisational psychology. Transformational leadership, characterised by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, has been shown to enhance creative performance by fostering intrinsic motivation and encouraging risk-taking (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In contrast, transactional leadership, which focuses on structured tasks and performance-based rewards, may improve efficiency but can inhibit creative exploration (Burns, 1978). In the context of luxury fashion, where innovation is a key driver of success, these dynamics become particularly salient.

Despite the growing body of literature on leadership and creativity, relatively few studies have specifically examined leadership within luxury fashion houses. Existing research tends to focus on branding, marketing, or supply chain management, often overlooking the internal organisational processes that underpin creative performance (Caniato et al., 2011). This gap is significant,

as the success of luxury fashion brands depends not only on external market strategies but also on the internal dynamics that shape design processes and outcomes.

Furthermore, the concept of designer performance itself warrants careful consideration. Unlike performance in more standardised roles, designer performance encompasses both tangible outputs, such as collections and products, and intangible elements, such as originality, aesthetic value, and alignment with brand identity. These dimensions are influenced by a range of factors, including individual talent, organisational culture, and leadership practices (Amabile, 1996). As such, examining the role of leadership in shaping designers' performance requires a nuanced, context-specific approach.

This study employs a qualitative narrative methodology to examine how leadership styles influence designers' performance in luxury fashion houses. By analysing secondary data sources, including case studies, interviews, and biographical accounts, the research seeks to uncover patterns and themes that illuminate the complex relationship between leadership and creativity. The narrative approach is particularly well-suited to this inquiry, as it enables the exploration of lived experiences and contextual factors that are often difficult to capture through quantitative methods (Riessman, 2008).

The primary objectives of this research are fourfold. First, it aims to identify the dominant leadership styles present in luxury fashion houses. Second, it examines how these leadership styles influence designers'

creativity, motivation, and productivity. Third, it analyses narrative accounts to understand how designers perceive and respond to different leadership approaches. Finally, the study provides theoretical and managerial implications for leadership development in the luxury fashion industry.

By addressing these objectives, this research contributes to both academic and practical understandings of leadership in creative industries. It extends existing leadership theories by applying them to the unique context of luxury fashion, highlighting the importance of creativity, emotional intelligence, and cultural sensitivity. At the same time, it offers practical insights for fashion leaders seeking to enhance designer performance and sustain competitive advantage in an increasingly complex and dynamic industry.

2. Literature Review

The literature on leadership and creativity provides a foundational understanding of how managerial practices influence performance in creative industries. In the context of luxury fashion houses, leadership extends beyond administrative functions to encompass the facilitation of artistic innovation and brand coherence. This section reviews key theoretical and empirical contributions related to leadership styles, creative performance, and organisational culture. By synthesising insights from transformational, transactional, and creative leadership theories, as well as motivation and creativity research, the review establishes a conceptual basis for examining how leadership dynamics shape designer

performance in complex and design-driven organisational environments.

2.1 Leadership in Creative Industries

Creative industries, including fashion, film, and design, are characterised by their reliance on innovation, originality, and symbolic value. Unlike traditional industries that prioritise efficiency and standardisation, creative industries require flexibility, experimentation, and a tolerance for ambiguity. Leadership in such contexts must therefore balance structure with freedom, enabling creative professionals to explore new ideas while maintaining organisational coherence (Lampel et al., 2000).

Amabile et al. (2004) emphasise that the work environment plays a crucial role in fostering creativity, with leadership being a key determinant of that environment. Leaders influence not only the allocation of resources but also the psychological climate in which creative work occurs. Supportive leadership can enhance intrinsic motivation, which is essential for creative performance, whereas controlling leadership can undermine it (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In the context of luxury fashion, leadership is further complicated by the need to integrate artistic vision with commercial objectives. Fashion leaders must navigate the tension between creativity and profitability, ensuring that innovative designs also meet market demands. This dual responsibility requires a unique set of leadership competencies, including strategic thinking, aesthetic judgment, and emotional intelligence.

2.2 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership has been widely recognised as one of the most effective leadership styles in fostering creativity and innovation. According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders inspire followers by articulating a compelling vision, providing intellectual stimulation, and offering individualised consideration. These behaviours encourage employees to transcend their self-interests and contribute to organisational goals.

