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# Upward impression management in the work place cross-cultural analysis

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## Abstract

This paper examines three basic issues pertaining to impression management behavior in the cross-cultural context: (a) Do employees coming from different cultures differ in the legitimacy they attribute to upward impression management? (b) Is there an agreement across cultures about the image one should convey to one's superior? (c) Do cultural groups differ in the use of impression management strategies? We use preliminary data collected in two different cultural groups: Israel-born employees and recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union. © 2001 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd.

*Keywords:* Cross cultural; Organizational behavior; Impression management; Communication; Immigrants; Human resource management

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## 1. Introduction

Impression management has been defined as any behavior by the individual attempting to control or manipulate others' attributions and impressions of him (Tedeschi & Riess, 1981, p. 3). Impression management occurs when a person wishes to create and maintain a specific identity. This goal is achieved by strategically exhibiting behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal, that will lead others to view the actor as more desirable (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997).

The study of impression management is of particular relevance in the work organization, especially in the context of superior–subordinate relationships. The structural dependency of the subordinate in this relationship leads to a natural desire to create a positive impression. Impression management behavior can have a

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considerable effect in this regard on individual success and promotion opportunities at work. It may also be a meaningful factor in enhancing our understanding of key organizational processes such as decision making, effective leadership, and the dynamics of teamwork. It is thus important to investigate how employees perceive and exercise upward impression management.

Impression management literature can be divided into two major categories. The first focuses on motivation. People construct a favorable image of themselves because they wish to maximize their rewards (Schlenker, 1980), maintain their self-esteem (Schneider, 1969), and/or create a desired self-identity (Swann, 1987). The second category of research focuses on construction, that is, on the way people impress others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Scholars have attempted to identify specific impression management tactics (Bohra & Pandey, 1984; Glimore & Ferris, 1989; Jones, 1964; Jones & Wortman, 1973; Liden & Mitchell, 1988; Pandey, 1981; Rao, Schmidt, & Murray, 1995; Wayne & Liden, 1995; Snyder & Copeland, 1989).

Several scholars suggest that culture is related to impression management (Giacalone & Breard, 1994). It should be noted that a cultural group is addressed in the context of this paper from two different perspectives: (A) a group of people who share specific values and behaviors and (B) a group of people who share specific socioeconomic or environmental conditions that are largely characteristic of a whole culture or of a cultural minority within a larger society (Cai & Drake, 1997; see also Chapman, 1997).

Based on a review of existing literature, Crittenden and Bae (1994) demonstrate how impression management theory explains attribution patterns within Asian cultures. Bond (1991) uses the Schwartz values project to discuss how cultural values could influence the way people present themselves.

Pandey (1986) accepts the normative influence of forms of ingratiation tactics and claims that there are specific ingratiation tactics that are used in specific cultures. Rosenfeld, Booth-Kewley, Edwards, and Alderton (1994) discuss impression management in the form of socially desirable responses on surveys and questionnaires among minorities in the United States, and Aune and Aune (1994) find that culture is one factor influencing appearance management. From a cultural perspective, upward impression management may be regarded as shared society knowledge pertaining to the motivation, the ideal image that an employee should convey, and the strategies she/he should perform. To the best of our knowledge, however, no specific empirical research about upward impression management behavior in organizations has been conducted in the cross-cultural context.

Studying impression management as a culturally constructed phenomenon can contribute to the understanding of relationships and interactions in diverse organizational settings, in multi-cultural teams, and in any setting in which immigrants or foreign workers encounter local people (Rosenfeld et al., 1994; Allison & Herlocker, 1994; Giacalone & Beard, 1994). The need to examine impression management as a culturally constructed phenomenon is especially important as globalization of organizations increases and managers need to interact across cultures.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the differences in the perception and practice of upward impression management in two distinct cultural groups of

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