

제3회 기업시민 연구공모전 우수논문 모음집_ 우수

포스코 임직원의 복장 자율성 인식이 조직시민행동과 직무몰입에 미치는 영향에 대한 연구

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 요약

코로나-19 팬데믹 기간 동안 재택근무가 증가함에 따라 많은 사람들이 엄격한 복장 규정에 대한 피로를 느끼고 있으며, 이에 따라 복장 자율성에 대한 선호도가 증가하고 있다. 이러한 추세에 부응하여 많은 회사들이 특정한 복장을 강요하지 않지만, 동시에 구성원들에게 얼마나 복장 자율성이 허용되는지 명확하게 알리지 않고 있다. 그렇기 때문에 많은 사람들은 자율성이 어느 정도까지 보장되는지에 대한 명확한 개념을 가지고 있지 않다. 이 연구는 POSCO가 기업시민 차원에서 추진하는 활동 중 People 측면에서 도입한 복장 자율화 프로그램의 취지에 입각하여 직원들의 복장 자율성 인식과 그 결과에 대한 이해를 추구한다. 구체적으로, 본 연구는 조직 내 복장 자율성 (dress autonomy)에 대한 인식이 실제 조직 구성원들의 진정성 (felt authenticity), 소속감 (felt belongingness), 직무 몰입도 (work engagement), 조직 시민행동 (organizational citizenship behavior) 등에 어떠한 영향을 미치는지 살펴본다. 본 연구를 위해 POSCO 사무직 직원들을 대상으로 2차에 걸쳐 설문조사를 실시하였으며, 1차와 2차 설문을 모두 응답한 319명을 대상으로 분석을 진행하였다. 분석 결과 복장 자율성에 대한 인식은 진정성과 소속감에 정(+)의 관계를 나타냈다. 또한, 진정성과 소속감은 복장 자율성과 조직 몰입도, 그리고 복장 자율성과 조직 시민행동 사이의 정(+)의 관계를 유의하게 매개하고 있음을 나타냈다. 본 연구에서는 조직의 긍정적인 문화를 만들기 위해 실질적인 방안으로 수용할 수 있는 복장규범을 벗어나지 않는 선에서 최대한의 복장 자율성을 구성원에게 부여하고, 또한 자율복장이 조직 내에서 허용되는 것을 명확하고 확실하게 구성원에게 전달하는 것을 제안하며, 이러한 결과가 갖는 이론적 및 실용적인 함의를 논의한다.

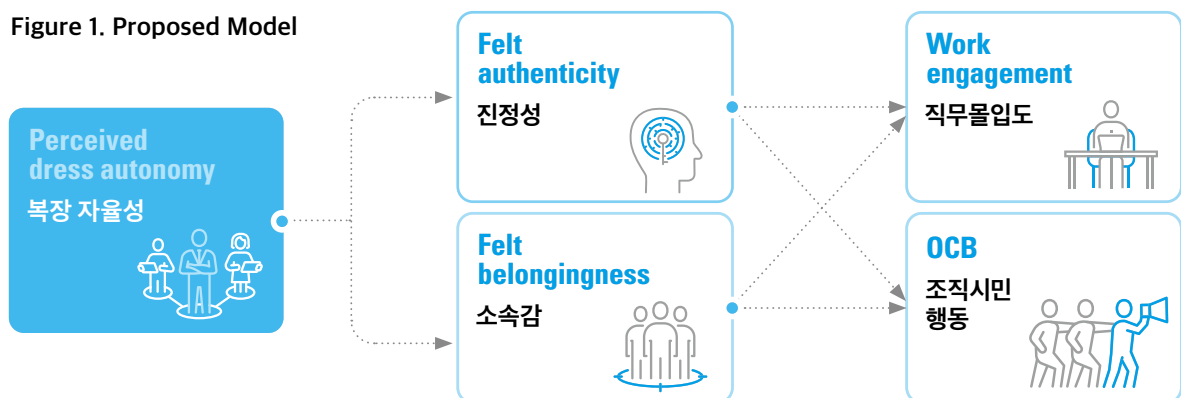
Dress policies widely vary across organizations. While some companies adhere to strict dress codes such as suits, others operate based on unspoken standards, and there are those that openly allow employees to choose their daily outfits (Peluchette & Karl, 2007). Such idiosyncratic implementation of dress codes underscores an acknowledgment of the significance of workplace attire but that opinions diverge on which dress policy best fosters organizational success. It's worth noting that while an organization's industry, be it service-oriented with uniforms or manufacturing with safety gear, influences dress codes, the extension of these policies to office employees challenges the idea that dress codes strictly reflect the nature of the

business (Biecher & Keaton, 1999).