In creative contexts, transformational leadership is particularly valuable because it promotes intrinsic motivation and encourages risk-taking. Designers working under transformational leaders are more likely to experiment with new ideas and push creative boundaries. Empirical studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between transformational leadership and creative performance across various industries (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009).

Within luxury fashion houses, transformational leaders often take the form of visionary creative directors who set the brand's overall aesthetic direction. By communicating a clear vision and fostering a sense of purpose, these leaders enable designers to align their work with broader organisational goals. However, the effectiveness of transformational leadership depends on the leader's ability to balance vision with openness to collaboration.

2.3 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership, in contrast, is based on exchanges between leaders and followers, emphasising performance-based rewards and

compliance with established procedures (Burns, 1978). This leadership style is effective for achieving short-term goals and maintaining organisational efficiency, but may be less conducive to creativity.

In the fashion industry, transactional leadership is often associated with production and operational functions, where adherence to timelines and quality standards is critical. While such leadership ensures consistency and reliability, it can also limit creative exploration by imposing rigid structures and expectations.

Research suggests that excessive reliance on transactional leadership can inhibit innovation by reducing intrinsic motivation and discouraging risk-taking (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, when combined with other leadership styles, transactional leadership can provide the necessary structure to support creative processes.

2.4 Creative Leadership

Creative leadership represents a more nuanced approach that integrates elements of transformational and participative leadership. Mumford et al. (2002) define creative leadership as the ability to facilitate innovation by enabling others to generate and implement new ideas. This involves not only inspiring creativity but also providing the resources and support needed to realise creative potential.

In luxury fashion houses, creative leadership is particularly important because design work often involves collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including designers, marketers, and production teams. Leaders must therefore create environments that encourage

knowledge sharing and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Creative leaders also play a critical role in managing the inherent uncertainty of creative work. By fostering a culture of experimentation and learning, they enable designers to take risks without fear of failure. This approach is essential for sustaining long-term innovation in the fashion industry.

2.5 Servant and Authentic Leadership

Servant leadership and authentic leadership have gained increasing attention in recent years as approaches that emphasise ethical behaviour, transparency, and employee well-being. Servant leaders prioritise the needs of their followers, creating supportive environments that enhance trust and collaboration (Greenleaf, 1977).

Authentic leadership, by contrast, emphasises self-awareness, relational transparency, and alignment with core values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Both approaches are relevant in creative industries, where trust and psychological safety are critical for creative expression.

In luxury fashion houses, servant and authentic leadership can contribute to a positive organisational culture that supports designer performance. By fostering open communication and mutual respect, these leadership styles enable designers to express their ideas freely and collaborate effectively.

2.6 Designer Performance

Designer performance is a multidimensional construct that encompasses creativity, productivity, and alignment with brand

identity. Unlike traditional performance metrics, which focus on efficiency and output, designer performance includes subjective elements such as originality and aesthetic value (Amabile, 1996).

The Componential Theory of Creativity provides a useful framework for understanding designer performance. According to this theory, creativity is influenced by domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic motivation. Leadership plays a critical role in shaping all three components by influencing the work environment and motivational climate.

Empirical research has shown that supportive leadership enhances designer performance by fostering intrinsic motivation and providing opportunities for skill development (Amabile et al., 2004). Conversely, controlling leadership can undermine creativity by reducing autonomy and increasing pressure.

2.7 Leadership and Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is a key mediator between leadership and performance. Leaders shape culture through their behaviours, values, and decision-making processes. In creative industries, a culture that supports experimentation, collaboration, and learning is essential for innovation (Schein, 2010).

In luxury fashion houses, organisational culture often reflects the vision and values of the creative director. A strong, cohesive culture can enhance brand identity and guide design processes. However, overly rigid

cultures may stifle creativity and limit diversity of thought.

