

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT WORKS IN CAREER SUCCESS! : MYTH OR REALITY?

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Abstract

"Vasthrena Vacha Vapusha" (Sanskrit Saying) means a person is judged by his Dreams, Talk and Appearance.

The above sentence itself reflects that impression management has its seed in our ancient scriptures. It is commonly observed that individuals in organizations use impression management tactics to control the perception of others about themselves in order to sustain and positively manipulate the image projected. In recent years, more and more research emphasis has been placed on how (i.e., what tactics are used) individuals can manage or manipulate the impressions others hold of them (Kumar and Beyerlein, 1991¹; Schriesheim and Hinkin, ²1990).

The term "impression management" refers to the regulation of actions and/or information to shape others' perceptions of oneself (Schlenker and Weigold, 1992³).

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¹ Kumar, K., & Beyerlein, M. (1991). Construction and validation of an instrument for measuring ingratiation behaviors in organizational settings. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76, 619-627.

² Schriesheim, C. A., & Hinkin, T. R. (1990). Influence tactics used by subordinates: A theoretical and empirical analysis and refinement of the Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson subscales. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75, 246-257.

³ Schlenker, B. R., & Weigold, M. F. (1992). Interpersonal processes involving impression regulation and management. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 43(1),

In the light of above discussion, this study is relevant from the point of the prospective employees as the Primary objective of the article is to understand the significance of impression management for the success of candidate's career i.e.; whether impression management affects the result of interview, if it does then what tactics of impression management influences it, its impact on performance appraisal of employee as well as in his/her career advancement.

Key words: Impression Management, Performance Appraisal, Job Interview & Career Advancement.

Introduction to Impression Management

"Impression management is a fact of life, but an ethically dubious one".

In sociology and social psychology, **Impression management** is the process through which people try to control the impressions others form of them. It is a goal-directed conscious or unconscious attempt to influence the perceptions of other people about a person, object or event by regulating and controlling information in social interaction (Piwinger & Ebert 2001, pp. 1-2⁴). It is usually used synonymously with self-presentation, if a person tries to influence the perception of their image. The notion of impression management also refers to practices in professional communication and public relations, where the term is used to describe the process of formation of a company's or organization's public image.

Most individuals have been socialized so that they "encode and decode automatically and are so well-trained that they are able to form impressions of others without even realizing which specific behavior produced the response and often using a particular nonverbal action through habit"

133.

⁴ Piwinger, Manfred; Ebert, Helmut (2001). "Impression Management: Wie aus Niemand Jemand wird". in: Bentele, Guenther et al. (Ed.), *Kommunikationsmanagement: Strategien, Wissen, Lösungen*. Luchterhand, Neuwied

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International Journal of Research in Social Sciences

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(Schlenker, Barry R. 1980). ⁵Therefore, impression management exists at work even if it is not intentional.

Schlenker defined impression management as, 'the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imaginary social interactions. When these images deal with some aspect of self, we call it self-presentation.

Impression management is the deliberate 'bending' of the truth in order to make a favorable impression. Managing impression includes deliberate use of any or all of:

- Dress, make-up, hairstyle and managing other visual appearance.
- Manner and general behavior, such as being pleasant, assertive, and so on.
- Managing body language to conceal anxieties or untruths and show openness, etc.
- Being economic with the truth, not telling lies but also not revealing the whole truth.
- Exaggeration or complete fabrications of things that make you look good.
- Downplaying or denials of negative factors that make you look bad.

Motives of Impression Management

There are two main motives that govern self-presentation.

- **INSTRUMENTAL:** It refers to the way of influencing others and gaining rewards.
- **EXPRESSIVE:** It happens when we construct an image of ourselves to claim personal identity, and present ourselves in a manner that is consistent with that image. If we feel like this is restricted, we exhibit reactance. We try to assert our freedom against those who would seek to curtail our self-presentation expressiveness.

