

THESIS SUMMARY

Impression Management in the workplace – individual and organizational influences

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To be is to be relative.

(A.E. van Vogt *The World of Null A*)

Social interaction is the human activity that involves great adjustment skills. Involving ourselves in relationships, dialogues and daily social interactions includes influencing others so that our own goals are met. The way we make ourselves known by others influences in a direct or indirect manner the relationship we'll have with them. Adapting the image that we wish to impact on others is one of the ways we make relationships work. Impression management is one of the ways we use to make ourselves known to others in a controlled fashion. Schneider (1981) begins his paper stating „Impression management is a universal trait, specific to social reality”. Schlenker (1980) also believes that individuals have a constant need to control the image they project in social interactions.

The thoughts and actions of a individual have a great attraction towards his professional environment. Social interactions with the coworkers become a good part of the individual social life, having spent up of 8 hours a day in their presence. The way we exhibit our traits in this environment satisfies specific individual goals and is very much influenced by our personal characteristics and the characteristics of the work environment.

Impression management is seen as an important element of organizational behavior and a key element in organizational communication. Therefore we believe necessary to analyze and understand the concept in order to investigate organizational elements in an economic workplace (Rosenfeld, Giancalone and Riordan, 1995).

As employees, is it just the specific situation that influences impression management, or do we have a latent potential due to individual and organizational characteristics?

What makes an employee an *impression manager*?

These above are the questions that the present paper is based on. Our main objective is to introduce a model that explains impression management behaviors of employees.

We began by making sure we understand the concept by covering the main definitions and conceptual boundaries (**Chapter 1**). In the first chapter of the thesis we propose a theoretical analysis of the main concept in this study – impression management. We introduce the main words that form the expression then we define impression management using multiple theoretical points of view. Then the paper revolves around adjacent concepts: social desirability and self deception. For a better understanding of the concept we thought necessary introducing similar concepts such as self presentation, emotional labor, political influence and organizational citizenship.

Impression management is approached as a behavior, intentional, willing and in accordance with personal goals. It can be defined as a managing, organizing and directing the effect we have on others. This effect we have on others is the impression we make at a given time, in regards to our own individual or other aspects of reality (objects, event, other people). Managing and directing impressions follow our goals, therefore that impression can have a positive or a negative aspect to it. The constant trait is that impression management follows social norms that are presented to the individual who accepts and internalizes them.

Impression management seems to be less conditioned by real facts, imaginary situations playing a big role in managing impressions others form. Despite the lack of reality conditioning, impression management must have an audience, real or imagined/presumed, a way of external validation of the directed behavior.

For better understanding the behavior and the process we introduce in the **second chapter** the ways impression management can be categorized and the multiple perspectives of explaining the process.

In accordance with psycho-social concepts, explaining the process of impression management begins in a one-dimensional perspective, refined as new theories are suggested or as theories are confirmed with empirical evidence.

Impression management can be explained using theatre references (Goffman, 2003), a expansive-restrictive point of view, or being a neutral concept and better seeing the dynamic. Impression management can be explained as a self-regulatory process, anticipating the way others react to behaviors and selecting the best conduct required by our assumptions (Paulhus, 1984). The process can be seen as constructive or as managing the image in a strategic manner (Leary and Kowalski, 1990) and can be manifested verbally or non-verbally (Stevens and Kristof, 1995), defensive or assertive (McFarland et al., 2005).

For a bi-dimensional perspective, we adopt the explanation given by Paulhus (1991) stating that impression management is a matter of self monitoring and actively building a social self.

The impression management tactics as comprised in a model authored by Jones and Pittman in 1982, adding to the process understanding. We adhere to this approach motivated by its good structure, being easy to understand and explaining in good detail the behaviors and goals of the impression management process. This model seems to be limited only to assertive tactics, not discussing the defensive tactics, as theorized by McFarland et al (2005).

