

# The Effect of Employee Uniforms on Employee Satisfaction

by Kathy Nelson  
and John Bowen

**E**mployee uniforms generally constitute an important component of a hospitality establishment's brand identity. Not only do uniforms create a specific impression of a property,<sup>1</sup> but they are an integral part of the atmosphere created by a hotel or restaurant. The ornate uniforms of bell persons at a luxury hotel, for example, help to confirm guests' expectations for that type of property. The casual uniforms of Southwest Airlines, on the other hand, add to that airline's relaxed and fun image. In a casual, single-unit restaurant, employees' uniforms can add to the guest's perception of eating at a professional operation. In a more practical vein, uniforms allow guests to identify employees easily. Thus, uniforms help to facilitate guests' locating an employee when they have a question or a complaint. They also help to make service more tangible by giving the guest an idea of what type of service to expect (e.g., limited service or upscale, formal or relaxed).

<sup>1</sup>M.R. Solomon, "Dress for Effect," *Psychology Today*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1986), pp. 20-28.

Uniforms also affect the employees' attitudes, as we discuss in this article. The following anecdotes demonstrate this point. A waitress complained to us that the managers never consulted the customer-contact employees when they selected uniforms. She described how her uniform's loose-fitting sleeves draped down into the food when she served food and cleared plates. A few hours after starting a shift, consequently, her uniform was stained and dirty, which made her self-conscious. This self-consciousness, in turn, made it more difficult for her to interact with guests in a friendly manner. A front-desk clerk in a hotel with a tropical theme stated to us that his bright purple jacket made him feel silly. Worse, guests often joked about the uni-

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form. While the guests' jokes were innocent enough, they humiliated the sensitive employee. In contrast, uniforms can also create favorable attitudes. Dealers in casinos told us that they feel professional when they put on a tuxedo, because it puts them in the mood for their role as a dealer. From stories such as these we learn that uniforms affect not only employees' attitudes, but also their ability to serve the guest.

### Focusing on Uniforms

This study analyzes the effect of mandatory uniforms on hospitality employees' attitude toward their jobs. In talking with employees of theme casino-resorts, the authors found decisions regarding employees' uniforms are usually made by the management team, with little or no input from the employees who will wear them. Our discussions found that managers are mostly concerned about the atmosphere the uniforms will help create, and managers rarely discussed the uniform's functionality or appearance with employees. The result of a poor selection (that is, a uniform that doesn't function well or looks bad) is that the uniform can actually have a negative effect on employee attitudes and, perhaps, lead to customer dissatisfaction.

The link between customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction has been well established. Interestingly, one group of casino customers recently described the casino's atmosphere as the ambience created by their interaction with employees. Thus, we consider employees' attitudes to be part of a hospitality establishment's atmosphere. It follows that uniforms that boost employees' morale should also have a positive effect on customer satisfaction through the uniforms' contribution to a positive atmosphere. Ironically, while improving a property's physical appearance through the use of uniforms, man-

agers often destroy what seems to be an important atmospheric attribute for customers—namely, the friendly and relaxed ambience created by positive interactions with employees. Because our discussions with employees have led us to believe that uniforms affect employee attitudes, we designed a study to test this proposition. First, we review the literature connected with uniforms.

### Uniform Design

Although guests may not consciously analyze a uniform's design, they are no doubt aware of an employee's uniform. One consultant claims that uniforms are the most visible aspect of a hotel.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a Seventh Avenue designer-turned-uniform-consultant maintains that uniforms are not just dressing the staff, but that they are instead setting the look of the entire resort.<sup>3</sup> Most uniform designs comprise the attributes of appearance, function, character, and comfort. Those attributes can be further parsed into the following design variables: color, construction, fit, identification, integrity, look, materials, performance, and style. We discuss those variables in the following section.

### Appearance

Appearance is a powerful design component that helps create an impression. Attractive people are considered to be more sociable<sup>4</sup> and more accomplished at tasks.<sup>5</sup> Clothing has a profound effect on degree of attractiveness. Clothing is laden

with symbolism that provides information about social and occupational standing, sex-role identification, political orientation, ethnicity, and aesthetic priorities.<sup>6</sup> One of clothing's most dominant messages emanates from color.

**Color.** Research in nonverbal communication suggests that colors generate influential associations.<sup>7</sup> Colors are sometimes used as a stratification technique.<sup>8</sup> For example, as noted here, different job levels are segmented while attempting to convey an overall harmony: "Within most city office buildings... browns, greens, and blues designate maintenance workers, the bottom rung; a step up is gray, which conveys technical skill and more substantial pay stubs."<sup>9</sup> Colors putatively convey personality traits and psychological clues about the wearer to the perceiver. However, the wearer's status is often denoted by materials used in clothing design.

**Materials.** The difference between good and bad fabric is the feel. Designers indicate that consumers think they want natural-fiber uniforms until they have to care for them. Marcia Hischke, executive designer of Uniforms to You, told us that "uniform consumers want the hand of cotton that performs like polyester." Rafaeli echoes the "dress for success" contention that synthetic materials are colder, convey lower class,<sup>10</sup> and have an effect on customers' actions and expectations.

