Impression Management in Organizations: Critical Questions, Answers, and Areas for Future Research

Mark Bolino,[1] David Long,[2] and William Turnley[3]

[1]Department of Management and International Business, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma 73019; email: mbolino@ou.edu

[2]Mason School of Business, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia 23187; email: David.M.Long@mason.wm.edu

[3]Department of Management, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506; email: turnley@ksu.edu

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Abstract

Over the past 30 years, researchers have devoted significant attention to understanding impression management in organizations. In this article, we review key questions that have been addressed in this area regarding definitions of impression management; types of impression management; impression management motivation; the effectiveness of ingratiation, self-promotion, and other tactics of impression management; personal factors associated with successful impression management; gender and impression management; cross-cultural implications of impression management; and the measurement of impression management. In doing so, we identify major themes and findings and highlight critical issues and unanswered questions. After reviewing these topics, we also discuss some practical implications for individuals and organizations. Finally, we conclude by outlining some broader avenues for inquiry that would help move this literature forward.

INTRODUCTION

People care about how they are seen by others, and this is of particular concern in organizations (Leary 1995, Leary & Kowalski 1990). Successful self-presentation is considered a critical part of landing a job, and after getting hired, employees are often concerned with projecting the right image to their superiors, colleagues, and subordinates. Indeed, how they are viewed by others can often affect how well they are liked and whether they are seen as competent and committed, the rewards they receive, and how quickly they get ahead in the organization (Bolino et al. 2008). Although sociologists and social psychologists conducted the first theoretical and empirical studies of impression management (e.g., Goffman 1959, Jones 1964, Schlenker 1980), organizational researchers began to focus on this topic in the 1980s. As this line of work has developed over the past 30 years, we have substantially increased our understanding of impression management in organizations.

Impression management is an important organizational phenomenon because it has broad implications for individuals and organizations (Bolino et al. 2008). For instance, when employees are concerned about their image it may affect their willingness to speak up, seek information and feedback, or engage in other proactive behaviors; employees' impression management behavior may also influence their performance or how their performance and actions are judged by others (e.g., Ashford & Tsui 1991, Bolino 1999, Grant et al. 2009, Morrison & Bies 1991). Similarly, because hiring decisions, performance evaluations, promotions, and other personnel activities are often influenced by how employees are seen by others (Bolino et al. 2008, Ferris et al. 1999), impression management plays an important role in shaping the nature and deployment of human resources within the organization, which may ultimately affect the organization's ability to survive and thrive (Becker & Gerhart 1996, Bowen & Ostroff 2004, Huselid 1995). For these reasons, impression management has garnered considerable interest from scholars in organizational psychology and organizational behavior.

Previous reviews of the impression management literature have often focused on the use of specific tactics of impression management, such as ingratiation and self-promotion (e.g., Gordon 1996, Higgins et al. 2003) or on the use of impression management in a specific context, such as the interview (e.g., Barrick et al. 2009, Ellis et al. 2002). In contrast, here we organize our review around the principal research questions that have been investigated over the past few decades. In doing so, we reveal the major themes and findings with regard to these questions. These key questions and themes are summarized in **Table 1**. Furthermore, we highlight some unanswered questions, critical issues, and future research directions, and discuss some practical implications for individuals and organizations. Finally, we conclude by identifying some broader avenues for inquiry that would help move this literature forward in the coming years.

WHAT IS IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT?

Most researchers define impression management in organizations as behaviors that employees (commonly referred to as actors) use to shape how they are seen by others (commonly referred to as targets—who are typically supervisors and coworkers, but sometimes subordinates and customers) at work (Bozeman & Kacmar 1997, Rosenfeld et al. 1995). Impression management involves trying to create a new, desired image or maintaining and protecting a current image (Bolino et al. 2008, Bozeman & Kacmar 1997, Tedeschi & Melburg 1984). This process may be conscious and strategic, in that employees may deliberately seek to cultivate a particular image (e.g., of likeability, competence, neediness) (Jones & Pittman 1982); however, impression management may also be unconscious or habitual. For instance, some people may have a reflexive tendency to compliment others (a behavior that is typically considered an ingratiatory tactic) (Jones 1964, Leary & Kowalski 1990).

Table 1 Research questions in impression management

What is impression management?
■ Actors versus targets
■ Conscious and unconscious impression management
■ Authentic versus deceptive impression management
■ Impression management versus influence tactics
What impression management behaviors have been identified?
■ Ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, intimidation, supplication
■ Tactical-assertive tactics, tactical-defensive tactics, strategic-assertive tactics, strategic-defensive tactics
■ Supervisor-focused tactics, self-focused tactics, job-focused tactics
Why are people motivated to manage impressions?
■ Goal relevance, value of desired goals, discrepancy between current and desired image
■ Desire to be seen as a good organizational citizen
■ Image concerns and proactive behavior
Does ingratiation work?
■ Ingratiator's dilemma
■ Ingratiation and job interviews
■ Ingratiation and work outcomes
Does self-promotion work?
■ Self-promoter's paradox
■ Self-promotion and job interviews
■ Self-promotion and work outcomes
Do other impression management tactics work?
■ Negative tactics, supplication, intimidation
■ Defensive tactics, apologies, excuses
■ Other tactics and job interviews
Are some people better at impression management than others?
■ Self-monitoring
■ Political skill
■ Position in social network
Is gender relevant in understanding impression management?
■ Frequency of use of impression management
■ Use of specific types of impression management
■ Gender role prescriptions and reactions to counternormative impression management
■ Observer gender and reactions to impression management
What are the cross-cultural implications of impression management?
■ Frequency of use across cultures
■ Influence of cultural norms and values
■ Use of impression management by expatriates
How is impression management measured?
■ Impression management tactics
■ Impression management motives
■ Rating sources and measuring impression management

Although impression management is sometimes construed as manipulative or deceptive behavior, researchers have argued that impression management does not necessarily mean that employees are creating false impressions (Leary & Kowalski 1990, Rosenfeld 1997). Thus, employees who truly are likeable, competent, and dedicated may engage in behaviors such as ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification (which are impression management behaviors commonly linked with those respective images) (Turnley & Bolino 2001); in this case, impression management is authentic. Although the implications of authenticity have seldom been addressed in the literature, at least one recent study has sought to understand the implications of deceptive versus honest (or authentic) impression management in the context of job interviews (Roulin et al. 2015). Researchers have also recently started to discuss the broader ethical implications of impression management. For instance, Turnley et al. (2013) argued that even when employees engage in authentic impression management, it can sometimes have negative consequences for coworkers and harm their well-being. Thus, although impression management is not necessarily deceptive or unethical, it can certainly be used in these ways.

Organizational researchers have sometimes used the terms impression management and influence tactics interchangeably (e.g., Higgins et al. 2003, Higgins & Judge 2004, Judge & Bretz 1994, Wayne & Ferris 1990). However, influence tactics typically refer to a broader set of behaviors that include not only ingratiation (a specific impression management behavior) but also several other tactics, such as consultation, rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, coalitions, sanctions, exchange, and upward appeals (Bolino & Turnley 2003b, Kipnis et al. 1980, Yukl & Falbe 1990). Researchers sometimes use the terms self-presentation and impression management interchangeably as well, but Leary & Kowalski (1990) argue that impression management is somewhat broader in scope, and that self-presentation is often concerned not only with managing the images held by others, but also with managing one's self-image. That is, self-presentation is frequently described as having important implications for the self as an audience (Leary 1995, Schlenker 1980). However, as discussed in our review, research in organizational contexts tends to take an others-as-audience approach (Leary & Kowalski 1990) and thus focuses almost exclusively on self-presentation or impression management that employees use to influence how they are viewed by others (e.g., peers, supervisors, subordinates).

Although we know much about what impression management is (and is not), researchers have not fully explored the implications of varying conceptualizations of impression management in organizational contexts. In particular, it would be interesting to investigate the use and implications of conscious and unconscious (or habitual) impression management in organizational settings. Furthermore, although researchers have recently explored the implications of deceptive versus honest impression management in the interview context, we know very little about how such tactics play out when used frequently in the workplace. Finally, as we describe later, the intraindividual effects of impression management are also something that would be worthwhile to explore.

