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Clothes make the leader! How leaders can use attire to impact followers' perceptions of charisma and approval

Thomas Maran [a,b], Simon Liegl [c], Sebastian Moder [c], Sascha Kraus [d,*], Marco Furtner [c]

[a] University of Innsbruck, 6020 Innsbruck, Austria
[b] LeadershipWerk, 9490 Vaduz, Liechtenstein
[c] University of Liechtenstein, 9490 Vaduz, Liechtenstein
[d] Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, 39100 Bolzano, Italy

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ABSTRACT

Sneakers at a product launch, a leather jacket when heads of state meet, sunglasses at a formal reception. While popular media relishes leaders who catch the eye by way of such distinctive fashion, we know little about how this salient daily practice of dress specifically affects perceptions of leaders in their daily business. Addressing this gap, we investigated how dress impacts perceptions and approval of a leader. Firstly, we found formal attire to lead to ascriptions of prototypicality but not charisma (Study 1). Secondly, leaders' charisma and approval were higher when a person's clothing style contrasted their organization's culture (Study 2). Lastly, we replicated the impact of informal clothing on both leader approval and charisma in a sample of CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies (Studies 3 and 4). Findings lend support to the notion that leaders can manipulate their style of attire to actively shape their followers' impressions of themselves.

1. Introduction

Numerous examples show that leaders purposefully choose their clothing in order to shape the way they appear. Former US president George W. Bush, despite his family's sophisticated, political background, often appeared in a cowboy hat; he signaled familiarity to his prospective voters and imbued himself with the heroism of the cowboy narrative (Hoffman, 2011). Similarly, Steve Jobs, founder and former CEO of Apple Inc., was known to "Think different." His playful approach to innovation carried over into his clothing style. He distinguished himself from his formal and rigid competitors by wearing sneakers and turtleneck sweaters to the company's important product presentations (Sharma & Grant, 2011). Even the absence of clothing can evoke a strong impression, as is evidenced by the popular snapshots of Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, fishing topless (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010). Taking a closer look, we find that these popular leaders have one thing in common. Be they incumbent presidents or CEOs, they stand at the helm of large-scale organizations that are highly structured and hierarchical by nature, an arena where traditional, formal dress-codes usually hold sway. However, the individuals mentioned above have managed to disrupt our expectations and evaluations simply by dressing differently, thus paying tribute to the pedigreed and often observed adage: clothes make the man.

One's choice of clothing can be adapted to manipulate beholders' perceptions. Certainly, one might consider this common knowledge, as many modern individuals spend a considerable amount of their time finding the right outfit, particularly for special engagements such as a festive occasion or job interview. This extends into the workplace setting. A certain level of formality in employees' clothing is usually required, while still giving employees freedom to manipulate their choice of colors, patterns, or accessories as paths to personal expression. For example, individuals willingly pay a higher price for luxury clothing brands to signal their wealth (e.g., Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). Furthermore, within organizations, small accessories may be used to signal differences in status (Goffman, 1951). In fact, in authoritative organizations like the military or the police, employees are required to signal their formal leadership position via standardized accessories like shoulder badges (Siart, Pflüger, & Wallner, 2016).

Over four studies, our work aims to translate such insights into the everyday workplace, where leaders and followers frequently interact, and the effectiveness of the organization depends at least in part on the followers' perceptions and acceptance of their leader. We investigated the effect of leaders' clothing style in the workplace on a number of attributes they elicit there, above all perceptions of charisma as well as

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: sascha.kraus@zfke.de (S. Kraus).

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leader prototypicality and approval (Antonakis, Bastardoz, Jacquart, & Shamir, 2016; Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984). The present paper provides three main contributions to the literature. First, it reveals a connection between a leader's choice of clothing and the degree to which their followers accept them as a leader and attribute charisma to them. More specifically, we find that followers attribute higher charisma to those leaders who wear clothing that contrasts their organization's cultural norms and lower charisma to their conforming counterparts. In turn, the present study adds to the body of knowledge on how leaders embody a deviation from the status quo through their choice of clothing (Reh, Van Quaquebeke, & Giessner, 2017). Second, we focus our research on concrete behaviors (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018) and, thereby, advance understanding of how leaders earn their followers' approval and attributions of charisma. Third, our findings disclose clothing as a potent tool for leaders' impression management. Crucially, our findings remain watertight even when derived from the naturalistic portraits taken from Fortune 1000 CEO incumbents, taken either as scale-type ratings or in a preferential duel where an informally clothed leader went heads up against one in more formal dress. Clothing is known to shape first impressions (e.g., Holman, 1980), but it has been widely neglected as a practice of impression management in managerial literature (e.g., Bolino, Long, & Turnley, 2016).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Leaders' charisma through the lens of signaling theory

What is to be done when a group is faced with a coordination problem that each individual of that group cannot solve by themselves? Someone has to step forward and provide a solution, influence all members to join their idea, translate the problem into a goal hierarchy, formulate an action plan, and coordinate the group while striving for the goal to, finally, solve the problem (Antonakis & Day, 2018; Yukl & Gardner, 2020; Yukl, 1999). But how can a prospective leader communicate that they would be best suited to lead a group? The act of selecting an able leader inherently confronts the group and the potential leader with an information asymmetry regarding a candidate's possession of certain resources, abilities, or traits, which enable them to lead effectively and solve the coordination problem (Grabo, Spisak, & Van Vugt, 2017). Signaling allows individuals to reduce this asymmetry by sending verbal or nonverbal cues (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Spence, 2002). A potential leader may signal their leadership ability through displaying the sophistication necessary to solve such problems and by intimating their ability to effectively influence followers to implement the leader's solution. This is where charisma emerges as a reliable signal of leadership ability. Charisma, long a nebulous construct, has recently been defined as "values-based, symbolic and emotion-laden leader signaling" (Antonakis et al., 2016; p. 304), which empowers a leader in their mission by helping them to influence and coordinate employees (Johnson & Dipboye, 2008; Meslec, Curseu, Fodor, & Kenda, 2020). These cues, sent by prospective leaders, hijack the attention of prospective employees, who are particularly sensitive to cues that may guide their decision on whom to approve of as a leader (Gerpott, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Silvis, & Van Vugt, 2018). Charismatic signals are supposed to be honest, in other words, to validly and reliably indicate actual leadership ability. For example, charismatic leaders use long fluent speeches to captivate their employees (Meslec et al., 2020). These speeches signal verbal sophistication, offering a dependable cue for cognitive ability (Von Hippel, Ronay, Baker, Kjelsaas, & Murphy, 2016). Thus, it may be this very reason why such cues are used by employees to accurately assess an individual's ability to lead effectively. The sender, in turn, is raising their probability of emerging as a leader and of gaining followership to a larger degree than their competitors who lack the ability to signal in this way (Grabo et al., 2017). Thus, research has decidedly come to regard charismatic leadership as an effective form of organizational leadership (Banks et al., 2017; House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015).

Studies have shown that employees are especially receptive for nonverbal expressivity when they assess prospective leaders' aptitude (Trichas, Schyns, Lord, & Hall, 2017). However, despite convincing evidence on the effects of nonverbal behavioral cues (Little, Jones, & DeBruine, 2011; Maran, Furtner, Kraus, Liegl, & Jones, 2019; Maran, Furtner, Liegl, Kraus, & Sachse, 2019; Maran, Moder, Furtner, Ravet-Brown, & Liegl, 2020; Masters, Sullivan, Lanzetta, Mchugo, & Englis, 1986; Trichas & Schyns, 2012), surprisingly little attention has been paid to the effects that an individual's choice of clothing has within the context of organizational leadership. Clothing is an easily accessible form of self-presentation and is strongly incorporated into our daily routines (Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd, 2014). Indeed, most individuals think of what to wear when they aim to earn specific ascriptions about themselves. Vice versa, they also tend to make trait inferences based on the appearance of others. However, the empirical evaluation of signals from dress styles as cues in a leadership context has, so far, been neglected.

