Measuring Impression Management through a Conditional Reasoning Test

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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. 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, a conditional reasoning test (CRT) is developed to measure impression management propensity. Using 40 CRT items, data were collected from a sample of college students. While some initial evidence of validity is obtained, the items are in need of further refinement. Accordingly, a second round of data collection will be conducted in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the measure.
Impression management can be defined as the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them (Leary & Kowalsky, 1990). According to Jones and Pittman (1982), impression management behaviors fall under one of five types. The first type, ingratiation, refers to behaviors aimed at being seen as likeable to others. Second type, exemplification, refers to attempts to be seen as an example individual. Third, intimidation refers to behaviors which are aimed at being seen as intimidating or dangerous. Fourth, self-promotion refers to behaviors conducted to be seen as a competent individual. Finally, the fifth type of impression management is supplication, which refers to behaviors aimed at being seen as in need of support or assistance. Most people engage in some sort of impression management in situations that involve interaction with others, and the workplace is arguably one of the most common settings for this behavior. Given some of the implications this might have (Bolino, 1999), it is important to understand and measure the extent to which people are likely to engage in impression management in the workplace. The current study is aimed at developing a conditional reasoning test (CRT) of impression management as an attempt in this direction.

Within the current study, 40 CRT items were developed to help facilitate our research on the measurement of impression management and data were collected from college students (N = 213) to obtain evidence of validity. Consistent with the CRT procedure (James, 1998), participants were told that the study was aimed at developing a reasoning test to be used in the employment context. After responding to the CRT items, they responded to additional items aimed at obtaining behavioral criteria for the five types of impression management behaviors. The first round of data provided promising results for the measures of exemplification and ingratiation, as they were able to lead to a significant difference in the level of criterion IM behavior. For intimidation, supplication, and self-promotion, most of the mean differences were
in the expected direction such that those who chose the IM motive response were more likely to engage in the IM behavior than those who did not endorse the IM option.

Although the newly developed scale shows some promise with most of the items distinguishing between high and low impression management behaviors in the expected direction, there is still a need to revise the items and further test whether the measure predicts impression management behaviors. The next round of data collection will allow for further refinement of these items in order to ensure validity. Accordingly, as the next stage in this line of research, the measure will be revised to only include those items with high correlations for impression management that show promise. Items that display insignificant levels of correlating with impression management will be revised as needed, and additional data will be collected to examine the scale’s validity. We plan to conduct a second round of data collection in order to further test criterion validity. In addition, we plan to diversify the participant pool by utilising MTurk in order to obtain varying levels of SES, racial diversity, and age to establish greater external validity of the items within our scale.
References