<sup>6</sup> Solomon, pp. 20–28.

<sup>7</sup> A. Rafaeli, "Dress and Behavior of Customer-contact Employees: A Framework for Analysis," *Advances in Services Marketing and Management*, Vol. 2 (1993), pp. 175–211.

<sup>8</sup> L. Jamieson, "Outfitting Staff with Style," *Canadian Hotel and Restaurant*, Vol. 11 (1988), pp. 26–28.

<sup>9</sup> L.R. Kennon and J.S. Reynolds, "Food-service Industry Uniforms: The Influence on Perceptions of Social Class," *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1994), p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Rafaeli, pp. 175–211. Also see: P. Fussell, *Class* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983); and John Molloy, *Dress for Success* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> S.C. Ludicke, "'90s Uniforms Project Image to Guests," *Lodging*, Vol. 4 (1990), pp. 77–78.

<sup>3</sup> D.M. Pogoda, "The New Pan Am Gets a New Look," *Women's Wear Daily*, Vol. 174, No. 55 (1997), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> S.J. Lennon and F.G. Miller, "Salience of Physical Appearance in Impression Formation," *Home Economics Research Journal*, Vol. 13 (1984), pp. 95–104.

<sup>5</sup> M. Lapitsky and C.M. Smith, "Impact of Clothing on Impressions of Personal Characteristics and Writing Ability," *Home Economics Research Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1981), pp. 327–355.

**Putting on the uniform  
and stepping into a role  
can assist the employee in  
representing the organization  
and serving the customer.**

**Fit.** Uniforms constructed even from the finest and most expensive fabrics will lose their positive effect if they are not fitted properly. A disheveled employee in an ill-fitting uniform reflects negatively on the organization. It can communicate to the guest that the operation is careless and inefficient.

**Conspicuousness.** Conspicuousness of dress refers to the extent to which dress of organizational members stands out from the dress of nonmembers. Rafaeli and Pratt categorized conspicuousness of dress into high, low, and moderate levels.<sup>11</sup> Highly conspicuous dress clearly distinguishes employees of an organization, as occurs in most hotels. Whereas highly conspicuous

dress constitutes a marketing or brand statement, a moderately conspicuous uniform sets the employee apart without making a definite positioning statement. Uniforms donned by medical workers, for example, typically have a moderate level of conspicuousness. Finally, a uniform with a low level of conspicuousness generally does not distinguish employees from non-employees, as might occur in a typical business setting.

**Function**

Simply put, uniforms must be functional to be effective. Moreover, employees are the best people to offer suggestions about functional design. Given the opportunity, employees will alert designers as to whether jacket pockets are large enough for guest-check pads; whether shirting fabrics are scratchy; whether the cut of the slacks restricts movement; and a host of other practical points that might easily be overlooked.<sup>12</sup> As part of the uniform, footwear comprises its own set of functional challenges, in particular to ensure that shoes are comfortable for the entire time an employee is standing during a shift.

**Materials.** Not only are materials a component of appearance, but they are also a component of function. Functionality is enhanced by fabrics that are both durable and easy to clean. Natural fibers are generally the most comfortable, but cotton, for instance, is not serviceable for long periods because it wears out and takes on stains. Coarse polyester weaves of past decades wore like iron, but they also felt like iron and looked progressively shabby as they pilled and suffered pulls and runs. Polyester remains a fabric of choice, but Hirschke, of Uniforms to You, re-

ports the use of a fine-spun polyester yarn (similar to a microfiber) that "feels like cotton or wool, but looks better and lasts longer—with little upkeep."<sup>13</sup> Footwear should have textured (non-skid) soles and be impervious to moisture, chemicals, and oils.<sup>14</sup>

**Performance and practicality.** Mandatory uniforms and dress-code requirements that fail to consider the performance requirements of each employee position leave indelible impressions about the organization on the wearer. Like the waitress we mentioned at the outset, a cocktail waitress told us that she had to wear a blouse with sleeves that draped. The blouse looked great, but the draping sleeves would knock over drinks when things got busy and she started moving fast.

**Symbol.** According to Rosencranz, clothing acts as a guide to inform the stranger of the status of an unknown person.<sup>15</sup> With that concept in mind, hospitality organizations should supply employees with uniforms that readily identify the employees' position. As an example of the power of symbol, an urban Miami hotel credits a significant decrease in criminal acts against property and guests to a change in security officers' uniforms. The security employees changed from relatively inconspicuous clothes—dark blue blazers, gray pants, and white button-down shirts—to a conspicuous, high-profile paramilitary-style uniform. The new uniforms not only enhanced guests' perception of security, but also deterred criminal behavior. One officer commented that he liked looking more like a law-enforcement official

<sup>13</sup> D. Biagini, "Uniform Diversity," *Hotel and Resort Industry*, Vol. 16, No. 10 (1993), p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> R. Petit, "Nice Shoes, but Do They Have Anti-lock Brakes?," *Hospitality*, Vol. 5 (1993), p. 144.

<sup>15</sup> M.L. Rosencranz, "Clothing Symbolism," *Journal of Home Economics*, Vol. 54 (1962), pp. 13–22.

