IJMR | International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research
Международный институт управления и предпринимательства
Research Article Print ISSN 3105-8884 Online ISSN 3105-8892 December 2025, Vol. 1, No. 3
https://doi.org/10.65231/ijmr.v1i3.101

# A Study on the Dual-Role Conflict and Integration of Design Managers As Creative Advocate and Project Constraint Controller

**Zhou Weiping[1], Li Yifeng***

Belarusian State University, 220030, Minsk, Republic of Belarus

**KEYWORDS**

*Design manager;*
*Role conflict;*
*Sustainable development;*
*Project management;*
*Integration strategy;*
*Green construction;*
*Creative management;*

**ABSTRACT**

The green transition in the architecture and interior design industry is being put under pressure by the global trend of pursuing Dual Carbon goals and ESG principles. The key players in this process are design managers. They have been struggling with a dilemma between dual roles: creative vision protection and project constraint control. Sustainable development has exacerbated this inherent conflict [1]. It becomes a powerful new agenda, tightening even further the traditional tension between creativity and commercial reality. This paper examines the new features of this conflict in the modern context. We believe that effective managers must not make binary decisions but become efficient translators and coordinators. Their main objective is to convert sustainable ideas into feasible designs and budgets which can be accepted by all stakeholders. This article offers fresh perspectives and practical methods for design managers who find themselves in this new age.

## INTRODUCTION

Design managers are in a special and sometimes difficult middle ground in the design and construction industry. On one hand, they need to be the Creative Advocate, defending the design's integrity, innovation, and the pursuit of superior aesthetics, functionality, and user experience. On the other hand, they must be the Project Constraint Controller, strictly controlling budgets, timelines, scope, and commercial objectives to ensure successful project delivery. The fundamental tension between these two roles is well-documented [2].

Now, the need to develop in a sustainable way has become an industry requirement because of the global climate issues and national policies such as the Dual Carbon targets of China. This change has changed the working environment of design managers fundamentally. They are now required to balance not only the traditional creativity-constraint paradox but also meet new requirements of eco-friendly materials, energy-saving technologies and green building certification. This is practically introducing another powerful role: the Sustainability Driver. The introduction of this new duty makes the current dynamic more complex. Sustainable needs tend to imply greater initial expenditures, longer time frames and technical risks, which immediately conflict with cost-cutting and schedule efficiency objectives. At the same time, the constraints of sustainable design can occasionally seem like a constraint on pure creative play [1].

This conflict is expressed in actual terms. As an example, the design team on a high-end office project might suggest a new low-carbon concrete. Although it is consistent with green principles, this material may be 30 percent more costly and available only to a few suppliers. The design manager has enormous pressure: he can either approve it which would lead to budget overruns and delays or reject it which would endanger the green rating of the project as well as the sustainability brand image of the client. The manager is squarely between two fires [1].

Thus, the present study aims at answering a number of important questions: How does the traditional role conflict of design managers manifest and escalate in the new imperatives of sustainable development? What are its underlying causes? Facing this heightened tension, what can design managers do to balance creative excellence,

* Corresponding author. E-mail address:weapenchau@foxmail.com

Received date: December 01, 2025; Revised manuscript received date: December 10, 2025; Accepted date: December 20, 2025; Online publication date: December 31, 2025.

commercial viability, and environmental responsibility? Answering these questions will not only help to understand better the real-world challenges that the profession faces but also provide practical recommendations on how to enhance project outcomes and promote green design practices.

## 1.Literature Revie

### 1.1.The Role and Identity of Design Manager

Design management is an interdisciplinary discipline, and the practitioners of this field tend to be in a hybrid or in-between position. It has been found out that design managers are always between the designer and manager identities, creativity and business, vision and practicality. This in-betweenness is both a source of their value-allowing them to cross different professional languages and logics-and a source of stress, which causes role ambiguity and conflict [6]. The professional identity of a design manager is not fixed but it is constantly formed by interactions with various stakeholders depending on the tools, skills and personal experiences of the individual.