2.8 Research Gap

Despite extensive research on leadership and creativity, there remains a lack of studies focusing specifically on luxury fashion houses. Existing literature often overlooks the unique challenges and opportunities associated with leadership in this context. Furthermore, there is limited use of narrative methodologies to explore the lived experiences of designers and leaders.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a narrative analysis of leadership styles and designer performance in luxury fashion houses, offering new insights into the complex dynamics of creative leadership.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that draws upon Transformational Leadership Theory, the Componential Theory of Creativity, and Social Exchange Theory. These complementary perspectives provide a multidimensional understanding of how leadership styles influence designer performance in luxury fashion houses. Given the complexity of creative work in fashion, where artistic expression intersects with commercial imperatives, no single theory sufficiently captures the dynamics involved. Therefore, a synthesised framework is essential for explaining the interplay between leadership behaviours, motivational processes, and creative outcomes.

3.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory, originally developed by Bass (1985), posits that leaders can enhance followers' motivation and performance by inspiring them through vision, intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration, and idealised influence. This leadership style is particularly relevant in creative industries, where intrinsic motivation and innovation are critical to success.

In luxury fashion houses, transformational leaders often take the form of visionary creative directors who define the brand's aesthetic direction while empowering designers to explore new ideas. Such leaders foster a sense of purpose and identity among designers, aligning individual creativity with organisational goals. By articulating a compelling vision, transformational leaders encourage designers to transcend routine thinking and engage in innovative problem-solving (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Moreover, intellectual stimulation, a key component of transformational leadership, encourages designers to challenge assumptions and experiment with unconventional ideas. This is particularly important in fashion design, where originality and differentiation are essential for maintaining competitive advantage. Individualised consideration further enhances designer performance by recognising and nurturing each designer's unique talents and creative potential.

Empirical research supports the positive relationship between transformational

leadership and creative performance. For instance, Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) found that transformational leadership significantly predicts employee creativity by fostering an environment conducive to innovation. In luxury fashion settings, this translates into increased experimentation, higher-quality design outputs, and stronger alignment with brand identity.

3.2 Componential Theory of Creativity

The Componential Theory of Creativity, developed by Amabile (1996), provides a robust framework for understanding the factors that influence creative performance. According to this theory, creativity is determined by the interaction of three core components: domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic motivation.

Domain-relevant skills refer to the knowledge, technical abilities, and expertise required for creative work. In fashion design, these include skills such as pattern making, textile knowledge, and aesthetic judgment. Creativity-relevant processes involve cognitive styles and personality traits that facilitate innovation, such as divergent thinking, risk-taking, and openness to experience. Intrinsic motivation, the most critical component, refers to the internal drive to engage in creative activities for their own sake.

Leadership plays a central role in shaping all three components. Transformational and supportive leadership styles enhance intrinsic motivation by creating a positive and empowering work environment (Amabile et

al., 2004). Leaders also influence creativity-relevant processes by encouraging experimentation and tolerating failure. Furthermore, leadership can facilitate the development of domain-relevant skills through mentorship, training, and resource allocation.

In luxury fashion houses, the Componential Theory of Creativity is particularly applicable because designer performance is inherently tied to creative output. Leaders who understand and support the components of creativity can significantly enhance designers' ability to produce innovative and high-quality work. Conversely, controlling or overly directive leadership may undermine intrinsic motivation and limit creative potential.

3.3 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) provides a relational perspective on leadership by emphasising the reciprocal nature of interactions between leaders and followers. According to this theory, relationships are based on the exchange of resources, including support, recognition, and trust. When employees perceive that they are treated fairly and valued by their leaders, they are more likely to reciprocate with positive behaviours, such as increased commitment and performance.

In luxury fashion houses, the relationship between leaders and designers is critical to fostering a collaborative and innovative work environment. Designers who feel supported and appreciated are more likely to invest their creative energy into their work and contribute to the organisation's success. Conversely,

negative or transactional relationships may lead to disengagement and reduced creativity.

Leader-member exchange (LMX), an extension of Social Exchange Theory, further highlights the importance of high-quality relationships between leaders and employees. High LMX relationships are characterised by trust, mutual respect, and open communication, all of which are essential for creative collaboration (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In fashion design teams, such relationships enable the free flow of ideas and facilitate the co-creation of innovative designs.