<sup>11</sup> A. Rafaeli and M.G. Pratt, "Tailored Meanings: On the Meaning and Impact of Organizational Dress," *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1993), pp. 32–55.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Durocher, "Uniforms: Styles Have Changed but the Purpose Is the Same," *Restaurant Business*, Vol. 7 (1990), pp. 94–96.

rather than being taken for someone from the reception desk.<sup>16</sup>

### Character

Character refers to the distinctive features or attributes conferred upon the wearer merely by donning the uniform. For example, a judge's robes confer distinction on the wearer. As we explain below, a uniform's character is strengthened by style and integrity, which can engender feelings of professionalism and self confidence for the person wearing the uniform.

**Style.** Style can range from formal to informal. Rafaeli suggests that formal style is tailored, precise, and clean, while an informal style is typically casual and loose.<sup>17</sup> A uniform's style can communicate concepts of status and power.<sup>18</sup>

**Integrity.** A uniform's integrity constitutes a vessel that delivers messages to the guest about the organization's values. A uniform's integrity enables the wearer to play a role or "to behave in an expected fashion."<sup>19</sup> Thus, a uniform's integrity helps to increase the wearer's self-confidence by preparing him or her to act in a manner expected by the customer. The classic housekeeper's outfit is an example of a uniform with integrity.

**Comfort.** Uniforms should be comfortable. Uncomfortable uniforms are a nagging irritant to employees. The frustration that comes from wearing uniforms that hinder movement—whether as a result of poor design or poor fabric choice for the function of the uniform—

can lead to job-attitude problems. Joseph maintains that "uncomfortable (mandatory) uniforms that severely constrain body movements are a constant reminder to the wearers of their lack of power."<sup>20</sup>

**Materials.** In addition to being constructed of a fabric appropriate for their application, uniforms must be durable. Some designers are recommending that hospitality uniforms should use a blend of 55-percent polyester and 45-percent wool, for a year-round tropical fabric. Regardless of the fabric content, designers suggest that managers look for fabrics that will wear for two years or 100 washings.<sup>21</sup>

**Construction.** Proper construction can contribute greatly to the uniform wearer's comfort. Unfinished seams (either improperly bound or unlined) can be irritating. Boning materials (used to enhance the figure of female employees) improperly applied during the construction phase can poke the skin.

### Uniforms and Attitudes

While a useful, comfortable uniform can boost employees' attitudes, the uniform can also help communicate attitudes to guests. That is, the uniform wearer's attitude must be considered in the context of how people perceive that attitude. Numerous researchers have demonstrated that a person's clothing influences others' perception of stereotypes of traits such as attitudes,

personality characteristics, social status, and social roles.<sup>22</sup>

### Employee Attitudes

The theoretical base for the use of uniforms is the concept of external identification of status and accountability through observable symbols.<sup>23</sup> This external-identification concept plays out in the hospitality industry through the necessary differentiation of employees from guests. Ideally, the nonverbal cue provided by the uniform enhances the organization's ability to serve the guest. Rafaeli and Pratt propose that dress can direct employees' behavior to be more consistent with the goals and standards of behavior established by the organization.<sup>24</sup>

Part of the concept of uniforms' directing employees' behavior comes from the idea that putting on a uniform also means stepping into a role, as discussed by Markus and Kunda and Markus and Wurf.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, regarding the notion of self-concept, Rafaeli pointed out that "dress acts as a reminder that helps engage particular cognitive schemas of behavior."<sup>26</sup> Putting on the costume and stepping into a role can assist the employee in representing the organization and serving the customer.

However, such role playing taken to an extreme can cause an individual to lose his or her identity, in a process called "deindividuation." This occurs when individuals shed

<sup>20</sup> N. Joseph, *Uniforms and Nonuniforms: Communication through Clothing* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> Jamieson, pp. 26–28.

<sup>22</sup> For example, see: P.N. Hamid, "Style of Dress as a Perceptual Cue in Impression Formation," *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, Vol. 26 (1968), pp. 904–906; K. Gibbons, "Communication Aspects of Women's Clothes and Their Relation to Fashionability," *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 8 (1969), pp. 301–312; H.I. Douthy, "Influences of Clothing on Perception of Persons," *Journal of Home Economics*, Vol. 55 (1963), pp. 197–202; Rosencranz, p. 18; and T.E. Lasswell and P.F. Parshall, "The Perception of the Social Class from Photographs," *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. 46 (1961), pp. 407–414.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Rafaeli and Pratt, pp. 32–35.

<sup>25</sup> H. Markus and Z. Kunda, "Stability and Malleability of the Self-concept," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 51 (1986), pp. 858–866; H. Markus and E. Wurf, "The Dynamic Self-concept: A Social Psychological Perspective," *American Review of Psychology*, Vol. 38 (1987), pp. 299–337.

<sup>26</sup> Rafaeli, p. 191.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Marshall, "Hotel Security Should Wear Appropriate Uniforms," *Hotel & Motel Management*, Vol. 213, No. 10 (1998), p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Rafaeli, pp. 175–211.