Recent data indicates a rising trend of organizations allowing employees greater flexibility in their choice of work attire. Yet, in the presence of ambiguous dress codes and prevailing organizational norms, some employees might feel they do not actually have too much autonomy in deciding what to wear to work despite the organization's effort to implement a more relaxed dress code policy. More specifically, POSCO introduced a more relaxed dress code policy in an effort to promote the "People" dimension of their *Corporate Citizen* initiative. However, POSCO's dress policy lacks a clear definition of what employees can wear to work. As such, this paper aims to understand whether varied perceptions of dress autonomy that may exist at POSCO have a meaningful impact on employees' psychology and behavior.

We further explain the mechanism by suggesting employees' felt authenticity and belongingness as a more proximal outcome of employees' perceived dress autonomy. Clothing not only symbolizes one's social role and group status (Hollander, 1993), but also provides an avenue for individuals to express their personal values, interests, and personality traits (Kaiser, 1997). People feel authentic when they can genuinely express themselves. Moreover, in environments that allow for such expression, individuals often feel more valued, welcomed, and belonged (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Given that dress autonomy provides employees the opportunity for self-expression, we posit that perceived dress autonomy leads to wearing attire that promotes feelings of authenticity and belongingness. The positive impact of authenticity and belongingness on work outcomes is well established (Cable & Kay, 2012; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Therefore, we anticipate that these feelings will enhance employee work engagement and foster organizational citizenship behavior.

Figure 1. Proposed Model



Our study has two main purposes. Firstly, we aim to determine how POSCO's relaxed dress policy is perceived across the workforce. Significant variations in perceptions of dress autonomy might suggest that the policy is either not being effectively communicated or there are obstacles preventing employees from genuinely feeling they have the freedom to choose their attire (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). Secondly, we aim to see if these variations in perceived dress autonomy translate to tangible effects on employee performance and well-being. If our findings indicate that a stronger sense of dress autonomy positively influences employee behavior, POSCO should invest more effort in emphasizing that employees feel free to select their work outfits without fear of repercussions.

Theory and Hypothesis Development

Throughout history, clothing has evolved from a means of protection from external environments to a complex symbol of identity, wealth, and social status (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). Initially developed for practical purposes such as shielding from the cold, sun, and wind or aiding mobility, like shoes for navigating rough terrains, clothing's role transformed as societies grew more complex. Over time, the design, fabric, and style of apparel began signifying one's social status, differentiating classes, and representing diverse occupations and social identities like gender. In many historical contexts, attire served as an outward expression of one's power, wealth, and societal role. In today's organizational landscape, clothing's purpose has shifted yet again, reflecting a tension between individuality, conformity, and professional appropriateness.

In recent times, a noticeable trend has emerged where many organizations are moving towards cultivating a more independent and relaxed work culture (Medici, 2023). This isn't a change made on a whim; it's deeply rooted in the understanding that an individual's freedom to express themselves can play a pivotal role in their professional satisfaction. A crucial aspect of this expression lies in one's attire. When employees feel they have the autonomy to dress in a way that resonates with their personal identity, they're not just wearing clothes; they're making a statement about who they are (Goffman, 1949; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). This, in turn, often translates to higher levels of engagement

and motivation in the workplace. Recognizing the potential benefits of such an idea, not limited to but including potential boosts in productivity, many of these forward-thinking organizations are revising their previously stringent dress codes. They are moving towards more flexible policies, hoping to foster an environment where employees feel valued not just for their work, but for the unique individuals they are.