WHAT IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT BEHAVIORS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED?

Jones & Pittman (1982) identified five tactics of impression management that are associated with specific desired images. Specifically, ingratiation (e.g., favors, opinion conformity) is used to be seen as likeable, self-promotion (e.g., boasting, taking credit) is used to be seen as competent, exemplification (e.g., staying late at work, appearing busy) is used to be seen as dedicated, intimidation (e.g., making threats) is used to be seen as menacing, and supplication (e.g., playing dumb) is used to be seen as needy. Interestingly, each of these desired images is associated with an undesired image; thus, impression management can backfire, and people who seek to be seen

as likeable, competent, dedicated, threatening, or needy, may instead be seen as sycophants, brag-garts, self-righteous, blusterers, or incompetent, respectively (Jones & Pittman 1982, Turnley & Bolino 2001).

In a conceptual paper, Tedeschi & Melburg (1984) explained that impression management can be either tactical (short term) or strategic (long term) and assertive (initiated by the actor) or defensive (used by the actor to respond to an undesired image). Accordingly, they developed a 2 × 2 taxonomy that included tactical-assertive tactics (e.g., ingratiation, self-promotion), tactical-defensive tactics (e.g., apologies, excuses), strategic-assertive tactics (e.g., trustworthiness, credibility), and strategic-defensive tactics (e.g., drug abuse, alcoholism). Given the nature of the strategic impression management tactics they identified, researchers have generally focused on the use of assertive and defensive tactical impression management; indeed, Tedeschi & Melburg (1984) classify all five of the behaviors identified by Jones & Pittman (1982) as tactical-assertive forms of impression management.

Other researchers have focused on the target of impression management. Most notably, Wayne & Ferris (1990) suggested that impression management behaviors can be focused on the supervisor, the self, or the job. Supervisor-focused tactics involve behaviors and statements that are directed at the supervisor; thus, they are behaviors that seek to make the supervisor see the employee as more likeable and largely consist of ingratiatory behaviors. Self-focused tactics consist of behaviors designed to highlight how the subordinate is a nice, polite person; thus, this type of impression management is somewhat consistent with exemplification. Job-focused tactics involve statements and behaviors that accentuate positive aspects of the employee's job performance; thus, these behaviors are designed to make the employee seem more competent and rely heavily on self-promotion. As discussed below, the development of this influential categorization scheme was largely based on the results of an exploratory factor analysis. Finally, in a review of the impression management literature, Bolino et al. (2008) found that researchers had identified more than 30 behaviors that had been labeled as forms of impression management (although several of them appear to overlap considerably) and suggested that it may be possible to categorize them based on their focus on the actor or the target and their goal of minimizing or maximizing the perception of good or bad in the actor or target.

Overall, several different types of impression management have been identified, and researchers have suggested that these behaviors can be categorized in different ways. By and large, however, organizational researchers have focused mainly on the tactical use of impression management, and there has been an emphasis on investigations of assertive behaviors that employees use to create a certain image or achieve a particular goal. Indeed, the two types of impression management that have been researched most are the use of ingratiation and self-promotion in the context of job interviews and performance evaluations (e.g., Ferris et al. 1994, Stevens & Kristof 1995, Wayne & Ferris 1990, Wayne & Kacmar 1991, Wayne & Liden 1995, Swider et al. 2011). In contrast, fewer studies have focused on the use of defensive impression management behaviors (e.g., excuses, accounts, justifications, apologies) (for exceptions, see Crant & Bateman 1993, Wood & Mitchell 1981); moreover, the research that has been done in this area has generally focused on how social accounts or explanations can reduce conflict and feelings of injustice (e.g., Bies 1987, Bies et al. 1988, Sitkin & Bies 1993) rather than on how such strategies shape one's image at work beyond cultivating an image of fairness (Greenberg 1990). Similarly, relatively few studies have examined impression management behaviors that might make people look less desirable (e.g., supplication, intimidation) (see Becker & Martin 1995 for an important exception). Moreover, researchers often focus on the use of just one or two tactics of impression management and have seldom considered the use of different combinations or patterns of impression management (see Bolino & Turnley 2003b for an exception). As such, there is a need for research that broadens our understanding

of impression management tactics that are less well understood and for more investigations that explore the use of multiple forms of impression management (e.g., assertive and defensive, tactical and strategic) used in combination.

WHY ARE PEOPLE MOTIVATED TO MANAGE IMPRESSIONS?

In addition to studying the use of specific impression management behaviors, researchers have also sought to understand what drives people to cultivate images. In one of the most influential papers on this topic, Leary & Kowalski (1990) argued that the motivation to manage impressions is driven by the goal relevance of impressions, the value of desired goals, and discrepancies between desired and current images. With regard to goal relevance, they argue that people are more motivated to manage impressions when their behavior is public and they are dependent on someone who controls valued outcomes (e.g., a supervisor or interviewer); similarly, certain people (e.g., careerists) are more likely to see their image as important in achieving goals. The motivation to manage impressions also increases when goals are highly valued; thus, when people really want to land a job or achieve a better performance evaluation, their motivation to manage impressions is stronger. Finally, when people feel there is a discrepancy between the way they hope to be seen and how they are currently seen, they are more motivated to manage impressions. Therefore, when employees feel they are seen as unlikeable they may be more likely to engage in ingratiation; alternatively, when they feel they are seen as incompetent they may be more likely to engage in self-promotion.

Given the drivers of impression management motives identified by Leary & Kowalski (1990), it is not surprising that the most investigated contexts of impression management research are job interviews and performance evaluations (Bolino et al. 2008). However, impression management motives and concerns are also relevant in other contexts. In particular, a relatively recent line of research has explored how employees may engage in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; or helpful behavior that goes beyond the call of duty) to create the impression of being a dedicated, committed employee (Bolino 1999, Rioux & Penner 2001). Furthermore, impression management motives may also interact with more traditional citizenship motives such as organizational concern and prosocial motives to influence OCB (Grant & Mayer 2009, Takeuchi et al. 2015). Impression management motives and concerns may also affect employees' willingness to be proactive by making suggestions, speaking out about controversial organizational issues, or advocating for organizational change (Ashford et al. 1998, Detert & Edmondson 2011, Dutton & Ashford 1993); similarly, image concerns are often very salient when employees are seeking information (Morrison & Bies 1991) or feedback (Ashford & Northcraft 1992). Relatedly, several studies have shown that OCB and proactive behavior may be viewed less favorably when they are attributed to impression management motives (e.g., Grant et al. 2009, Huang et al. 2013, Lam et al. 2007). Thus, although it is common for individuals to be conscious of their image at work, it is helpful if observers and targets do not pick up on such motives.

With regard to future research, it would be helpful to devote more attention to understanding why people manage impressions. Although there have been some attempts to identify the antecedents of impression management (e.g., Barsness et al. 2005, Kacmar et al. 2004), most research on impression management has focused on the consequences of such behavior. Furthermore, drawing on our observations regarding the nature of impression management, it would be useful to understand when people are motivated to engage in impression management to manage their own self-image (i.e., self-presentation), when the motivation to manage impressions is subconscious, and how the motivation to engage in inauthentic and unethical impression management may differ from more traditional motives.

DOES INGRATIATION WORK?

Individuals display ingratiation through a handful of behaviors, such as opinion conformity, when employees act in a manner consistent with the preferences of a target (Jones 1990, Leary 1995); favor doing, when employees render favors to a target (Baumeister 1982); or other- and self-enhancement, when employees use flattery and praise or make salient certain qualities that a target may find attractive (Deluga & Perry 1994, Rosenfeld et al. 1995). However, as Leary (1995, p. 37) asserts, "virtually any observable behavior can serve self-presentational goals," and scholars have expanded this initial set of behaviors to include humor (Cooper 2005), feedback seeking (Lam et al. 2007), citizenship behaviors (Bolino 1999, Grant & Mayer 2009), and peer connections (Long et al. 2015, Tal-or 2010), as well as smiling (Grandey et al. 2005) and other nonverbal behaviors (Barrick et al. 2009).