<sup>18</sup> S.M. Forsythe, "Effect of Applicant's Clothing on Interviewer's Decision to Hire," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 20 (1990), pp. 1579–1595.

<sup>19</sup> G.E. Goll, "Marketing Your Values: A Method for Conducting a Value Inventory Analysis," *Journal of Restaurant and Foodservice Marketing*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1994), p. 15.

## Questionnaire

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

1. The kind of uniform I wear has a very favorable influence on my overall attitude toward my job.
2. Considering everything, most days I am very satisfied with my job at the present time.
3. I am always able to maintain a positive attitude when interacting with customers.
4. Most days I am enthusiastic about my job.
5. I consider my job pleasant.
6. My job is usually interesting enough to keep me from getting bored.
7. I get the positive feedback I deserve and expect.
8. Communication between me and my boss is good.
9. Overall, my working conditions are healthy.
10. I feel good about my future with this organization.
11. I can take pride in my appearance when at work.
12. The kind of uniform I wear affects my overall attitude toward my job.
13. The uniform I wear accurately represents the theme of the property.
14. The style of uniform I wear accurately represents my position.
15. The uniform I wear enables me to better perform my job.
16. The uniform I wear helps create a role for me to play while performing my job.
17. The uniform I wear (excluding footwear) is comfortable.
18. The style of uniform I wear elicits rude behavior from customers.
19. The color of the uniform I wear is one I would choose myself for this uniform.
20. The style of uniform I wear elicits negative behavior from customers.
21. The uniform I wear increases my level of self-confidence while performing my job.
22. The style of uniform I wear enhances my credibility with customers.
23. The style of uniform I wear enhances my professionalism with customers.
24. The uniform I wear is tailored to fit my body.
25. The uniform I wear is easy to clean.
26. The uniform I wear is made of natural materials such as wool and cotton.
27. The uniform I wear makes me perspire.
28. The uniform I wear breathes easily.
29. The uniform I wear provides me with year-round comfort.
30. The uniform I wear interferes with my ability to perform my job.
31. I can take pride in the appearance of my uniform.
32. The specifications for footwear allow me to wear a comfortable footwear design.
33. I understand the original design concept as it relates to my uniform.
34. Before the next uniform design change, management will discuss the changes with the employees.

their individual goals, preferences, and standards of behavior to adopt a group's goals and standards.<sup>27</sup> Depriving individuals of the right to determine their own appearance has been found as a major contributor to the process of deindividuation.

### Perceiver-wearer relationship.

Much of the psychology of uniforms is bound up in the attitudes

the uniform engenders between the wearer and the perceiver (or a hotel employee and a guest). The perceiver is vital for the wearer's self-image, which is based largely on the perceiver's reaction.<sup>28</sup> By giving nonverbal clues to observers, uniforms are often designed to stimulate feelings in the wearer, as in the case of military regalia.

### Degree of Guest Interaction

We also wondered whether the extent of interaction between an employee and guests had any influ-

<sup>28</sup> Joseph, p. 10.

ence on attitudes toward uniforms. Pollster George Gallup, Jr., states: "A variety of factors may affect a consumer's perception of service quality, including time spent waiting, treatment by staff, or, sometimes, just the look of the place."<sup>29</sup> Uniforms not only contribute greatly to the look of the place, but also have the ability to affect the service encounter with the guest. Richard Normann developed the term "moments of truth," which Jan Carlzon later popularized to mean the moment when employee and customer have contact. Normann states that when this occurs what happens is no longer directly influenced by the company. It is the skill, motivation, and tools employed by the firm's representative.<sup>30</sup> One of the ways a company can influence such moments of truth is by providing a well-designed uniform.

The five employee positions selected for the study comprised customer-contact employees whose positions involve a range of guest interaction. Showroom dancers and bell station employees, for instance, have the lowest degree of guest interaction; front-desk employees have a moderate degree of interaction; and food servers and cocktail servers demonstrate the highest degree of guest interaction.

Showroom dancers usually have no direct verbal contact with guests, while bell-station employees do not typically spend a great deal of time interacting with guests. For example, in Las Vegas a bell person will typically collect the guest's luggage from a car or taxi and deliver the luggage to the guest room. Unlike the practice in many hotels, the bell person does not usually go to the room

<sup>27</sup> See: S. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); and P.G. Zimbardo, "The Human Choice: Individuation, Reason and Order versus Deindividuation, Impulse and Chaos," in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, ed. W.J. Arnold and D. Levine (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1969), pp. 327-347.

<sup>29</sup> S. B. Wehrenberg, "Front-line Interpersonal Skills a Must in Today's Service Economy," *Personnel Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (1987), pp. 115-118.

<sup>30</sup> R. Normann, *Service Management: Strategy and Leadership in Service Businesses* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1984), p. 33.

with the guest. We felt cocktail waitresses and food servers have a high degree of interaction with the guest since they usually have numerous contacts with the same guests.