3.4 Integrative Framework

By integrating these three theories, this study proposes a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between leadership styles and designer performance. Transformational Leadership Theory explains how leaders inspire and motivate designers; the Componential Theory of Creativity elucidates the mechanisms by which creativity is generated; and Social Exchange Theory highlights the relational dynamics that underpin effective leadership.

Together, these theories suggest that leadership influences designer performance through multiple pathways: by shaping motivation, enabling creative processes, and fostering supportive relationships. This integrative approach is particularly valuable in the context of luxury fashion houses, where creativity, collaboration, and organisational culture are deeply interconnected.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative narrative methodology to examine the relationship between leadership styles and designers' performance in luxury fashion houses. Given the complexity and context-specific nature of creative work, a narrative approach enables the examination of lived experiences and organisational practices through secondary data sources. This section outlines the research design, data collection strategies, and analytical procedures employed in the study. Emphasis is placed on the use of purposive sampling, narrative analysis, and methodological rigour to ensure credibility and depth in understanding leadership dynamics within the luxury fashion industry.

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a narrative approach to explore the relationship between leadership styles and designer performance in luxury fashion houses. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena, including leadership dynamics and creative processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The narrative approach focuses on analysing stories and accounts that reflect individuals' experiences and organisational practices. In this research, narratives derived from secondary data sources provide valuable insights into how designers perceive and experience leadership styles. This approach enables the exploration of contextual and temporal dimensions of leadership, which are

often overlooked in quantitative studies (Riessman, 2008).

4.2 Data Sources and Sampling

The study relies on secondary data, which includes a wide range of textual and documentary sources. These sources were selected based on their relevance to leadership and design practices in luxury fashion houses. The primary data sources include:

- Peer-reviewed academic journal articles
- Biographies and autobiographies of fashion designers and creative directors
- Published interviews with industry professionals
- Case studies of luxury fashion brands
- Industry reports and fashion media publications

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select data sources that provide rich and relevant narratives. This approach ensures that the selected materials are directly aligned with the research objectives and contribute meaningful insights into the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015).

4.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved a systematic review of relevant literature and archival materials. Sources were identified through academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar) and industry publications. Keywords used in the search process included "leadership in fashion," "creative leadership," "designer performance," and "luxury fashion management."

The collected data were organised and categorised according to themes related to leadership styles, designers' experiences, and organisational culture. This process facilitated the identification of patterns and relationships within the data.

4.4 Data Analysis: Narrative Analysis

The study employs narrative analysis as the primary method of data analysis. Narrative analysis involves interpreting stories to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences and how these experiences are shaped by social and organisational contexts (Riessman, 2008).

The analysis was conducted in four stages:

- **Data Familiarisation:** The researcher thoroughly reviewed all selected materials to gain an overall understanding of the narratives.
- **Coding:** Key themes and concepts related to leadership and designer performance were identified and coded.
- **Thematic Development:** Codes were grouped into broader themes, such as transformational leadership, creative autonomy, and organisational culture.
- **Interpretation:** The themes were interpreted in light of the theoretical framework to generate insights into the relationship between leadership and designer performance.

This iterative process enabled the development of a nuanced, contextually

grounded understanding of the research topic.

4.5 Trustworthiness and Rigour

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, the study adopts several strategies for enhancing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

- **Triangulation:** Multiple data sources were used to corroborate findings and reduce bias.
- **Thick Description:** Detailed descriptions of narratives and contexts were provided to enhance transferability.
- **Theoretical Triangulation:** The use of multiple theoretical perspectives strengthens the analytical framework.
- **Audit Trail:** A transparent documentation of data collection and analysis processes ensures dependability.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

As the study is based on secondary data, it does not involve direct interaction with human participants. However, ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring proper citation and acknowledgement of all sources. The researcher also maintained academic integrity by avoiding data misrepresentation and adhering to ethical research standards (Mannan & Farhana, 2026).

4.7 Limitations of the Study

Despite its strengths, the study has certain limitations. The reliance on secondary data may limit the ability to capture real-time experiences and perspectives. Additionally,

narrative analysis involves a degree of subjectivity, which may influence interpretation. However, these limitations are mitigated by rigorous methods and the use of multiple data sources.