More specifically, design managers work on a daily basis in the area of translation. They need to transform the technical language of designers into business value that is comprehensible by clients and transform client budget limitations into specific technical limits to designers. Effective design managers tend to be boundary spanners who are able to create connections between various domains. But as sustainability emerges as an important new dimension, this bridge is put under significant pressure increasing the existing strain of their intermediary role.

### 1.2.Role Conflict Theory and Its Manifestation in Design

The role conflict theory argues that stress is caused by the existence of incompatible or conflicting expectations among individuals. This conflict is especially acute in design project management. Role conflict was found in design supervision early on and organizational changes were proposed as a mitigation strategy [2]. In green building projects, conflicts are even more multifaceted, occurring at various stages due to misalignment between sub-goals, such as energy performance versus cost targets [1].

The recent studies have concentrated on the issue of conflicts in sustainable projects. As an illustration, a 2021 case study following three LEED-certified projects concluded that more than 60 percent of major design modifications and disputes were related to fulfilling certain sustainability credit criteria [1]. These clashes are not only between clients and contractors but also among design teams where architects, structural engineers, and MEP specialists might have different interpretations and priorities concerning the implementation of green. The choice of design leaders in such situations is complicated by external factors (such as cost perceptions) and internal drivers (personal values and environmental ethos). This complexity is one of the fundamental forms of internalized role conflict; surveys show that most design managers experience considerable stress when their personal sustainability beliefs are in conflict with strict project cost controls [5].

### 1.3.The New Demands of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has shifted to become a central force of design practice instead of a peripheral concern. Multi-level, systems-thinking is now recommended in scholarly frameworks regarding sustainable design [3]. As a result, the designer is becoming a change agent [5]. Studies have classified different roles that designers play in promoting sustainability in organizations as internal advocate, practical expert, and systems thinker, indicating that varying capabilities are needed at various organizational maturity levels [4].

This means that design managers should not only promote sustainability but also create the appropriate capabilities in their teams and organizations. This certainly adds to their workload and managerial complexity, with activities such as training teams on new green material standards or developing new sustainable supplier assessment protocols being tasks that go beyond traditional design management duties [3]. Global rating systems like WELL further compound this by expanding the focus from energy to holistic human health factors, requiring design managers to engage with a broader range of scientific parameters and specialist consultants, thereby increasing the interfaces and knowledge domains they must coordinate [1].

To recap, the current literature has looked into design manager identity, role conflict and sustainable design

separately. Nevertheless, only a few studies combine all three to systematically examine how sustainability becomes an important contextual variable that transforms and amplifies the traditional role conflict of design managers. This study is aimed at filling that gap.

## 2.New Manifestations of Dual-Role Conflict Intensified by Sustainability

In the face of sustainable development requirements, the traditional conflict between creativity and constraint is gaining new aspects. The circumstances that cause a conflict, its strength, and complexity have been dramatically increased to become an ever-present and overt theme in all projects [1].

To begin with, conflicts are becoming more and more focused on sustainability-related decisions that require complex and specialized information. A good example is material selection. Low-carbon materials tend to have a cost premium and longer lead times, which directly conflict with budget and schedule goals [1]. The decision is no longer a simple price comparison. Managers need to evaluate "embodied carbon," compare Life Cycle Assessment reports, and consider supply chain locality for certification points. This specialized data requires time to digest, yet clients often demand immediate answers on best value, creating conflict through information asymmetry and time pressure [1].

In the same way, design reviews of improved energy or health standards can also be associated with new technologies that have uncertain risks and maintenance expenses. In this case, the drive to innovate by the Creative Advocate collides head-on with the need to mitigate risk by the Constraint Controller. An example is the choice to implement a new smart shading system to save energy which usually causes controversy because clients are concerned about long term support and maintenance liabilities of software. As one of the design directors interviewed said, we promoted an advanced algorithmic shading system in terms of energy objectives, but the client was busy worrying about the possibility of the software company failing within five years. The negotiations were drawn out as a result of the technological risk being balanced against our sustainability goals.