Variations in dress autonomy perceptions among employees

An interesting phenomenon to explore in the context of contemporary organizational culture is the heterogeneity in perceptions of dress autonomy among employees (Peluchette & Karl, 2007). Even within the confines of identical dress guidelines instituted by the organization, employees exhibit divergent interpretations of what constitutes “freedom” and “constraint” in attire. This disparity is not merely superficial but underscores the complex interplay between individual experiential backgrounds, socio-cultural influences, and the nuances of organizational policy. It suggests that the manner in which employees perceive and navigate dress autonomy is significantly influenced by a confluence of personal experiences and the intricate dynamics of the organizational environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Specifically, various factors shape how employees perceive dress autonomy. Individual backgrounds and cultural influences might lead some to view a relaxed dress code as a way to express themselves (Hofstede, 1984). However, individuals who have previously worked in environments with strict and clearly defined dress norms might approach a “relaxed” dress code with skepticism or caution (Peluchette & Karl, 2007). Factors like what peers wear, an employee’s role in the company, and their personality also play a part (Brewer & Silver, 2000). For instance, while introverted individuals might opt for more understated attire, extroverted ones might choose bolder outfits. Feedback about clothing can further reinforce or change these beliefs (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). In essence, even if a dress code is intended to be flexible, interpretations will differ from person to person. This study seeks to understand the broader effects of these perceptions on dress autonomy and their influence on the overall workplace environment.

The relationship between dress autonomy and felt authenticity

Attire has consistently served as a prominent indicator of one's identity across various epochs and cultures. More than merely a functional necessity, clothing becomes a narrative medium, intricately interwoven with socio-cultural traditions, personal beliefs, affiliations, and values. Specific articles of clothing can encapsulate broader cultural narratives, while individualized style choices provide deeper insights into an individual's ideologies and experiences. Consequently, the freedom to make clothing choices becomes a pivotal means for individuals to articulate their distinct identities, transforming clothing into an intimate canvas for self-expression.

The idea of autonomy extends beyond dress and touches directly upon an individual's freedom and control over their actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In the professional sphere, autonomy is consistently associated with heightened job satisfaction, reduced turnover intentions, and amplified engagement (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Conceptualizing dress autonomy within this framework, it can be understood as a subset of workplace autonomy, wherein employees have the liberty to make attire choices that resonate with their personal identities.

Authenticity is intrinsically linked to autonomy (Wardrobe, 2014). When an individual's external representation, such as their choice of clothing, resonates with their internal self-concept, it gives rise to an enriched sense of authenticity. Furthermore, when individuals perceive they have agency over their choices, they align their actions with their core self, leading to feelings of authenticity. Given that clothing is a primary avenue for self-expression, the autonomy in attire decisions can lead to these feelings. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that:

[Hypothesis 1] Employees' perception of dress autonomy is positively related to felt authenticity at work.

The relationship between dress autonomy and felt belongingness

The concept of belongingness is deeply rooted in human evolutionary history and is fundamental to our psychological well-being (Maslow, 1943). This intrinsic need underscores the human aspiration to inte-

grate into societal structures, establish meaningful relationships, and gain recognition within a group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Realizing this sense of belonging within organizational contexts can yield significant benefits within organizational contexts (Tett & Meyer, 1993). At the heart of this discourse on belongingness lies the construct of social identity (Tajfel et al., 1979). Individuals continuously strive to align their distinct identities with the prevailing values and ethos of the affiliations they choose (Turner et al., 1987).

In the context of social identity expression, attire assumes a critical role. Across varied cultural contexts and historical timelines, clothing acts as an emblem of identity, indicating affiliation to distinct groups or ideologies (Craik, 2009). While organizational uniforms can foster a sense of collective identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), individual clothing choices provide a medium for individuals to both align with and differentiate from group norms. This balance promotes a synthesis of individual uniqueness and group alignment (Postmes et al., 2005).

