

Issue 057: Dress Code

Adrian Kosmaczewski

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Welcome to the fifty-seventh issue of *De Programmatica Ipsum*, about *Dress Code*.

In this edition:

- We investigate the history and role of fashion¹ in the software industry.
- In the Library section², we review “Peopleware” by Tom DeMarco and Timothy Lister³.
- In our Vidéothèque section⁴, we learn what Mayuko Inoue⁵ wears every day to work.

We would also like to thank our patrons who generously contribute every month (or have contributed in the past) to our work and help us run this magazine. Thank you so much! In alphabetical order: Adam Guest, Adrian Tineo Cabello, Benjamin Sheldon, Christopher Nascone, Jean-Paul de Vooght, Patryk Matuszewski, Paul Hudson, Quico Moya, Roger Turner, and Szymon Licau.

Enjoy this issue! Please subscribe to our free newsletter⁶ to stay updated about new releases, share the articles on social media, or contribute⁷ if you would like to support our work.

Cover photo by Keagan Henman⁸ on Unsplash⁹.

¹<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/tenue-correcte-exigee/>

²<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/category/library/>

³<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/tom-demarco-timothy-lister/>

⁴<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/category/videotheque/>

⁵<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/mayuko-inoue/>

⁶<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/newsletter/>

⁷<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/contribute/>

⁸https://unsplash.com/@henmankk?utm_source=unsplash&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=creditCopyText

⁹https://unsplash.com/photos/xPJYL0l5Ii8?utm_source=unsplash&utm_medium=referral&utm_content

=creditCopyText

Tenue Correcte Exigée

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The French have a very intimate relationship with clothing. This should not be a surprise, given the sheer size and impact of their renowned fashion industry, arguably one of the biggest contributors to France's GDP.

Unsurprisingly, this relationship extends to their vocabulary. Expressions such as “l’habit ne fait pas le moine” (“do not judge a book by its cover”), “le cordonnier est souvent mal chaussé” (“the cobbler’s children are the worst shod”), or “deshabiller Paul pour habiller Jean” (“rob Peter to pay Paul”) populate the colorful language shared by Yves Saint Laurent¹, Inès de la Fressange², Karl Lagerfeld³, and Olivier Rousteing⁴.

¹[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yves_Saint_Laurent_\(designer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yves_Saint_Laurent_(designer))

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In%C3%A8s_de_La_Fressange

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Lagerfeld

⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olivier_Rousteing

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry⁵, author of the second-most translated book of all time⁶, colorfully explained (also in French) the importance of dress in our society through a simple anecdote: the planet of the Little Prince had been discovered in 1909 by a Turkish astronomer that nobody took seriously because of his traditional clothes. Repeating his conference in 1920, this time in suit and tie after a reform in his country, he had been applauded at length.

Many professions can be recognized through their dress codes. Doctors and nurses wear aprons. Police officers, firefighters, and soldiers wear uniforms. Tennis players in Wimbledon⁷ must dress exclusively in white. Astronauts wear space suits. Dominatrices wear black latex catsuits. The Pontifical Swiss Guard⁸ in the Vatican wears the same outfit⁹ since the 16th century. Soccer players have matching kits. Wolverine fights evil dressed in yellow spandex. Software developers wear the t-shirts they got for free at the last conference.

To a certain extent, beyond the practical considerations of those clothing styles (both driven by safety issues and tradition), we expect practitioners of those professions to wear those uniforms, as if we wanted them to conform to certain stereotypes and/or prejudices. Not doing so would send a wrong signal.

Many locations enforce strict dress codes, like operas, or some restaurants, like Parker's Restaurant¹⁰ in Boston, where

Appropriate dress is required. Jackets for gentlemen preferred. Shorts and shirts without collars are not permitted. Footwear is required.

We should never underestimate the power of clothing in our capacity to relate to others. Take, for example, the late Steve Jobs. Reading chapter 28 of his biography by Walter Isaacson, we learn that Jobs wanted Issey Miyake¹¹ to create a uniform for Apple employees, an idea that, understandably, was poorly received by his peers in the upper layers at Cupertino.