4.8 Justification of Methodology

The exploratory nature of the research justifies the choice of a qualitative narrative approach. Leadership and creativity are complex and context-dependent phenomena that require interpretive methods for meaningful analysis. By focusing on narratives, the study captures the richness and depth of experiences within luxury fashion houses, providing insights that would be difficult to obtain through quantitative methods.

5. Findings and Analysis

The narrative analysis of secondary data reveals complex, multifaceted relationships between leadership styles and designers' performance in luxury fashion houses. Drawing upon documented case narratives, interviews, and scholarly interpretations, several key themes emerge: the enabling role of transformational leadership in fostering creative excellence, the constraining yet stabilising influence of transactional leadership, the growing significance of creative and collaborative leadership, the role of emotional intelligence in leadership effectiveness, and the mediating influence of organisational culture.

5.1 Transformational Leadership as a Catalyst for Creative Excellence

One of the most prominent findings is the strong association between transformational leadership and enhanced designer performance. Narrative accounts consistently highlight that leaders who articulate a compelling vision and inspire their teams create environments conducive to creativity and innovation. Designers working under such leaders often report heightened intrinsic motivation and a stronger sense of purpose.

Transformational leaders in luxury fashion houses typically act as visionary figures who define the brand's aesthetic identity while encouraging designers to experiment within that framework. This balance between direction and autonomy is critical for sustaining innovation. For instance, narratives from fashion houses indicate that when leaders engage in intellectual stimulation, encouraging designers to challenge norms and explore unconventional ideas, creative output significantly improves (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Moreover, individualised consideration, a key dimension of transformational leadership, enables leaders to recognise and nurture each designer's unique talents. This personalised approach not only enhances skill development but also fosters a sense of belonging and commitment. As Amabile et al. (2004) suggest, such supportive environments are essential for maintaining high levels of creativity over time.

The findings also suggest that transformational leadership contributes to aligning individual creativity with

organisational goals. Designers are more likely to produce work that reflects the brand's identity when they understand and internalise the leader's vision. This alignment is particularly important in luxury fashion, where brand consistency is a critical determinant of success.

5.2 Transactional Leadership: Structure and Constraint

While transformational leadership dominates the creative domain, transactional leadership plays a significant role in ensuring operational efficiency. Narrative data indicate that transactional leadership is commonly employed in areas such as production, supply chain management, and quality control. In these contexts, clear expectations, performance monitoring, and reward systems are essential for maintaining consistency and meeting deadlines.

However, the analysis reveals that transactional leadership can constrain designer performance when applied excessively in creative processes. Designers operating under rigid structures and strict performance metrics often experience reduced autonomy and intrinsic motivation. This, in turn, can limit their willingness to take creative risks, leading to more conventional and less innovative designs (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Despite these limitations, transactional leadership is not inherently detrimental. When used in conjunction with transformational leadership, it provides the necessary structure to support creative activities. For example, while designers may enjoy creative freedom during the conceptual

phase, transactional mechanisms ensure that final outputs meet quality standards and production requirements.

Thus, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of transactional leadership depends on its integration with more flexible and supportive leadership styles. A balanced approach allows organisations to maintain both creativity and efficiency, which are essential for success in the luxury fashion industry.

5.3 Emergence of Creative and Collaborative Leadership

Another significant finding is the increasing prominence of creative and collaborative leadership styles in contemporary luxury fashion houses. Unlike traditional hierarchical models, these approaches emphasise teamwork, knowledge sharing, and collective problem-solving.

Creative leadership involves facilitating innovation by empowering designers and encouraging experimentation. Leaders adopting this style act as mentors and facilitators rather than authoritative figures. Narrative accounts indicate that such leadership fosters a culture of openness and inclusivity in which designers feel comfortable sharing ideas and taking risks (Mumford et al., 2002).

Collaborative leadership, by contrast, emphasises the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. In modern fashion houses, design processes often involve multiple stakeholders, including marketing teams, product developers, and digital specialists. Leaders who promote collaboration facilitate the integration of

diverse perspectives, resulting in more innovative and market-relevant designs.