Tactics of Self-Presentation

⁵ Schlenker, Barry R. (1980). *Impression Management: The Self-Concept, Social Identity, and Interpersonal Relations*. Monterey/California: Brooks/Cole

There has been much research to try to identify the particular objectives individuals seek in impression management (Burgoon et al., 1996)⁶. Some of the broader goals of impression management include creating an image of oneself which one wishes to project, determining how that image will be demonstrated, and defending the image if threatened (Dipboye, 1992⁷). These are accomplished through tactics and strategies by assertive and defensive means (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984).⁸

Jones and Pittman (1982)⁹ identified five tactics of self-presentation that a person may adapt. They are:

- **Ingratiation:** The goal of ingratiation is being likeable. This involves complimenting another person or indulging in flattery with certain amount of credibility and honesty. It also involves conforming, another person's view point.
- **Intimidation:** In this strategy the person does not care about being likeable, all he wants is to control others and exercise his powers.
- **Self- promotion:** This is a kind of advertising where a person wants to be seen as competent in certain areas. He may acknowledge minor flaws in his skills while emphasizing stronger points of his personality.
- **Exemplification:** In this strategy, the person tries to elicit the impression of moral worthiness and integrity while creating a feeling of guilt among others.
- **Supplication:** In this strategy the person advertises his weaknesses in order to get sympathy.

⁶ Burgoon, J. K., Buller, D. B., & Woodall, W. G. (1996). *Nonverbal communication: The unspoken dialogue* (2nd ed.). New York: The McGraw-Hill.

⁷ Dipboye, R. L., Ferris, G. R., & Rowland, K. M. (Eds.) (1992). *Selection interviews: Process perspectives*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Publishing

⁸ Tedeschi, J. T., & Melburg, V. (1984). *Impression management and influence in the organization*

⁹ Jones, E. E., & Pittman, T. S. (1982). *Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation*. In J. Suls (Ed.), *Psychological perspectives on the self* (pp. 231-261). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Although, a person may use all the five tactics on different occasions, some people specialize in one or two tactics. Sometimes they use more than one strategy to influence others. Some people may stick to one tactic for so long that it may become a consistent aspect of their personality.

Pillars of Impression Management

Leary & Lawaslski identify two elements in the process of IM :

- Impression motivation
- Impression construction.

Impression motivation is particularly applicable in organizations where the employees try to control the perception of their superiors about them .The extent of their impression motivation depends upon a set of factors:

- Relevance of impression to the attainment of personal goals.
- The value of the goals to the individual.
- Divergence between the actual & desired image.

Impression construction refers to the methods adopted by a person to create the specific impression that he wants.

Literature Review

Topic of research	Authors	Year of Study	Issues explored	Findings	Method/ Statistical tool used (if any)
Making the right impression: A field study of applicant impression management during job interviews	By Stevens, Cynthia Kay; Kristof, Amy L. Journal of Applied Psychology.	OCT, 1995	Two issues were explored: (a) which impression management (IM) tactics applicants use during actual interviews (b) Whether there is a relationship between applicants' IM tactics and their interview outcomes. The study also examined convergence across different methods and raters when measuring IM.	Analyses revealed low to moderate convergence across methods and raters, suggesting that IM tactics may be multidimensional constructs. There was consistent evidence of greater applicant self-promotion than ingratiation.	Post interview survey measures were obtained from applicants and interviewers regarding applicant IM behavior during a specific interview; in addition, a subset (n = 24) of interviews was audio taped and analyzed for the presence of IM.
Impression Management, Fairness, and the Employment Interview	Paul Rosenfeld Journal of Business Ethics	June, 1997	Impression management is not inherently a threat to fairness in employment interviews. Viewing expansive model of impression management	Organizations can make employment interviews more fair by: viewing impression management as a skill and not a deficit & training interviewers	
The use of impression management tactics in structured	By Ellis, Aleksander P. J.; West, Bradley J.; Ryan, Ann	Dec 2002	Study investigated impression management tactic use during structured interviews. Authors examined whether	Results indicated that almost all of the applicants used some form of impression management. Significantly more	119 structured interviews were conducted.

Topic of research	Authors	Year of Study	Issues explored	Findings	Method/ Statistical tool used (if any)
interviews: A function of question type?.	Marie; DeShon, Richard P. Journal of Applied Psychology		applicants' use of impression management tactics depended on question type.	assertive than defensive impression management tactics were used. Assertive tactics- More self-promotion rather than ingratiation.	
Applicant Impression Management: Dispositional Influences and Consequences for Recruiter Perceptions of Fit and Similarity	Amy Kristof-Brown, MurrayR. Barrick, Melinda Franke	2002	This study investigates how applicant characteristics influence the use of impression management (IM) tactics in interviews, and how these behaviors affect interviewer perceptions of person-job fit (P-J fit) and applicant-interviewer similarity	Results demonstrated that extraverted applicants made greater use of self-promotion during their interviews. IM tactic most strongly related to interviewers' perceptions of P-J fit, whereas non-verbal IM influenced perceived similarity	72 applicants were interviewed.