In the process, however, he became friends with Miyake and would visit him regularly. He also came to like the idea of having a uniform for himself, because of both its daily convenience (...) and its ability to convey a signature style. "So I asked Issey to make me some of his black turtlenecks that I liked, and he made me like a hundred of them." Jobs noticed my surprise when he told this story, so he gestured to them stacked up in the closet. "That's what I wear," he said. "I have enough to last for the rest of my life."

Steve Jobs' dress style was so iconic that Elizabeth Holmes, of failed Theranos fame, copied it almost verbatim to appear on the covers of Fortune, Inc., and Forbes.

These days, software developers expect to wear t-shirts and jeans to work, and any suggestion of a mandatory dress code is taken as nothing less than an offense. This has not always been the case.

John von Neumann¹² was famous, among other things, for always wearing¹³ an eternal, impeccable 3-piece suit:

⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoine_de_Saint-Exup%C3%A9ry

⁶https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Little_Prince

⁷https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wimbledon_Championships

⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swiss_Guard

⁹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swiss_Guard#Uniforms

¹⁰<https://www.omnihotels.com/hotels/boston-parker-house/dining/parkers-restaurant>

¹¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Issey_Miyake

¹²<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/william-aspray/>

¹³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_von_Neumann

He always wore formal suits. He once wore a three-piece pinstripe while riding down the Grand Canyon astride a mule. Hilbert is reported to have asked, “Pray, who is the candidate’s tailor?” at von Neumann’s 1926 doctoral exam, as he had never seen such beautiful evening clothes.

Bret Victor¹⁴ gave his “The Future of Programming” talk dressed in a shirt and tie, just like any engineer would in 1973, and just like Douglas Engelbart¹⁵ did in his “Mother of all Demos”¹⁶ in 1968.

James Cortada, in his 2018 extraordinary book about IBM¹⁷, mentioned the dress code of his fellow IBMers in various places. First, when talking about how Watson Sr. ordered his troops to wear the quintessential IBM uniform: a blue suit, with a white shirt and a matching blue tie. Then on page 604, when he shows a photograph of Brazilian IBMers having a beer (something unthinkable in a company that actively banned alcohol) wearing suspenders, shirts, and ties.

And the cover of the book¹⁸ about the ins and outs of one of IBM’s most iconic machines, the IBM 5150, literally shows Peter Norton wearing a pink shirt and tie. Closer to us: Maurice Moss in *The IT Crowd*¹⁹, played by Richard Ayoade²⁰, always wore a tie for an increased comedic effect.

The dominance of IBM in the computer industry not only meant large installed bases of IBM 1401s²¹, but also that those operating them would wear the same uniform as those selling them.

Things changed slowly, and then all of a sudden. This transition is quite visible in the “I’m a Mac, I’m a PC” series of commercials²² made by Apple in the mid-2000s, one of which even featured fashion icon Gisele Bündchen²³ herself.

The inflection point of dress codes towards what we know today happened somewhere between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, just as IBM’s culture started vanishing, and a newly born hacker culture, driven by personal computers, Free and Open-Source software²⁴, and later the web²⁵, gained more and more traction.

The classic photo of Microsoft in Albuquerque in 1978²⁶ shows no suits or ties but a few colorful shirts. More or less at the same time, in the Santa Cruz Operation or SCO, not to be confused with the infamous SCO Group,

Dress was casual to the point where some staffers went barefoot.

(Source²⁷)

¹⁴<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/bret-victor/>

¹⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5PgQS3ZBWA>

¹⁶https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mother_of_All_Demos

¹⁷<https://direct.mit.edu/books/book/4177/IBM-The-Rise-and-Fall-and-Reinvention-of-a-Global>

¹⁸<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/peter-norton/>

¹⁹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_IT_Crowd

²⁰https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Ayoade

²¹<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/ken-ross-paul-laughton/>

²²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eEG5LVXdKo>

²³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s01yqqbpuI0>

²⁴<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/open-always-wins/>

²⁵<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/from-hypertext-to-spas-to-hypertext/>

²⁶<https://news.microsoft.com/2008/06/25/iconic-albuquerque-photo-re-created/>

²⁷https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Cruz_Operation

I deduce that the SCO staff never had lunch at Parker's in Boston. On the other hand, it is no pizzeria, so...