Despite the breadth of these behaviors, the effectiveness of ingratiation varies when it comes to influencing important workplace outcomes. In particular, Higgins et al. (2003) found in a meta-analysis that the correlation between ingratiation and work outcomes differed across fifty studies, as evidenced by their reported 95% credibility interval of −0.28 to 0.74. This suggests that the success of any one attempt at ingratiation can be difficult to predict, as it can have many components, including who is involved, who the target is, and under what conditions the behavior occurs. For example, scholars have noted a phenomenon called the ingratiator's dilemma, which suggests that the situations where people are most inclined to use ingratiation are the same situations where targets are most likely to be suspicious of the ingratiator's motives (Jones 1990). Because the success of ingratiation largely depends on targets not attributing such behavior to ulterior motives (Eastman 1994, Leary 1995), this dilemma presents a significant problem for individuals. However, there are ways to make ingratiation less transparent. For instance, scholars have suggested that individuals can disagree with targets on trivial issues yet agree with them on important ones as a way to conceal opinion conformity (Jones 1990). Or, individuals can draw attention to their positive qualities by having someone else (e.g., coworker, customer) point them out to targets, making self-enhancement appear less obviously self-interested (Rosenfeld et al. 1995, Weiner 1995).

Recently, scholars have also focused on ways ingratiation can be less obvious for leaders. In one qualitative study, Stern & Westphal (2010) interviewed executives about purposeful ways they ingratiate that are less likely to draw negative reactions and more likely to draw favorable attributions from targets. Those interviews revealed seven "sophisticated" forms of ingratiation: letting targets know that impending flattery will embarrass them, seeking advice from targets, arguing with targets prior to conforming, conforming with opinions targets recently expressed to others, praising targets to others, conforming to target values prior to target opinion, and referencing shared values or affiliations with targets prior to a more obvious ingratiation attempt. Moreover, a subsequent field study revealed that executives who used these techniques were more likely to receive board appointments than were those who used other forms of ingratiation. Other research suggests that finding commonalities with targets can help build genuine affect toward the target, thus making leaders' ingratiation more sincere and effective (Westphal & Shani 2015). The results of these studies suggest that leaders can be successful in influencing other leaders to the extent that they engage in either subtle or sincere ingratiation.

In addition to exploring the ingratiator's dilemma, researchers have also looked at the impact of ingratiation on performance outcomes. For example, during job interviews, using ingratiation is one way for candidates to appear to fit in a particular job or organization (Chen et al. 2008) and increases their likelihood of receiving an offer (Zhao & Liden 2011). In the Higgins et al. (2003) review, the authors found a strong connection between ingratiation and interview performance. However, their findings were based on a small sample of studies, and the authors did not address any

potential moderators. Using a larger sample of studies, Barrick et al. (2009) found the connection to be more moderate and dependent on the structure of the interview. In low-structure situations, where interviewers went off script, ingratiation was more effective. In high-structure situations, where interviewers stayed on script, ingratiation was less effective. These results suggest that applicants should rely on ingratiation more when building rapport at the beginning of an interview and less when answering structured interview questions.

Scholars have also recently addressed the effectiveness of ingratiation when combined with other tactics in interviews. In one study, participants who combined ingratiation with self-promotion were more likely to receive a job offer than those who only used ingratiation (Proost et al. 2010). However, impression management scholars have found that combining ingratiation with other tactics can be effective only to a certain point, but "too much of a good thing" could cause the combinations to backfire (Baron 1986, p. 24; Bolino & Turnley 2003b), as interviewers may sense desperation or deceit in the applicants (e.g., Roulin et al. 2015).

Other outcomes that researchers have paid attention to are job acquisition and performance. Research suggests that ingratiation can lead to higher supervisor ratings of individuals' task performance (Higgins et al. 2003), as well as OCB (Bolino et al. 2006). Also, ingratiation has been shown to improve one's ability to gain a job in certain situations. For example, when company directors use ingratiation toward their peers they are more likely to gain appointments on other boards (Stern & Westphal 2010, Westphal & Stern 2007), and when interns use ingratiation they are more likely to receive a permanent placement (Zhao & Liden 2011). More recently, researchers have looked at how ingratiation over time can affect performance ratings. Bolino et al. (2014) found that ingratiation has an initial positive influence on performance ratings, but over time and with repeated use those ratings decline. This suggests that ingratiation may be more effective in the earlier stages of a relationship, or as an isolated occurrence. Research has also shown that employees who are motivated to manage impressions will often use job performance behaviors as a way to do so, including acts that fall within the realm of ingratiation, such as prosocial behaviors (Grant & Mayer 2009) and peer support (Long et al. 2015). However, the success of this approach is likely dependent on the motives that supervisors attribute to such behaviors (Eastman 1994).

Although a large body of research on ingratiation exists, there is still much we do not know. For example, is there a connection between ingratiation and counterproductive behaviors—another dimension of job performance? Some supervisors may view ingratiation as counterproductive and dysfunctional to the work environment (Gardner & Martinko 1998), whereas others may agree with the ingratiator's positive overtures and see this act as less counterproductive (Vonk 2002). Also, what other workplace behaviors could be considered ingratiation? One potentially ingratiatory behavior is when an individual adopts some of the characteristics of a target, in an effort to appear more similar to the target. Research suggests that individuals are inclined to like those who are similar to them (Byrne 1971). As such, mimicking the boss' appearance, lingo, or style could be an effective form of ingratiation. In preliminary support of this, recent research suggests that bosses who are morning people react more favorably to employees who arrive to work early than those who come in later (Yam et al. 2014).

DOES SELF-PROMOTION WORK?

Self-promoters are inclined to highlight their accomplishments, take credit for positive outcomes, name-drop important others, and downplay the severity of negative events to which they are connected (Bolino & Turnley 1999, Jones & Pittman 1982). Whereas ingratiators are inclined to point out the positive aspects of targets, self-promoters draw attention to important aspects of themselves or their jobs (Wayne & Ferris 1990). However, as with ingratiators, self-promoters

hope to enhance their image through various behaviors, which for many individuals can be a slippery slope (Cialdini & De Nicholas 1989). This peril can represent what scholars call the self-promoter's paradox—when individuals overemphasize their credentials, they appear self-interested, and risk looking less competent (Berman et al. 2014, Jones & Pittman 1982). To offset this paradox, scholars suggest that self-promoters need to establish credibility by being subtle when claiming their image (Gardner & Avolio 1998).

One context where the self-promoter's paradox may be less of a concern for individuals is during job interviews, as research suggests that self-promotion can be highly effective in these situations (Barrick et al. 2009). During interviews, interviewers generally expect candidates to promote their competencies to demonstrate their capability to perform the job (Lievens & Peeters 2008). In fact, some research suggests that self-promotion is even more effective than ingratiation during interviews, particularly when the interview is formal and structured (Chen et al. 2010). For example, one study found that when candidates made a poor initial impression on interviewers during the early rapport-building phase of the interview, they were able to improve their image and earn high interview scores using self-promotion during the later structured phase of the interview (Swider et al. 2011). This suggests that self-promotion may be a remedy for candidates less skilled at ingratiation.

The self-promoter's paradox is likely more an issue in relation to individuals' job performance ratings. The Higgins et al. (2003) review found a nonsignificant correlation between self-promotion and performance, and other research suggests that self-promotion can actually hurt an individual's performance ratings (e.g., Dulebohn et al. 2004). However, individuals who are more socially skilled are better able to garner higher performance ratings when using self-promotion (Harris et al. 2007, Turnley & Bolino 2001). Also, Zhao & Liden (2011) found that interns who self-promoted were more likely to earn a permanent position. Recently, researchers have suggested that to appear competent, individuals sometimes downplay their warmth and friendliness (Holoien & Fiske 2013). This suggests that to make self-promotion more effective, individuals might display lower amounts of ingratiation.