The findings suggest that these leadership styles are particularly effective in addressing the complexities of the contemporary fashion industry, where rapid technological advancements and changing consumer preferences require adaptive and flexible approaches.

5.4 Emotional Intelligence as a Key Leadership Competency

Emotional intelligence emerges as a critical factor influencing leadership effectiveness and designer performance. Narrative data highlight that leaders who demonstrate empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal sensitivity are better equipped to manage creative teams.

Design work is inherently personal and emotionally driven. Designers often invest significant emotional energy into their creations, making them vulnerable to criticism and rejection. Leaders with high emotional intelligence can provide constructive feedback while maintaining designers' confidence and motivation.

Furthermore, emotionally intelligent leaders are more effective in resolving conflicts and fostering positive team dynamics. In high-pressure environments such as fashion houses, where deadlines and expectations are intense, the ability to manage emotions becomes particularly important.

The findings align with existing research suggesting that emotional intelligence enhances leadership effectiveness by improving communication, trust, and

collaboration (Goleman, 1998). In the context of luxury fashion, these factors are essential for sustaining creativity and innovation.

5.5 Organisational Culture as a Mediating Factor

Organisational culture plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between leadership and designer performance. Leaders shape culture through their values, behaviours, and decision-making processes, which in turn influence how designers approach their work.

Narrative analysis indicates that cultures characterised by openness, experimentation, and collaboration are more conducive to creativity. In such environments, designers feel empowered to explore new ideas without fear of failure. Conversely, hierarchical and risk-averse cultures tend to inhibit creativity by imposing constraints and discouraging innovation (Schein, 2010).

The findings also suggest that organisational culture reinforces leadership practices. For example, transformational leaders often cultivate cultures that support creativity and innovation, whereas transactional leaders may foster more structured and controlled environments.

In luxury fashion houses, where brand identity is paramount, organisational culture also plays a role in maintaining consistency and coherence. Leaders must therefore strike a balance between fostering creativity and preserving the brand's core values.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between leadership styles and designer performance in luxury fashion houses. By integrating narrative evidence with established theoretical frameworks, this section discusses the implications of these findings for the existing literature and highlights their contributions to both theory and practice.

6.1 Reaffirming the Role of Transformational Leadership

The strong association between transformational leadership and creative performance observed in this study is consistent with prior research in organisational behaviour and creativity. Transformational leadership enhances intrinsic motivation, which is a key driver of creative performance according to the Componential Theory of Creativity (Amabile, 1996).

In the context of luxury fashion, transformational leadership appears particularly effective because it aligns individual creativity with the organisation's vision. Designers are not only motivated to produce innovative work but also to ensure that their creations reflect the brand's identity. This dual alignment is critical for maintaining competitive advantage in the luxury market.

However, the discussion also reveals that transformational leadership is not without challenges. The strong influence of visionary leaders may overshadow the contributions of individual designers, creating tensions

between autonomy and control. This highlights the need for leaders to balance inspiration with inclusivity.

6.2 The Complementary Role of Transactional Leadership

While transformational leadership is essential for fostering creativity, transactional leadership provides the structure necessary for operational success. The findings suggest that the most effective leadership approach in luxury fashion houses is not a single style but a combination of styles tailored to different organisational functions.

This aligns with contingency theories of leadership, which argue that the effectiveness of a leadership style depends on the context (Northouse, 2021). In creative processes, flexibility and autonomy are crucial, whereas in production and execution, structure and discipline are required.

The discussion underscores the importance of integrating transactional and transformational leadership to achieve both creativity and efficiency. Leaders who can navigate this balance are better positioned to manage the complexities of the fashion industry.

6.3 Advancing Creative Leadership in Fashion

The emergence of creative and collaborative leadership styles reflects broader changes in organisational structures and work practices. As fashion houses become more global and technologically advanced, the need for interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation has increased.

Creative leadership, as identified in this study, extends beyond traditional leadership models by emphasising facilitation rather than control. This approach is particularly relevant in knowledge-intensive industries, where value is created through the exchange of ideas and expertise (Mumford et al., 2002).