When granted the freedom of dress choice, employees often opt for attire that not only reflects their personal values but also aligns with the organizational culture (Ellemers et al., 2004). Such congruence between personal and organizational values can amplify the sense of belonging, positioning attire as a symbol of both individual expression and organizational assimilation. Moreover, when organizations extend significant dress autonomy, it is often interpreted as an affirmation of individual identity. Such organizational gestures are perceived as genuine acknowledgments of individual uniqueness, further reinforcing the sense of belonging. Given the instrumental role of attire in articulating identity, combined with the inherent human desire for belongingness and the empowering nature of autonomy, we argue that dress autonomy can significantly lead to feelings of belongingness. Thus, we hypothesize,

[Hypothesis 2] Employees' perceptions of dress autonomy are positively related to felt belongingness at work.

Mediating Role of Felt Authenticity

Authenticity at work is paramount because it fosters an environment of trust, enhances interpersonal relationships, and boosts overall morale. When individuals are genuine in their interactions, they present

themselves honestly, without pretense, allowing for clearer communication and understanding. Authentic behavior ensures that employees, managers, and stakeholders operate from a place of integrity, promoting transparency in decision-making processes and actions. Moreover, an authentic workplace culture attracts and retains talent, as employees feel valued, understood, and motivated to contribute their best when they can be their true selves. Ultimately, authenticity creates a foundation upon which collaboration, innovation, and lasting success are built.

Delving into the realm of work engagement, research has consistently underscored that employees who feel authentic at work don't just complete tasks—they embed them with passion and purpose. As an illustration, when a product manager feels authentically connected to a project, it transitions from a mere assignment to a mission, steeped in personal commitment and value alignment. Such depth of involvement from feeling authentic naturally amplifies work engagement, leading to elevated dedication and a palpable absorption in tasks (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Authenticity has a significant influence on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs). At the heart of this influence is the alignment of individual values with organizational values. When employees experience authenticity at work, they often find a deeper congruence between their personal values and those of the organization. An engineer, for instance, genuinely resonating with the company's values might be more inclined to voluntarily mentor newcomers, ensuring their smooth integration into the team (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013). Moreover, the intrinsic motivation, a byproduct of authenticity, drives employees beyond their standard responsibilities, compelling them to engage in behaviors outside their formal roles (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Such actions, rooted in an inherent desire to contribute and a genuine commitment to the organization's mission, epitomize OCBs. Additionally, authenticity fosters trust within the workplace. When employees can express their true selves and sense that the organization values this authenticity, a profound mutual trust is nurtured (Leroy, Anseel, Dimitrova, & Sels, 2013). This trust often materializes as positive, discretionary behaviors that may not be part of the official job description but significantly benefit the organization. These proactive, voluntary actions, anchored in genuine commitment and a heightened sense of trust, remain central to OCBs (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

In summary, we argue that when employees' genuine selves resonate harmoniously with their professional environments, it catalyzes heightened work engagement and fosters a climate ripe for robust OCBs.

[Hypothesis 3(a-b)] The positive relationship between (a) dress autonomy and engagement and (b) clothing autonomy and organizational citizenship behavior is mediated by felt authenticity.

Mediating Role of Felt Belongingness

Central to human motivation and behavior is the deep-seated desire to belong. This foundational need, rooted in our evolutionary history, plays a crucial role in contemporary workplaces (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Enhanced by personal choices such as dress autonomy, we argue that this sense of belonging influences two primary organizational outcomes: work engagement and OCB.

Work engagement can be understood as the emotional resonance employees experience when they feel integrated into their workplace (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As Baumeister and Leary (1995) posited, humans have an inherent need to belong, and when this need is fulfilled, it culminates in increased motivation and commitment to tasks. Additionally, belongingness creates an environment of trust, encouraging individuals to voice opinions, innovate, and take calculated risks (Edmondson, 1999). Employees, anchored in their sense of belonging, naturally align their personal objectives with the broader goals of the organization, magnifying their engagement in the process. The software developer's sense of belonging, for instance, transforms coding challenges from mere tasks into opportunities for meaningful contribution, reinforcing her connection to shared team goals. Ultimately, satisfying the deep-seated human need to belong in professional contexts can dramatically elevate work engagement, productivity, and satisfaction.