2.2. Clothing as a tool for signaling

Impressions formed and judgments made of others are commonly based on their physical appearance. Indeed, they may form even before any face-to-face interaction is initiated, or any behavior is perceived. This human tendency has proven to be successful. For example, people infer traits, judged through the sole physical appearance, with an accuracy far exceeding mere chance (e.g., Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009; Todorov, 2005; Todorov, Said, Engell, & Oosterhof, 2008). Such inferences are based on nonverbal signals like clothing, hairstyle, facial expression, gestures, and mimicry, as well as on verbal cues regarding the content and manner of speech (e.g., Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010). Clothes may be of particular significance in this regard since they possess inherent symbolic character (Robinson & Baum, 2020), express status, roles, and affiliation to groups (Hamid, 1972), convey information about values, moods, and attitudes (Stone, 1962), and impact the level of mental abstraction (Burger & Bless, 2017; Slepian, Ferber, Gold, & Rutchick, 2015). For example, flashy and neat dress impresses strangers at first glance (Back et al., 2010). Further findings show that observers judge conscientiousness (Albright, Kenny, & Malloy, 1988; Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993) as well as extraversion (Naumann et al., 2009) based on the neatness or formality of clothing. In addition, an individual's social values, such as their desire for conformity, ambition, or interpersonal affiliation, can be predicted through their choices regarding style and brand (Rose, Shoham, Kahle, & Batra, 1994; Unger & Raymond, 1974). By such means, dress often indicates ranks and social status, through style of clothing in general, and through uniforms in particular. For example, non-uniformed public services members seem more competent and authoritative in business dress than casual dress. Furthermore, individuals implicitly make role and hierarchy attributions between differently dressed members of uniformed public services, such as firemen or military staff (Karl, Hall, & Peluchette, 2013). Even in the first years of life, children learn to draw conclusions about others' character from their choice of clothing, differentiating between firemen and policemen before they can infer distinct personality traits (Hamid, 1972). Clothing, therefore, is a nonverbal cue and transmits a great amount of information about the wearer (Damhorst, 1990).

Such attributions commonly even lead to certain expectations about behavior, from casual clothing to workplace uniforms. For example, observers attribute higher intelligence to both students (Behling & Williams, 1991) and teachers (Morris, Gorham, Cohen, & Huffman, 1996) when these wear more formal clothing. Further, clients are more likely to return if their therapist wore formal rather than casual clothing (Dacy & Brodsky, 1992). Specifically, formal clothing conveys social distance, since it is typically associated with unfamiliar and less intimate settings (Slepian et al., 2015). Physical appearance, which includes

one's choice of clothing, has even been shown to be the most influential factor in employee selection, outperforming other verbal and nonverbal behaviors and impression management tactics (Barrick, Shaffer, & DeGrassi, 2009).

Indeed, a large body of literature has already examined the effect of clothing as a signal shaping impressions, but only a marginal amount of research has been done on the function of dress as an embodiment practice by the wearer. For example, there is evidence for a clear relationship between one's emphasis on appearance and both neuroticism and extraversion (Johnson, Francis, & Burns, 2007), as well as on the strategic choice of dress to manipulate appearance with the aim of meeting cultural ideals of masculinity (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). Further evidence reveals that individuals in public service feel more competent, authoritative, trustworthy, and productive when wearing either formal or casual business attire (Karl et al., 2013). Wearing less formal or even casual attire leads to feelings of friendliness and creativity (Cardon & Okoro, 2009; Peluchette & Karl, 2007). In addition, individuals wearing a suit do in fact embody power, status, and rationality (Barry & Weiner, 2019). Thus, existing research suggests that individuals who desire to be perceived as prototypical leaders and to earn attributions of trustworthiness, intelligence, and competence would be well-advised to dress formally, e.g., in a suit (Peluchette & Karl, 2007; Ruetzler, Taylor, Reynolds, Baker, & Killen, 2012; Sebastian & Bristow, 2008). Apart from the fact that clothing shapes interpersonal impressions, signaling via clothing is directly and easily manipulable by the individual (Roach & Eicher, 1965) as opposed to established, well researched and documented cues of leader outcomes like physical appearance or body-height (Reh et al., 2017). Besides, clothing and how it impacts success of leaders has received considerable attention in the popular management media (e.g., Fouse, 2020; Thibodeaux, 2020).

The meaningful signaling character of clothing in the process of interpersonal judgments is therefore empirically underlined, yet the significance of dress to the perception and attribution of leadership qualities is a subject to be broached. This is intriguing, as categorization approaches to leader perception take as their starting point precisely the sort of cognitive category, or rather cognitive prototype, which is used to distinguish leaders from non-leaders. Such prototypes, in turn, are activated by just such cues (Tskhay, Zhu, Zou, & Rule, 2018) and thereby bias perceptions, evaluations, and behaviors towards a leader candidate (Lord et al., 1984).

A core task of leaders is to set goals and to offer employees a structure for their achievement. Formal clothing provides a further means to an end in this respect, with it being, in a sense, structured clothing. A formal style of dress signals structure to a leader's surroundings, in particular to their subordinates. Therefore, we hypothesize dress to be an effective cueing strategy in the formation of impressions of a supervisor via their leader prototypicality.

Hypothesis 1. A more formal clothing style makes a leader appear more prototypical of their station.

Clothing, by its very nature, represents a multi-signal capacity (Kaiser, 1985). Therefore, a recipient's impressions of such physical signals are formed within the context of their surrounding environment instead of depending solely on the stimulus person and the perceiver (Damhorst, 1990). The same may be said for leadership. It is well known that the attribution of leader ability depends on contextual factors (Lakens, Semin, & Foroni, 2011; Reh et al., 2017). Hence, besides the embodied signals a leader wants to communicate in order to be perceived as effective (Lord & Shondrick, 2011), the organizational environment plays a key role for the interpretation of those signals. Organizations represent an environment with expected norms and shared standards of formal conduct, both representing artefacts of an organization's culture (Schein, 1985). Each organization is characterized by a broad and inclusive set of factors shaping its identity, values, and processes (Marinova, Cao, & Park, 2019; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). For example, control-oriented organizations are characterized by a strong and deep formal hierarchy, often spanning multiple levels of management. They tend to value stability, efficiency, and predictability. The power to make decisions is held by higher-level authorities. Such mechanistic structures often follow uniform and rigid regulations, and employees' work is characterized by standardized processes and routines (Ambrose & Schminke, 2003). This type of culture is most prevalent in larger organizations and government agencies. While it allows the efficient and cost-effective exploitation of existing offerings, organizations may be challenged to survive if the conditions of the market suddenly change. On the other hand, there are flexibility-oriented adhocratic organizations. These tend to follow a more organic structure, employ fewer formal rules, and value open communication (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Temporary project teams and their corresponding decentralized power structure tend to emerge and disintegrate ad hoc depending on the distribution of competence among their members with regard to the current situation. These organizations' flexible culture allows them to strive in dynamic markets coined by volatility and ambiguity (Cameron & Quinn, 1999).

Clothing is one of the most salient artifacts of culture. These days, it is ubiquitous, from the blue pinstripe suits iconic for the Zurich financial industry, to the Patagonia-branded fleece vests of their transatlantic brethren. Even more so, in uniformed services like the military, fire department, or police, standardized badges clearly denote a wearer's position within their respective hierarchy (Siart et al., 2016). In other words, an organization's culture is accompanied by an innate institutionalized aesthetic code (Creed, Taylor, & Hudson, 2020) that may be directly reflected in its employees' clothing. The more formal an organizational culture is, the more formalized their dress code will likely be, whether it is communicated explicitly or implicitly (Schein, 1990). This is mirrored in the everyday wisdom that neat clothing is deemed appropriate or necessary for certain roles. In fact, there exists an inherent understanding to this effect, which is given added emphasis by findings showing that formal dress explicitly embodies competence and dominance (Barry & Weiner, 2019). Hence, one might assume that leaders' signaling of leadership ability through clothing would occur through clothing typifying their dominant position and conforming to the appropriate norms. However, with regard to many outstandingly popular charismatic leaders, quite the contrary holds true. Leaders good at drawing the media spotlight are, in fact, often excellent at deviating from such routines. Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba, for example, is known for his attention-grabbing habit of wearing lipstick and wild wigs in order to entertain his employees during annual meetings (MacLeod, 2014). In similar if more restrained fashion, Steve Jobs commonly wore sneakers and turtleneck sweaters at product launches, to visually distinguish himself from his competitors (Lohr, 2010; Smith, 2012). In short, the paradigm of context adequate appearance is violated by such actors intentionally, in order to stimulate a specific and desired perception in their employees.

They purposefully and autonomously disregard normative expectations with regard to their dress code, and, in turn, signal that they do not fear repercussions for deviating from the norm. Having high status, they are not obliged to adhere to social constraints, and may deviate further from the norm than low-status individuals (Hollander, 1958; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001). For example, low qualified individuals choosing a non-normative style of attire for job interviews face repercussions that highly qualified applicants would not (Oostrom, Ronay, & van Kleef, 2020). Expected norms and shared standards of formal conduct are provided by the cultural context; it plays a crucial role when observers make use of clothing as a signal to form their impressions about a person. In cases of divergence, research has shown that inferences of high status in such situations appear if, and only if, receivers are aware of the to-be-violated cultural context and its norms, and when the actor's deviation from the norm is seen as intentional. Hence, the organizational context frames to a certain extent how a leader is expected to appear and behave. By leaving this frame and extending themselves into the spectrum of unexpected behaviors,

leaders may create paradoxical tensions in employees (Zhang, Waldman, Han, & Li, 2015). Appearing to stand out from a given context assigns a leader a more salient role and results in them garnering greater attention from fellow group members (Gerpott et al., 2018). Such contradicting dissimilarity, created by unexpected appearance in a certain context, leads employees to forming more charismatic impressions of leaders (Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan, 2014). Therefore, we argue that a leader dressing in a manner unconventional to a certain organizational culture creates a paradoxical contrast in the eyes of employees, resulting in greater attention being given to that leader. If leaders contrast a flexibility-oriented culture of an organic nature by signaling structure and hierarchy through formal clothing, they will stand out. Equally, a casual look in a more mechanistic environment will attract the attention of the employees. We posit, furthermore, that this singular surplus of attention, this unique prominence, will make a leader appear more charismatic. Thus, while we expect formality in and of itself to engender ascriptions of prototypicality in a leader (see Hypothesis 1), we hypothesize that the clothing style of a leader affects the employees' perception of their leader's charisma if it contrasts the given organizational culture.

