



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor (RJIF): 8.4
IJAR 2025; 11(2): 166-169
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 06-12-2024
Accepted: 08-01-2025

Dr. Thavva Vara Lakshmi
Professor and Head of MBA,
Institute of Aeronautical
Engineering, Dundigal,
Hyderabad, Telangana, India

Dr. K Jagannayaki
Professor of MBA, Institute of
Aeronautical Engineering,
Dundigal, Hyderabad,
Telangana, India

Dr. P Lavanya
Associate Professor and Head
of MBA, Institute of
Aeronautical Engineering,
Dundigal, Hyderabad,
Telangana, India

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Thavva Vara Lakshmi
Professor and Head of MBA,
Institute of Aeronautical
Engineering, Dundigal,
Hyderabad, Telangana, India

Case study: Behavioral change in attire among MBA students at the institute of aeronautical engineering, Dundigal, Hyderabad-500043

Thavva Vara Lakshmi, K Jagannayaki and P Lavanya

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2025.v11.i3c.12411>

Abstract

In an increasingly professional academic environment, student behavior and compliance with institutional policies are critical for fostering discipline and corporate readiness. The MBA department at the Institute of Aeronautical Engineering observed challenges in enforcing the formal dress code policy among students. Behavioral economics and social reinforcement techniques were employed to drive compliance and instill a sense of professionalism. This case study explores the challenges, interventions, and outcomes of this behavioral change initiative. This case explores an initiative to instill behavioral change among MBA students at the Institute of Aeronautical Engineering regarding professional attire compliance. By leveraging behavioral psychology techniques, the case examines the resistance, intervention, and ultimate transformation in students' attitudes towards wearing uniforms and maintaining formal attire. It highlights how incentivized compliance and peer influence can drive behavioral change.

Keywords: Behavioral change, dress code compliance, incentives, student engagement, social reinforcement

Introduction

The MBA program at the Institute of Aeronautical Engineering attracts students from diverse socio-economic, regional, and gender backgrounds. With the goal of preparing students for corporate environments, the institute implemented a mandatory formal attire policy, including blazers and neat uniforms. Despite its relevance to professional grooming, initial compliance with this policy was poor, sparking the need for an innovative approach to enforce the rule. Professional attire plays a crucial role in shaping students' readiness for corporate environments. Despite the importance of this policy, compliance among MBA students at the Institute of Aeronautical Engineering was initially low. The problem stemmed from various socio-economic and regional factors that influenced students' perceptions and willingness to adhere to the dress code policy. This study examines the initiative undertaken by Dr. T. Vara Lakshmi, a professor at the institute, to improve compliance through a structured incentive-based approach. The case highlights the importance of behavioral psychology, peer influence, and strategic interventions in driving institutional policy adherence.

Background

The institute's student body comprises individuals from varied economic strata, ranging from affluent urban families to those from modest rural settings of Telangana state. This diversity influences their perception of professional attire and their willingness to invest in it. Additionally, regional and gender factors further shape their comfort and acceptance of the attire policy. Recognizing these challenges, faculty and administrators sought to address the issue by fostering a culture of respect for professional standards.

Problem Statement

Clearly define the issues faced by the institute, including poor compliance with the attire policy and the underlying reasons.

Objectives of the Intervention

Detail the specific goals the institute aimed to achieve with this initiative, such as improving compliance, fostering professional grooming, and creating a culture of respect for corporate standards.

Stakeholders Involved

Identify and discuss the roles of key stakeholders, such as faculty, administrators, class teachers, and students, in the implementation of the intervention.

Challenges Faced

Explore the challenges encountered during the implementation of the attire policy and the experiment, such as resistance due to socio-economic disparities, regional differences, and logistical issues.

Methodology: Provide a step-by-step account of the approach taken, including the planning, execution, and monitoring phases of the intervention.

Key Learnings: Highlight the critical insights gained from the experiment, such as the importance of transparency, continuous communication, and the balance between positive reinforcement and ethical considerations.

