One size does not fit all – analysis on professional dress

With any culture shift, this new tendency has created controversy and disagreement in the business world. What remains to be determined is: Do less formal dress codes really benefit businesses? While more casual dress codes may be effective in portraying a friendly, approachable working environment, dressing down may damage a company's image.

With that being said, do the costs of implementing an informal dress code outweigh the benefits? This seemingly uniform shift towards the " business casual" trend of dress, however, does not seem to be the most beneficial. A certain amount of strategy can be employed to help enhance dress codes and, in effect, further assist businesses. Defining Business Casual To fully understand what has become known as " business casual" one must look back to the history of dress code trends.

Traditional workplace attire once included a suit and tie, much else was typically frowned upon as being unprofessional.

With the " dotcom boom", many information technology businesses in Silicon Valley adopted a more casual dress code in response to an energy crisis at the time that forced employers to raise thermostat settings. This new mode of dress (losing the jacket and tie) quickly became popular in America, and more recently, has evolved into what is now known as " business casual". To start off, it is required to define what is generally accepted to be considered business casual. Steven Norton and Timothy M.

Franz, publishers of a study: Methodical Issues in Research on Business Casual Dress define business casual as " attire that is part way between casual and formal style.

This includes clothing such as khakis, knit shirts, turtlenecks or sweaters (especially for women), and rubber-soled shoes" (Norton, 136) But, this raises questions: Does this include short-sleeved shirts? Capri pants for women? What about a collared polo with a nice fat logo on it? Unfortunately, the problems with business casual clothing begin here, in defining " business casual". Such a simple term has escalated into a wildly complex category.

Interestingly enough, this business casual trend has formed entire corporations of people who are confused on how to dress in the morning. Too many definitions and variations of the term " business casual" have developed ever since the popular adaptation of the dress code has emerged. " There may also be a certain amount of dissonance between what individuals believe they are expected to wear and what they would prefer to wear. (Peluchette, 50) In effect, much is left to the employees' judgment to determine whether certain clothing meet certain criteria.

Thus, companies may often witness employees who are not dressed to their necessary standards. Chances of this happening increase with the implementation of a " business casual/casual" dress code. This leaves companies constantly changing the outlines of what is acceptable to wear to work; taking away time that could be used to accomplish something more valuable. Since the term has evolved into something that is so involved and multifaceted, it is important to recognize the differences that can come from a " business casual" dress code.

Variations of the dress can come from different regions of the USA.

Similarly, " business casual" in New York is surely different than " business casual" in Hawaii. With this being said, within the firm… Is it logical that a number cruncher in a financial firm dress the same as a sales associate or CFO? What about a banker and a lawyer? It makes sense that dress should vary because the jobs people perform vary. Bankers and sales associates are often engaged with others as representatives of their companies and their dress should depict that.

Therefore, making a dress code should be a conscious and strategic move that takes into consideration line of work, image, comfort, and other variables that will be discussed. Productivity and Employee Self Perceptions Those who support business casual dress codes believe that having a more casual mode of dress allows one to work comfortably; hence enhancing productivity and work output.

This forces the question: Does the way a person dress at work change how productive they are? However, it is difficult directly relate modes of dress and a worker's productivity to determine a cause and effect relationship.

Given this, some assumptions must be made to try to answer this fundamental question. Employee productivity, therefore, must be evaluated through employee self perceptions and surveys. A study was recently conducted on the Impact of Workplace Attire on Employee Self Perceptions. In this study, 91 MBA students were surveyed with the purpose of investigating the interaction of employee preferences on attire and how it made them feel (by rating the mode of dress on a scale of 1-5).

The three modes of dress were formal, business casual, and casual.