Jeans, Flip Flips, and Suit Jackets:
The Mixing Bowl of Today's Business Attire

Sara Joy Krivacek

Clemson University, USA

INTRODUCTION

In a competitive nature to recruit and keep the most talented workers, companies are constantly evolving to meet different generations' needs and preferences. One factor, in particular, that has evolved overtime is the accepted norm for work attire. While there lies a wide spectrum of variables that determine a company's dress code, companies, as well as current or potential employees, have an increased awareness about work attire. Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, and Mark Cuban are successful people who believe in or wear casual attire in the workplace. Steve Jobs wore a black turtleneck religiously with jeans and sneakers. According to a Forbes article, Jobs not only felt comfortable in this clothing, but it also allowed him to focus less on his choice of attire, and more on work (Smith, 2012). Zuckerberg wears jeans and a t-shirt for similar reasons. Finally, Cuban passionately expresses his opinion against suits as he once stated in his blog, "I just could never think of any good reason for any sane person to wear a suit in the first place. Exactly what purpose does a suit serve?...Does wearing a tie make us work harder or smarter?" (Blog Maverick, 2007). Whether it is for marketing purposes, making a statement, or other various reasons (Clifford, 2011), employees, specifically millennials, have had an immense impact on the attire policy in the workplace.

This chapter utilizes the intrinsic business case study analysis to better understand work attire and its evolution, and offer recommendations for companies. The chapter first defines work attire and provides a literature review and useful theories on its impact in the workforce. Then, the author categorizes and details the three different types of work attire: business professional, business casual, and casual. Finally, the author analyzes three different companies that contain a variety of dress policies and represent each of the three categories mentioned prior. It is important to note that the topic, discussion, and purpose of the chapter is work attire, and the business cases incorporated in the chapter play a supportive role in understanding the topic. Arguments for and against different work attire and final recommendations are made based on the research.

BACKGROUND

Work attire can be defined in several ways, whether it is "the clothing (e.g. jacket, skirt, pants) and artifacts (e.g. name tag, smock, jewelry) that employees of an organization wear while at work" (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993, p. 34), or "an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements displayed by a person in communicating with other human beings" (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992, pg. 15). Overall, it can be seen as nonverbal communication and expression in the workplace. Rafaeli and Pratt (1993) developed a framework for the study of organizational dress. This framework addressed how extra-organizational factors (societal and institutional standards) as well as intra-organizational factors (values and structure)

significantly influenced organizational dress. In addition, dress can impact multiple factors, including first impressions (Davis, 1984), the way a person behaves (Adam & Galinsky, 2012; Davis & Lennon, 1988; Johnson, Yoo, Kim, & Lennon, 2008), as well as the way a person feels about him/herself (Peluchette, Karl, & Rust, 2006). It is important to note that there are various factors, outside of the company's policies and guidelines, that impact employee dress.

Several theories have been useful in explaining various influences and impacts that work attire can have on an employee, as well as other coworkers. First, in alignment with role theory, an employee may dress according to his/her part in the company in order to exemplify how he/she wants others to perceive him/herself. According to role theory, which was developed in the 1920s and 1930s through theoretical works of Mead, Moreno, Parsons, and Linton, people may behave in a predictable, context-specific situation based on social situations, hierarchical chains, and other factors (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007). For example, a new manager in a company may dress more professionally in hopes to receive respect and set the level of expectation of appropriate attire for other employees. The manager may feel the need to dress business professional due to his/her role in the company. In addition, impression formation theory can help explain the impacts attire has on the workforce. Impression formation (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990) describes an impression made on a person's character based on available information, such as attire. In other words, employees may perceive one another based on the attire that he/she is wearing. This theory is especially important in relation to work attire policy when considering if a company is client-focused.

Defining and categorizing work attire can be difficult as there are countless options and interpretations. Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1992) declare "that systems for defining and classifying types of dress are frequently incomplete, and that the terminology used is ambiguous and inconsistent" (p. 13). For instance, many definitions of dress do not consider "body modifications, from skin coloring to perfumes and hairdress" (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, 1992, p.13). Colbert (2014) defined dress categories according to three attributes: color, material, and style of clothing. There are endless qualitative observations when analyzing a person's dress. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, work attire will be strictly defined as the clothing, shoes, and accessories (i.e. jewelry, scarves, hats, etc.) both men and women wear in the workforce. Similar to the definition, the categories of work attire can be endless. To remain consistent within the scope of this paper, three categories of work attire are addressed for both genders: business professional, business casual, and casual. Each category will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

DRESS CATEGORIES

Business Professional

The business professional attire can be viewed as the traditional clothing policy that many corporations have adopted since the 19th century. More specifically, this is the attire that millennials are rejecting. Business professional can vary according to gender, but for simplicities sake, it can be viewed as the suit-and-tie, dress pants, suit jackets, dresses, and so forth. Many corporations require this type of attire, especially when interacting with customers. It is almost expected, unless otherwise stated, that interviewees wear traditional business professional clothing in the job application process. In fact, Mosca and Buzza (2013) establish three main effects in "dressing for success: maintain respect, establish credibility, and establish yourself as an authority figure" (p. 63). Many employees utilize this dress category also to establish strong first impressions. In fact, college students are taught that first impressions are made

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/jeans-flip-flips-and-suit-jackets/263719

Related Content

RFID Technologies and Warehouse Applications: Case Studies
Alan D. Smith (2021). *Encyclopedia of Organizational Knowledge, Administration, and Technology (pp. 2393-2402).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/rfid-technologies-and-warehouse-applications/263699

Contextually Intelligent Leadership for Improving Schools Across Different Contexts and Regions
Ramodikoe Nylon Marishaneand Sharon Thabo Mampane (2019). *Predictive Models for School Leadership and Practices (pp. 43-58).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/contextually-intelligent-leadership-for-improving-schools-across-different-contexts-and-regions/211259

Equity and Access as Keys for Opening Open Learning: The Case for Virtually Facilitated Work-Based Learning
Luke van der Laanand Liz Neary (2016). *Open Learning and Formal Credentialing in Higher Education: Curriculum Models and Institutional Policies (pp. 263-290).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/equity-and-access-as-keys-for-opening-open-learning/135650

Quantitative Concession Behavior Analysis and Prediction for Decision Support in Electronic Negotiations
Réal A. Carbonneau, Rustam Vahidovand Gregory E. Kersten (2016). *Leadership and Personnel Management: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1469-1483).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/quantitative-concession-behavior-analysis-and-prediction-for-decision-support-in-electronic-negotiations/146450

Building a Culture of Inclusiveness That Supports the Latinx Student
Maricela Gonzalez-Martinez (2020). *Developing an Intercultural Responsive Leadership Style for Faculty and Administrators (pp. 132-144).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/building-a-culture-of-inclusiveness-that-supports-the-latinx-student/258462