The one-dimensional perspective (Paulhus, 1984) is used to create scales, incorporating the 2-factor point of view (Paulhus, 1991), also testing the influence of independent variables on impression management (chapters 5 and 6). The impression management tactics model (Jones and Pittman, 1982) is used in this paper, first, for identifying impression management behavior and categorizing them in tactics (chapter 4). Also, this model is used for refining the association between impression management and individual and organizational variables.

Continuing with the thesis (**chapter 3**), experimental arguments are introduced with prior research results supporting and endorsing the study we propose in this thesis. Impression management builds strong bonds with individual traits, the most frequently studied being the bond to self-esteem. High levels of self-esteem encourage impression management, especially other-enhancement tactics. Low self-esteem is linked to self-oriented tactics. Impression management is often seen associated with emotional intelligence, conscientiousness, agreeability and emotional stability. When regarding specific tactics, self-monitoring has an influence on positive impression management behaviors, and machiavellianism activates ingratiation tactics.

When talking about impression management in the work-place, the most important factors are the use of similar behaviors by co-workers, the distance from the boss and the low ambiguity situation. Impression management is more often found in high level management and is used by employees with more responsibilities. Work satisfaction and interacting with clients frequently activates impression management behaviors.

Other studies investigate specific aspects of the impression management field, but the great number of models, measures and similarities makes the task of forming a unified model very difficult.

The present thesis aims to combine different points of view and investigate the impression management field in a unified way. Also, we aim to investigate impression management as a whole, and also defined by specific behavioral tactics as described by Jones and Pittman (1982).

Having displayed the concepts and models, **chapter 4** aims to be a qualitative testing of the impression management tactics taxonomy, as seen used by Romanian employees.

Assuming that previously shown strategies are specific to the cultures of their authors, mostly anglo-saxon cultures, we would like to know the way they present themselves in the Romanian culture. Also, we would like to investigate if there is a cultural characteristic involved in using impression management tactics.

The study confirmed the use of impression management behaviors in the Romanian culture. First the study used a free assembly technique, grouping behaviors by similarities and frequencies. Impression management manifests itself verbally, non-verbally and para-verbally, also in specific attitudes towards others. Verbal impression management is used by involving yourselves in the discussion, using the right words and complimenting others. Nonverbal impression management represents active listening and bringing others close. Impression managers smile, maintain eye-contact and control their posture. It is interesting to see that a shy attitude is an efficient way of impression management. The para-verbal part of impression management is controlling the tone, volume and debit of speech.

The behavior of managing impressions investigated is similar to other cultures (Goffman, 2003; Arkin, 1981; Tedeschi and Riess, 1981; Schlenker and Weigold, 1992). Intercultural differences are yet to be studied.

Culture is the bigger context of building and manifesting impression management tactics. Social norms and roles are given in a way that we can use them to meet our goals of social interaction (Brym and Lie, 2006). The way we shape what society gives us makes us who we are and what others perceive. Even physical appearance influences the way different

cultures react to an individual. For example, the American people prefer light-haired individuals, when in Indonesia dark-haired individuals are more liked.

Impression management has a positive spin when it is introduced as organizational citizenship (Nguyen, Seers and Hartman, 2008). Having read this, we assumed that impression management has a “bad image”. Romanian employees view impression management in both ways. People who manage impressions are seen as sociable, intelligent, ambitious, able and talkative, while being described as manipulating, false, unsure, hypocrite, liars. Not using impression management is seen as being confident, natural, different, sincere. Although, these individuals can at times be seen as indifferent, unmotivated, not interested, lazy, alone, passive and with adaptive shortcomings.

Our results confirm the assumption that impression management is not a social desirable behavior, people expecting its absence. Although, sometimes its absence can be interpreted in a very negative way.

In the second part of the qualitative study we confirmed the representation of the impression management tactics model as proposed by Jones and Pittman (1982). We also described in detail each tactic and behavior used by Romanian employees.

The qualitative study aims to be a starting point in analyzing the impression management behaviors specific to the local culture and trans-cultural tactics.