### Connecting Uniforms, Attitudes, Interaction, and Performance

One key to improving service quality in the hospitality industry lies in the management's ability to improve the attitude and performance of the staff members.<sup>31</sup> Researchers have found that attitudes regarding workload and stress, training and development, and job and company satisfaction all bear on customer satisfaction.<sup>32</sup> It is reasonable to believe, based on research results pertaining to effects of clothing on the wearer, a relationship exists between uniforms and employees' job attitude. The purpose of the survey discussed here was to test this relationship. Additionally, it is reasonable to believe the strength of that effect may be moderated by the degree of contact an employee has with a guest. We also explored the moderating effect of employee position on the relationship between uniforms and employees' job attitudes.

**Survey design.** The objective of this study was to develop an understanding of the relationship between four independent variables of uniform design (appearance, function, character, and comfort) and the dependent variable of employee attitude toward the job. It also sought to examine possible effects of individual design attributes (i.e., color, conspicuousness, fit, integrity, materials, performance, style, and

symbol) on employee attitude toward the job.

The study respondents were employees in Las Vegas theme casino-resorts assigned to positions of front desk, bell station, cocktail server, and food server, plus showroom dancers. We developed a 34-item questionnaire that used multiple items for each construct. Respondents answered each question on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). We refined the survey's design by collecting information from focus groups with customer-contact employees and qualitative interviews with casino-resort employees to elicit their ideas about the topic.

We also interviewed uniform manufacturers and academic researchers. We contacted six uniform manufacturers that specialize in the design of hospitality uniforms, which provided suggestions and comments relating to the survey instrument.<sup>33</sup> Researchers on the effects of clothing on behavior also reviewed the questionnaire.

### Measuring Variables

This section describes how we measured the independent and dependent variables. The survey instrument is shown in the box on the facing page.

**Appearance.** We assessed respondents' ratings of uniforms' appearance through questions on color, materials, fit, and conspicuousness. The question relating to color measured an employee's attitude about the color of his or her required uniform. Another question, relating to materials, asked respondents to consider the quality of fabrics used in the uniform's construction. One item measured fit, by asking about employees' attitudes

regarding the uniform's tailoring. The two questions addressing conspicuousness in relation to appearance asked how the uniform's appearance contributed to the employee's taking pride, first, in his or her own appearance and, second, in the appearance of the uniform itself.

**Function.** We measured uniforms' functionality through the questions about materials, performance, and symbolism. Materials related to maintenance were measured through one item that addressed the degree to which the uniform is easy to clean. Two performance-related items measured the uniform's ability to enable or interfere with job performance. Symbol was measured through three items; two measured how well the uniform represents the property theme and the employee's position. One item measured the employee's understanding of the original design concept.

**Character.** The survey measured the uniform's character through items on style, integrity, materials, and construction. Four items applied to style: two of them on the perceived effects of style on customer behavior and two on the uniform's effect on the employee's self-concept. The two items relating to integrity measured the uniform's ability to establish the wearer's credibility.

**Comfort.** The constructs for comfort comprised materials and construction. Three items relating to materials measured the fabric's contribution to body-temperature control, breatheability, and the uniform's flexibility in offering year-round comfort. The survey used two items to assess construction as it related to comfort—one on the comfort given by the uniform's design (excluding footwear) and one specifically addressing the footwear's comfort.

**Job attitude.** The job-attitude dependent variable was measured through 12 items. Three items mea-

<sup>31</sup> C. Barbee and V. Bott, "Customer Treatment as a Mirror of Employee Treatment," *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, Vol. 2 (1991), pp. 27-31.

<sup>32</sup> C.S. Smith, L.M. Kendall, and C.L. Hulin, "The Measurement of Satisfaction in Work and Retirement: A Strategy for the Study of Attitudes," (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Chosen from the National Association of Uniform Manufacturers & Distributors 1996 *Membership Directory & Resource Guide*.

## Exhibit 1 Principal-components analysis (varimax rotation)

Factor names Components that load on the factors	Factors				
	F <sub>1</sub>	F <sub>2</sub>	F <sub>3</sub>	F <sub>4</sub>	F <sub>5</sub>
<b>Character (F<sub>1</sub>)</b>					
Increases self-confidence	.78112				
Enables performance	.74963				
Enhances credibility	.72369			.41860	
Creates a role	.72185	.42050			
Enhances professionalism	.69812			.41018	
<b>Appearance (F<sub>2</sub>)</b>					
Represents position		.77806			
Uniform appearance		.73427			
Overall appearance		.65681			
Represents theme	.45099	.63445			
Original concept		.57172		.48309	
Color		.48953			
<b>Comfort (F<sub>3</sub>)</b>					
Breathes easily			.74362		
Perspiration (shows)			-.71846		
Year-round comfort			.68971		
Easy to clean			.56445		
Comfortable		.40280	.51839		
<b>Materials (F<sub>4</sub>)</b>					
Footwear				.71884	
Natural fabrics				.65476	
<b>Function (F<sub>5</sub>)</b>					
Elicits rude behavior					.83627
Interferes with performance					.65769

The table above shows the extent to which individual components loaded on the five factors identified in the factor analysis. In most cases the individual components were exclusively associated with one factor, but some loaded on more than one factor, as shown by two or more sets of factor loadings in a given line. Exhibit 2 compares the components of the above factors with those expected according to earlier research. In Exhibit 3, the factors become independent variables in the regression equation using employee attitude as a dependent variable.

sured the employee's perception of the relationship between the uniform he or she is wearing and the attitudes he or she has about the job he or she is performing. The remaining nine data variables were taken from various job-attitude and job-satisfaction survey instruments.