OCBs encapsulate the discretionary actions that employees undertake beyond their formal duties, reflecting their commitment to the organization's overarching health and success. Central to these voluntary behaviors is the underlying sentiment of belonging. When employees perceive themselves as intrinsic components of their workplace, they cultivate a deep-seated affiliation and commitment, often propelling them to engage in actions benefiting the organization as a whole (Tyler & Blader, 2003). This sense of belonging aligns individual and organizational purposes. As a result, employees begin to internalize organizational successes and challenges, prompting proactive engagement in tasks outside their explicit job descriptions (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Moreover, belonging fosters cooperation; individuals

who feel integrated are more inclined to prioritize collective success, leading to behaviors that underpin the well-being of their colleagues and the broader organizational environment (De Cremer & Leonardelli, 2003). The reciprocal nature of this relationship further amplifies OCBs. When organizations create inclusive environments, employees, in a cycle of gratitude, often seek ways to ‘give back,’ fortifying the organizational community through various beneficial actions (Gouldner, 1960). Such connected employees, feeling part of their organizational tapestry, not only assist newcomers but champion company-aligned initiatives, volunteer for team endeavors, and can even represent the company in community outreach, driven by a desire to substantively contribute to an entity they resonate with (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

In conclusion, we argue that the sense of belonging fostered by employees’ perceptions of dress autonomy can have a positive impact on work engagement and OCBs.

[Hypothesis 4(a-b)] The positive relationship between (a) clothing autonomy and engagement and (b) clothing autonomy and organizational citizenship behaviors is mediated by felt belongingness.

METHOD

We conducted a study involving office workers at POSCO over two time periods. The POSCO research team liaisons administered two surveys, with a one-week gap between them.

In the first survey (Time 1), employees answered questions related to their perceptions of clothing autonomy and provided demographic information. In the second survey (Time 2), employees shared their perceptions of felt belongingness, felt authenticity, work engagement, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Initially, 531 employees participated in the Time 1 survey, while 454 employees participated in the Time 2 survey. In the end, we were able to analyze 319 employee responses from individuals who completed both the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys. On average, the sample was 37.40 years old with 11.13 years of organizational tenure and was 70% male. To encourage participation, we randomly selected 30 employees for each survey and compensated them with a 5,000 Korean won Starbucks gift card.

Measures

We assessed all items on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Clothing Autonomy. For assessing clothing autonomy, we utilized five items that were adapted from Morgeson and Humphrey's (2006) job autonomy dimension within the job characteristics scale. An example statement is, "I have the ability to decide what I wear to work."

Felt Belongingness. To gauge the sense of belonging, we employed four items adapted from the acceptance and inclusion dimension of the general belongingness scale developed by Malone and colleagues (2012). An example statement is, "I feel included by my colleagues at work."

Felt Authenticity. To measure authenticity at the workplace, we used four items from Feeson et al. (2010) and Heppner et al. (2008). An example statement is, "I am able to express my true self while at work."

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors. To assess organizational citizenship behaviors, we employed three items from Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch (1994). An example statement is, "I have assisted my colleagues with their heavy workloads."

Control variables. In our study, we included control variables to account for the potential influence of age and gender on our findings. These factors were considered relevant due to established trends in employee attire. Specifically, research studies have shown that older employees tend to adopt a more formal dress code compared to their younger counterparts (Twigg, 2007). Therefore, it was crucial to include age as a control variable in our analysis to accurately capture the nuances of participants' clothing choices. Furthermore, we controlled for gender in our study, as both academic research and popular media reports have indicated that gender can significantly impact individuals' clothing preferences and their susceptibility to the effects of clothing on self-perception and performance (Crane, 2012). This allowed us to address potential gender-related variations in our results more comprehensively.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for this Study. To examine the factor structure and discriminant validity among the variables, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) in Mplus. The results of CFAs revealed that the five-factor model (clothing autonomy, felt belongingness, felt authenticity, work engagement, and OCB) provided an adequate fit to the measurement model ($\chi^2(142) = 380.31$, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .04). The model fit of all alternative models were significantly worse compared to the hypothesized model. For example, the model fit was significantly reduced when belongingness and authenticity were loaded onto one factor ($\chi^2(146) = 870.19$, CFI = .87, TLI = .85, RMSEA = .13, SRMR = .06).