Topic of research	Authors	Year of Study	Issues explored	Findings	Method/ Statistical tool used (if any)
Exploring Boundaries of the Effects of Applicant Impression Management Tactics in Job Interviews	WeiChi Tsai, Chien-Cheng Chen and Su-Fen Chiu. Taiwan	2005	This study extends previous research by examining the moderating roles of interview structure, customer-Contact requirement, and interview length in real employment interviews for actual job openings.	Results from 151 applicants of 25 firms showed that the more structured the interview, the weaker the relationship between applicant nonverbal tactics and interviewer evaluation.	151 applicants of 25 firms were interviewed
Differential Effectiveness of Applicant Impression Management Tactics on Employment Interview Decisions	K. michele kacmar, JOHN E. DELERY, GERALD R. FERRIS (Journal of Applied Social Psychology)	31 July 2006	Study contrasted two sets of impression management tactics used by applicants and observed their effects on interviewer decisions in a controlled laboratory experiment	An applicant who employed self-focused-type IM tactics was rated higher, received more recommendations for a job offer, and received fewer rejections from business students, who had just completed an interviewer training program, than when he used other-focused-type tactics.	
Verbal and Nonverbal Impression	Helga Peeters, Filip Lievens (International	September 2006	This study investigated how structured interview formats, instructions to convey	Results demonstrated that interview format affected the kind of tactics used,	190 people who were screened for a training program Were observed.

Topic of research	Authors	Year of Study	Issues explored	Findings	Method/ Statistical tool used (if any)
Management Tactics in Behavior Description and Situational Interviews	Journal of Selection and Assessment)		favorable impressions, & applicants' individual differences influenced the use and effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal impression management (IM).	which in turn positively influenced interviewer evaluations	

Table: 1, Analysis of the Previous Research



Impression Management & Job Interview

Now-a-days each & every organization is using the interview as the selection tool for the employee. For an applicant it's not enough to just have the required competency for the job but it's also necessary to know what the required attitude is at the time of interview, what are the other factors beside the knowledge that can influence the interviewer. As the applicants just have limited time to impress the employer, so he should know what is required to form the right impression.

Research says that the interviewers' rating of job applicants is influenced by a wide range of factors. One of the most important factors is applicant's physical appearance. Employers are severely irritated by inappropriate dress, mumbling and even poor handshakes by job applicants during interviews. A recent study, conducted by an employment law firm, Peninsula, asked businesses in the United Kingdom what interview habit they found most annoying, maximum interviewer were upset by unsuitable clothing or appearance. While the interviewer is attempting to gather information about the applicant in the interview, the applicant is similarly trying to convince the interviewer that he or she is indeed the best candidate (Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992).¹⁰ Research has documented that applicants may choose to employ impression management (IM) tactics to influence interviewer decisions (Baron, 1989¹¹; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989¹²; Stevens & Kristof, 1995¹³).

Impression Management & Performance Appraisal System

¹⁰Kacmar, K., Delery, J. E., & Ferris, G. R. (1992). Differential effectiveness of applicant impression management tactics on employment decisions. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 22, 1250-1272.

¹¹Baron, R. A. (1989). Impression management by applicants during employment interviews: The "Too much of a good thing effect". In R. W. Eder & G. R. Ferris (Eds.), *The employment interview: Theory, research, practice* (pp. 204–215). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

¹²Gilmore, D. C., & Ferris, G. R. (1989). The effects of applicant impression management tactics on interviewer judgments. *Journal of Management*, 15, 557–564. doi: 10.1177/014920638901500405

¹³Stevens, C. K., & Kristof, A. L. (1995). Making the right impression: A field study of applicant impression management during job interviews. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80, 587–606. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.80.5.587

Performance appraisal processes are one of the central pillars of the performance management which is directly related to the organizational performance and have a direct impact on it.

Impression management is of utmost importance in organizations. It can be helpful in determining the validity of the appraisal. It has been noted that appraisee may be manipulated by the appraiser to assign higher ratings than what he/she actually deserves. Thus, IM Process is an important element for maintaining overall good performance of the employees. Many a times employees are well equipped with job related skills and doing their best at their job location but because of lack of knowledge of projection techniques to impress their bosses they sometimes fail.

Many research findings contemplate that one of the perceptual bias in performance appraisal is because of impression management strategies adopted by employees during the appraisal feedback process.

To avoid such biasness the management should attempt to nullify varied personal-situational & organizational characteristics which promote undesirable impression management efforts. The management should make concerted efforts to identify ulterior motives & thus, keep itself away from being overly impressed by undesirable strategies. Thus, if the management is aware of the real competence, it is less likely to be influenced by invalid claim while conducting performance appraisal.