### Survey Method

We used a drop-off survey method, which combines features of the face-to-face interviews with mail surveys. We dropped off a predeter-

mined number of surveys at each of the five resorts. The surveys were left with a manager who was instructed in the survey process. The manager distributed the surveys to employee supervisors who, in turn, gave the surveys to the employees to fill out in the break-room during their breaks. The employees placed the completed survey in a sealed envelope and returned it the supervisor. (The employee's name did not appear on the survey.) We dropped off a total of 560 surveys at five

casino-resorts. The number of surveys dropped off at each property was proportional to the number of employees the casino had in each of the five categories when compared to the total number of employees in each category. The distribution of surveys by employee position was as follows: 157 (12.6 percent) to bell-station employees; 245 (19.6 percent) to front-desk employees; 434 (34.7 percent) to food servers; 298 (23.7 percent) to cocktail servers; and 117 (9.4 percent) to show-room dancers. We received 201 completed surveys, for a 36-percent response rate.

### Statistical Analysis

To reduce the data from our large number of variables into a manageable number of components, we subjected the data to a principal-components analysis using varimax rotation.<sup>34</sup> This analysis yielded five factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1.00 and one component with an eigenvalue of 0.82, which we excluded as not explaining a sufficient amount of variance in the data. Exhibit 1 shows the factors and the variables that we believe those factors comprise, based on the statistics. The only variable that we dropped from the analysis was tailoring, since it loaded across a number of components and did not load over 0.5 on any component. With tailoring removed, we again ran the principal-components analysis to produce the factors used in this study.

Exhibit 2 shows the differences between the factors' expected component composition and the actual component composition. The "expected components" were based on variables included in the study in-

<sup>34</sup> For a summary of factor analysis, see: Robert C. Lewis, "Isolating Differences in Hotel Attributes," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (November 1984), p. 67; or A. Parasuraman, *Marketing Research* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1991).

**Exhibit 2**  
**Comparison of expected and actual component variables**

Expected components		Actual components
<b>Appearance</b>		
Color Natural fabrics Tailored Overall appearance Uniform appearance		Represents position Uniform appearance ** Overall appearance ** Represents theme Original concept Color **
Includes three of the predicted appearance variables, variables that relate to the concept or theme and a variable that indicates one can tell an employee's position from the appearance of the uniform.		
<b>Function</b>		
Easy to clean Enables performance Interferes with performance Represents theme Represents position Original concept		Elicits rude behavior Interferes with performance **
Includes one predicted function variable and a second variable that would limit the functionality of the person wearing the uniform.		
<b>Character</b>		
Elicits rude behavior Elicits negative behavior * Enhances credibility Enhances professionalism Creates a role Increases self confidence		Increases self confidence ** Enables performance Enhances credibility ** Creates a role ** Enhances professionalism **
Four of the five variables in this component were originally categorized as character variables.		
<b>Comfort</b>		
Perspire Breathes easily Year-round comfort Comfortable		Breathes easily ** Perspire ** Year-round comfort ** Easy to clean Comfortable **
Four of the five variables in this component were originally categorized as comfort variables.		
<b>Materials</b>		
		Footwear Natural fabrics
This was a new component based on the materials of the clothes and the comfort of the footwear, which is often due to the materials used to construct the footwear.		

\* Dropped from survey instrument  
\*\* Loaded on predicted components

Exhibit 2 shows the differences between the expected component composition and the actual component composition. The expected components were based on variables included in the study intended to measure a specific component based on the authors' review of past research. The actual components are the components that emerged from the data analysis in this study. The commentary below each variable set offers the reason for naming the factor.

**Glossary of factors and their component variables**

**Appearance:** The overall look of the uniform and of the person wearing the uniform.

*Color:* All of the tints, hues, and shades between white and black.<sup>1</sup>

*Natural fabrics:* Fabrics made from products occurring in nature (e.g., cotton, wool, silk) as opposed to fabrics manufactured from man-made materials (e.g., nylon and polyester).

*Overall appearance:* The employee's overall look.

*Uniform appearance:* The uniform's overall look.

**Function:** To enable job performance in a required or expected manner.

*Easy to clean:* Does not require dry cleaning or special washing instructions.

*Enables performance:* Facilitates the effective operation of tasks.

*Interferes with performance:* Disrupts the effective operation of tasks.

*Represents theme:* Acts as a symbol of the central design topic of the property.

*Represents position:* Acts as a symbol of the employee's occupational standing.

*Original concept:* Central design topic prior to modifications.

**Character:** Design elements that provide clues about the personal traits and values of the wearer.

*Elicits rude behavior:* Invokes discourteous behavior from perceiver.

*Elicits negative behavior:* Invokes degrading behavior from perceiver.

*Enhances credibility:* Strengthens wearer's projection of authenticity.

*Enhances professionalism:* Strengthens wearer's projection of expertness.

*Creates a role:* Shapes wearer's projection of persona.