Andy Hertzfeld mentioned an anecdote in page 13 of his book "Revolution in the Valley"²⁸ telling the story of the creation of the Macintosh in the early 1980s:

Burrell (Smith) started thinking about what it would take to get promoted. It obviously wasn't a matter of talent or technical skill because he was already far more accomplished in that regard than most of the other hardware engineers. (...) Finally, he noticed something that most of the other engineers had in common that he was lacking: they all had fairly prominent moustaches. (...)

So Burrell immediately started growing his own moustache. It took around a month or so for it to fully come in, but he finally pronounced it complete. And sure enough, that very afternoon, he was called into Tom Whitney's office and promoted to "member of technical staff" as a full-fledged engineer.

There is no mention of a dress code in Valve's Employee Handbook²⁹ or other³⁰ company handbooks.

Sign of a macho-driven culture, Lenna³¹ was naked in pretty much every book about computer graphics, well into the 2010s.

Is the classic "geek" dress code a signal of longing for some sort of "lost paradise"? Are we all wishing to return to some kind of long-lost childhood? Are we therefore refusing to grow? No, clearly not. That is the common wisdom of much of the establishment intelligentsia in big corporations. The truth is, there is much more to the geek dress code than meets the eye at first. It represents a reaction, a counterpoint, and a staccato.

In Marillion's 1985 masterpiece "Childhood's End" the raucous voice of Fish³² told us that

You want to change the world
You'd resigned yourself to die a broken rebel
But that was looking backward
Now you've found the light

Breaking from the mold of the corporate dress code, geeks and hackers were able to show the world a new way of thinking, one that did not need the uniformity (and restraint) of a suit and a tie. Their radicalism brought forward a world driven by software, in all of its forms, in as many programming languages as we could come up with.

The Mentor, in *The Conscience of a Hacker*³³, proclaimed in 1986 such newfound freedom with clarity and purpose:

Yes, I am a criminal. My crime is that of curiosity. My crime is that of judging people by what they say and think, not what they look like. My crime is that of outsmarting you, something that you will never forgive me for.

In *The Tao of Programming*³⁴, "translated" by Geoffrey James in 1987, we read the common reaction from the rest of the industry to this growing subculture:

²⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution_in_the_Valley

²⁹<https://archive.org/details/ValveEmployeeHandbook>

³⁰<https://handbook.vshn.ch/>

³¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenna>

³²[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fish_\(singer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fish_(singer))

³³<http://phrack.org/issues/7/3.html>

³⁴<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/geoffrey-james/>

A programmer from a very large computer company went to a software conference and then returned to report to his manager, saying: “What sort of programmers work for other companies? They behaved badly and were unconcerned with appearances. Their hair was long and unkempt and their clothes were wrinkled and old. They crashed our hospitality suite and they made rude noises during my presentation.”

The manager said: “I should have never sent you to the conference. Those programmers live beyond the physical world. They consider life absurd, an accidental coincidence. They come and go without knowing limitations. Without a care, they live only for their programs. Why should they bother with social conventions?

They are alive within the Tao.”

Suits are slowly disappearing from work spaces, and the COVID pandemic only strengthened this trend, just like there is now an unstoppable movement towards remote work. Well, except in some reluctant Fortune 500 companies, and in some countries like Switzerland, where managers stubbornly clutch at straws forcing their teams to look alike at all times and in person at the office.

A strict dress code only promotes and enforces an already problematic and pervasive, impossible dialogue³⁵ between managers and programmers. It must be banned, it is anachronistic, and quoting some influencers, it is completely unfashionable. As DeMarco and Lister³⁶ colorfully put it in their classic book “Peopleware”:

Uniformity is so important to insecure authoritarian regimes (parochial schools and armies, for example) that they even impose dress codes. Different lengths of skirt or colors of jacket are threatening, and so they are forbidden. Nothing is allowed to mar the long row of nearly identical troops. Accomplishment matters only to the extent it can be achieved by people who don’t look different.