The next stage was comprised of constructing the method and measures for investigating impression management (**chapter 5**). We wish to investigate impression management by using a cultural specific measure. The items have the added benefit of referencing the work place, being useful to the present thesis. The DS10 questionnaire (Social Desirability 2010) aims to measure social desirable behavior as seen by Paulhus (1984) with two factors: self-deception and impression management.

From this point forward, the research focuses on testing and then investigating the individual and organizational factors that influence the manifestation of impression management and specific tactics.

We explore the investigative field in **chapter 6**, testing the strength of the influence some variables have on impression management. The main purpose was to identify the variables that predict impression management, and then investigate in a more detailed manner.

The study analyzes the variables that precede impression management and not the effects of impression management. Also, impression management is viewed as a whole, not investigating specific tactics.

Having reviewed previous studies that investigate a great number of variables, we chose those variables that are investigated more frequently in relation to the way we influence how others perceive us or the things we wish to control.

This first study aims to investigate only the variables that can be measured in an objective way, not focusing on situational factors. The way we perceive the workplace is subjective and has low reliability in time. Each individual sees the same workplace in a different manner and the same workplace can have different images in different moments in time. We chose to investigate variables that are linked to the individual, his personal traits (personality, self-esteem) and the characteristics of his workplace (institution type).

Also, we selected the variables bearing in mind multiple aspects shown in previous research. We chose variables that were investigated in relation to similar concepts (political influence). A different set of variables were selected because they have been investigated in an incomplete manner.

Impression management is activated differently depending on the personality profile, self esteem and institution type. Most frequently impression management is used by employees working in private firms, with a low self esteem, who like to be surrounded by people, who plan their actions, like tradition, persevere and don't take risks. It is interesting to see that impression management is linked to low self esteem, but self-deprecation inhibits impression management. Also, the behavior is inhibited in people who manifest infatuation – very high self esteem.

Chapter 7 introduces the next stage of the research, integrating previous variables. This final study aims to analyze factors that influence both impression management and specific behavioral tactics, integrating both individual and organizational variables in the same structural model.

Although varied and well constructed, previous research on this matter doesn't focus on one specific taxonomy. Some studies investigate the factors that influence the Kacmar typology (1992, apud Tsai et al., 2005), others study verbal versus non-verbal tactics. Also, there are some tactics that are more frequently cited (self-promotion and ingratiation), not focusing on the entire model.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the specific variables that influence each impression management tactic cited in the Jones and Pittman taxonomy (1982), using the scale constructed by Bolino and Turnley (1999): ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, intimidation. The study test the way that different variables influence impression management. The variables used are those from the earlier study: the Big Five personality traits, self esteem and institution type. We aim to analyze these variables in relation to each impression management tactic.

We also added to the analysis individual variables (sex, age, education) and organizational variables (satisfaction, management level, organizational activity, income level).

Results indicate that impression management is influenced by sex, conscientiousness, agreeability, the absence of infatuation and high levels of satisfaction regarding coworkers.

Individual and organizational variables have a significant influence towards each impression management tactic (ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, intimidation) (Jones and Pittman, 1982). Impression management tactics don't depend on sex, age, education, institution type, organizational activity or income level.

The ideal situation in which ingratiation is used is when an employee has a high self esteem, high neuroticism, is placed in high management and is satisfied by his work, lacking promotion opportunities. Self promotion is most used by infatuated employees, satisfied by their work. Employees with extreme self esteem levels are more likely to use exemplification. Ingratiation is a tactic used in cases of infatuated or self-deprecating employees, with low levels of agreeability, who are satisfied by the work they're doing. Highly satisfied employees regarding their activity, coworkers and boss use intimidation.

The integrating model proposed by this thesis explains impression management and the specific tactics using individual and organizational variables.

The studies addressed by this thesis find their use in both organizational and theoretical fields. The present thesis is intended to be brought forth by future studies in order to find the most simple and detailed explanation of the way that impression management and its specific tactics are activated in the workplace environment.