Table 1. Scale Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Reliabilities

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Dress autonomy	2.81	1.03	(.96)					
2. Felt authenticity	3.38	.95	.35**	(.93)				
3. Felt belongingness	3.89	.75	.28**	.67**	(.92)			
4. OCB	3.68	.74	.24**	.58**	.57**	(.79)		
5. Engagement	3.79	.80	.35**	.70**	.62**	.64**	(.88)	
6. Age	37.40	8.55	.22**	.50**	.31**	.27**	.40**	-
7. Gender	1.30	.46	-.02	-.19**	-.21**	-.16**	-.15**	-.22**

Note. *N* = 319. Values on the diagonal represent internal consistency reliability estimates. OCB = organizational citizenship behavior. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01.

We used Mplus to test our hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 suggested that employees who feel they have more freedom in choosing their clothing are more likely to experience a sense of authenticity. To examine this, we conducted a regression analysis, with felt authenticity as the dependent variable and dress autonomy as the independent variable. As shown in Table 1, the results supported Hypothesis 1, showing a significant positive relationship between dress autonomy and felt authenticity ($b = .23$, $se = .05$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 2 proposed that dress autonomy positively influences the feeling of belongingness. Our results confirmed this hypothesis, as there was a significant positive relationship between dress autonomy and felt belongingness ($b = .17$, $se = .04$, $p < .01$).

Table 2. Regression Analysis

Predictor	Felt authenticity		Felt belonging		OCB		Engagement	
	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>
Dress autonomy	.23**	.05	.17**	.04	.02	.04	.08*	.03
Felt authenticity					.29**	.05	.29**	.05
Felt belongingness					.31**	.07	.29**	.06
Age	.05	.01	.02	.01	.00	.01	.01	.00
Gender	-.20*	.10	-.25**	.09	-.05	.07	.01	.07

Note. *N* = 319. OCB = organizational citizenship behavior. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b suggested that dress autonomy has a positive effect on work engagement (H3a) and OCB (H3b) through its impact on felt authenticity. To test these hypotheses, we used bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to estimate the indirect effects. Supporting Hypotheses 3a and 3b, our findings showed that the indirect effect of dress autonomy on work engagement through felt authenticity (H3a: *b* = .09, *se* = .02, 95% *CI* = .05, .14) and the indirect effect of dress autonomy on OCB through felt authenticity (H3b: *b* = .07, *SE* = .02, 95% *CI* = .04, .11) were both positive and significant (see Table 3).

Finally, in line with Hypotheses 4a and 4b, which suggested that dress autonomy would positively influence work engagement (H4a) and OCB (H4b) through its impact on felt belongingness, our results indicated that the indirect effect of dress autonomy on work engagement through felt belongingness (H4a: *b* = .05, *se* = .02, 95% *CI* = .03, .08) and the indirect effect of dress autonomy on OCB through felt belongingness (H4b: *b* = .05, *se* = .02, 95% *CI* = .02, .09) were also positive and significant (see Table 3).

Table 3. Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis	Predicted path	Indirect effect		95% CI UL	95% CI LL
		<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>		
H3a	Dress autonomy → Felt authenticity → Engagement	.09	.02	.05	.14
H3b	Dress autonomy → Felt authenticity → OCB	.07	.02	.04	.11
H4a	Dress autonomy → Felt belongingness → Engagement	.05	.02	.03	.08
H4b	Dress autonomy → Felt belongingness → OCB	.05	.02	.03	.09

Note. *N* = 319. OCB = organizational citizenship behavior. CI = confidence interval. UL = upper level. LL = lower level.

DISCUSSION

Our research aimed to enhance our comprehension of how employees' perceptions of having the freedom to choose their attire affect them in a significant way. We focused on investigating the influence of feeling authentic and a sense of belonging and aimed to uncover the process through which dress autonomy impacts employee engagement and OCB. Our study findings revealed that individuals who experienced higher levels of dress autonomy also reported feeling more authentic and experiencing a stronger sense of belonging, which ultimately resulted in increased work engagement and OCBs at work by employees.