*Increases self-confidence:* Raises wearer's projection of level of assurance.

**Comfort:** A state of ease, free from pain.

*Perspire:* Moisture issued through pores of the skin.

*Breathes easily:* Allows air to circulate through fabric.

*Year-round comfort:* Comfortable at all times.

*Comfortable:* Providing comfort.

**Materials:** All elements used in the process of uniform construction that remain as part of the final product.

*Footwear:* Shoes were the only type of footwear investigated in the study.

<sup>1</sup> M. B. Picken, *The Fashion Dictionary* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1957).



### Exhibit 3 Analysis of uniforms' favorable influence on job attitude

**Dependent Variable:** Favorable influence on overall job attitude  
**Independent Variables:**  $F_1$ (Character),  $F_2$ (Appearance),  $F_3$ (Comfort),  $F_4$ (Materials),  $F_5$ (Function), Tailored

Regression statistics				
Multiple R = .73788	Analysis of variance	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square
R <sup>2</sup> = .54446		Regression	6	139.87635
Standard error = .86614	Residual	156	117.03162	.75020
F = 31.08				
Significant F = .00				
n = 163 (some respondents were dropped due to missing values)				

Variables in the Equation					
Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Character ( $F_1$ )	.572926	.072837	.456365	7.866	.0000*
Appearance ( $F_2$ )	.546550	.074839	.420183	7.303	.0000*
Comfort ( $F_3$ )	.055508	.068672	.044324	.808	.4201
Materials ( $F_4$ )	.130942	.070886	.102999	1.847	.0666
Function ( $F_5$ )	-.185601	.067523	-.148626	-2.749	.0067*
Tailored	.139336	.056042	.157995	2.486	.0140*
(Constant)	2.358954	.192593	12.248	.0000	

The multiple-regression analysis, for which the statistics are given above uses *overall job attitude* as a dependent variable for the independent design variables developed in the component analysis. A significant relationship (.05 or lower, indicated by the asterisk) exists between attitude toward the job and the design components  $F_1$  (Character),  $F_2$  (Appearance),  $F_5$  (Function), and Tailored. Independent design variables are significant. Hypothesis 1 is supported.

tended to measure a specific component based on the authors' review of past research. The "actual components" are those that emerged from the data analysis in this study. In each of the actual components in Exhibit 2 we offer our rationale for naming the component.

#### Testing Hypotheses

Before sending out the survey, we developed two hypotheses as guides to our data analysis. These hypotheses are based on the principles drawn from our literature study, which we outlined above. The hypotheses are as follows.

**Hypothesis 1.** There is a significant linear relationship between the design components (appearance, function, character, and comfort) used to create mandatory uniforms and attitude toward the job of employees who wear them, as measured by favorable influence on overall attitude.

We tested this hypothesis using six multiple-regression equations,

one for each of six independent variables. Those are: character ( $F_1$ ), appearance ( $F_2$ ), comfort ( $F_3$ ), materials ( $F_4$ ), function ( $F_5$ ), and tailoring. In our multiple regression equation, we must test six sets of hypotheses.<sup>35</sup> The basic equation is:

$$H_o : B_{\text{variablename}} = 0 \text{ and}$$

$$H_a : B_{\text{variablename}} \neq 0.$$

**Attitude check.** We ran a multiple regression to examine the association between independent uniform-design variables and the dependent variables of attitude toward the job. The question used that tested employees' job attitudes was, "The kind of uniform I wear has a very favorable influence on my overall attitude toward the job."

The analysis regarding hypothesis 1, favorable influence on overall job

<sup>35</sup> The six resulting equations are as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} H_o : B_{\text{Character}} &= 0 \text{ and } H_a : B_{\text{Character}} \neq 0 \\ H_o : B_{\text{Appearance}} &= 0 \text{ and } H_a : B_{\text{Appearance}} \neq 0 \\ H_o : B_{\text{Comfort}} &= 0 \text{ and } H_a : B_{\text{Comfort}} \neq 0 \\ H_o : B_{\text{Materials}} &= 0 \text{ and } H_a : B_{\text{Materials}} \neq 0 \\ H_o : B_{\text{Function}} &= 0 \text{ and } H_a : B_{\text{Function}} \neq 0 \\ H_o : B_{\text{Tailoring}} &= 0 \text{ and } H_a : B_{\text{Tailoring}} \neq 0 \end{aligned}$$

attitude (Exhibit 3), reveals a significant relationship (.05 or lower) between the design components and attitude toward the job. Independent design variables  $F_1$  (character),  $F_2$  (appearance),  $F_5$  (function), and tailored each show a significant relationship. This analysis supports hypothesis 1.

**Hypothesis 2.** The degree of customer contact will serve as a moderating variable on the linear relationship between the design attributes (appearance, function, character, and comfort) used to create mandatory uniforms and attitude toward the job as measured by the favorable influence on the overall-job-attitude variable.

Based on the literature, we believed that the uniform's effect on an employee's favorable job attitude would vary by position, based on the employee's interaction with the guest as described above. We grouped the high-contact employees (i.e., cocktail waitresses, food servers) into one group and the moderate- or low-contact workers (i.e., bell-station employees, show-room dancers, and front-desk employees) into a second group.