Impression Management & Career Advancement

The process of impression management may also be deliberately used as a political device to climb the ladder of promotion in work settings. There are two basic strategies of impression management that employees can use. If trying to minimize responsibility for some negative event or to stay out of trouble, they may employ a demotion-preventive strategy. On the other hand, if they are seeking to maximize responsibility for a positive outcome or to look better than they really are, then they can use a promotion-enhancing strategy.

I. Demotion-preventive Strategies:

This strategy is characterized by the following:

i. Accounts: These are employee's attempts to excuse or justify their actions. Example: excuse is, not getting something done on time because of other high-priority assignment.

ii. *Apologies*: When there is no logical way out, the employee may apologize to the boss for some negative event. Such an apology not only gives the impression that the individual is sorry but also indicates that it will not happen again. The employee is big enough to face up to a problem and solve it.

iii. *Dissociation*: When employees are indirectly associated with something that went wrong (for example they are a member of a committee or work team that made a bad decision), they may secretly tell their bosses that they fought for the right thing but were overruled. Employees using this approach tend to be removed both from the group and from responsibility for the problem.

II. Promotion-enhancing Strategies:

These involve the following:

i. *Entitlements*: Employees feeling they have not been given credit for a positive outcome may make sure that it is known through formal channels or they may informally note to key people that they are pleased their suggestions or efforts worked out so well.

ii. *Enhancements*: Here, employees may have received credit but they point out that they really did more and had a bigger impact than originally thought. For example, their effort or idea not only served a customer well or met a difficult deadline, but can be used in the future to greatly increase profits.

iii. *Obstacle Disclosures*: In this strategy employees identify either personal (either family or health) or organizational (lack of resources or cooperation) obstacles they had to overcome to accomplish an outcome. They try to create the perception that because they obtained the positive outcome despite the big obstacles, they really deserve a lot of credit.

iv. *Association*: Here, the employees make sure to be seen with the right people at the right time. This creates the perception that the employee is well connected and is associated with successful projects.

Most people looking to move up the corporate ladder realize the importance of mastering job-related skills. But what they may not also know is the soft skills - the way they carry themselves, dress, interact with others - can be just as important in determining whether they will or will not be promoted, and may even be creating a negative image without their knowledge. Having well-rounded socializing skills are not an option, but a necessity of business life.

Application of Impression Management @ Work

Managers & professionals mostly use three sets of IM tactics to build reputation. Some are short-term strategies while others are long-term strategies.

I. Boss- Centered IM

Rightly said, *boss is always right & even if he is wrong, just see the first rule.*

People build friendly relationships with their boss and extend this friendly behavior upwards to the key personnel above them. They create opportunities for interaction, asking for advice, reporting that on how it went & thanking the manager for involvement. This is labeled “Ingratiation” in the psychology literature, but it does not have to mean sucking up to the boss. It can be a positive way of building & maintaining relationships that may lead to future support for ideas, resources, such as information about opportunities & sponsorship for promotions.

II. Self- Centered IM

This set of practices refers to how you present yourself & you strive to be seen as professional, and successful at work. People find ways of informing their successes to others excessively done may lead to showing-off. But if no one knows of your successes, then you may not get the credit you feel, you deserve, so there is a fine line difference. Certainly, your success should be recorded, discussed in appraisals, and shared where appropriate with your team. Similarly, if you are ambitious, you need to be open about it with your manager, develop a carrier plan together. Be prepared for comments that you are not qualified (so ask for help to get the right experience), not ready (so ask for this to be reviewed next year) or not good enough (uncomfortable, but if that is the case, work to reverse that assessment).

III. Task –Centered IM

This strategy is to impress by the quality and quantity of your work. Delivering and exceeding the exceptions of performance and commitment are the key. This is where working long hours, preparation, staying late; giving up personal life responsibilities to deliver at work comes in. This is seen more among women than men, but it may not be enough for promotion to senior level, where leadership, engagement in political activities and networks require skills other than just the job-related.

Techniques for Impression Management

- **Dress and groom professionally/ proper blend in With Co-Workers**

Maintain a professional and well-groomed physical appearance. This communicates the message that you are aware of coming across and putting your best foot forward. Thus, never underestimate the importance of dressing professionally in your job.