Hypothesis 2. The more a leader's clothing style deviates from the organization's cultural norms, the more charismatic they appear.

Ascribing certain characteristics onto leaders based on observable signals is highly heuristic in nature (Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015), with ascriptions of certain attributes being linked to others (Fiske, 1995). So, an inference based on a nonverbal charismatic signal, like the chosen style of attire, might lead to various other inferences that themselves are not based on an actually perceived cue (Cantor & Mischel, 1977). For example, as a consequence of receiving such signals, followers might ascribe leaders a variety of desirable attributes associated with a typical leader, e.g., dominance, competence, and trustworthiness (Grabo et al., 2017; Maran, Furtner, Liegl, et al., 2019; Reh et al., 2017; Van Vugt & Grabo, 2015). This results in an overall increased likelihood for this person to be approved as a leader, expressed by the proportion of individuals voting for them (Todorov, 2005). Prospective followers perceive leaders who send charismatic signals as more effective and, consequently, are more likely to vote for them (Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015). Hence, a candidate's charismatic signalling enables them to emerge as leader of the group. If wearing deviant attire is a distinctive signal in a leader's repertoire, earning the approval of the group through adopting this signal is a trial by fire.

Hypothesis 3. A leader who chooses a deviant clothing style receives more approval than a leader who chooses a conforming clothing style.

To test our predictions, we designed four experimental designs. During the first two, individuals were presented with pictures of a designated leader. We systematically manipulated their clothing style (see Yan, Yurchisin, & Watchravesringkan, 2011), which allowed us to draw causal implications from the experiment (e.g., Kraus, Meier, & Niemand, 2016). To ensure external validity, we substantiated our findings through two subsequent studies by using pictures of incumbent CEOs from the Fortune 1000 list. In doing so, we instrumentalized naturalistic variation in clothing styles as practiced by real top-level leaders. Our focus throughout all four experiments was to gain a detailed insight into how clothing shapes perceptions of a leader's charisma and how it aids them in gaining approval from their followership, seeking evidence for our two main hypotheses (Hypotheses 2 and 3). Additionally, we assessed whether wearing formal attire corresponds to the stereotypical prototypes of a leader (Hypothesis 1), in our initial two studies.

3. Study 1: Ascriptions of desirable leader attributes depending on clothing style

Our first study aimed to examine whether a more formal clothing style makes a leader appear more prototypical of their station (Lord et al., 1984) and, further, how the choice of dress affects observers' perceptions of the leader's charisma as well as observers' approval of them as a leader. A sample of employees were asked to express the degree to which they ascribed a variety of desirable attributes to a picture of a designated leader wearing one of three clothing styles (formal, smart, or casual). Since formality signals structure, and providing structure is a core component of leadership (e.g., Yukl, 1999), we expected more formally clothed leaders to better fit employees' idea of a leader, and hence to earn higher ascriptions of leader prototypicality (Hypothesis 1).

3.1. Methods and Design}

We assigned participants randomly to rate one of three pictures of a designated leader wearing either formal, smart, or casual clothing using an online questionnaire. Our criterion for selecting participants was that they were in active employment at an organization and thus had experience being part of a formal leader-follower relationship.

3.2. Sample

Our sample consisted of 78 german-speaking working participants (60.3% female) with a mean age of $M = 32.08$ ($SD = 11.43$, range 17 to 66) recruited by directly contacting local enterprises and professional education facilities. Most participants worked in healthcare (17.9%), or economics and administration (15.4%) and the most prevalent units were marketing (15.4%), sales (9.0%), HR and IT (7.7% each). We assigned the participants randomly to one of the three conditions (casual, smart, formal), resulting in 26 participants per clothing style.

3.3. Measures

Leader's prototypicality. Leader Prototypicality is a scale assessing the extent to which the presented designated leader corresponds to the participants' prototypical appearance of a leader. We employed three items of the prototypicality questionnaire (adapted questionnaire by Antonakis, Fenley, & Liechti, 2011; based on Cronshaw & Lord, 1987). The questionnaire features items such as: "The person I am rating acts like a typical leader." Reliability was measured at $\alpha = 0.88$.

Leader's charisma. We selected 16 items of the transformational leadership scale, that are specifically suited to capture a leader's charismatic aura and their emotional effect on employees (MLQ Form 5X-Short, Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; German translation by Felfe, 2006; Towler, 2003). An example item reads: "Impresses and fascinates others with his personality." The scale's Cronbach's alpha reliability was at $\alpha = 0.94$.

Leader approval. We quantified the approval of a leader by asking participants whether they would vote for the stimulus person as their own leader on a dichotomous scale (*yes* or *no*).

Desirable leader attributes. Four different trait impressions (charisma, dominance, competence, trustworthiness) have been employed using a single item for each (e.g., Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008; Willis & Todorov, 2006). Items followed the format of: "How charismatic is this person?"

3.4. Stimulus material

We employed a professional photographer to take three pictures of the same middle-aged Caucasian male. Since the perception of female leaders is regrettably heavily affected by stereotypes (e.g., Brescoll, 2016), ratings of them would likely be skewed due to gender bias. Therefore, to ensure that the influence of the clothing style was adequately reflected in the ratings, we chose a male to depict the leader. The pictures displayed the person's full body and were shot in front of a neutral office background. We matched the exact position and body posture between each picture, with the only variation between the

pictures being the attire worn (see Fig. 1). For the casual condition, the stimulus person wore a plain dark t-shirt, jeans, and white sneakers; for the smart condition, a white shirt, black dress pants, and black dress shoes; for the formal condition he added a black suit jacket and a blue tie.

3.5. Results and discussion

To examine variations in the impressions left by the style of clothing worn by the stimulus person, we computed univariate analyses of covariance with the attire (formal, smart, causal) acting as the fixed factor. Participants' age and gender were included as covariates to each model. Partial eta squared η_p^2 (0.01 = small, 0.06 = medium, 0.14 = large effect; see Ellis, 2010) are used to report effect size. The alpha-level was set to 0.05 for all statistical tests. All reported *p*-values are two-tailed. Bayes factors (Marsman & Wagenmakers, 2017; Wagenmakers et al., 2018) were calculated to quantify the relative strength of evidence for each hypothesis compared to its alternative [1 to 3 = anecdotal evidence; 3 to 10 = moderate evidence; 10 to 30 = strong evidence; 30 to 100 = very strong evidence; >100 = extreme evidence; Lee & Wagenmakers, 2014]. We computed all data analyses using SPSS (Version 26) and JASP (Version 0.11.1; JASP Team 2019).

Leader's prototypicality. Firstly, the style of attire affected ascriptions of prototypicality ($F_{2,73} = 5.26$, $p = 0.007$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$, $BF_{10} = 6.42$; see Fig. 2A). The leader appeared as less prototypical for his station when wearing casual ($M = 3.93$, $SE = 0.32$) as compared to smart ($M = 5.17$, $SE = 0.32$; $MD = -1.24$, $SE = 0.46$, $p_{Bonf} = 0.025$) or formal attire ($M = 5.26$, $SE = 0.33$; $MD = 1.33$, $SE = 0.46$, $p_{Bonf} = 0.016$), confirming our first hypothesis. Wearing formal or smart attire did not differentially affect prototypicality perceptions ($MD = 0.09$, $SE = 0.46$, $p_{Bonf} = 1.000$).

Leader's charisma. Secondly, when analyzing the differences in perceptions of leader's charisma, as measured by the selection from the transformational leadership scale, we found the attire did not influence others' perceptions of the leader's charisma ($F_{2,73} = 0.60$, $p = 0.553$, $BF_{10} = 0.17$; see Fig. 2B).

Leader approval. Thirdly, the tendency to vote for the stimulus person as one's own leader was not affected by their attire ($F_{2,73} = 0.15$, $p = 0.860$, $BF_{10} = 0.13$; see Fig. 2C).