Despite the research that exists on self-promotion, there is still much we do not know. For example, in what other contexts is self-promotion effective? One possibility is in professional services, as research suggests that patients react positively to doctors who openly display their credentials on waiting room walls (Cialdini 2001). From this perspective, should chefs more openly display their culinary credentials on the walls of their restaurants? Future research could address this and other questions. Another important question is how individuals can appear competent and likeable. Often, if individuals want to appear competent, they may avoid certain behaviors associated with being likeable, and vice-versa. For example, to appear competent, most individuals will be reticent to seek others' advice and opinions (Ashford & Northcraft 1992, Lee 2002). However, a recent study by Brooks et al. (2015) suggests just the opposite—that seeking advice on difficult tasks makes the individual appear more competent. Perhaps by seeking advice, individuals can appear likeable by making the person whose advice is sought feel appreciated and competent because through it they obtain task-relevant knowledge. Other new research has touched on this question by addressing humblebragging—using humility to mask bragging in an effort to self-promote and still be liked (Sezer et al. 2015). This research highlights one of the challenges of impression management, however, as humblebragging has been found to be negatively related to liking and perceived competence.

DO OTHER IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT TACTICS WORK?

In addition to the positive impressions individuals proactively seek through ingratiation and self-promotion, individuals occasionally seek to make negative impressions as well. One way that

individuals may create negative impressions is through supplication (Becker & Martin 1995, Jones & Pittman 1982, Bolino & Turnley 1999). By supplicating, individuals try to capitalize on the norm of social responsibility, which suggests that targets should feel compelled to provide resources or lend aid to cover for the shortcomings and weaknesses of those who request assistance (Berkowitz & Daniels, 1964). In some situations, this results in supplicants getting extra help or avoiding an undesirable job. For the most part, however, research has shown that supplication is risky for individuals as it can lead to lower performance outcomes (Harris et al. 2007, Kacmar et al. 2013). Scholars have speculated that this occurs because targets either view the supplicant as weak or lazy, or they ignore the social responsibility to help and provide resources (Jones & Pittman 1982).

Another way employees create negative impressions is through intimidation. Although little research exists on the effectiveness of intimidation as an impression management strategy, one might speculate that targets will react negatively toward those who use it. However, research suggests that when individuals first earn affection from others, they can then be more forceful and heavy-handed without creating as much negative sentiment (Cuddy et al. 2013). Perhaps if individuals initially earn liking from targets through ingratiation, they can then more effectively use intimidation tactics toward them. Also, intimidation might be effective in situations that require both physical and mental endurance, such as various sports and military training. Here, a feared coach or instructor might be able to use intimidation as a motivational technique.

Although supplication and intimidation are unique in that they are commonly associated with negative impressions, they still require individuals to be proactive about finding ways to elicit desired attributions. However, individuals are not always in the driver's seat when it comes to impression management, and may have to react to their surroundings with defensive tactics. For instance, when individuals offer an apology for a negative outcome, it signals to others that they are accepting responsibility and asking for forgiveness (Schlenker 1980). Alternatively, individuals may offer an excuse to reduce their responsibility for a negative outcome. Finally, individuals may justify their actions by claiming that the negative outcome is not as bad as it appears (Leary 1995).

Previous studies on these and other defensive impression management tactics suggest that these strategies can sometimes be effective (Crant & Bateman 1993, Leary 1995, Rosenfeld et al. 1995, Wood & Mitchell 1981). However, recent research suggests that the effectiveness of a defensive tactic depends on how that tactic is composed. One study found that to be effective, apologies must include the specific component that the victim needs to hear (Fehr & Gelfand 2010). According to this research, apologies that contain components that directly address victims' self-construal—how they see themselves in relation to their surroundings—are most effective. As an example, individuals who see themselves as separate from others react more positively to apologies that contain monetary compensation; individuals who see themselves as closely connected to others react better to apologies that contain empathy; and individuals who see themselves as part of a group react better to apologies that admit group norms were violated.

Other research shows that these tactics can be effective early in a relationship. For example, defensive tactics can be effective during job interviews (Lievens & Peeters 2008), particularly when questions arise regarding the applicant's competence or character (Tsai et al. 2010). By using defensive strategies, applicants may get an opportunity to clear up interviewer concerns and improve their chances of receiving an offer. However, over time, the effectiveness of these tactics may wane, as targets may grow tired of hearing the same reasons for a negative outcome (Bolino et al. 2014).

One critical, but unanswered, research question is whether supplication and intimidation tactics are contagious to other employees. Research on counterproductive behaviors suggests that coworkers who perform them are like bad apples spoiling the bunch, often compelling others to also be counterproductive (Robinson et al. 2014). Perhaps by observing coworkers use supplication

or intimidation, other employees may also do the same. As for defensive tactics (e.g., apologies, excuses, justifications), an important question is whether they are equally effective when performed electronically as opposed to in person. For example, apologies need to be perceived as heartfelt to be effective, and research suggests that emotions are hard to communicate electronically (Byron 2008). Perhaps email apologies to customers or employees are not as effective as other methods. Future research could address these and related questions.

ARE SOME PEOPLE BETTER AT IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT THAN OTHERS?

Impression management attempts always run the risk of being perceived negatively (Jones & Pittman 1982). This raises the question of whether some people are simply better at managing impressions than others, either in terms of using impression management to receive better outcomes or in terms of using impression management to create desired images while avoiding undesired images. There are at least three variables that are generally assumed to influence the extent to which individuals are likely to be able to use impression management more successfully—self-monitoring, political skill, and one's position in a social network.

For self-monitoring, individuals who are high self-monitors pay attention to the appropriateness of the image they are conveying and act like "social chameleons" by changing their attitudes and behaviors to fit different social situations (Snyder & Gangestad 1986). High self-monitors have been described as being attentive to social cues, having the ability to change the way they present themselves to others, and frequently utilizing impression management (Gabrenya & Arkin 1980). Prior research supports the idea that high self-monitors are often better at impression management than low self-monitors. Some of the support for this notion comes from studies that examine the career success and performance evaluations of high versus low self-monitors. Other support comes from research that demonstrates that high self-monitors carefully control the information that they present to others. For example, Kilduff & Day (1994) found that high self-monitors were generally more successful in managing the early stages of their career than were low self-monitors, and these differences were thought to be related to their enhanced ability to manage impressions. Similarly, Day & Schleicher (2006) noted that self-monitoring had a bigger influence on subjectively evaluated performance than it did on objectively evaluated performance, a finding consistent with the notion that high self-monitors are better at managing the impression of being a key contributor. Moreover, multiple studies indicate that high self-monitors are more likely to manipulate the information they present to others and are more likely to tailor their impression management strategies to their audience (Fandt & Ferris 1990). Finally, previous work also indicates that high self-monitors pay particular attention to situational factors when deciding when to engage in voice as a type of impression management (Fuller et al. 2007).

Other research supports the notion that high self-monitors are not only more sensitive to social cues and more likely to use impression management than low self-monitors, but also more likely to see their attempts at impression management be effective (Anderson & Narus 1990, Caldwell & O'Reilly 1982). In one of the most direct examinations, Turnley & Bolino (2001) found that high self-monitors were more adept at using ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification to achieve favorable images than were low self-monitors. Indeed, in the case of ingratiation, high self-monitors who used ingratiation were seen as more likeable, whereas low self-monitors who used ingratiation were seen as less likeable. Moreover, low self-monitors who used self-promotion and exemplification were significantly more likely to be perceived negatively than were high self-monitors who used those tactics. Thus, on the whole, self-monitoring seems to play an important role in determining whether impression management will result in the desired

impression outcome. Indeed, low self-monitors who attempt to use impression management may sometimes do themselves more harm than good.

As for political skill, individuals with a high level of political skill may also be better at using impression management than individuals with a low level of this characteristic. Political skill is the ability to understand the work environment and those operating in that environment, and to use that knowledge to influence others to act in ways that further one's personal or organizational objectives (Ahearn et al. 2004, Brouer et al. 2014). Those with political skill are thought to be able to use the most appropriate impression management tactics to influence others at work (Ferris et al. 2005).

It is not simply the extent of impression management usage that influences observers' reactions; instead, effectiveness is determined by the style and ability of the person doing the influencing. Political skill may allow those engaged in impression management to hide any ulterior motives guiding their behaviors and to project positive or neutral motives instead (Higgins et al. 2003). Political skill also helps individuals use social cues to better understand the situation and tailor their behaviors so as to have the most favorable impact on others. Those with political skill are more likely to be aware of how targets will perceive their actions and understand how to manage those perceptions. In contrast, those with less political skill may not recognize all of the important situational characteristics and may use impression management in a way that alienates others. As an example of how this might work, Treadway and colleagues demonstrated that the ingratiatory behaviors of those with high political skill were less likely to be perceived as a manipulative influence attempt than the same behaviors used by those with less political skill (Treadway et al. 2007).