Theoretical implications

The findings from this study offer several pivotal theoretical implications for the broader understanding of autonomy within the organizational context. Firstly, our research amplifies the existing knowledge on autonomy by emphasizing the importance of “dress autonomy” in the workplace (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). While autonomy has predominantly been studied in terms of job-related tasks (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), our results underscore that autonomy in seemingly trivial domains, such as dress code, can substantially influence organizational behaviors (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Secondly, the established relationship between clothing autonomy and felt authenticity sheds light on the interplay between personal freedom and the sense of being genuine at work (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). It indicates that when employees are given the leeway to make personal choices, like their attire, it facilitates them in embodying their authentic selves at work, leading to enhanced work experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Another crucial takeaway from our findings is the connection between autonomy and the sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Our data suggests that personal freedoms, such as those in choosing what to wear, don't just cater to an individual's independence but also foster feelings of inclusion and deeper social ties within the workplace (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002).

Moreover, the indirect effects of clothing autonomy on work outcomes, specifically on work engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors via felt authenticity and belongingness, are noteworthy (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). This finding signifies that the benefits of autonomy might not

manifest directly but can influence job outcomes through other significant psychological states (Deci & Ryan, 2000), offering a layered understanding of autonomy's influence on employee behavior.

Lastly, our research beckons a reevaluation of established organizational norms, especially around dress codes. Given that dress codes have historically been a fixed component of many organizational cultures, the observed significance of clothing autonomy suggests a need for organizations and researchers to reexamine how such aspects, often deemed mundane, can deeply impact organizational behavior (Kim, Holtz, & Vogel, in press). This study, therefore, provides a richer, more nuanced lens through which the multifaceted effects of autonomy in the workplace can be understood, emphasizing the significance of areas that were previously overlooked (Grant, 2007).

Practical Implications

Our study's findings underscore several actionable insights that organizations can harness to foster a more vibrant and engaged workplace environment. First and foremost, it is imperative for organizations to reevaluate their dress codes. By instituting flexible dress policies, not only is a foundation set for an environment where employees experience authenticity and belonging, but the professional standards integral to the company's brand and culture can still be maintained. This adjustment aligns with our findings between clothing autonomy and an enhanced sense of authenticity. When employees feel they can express their authentic selves, they are likely to exhibit elevated engagement levels, which in turn can catalyze improved productivity and retention.

Furthermore, the relationship between clothing autonomy and heightened organizational citizenship behaviors provides an avenue for organizations to foster altruistic and cohesive behaviors. Such a boost in team collaboration and unity can be invaluable. Additionally, in recognizing the potential of clothing autonomy, organizations might consider launching training sessions or workshops to educate managers about the myriad benefits of affording employees greater personal freedoms. These trainings can delve into realms beyond just dress codes, highlighting broader autonomy-related benefits.

Of paramount importance is effective communication. If organizations are shifting towards greater clothing autonomy or if they already have such policies in place, clear communication is vital. Employees should not only be made aware of these freedoms but also be reassured that past norms and restrictive

policies no longer bind them. This affirmation will ensure they genuinely feel the liberty to wear what they feel best represents them, without the overhang of erstwhile restrictions.

In essence, while clothing autonomy might appear as a peripheral element juxtaposed against core job functions, its influence on workplace dynamics is undeniable. Organizations aiming to create an engaged, authentic, and synergistic workforce would do well to heed these insights and reflect upon their practical translation in today's corporate milieu.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the intersection of clothing autonomy with workplace dynamics is a testament to the nuanced factors influencing organizational behavior. While seemingly subtle, the freedom to choose one's attire plays a pivotal role in shaping feelings of authenticity, belongingness, and engagement among employees. As the world of work continues to evolve, reimagining traditional norms, such as dress codes, becomes crucial. By championing greater autonomy in such areas, organizations can pave the way for a more inclusive, authentic, and engaged workforce, driving both individual well-being and collective productivity. The challenge for modern organizations lies not just in recognizing these subtleties but in translating this understanding into actionable policies that resonate with the aspirations of the contemporary workforce. 🔄

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