Desirable leader attributes. Lastly, the style of clothing had no impact on the attributions of charisma ($F_{2,73} = 1.90$, $p = 0.156$, $BF_{10} = 0.45$), dominance ($F_{2,73} = 0.32$, $p = 0.728$, $BF_{10} = 0.14$) or competence ($F_{2,73} = 1.41$, $p = 0.252$, $BF_{10} = 0.32$). However, wearing the smart attire led to lower trustworthiness ratings ($M = 4.56$, $SE = 0.29$) as compared to the formal ($M = 5.63$, $SE = 0.30$; $MD = -1.07$, $SE = 0.42$, $p_{Bonf} = 0.039$), but not to the casual clothing ($M = 5.43$, $SE = 0.30$; $MD = -0.87$, $SE = 0.42$, $p_{Bonf} = 0.119$). The latter two conditions showed no differentiation from each other ($MD = 0.20$, $SE = 0.42$, $p_{Bonf} = 1.000$; $F_{2,73} = 3.70$, $p = 0.030$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$, $BF_{10} = 1.95$).

In essence, these findings strongly support our first hypothesis that casual clothing results in low ascriptions of leadership prototypicality, while formal attire makes a leader appear more prototypical of their station.

4. Study 2: Ascriptions of desirable leader attributes depending on clothing style and organizational culture

In our first study, we found evidence in support of our proposition that a leader's clothing influences the way they are perceived by prospective employees, confirming Hypothesis 1. Subsequently, we conducted a second study to examine a contingent interaction between a leader's clothing style and their respective organization's culture, seeking evidence for our second and third hypotheses. To do so, we replicated our first study but added an introductory text, framing in our participants' minds the culture that the stimulus person was assumed to

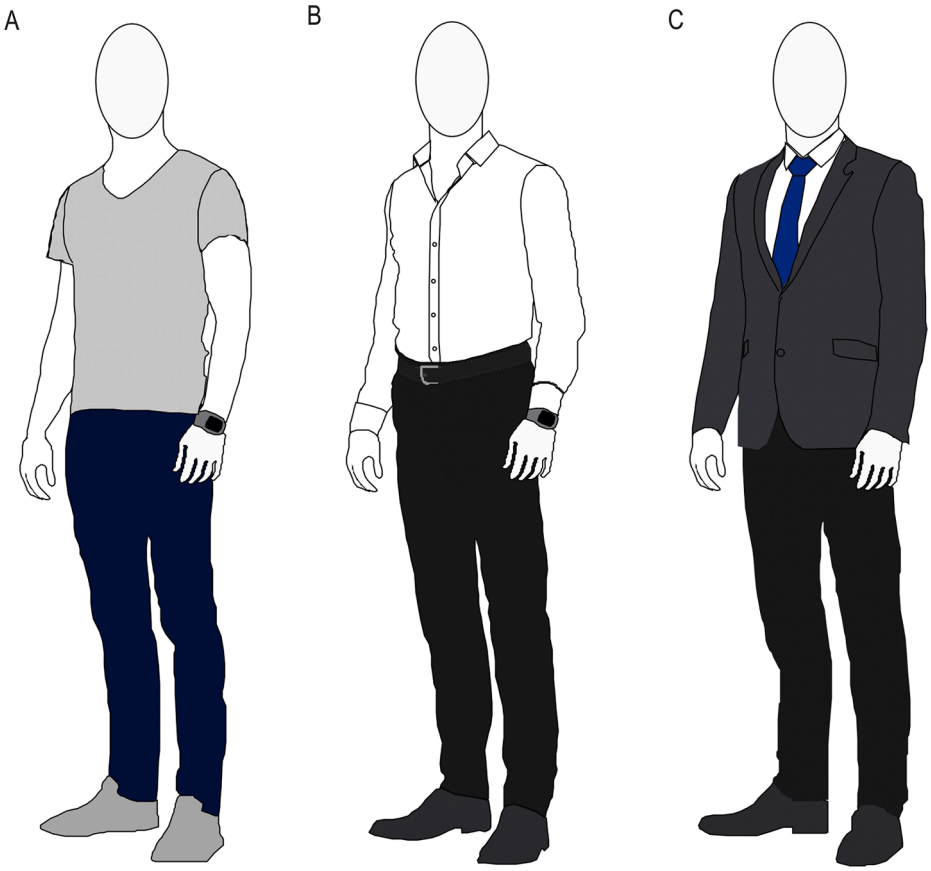

Fig. 1. Schematic depiction of the stimulus material for the formal (A), smart (B), and casual (C) condition.

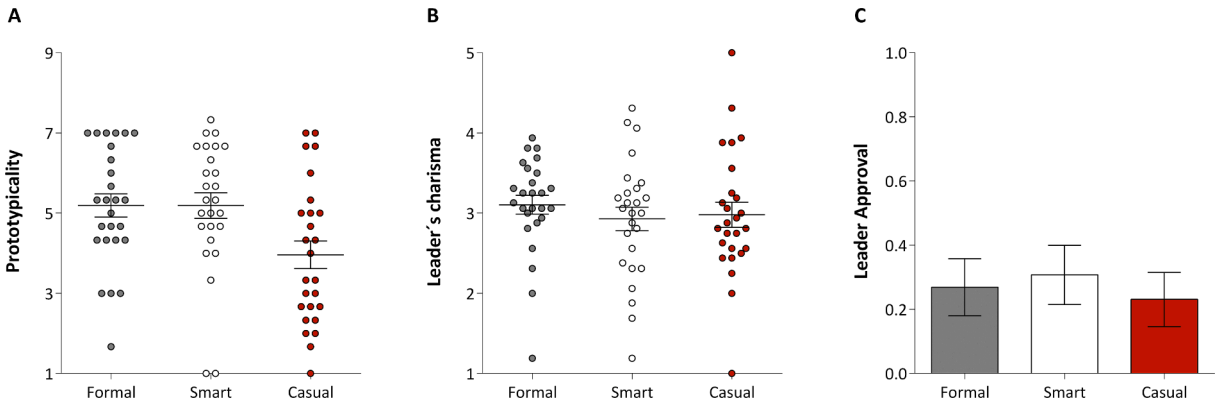

Fig. 2. Distribution of the ratings of the leader's prototypicality (A), charisma (B), and approval (C) depending on their style of attire. $N = 78$.

work in. More specifically, we referred to a bi-dimensional approach based on the well-established competing values framework (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Marinova et al., 2019). On the one hand, we described an organization that can quickly adapt to changing market conditions, which is shaped according to organically resolved structures and is dynamic in nature (adhocracy or flexibility-oriented); on the other hand, an organization characterized by formalization and centralization that gains effectiveness from steadiness regarding their design and output (hierarchy or control-oriented). In the former, to create is a key value, whereas in the latter to control can be regarded as a case in point (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). We have suggested that a style of dress that contrasts with the context, in this case the organisational culture, enables leaders to appear more charismatic. Therefore, a leader should appear more charismatic to their employees (Hypothesis 2) and subsequently gain a higher approval (Hypothesis 3) rate when clothed less formally in a control-oriented culture, or more formally in a flexibility-oriented culture.

4.1. Methods and design

We extended the approach of Study 1 by designing a 2 (culture) × 3 (clothing style) factorial experiment. We assigned participants randomly to rate one of three pictures of a designated leader (formal, smart, or casual; see Yan et al., 2011) in the context of a specific organizational culture (control-oriented or flexibility-oriented; see Cameron & Quinn, 1999). As measures, we administered the same as in Study 1, with reliabilities being at $\alpha = 0.90$ for the prototypicality and at $\alpha = 0.91$ for the leader's charisma ratings. The organizational culture was manipulated insofar that participants received written contextual information (see *Supplementary Information*) they considered for their judgement of the presented leader before being presented with the visual stimulus and the questionnaire.

4.2. Sample

We sent out questionnaires to 251 German-speaking employees from three local enterprises that execute their operations in manufacturing, financial services, and IT. The final sample consisted of $N = 148$ (29.1% female) participants that completed our survey. Their age ranged from 20 to 61 years, $M = 36.32$, $SD = 12.60$. The criterion of being in a leader-employee relationship was therefore strictly fulfilled for all participants. The most common units were distribution (12.2%), R&D (10.1%), management, sales and finance (9.5% each). It is important to have equal group sizes in order to control for distinct effects. As the 2 × 3 experimental design results in six different scenarios, in our study, the six subsamples therefore consist of 24 to 25 individuals each.

4.3. Results and discussion

To analyze whether there was an interaction between the clothing style of a leader and the respective organizational culture on the perceptions of the leader, a 2 × 3 ANOVA for independent measures was applied. Style of dress (formal, smart, and casual) served as the between-subject variable, and the organizational culture (control-oriented and flexibility-oriented) as the context variable. In case of an interaction effect we further computed Bonferroni-corrected *t*-Tests, analyzing the impact of the context variable across clothing styles. Again, we added the participants' age and gender as covariates to all analyses of variance. As the effects of the style of attire on the perceptions of the leader's charisma and prototypicality found in Study 1 were replicated in this study, we focus on the effects of the culture modulation and interaction effects in the following results description. Statistical parameters were the same as those laid out in Study 1.