Although the relationship between political skill and the effectiveness of impression management has not been examined very frequently, there are several key studies that suggest that this relationship may work as expected. In particular, Harris et al. (2007) found that political skill moderated the relationship between the use of five different types of impression management (ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, intimidation, and supplication) and supervisor-rated performance. Overall, the results of that study indicate that individuals who engage in higher levels of impression management were more likely to be evaluated as good performers when they possessed a high level of political skill. In another study, Brouer et al. (2014) argued that employees high in political skill use positive impression management tactics (i.e., ingratiation, self-promotion and exemplification) more often and that they also execute those tactics more effectively than individuals lower in political skill. In particular, Brouer et al. (2014) examined several specific dimensions of political skill and found that those who scored high in certain aspects of political skill were more likely to use positive than negative forms of impression management and that political skill moderated the relationship between objective performance and supervisor-evaluated ratings of employees.

Finally, there are numerous contextual variables that influence whether impression management works as intended, but an individual's position in the social network is likely to be one of the most relevant factors. It has been argued that well-networked individuals are more adept at engaging in risk assessment and are better able to determine which impression management tactics to use (Brouer et al. 2014). Additionally, those who have more influence (related either to their personal characteristics or to their place in the social network) are likely able to use impression management in a way that others will respond to more positively.

Thus, somewhat related to political skill, networking ability is the skill to understand organizational dynamics and position oneself advantageously within the network to accrue social capital and have influence over important outcomes (Brass 2001, Brouer et al. 2014). Similarly, network centrality reflects the degree of access that an individual has to others within the organization

or social network. Individuals who have access to several individuals are considered to be more central (Bowler et al. 2009), and network centrality may influence the effectiveness of impression management in several ways. First, the more centrally networked the individual, the more people he or she is connected to, and thus, the greater the potential reach and effectiveness of impression management behaviors. Second, centrally networked individuals have greater control over the dissemination of information and, thus, can influence both the amount and the content of information that passes through the network (Brass & Burkhardt 1993). Indeed, prior research has found an interaction between impression management motives and network centrality in predicting the performance of certain types of OCB that are intended to make the employee look better within the organization (Bowler et al. 2009).

Although previous research has not directly examined how network centrality influences the effectiveness of specific impression management behaviors, it is possible that this characteristic plays a critical role in that regard. For highly central individuals, not only does the increased number of ties lead to more opportunities to utilize impression management, but it may also allow individuals to be more selective about when and how they choose to use such behavior. In fact, prior work implies that those with strong impression management motives who score low on network centrality may engage in impression management more frequently but less effectively than those who score high on network centrality (Gardner & Martinko 1988). Indeed, being strongly connected to several people reduces the need to engage in impression management in general but increases the willingness of people to use impression management when they feel it is necessary (Gardner & Martinko 1988). Most importantly, it may make the use of impression management more effective because individuals have more information on which tactics will be well received and how exactly those tactics should be employed (Barsness et al. 2005).

Still, there are many unanswered questions related to the issue of whether some employees are better at impression management than others. Self-monitoring, political skill, and network centrality all seem to play an important role in determining one's success at impression management. However, the effectiveness of impression management may also be very context dependent. The impression management tactics that work well in one situation may not work as well in another (e.g., Ferris et al. 2005, Fuller et al. 2007). Similarly, each of these characteristics may influence the success of some forms of impression management more than others. For example, network centrality may play a large role in determining whether attempts at self-promotion are effective but may play less of a role in determining whether an individual can use intimidation without negative consequences. Furthermore, there are unanswered questions regarding the factors that determine how successfully individuals can use impression management through social media. The dynamics that influence impression management success may change depending on whether the interactions occur face-to-face or online. Finally, numerous demographic characteristics (age, race, gender, etc.) are likely to influence the success of some forms of impression management; these and other issues need to be investigated.

IS GENDER RELEVANT IN UNDERSTANDING IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT?

Gender role theory (Eagly 1987) indicates that different types of behavior are expected from women and men. In particular, women are expected to engage in more communal behaviors, and men are expected to engage in more agentic behaviors (Smith et al. 2013). Accordingly, actions that demonstrate modesty, friendliness, submissiveness, unselfishness, and concern for others represent stereotypically feminine tactics. In contrast, behaviors that demonstrate self-confidence, assertiveness, self-reliance, directness, and instrumentality represent stereotypically masculine

tactics. Because gender-based expectations include both descriptive and prescriptive elements, gender influences not only the extent to which individuals engage in impression management and the types of impression management that they utilize, but also the types of tactics that are seen as acceptable and how others react to those tactics (Bolino & Turnley 2003a,b; Guadagno & Cialdini 2007; Rudman & Phelan 2008).

In some studies, researchers have treated gender as a nuisance variable and attempted to control for its influence on the use of particular impression management tactics (Smith et al. 2013). However, when the effects of gender have been directly examined, research generally supports the idea that men and women engage in differing levels of impression management. For example, on the whole, women may be less inclined to use impression management than men and tend to think that doing a good job should be sufficient to achieve success (Singh et al. 2002). Thus, men tend to use impression management more frequently and aggressively than women (Bolino & Turnley 2003b) and also utilize a wider range of impression management tactics (Guadagno & Cialdini 2007).

Men and women also differ in the extent to which they engage in specific types of impression management. For example, consistent with gender role theory, men are more likely to use relatively aggressive and self-serving forms of impression management (such as self-promotion and intimidation) than women. In contrast, women utilize less aggressive and other-oriented forms of impression management (such as ingratiation and supplication) more frequently than men (Guadagno & Cialdini 2007). Moreover, men generally use impression management to help themselves stand out from others and to acquire instrumental rewards, whereas women are more likely to use impression management in an effort to achieve fairness and to balance the needs of all involved (Tannen 1994).

One of the most consistent findings in prior research is that observers tend to react more favorably to attempts at impression management that fit gender role prescriptions (Rudman & Glick 1999, Smith et al. 2013). Thus, using the same impression management tactic may not lead to the same outcomes for men and women. For instance, Bolino & Turnley (2003b) found that men who used intimidation received more favorable performance evaluations, whereas women who used intimidation did not. In addition, in that same study, the use of intimidation did not make men less likeable, but it did negatively influence the likeability of women. In contrast, Kipnis & Schmidt (1988) found that ingratiation led to higher performance ratings for women but that it did not lead to higher performance ratings for men. In both of these studies, individuals were perceived more positively when they engaged in gender-normative types of impression management and less positively when they engaged in counternormative forms of impression management.

Although both men and women are expected to engage in behaviors that meet gender stereotypes, these social expectations may put women in a particularly disadvantageous position in the workplace. In general, men are more likely to engage in gender-consistent impression management tactics than are women (Singh et al. 2002), perhaps because the expectations regarding social and work behaviors tend to overlap to a greater degree for men. In contrast, women are more likely to engage in counternormative impression management, perhaps because they need to use tactics such as self-promotion and intimidation to be seen as a leader. Significant research has examined the so-called backlash effect that results from the use of counternormative behaviors, particularly when women engage in relatively aggressive forms of impression management (e.g., Rudman 1998, Rudman & Phelan 2008). In most cases, women who use self-promotion and intimidation are not evaluated as favorably as men who do so. However, even in those cases where women who engage in aggressive forms of impression management are seen as equally competent to their male counterparts, the downside is that they are almost always seen as less likeable, which

can come back to hurt them in other ways (Bolino & Turnley 2003b, Rudman 1998, Rudman & Phelan 2008).

The relationship between gender and the interpretation of impression management is fairly complex. There are several factors that interact with gender to influence how attempts at impression management are perceived (Smith et al. 2013). For example, the gender composition of the workplace helps to determine the extent to which impression management is judged differently depending on the gender of the user. When individuals are working in a position that is occupied by relatively few members of their gender, the social consequences for engaging in counternormative impression management may be greater (Guadagno & Cialdini 2007). In contrast, individuals are given more leeway to stray from gender prescriptions when the gender composition of the workplace is more balanced.