It is only a matter of time now. Suits will soon be gone, not only in IT teams, but everywhere. Even Goldman Sachs realized that it needed to relax its dress code to attract talent³⁷. “Casual Fridays” are no longer enough, and this is just the beginning.

As Karl Lagerfeld once said³⁸,

Fashion is a language created in clothes to interpret reality.

Reality in 2023 is vastly different from what it used to be in 1959, 1986, and even 2019. Fashion codes will interpret it accordingly, even through endless collections of geek t-shirts.

Now, if we could also get rid of open spaces, I would be most thankful, too.

Cover photo by Benjamin Rascoe³⁹ on Unsplash⁴⁰.

³⁵<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/the-impossible-dialogue/>

³⁶<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/tom-demarco-timothy-lister/>

³⁷<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/07/13/goldman-sachs-relaxes-dress-code-for-techs-in-fight-for-talent.html>

³⁸<https://citation-celebre.leparisien.fr/citations/150234>

³⁹https://unsplash.com/@dapperprofessional?utm_source=unsplash&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=creditCopyText

⁴⁰https://unsplash.com/photos/ItqFmSxKnIg?utm_source=unsplash&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=creditCopyText

Mayuko Inoue

Adrian Kosmaczewski

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The archetype of software engineering dress code is quite parochial: a t-shirt (usually featuring a conference or programming language logo, or a geek joke), a pair of jeans, sneakers, and a sweatshirt, in case the weather gets more San Francisco-like than you might expect. And that is it. Let us admit it: the “about us” page of software companies often looks like advertising for The Gap¹, American Apparel², or sometimes even, sadly, Abercrombie & Fitch³, minus the abs, of course.

This prototypical vision is strongly influenced by a software industry predominantly populated by white males between 25 and 35 years old. Thankfully, the winds of change, particularly since the 2010s, have brought a much-needed breath of fresh air, and we see more and more people from other ethnic and gender groups lately.

(Well, at least in some parts of the world. In Switzerland, as usual, we are quite a bit behind the rest of the world, this time in terms of diversity. The software industry in this country remains a stubbornly white male affair, at least for now.)

We also saw during the last decade the rise in popularity of a new kind of entertainer: the social media influencer. Many have built solid names in the tech field; suffice to mention Justine Ezarik⁴ (aka iJustine), Linus Sebastian⁵ (aka Linus Tech Tips), and Marques Keith Brownlee⁶ (aka MKBHD), among a myriad of others.

Hence our choice for this month’s Vidéotheque section: Mayuko Inoue’s video “What I wear to work in a week (as a Software Engineer)”⁷. Mayuko is an iOS software engineer and social

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gap_Inc.

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Apparel

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abercrombie_%26_Fitch

⁴<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IJustine>

⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linus_Sebastian

⁶https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marques_Brownlee

⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ2h8vmMsCE>

media personality from San Diego, USA. She has worked for companies such as Patreon and Netflix, and shares her experiences of being a software engineer in various online channels. She is the voice of a whole new generation of female software engineers, sharing their passion and expertise, and inspiring future generations to join our industry.

In her video “What I wear to work in a week (as a Software Engineer)”⁸ Mayuko shares the rationale and motivation to choose an outfit that corresponds to the expectations and the look & feel of the industry. She mentions a newfound love for fashion, as a motivation to “energize” herself and to feel comfortable while working, and then she describes five basic outfits that make her feel comfortable at work, while at the same time making her feel good in general.

Mayuko is an excellent storyteller, touching a variety of subjects. She has been interviewed in various podcasts and magazines, speaking against the spread of hustle culture⁹ in the tech industry, explaining how to build a career as a content creator¹⁰, and in general, letting her followers know more about what it is like to work¹¹ in the tech field.

Complement Mayuko’s video with this complete dress code guide¹², followed by Microsoft’s¹³, Google’s¹⁴, Facebook’s¹⁵, and Netflix’s¹⁶ specific dress code guides. Spoiler alert: The Gap, American Apparel, and Abercrombie & Fitch.

Mayuko’s video “What I wear to work in a week (as a Software Engineer)”¹⁷ is available on her YouTube channel¹⁸. Visit her website¹⁹, and then follow her on LinkedIn²⁰, Instagram²¹, Twitch²², and Twitter²³.