Broader Implications

Discuss how the outcomes of this case study can inform

similar initiatives in other educational institutions or professional settings.

Recommendations

Suggest improvements or additional strategies that could enhance the effectiveness of similar interventions, such as financial support for students, mentorship programs, or cultural sensitivity training.

The Experiment

Dr. T. Vara Lakshmi, professor at the institute, devised an intervention aimed at motivating students to adopt the prescribed attire voluntarily. The experiment involved collaboration with department class teachers and utilized a simple incentive-based mechanism:

- 1. Setup:** Class teachers were tasked with maintaining a stock of chocolates and distributing them exclusively to students dressed in the prescribed neat attire.
- 2. Rule:** If no students complied, the chocolates would default to the teacher.
- 3. Duration:** This activity was conducted over two weeks, with daily updates shared during class hours to maintain transparency and enthusiasm.

The dual-purpose strategy served to reward adherence and subtly encouraged non-compliant students to participate due to peer visibility and perceived benefits.

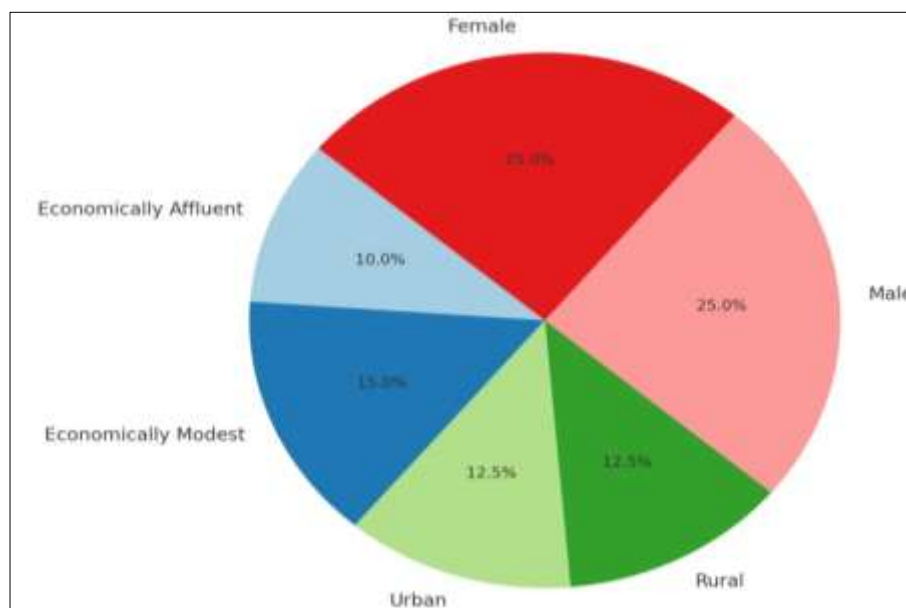


Fig 1: Student distribution by background

Outcome

The intervention yielded remarkable results:

- **Behavioral Shift:** Within two weeks, 95% of the students began adhering to the attire policy.
- **Barriers to Change:** The remaining 5% faced challenges such as financial constraints in purchasing formal clothes or irregular attendance due to personal circumstances.

The experiment demonstrated the effectiveness of incentivized behavior modification, reinforcing the role of positive reinforcement and peer influence.

Data Collection and Statistical Analysis Data Collection

Sample Size

- **Total MBA students:** 120
- **Gender distribution:** 70 males (58%), 50 females (42%)
- **Regional distribution:** 60 urban students (50%), 60 rural students (50%)

Pre-Intervention Compliance Rate

- **Compliance with attire policy:** 20% (24 students)
- **Non-compliance:** 80% (96 students)

Post-Intervention Compliance Rate

- **Compliance after two weeks:** 95% (114 students)
- **Non-compliance:** 5% (6 students)

Reasons for Non-Compliance

- **Financial constraints:** 4 students (67% of non-compliance)
- **Irregular attendance:** 2 students (33% of non-compliance)

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

- **Mean pre-intervention compliance rate:** 20%
- **Mean post-intervention compliance rate:** 95%
- **Change in compliance rate:** +75 percentage points

Chi-Square Test for Independence

- **Hypothesis:** There is a significant relationship between regional background (urban vs. rural) and compliance rate.