Other factors may also mitigate the extent to which counternormative impression management harms one's image. For example, women tend to be perceived negatively when they act assertively on their own behalf. However, women who act assertively on behalf of another party are not perceived as negatively (Amanatullah & Morris 2010). Additionally, women who simultaneously display warmth (a stereotypically feminine trait) while using relatively aggressive impression management tactics may not receive the negative attributions that women who are not warm tend to receive (Rudman & Phelan 2008). Moreover, the extent to which different forms of counternormative impression management are viewed negatively for women may change with the age of the individual who is using the tactic (Singh et al. 2002).

Finally, although less research has been done in this area, the gender of the observer may also play a role in the way that attempts at impression management are perceived. For instance, although results across studies have been mixed, there is some evidence that women who use assertive forms of impression management are judged especially harshly by other women (Rudman 1998). Furthermore, women make more negative attributions about individuals who engage in specific forms of impression management, such as self-handicapping, than do men (Hirt et al. 2003).

Although prior research has identified some of the ways that gender influences the impression management process, there are still many unanswered questions in this area. For example, it is unclear why women tend to suffer harsher backlash effects than men when they engage in counternormative impression management. It may be that normative expectations are stronger for women than for men. However, the backlash effect may occur because men tend to exceed social expectations when they engage in counternormative behavior whereas women generally fall short of such expectations when they act in counternormative ways. As an example, males who engage in ingratiation (a stereotypically feminine tactic) may be seen as nicer than expected, whereas females using intimidation (a stereotypically masculine tactic) may be seen as ruder than expected.

In addition, contextual factors are likely to influence the relationship between gender and impression management. Age, gender composition in the job, and balancing communal and agentic tactics were discussed above as key contextual factors that influence how impression management is interpreted. However, impression management is a complex phenomenon, and many other factors are likely to play a role as well. For example, physical characteristics such as attractiveness, size, and race may interact with gender to influence how specific behaviors are interpreted. Similarly, organizational culture and characteristics of the target may also be relevant. Finally, individuals rarely use only one form of impression management (Bolino & Turnley 2003b), but we know relatively little about how the use of impression management tactics in combination influences observer reactions. It may be that specific combinations of impression management tactics are particularly effective or ineffective when utilized by women or by men.

WHAT ARE THE CROSS-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT?

The vast majority of research on impression management has been conducted in the United States and has been based on theories and assumptions that reflect how impression management tactics are likely to work in Western cultures (Sandal et al. 2014). However, there have been some studies that examined the use of impression management in other countries (e.g., Bolino et al. 2006, Huang et al. 2013). Even when impression management has been studied in other countries, however, the cultural context has only occasionally been considered. Instead, it is frequently assumed that impression management works the same way across cultures.

Similarly, most of the instruments used to measure impression management have been developed and validated using respondents from the United States (Bye et al. 2011), which raises questions about the extent to which such instruments are valid and applicable in other cultures. As a result, Sandal et al. (2014) developed the Cultural Impression Management Scale to examine impression management tactics used during interviews in both Western and non-Western cultures. Although the four strategies identified do not map perfectly onto existing impression management typologies, the scale does assess behaviors associated with tactics such as ingratiation and self-promotion. Still, this new scale has not been widely utilized, does not cover all impression management tactics, and focuses specifically on impression management in interview contexts, making comparisons with prior research a challenge.

Other research comparing the use of impression management across countries has occurred relatively infrequently and has proceeded in a scattered and fragmented manner (Bye et al. 2011). Much of that research has compared the utilization of impression management and influence tactics in the United States to that in other countries (e.g., Fu et al. 2004, Ralston et al. 2005). For example, prior research suggests that self-enhancement is more prominent in North America and Western Europe than in Southeast Asia and that the use of impression management may be even more common in the United States than in other relatively affluent, Western cultures such as Norway and Germany (Sandal et al. 2014).

Beyond that, studies have occasionally examined differences in the use of impression management in areas outside the United States. For instance, Merkin (2012) examined impression management in the Middle East and found that Israelis used more direct forms of impression management than Syrians. Another study suggests that Ghanaians and Turks use more of some forms of impression management than Norwegians and Germans (Bye et al. 2011). Additionally, Kurman (2001) found that the use of self-enhancement may occur more often for agentic traits in individualistic than communal cultures, but that there may not be significant differences in impression management related to communal traits between people in individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Although uncovering variations in the use of impression management across various countries is interesting, simply identifying that such differences exist does not explain why this occurs or why it is important. Differences in usage may be related to cultural values, to the level of affluence in a particular country, to varying norms regarding the social desirability of responses, to individual differences, or to a host of other factors. In addition, these factors may also help to determine the effectiveness of attempts at impression management.

Specifically, impression management is effective when the behavior has the intended influence on the target. In general, cultural norms and expectations influence how much and what type of impression management is acceptable or desired (Mendenhall & Wiley 1994). Indeed, the success or failure of attempts at impression management is dependent on their fit with the cultural environment because particular strategies are likely to be seen as more appropriate in some contexts than in others (Spong & Kamau 2012). For example, in one study, behaviors associated

with ingratiation and exemplification were perceived to be more attractive to American than Asian respondents, whereas behaviors associated with intimidation and supplication were particularly disliked by American respondents (Manzur & Jogaratnam 2006).

The ability to utilize impression management effectively is thought to be particularly important for expatriates because it is critical for them to be able to adapt to parent company expectations regarding their behavior (Mendenhall & Wiley 1994). The Cross-Cultural Impression Management model suggests that whether the individual is perceived favorably by others is influenced by the cultural backgrounds of both actors and targets, and that differences between expected and actual behaviors may reinforce negative perceptions and stereotypes (Bilbow 1997). For example, those who were able to use upward influence tactics (including ingratiation and assertiveness) in a way that fit with cultural norms were seen as more promotable than those who used tactics that did not fit cultural norms (Herrmann & Werbel 2007). Moreover, research indicates that people try to self-enhance in domains that are congruent with the norms and values of the culture in which they are working (Kurman 2003, Sandal et al. 2014). Consistent with that point, several scholars have noted the need for impression management training prior to sending employees on expatriate assignments (e.g., Giacalone & Beard 1994).

Finally, some research has emphasized the role that values play in determining the extent and success of impression management in cross-cultural contexts. In particular, both Schwartz's (1992) value theory and Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory have been applied to predict how impression management will be used and received in different cultural contexts (e.g., Manzur & Jogaratnam 2006, Sandal et al. 2014). Although the results have not been perfectly consistent, there is evidence that cultural values often play an important role in determining the effectiveness of attempts at impression management.

Still, the lack of research on the cross-cultural use of impression management has left many unanswered questions and directions for future research. Impression management has rarely been examined in some countries and cultures, and even when research indicates that differences exist, we know very little about what implications those differences have for important outcomes. Limited research on how cultural values influence the use and interpretation of impression management has been conducted, but this line of inquiry needs to proceed in a more comprehensive and systematic fashion. Moreover, much of the existing research has used student samples. Thus, it is important to examine impression management among employed individuals throughout the world. Similarly, we need to expand the outcomes that have been examined beyond interpersonal liking and initial assessments of employability. Finally, most prior research has focused on individual differences that are particularly important in the United States. Future research needs to examine individual differences that are relevant in other countries and also acknowledge that factors such as gender norms may be stronger or weaker, or work in a very different manner in other cultures.

HOW IS IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT MEASURED?