- **Communicate through appropriate and positive body language**

Develop your body language that is both welcoming and confident. Keep contented eye contact. Smile when it is required. Reveal your self-esteem and self-confidence by footing straight and tall, with enormous posture. Propose a firm handshake. Discuss ideas with open palms. Make sure they've formed a good one. Thus, Fake it until you feel it, don't over shine yourself.

- **Focus on right & impactful words and phrases**

Use confident, positive phrasing when suggesting your ideas. At the same time, be encouraging about the ideas of others, too. Pay attention to the speaking patterns and phrases used by influential peoples, particularly your superiors.

- **Apply self-promotion techniques; don't hesitate!**

Remember that self-promotion is basically a form of advertising. Honesty in advertising is always the best policy, and the practice of personal impression management is no exception to this rule.

You might believe that your good work will speak for itself. But it can only do so if the right people know about it.

- **Develop interpersonal skills at the workplace.**

Strengthen your position in the team by cultivating friendly and positive relationships with your coworkers and superiors.

- **Be a team player with positive attitude & team spirit.**

Show loyalty to your co-workers and focus more -- initially at least -- on sharing any recognition you get with the team. Always give credit to the team.

- **Be a Self-Starter; Take Initiative**

In most situations, in your first days on the job, you will be given small doses of work -- to let you get your feet wet. As you finish assignments and are ready to handle a bigger workload, take the initiative and ask for more assignments.

- **Discover Everything About Your Employer**

Gather all those reports and company literature and read up and become an expert on your organization.

- **Work Full Days**

Be on time, come in early, stay a little later. Once you have established yourself, you can leave early, go out for lunch, shift your hours, or take work home with you. But in the beginning, be totally dedicated to being there all the time and picking up as much as you can possibly handle.

- **Avoid Office Politics and Gossip**

Rumors and gossips are inevitable. Stay out of the office politics for as long as possible. It's inevitable that you will be exposed to them sooner or later, and you will most likely participate in them as it's human nature. But stay out of the game for the first few months.

- **Use your mouth & ear in their proportion.**

One of the hardest skills to learn for some of us -- especially extraverts -- is that, when you are new to the organization, it's better to listen than talk.

- **Record Accomplishments**

Tracking accomplishments is great for any number of reasons -- for personal satisfaction, for raise and promotion meetings, and for future job-hunting.

- **Appreciate for good work.**

Nothing works like kindness and genuine appreciation. So, show appreciation to everyone who helps to learn the ropes during first days on the job -- from co-workers to receptionists to the human resources folks.

- **Find a Mentor**

As you get introduced to senior staff, begin thinking about developing a mentoring relationship with a member of management above you -- and outside your department -- in the organization. Mentoring has numerous benefits, from a simple sounding board to someone who helps direct and advance your career within the organization.

- **Get and Stay Organized/Set Goals**

Develop a system for keeping track of meetings, appointments, assignments and projects. Get an organizer or planner and keep on top of all your work. And as you look ahead, set goals for yourself -- and then strive to achieve them.

- **Keep Your Boss Informed -- of Everything**

Your boss is not a mind-reader, so keep him/her informed of how you are doing. "Request meetings with your boss on a consistent basis to review performance. Express interest in moving ahead and ask what else you can be doing to get to that next step," advises Von Staudach¹⁴.

- **Meet and Network with Key People in Organization & Profession**

Take advantage of every opportunity to network with key people in your organization and profession. Just because you never know when a problem or opportunity will arise. And networking with key people can also help you in finding one or more mentors.

Conclusion

"Growth is a stretching process and people do not stretch their perception or their judgment until they try to do something well". Isabel Briggs Myers

Whether impression management practically works or not depends upon the context i.e.; why it is used and what it does. It serves a number of purposes. Impression management is linked to self-interest & boosts our self-confidence and self-esteem. It affects the way others think about us. It can produce self-fulfilling prophecies when people are impressed by our behavior. Over time, actions speak louder than words and in general people are more impressed by actions. Thus,

¹⁴http://www.streetdirectory.com.my/careers/career_advice/career_development/another_10_tips_to_help_you_make_a_good_first_impression

polishing the skills at impression management might be the key to getting the job interview success, better performance evaluation and career advancement or increasing your boss's respect for your efforts. In practice Ingratiation and self-promotion are widely used techniques of impression management by the organizations. In many work situations, impression management is used to support excuses, justifications and damage control. Of course, where impression management is used for political gain, it can be destructive of trust and relationships, creating a culture where point-scoring and blame-dodging are endemic.

Thus, reputation is most critical asset in today's professional world. Develop it and protect it, as we would do with any other asset.

Remember "*Successful people look successful!*"

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