Leader's prototypicality. The leader left a more prototypical impression in the flexibility-oriented ($M = 5.75$, $SE = 0.20$) than in the control-oriented condition ($M = 4.63$, $SE = 0.20$; $F_{1,140} = 15.40$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.10$, $BF_{10} = 46.06$; see Fig. 3A).

Leader's charisma. The style of clothing indeed differentially affected the ratings on the selection from the transformational leadership scale, depending on the presented scenario ($F_{2,140} = 3.55$, $p = 0.031$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$, $BF_{10} = 1.96$; see Fig. 3B). When the leader was wearing the formal ($t = -4.94$, $p_{Bonf} < 0.001$, $d = -1.41$, $BF_{10} = 1612.54$) or smart attire ($t = -4.72$, $p_{Bonf} < 0.001$, $d = -1.34$, $BF_{10} = 874.78$) the ratings were higher when the culture was described as flexibility-oriented compared to control-oriented, whereas they did not differ from one another when he was wearing casual clothing ($t = -1.32$, $p_{Bonf} = 0.576$, $BF_{10} = 0.58$). Overall, the ratings were higher in the flexibility-oriented culture ($M = 3.35$, $SE = 0.07$) as compared to the control-oriented condition ($M = 2.77$, $SE = 0.07$; $F_{1,140} = 36.69$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.21$, $BF_{10} = 650850.67$). These findings confirm our second hypothesis regarding the impact of a formal culture on ascriptions of charisma based on a leader's attire.

Leader approval. Our next analysis revealed that the scenario determined the percentage of leader approval, with 49.3% ($SE = 5.2\%$) of the participants voting for him in the flexibility-oriented condition, whereas only 22.0% ($SE = 5.3\%$) showed approval in the control-oriented culture ($F_{1,140} = 13.53$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$, $BF_{10} = 63.32$; see Fig. 3C). However, opposing our expectations, we found no interaction effect that would mirror the results on the leader's charisma ($F_{2,140} = 1.84$, $p = 0.163$, $BF_{10} = 0.53$). Results even indicated a general positive effect of formality on leader approval ($F_{2,140} = 5.14$, $p = 0.007$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$, $BF_{10} = 3.81$). The approval rate was higher when the leader was wearing formal ($M = 49.2\%$, $SE = 6.5\%$) as opposed to casual clothing ($M = 20.2\%$, $SE = 6.4\%$; $MD = 29.0\%$, $SE = 9.1\%$, $p_{Bonf} = 0.005$), but not substantially different in comparison to the smart attire ($M = 37.6\%$, $SE = 6.4\%$), which was just in between the formal ($MD = -11.5\%$, $SE = 9.1\%$, p_{Bonf}

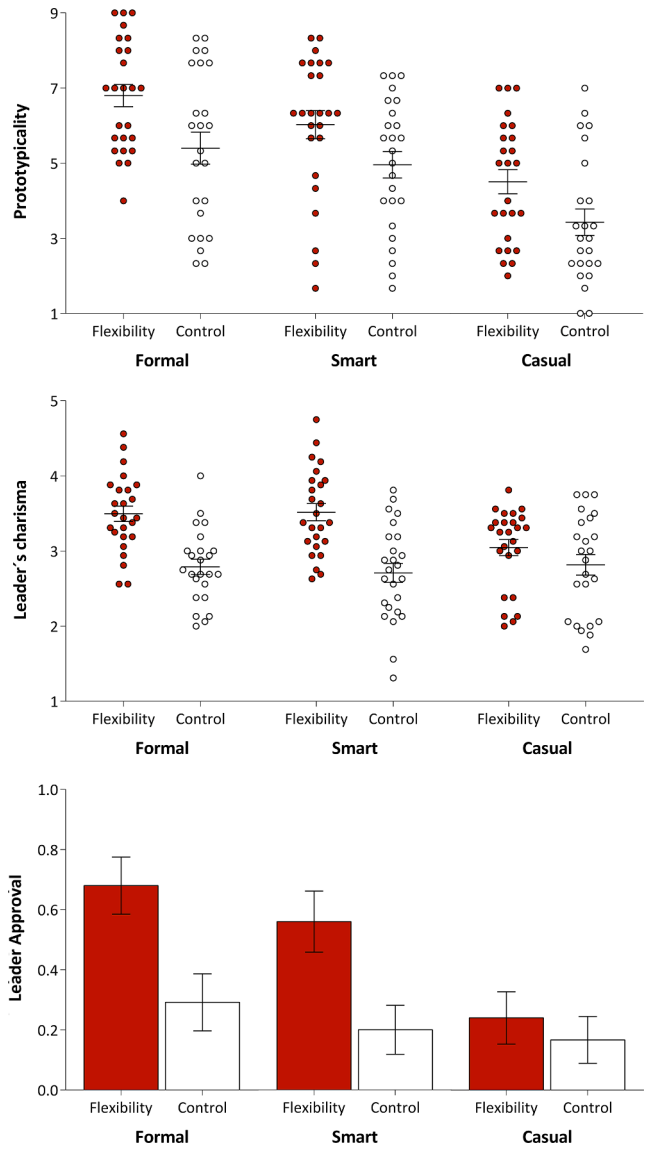

Fig. 3. Distribution of the ratings of the leader's prototypicality (A), charisma (B), and approval (C) depending on the presented culture and clothing style. $N = 148$.

$= 0.620$) and casual ($MD = 17.5\%$, $SE = 9.0\%$, $p_{Bonf} = 0.166$) condition.

Desirable leader attributes. The first impressions of charisma were higher in the flexibility-oriented ($M = 5.66$, $SE = 0.20$) as compared to the control-oriented condition ($M = 4.72$, $SE = 0.20$; $F_{1,140} = 11.14$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$, $BF_{10} = 31.83$). Dominance on the other hand was not affected by the culture ($F_{1,140} = 2.59$, $p = 0.110$, $BF_{10} = 0.47$). In relation to the perceived competency, we found the leader to be rated more competent in the flexibility-oriented ($M = 6.10$, $SE = 0.17$) than in the control-oriented condition ($M = 5.41$, $SE = 0.17$; $F_{1,140} = 7.98$, $p = 0.005$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$, $BF_{10} = 4.12$). Lastly, the leader was perceived as more trustworthy in the flexibility-oriented ($M = 5.85$, $SE = 0.19$) than the control-oriented scenario ($M = 4.83$, $SE = 0.19$; $F_{1,140} = 14.64$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.10$, $BF_{10} = 58.41$).

In providing participants with information on the organization's cultural context, we were able to achieve two aims: replicate the findings from our first study, and delineate several interesting interaction effects between clothing and organizational culture, testing our second and third hypothesis. Firstly, formal and smart attire were rated as more charismatic in flatter, more organic corporate cultures than in control-oriented cultures. Meanwhile, casual clothing elicited similar ascriptions of charisma in both types of cultures. Overall, then, a flatter, more flexibility-oriented organizational culture was associated with higher ratings of charisma, leadership prototypicality, competency, trustworthiness, and leader approval, regardless of a leaders' clothing style. We conclude organizational culture to interact with clothing to shape ascriptions of leaders' charisma. However, we found no conclusive evidence for our third hypothesis, that leaders would reach an increased approval rate when deviating from the conventional style of attire for their company's culture, as results on leader's approval corresponded in terms of the main effect of flexibility-oriented culture with those on leader's charisma, but instead of an interaction we found a general effect of formality on approval, that can't be explained by our expected relation between charisma and approval alone. In Study 3 and Study 4, we aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the relation of these two key variables for leader success.

5. Study 3: Individual ratings of incumbent leaders

So far we found evidence that formal clothing, overall, elicits desirable leader attributes, especially in flexibility-oriented cultures. To translate these findings into the real world of leadership, we made use of the natural variations in self-image occurring readily in real leaders which were captured on photographs. More specifically, we used natural footage of incumbent CEOs from the Fortune 1000 list, split into either formal or informal dress. We then introduced them to participants as designated candidates for the role of the CEO, and asked participants to ascribe certain attributes to them. Mature companies of a size great enough to occupy a place in the Fortune 1000 are, by their very nature, established, and therefore more formalized than a startup at the foot of its growth curve. This notion is reflected in participants rating the culture of the CEOs' companies as mostly control oriented (7-point Likert-scale, 1 = *very control-oriented*, 7 = *very flexibility-oriented*; $M = 3.56$, $SE = 0.09$) In lieu of the argumentation towards our second and third hypotheses, therefore, we expect CEOs deviating from a formal clothing style to be perceived as more charismatic than their formally clothed counterparts and thus achieve an increased approval rate.

5.1. Methods and design

We gathered portraits of 88 CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies, turned them to grayscale, cropped them in a similar fashion, and matched them to form 44 pairs of individuals that were similar in age and rank but differed in their clothing style (formal and informal). We had them rated both individually (Study 3) and against each other directly (Study 4) with regard to the impressions of the leader that were evoked in the participants.

