



Global Trends on Dress Codes at Work

A short survey among IriS members

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a Munro group company

A quick survey among IriS network experts

With the increasing opening up of the China market, it is believed that global trends on dressing at work might impact on the dress codes in the workplace in China.

Being the China representative of the IriS (International Research InstituteS), N-Dynamic has conducted a quick survey on trends of dress codes in the workplace among IriS members by email. 12 Senior Management staff at independent market research agencies in 12 countries have responded.

IriS is the largest network of 30 independent, respected marketing research and consulting firms in the world, with one member in one country. IriS is able to “be global and think local” and membership is limited to those who pass stringent quality standards and have sufficient international research experience.

We are now sharing some preliminary results for your reference.



12 IriS member countries participated in the research



Australia



Belgium



Canada



China Hong Kong



Japan



Ireland



Mexico



Portugal



Russia



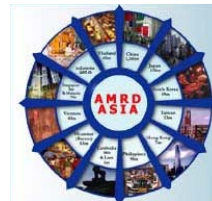
Thailand



UK



USA



Global dress codes vary by industry, position and age

Uniforms

Formal

**Business
Casual**

Leisure Casual

INDUSTRY

Nurses
Retailers
Drivers
Police officers
Factory workers

Public sector
Legal
Finance
Accountant

Across different
Industries including
advertising, design,
and architects

Uncommon in the
workplace in
countries outside
China

DESCRIPTION

Disciplined
Lack of style

Quasi-uniform
Asexual
Classic

Practical
Sensible
Asexual
Business like
Fashionable

Leisure
Feminine
Sexy
Relaxed

Older employees or in more senior positions tend to dress more formally

A historical perspective on dress codes in the UK

1980's



Power Dressing

“Power dressing” in a fairly hard, sharp, arguably ‘muscular’ way to gain respect of (male) senior management

1990's



Business Formal

More feminine style of dress; based on the idea that women can be smart and taken seriously without conforming to masculine ideals of working styles or dress. More formal from Monday to Thursday; dress down on Friday

2000's



Business Casual

More casual, every day is dress down; with only more formal clothes for important meetings

Canadian and Irish perspective



I can see potential in designers coming up with more practical clothing (no tight collars, less expensive materials and manufacturing) that still communicates that the wearer is there to do work in a serious way and not communicate that they are only interested in playing and having fun.

In a related setting, we have seen a slight increase in the number of schools in Canada that have moved to school uniforms although that was intended to avoid the competition and distractions of some students wearing very expensive and hard to get designer clothing.

Environics, Canada

I did have an exhaustive list at one stage from my wife's former employer, CitiBank, which had rules about t-shirts having collars, sports jerseys being inappropriate, shorts inappropriate, navel piercing not allowed and so forth. All of these were accompanied by illustrations (lest there be any uncertainty as to what a "belly top with naval piercing" looked like.)

Behaviour & Attitude, Ireland



Russian perspective



The role of dress code is not limiting to creating required impression among company clients. It also has got two important functions within the company:

- Means of discipline and translation of corporate values to employees
- Visual mark separating white collars at large companies from outsiders, sign of status of success

These functions were very important 8-10 years ago. Both multinationals who came to Russia and Russian companies who were growing larger needed their employees to obtain skills required in modern economy and to follow their corporate aims, and offered status demonstration as a reward.

Now, skills of working in a large modern company are not rare, economic growth created more different career opportunities so the functions I had described are less important. Add latest trends in HR management which claim the importance of informal creative atmosphere - and it is easy to understand why things have changed.

O + K, Russia



Australian view



In most corporate sectors like banking, finance, accounting, Law, IT, brokerage etc., a formal, conservative dress code is the norm. Dark suits, like black and navy with white shirts and a ties is standard. You could say the idea is to just blend in, not stand out - corporate dress code is quite conservative in Australia.

If you walked around Sydney central business district of a lunch hour most business people look the same. Women have even created a name to identify men in management positions who are likely in high paid positions. These men are often called “suits”. So you may say, “the bar was full of suits” – meaning men in those above-mentioned occupations with management titles.

In those sectors (above) women in management positions are also generally expected to wear suits, with either skirts or trouser suits being equally as common. For women, it is the norm to not “over do it”- for example, not too wear or use too many accessories or to not wear too much make-up; this is considered showing off.

A final point: Australians have strict equal opportunity / anti-discrimination laws, and as such, if an employer wants to introduce a written policy on dress codes then it needs to comply to the following:

- be applied equally to men and women;
- relate to the job and be a reasonable requirement;
- allow workers to follow their cultural or religious beliefs;
- be fair to people with disabilities.

Instinct & Reason, Australia”



The future

- All IriS members participated in the survey stated that they followed the UK trend mostly.
- Global trend towards 'casualisation' due to:
 - Employees' demand for comfort and practicality
 - Chain stores' promotion of new, cheap and more casual clothing
 - Difficulty for employers to impose strict 'formal' dress codes
 - Energy savings considerations

For example: Many companies in Japan have adopted an idea called 'Cool Biz' during summer period. Air conditioners in companies and office buildings are under control (not being too cold) and companies allow employees to 'dress-down' to feel comfortable in higher temperature.

- We do not believe there will be a return to the 'Business formal' past

Thank you

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