Testing hypothesis 2 involved a two-step procedure. First, following the procedures for hypothesis 1, we did additional regression models for each of the groups. We then used Chow tests to determine whether regression models based on two employee groups were different. The Chow test produced a Q of .45, with the critical Q at the .05 level being 2.74. Thus, there was no significant difference between the regression models of the two groups of employees, and we were not able to support hypothesis 2.

#### Starting Point

The study's finding that mandatory uniforms do affect employee attitudes may not be a revelation, but it is worth noting that we found that employees have strong feelings about the uniforms they are made

to wear. Other findings may be more surprising and perhaps challenge conventional wisdom. For example, our study found that the degree of guest interaction, based on the employee's position, had no effect on an employee's attitude toward his or her job. One possible implication of this is that uniforms may have a significant effect on all employees, and not just those who interact with customers. At the beginning of this article we cited literature that claimed putting on a uniform could have psychological and behavioral implications for the wearer. Thus, the positive effect of uniforms may go beyond customer-contact employees. Future research should include housekeeping, maintenance, kitchen, and other back-of-the-house positions. Our conversations with employees revealed also that customers were not shy about offering their own reactions to employees' uniforms, whether that response was negative or positive. This was true for employees in all five positions. Bell-station employees, for example, said that customers were often willing to make negative comments to them regarding their uniforms even during the short ride in the elevator on the way to the guest room.

### The Importance of Uniforms

Uniforms are a part of a hotel's or restaurant's signature or image. Researchers dealing with the congruency of an organization's messages, such as Rafaeli, note that the appearance of all aspects of service should be coordinated so that the service context is obviously a complete package.<sup>36</sup> Uniforms must be part of that coordinated message. That concept may not be difficult to execute in a business-oriented hotel, but in a complex operation like a casino-resort, the multiplicity of uniforms can make congruency a challenge.

<sup>36</sup> Rafaeli, p. 185.

### Design Challenges

Apparel designers must consider how to make a uniform that will look good on everyone, regardless of body type, because people expect clothing to enhance their appearance. Since people come in all shapes and sizes, trying to make everyone look good presents challenges for uniform manufacturers and hotel uniform departments. For example, it is impossible to pick one color or one style that will look good on everyone. Because developing a uniform design that pleases everyone who wears the outfit is a thankless task, managers must instead focus on fit and function.

All design elements must come together to make an attractive uniform. Employees at theme casinos are given uniforms whose colors have been chosen to go with the décor and a style chosen to represent the property's theme. Thus, individual taste and appearance is sacrificed for an overall look.

Our survey found a strong preference for costumes that not only look good but work well. Thus, another hurdle for the designer is to balance fashion with function. Few people would challenge Pogoda's contention that "fashion has traditionally taken a back seat to function" in uniform design.\* The employees whom we surveyed want functional uniforms, but we also observe that managers often have a different agenda. Managers look for uniforms that represent the property and act as a marketing tool by enhancing the property's image. We suggest that it is paramount to allow employees to be involved in uniform choices regarding both function and projected image. Recognizing the importance of that idea, Uniforms to You surveys its clients' employees by mail, asking them to identify uniform features that they prefer.

We recognize that uniforms, as part of the interior design, are often chosen long before a property opens and the first employees are in place. Nevertheless, managers could bring employees into the final phase of uniform selection, perhaps during preopening. Certainly, when a property is being renovated or redesigned, employees can participate in selecting new uniforms. In either case, managers can narrow the search, choosing a set of uniforms that would be acceptable and allowing employees to make the final choices. In the final analysis, after all, employees are the ones who must wear the uniform.—K.N. and J.B.

\* D.M. Pogoda, "The New Pan Am Gets a New Look," *Women's Wear Daily*, Vol. 174, No. 55 (1997), p. 23.

Beyond that issue, however, is the root issue addressed in this study, which is how uniforms affect employees' attitudes. The short of it is that a functional, nicely fitted uniform of appropriate design can help an employee feel good about the job. That seems to be true even in the face of frustrating guest interaction—or no guest interaction at all. As a guide for managers and uniform designers, we offer in the accompanying box (above) some design points drawn from our literature study. To conclude the findings of our research, it was clear to us that hotel employees would appreciate having input into uniform design and selection.

### Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study was managers' sensitivity to what they perceive as potential morale problems and negative-perception problems caused by raising the issue of uniforms and attitudes while surveying employees. Thus, the

managers trimmed the number of questions measuring attitude to just the two on the final survey. We also reiterate that the study was conducted only in casino-resorts, and the results of this study may not hold outside of Las Vegas.

### Powerful Symbols

Uniforms are an integral part of the marketing statement for casino-resorts, but there are more considerations in the choice of uniforms than marketing symbolism. Uniforms' design considerations must be weighed against the potential negative effects on employee attitude of a poor uniform choice. Guest satisfaction is undoubtedly one of a hospitality organization's primary goals, and our survey indicates that uniforms can have an indirect influence on that goal. First, uniforms can enhance the organization's presentation, and, second, uniforms can contribute to the employees' confidence in serving those guests. **CQ**