In Study 3, we presented participants with a single portrait of a CEO and asked them to express the degree to which they ascribed charisma, competence, trustworthiness, dominance, and attractiveness, as well as their approval of the leader (see Study 1). Furthermore, we asked them to rate the formality of the CEO's clothing style and the respective company's culture (see 5.3. Measures). We recruited raters as described in Study 1.

5.2. Sample

A total of 65 german-speaking raters (35.3% female) participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 19 to 27 ($M = 22.00$, $SD = 1.76$). We assigned the raters randomly to 88 leaders from Fortune 1000 companies selected for this study. 6 to 12 ratings were obtained for each of the leaders and each participant rated 13 leaders on average.

5.3. Measures

Clothing style. We employed both an objective dichotomous measure for the formality of the leaders' attire (informal/formal) and a 7-point

Likert-scale ranging from 1 = *informal* to 7 = *formal* rated by the participants. The ratings corresponded with $r = 0.75$, $p < 0.001$, with the objective clothing style.

Control variables. As a multitude of factors fundamentally impact our impressions of others, we aimed to control for the impact of the most prevalent ones. Therefore, we assessed the perceived age and attractiveness of the respective CEOs, both factors that are known to bias perceptions of leaders (e.g., Eagly et al., 1991; Spisak, Grabo, Arvey, & Van Vugt, 2014). As objective measures, we coded whether the CEO was wearing glasses, as these may impact perceptions of attractiveness and intelligence (e.g., Kinley, Strübel, & Amlani, 2019; Lundberg & Sheehan, 1994) and assessed the word count of their English Wikipedia article as a measure for their general renown to mitigate possible familiarity effects (e.g., Harmon-Jones & Allen, 2001; Wyatt & Silvester, 2018).

5.4. Results and discussion

We conducted bivariate correlational analyses to assess the relation between one's perception of a leader's clothing being informal or formal to the characteristics and approval ascribed to them. We don't report Bayesian factors for the correlational and following regression analyses, given that they depend on the same test statistics as *p*-values, therefore offering no additional information in the statistics for cross-sectional designs (García-Pérez, 2017).

Correlational analyses revealed ratings of leaders' charisma to be negatively related to the perceived formality of the attire ($r = -0.26$, $p = 0.013$). The approval of the leaders, however, did not correlate with the perceived formality ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.120$). Next, we computed linear ordinary least squares regression models to gain further insight into these findings and the factors influencing charisma perception and leader approval (see Table 1). We proposed three models, with the first including only the objective control variables in the form of whether the CEO was wearing glasses, and the word count of their English Wikipedia article. To the second model we added the subjective perceptions of attractiveness and age. Lastly, we added the rating of the attire being informal or formal to the third model. As to mitigate the impact of heteroskedasticity, robust standard errors were calculated using the heteroskedasticity consistent estimator 3 (HC3; Davidson & MacKinnon, 1993) in the RLM macro for SPSS by Darlington and Hayes (2016). We report the standardized coefficients.

The objective measures of the CEO wearing glasses ($\beta = -0.08$, $SE = 0.13$, $p = 0.565$) and the word count of their Wikipedia article ($\beta = -0.06$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = 0.609$) were not suited to explain variance in the charisma ratings ($\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $F_{2,85} = 0.32$, $SE = 1.01$, $p = 0.730$). With the addition of the subjective measures, however, a considerable amount of the variance could be explained ($\Delta R^2 = 0.32$, $F_{4,83} = 8.74$, $SE = 0.83$, $p < 0.001$), mainly by the perceived attractiveness ($\beta = 0.61$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < 0.001$), not by the age ($\beta = 0.15$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.183$). Including the perceived formality of the attire ($\beta = -0.25$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.030$) again increased the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.05$, $F_{5,82} = 8.90$, $SE = 0.81$, $p < 0.001$). In total, 38.6% of the variance in charisma impressions were explained by our final model. This lends further evidence to our second hypothesis.

Repeating these analyses for the tendency to approve of a CEO as one's own leader showed similar results. The objective control variables, glasses ($\beta = 0.10$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.342$) and word count ($\beta = -0.12$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = 0.294$) could not explain the approval rate ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $F_{2,85} = 0.82$, $SE = 1.00$, $p = 0.442$). The subjective measures, attractiveness ($\beta = 0.52$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$) and age ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = 0.202$), on the other hand, could ($\Delta R^2 = 0.24$, $F_{4,83} = 9.78$, $SE = 0.88$, $p < 0.001$). Lastly, the addition of the clothing style ($\beta = 0.23$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.035$) explained additional variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $F_{5,82} = 8.71$, $SE = 0.86$, $p < 0.001$). 30.2% of the variance in leader votes could be explained by this last model.

These results show inverse effects for the impact of formal clothing. While less formal clothing increases charisma ascriptions, more formal

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients between the perceived formality of the attire, the four desirable leader attributes, the approval of the leader, and the two control variables, perceived attractiveness and age. Reliability coefficients are presented in parentheses.

	M	*SD*	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Objective formality	0,500	0,503									
2. Perceived formality	5,286	0,932	0,745 ***								
3. Charisma	4,072	0,682	−0,234 *	−0,263 *							
4. Leader approval	0,492	0,177	0.053	0.167	0.439 ***						
5. Dominance	3,969	0,793	0.219 *	0.276 **	0.122	0.221 *					
6. Competence	4,922	0,671	0.176	0.270 *	0.198	0.452 ***	0.050				
7. Trustworthiness	4,329	0,682	−0.034	−0.042	0.287 **	0.343 **	−0.301 **	0.362 **			
8. Attractiveness	2,767	0,638	−0.177	−0.175	0.560 ***	0.473 ***	0.245 *	0.108	0.219 *		
9. Perceived age	50,661	5,848	0.177	0.384 ***	−0.085	−0.057	0.040	0.230 *	0.029	−0.364 ***	
10. Company's culture	3,564	0,799	−0.350 **	−0.556 ***	0.338 **	0.019	−0.120	−0.156	0.053	0.418 ***	−0.612 ***

Note. $N = 88$. Reliability coefficients are presented in parentheses along the diagonal.
$^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

clothing increases the tendency to vote for the leader. However, charisma ratings were positively associated with the tendency to vote someone as their leader ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). To gain further insight into this process, we computed mediation analyses in accordance with the procedures outlined by Hayes (2012, 2018), performing Preacher and Hayes' bias-corrected bootstrapping techniques with 10,000 samples using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018). Robust standard errors were calculated using the included heteroskedasticity consistent estimator 3 (HC3; Davidson & MacKinnon, 1993). The indirect effects were considered statistically significant if the 95% confidence intervals did not contain zero. We analyzed the influence of the formality of the attire on the tendency to vote the CEO as one's own leader, mediated by the charisma ascribed to the leader.

First, when adding the objective dichotomous measure of clothing formality to the mediation model, results reiterated that a formal attire was negatively related to charisma ratings ($\gamma = -0.23$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.030$). These, however, were associated with an increased tendency to vote for the leader ($\gamma = 0.48$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$), which resulted in an overall negative indirect effect ($\gamma = -0.11$; $SE = 0.05$; 95% CI = −0.21 to −0.02) and an increased direct effect ($\gamma = 0.16$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = 0.103$) of formality on voting for the leader as compared to the total effect ($\gamma = 0.05$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.627$).

Second, we found similar effects when including the subjective measure of clothing formality. More perceived formality decreased ascriptions of charisma ($\gamma = -0.26$, $SE = 0.13$, $p = 0.040$), whereas increased charisma ratings were associated with a higher proportion of participants voting for the leader ($\gamma = 0.52$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, the indirect effect of formality on voting for the leader was negative ($\gamma = -0.14$; $SE = 0.06$; 95% CI = −0.27 to −0.02), but the direct effect positive ($\gamma = 0.30$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = 0.019$) and more pronounced than the total effect ($\gamma = 0.17$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = 0.107$).

In summary, therefore, we delved under the surface of the relationship between clothing and leader ascription, unearthing a number of connections which go beyond the obvious. While these findings confirm our second hypothesis and shed light on the inconclusive findings of Study 2, we discovered an unexpected antagonistic relationship between the style of attire, ascriptions of charisma, and leader approval. In essence, a dichotomy is essential to shaping the effect of clothing formality, with formal dress increasing positive ascriptions and directly improving a leader's chance of being elected, while simultaneously denigrating their perceived charisma. In contrast, more casual clothing failed to give leaders a bump in hypothetical election results, due to the cancelling out of two simultaneous and opposing effects: while informal dress negatively affected a leader's likelihood of being approved by our participants to lead, that same style of attire also lead to higher ratings of charisma (Hypothesis 2), which increased approval (Hypothesis 3).