The discussion highlights that adopting creative leadership practices can enhance organisational adaptability and resilience. By fostering a culture of experimentation and learning, leaders can enable fashion houses to respond effectively to changing market conditions.

6.4 Emotional Intelligence and Relational Leadership

The importance of emotional intelligence identified in the findings reinforces the relevance of relational leadership theories, such as Social Exchange Theory and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). High-quality relationships between leaders and designers are characterised by trust, respect, and mutual support, which are essential for creative collaboration (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to build and maintain these relationships, thereby enhancing designer performance. This is particularly important in the fashion industry, where creative work is deeply personal and emotionally driven.

The discussion suggests that leadership development programs in fashion organisations should place greater emphasis on emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. Such competencies are critical for managing diverse and creative teams.

6.5 Organisational Culture as a Strategic Asset

The findings highlight organisational culture as a key mediator between leadership and performance. This aligns with Schein's (2010) view that culture is both shaped by and shapes leadership. In luxury fashion houses, culture serves as a framework within which creativity is expressed and managed.

The discussion emphasises that leaders must actively cultivate cultures that support innovation while maintaining alignment with brand identity. This involves promoting values such as openness, collaboration, and continuous learning.

Furthermore, organisational culture can serve as a source of competitive advantage. Fashion houses with strong, creativity-supportive cultures are better positioned to attract and retain talented designers, thereby enhancing their long-term performance.

6.6 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature by integrating multiple theoretical perspectives to explain the relationship between leadership and designer performance. The combination of Transformational Leadership Theory, the Componential Theory of Creativity, and Social Exchange Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding this complex phenomenon.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for fashion leaders and managers. By adopting a balanced and adaptive leadership approach, organisations can enhance designer performance and

sustain innovation. Key recommendations include:

- Encouraging transformational and creative leadership practices
- Integrating transactional mechanisms for operational efficiency
- Developing emotional intelligence among leaders
- Cultivating supportive organisational cultures

6.7 Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides important insights, it is not without limitations. The reliance on secondary data may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could incorporate primary data through interviews and ethnographic studies to gain deeper insights into leadership dynamics.

Additionally, comparative studies across different segments of the fashion industry, such as fast fashion and sustainable fashion, could further enhance understanding of leadership practices.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the relationship between leadership styles and designer performance in luxury fashion houses through a qualitative narrative approach. By integrating insights from Transformational Leadership Theory, the Componential Theory of Creativity, and Social Exchange Theory, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how leadership influences creativity, motivation,

and organisational outcomes in design-driven environments.

The findings demonstrate that transformational leadership plays a central role in enhancing designer performance by fostering intrinsic motivation, encouraging innovation, and aligning individual creativity with organisational vision. Designers working under transformational leaders are more likely to engage in creative risk-taking and produce work that reflects both originality and brand identity. At the same time, the study highlights that transactional leadership, while essential for maintaining operational efficiency and quality control, can constrain creativity if applied excessively within the design process. This underscores the importance of adopting a balanced and context-sensitive leadership approach.

The emergence of creative and collaborative leadership styles reflects the evolving nature of the luxury fashion industry, where interdisciplinary collaboration and adaptability are increasingly important. Leaders who act as facilitators rather than controllers enable designers to experiment, share ideas, and co-create innovative solutions. Furthermore, emotional intelligence is identified as a critical leadership competency, as it enhances communication, trust, and team cohesion, factors that are essential for sustaining creativity in high-pressure environments.

Organisational culture is found to be a key mediating factor in the relationship between leadership and designer performance. Cultures that promote openness, experimentation, and learning create conditions in which creativity can thrive,

while rigid and hierarchical cultures may inhibit innovation. Therefore, leaders must actively cultivate supportive cultural environments that balance creative freedom with strategic alignment.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on leadership in creative industries by providing a nuanced, context-specific analysis of luxury fashion houses. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that fashion leaders should adopt flexible leadership styles, invest in emotional intelligence development, and foster collaborative cultures to enhance designer performance. Future research could build on this work by incorporating primary data and exploring comparative analyses across different segments of the fashion industry.

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