Cover snapshot chosen by the author.

⁸<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ2h8vmMsCE>

⁹<https://www.fastcompany.com/90742976/how-a-netflix-software-engineer-turned-creator-is-pushing-back-against-hustle-culture>

¹⁰<https://theworkitem.com/blog/interview-mayuko-inoue/>

¹¹<https://www.hackingwithswift.com/interviews/mayuko-inoue-what-is-the-mayuko-inoue-key-to-success>

¹²<https://developerpitstop.com/software-engineer-dress-code/>

¹³<https://developerpitstop.com/microsoft-dress-code/>

¹⁴<https://developerpitstop.com/google-dress-code-a-complete-guide/>

¹⁵<https://developerpitstop.com/facebook-dress-code/>

¹⁶<https://developerpitstop.com/netflix-dress-code-a-complete-guide/>

¹⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ2h8vmMsCE>

¹⁸<https://www.youtube.com/hellomayuko>

¹⁹<https://www.hellomayuko.com/>

²⁰<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mayukoinoue/>

²¹<https://www.instagram.com/hellomayuko/>

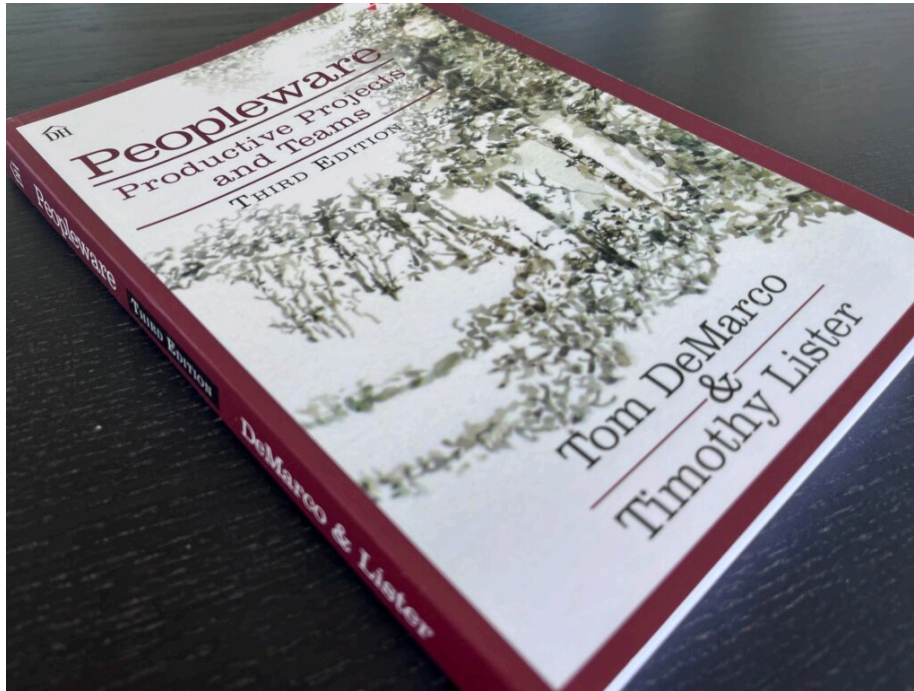
²²<https://www.twitch.tv/hellomayuko>

²³<https://twitter.com/hellomayuko>

Tom DeMarco & Timothy Lister

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One of the saddest realizations of my career in the software industry has been discovering that no “Human Resources” manager I have worked with had heard about “Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams” by Tom DeMarco and Timothy Lister¹. Not a single one. I’m not even talking about having read it, but at least knowing of its existence. None. Nothing. Nada.

I wonder what are the reasons for this lack of awareness. This is, after all, a book that would be a welcome read by most people in charge of others writing software. Instead, it is known mostly by those that have no hierarchical power to actually put its ideas into action: the programmers themselves. This is a tragedy; another one², as I count them.

“Peopleware” was not the first book dealing with the human aspect of programmers and coders. We have already talked about “The Psychology of Computer Programming”³ by Gerald Weinberg in this magazine. “Peopleware” is not only newer in its publication (1987 versus 1971) but also geared towards practical advice, while Weinberg takes a more descriptive approach.