6. Study 4: Juxtaposing incumbent leaders with different clothing styles

After identifying the ambivalent influence of casual clothing on leader approval, we strived to extend our findings by employing the same stimulus material in a fourth study, but presenting the images to our subjects in a dyadic juxtaposition. Essentially, two CEOs from the Fortune 1000 competed against each other for leadership, one in formal and one in informal dress, with subjects deciding subjectively on whom they would ascribe charisma. We expect casually clothed CEOs to outperform their more formally clothed colleagues with regard to the charisma attributions they earn. Furthermore, in replication of Study 3, we expected informally dressed leaders to earn more approval in their competition for leadership than their more formally clothed competitors.

6.1. Methods and design

In Study 4, we acquired participants as in studies 1 and 3, with the addition of reaching out to employees of enterprises based in the UK and US. They were shown two images of CEOs in pairs, displayed side by side. We asked them to decide on which one they perceive to be more charismatic, older and more attractive, and which they would rather approve of as leader, each rated on a single choice item. Pairs were kept constant over all participants.

6.2. Sample

Overall 70 raters (47.1% female) with a mean age of 29.83 (SD = 10.06, age range 19 to 69) participated in this study and evaluated each of the 44 CEO pairings in a randomized order. Raters were mostly working in the education (11.4%), healthcare (8.6%), or retail and distribution sector (7.1%).

For this study, we opted for a more international sample and therefore administered german and english translations of the questionnaires. Participants were mostly German (41.4%), British (32.9%) or US-American (12.9%). Participants received a monetary compensation for completing the questionnaire.

6.3. Results and discussion

We conducted two repeated measures analyses of covariance comparing the percentage of participants firstly deciding on which of those leaders appeared as more charismatic and secondly selecting the more formal dressed as compared to the less formal dressed CEO as their leader. Differences in the perceived age, attractiveness, and rank difference to the less formally dressed leader were added as covariates to both models. Details on the reported effect sizes, alpha-levels and Bayes factors are laid out in Study 1. The less formal leader was perceived as more charismatic by 57.9% ($SE = 1.5\%$) of the participants ($F_{1,40} = 4.80$, $p = 0.034$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.11$, $BF_{10} = 56.56$), offering us more evidence in support of our second hypothesis. Similarly, more participants (50.6%, $SE = 1.1\%$) tended to vote for the less formal CEO as their own leader ($F_{1,40} = 7.72$, $p = 0.008$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$, $BF_{10} = 0.22$), supporting our third hypothesis.

To conclude, when presented with pairs of Fortune 1000 s CEOs in juxtaposition, we found that our participants lent the one clothed informally higher ascriptions of charisma, and were more likely to elect them as a leader than their counterpart. This effect emerged even when controlling for the difference in Forbes 1000 rank, perceived age, and perceived attractivity. Thus, we confirm our findings, regarding the effect of nonconformity in control-oriented organizations on the leader's approval rate (Hypothesis 3). In addition, we are thereby able to substantiate that informally dressed leaders were likely to knock out their competition based on dress alone.

7. Discussion and conclusion

Thinking of the prototypical organizational leader, most of us would likely imagine a person sitting behind a large wooden desk wearing a suit. However, many popular leaders have successfully turned this picture on its head. Think of George W. Bush, playing up his Texan credentials with a cowboy hat, thus involving grassroots voters in his vision, and Steve Jobs, attuning Apple customers to his embodiment of a forward-looking, informal company through his relaxed and unconventional dress sense. Their clothing does indeed fulfill the criteria of acting as a signal: it is highly visible and designed to communicate (Spence, 2002).

Quite in line with this picture, offered by replete examples from the media exposition surrounding popular leaders, our results offer a first concrete and quantifiable link to illuminate what impact clothing exerts on peoples' perceptions of leaders. Our results first lay a foundation, showing that formal dress increases a leaders' perceived prototypicality for their station (Hypothesis 1), while not showing much effect on their charisma ratings nor their approval. Our second study then goes on to

show how culture modulates this primary relationship, with leaders appearing charismatic when lifting themselves from their surroundings through their choice of dress. This may be executed with a disparity either way along the dimension of formality, when wearing informal clothing in a formal setting or vice versa (Hypothesis 2). Our third study then moves on to examining the specifics more or less in vivo, in Fortune 1000 CEOs, who are actually perceived as more charismatic when they are dressed casually, which makes them more likely to gain approval. But the effect is far from simple: apart from this mediation through leader's charisma, there is also an opposing direct effect, which suggests that a leader gains more approval through formal dress, leveling out at a stalemate. Finally, when these same CEOs competed for employees approval, then the more informally dressed leaders were able to outperform the more formally dressed opponents in the selection tournament (Hypothesis 3). Our results reveal the importance of a leader's context when they *dress to impress*. While the traditional suit serves them best in highly dynamic organizations, dressing down may actually be a better choice in a highly structured culture if they desire to outperform their competition. However, the results also reveal an opposite effect, where formal dress makes a leader appear more prototypical and also leads to more approval.

Think about Abraham Lincoln's prominent nose (Carwardine, 2003) or Grigori Rasputin's piercing eyes (Smith, 2016). Outstanding leaders have anecdotally been associated with outstanding features. Their salience earns them a variety of desirable effects, for example, being in the spotlight of a group by hijacking employees' attention (Gerpott et al., 2018). Our findings are consistent with earlier evidence on the effect of nonconformity on beholders' perceptions. Not adhering to a dress code created by social norms incurs social costs (Levine, 1989). In a control-oriented organization with formal dress code, dressing informally could be seen as being ignorant; in a flexible adhocratic one, dressing formally could be interpreted as being narrow-minded. By displaying the willingness to face potential consequent adversity, nonconforming individuals elicit ascriptions of status. They communicate that they do not fear losing their position in the society or organization. Further, deliberately subjecting oneself to social judgment could be interpreted as conspicuous consumption. Nonconforming actors display that they can afford the social costs to deviate from the norm, similar to individuals purchasing luxury items to display their wealth to others (Bellezza et al., 2014). Our findings suggest that leaders can intentionally or coincidentally benefit from this effect to elicit ascriptions of charisma and, therefore, leader approval. In highly formalized organizational cultures, deviating from the norm by wearing less formal attire makes individuals stand out, as does wearing formal attire in more flexible organizational cultures. Specifically, these leaders dare what others do not, and in doing so they pull all eyes onto themselves. The amount of attention they garner makes them stand out, implicitly creating the notion in peoples' minds that such prominence is indeed warranted. These individuals, therefore, communicate status and power because they do not fear the social judgment for disregarding common practices. This line of argumentation can be affirmed by the notion that in fact literally outstanding leaders are perceived as outstanding leaders (Gerpott et al., 2018). To conclude, clothing deviating from the norm may act as a charismatic signal, because it indicates the presence of ability outstanding enough to permit the wearer to deviate so obviously. This notion is well supported by the so-called Red Sneakers Effect in marketing science, which shows that prestige based on outstanding ability (e.g., a professor's affiliation with a "top-tier" university vs. a regular one) often leads people to signal this prestige by deviating from norms, specifically by clothing themselves differently (Bellezza et al., 2014). Our findings offer first substantial, tangible insights into this dynamic by showing that leaders who choose to dress differently not only appear more charismatic, but also gain more approval from their group.

The role of a leader is first of all to motivate employees, and thence to signal structure, encompassing the provision of clear goals, as well as the supervision, monitoring and coordination of the group during the process of goal completion (Yukl, 1999). To gain further insight into this process, we did not focus on leadership styles and tried to draw inference on resulting behaviors, but rather focused on the behavioral underpinnings that constitute leadership, an approach that is still underrepresented in leadership research (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). Leaders embody certain nonverbal signals, such as their height (Judge & Cable, 2004), body-language (Tskhay, Xu, & Rule, 2014), facial expressions (Barrett & Barrington, 2005) and possibly their style of attire, that inform their surroundings on their leadership abilities beyond their rhetoric capabilities (Reh et al., 2017). Formal dress embodies a higher degree of structure than casual clothing, and most large and mature organizations are highly structured in terms of formalization and centralization (e.g., Dougherty & Hardy, 1996). Consistent with our line of reasoning we found that leaders wearing more formal clothing therefore generally access, to their benefit, the implicit association of structure, merely by dressing in a formal manner, resulting in higher ascriptions of prototypicality for their station and an increased approval rate. However, integrating the findings of our second study, the cultural context of the organization has a sizable influence on how clothing shapes perceptions of a leader. In a flexibility-oriented culture, formal clothing lets a leader appear charismatic; by contrast, in a more formal and control-oriented culture, the casual clothing ensures the same result. Although the formal dress of a leader is consistent with the broad prototype of a leader, it is the deviation from the context, expressed in their clothing, which makes them charismatic. This latter notion gains further support from our results on Fortune 1000 CEOs, who lead organizations that are inherently formalized and hierarchical. A more casual style of attire not only makes these leaders appear more charismatic, but the increase in perceived charisma also boosts their appeal among their potential followership. Watched through the lense of the paradox perspective (see Fairhurst & Putnam, 2019; Waldman, Putnam, Miron-Spektor, & Siegel, 2019; Zhang et al., 2015), we argue that followers appreciate a leader that embodies flexibility if the cultural context provides structure, and vice versa, in organizations where the culture is defined by flexibility and adhocracy, the designated leader gains approval when embodying a certain degree of structure. They thus earn higher ascriptions of desirable leader attributes such as charisma when they signal that which is not predefined by the cultural context: structure in the absence of structure, or flexibility in the absence of flexibility. Such unexpected leader appearance may increase employees' attention, as they sense paradox tension from non-confirmative leader behavior and attribute high leadership abilities to a leader who is responding to contradicting demands (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

7.1. Limitations and future research

Our study offers compelling insights into how observers form charismatic impressions of designated leaders based on their clothing. Thereby, we are able to identify clothing as one distinct and easily manipulable behavioral signal of charisma. However, clothing is only one of many powerful nonverbal cues that influence impressions of leaders. There are many other claimed signals of a leader's charisma (e.g., Antonakis et al., 2016; Grabo et al., 2017; Reh et al., 2017) for which experimental evidence of their effect is still to be found.