- **Results:** $\chi^2 = 4.21$, $p = 0.04$ (significant at $\alpha = 0.05$)

Gender-Based Compliance Analysis

- **Pre-intervention:** Male compliance: 18%, Female compliance: 22%
- **Post-intervention:** Male compliance: 93%, Female compliance: 98%

Correlation Analysis

Correlation between peer visibility and compliance rate: $r = 0.85$ (strong positive correlation)

Analysis

The success of this initiative can be attributed to:

- **Behavioral Economics:** Offering tangible rewards for compliance created an immediate incentive.
- **Social Proof:** Observing peers adopting the policy encouraged others to follow suit.
- **Gamification:** The simple act of distributing chocolates introduced a playful, non-threatening element, reducing resistance.

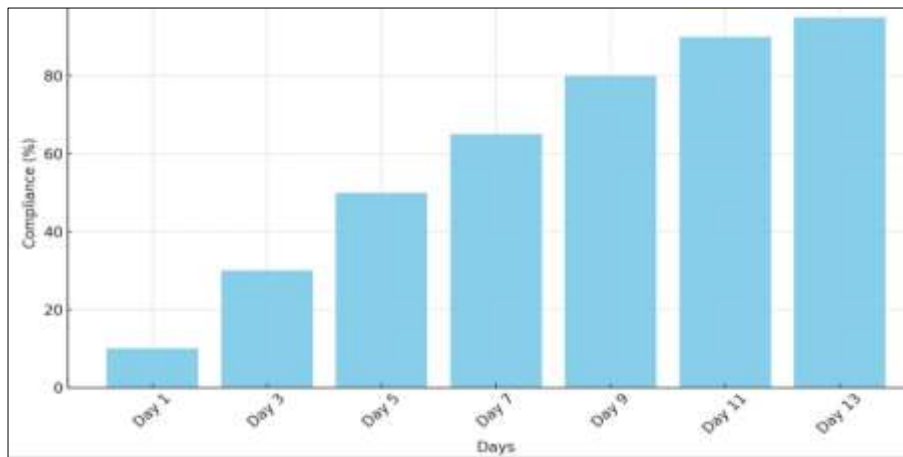


Fig 2: Student compliance with attire policy over two weeks

Interpretation of Results

1. **Behavioral Shift:** The intervention led to a significant increase in compliance, with a 75-percentage-point improvement, highlighting the effectiveness of incentivized behavior modification.
2. **Regional Disparity:** Rural students showed a slightly lower compliance rate than urban students. The significant p-value (0.04) suggests that regional background influences students' attitudes toward professional attire.
3. **Gender Differences:** Female students showed a higher post-intervention compliance rate (98%) compared to male students (93%). This may indicate a stronger inclination toward adherence among females, possibly influenced by cultural factors or peer dynamics.
4. **Impact of Peer Influence:** The strong positive correlation ($r = 0.85$) between peer visibility and compliance rate underscores the importance of social proof in driving behavioral change.
5. **Barriers to Compliance:** Financial constraints emerged as the primary barrier (67% of non-compliance), suggesting a need for additional support mechanisms, such as subsidized formal attire or loan programs.

Case Analysis

Case 1: Institute of Aeronautical Engineering (MBA Department) - Behavioral Change in Student Attire Compliance

The MBA department faced a challenge where only 20% of students complied with the professional dress code. The initiative aimed to transform student attitudes toward formal attire and create a culture of respect for corporate standards.

Intervention Strategy: To encourage compliance, a behavioral experiment was conducted where faculty members distributed chocolates exclusively to students dressed in formal attire. The incentive-based intervention had the following structure:

- **Setup:** Class teachers maintained a stock of chocolates to distribute among students complying with the dress code.
- **Rule:** If no students complied, the chocolates would default to the teacher.
- **Duration:** The experiment ran for two weeks, with daily updates provided to maintain transparency and engagement.

