WE WOULD LIKE TO BE LIKED – STRATEGIES USED TO CONTROL THE IMPRESSION OTHERS FORM OF US

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Abstract: *In the 'Power and Politics' chapters of Organizational Behaviour textbooks we often find a section on Impression Management (IM). This term means that people tend to influence how other people perceive them. This research field has been at the centre of interest since the 1980s. Researchers first defined the term, then explained the different forms, tactics and strategies of IM, and also developed measurement tools, which can be used to evaluate it. Its impact and connection with other behaviour variables has also been studied. In this article we will present a smaller part of our research in which we analyse the connection between Dark Triad personality factors, the perception of ethical leadership and the impression of management tactics used by university students. The research was done in the framework of an Organizational Behaviour course at the University of Debrecen's Faculty of Economics and Business. Students were asked to fill in a questionnaire. Feedback was given to them on how to interpret the results, in order to improve their self-awareness. Then the anonymous questionnaires were collected for research purposes. Participation in the research was voluntary. In the analysis we used basic statistical methods to compare the popularity of the 22 different IM behaviours. It is possible to divide the 22 items of the questionnaire into five well differentiated IM tactics. We calculated these figures and measured if there are significant differences between IM tactics preferred by men and by women, between respondents with and without work experience and between groups of students studying in different majors. We also compared our research results with one of our previous findings, and with figures available in the international literature. The most frequently used IM tactic in our sample was ingratiation. We found a significant difference between male and female respondents in the use of self-promotion and intimidation tactics. Comparing our research result to one of our previous studies (Ujhelyi and Barizsné, 2018), we found significant differences between Hungarian and Chinese students in the use of all IM tactics, and we also obtained similar results when we compared our findings with a sample from the USA analysed by Bolino and Turnley (1999).*

Keywords: *Impression management tactics; university students' behaviour; international comparison.*

JEL Classification: *M10; I23.*

1. Introduction

In this paper we will present a smaller part of research in which we analyse the connection between respondents' Dark Triad personality characteristics, the Impression Management (IM) tactics they use and the way they see ethical

leadership. The data collection was made among university students at the University of Debrecen's Faculty of Economics and Business. This study focuses on the IM tactics used by respondents. As a research methodology we used Bolino and Turnley's (1999) Impression Management questionnaire, which contains 22 items and measures five IM tactics: ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, and intimidation. In our analysis we used basic statistical methods. Before presenting our findings we give a short review of the literature on IM tactics.

2. Literature Review

"Impression management refers to the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them" (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). This term is frequently used interchangeably with self-presentation; however, Schlenker (1980), for example, "reserved the term self-presentation for instances in which the projected images are self-relevant". Impression management has a broader meaning, while self-presentation also involves efforts to control individuals' impressions of themselves. When we want to analyse individuals' behaviour in order to control the impressions others form of them we can use both terms as synonyms (Leary and Kowalski, 1990).

Gardner and Martinko (1988) listed five reasons why it is important to deal with IM. First, it has an impact on individual success and promotion. Second, leaders within organizations can use it as an influencing tactic to obtain support from subordinates. Third, IM behaviours are elements of the managers' behaviour repertoire which they can use to influence organization and personal successes. Fourth, IM has practical importance, and fifth, through understanding IM behaviour, it is possible to better explain and understand social interactions within organizations.

Impression management has been studied from different points of view. An important question is the following: which factors stimulate the appearance of IM behaviour? According to Gardner and Martinko (1988), the environmental setting, and the characteristics of the actor and of the audience (target) also have an impact on IM. Turnley and Bolino (2001), in their research, proved that high self-monitors used IM tactics more successfully than low self-monitors. Other antecedents of IM and general evaluations made by observers about people who used these tactics were summarized by Bolino et al. (2008).

Probably the most important areas where IM has an impact are interviews and performance evaluations (Robbins and Judge, 2019; Harris et al., 2007; Higgins and Judge, T. A. 2004; McFarland et al., D. 2003).

In their comprehensive work, Bolino et al. (2008) reviewed the most relevant articles on IM published after 1988 in leading management journals. They collected frequently mentioned IM behaviours and defined these tactics. Table 1. presents these behaviours.