The basic tenet of DeMarco and Lister’s thesis appears in the first chapter:

The major problems of our work are not so much technological as sociological in nature.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peopleware:_Productive_Projects_and_Teams

²<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/the-impossible-dialogue/>

³<https://deprogrammaticaipsum.com/gerald-weinberg/>

This book was arguably the first to propose the (still, nowadays) radical idea that throwing software to problems *does not* constitute a solution per se.

The main reason we tend to focus on the technical rather than the human side of the work is not because it's more crucial, but because it's easier to do.

Ouch.

I tend to believe nowadays that the reason why "Peopleware" is largely unknown, is because it shamelessly dives into all the uncomfortably truths of corporate life. And people do not want to be told bad news. Particularly, not "Human Resource" managers, of all people, who are supposed to actually improve the lives of workers to treat humans as resources. Their bonus might be at stake.

We are now in 2023 as I write these words, and the phrase "Human Resources" has fallen unfashionable (I hear somebody in the audience shouting "finally.") Hence, we find monikers such as "Industrial Relations" (my girlfriend back in 1999 was preparing a bachelor degree with that name), "Personnel," "People & Culture," and lately "PeopleOps." Sadly, a change in the nomenclature seldom indicates a change in the substance beneath; for by and large, the state of things has remained largely untouched. And I still have to find a single manager in one of those positions who has actually even heard about "Peopleware."

Anyway.

"Peopleware" is worth a read even if you do not hold a management position with the political power required to change things in a hierarchical organization. If anything, it will give you a new perspective on your current employer, and might prompt you to change your current situation in various ways. For example, leaving your current employer because life is too short to have to deal with bad managers.

The general accounting convention is that all salaries are treated as expense, never as capital investment. Sometimes this makes sense, but sometimes it doesn't.

(Chapter 20)

If by choice, merit, or sheer luck, you find yourself in such a position of power, you could shake a few things up in your organization following the learnings of DeMarco and Lister. I truly wish for that to happen. Of course, beware, because as explained in chapter 14 of the third edition,

SECOND THERMODYNAMIC LAW OF MANAGEMENT: Entropy is always increasing in the organization.

That's why most elderly institutions are tighter and a lot less fun than sprightly young companies.

There is not much you can do about this as a global phenomenon, but you've got to fight it within your own domain. The most successful manager is the one who shakes up the local entropy to bring in the right people and let them be themselves, even though they may deviate from the corporate norm. Your organization may have rigor mortis, but your little piece of it can hop and skip.

The book provides a wealth of advice in a variety of topics, always in a colorful language that is not meant to make managers feel comfortable (another of the reasons why this book is

virtually unknown in MBA curricula.) These topics range from hiring to office layout, overtime, “excellence,” evolution, meetings, “teamicide,” and, of course, dress codes, granting its inclusion in this issue of this magazine.

What the technology enhances is the dreadfulness of meetings. Our meetings are worse today than they were a generation ago, because a generation ago people wouldn’t have been able to bear them—they would have revolted.

Behavior that we take for granted today would have gotten you fired a generation ago.

(Chapter 31)

The discussion also famously dives into the open space madness, a folly that for the past 50 years has plagued the lives of software workers all over the world. In chapter 9, DeMarco and Lister cite a study conducted by IBM before building a new facility for their programmers, when they realized that they needed silence, and that cramming more people in smaller spaces, even if cheaper in the short term, was a bad idea:

Cost reduction to provide work space below the minimum would result in a loss of effectiveness that would more than offset the cost savings. Other studies have looked into the same questions and come up with more or less the same answers. The McCue study was different only in one respect: IBM actually followed the recommendations and built a workplace where people can work. (We predict this company will go far.)

I could go on and on and on. “Peopleware” is a timeless gem that is worth a thousand re-reads. As far as I am concerned, I actually gave a copy of it to one of my former “Human Resource” managers, but I have no idea whether they read it or not.

I sincerely hope so, if anything, because of the nontrivial amount of laughter contained therein.

Cover photo by the author.