There are several different scales that have been developed to measure impression management. **Table 2** provides some details about some of these key measures. Arguably, the scale that is used most often is the one developed by Wayne & Ferris (1990). However, the three dimensions they identified were based on an exploratory factor analysis. Over the years, researchers have identified some problems with specific items and some of the subscales associated with this measure (e.g., Ferris et al. 1994), which has resulted in significant inconsistencies in the way that it has been used. Typically, researchers will use just a subset of items (e.g., Bolino et al. 2006) or focus on just one or two subdimensions (e.g., Barsness et al. 2005, Judge & Bretz 1994, Wayne & Liden 1995),

Table 2 Impression management measures

Source of measure	Focus of measure subdimensions (# of items)	Sample items
Andrews & Kacmar (2001)	Indirect impression management	
	■ Blare (3)	When someone else does a poor job, I let others know I maintain a higher level of performance.
	■ Blur (3)	When a superior compliments me on good work for which someone else is responsible, I don't bother to explain otherwise.
	■ Boast (3)	I let others know that I am friends with people in informative or powerful departments.
	■ Bury (3)	When my peer has a major problem with his or her work, I try to dissociate from him or her so that others won't think I am involved.
Bolino & Turnley (1999)	Impression management strategies from Jones & Pittman (1982)	
	■ Ingratiation (4)	Compliment your colleagues so they will see you as likeable.
	■ Self-promotion (4)	Make people aware of your accomplishments.
	■ Exemplification (4)	Come to the office at night or on weekends to show that you are dedicated.
	■ Supplication (5)	Act like you know less than you do so people will help you out.
	■ Intimidation (5)	Be intimidating with coworkers when it will help you get your job done.
Dahling et al. (2009)	Machiavellian Personality Scale	
	■ Amorality (6)	I am willing to be unethical if I believe it will help me succeed.
	■ Desire for status (3)	Status is a good sign of success in life.
	■ Desire for control (3)	I enjoy having control over other people.
	■ Distrust of others (6)	If I show any weakness at work, other people will take advantage of it.
Feldman & Weitz (1991)	Careerist orientation to work (23)	Who you know in an organization is more important than what you know.
Ferris et al. (2005)	Political skill inventory	
	■ Networking ability (6)	I am good at using my connections and networks to make things happen at work.
	■ Apparent sincerity (3)	When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do.
	■ Social astuteness (5)	I always seem to instinctively know the right thing to say or do to influence others.
	■ Interpersonal influence (4)	It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people.
Kumar & Beyerlein (1991)	Measure of Ingratiatory Behaviors in Organizational Settings	
	■ Other enhancement (7)	Exaggerate his/her admirable qualities to convey the impression that you think highly of him/her.
	■ Opinion conformity (7)	Show him/her that you share his/her enthusiasm about his/her new idea even when you may not actually like it.
	■ Self-presentation (4)	Try to make sure that he/she is aware of your successes.
	■ Favor rendering (6)	Go out of your way to run an errand for your supervisor.

(*Continued*)

Table 2 (*Continued*)

Source of measure	Focus of measure subdimensions (# of items)	Sample items
Levashina & Campion (2007)	Interview Faking Behavior scale Slight image creation	
	■ Embellishing (4)	I exaggerated my responsibilities on previous jobs.
	■ Tailoring (6)	During the interview, I distorted my answers to emphasize what the interviewer was looking for.
	■ Fit enhancing (4)	I tried to use information about the company to make my answers sound like I was a better fit than I actually was.
	Extensive image creation	
	■ Construction (7)	I told fictional stories prepared in advance of the interview to best present my credentials.
	■ Inventing (7)	I invented some work situations or accomplishments that did not really occur.
	■ Borrowing (3)	When I did not have a good answer, I borrowed work experiences of other people and made them sound like my own.
	Image protection	
	■ Omitting (4)	I tried to avoid discussion of job tasks that I may not be able to do.
	■ Masking (4)	I did not reveal requested information that might hurt my chances of getting a job.
	■ Distancing (3)	I clearly separated myself from my past work experiences that would reflect poorly on me.
	Ingratiation	
	■ Opinion conforming (8)	I tried to express the same opinions and attitudes as the interviewer.
	■ Interview or organization enhancing (4)	I exaggerated my positive comments about the organization.
Rioux & Penner (2001)	Citizenship motives	
	■ Impression management (10)	To look better than my coworkers.
	■ Prosocial values (10)	Because I feel it is important to help those in need.
	■ Organizational concerns (10)	Because I care what happens to the company.
Sandal et al. (2014)	Cultural Impression Management Scale	
	■ Individual excellence (4)	Talk about strengths and positive aspects only.
	■ Pointing out obstacles (8)	Try to make the interviewer understand that serious personal reasons can influence fulfillment of the job (e.g., poor health, exhaustion, transport problems).
	■ Assertiveness (11)	Point out your qualities and potential as a leader.
	■ Accommodation (9)	Show willingness to listen and take orders from your boss.
Snyder & Gangestad (1986)	Self-Monitoring Scale	
	■ Self-monitoring (18)	I'm not always the person I appear to be.

(*Continued*)

Table 2   (Continued)

Source of measure	Focus of measure subdimensions (# of items)	Sample items
Stevens & Kristof (1995)	Interviewee impression management	
	■ Self-promotion (5)	Described your skills and abilities in an attractive way.
	■ Fit-with-organization (3)	Found out what kind of person the organization was seeking and explained how you fit in.
	■ Opinion-conformity (2)	Discussed interests you shared in common with the interviewer.
	■ Other-enhancement (2)	Complimented the interviewer or organization.
	■ Nonverbal (2)	Smiled a lot or used other friendly nonverbal behaviors.
Wayne & Ferris (1990)	Impression management tactics	
	■ Supervisor-focused (7)	Do personal favors for your supervisor.
	■ Self-focused (5)	Try to act as a "model" employee in front of your supervisor by, for example, never taking longer than the established time for lunch.
	■ Job-focused (12)	Play up the value of a positive event that you have taken credit for.
Yun et al. (2007)	Self-enhancement motives (6)	I try to modify my behaviors to give good images to others.

but in some studies, researchers have combined all of the dimensions into an overall measure of impression management (e.g., Huang et al. 2013).

Noting the limitations of the Wayne & Ferris (1990) scale and seeking to operationalize Jones & Pittman's (1982) taxonomy of impression management, Bolino & Turnley (1999) developed and validated a measure that included all five strategies. Since its creation, the overall scale or measures associated with specific dimensions have been used in numerous studies (e.g., Harris et al. 2007, Turnley & Bolino 2001, Whitaker & Dahling 2013, Wu et al. 2012). Researchers have also developed measures focusing on specific types of impression management. In particular, Kumar & Beyerlein (1991) developed the Measure of Ingratiatory Behaviors in Organizational Settings (MIBOS) scale, but other researchers have raised questions about its psychometric properties (Harrison et al. 1998). Also, Andrews & Kacmar (2001) developed a measure of the four indirect impression management tactics (i.e., boasting, blurring, blaring, and burying) identified by Cialdini (1989). Given the issues associated with the dimensionality of the Wayne & Ferris (1990) scale, we recommend that researchers consider using this measure to assess the global use of impression management rather than specific dimensions, as illustrated by Huang et al. (2013). The Bolino & Turnley (1999) scale is ideal for measuring the various impression management tactics identified by Jones & Pittman (1982); however, given that the length of each subscale is relatively short, it may be worthwhile for researchers interested in a specific tactic, such as self-promotion or supplication, to develop more comprehensive measures that might better capture the full content of these constructs. Furthermore, given the shortcomings associated with the MIBOS, researchers interested in learning more about ingratiation should consider developing a new scale that would assess the various types of ingratiation (e.g., flattery, opinion conformity). Finally, it would also be helpful for researchers to develop reliable and valid measures of defensive tactics of impression management.

Researchers have also developed assessments of impression management motives. Most notably, Rioux & Penner (2001) developed an OCB motives scale, which includes an impression management motives subdimension, and Yun et al. (2007) created a more general measure of employee self-enhancement motives. Levashina & Campion (2007) developed the Interview Faking Behavior scale, which assesses the degree to which job seekers use slight image creation, extensive

image creation, image protection, and ingratiation in a job interview. Although most studies of impression management have relied on the various measures described here, researchers have also conducted experiments in which impression management behaviors are manipulated (e.g., Wayne & Ferris 1990, Wayne & Kacmar 1991) or have measured the actual use of impression management, particularly in the context of interviews or mock interviews (e.g., Roulin et al. 2015, Stevens & Kristof 1995). Finally, researchers have developed scales that measure personalities that are thought to be associated with the use of impression management, such as careerism (Feldman & Weitz 1991), self-monitoring (Snyder & Gangestad 1986), and Machiavellianism (Dahling et al. 2009).

