

Deceptive Impression Management: Does Deception Pay in Established Workplace Relationships?

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ABSTRACT. We examine deceptive impression management's effect on a supervisor's ratings of promotability and relationship quality (i.e., leader–member exchange) via the mediating role of the supervisor's recognition of deception. Extending ego depletion theory using social information processing theory, we argue that deceptive impression management in a supervisor–subordinate relationship is difficult to accomplish and the degree that deception is detected will negatively impact desired outcomes. Data collected from a matched sample of 171 public sector employees and their supervisors supported this model and indicated that recognition fully mediated the negative relationships between deceptive impression management with supervisor's rating of promotability and relationship quality.

KEY WORDS: deception, impression management, leader–member exchange, promotability

Deception by colleagues in the workplace is an issue which few of us care to ponder, although deception has long been recognized as a frequent and significant part of everyday communication (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; Turner et al., 1975). Further, it is important to recognize that the ubiquity of deception encompasses all aspects of organizational life and interaction (e.g., Carlson and George, 2004; Grover, 1993). While deception is often studied in isolated events (e.g., job interviews), some deceptive acts may be employed in established relationships with the intention to manage impressions and to further an individual's goals within the organization. These deceptive acts in the supervisor–subordinate relationship are the focus of this study.

Impression management (IM), or the process through which individuals manage information

about themselves so that others view them in the way in which they would like to be viewed (Schlenker, 1980), has been identified as one aspect of organizational behavior likely to contain deceptive acts (Carlson et al., 2004). Impression management tactics are the behaviors that individuals engage in to help manage the impressions they emit such as self-promotion, ingratiation, intimidation, supplication, and exemplification (Jones and Pittman, 1982). Individuals who engage in successful IM stand to gain organizational benefits such as promotions and other advantages stemming from strong, positive affect from one's supervisor and a favorable organizational image (e.g., Graen et al., 1990; Yukl, 1989).

However, while knowledge regarding the process of IM in organizations has advanced significantly over the past two decades, there is still much to be learned. More specifically, we still do not fully understand the role of deception in this process (Depaulo et al., 1989; Jehn and Scott, 2008). Therefore, the goal of this study is to combine the fields of impression management and deceptive communication to theoretically develop and empirically test the concept of deceptive IM. We define deceptive IM as “the communication of information that has been manipulated by an actor so as to create an inaccurate and favorably biased understanding on the part of a related target concerning the actor.” We will argue that deceptive IM occurs within an established relationship and thus generally consists of multiple lies that must be managed and reinforced over the duration of a relationship. In addition, we specifically do not define deceptive IM as a new IM tactic; rather, we believe that deception may be

employed in the enactment of any form (or multiple forms) of IM.

A second goal of this research is to examine the impact of a subordinate's use of deceptive IM on the supervisor's evaluation of the deceptive subordinate. Extant research on deceptive behaviors in managing impressions focuses almost entirely in the area of interviewing (Delery and Kacmar, 1998) and has not been extended to a long-term relationship (Weiss and Feldman, 2006). Therefore, based on the theoretical foundations of ego depletion theory, we believe that deceptive impression management (IM) becomes increasingly difficult to carry out as established relationships must be maintained. Ego depletion theory suggests that self-regulation requires resources and when those limited resources have been used, the individual falls into a state of ego depletion where additional self-regulatory attempts are unsuccessful (Baumeister et al., 2006). As such, we will argue that using deceptive IM in supervisor-subordinate relationships will result in lower supervisor evaluations of the subordinate as measured by promotability and relationship quality (leader-member exchange, LMX).

A third goal of this article is to expand ego depletion theory by using social information processing theory to examine the supervisor's recognition of being deceived. We believe that recognition plays a role in how supervisors perceive their subordinates and their subsequent evaluation of those subordinates. More specifically, we position the supervisor's recognition of the use of deceptive IM as a mediating factor in the relationship between deceptive IM and the supervisor's evaluation of promotability and relationship quality (LMX) using a matched sample of supervisors and subordinates.