An important issue regarding IM is how to measure it. Researchers have developed different scales and measurement tools in this field. For example, Wayne and Ferris (1990) developed a measure of IM that has three groups of items: supervisor-, self-, and job-focused items. From our empirical research's point of view, an important feature is the 22-item scale measurement tool developed by Bolino and Turnley (1999). They use it to measure five types of IM behaviours: ingratiation (individuals do favours or use flattery to be loved), self-promotion (individuals point out their abilities, or accomplishments, in order to be seen as competent), exemplification

(individuals self-sacrifice in order to look dedicated), supplication (individuals advertise their weaknesses in order to look needy), and intimidation (individuals signal their power or potential to punish, in order to be seen as dangerous).

Table 1: Definitions of Impression Management Behaviours

Behaviour	Definition
Accounts	Provide explanations for a negative event to escape disapproval. Excuses and justifications are specific types of accounts.
Apologies	Accept responsibility for a negative event, offer to make things right, and promise to do better in the future; a form of defensive IM.
Assertive IM	Proactively manage impressions about themselves, typically by means of enhancements, ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification.
Blaring	Publicly minimize their connections with unfavourable others; a form of self-focused IM.
Blurring	Blur their connections with favourable others by way of strategic omissions; a form of self-focused IM.
Boasting	Boast about their positive connections with favourable others; a form of self-focused IM.
Burying	Conceal their connections with unfavourable others; a form of self-focused IM.
Defamation	Attempt to harm the reputation of the target.
Defensive IM	Reactively manage impressions about themselves, typically by means of apologies, excuses, justification, and self-handicapping.
Demonstrative IM	Provide facts or details regarding the organization's specific activities.
Enhancement	Claim that positive outcomes for which they are responsible are more valuable than generally believed; a form of assertive, self-focused IM.
Excuses	Deny responsibility for negative behaviour or outcomes; a form of account; defensive IM.
Exemplification	Do more or better than is necessary to attempt to appear dedicated or superior; a form of assertive IM.
Favour	Rendering help for others or doing favours for them; a form of ingratiation
Illustrative IM	Focus on things like pictures or broad generalizations.
Ingratiation	Use flattery and doing favours to attempt to appear likeable; a form of assertive IM.
Intentionally looking bad at work	Decrease performance, work at less-than-full potential, withdraw, display a bad attitude, or broadcast limitations to look bad or incompetent.
Intimidation	Threaten or harass to attempt to appear dangerous and powerful; a form of assertive IM.
Job-focused IM	Manipulate job performance information for their own benefit; similar to self-promotion.
Justifications	Accept responsibility for negative outcomes but not the negative implications; that is, there is an external cause for their action; a form of account; defensive IM.
Nonverbal	Alter facial expressions, posture, and so on to attempt to manage impressions.
Opinion conformity	Speak or behave in ways consistent with the target; a form of ingratiation.
Other-enhancement	Compliment or flatter targets; a form of ingratiation.
Other-focused IM	Behave in ways intended to make the target perceive them as likable or attractive; a form of ingratiation.

Behaviour	Definition
Self-enhancement	Make their best characteristics salient to targets; a form of ingratiation.
Self-focused IM	Behave in ways intended to make the actor seen as nice and polite by acting like a "model" employee or working hard when results will be seen by others; similar to exemplification.
Self-handicapping	Behave so as to provide an external explanation for poor performance; a form of defensive IM.
Self-promotion	Communicate abilities and accomplishments to attempt to appear competent; a form of self-focused IM.
Supervisor-focused IM	Engage in favour rendering, opinion conformity, and other forms of ingratiation that is targeted toward supervisors.
Supplication	Portray themselves as weak or dependent to obtain help; a form of assertive IM.
Verbal	Use spoken or written words to attempt to actively manage impressions.

Source: Bolino et al. (2008)

This is an instrument which is easy to use in organizations, is based on contemporary impression management theory, and involves the full range of IM tactics which individuals frequently use (Bolino and Turnley, 1999).

3. Methodology

In our empirical research, we used the Impression Management questionnaire developed by Bolino and Turnley (1999). It contains 22 items. The statements related to the five impression management strategies were mixed up before we used it. We carried out our data collection among Hungarian university students. Respondents had to respond on a 5-digit Likert scale according to what extent the statements were true for them. A few background variables were also asked (gender, year of study, course, ethical training). Students were asked to fill in the anonymous questionnaire during their Organizational Behaviour seminars. A total of 177 questionnaire were collected. In the data analysis we used simple statistical methods, calculated the means and the standard deviation, and also made independent-samples t-test; our findings were also compared with previous research results.