With regard to measurement, a key issue that warrants greater attention is who (i.e., what source) provides the most accurate measures of impression management behavior. In most studies, impression management behaviors are self-reported by employees. Bolino & Turnley (1999) argued that this is appropriate given that employees themselves should be most aware of such behavior and because when an employee manages impressions successfully, others should be less aware that the individual is, in fact, managing impressions. It would still be useful, however, to compare impression management ratings obtained from other sources, including peers, supervisors, subordinates, and independent observers. Indeed, although collecting data from multiple sources is often challenging, for such a mature research area, we actually know very little about how the source of impression management ratings may affect their validity. Indeed, such data may enable researchers to determine who is able to most accurately evaluate when someone is managing impressions. Similarly, it would be helpful to gain a deeper understanding of how different parties make different attributions about employees' motives for engaging in OCB and proactive behavior using scales such as the ones developed by Allen & Rush (1998).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Research on impression management has practical implications for individuals and for organizations. For individuals, crafting the right image plays a vital role for success at work and in life. The question becomes, "Is there a best way for individuals to manage impressions?". The literature highlights two possible approaches that individuals can take to be successful at impression management. First, it is clear that targets and observers prefer impression management behaviors that are authentic rather than deceitful or fake (Leary 1995). As such, it would be beneficial for employees to consider the qualities (e.g., traits, skills, competencies) that they genuinely possess or desire and to communicate those characteristics to audiences instead of trying to convey qualities that they do not possess or believe audiences wish they possessed.

Second, individuals should look for situations in which using impression management is most appropriate. During a job interview, a work-related ceremony, or an interaction with a customer, it may be warranted for employees to create certain impressions. One can imagine how beneficial it is to say a few kind words during a coworker's retirement ceremony, even if that coworker was difficult to work with. However, there are times when impression management may be less appropriate, or even detrimental, perhaps in situations involving health and safety, where openness and honesty are more important than any image-related concerns (Leary 1995). Therefore, employees should try to develop a clearer awareness of when and how frequently to manage impressions, perhaps by improving their self-monitoring or political skills through practice, feedback, or other professional development activities.

Having a better understanding of impression management is also valuable to organizations and managers, given important workplace decisions are affected by these tactics (Barrick et al.

2009, Rosenfeld et al. 1995). Because employee impression management is pervasive (Gardner & Martinko 1988), managers should encourage employees to build impressions that are both genuine and beneficial to the organization. For example, managers could identify individual-level competencies that are important to their organization and have employees take self-assessments measuring those competencies. Then, managers could encourage employees to build their impressions around the competencies on which they scored the highest, as a way to benefit the organization, satisfy individuals' image concerns, and build their personal brand.

However, managers should also discourage employees from managing impressions when doing so is harmful to the organization. For example, hiring a person who is good at making an impression during an interview could hurt the organization if that person is unable to perform their job. As such, hiring managers not only should be trained to look out for so-called apple polishers, but they should also utilize structured or formal interviews as a way to deter candidates who are merely adept at managing impressions (Tsai et al. 2005). Similarly, rewarding employees who are so-called yes-men can also hurt organizations. Managers should therefore base performance ratings on more objective outcomes as another way to limit harmful impression management.

Finally, managers can benefit themselves and their organizations by sharpening their awareness of their own biases when forming impressions. Simply knowing that they may be inclined to see assertive employees as leaders when they are male and bossy when they are female may help mitigate that bias. Managers should also be aware that some employees may feel pressure to fill certain gender roles at work (Eagly 1987, Leary & Kowalski 1990). Doing so could help managers create environments where employees do not feel they have to fill those roles to be positively evaluated. By being more aware of their biases, managers may not only create a better work environment, but they also may limit their exposure to legal action.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Clearly, organizational researchers have tackled several critical topics regarding impression management over the past 30 years. Indeed, we have a greater understanding of its nature, the different strategies for cultivating certain images, the effectiveness of such tactics, the various ways of measuring impression management, etc. Furthermore, in describing the existing research, we highlighted some additional unanswered questions in each area; these avenues for future research are summarized in **Table 3**. Below, we discuss some additional, broader questions that also warrant future attention.

First, we limited our review to the use of impression management at the individual level of analysis, which reflects the emphasis of the literature to date. Nevertheless, given the importance of teams and groups in organizations, more work is also needed to understand impression management at this level. In particular, we have little understanding of how teams and departments seek to engage, collectively, in strategies of impression management and what the implications of such behaviors might be. It is also possible that the use of impression management by groups and departments could affect the allocation of resources and perceptions of organizational politics. Thus, we call for more research of team-level impression management, including its nature, antecedents, and consequences.

Second, although the use of impression management clearly has important implications for those who engage in such behavior, the broader organizational implications remain unclear. Put simply, when it comes to organizational performance and effectiveness, is the use of impression management functional, dysfunctional, or largely irrelevant? One could argue that, as does OCB, some impression management behaviors facilitate organizational effectiveness because employees who care about their image may present themselves in ways that make them appear

Table 3 Directions for future research regarding impression management questions

What is impression management?
■ Unconscious (or habitual) impression management in organizational settings
■ Deceptive versus honest impression management in the workplace
■ Intraindividual effects of impression management
What impression management behaviors have been identified?
■ Defensive impression management behaviors
■ Impression management behaviors that make employees look less desirable
■ Combinations or patterns of impression management tactics
Why are people motivated to manage impressions?
■ Antecedents of impression management
■ Timing of impression management
■ Conscious versus subconscious use
■ Inauthentic and unethical impression management motives
Does ingratiation work?
■ Ingratiation and counterproductive behaviors
■ Other types of ingratiation
■ Likeable and competent
■ Ingratiation and mimicking
Does self-promotion work?
■ Self-promotion in professional service contexts
■ Self-promotion and ingratiation combined
■ Humblebragging
Do other tactics work?
■ Contagion effects
■ Observing other tactics
■ Electronic versus in-person
Are some people better at impression management than others?
■ Influence of contextual or situational factors
■ Interaction between personal characteristics and specific types of impression management
■ Factors that contribute to successful impression management using social media
■ Influence of demographic characteristics
Is gender relevant in understanding impression management?
■ Effects of counternormative impression management for women versus men
■ Effects of physical characteristics and gender on impression management effectiveness
What are the cross-cultural implications of impression management?
■ Impression management in other cultures
■ Why cultural differences exist and their implications
■ Special relevance of impression management in specific cultures

likeable, competent, and dedicated. However, engaging in impression management uses resources (Vohs et al. 2005), and it is possible that employees who are worried about their image may be less productive (Bolino 1999). Similarly, impression management could also politicize the work place, and when employees engage in deceptive forms of impression management, it could lead to poor decisions and the misallocation of resources (Ferris & Kacmar 1992). Accordingly, studies that investigate these types of questions would be valuable.

Third, for years, researchers have noted that the world of work is changing and will continue to change in years to come; in particular, organizations are increasingly affected by technology and globalization (Cascio 2003). As noted earlier, there is a lack of theory and research addressing the cross-cultural implications of impression management. Similarly, research on impression management using technology and in the context of virtual teams has only recently emerged (e.g., Beard 2004). Unfortunately, the implications of these forces with regard to impression management are not well known. It would be helpful, then, for researchers to consider how impression management may be different in modern organizations that are more global, decentralized, and networked and that rely more heavily on contingent workers, teams, and technology for accomplishing tasks. In other words, given the changing context for organizations, we may need to revisit and reconsider our thinking and theories regarding impression management.

Finally, there has clearly been an emphasis in the literature on how recruiters and supervisors react to the use of impression management. But impression management theory and the notion of self-presentation indicate that people often manage impressions because they seek to achieve important self-image goals. However, the intraindividual implications of impression management have not been explored in an organizational context. For instance, do employees who ingratiate and self-promote see themselves as more likeable and competent, and how much does their own image matter in determining their behavior? Indeed, when is the use of impression management largely driven by the desire to manage an internal, rather than an external, image? Similarly, when and why do employees see their own use of impression management as strategic or political, and when is the use of impression management purely (or mostly) unconscious? Answering these questions would certainly facilitate our understanding of impression management.

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Contents

Errata

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