

Developing A Conditional Reasoning Test for Impression Management

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Abstract

Individuals engage in impression management behaviors in most social situations. However, one of the most prone settings to impression management is the work context. Even though the extent to which an individual performs impression management behaviors is influenced by situational factors, it is also plausible that there is a dispositional component involved, as some people are more likely to engage in impression management behaviors than others. Therefore, it is important to be able to measure the extent to which individuals are likely to engage in impression management. In this study, an innovative approach to the measurement of impression management is proposed. Specifically, as a form of implicit assessment, a conditional reasoning test (CRT) is developed to measure impression management propensity.

Keywords: Impression management, CRT, ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification

Impression management behaviors can be defined as the process by which individuals attempt to control others' perceptions of them (Leary & Kowalsky, 1990). These behaviors manifest similarly to organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), which are behaviors that are not part of an employee's job description (Organ, 1988). Bolino (1999) proposed that OCBs may be motivated by impression management concerns in some cases. Impression management may also cause image concerns to impair performance as employees may exert less effort on unmonitored tasks (Bolino, 1999). Thus, it is important for organizations to investigate the propensity for employees and applicants to engage in impression management behaviors. This study will utilize a conditional reasoning test to measure impression management tendencies.

Several examples of impression management measurement are available in the literature (e.g., Andrews & Kacmar, 2001, Jones & Pittman, 1982, Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991, Wayne & Ferris, 1990). A common methodological limitation is the use of self-report instruments; in which respondents, especially those high in impression management, are likely to distort their answers. James (1998) developed a personality measurement approach called the conditional reasoning test (CRT). The questions on CRTs appear to be inductive reasoning problems, but they are constructed in such a way that different options appeal to individuals with different motives, and thus, different dispositions.

The CRT developed for this study consists of 22 items based on the Jones and Pittman (1999) taxonomy of impression management. Accordingly, the 22 item test included options representative of five different impression management behaviors: supplication (i.e., feigning incompetence to gain help), exemplification (i.e., intentionally performing extra work to embody an exemplary employee), intimidation (i.e., signaling power to punish or reprimand coworkers),

ingratiation (i.e., performing favors to be likeable), and self-promotion (i.e., speaking highly of one's attributes to appear more competent; Jones & Pittman, 1999).

The data will be collected using an online survey in two stages. In the first stage, data will be collected from Appalachian State University students ($n = 300$) and will be used to examine the factor structure and provide initial validity evidence. The students will be entered in a raffle to win one of five \$100 cash prizes. In the second stage, an MTurk participant pool will be utilized ($n = 300$) to confirm the factor structure and provide additional validity evidence. The measures to be used for demonstrating convergent and discriminant validity include the 23-item careerism scale (Feldman & Weitz, 1991), self-reported impression management scale (Bolino & Turnley, 1999), and the BFI personality scale (John & Sirvastava, 1999).

In order to provide evidence for criterion-related validity in measuring impression management, participants will be given an opportunity to impression-manage the researchers. Specifically, they will be informed that the distribution of cash prizes will depend on their responses. This will create a situation in which participants can perform three of the five impression management behaviors in their responses to the survey questions. For example, participants will be asked to rate the extent to which the study was well-planned. An ingratiation behavior can be inferred depending on the extent to which they provide positive ratings.

Employers recruit, train and evaluate their employees through a variety of human resource-related activities. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities, understanding the potential role of impression management on an employee's actions can provide a clearer understanding of their engagement with the company or organization.

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