

"DRESS APPROPRIATELY": A REFLECTIVE, INCLUSIVE AND INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO WORKPLACE ATTIRE

A SELF-REFLECTIVE EXERCISE FOR LEADERS

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PURPOSE

THIS CAPSTONE PROVIDES A SELF-REFLECTIVE EXERCISE THAT ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERS CAN USE TO CONSIDER THEIR OWN BIASES IN REGARD TO APPEARANCE AND DRESS. THROUGH THE EXERCISE, LEADERS CAN IDENTIFY AND ENACT NEW NORMS THAT COMBAT POTENTIALLY DISCRIMINATORY AND BIASED BEHAVIORS.

REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

STARTING POINTS FOR
RETHINKING A BETTER (WRITTEN)
DRESS CODE

MAKE IT
RELEVANT

Richard Thompson Ford (2021) writes that well-written dress codes allow businesses to:

- Shape cooperative working cultures
- Convey professional values
- Create distinctive experiences for customers

EXPRESS IT
BEYOND THE
BINARY

From DaPonte Thornton (2015), the author suggests leaders consider the following:

- Can I express the dress code in a gender-, cultural-, and race-neutral way?
- Can I express the dress code in an affirmative rather than a punitive way?

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WHAT UNWRITTEN OR UNSPOKEN
RULES ABOUT DRESS AND
APPEARANCE EXPECTATIONS
EXIST WITHIN MY ORG?

DEEPER
REFLECTION

Are there unwritten expectations around dress for specific departments, work events, teams, meetings, etc.?

Do these differences unintentionally create hierarchical structures within the organization?

Are there advantages to understanding the unwritten dress codes at work? Are there disadvantages?

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Organizational Target: Executive
Leadership Team + HR + DEIB

What language is being used in your existing dress code policy? Are you only using binary language? Are you enforcing heteronormative based standards of appropriateness? Is there a way to engage affirmative rather than punitive language?


If your organization doesn't have a dress code, what would it look like if you did? Can you identify organization values that can provide a starting point?

Consider the expanded meaning of dress codes for remote employees, and what is considered appropriate for Zoom video norms (on or off), profile pictures, video backgrounds, and other nontraditional identifiers necessary for relationship-building in a virtual world.


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KEY TERMS

- **HETERONORMATIVITY:** SOCIAL REGULATORY FRAMEWORK THAT DEFAULTS TO A BINARY SEX DIVISION, NORMALIZING THE DESIRE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN
- **INTERSECTIONALITY:** TERM USED TO DISTINGUISH AND AMPLIFY THE DIFFERENT LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AN INDIVIDUAL BASED ON THEIR MULTIDIMENSIONAL IDENTITIES, AND THE WAYS THAT THOSE IDENTITIES OVERLAP AND PRESENT UNIQUE BARRIERS TO EQUALITY IN DIFFERENT FACETS OF SOCIETY
- **DEIB (DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & BELONGING) INITIATIVES:** ESTABLISHED TO FACILITATE AWARENESS; UNDERSTANDING; AND, WHEN NECESSARY, CHANGE IN ORDER TO CREATE MORE DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE, AND EQUITABLE SPACES FOR INDIVIDUALS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS

By recognizing opportunities to be explicit in expectations of appearance and dress, an organization invites the individual to express themselves without judgement, providing a psychologically safe workspace that does more to promote inclusivity, empathy and allyship than the indifference that accompanies vague, or non-existent dress codes.

“Revolution is not a one-time event. It is becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a genuine change in established, outgrown responses; for instance, it is learning to address each other’s difference with respect.” -Audre Lorde

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