Second, the cause of conflict has changed into "temporal trade-offs" with inconsistent measures instead of differences in opinion. In traditional conflicts, there was a focus on varying perspectives regarding the immediate value of projects (e.g., aesthetics vs. cost). Sustainability brings about conflicts between short-term project expenditure and long-term environmental/social benefits [3]. It is very difficult to convince a client to invest in a measure that takes 20 years to pay back, as it tests the manager's communication and value-articulation skills.

The main problem is that it is hard to measure the long-term benefits of green certification such as better health of occupants or brand improvement. Although there are tools to compute financial returns, most of the sustainability advantages are considered intangible. Studies have shown that design leaders make their decisions based on a personal evaluation of costs and these long-term values [1]. This value perception gap increases when clients are developers who care about short term rental yields, and the manager becomes a value translator selling a future oriented story to a present focused stakeholder.

Lastly, conflict entails more stakeholders and criteria of evaluation that require new knowledge and challenge the traditional authority. The client-designer-contractor triad is no longer the only one; environmental consultants, certification bodies (e.g., LEED AP), and even the wider society become significant participants. Conflict resolution has to meet changing regulations, certification standards, and social norms instead of merely technical or business sense. Choosing a flooring material, such as checking VOC emissions in order to get WELL certification, and using materials from sustainably managed forests are examples of knowledge areas that might be outside the scope of a typical designer or project manager [1].

Therefore, design managers have to strike a balance between technical, economic, regulatory and social acceptability. This is very hard. They can experience their traditional professional authority being questioned because they will need to depend on and integrate the advice of new sustainability experts yet make final decisions about feasibility and cost impact. This slight change in their role contributes to the load [6].

## 3.Pathways to Integration: Triadic Synergy Strategies for Design Managers

When faced with the increased demands of sustainability, high-performing design managers do not just pick one or the other. They come up with plans to systematically incorporate

the three goals of creativity, constraint and responsibility [5]. This integration is not a static compromise but a dynamic, creative management process.

First, Be a Sustainable Value Translator to combine creativity and responsibility in new communication languages. Good integrators are good at translating abstract green ideas into concrete design language and persuasive business value [3]. They go beyond generic eco-friendly claims, using data (energy simulations, carbon calculations) and experiential demonstrations (showing how healthy materials improve space quality) to convert long-term environmental benefits into immediate user advantages or brand equity.

As an illustration, when suggesting a high-end low-formaldehyde panel they can offer comparison samples to customers so that they can feel the air quality difference or reference studies which associate enhanced indoor air with fewer sick days among employees and related cost savings. This strategy at once gains the support of the Creative Advocate (looking for healthy spaces) and the Constraint Controller (concentrating on total cost-benefit). This requires not only knowledge of sustainability but also the ability of managers to translate it into persuasive stories, skills in interpreting Life Cycle Assessments and communicating technical results in layman terms [1].

Second, Engage in Dynamic Contextual Trade-offs, setting phase-specific decision rules instead of rigid either-or choices. Integration involves dynamically prioritizing the three goals depending on project phase, specific tasks, and stakeholder concerns [1]. Proactive managers establish a clear decision priority framework with key stakeholders at the project outset. In the conceptual design phase, exploration of creative and sustainable vision may take precedence with a more flexible budget. During detailed design, the focus shifts to lock-down, strict control of technical implementation and cost. In procurement, balancing environmental performance, price, and supply stability might involve a weighted sustainability-cost scoring matrix for vendor selection.

This contextual flexibility is an advanced management acumen. It entails the full knowledge of the whole project life cycle and the capacity to assume various lead roles: Explorer/Advocate at the beginning, Controller/Arbiter in the middle, and Coordinator/Ensurer towards the end. Studies indicate that a design manager's identity is formed exactly by passing through such contextual challenges [6]. Explicit phase rules can prevent numerous possible conflicts prior to their occurrence during meetings.

Third, Create a Systematic Collaborative Governance model that would encourage organizational change based on individual dependence to institutional support. The efforts of individuals need to be supported by the organization. Design managers may serve as catalysts towards institutionalizing support in several ways:

Promote cross-functional green project teams that bring together design, cost, engineering, procurement and sustainability consultants right at the start, with set collaboration mechanisms.