This study contributes to the impression management literature in two ways. First, we conduct our research at the relationship level instead of focusing on one-time interactions (such as interviewing) as is often found in prior research. Our research goes beyond the outcomes of such one-time interactions and investigates how the behavior of deceptive IM influences the supervisor-subordinate relationship and interactions. Second, our research acknowledges the role of the supervisor's perception of deceptive IM and thus contributes by investigating a key mechanism through which deceptive IM affects subordinate outcomes. Fur-

thermore, the present study adds concretely to theory by proposing that it is the *perceived* recognition of the subordinate's deceptive IM that leads to outcomes.

Impression management and deception

Impression management is a process by which people attempt to influence the image others have of them by creating and maintaining a desired reputation (e.g., Graen et al., 1990; Rosenfeld et al., 1995). Thus, impression management is purposeful, goal-directed behavior. An employee's campaign for a particular image may span many exchanges over weeks, months, or even years and is accomplished by employing one or more IM tactics (Bozeman and Kacmar, 1997). Over the past 20 years, IM research has examined the individual level of the IM process seeking to understand ways in which actors' behaviors influenced evaluations made by targets (Bolino et al., 2008).

Work in the impression management field has examined a number of behaviors that can be seen as deceptive, for example, lying and faking (Levashina and Campion, 2007). In fact, as many as 20 years ago, researchers were examining lying in organizations and how judges detect those lies (Depaulo et al., 1989). Most of this research can be found in the interview literature and suggests that many job candidates engage in faking or other forms of deceptive IM during the employment interview (Levashina and Campion, 2007; Van Iddekinge et al., 2007), and that faking on personality assessment as part of the selection process has a significant effect on hiring decisions (Rosse et al., 1998). Despite the proliferation of research, however, very little has examined the role of deceitful behavior in the management of an impression in established workplace relationships. Because employment relationships are rarely as isolated or brief as a job interview, it is important to expand our understanding of how deceptive IM affects an established relationship and ultimately affects outcomes desired by the deceiver. It is this gap in the literature that we seek to fill by investigating the effects of subordinate deceptive IM attempts on supervisor ratings of subordinate promotability and LMX.

Deception can be defined as the communication of information that is manipulated by a sender so as to knowingly encourage a false conclusion by the receiver (Buller and Burgoon, 1996). Deception is an intentional communication act that may or may not actually contain untrue information but that the sender believes will promote a fully or partially untrue understanding on the part of the receiver (Buller and Burgoon, 1996). That is, this manipulation can include either the inclusion of false information or the omission of pertinent (and true) information to facilitate the deception (Miller and Stiff, 1993). Moreover, deception may include the manipulation of information that is not directly communicated to another person but that will eventually bias the deception target's understanding. For example, the deceiver may alter a record stored in a database with false information that will later be used to generate a report that could achieve the goals of the deception (Johnson et al., 2001; Zmud, 1990).

Although there are many possible motivations for an employee to deceive, it has long been recognized that among them, reasons related to identity include "to avoid embarrassment, project a more favorable image, or increase social desirability" (Burgoon et al., 1996). However, much of the prior empirical research on deception can be found in the communication field (Burgoon and Buller, 2008), although it has generally focused on subjects having little or no prior relationship, expected future relationship, or significant experience with the deceptive act under consideration. The restrictive parameters under which deception research has been conducted may be one reason why the IM literature rarely explicitly identifies lying as an IM practice. Indeed, human communication is established on an implied mutual agreement of truthfulness (Grice, 1989) and people are naturally biased to expect truthful information (McCornack and Parks, 1986). However, while there is nothing inherently deceitful about IM, some believe IM could involve pretense or deceit in some form (Gardner and Avolio, 1998, O'Sullivan, 2000). Given an employee under difficult circumstances and strongly motivated to protect his/her identity, we contend that any of the IM tactics could be used in a deceitful way. We recognize that there are many examples of IM that do not include deception, but our interest here is on those employees

who do use deception in their efforts to manage their supervisors' impression of them.

