

# An exploration of the extent to which project management can be applied across creative industries



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## **KEYWORDS**

- Creative industries
- Fashion
- Project management
- SMEs

## **Article highlight:**

This paper investigates whether project management tools and techniques can be used effectively in the creative industries. It looks specifically at a study of their use in the fashion industry in the North East of Scotland.

## **What does the paper cover?**

The fashion industry tends to recruit people from an artistic background, resulting perhaps in a lack of business management skills in the sector. But fashion is a business and companies need entrepreneurial and management skills to thrive.

As part of the creative industries, fashion will have particular challenges but also opportunities to maximise benefit, as it is an industry in which projects form a core component of delivery. Collection launches, trade events, the redesign of lines, and outlets are some of those projects. Fashion managers might therefore be responsive to the value of project management tools and techniques.

## Methodology:

The authors interviewed eight fashion managers who lead projects in the fashion industry in the North East of Scotland, where fashion is not a predominant industry activity. Fashion design in the area tends to be small scale. Fashion retail ranges from high street to high end.

The methodology used in the study was qualitative and exploratory because the topic had not been investigated before.

The fashion managers who took part in this study represent design and manufacture, events and retail. They were asked a series of questions exploring the value of using project management tools and techniques.

Interviewees were recruited from key contacts from an existing network and 'snowball' sampling. They were all female; indicative of a predominantly female working environment, largely in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the interviewer to ask prompting questions. Only one interviewee had formal training in project management, so some explanatory information was included in the interviews.

Questions on tools and techniques were split into three sections: those which help plan and control a project; those concerned with the people aspect of project management; and tools and techniques which help facilitate lessons learnt and continuous improvement.

## Research findings:

The study uncovered five themes relating to the use of project management tools and techniques within the fashion industry and, in particular, SMEs:

- **the application of project management tools and techniques** - interviewees felt that it was difficult to plan ahead due to the ever-changing nature of the industry and their own lack of resources in running small businesses;
- **the need to be flexible and reactive** - the fast-paced, change-oriented nature of the industry means that fashion managers need an aptitude for embracing uncertainty. Entrepreneurs are generally thought to be more willing to take risks, which may explain why interviewees appeared very relaxed in their approach to risk management;
- **the intuitive application of project management techniques** - interviewees felt that it was not that they lacked project management skills necessarily, but that they used such skills and techniques in an unstructured and intuitive manner;
- **the importance of lessons learnt** - a significant number of interviewees acknowledged that it was unusual for success to be specified in advance of a project, and that this would typically be defined in retrospect, usually on an instinctive, loosely defined and ad hoc basis;
- **the tension between the creative and analytical mindsets** - three-quarters said that they draw on both creative and analytical styles and tended to think that the management and commercial aspects of their business required the analytical mindset to predominate.

## Conclusions:

The challenges of adopting project management tools and techniques in this sector include a need to be flexible and reactive; the importance of reflecting on success and lessons learnt; and a tension between the creative and analytical mindsets.

Most of the interviewees were unaware of formal project management tools and techniques, but recognised the value that these might bring. They were sceptical about overly complex and repetitive processes.

Project management might adapt to the needs of the industry, for example by understanding the fashion life cycle and the role of agile project management, or by improving customer relations through delivery of successful projects.

The artistic and explorer mindsets can contribute to project management beyond problem definition and idea generation, such as in evaluation, in maintaining relations, in imaginative and innovative solutions, in openness to change, in being flexible, and in seeing the bigger picture and understanding success holistically.

## Significance of the research:

Project management tools and techniques could be adapted and their value demonstrated better in the creative industries.

Future research could usefully explore:

- how to assist creative entrepreneurs in being business-like in a manner that recognise their preferred mindset;
- the contribution made by the artistic and explorer mindsets to project management.

## Comments from the authors:

Literature surrounding the use of project management in the creative industries is still in its infancy. More work is required to explore its full potential.

Project management as a discipline has traditionally been regarded as process driven and time consuming, therefore not lending itself well to more dynamic fast-paced industries. However, recent research suggests that agile, value-driven approaches are being adopted successfully in more traditional contexts; for example in the oil and gas industry, which has had to rapidly adapt to a low-price environment.

Future research could valuably explore the efficacy of these more flexible approaches to project management and how these could support SMEs.

***Madeleine Marcella-Hood and Sheonagh Rowley, The Robert Gordon University***

## Complete article

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## Association for Project Management

Ibis House, Regent Park  
Summerleys Road,  
Princes Risborough  
Buckinghamshire,  
HP27 9LE

**Tel (UK)** 0845 458 1944  
**Tel (Int)** +44 1844 271 640  
**Email** [research@apm.org.uk](mailto:research@apm.org.uk)  
**Web** [apm.org.uk](http://apm.org.uk)

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## Glossary:

|                             |                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Mindset</b>              | A way of thinking, particularly a regularly recurring one.                                                                            |
| <b>Projectification</b>     | A development in the workplace where tasks are increasingly carried out in the form of projects and less as 'ordinary' lines of work. |
| <b>Resource management</b>  | The acquisition and use of the resources needed to deliver a project.                                                                 |
| <b>Strategic management</b> | The identification, selection and implementation of an organisation's long-term goals and objectives.                                 |

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