Second, future research could explore a wide array of cues, such as gestures (e.g., Frese, Beimel, & Schoenborn, 2003), vocal projection (e.g., Niebuhr, Voße, & Brem, 2016), or facial expressions (e.g., Bono & Ilies, 2006), with regard to their interaction with contextual factors, such as organizational culture. For example, eye contact, which enables a leader to connect with their followers (Maran, Furtner, Liegl, et al., 2019), produces different effects, for example in an internally oriented culture as compared to in an externally oriented culture.

Third, despite our study's high internal validity and our effort to replicate our findings within more naturalistic settings using images of actual Fortune 1000 companies' leaders (e.g., Bellezza et al., 2014), our

studies face some issues regarding external validity. Future research should therefore seek to replicate our findings in a real-life workplace setting, deploying, for instance, experimental designs (Kraus et al., 2016; Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2019), where employees are presented with real leaders wearing different styles of clothing. Fourth, all our stimulus subjects were male, for the sake of consistency and comparability in the face of a regrettable lack of female CEOs in Fortune 1000 listed companies. However, if a sample of sufficient power could be obtained, it would be of great interest to contrast the effects of conformity and clothing between male and female leaders (Brescoll, 2016). Lastly, whereas the pictures used in studies 1 and 2 displayed the full body of our stimulus person, we used portrait pictures of the Fortune 1000 companies' leaders in studies 3 and 4, again for the sake of comparability between these pictures and to increase the external validity of our findings. This, however, places a greater emphasis on the leaders' faces, bringing possible confounding factors into play, such as facial features (e.g., Antonakis & Eubanks, 2017; Todorov, 2005), like the facial width-to-height ratio (Geniole, Denson, Dixson, Carré, & McCormick, 2015), or whether the leaders were smiling or showing different facial expressions that act as possible signals for charisma and thus impact observers' impressions (e.g., Trichas et al., 2017). One could expect smiling leaders to garner more positive ascriptions and subsequent votes, following the definition of charisma being emotion-laden signalling (Antonakis et al., 2016), and leaders with an increased facial width-to-height ratio to be perceived as more dominant and aggressive (Carré, McCormick, & Mondloch, 2009). However, as previous research revealed, the impact of affective displays is highly context dependent (Damen, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg, 2008; Koning & Van Kleef, 2015; Van Knippenberg & Van Kleef, 2016) and similarly, when it comes to the stable facial physiognomy, a generalizability of these effects could not be confirmed (Kosinski, 2017). Still, we believe assessing the differential impact of nonverbal cues in relation to each other and possible reciprocal effects between them provides a promising avenue for future research that will bring needed clarity to the nature of the behavioral foundations of charisma.

7.2. Practical implications

If nonconformity serves as a signal of charisma, intentional deviance from etiquette can elicit ascriptions of higher status and competence than a conformist choice of apparel (Bellezza et al., 2014). This is of course highly relevant to those who produce apparel, and has the power to influence aspects ranging from product design over marketing targets to advertisement designs. Some, of course, already relish in the sale of nonconforming apparel, such as mismatched socks in packs of three, while luxury designer brands hinge on the charismatic personality of the designer, which they aim to reflect in the distinguished products or services (Dion & Arnould, 2011). However, a more targeted approach could leverage the implications of charisma and leader prototypicality being influenced by clothing further. Similarly, any of the countless political and corporate PR advisory agencies who specialize in optimizing every aspect of public presentations by notables or spokespersons could profit applying these findings. Furthermore, these findings are of intrinsic relevance to applications of leadership development (Meier & Carroll, 2020; Prommer, Tiberius, & Kraus, 2020). Leaders are bound to their institution's aesthetic code, and thus have to learn in which cases deviating from this implicit code is beneficial, and in which they should rather conform with it, to shape their employees' impressions as intended (Carroll & Smolović Jones, 2018). Finally, the use of clothing as a control variable in public surveys assessing any aspect of leadership could clean those results of residual bias, introduced if some of the subjects diverged from conformity in their dress code. However, future research is needed to explore this proposition in greater detail.

7.3. Concluding remarks

Our results paint a heterogeneous picture of how a leader's choice of attire shapes their prospective followers' perception. While wearing a suit, overall, causes a leader to appear more prototypical and to garner a higher approval rate, we challenge the traditional image of the formally dressed leader by taking the organizational context into consideration. Whether it's formal dress amidst a dynamic environment or informal dress where the culture demands structure: If a leader dresses in a way that is contrary to the context that the organization operates in, they may surpass their more conformingly dressed competitors when running for leadership. In a nutshell, a clothing style that deviates from the context acts as a charismatic signal and impacts leader approval. At the same time, recommendations for action should be treated with caution. The results also reveal an opposite effect, which is consistent with the notion that it is formal dress that makes a leader appear more prototypical and also leads to more approval. These results offer a first insight into the dynamics at play when leader perception meets personal clothing preferences in the crucible of corporate dress codes.

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Appendix A. Vignette texts (Study 2)

The following vignette texts were used as introductory texts in Study 2, to provide contextual information on the company's culture the participants should imagine themselves working in. These were composed by closely following the definitions of the flexibility-oriented adhocracy and the control-oriented hierarchy dimension of the competing values framework.

Context for the flexibility-oriented culture:

Imagine you are working in a young organization. Your organization in an open and decentralized network with a large number of colleagues of equal standing. Your work consists of various dynamic and creative activities.

Your organization thrives on innovation and likes to experiment. The main goal of the organization is to grow in the long term. Leadership is characterized by their innovative ideas and by a high willingness to take risks. The organization offers you and your colleagues a lot of freedom and encourages you to find new solutions.

Context for the control-oriented culture:

Imagine you are working in an established organization. Your organization lives strictly by fixed rules and formal procedures. Your work is formalized and everything has its rightful place. Employees have their fixed place and the opportunities for advancement are highly dependent on their performance.

Your organization is primarily interested in efficiency. The main goal is to avoid unforeseeable events and to secure the employment of the staff. Leadership is characterized by controlling and coordinating the employees to keep the organization running smoothly.

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Thomas Maran researches and teaches Leadership, Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Universities of Liechtenstein and Innsbruck. He holds a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Innsbruck, Austria. He and his company, LeadershipWerk, consult established companies to improve their leaders, drive towards data-driven choices and develop their range of leadership options. His portfolio includes a series of leader(ship) development programs, assessment centers and psychometric testing, as well as evaluation of transformation, business experiments and data intelligence.

Simon Liegl completed a master's degree in psychology at the University of Innsbruck and is currently enrolled in the PhD in Business Economics – Entrepreneurship and Management at the University of Liechtenstein. His research focuses on charismatic leadership behaviors.

Sebastian Moder completed a master's degree in entrepreneurship at the University of Liechtenstein and is currently enrolled in the PhD in Business Economics – Entrepreneurship and Management at the University of Liechtenstein. His research focuses on leadership and its effect on organizational culture.

Sascha Kraus is Full Professor of Management at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in South Tyrol, Italy. He holds a doctorate in Social and Economic Sciences from Klagenfurt University, Austria, a PhD in Industrial Engineering and Management from Helsinki University of Technology and a Habilitation (Venia Docendi) from Lappeenranta University of Technology, both in Finland. Before, he held Full Professor positions at Utrecht University, The Netherlands, the University of Liechtenstein, École Supérieure du Commerce Extérieur Paris, France, and at Durham University, United Kingdom.

Marco Furtner holds the Chair for Entrepreneurship and Leadership at the University of Liechtenstein. He is Head of the Institute of Entrepreneurship and Dean of Studies for the MSc Entrepreneurship at the University of Liechtenstein. His current research focuses on leadership, entrepreneurship, and innovation.