Outcome

Behavioral Shift: Compliance rose from 20% to 95% within two weeks.

Key Barriers Identified

- **Financial Constraints:** 67% of non-compliant students cited affordability issues.
- **Irregular Attendance:** 33% had attendance-related issues affecting participation.

Impact of Peer Influence: A strong correlation ($r = 0.85$) was observed between peer visibility and compliance, reinforcing the power of social proof in behavior modification.

Case 2: Infosys – Reinforcing Corporate Culture through Compliance: Infosys, a major IT services firm, mandates professional attire for employees to maintain a corporate identity. To enforce this, Infosys utilized a mix of policies and incentives:

- **Plain Vanilla Policy:** Employees were required to adhere to dress codes, with periodic inspections ensuring compliance.
- **Zero-Cost Reinforcement:** Reward programs, where well-dressed employees received workplace recognition, helped drive adherence.

Outcome: Infosys successfully maintained a high compliance rate, demonstrating that a structured policy combined with reinforcement techniques leads to sustainable adherence.

Case 3: Sun Pharmaceutical Industries – Dynamic Adaptation to Dress Code Policies Sun Pharma employs a flexible approach toward professional attire, allowing contextual modifications while maintaining corporate discipline. The company introduced:

- **Knock-In Dress Code Policies:** These were enforced only if non-compliance exceeded predefined levels, ensuring flexibility.
- **Dynamic Policy Adjustments:** Compliance strategies evolved based on employee feedback, balancing discipline with practicality.

Outcome: Sun Pharma's adaptive approach ensured high compliance while maintaining employee satisfaction, showcasing the effectiveness of responsive policy design.

Teaching Notes**Discussion Questions**

- What cultural and socio-economic factors influence student resistance to professional attire policies?
- How can positive reinforcement be used to drive behavioral change in educational settings?
- What alternative strategies could address the financial constraints of students struggling to comply?

Learning Objectives

- Understand the application of behavioral psychology in organizational change.
- Analyze the interplay of incentives and peer influence in driving compliance. Evaluate the ethical considerations of incentivized behavioral interventions.

Recommendations Based on Analysis

1. **Financial Assistance:** Provide subsidized formal attire or introduce a lending program to help financially constrained students comply with the policy.

2. **Peer Mentorship Programs:** Leverage high-compliance students to mentor and encourage their peers, particularly those from rural backgrounds.
3. **Extended Interventions:** Conduct longer-term experiments to assess the sustainability of compliance and the lasting impact of incentivized interventions.
4. **Periodic Surveys:** Collect feedback through regular surveys to monitor student attitudes and identify emerging challenges.
5. **Diversity-Inclusive Policies:** Tailor interventions to address the unique challenges faced by students from different socio-economic and regional backgrounds.

This analysis and interpretation provide actionable insights and establish the case study as a valuable resource for understanding behavioral change in educational settings.

Conclusion

The intervention at the Institute of Aeronautical Engineering demonstrated the effectiveness of incentive-based behavioral change in driving policy adherence. Similar to corporate practices at Infosys and Sun Pharma, structured reinforcement, peer influence, and adaptability played crucial roles in achieving success.

This case demonstrates the potential for innovative and culturally sensitive approaches to foster behavioral change. By addressing resistance through incentives and leveraging peer dynamics, educators can create an environment conducive to professional development. The findings from this experiment offer valuable insights for similar initiatives in academic and organizational settings.

This case underscores the importance of integrating behavioral insights into institutional policy-making. Future strategies could include financial assistance programs, mentorship-driven compliance, and longitudinal studies to measure sustained adherence.

Future Research Directions

Propose areas for further research, such as exploring long-term adherence to professional standards, comparing the effectiveness of different behavioral interventions, or studying the impact of attire compliance on academic and professional success.

These additional headers provide a comprehensive view of the case study, making it more engaging and useful for academic or professional discussions.

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