The distribution of our sample by gender was 116 women (65.54%) and 61 men (34.46 %). All respondents were students at the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Debrecen. They were studying on five different degree programmes. The most populous group was 94 students (53.11%) on the Bachelor in Finance and Accounting course, followed by 42 (23.73%) on the Bachelor in Business Administration and Management course, 26 (14.69%) on the Bachelor in International Business Economics course, 9 (5.85%) doing the Master's course in Leadership and Organizations, and 6 (3.39 %) doing the Master's course in Human Resource Counselling.

4. Results

First we exhibit the mean values of the Impression Management questionnaire's 22 items, in decreasing order (Figure 1).
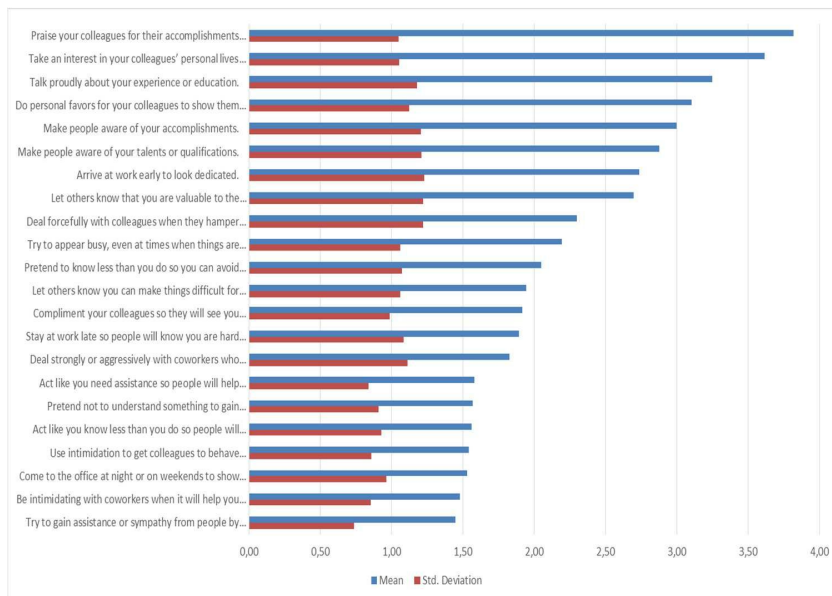
Figure 1: How frequently are different Impression Management behaviours used by respondents?
Source: Authors' own research results.

The highest values are close to 4 points, which mean that the respondent "sometimes behaves this way", with the lowest around 1.5, which lies between "never behaves this way" and "very rarely behaves this way". The items with the highest values are forms of ingratiation, or self-focused behaviour, while those with the lowest values are more assertive IM tactics, or forms of supplication.

We have calculated the means and standard deviation of responses related to the five different impression management tactics. Table 2 shows the values of the total sample, as well as the results for the male and female respondents.

Table 2: The means and standard deviation of IM tactics used by male and female respondents.

Impression Management Strategy	Total sample		Female respondents		Male respondents		T-test values
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
Self-promotion	2.96	0.95	2.85	0.91	3.15	1.00	-1.987**
Ingratiation	3.11	0.81	3.18	0.83	2.98	0.77	1.638
Exemplification	2.09	0.73	2.02	0.71	2.21	0.74	-1.632
Intimidation	1.82	0.76	1.66	0.66	2.11	0.84	-3.608***
Supplication	1.64	0.70	1.60	0.70	1.73	0.70	-1.155

** significant at the.05 level, *** significant at the.01 level
Source: Authors' own research results.

The table shows that self-promotion and ingratiation are the two most commonly used tactics for the entire sample, as well as for male and female students. In the case of self-promotion and intimidation tactics, we found a significant difference in the behaviour of women and men (Table 2). Men are more likely to use both impression devices.

For items related to self-promotion tactics (except "Make people aware of your accomplishments,") the mean value for men was higher. For the items "Let others know that you are valuable to the organization," and "Make people aware of your talents or qualifications", this difference was significant (at the 5% level).