Deceptive impression management

Deceptive IM has some unique characteristics that differentiate it from other types of impression management. For example, deceptive IM is the use of deception in an established impression management relationship, in our case between a subordinate and a supervisor. Indeed, we are not interested in individual communication events or deceptive acts, our focus is at the level of the relationship between the two parties. The importance of the past and expected future relationship of the participants to the deception is highlighted by Carlson et al. (2004). Deceptive IM is viewed as a campaign of communicative acts that the actor engages in to fulfill his IM goals, whereas lying and faking are often characterized as isolated, single events or interactions (Jehn and Scott, 2008; Levashina and Campion, 2007). In other words, for actors using deceptive IM, it is possible and perhaps likely that the actor will be engaged in multiple, ongoing, and concurrent deceptive interactions about different topics but having the same end goal (i.e., improving the supervisor's impression of the actor). For example, a subordinate may lie about the contribution he/she made on Project A as part of an interaction with his/her supervisor which requires the subordinate to maintain and reinforce this deception over a period of time. During this time, the subordinate may also lie about progress on another project (Project B). This lie about Project B also may start an interaction in which the subordinate is required to recall and repeat the prior deception. The more lies the subordinate initiates, the more lies have to be maintained, and the greater the likelihood that these maintenance activities will overlap to some degree. The goal of deceptive IM is the same as that of honest impression management: to shape a supervisor's impression of a subordinate. Conversely, the motivation of an employee's simple deceit may be to relieve stress at work (Grover, 1993), greed (Cruver, 2002; Levy and Linden, 2002), or to evade work (Payne, 2008). Thus, while previous research has established impression management behaviors such as lying and faking that could be considered

deceptive, the construct of deceptive IM as captured here is unique because it is focused on the management of an impression through deception in a relationship, not merely a single event or interaction.

Theory and research suggest that deceivers are motivated to engage in deception because they believe it will be instrumental in increasing the likelihood that they will receive certain desired outcomes (e.g., Miller and Stiff, 1993). Similarly, it is generally supported that actors employ IM tactics with the expectation that their actions will result in better outcomes such as higher performance evaluations (e.g., Ferris et al., 1994; Wayne and Kacmar, 1991; Wayne and Liden, 1995). As such, we expect that those individuals who choose to engage in deceptive IM do so with the expectation that this behavior will result in the favorable outcomes desired.

However, deceptions are not always successful and the risks associated with being caught in a lie are an important factor in deciding whether to deceive (e.g., Carlson et al., 2004; George and Carlson, 1999). Although prior studies have not explicitly examined lie detection in the context of impression management, lying is typically detected with success rates averaging about 50% (e.g., Feeley and de Turck, 1995; Miller and Stiff, 1993). Inherent in the definition of impression management is that the desired image develops over time, in a relationship between a target and an actor that the actor is trying to manage (Bozeman and Kacmar, 1997). Therefore, as deceptive IM is employed as part of an ongoing image management process, the chances of being caught in at least one of these deceptive acts continually increases.

Just as not all deceptions work out favorably, the relationship between IM and outcomes is not uniformly positive, as risks associated with using IM also have been noted (e.g., Turnley and Bolino, 2001; Wayne et al., 1997). Turnley and Bolino (2001) noted that impression management may lead to favorable or unfavorable impressions of the actor attempting the impression management. If the target of the IM perceives that they are being manipulated – even in a completely honest manner – they will likely feel less favorably toward the actor as a result (Jones and Pittman, 1982; Turnley and Bolino, 2001). In most cases, being seen as manipulative would not be helpful in generating the positive outcomes desired by the actor.

Deceptive IM and supervisor-rated outcomes

Based on the foundation of ego depletion theory, the notion that self-regulation requires resources and that when those limited resources are depleted, the individual falls into a state where additional self-regulatory attempts are unsuccessful (Baumeister et al., 1998, 2006; Schmeichel et al., 2003), we posit that maintaining lies in an ongoing relationship is cognitively taxing for the subordinate. Ego depletion theory argues that exertion of self-regulated behavior depletes the ego's energy, which is a limited resource. Further, Baumeister and colleagues have demonstrated that as individuals engage in tasks that require expenditures of focused, conscious effort (self-regulating behavior) of a recurring nature, those behaviors are difficult to maintain as resources are depleted (Baumeister et al., 1998; Muraven and Baumeister, 2000; Muraven et al., 1998; Schmeichel et al., 2003). Similarly, the process of managing an impression involves complexity of information, communication, and control (Bozeman and Kacmar, 1997).