Measure sustainability goals and incorporate them into the terms of a contract, e.g. design fee structure based on levels of certification achieved or provisions requiring certain proportions of recycled materials in construction contracts [1].Create project performance evaluation systems with environmental measures that will make sure that internal KPIs measure energy/water savings and carbon reduction in addition to profit and schedule, thus encouraging sustainable results since the beginning [5].

By streamlining the organizational processes and incentive systems, individual role conflict can be turned into institutionalized collaboration. This is in line with the conventional methods of solving role conflict by organizational adjustment but it has been injected with the new imperative of sustainability [2]. The design manager ceases to be a solitary advocate when sustainability is incorporated into the normal operations of the system and becomes an executor and beneficiary of the system thereby reducing personal pressure.

## Conclusion

The research has discussed the conflict and integration of the roles of design managers as the Creative Advocate and Project Constraint Controller in the imperative of sustainable development. The results indicate that sustainability is not an extra role but a major aspect that dramatically transforms the traditional conflict pattern [1]. It renders conflict situations more concrete (based on green decisions), roots deeper (based on trade-offs between temporal values), and solutions more complicated (with the need to coordinate more heterogeneous stakeholders). Design managers are able to work in a triadic force field of creativity, constraint and responsibility with all three vectors pulling at every

decision.

To overcome this challenge, design managers need to undergo a fundamental cognitive shift: from a binary either-or mindset to a systemic triadic synergy approach. They must become Translators of Sustainable Value, Masters of Dynamic Contextual Trade-offs, and Architects of Systematic Collaboration. The future core competency profile for design managers must expand beyond traditional design and project management to include systems thinking, lifecycle assessment, sustainability value communication, and multi-stakeholder mediation [3][5]. Correspondingly, educational frameworks in architecture and interior design must evolve to strengthen training in sustainability knowledge, interdisciplinary communication, and complex system management.

The major contribution of this paper is to incorporate the context of sustainable development into the analytical framework of role conflict among design managers, and to propose a model of triadic force field that provides a more contemporary and explanatory view. Moreover, these three integration strategies, value translation, dynamic trade-offs and systematic collaboration are an integrated answer to individual capability to organizational systems, giving practical directions.

This study has a limitation of depending on theoretical analysis and synthesis of the available literature without any primary empirical data based on large-scale surveys or in-depth case interviews. The conflict manifestations and integration strategies that have been discussed here could be further validated through future research by using detailed case studies, behavioral event interviews, or extensive questionnaires. Further exploration of how these dynamics differ across various organizational cultures (e.g., developer, design institute, government agency) and project types (e.g., commercial, healthcare, educational) would give more nuanced insights. Also, it is an interesting new research direction to explore how digital tools (e.g., BIM, carbon calculation software) might alleviate or exacerbate this role conflict [1]. Such detailed work will offer more scientific and accurate advice on the professional development of design managers, organizational design, and industry education.

## REFERENCES

1. Darko, A., & Chan, A. P. C. (2023). Green construction management research review. Journal of Cleaner Production, 382, 135296. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.135296.
2. Brooks, L., & Wells, C. S. (1989). Role conflict in design supervision. IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, 36(3), 271-281. https://doi.org/10.1109/17.32231
3. Ceschin, F., and Gaziulusoy, I. (2020). Designing sustainability: A multi-level framework of products to socio-technical systems. Routledge. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Design-for-Sustainability%3A-A-Multi-level-Framework-Ceschin-Gaziulusoy/e603951099a9904bf0bec1b9b3813a64ab41c5d3
4. Hakio, K., and Mattelmaki, T. (2022). Designers as Change Agents: Perceived Roles in Advancing Sustainability in Organizations at Different Levels of Utilization of Designs. Proceedings of the Design Society, 2, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1017/pds.2022.1.
5. Pkknen, T., Sarantou, M., and Miettinen, S. (2020). Sensemaking in the design space: In-betweenness and identity construction of design managers. In Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Design Creativity (ICDC 2020). https://kyushu-u.elsevierpure.com/en/publications/sensemaking-in-the-design-space-in-betweenness-and-identity-const
6. China Society for Urban Studies. (2023). 2022 China Green Building Market Development Report.