For statements connected to the intimidation strategy the mean value of men was always higher than that of women, and the difference between them was significant, except for the item "Let others know you can make things difficult for them if they push you too far".

We measured if there are significant differences between the frequency of IM behaviour used by students with and without work experience, but we did not find this to be the case at the 5% level.

Using the ANOVA method we measured whether we find differences in the responses of students in different majors. Only with the item "Deal strongly or aggressively with co-workers who interfere in your business" did we find a significant difference (at the 10% level) between International Business Economics and Business Administration and Management students.

Last year we carried out a similar analysis among international students studying in Debrecen. In Table 3 we compare our current results with the results for Chinese students.

Table 3: Comparison of the frequency of IM tactics used by Hungarian and Chinese students.

Impression Management tactics	Sample of Hungarian students (n = 177)		Sample of Chinese students (n = 20)		t
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Self-promotion	2.96	0.95	3.29	0.73	-4.667***
Ingratiation	3.11	0.81	3.23	0.82	-1.931*
Exemplification	2.09	0.73	2.66	0.85	-10.495***
Intimidation	1.82	0.76	2.23	0.69	-7.265***
Supplication	1.64	0.70	2.65	0.95	-19.075***

* significant at the.10 level, *** significant at the.01 level
Source: Authors' own research results.

The data show that there are several tenths of differences between the means of the two samples, and Chinese students use IM tactics more frequently. The statistical significance of the deviation was checked by a one-sample t-test, where Chinese averages were considered as reference values. The last column of Table 3 shows that we have obtained significant differences between the two groups, even at the 1% level, except in the case of ingratiation (there we found a significant difference at the 10% level). The biggest difference exists between the means of supplication (1.01). Chinese students use these tactics more frequently. The order of frequency of the tactics used by Hungarians are ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification,

intimidation and supplication. Chinese use self-promotion most frequently, followed by ingratiation, exemplification, supplication and intimidation. The standard deviation of the Hungarian sample was particularly pronounced in the case of supplication, exemplification and ingratiation.

Bolino and Turnley (1999) also tested the questionnaire with the participation of university students (n = 94) from the USA, so we were able to compare our results with the US means. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations of the Hungarian and USA samples.

The data show that here we also have differences between the means of the two samples, and the American students use the analysed IM tactics more frequently. Similarly to the previous analysis, the statistical significance of the deviation was checked by a one-sample t-test, where USA averages were considered as reference values. The last column of Table 4 shows that we have obtained significant differences between the two groups at the 1% level.

Table 4: Comparison of the frequency of IM tactics used by Hungarian and USA students.

Impression Management tactics	Sample of Hungarian students (n = 177)		Sample of USA students (n = 94)		t
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Self-promotion	2.96	0.95	3.40	0.75	-6.203***
Ingratiation	3.11	0.81	3.46	0.78	-5.706***
Exemplification	2.09	0.73	2.82	0.84	-13.430***
Intimidation	1.82	0.76	2.22	0.85	-7.089***
Supplication	1.64	0.70	2.24	0.76	-11.298***

*** significant at the.01 level
Source: Authors' own research results

The biggest difference in the use of tactics is with exemplification, where there is a 0.8 difference between the means. As for the order, intimidation and supplication in both samples are in the last two places, but in the case of the Hungarian students the least frequently used tactic is supplication, while for American students it is intimidation. In both samples ingratiation had the highest mean. The standard deviation of the Hungarian sample was particularly pronounced in the case of self-promotion and ingratiation, while the standard deviation of the American sample was greater in the case of exemplification and intimidation.

5. In Conclusion

In our paper we analysed the IM tactics used by university students with the help of the Impression Management Questionnaire developed by Bolino and Turnley (1999). It has 22 items and measures five general IM tactics: self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation and supplication. The most frequently used tactic in our sample (n=177) was ingratiation. We found a significant difference (on a 10% level) between male and female respondents in the usage of self-promotion and intimidation. In case of other background variables we found only minor differences. Comparing our results to one of our previous studies we found that a strong

significant difference exists between Hungarian and Chinese students' IM tactics, and we also found a similarly strong difference when we compared our Hungarian sample with the American one analysed by Bolino and Turnley (1999).

6. Acknowledgements

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