Therefore, the exertion of behavior required to effectively manage the complexity of an impression created using deception will likely be ego depleting and difficult to maintain in an ongoing relationship. More specifically, we believe deceptive IM is like a "campaign" of lies, since most will need to be at least occasionally repeated and reinforced as the need arises in maintaining an image with one's supervisor. Successfully executing such a campaign will require the subordinate to recall which lies were told to which people about which projects and will take an eventual toll, consistent with the theory of ego depletion (Baumeister et al., 1998; Schmeichel et al., 2003). We believe this campaign will be difficult to successfully maintain in the cognitively complex environment of managing impressions in a relationship with a supervisor.

Activities such as deceptive IM that require focused, concentrated cognitive effort will be difficult to carry out because the individual will eventually find that they do not have the necessary cognitive resources to draw upon (Baumeister et al., 1998; Schmeichel et al., 2003). In a relationship with a supervisor, subordinates may have more difficulty selecting appropriate IM tactics, choosing appropriate deceptive acts to be used, monitoring the

ongoing success of the campaign, and adapting as required to challenges to the deceptive acts (Buller and Burgoon, 1996) and failures of the IM tactics (McFarland et al., 2003). Such difficulties may make it possible for the supervisor to catch the subordinate in a lie and recognize the deceptive actions for what they really are or may simply result in suboptimal, ineffective or even counterproductive influence attempts. As such, we believe that users of deceptive IM will not experience the favorable outcomes they seek. Two outcomes in particular where using deceptive IM could produce poorer supervisor ratings are promotability and relationship quality because each of these outcomes is influenced by the relationship between the actor and the target.

Promotability

Promotion decisions are a good example of an evaluative decision based on some degree of perception that normally occurs over a period of time in a particular organizational setting. Using the foundation of ego depletion theory, we believe that deceptive IM will be very difficult to maintain (Baumeister et al., 1998) and thus likely to be considered when giving promotion ratings. In other words, subordinates who are viewed as deceptive are not likely to inspire perceptions of competence. A supervisor's lack of perceived competence in the subordinate will negatively impact the job-related outcome of subordinate promotability (Thacker and Wayne, 1995).

Research has demonstrated that organizational outcomes such as performance ratings are susceptible to influence attempts and are subjective in nature (Chen and Fang, 2008; Harris et al., 2007; Wayne and Kacmar, 1991; Zivnuska et al., 2004). More specifically, impression management tactics have been found to play a significant role in affecting assessments of promotability (Thacker and Wayne, 1995). While this research is inconsistent with regard to the effect of impression management tactics on promotability, findings suggest that influence attempts can have negative results for the user if used in a threatening manner as with assertiveness (Ferris and Judge, 1991) or in an inappropriate way (Baron, 1986; Thacker and Wayne, 1995).

Thus, promotion is a construct that taps the supervisor's perception of the subordinate, likely spanning some period of their relationship. Although the research on IM and promotability is limited, it

supports the notion that IM can have an impact on promotability (Thacker and Wayne, 1995). Based on ego depletion theory, we believe that deceptive IM will be very difficult to maintain (Baumeister et al., 1998) and the act of engaging in deceptive IM will lead to a lower likelihood of promotability. Specifically, we predict

Hypothesis 1: Deceptive IM is negatively related to supervisor's promotability ratings of the subordinate.

Relationship quality

The quality of the relationship between a supervisor and subordinate is often described in terms of the LMX model (Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Graen and Scandura, 1987). Prior research has identified differences between subordinates in high-quality LMX relationships and those in low-quality LMX relationships. Subordinates in high-quality relationships receive more favorable organizational benefits (Graen et al., 1990; Yukl, 1989) and enjoy relationships characterized by trust, loyalty, and mutual influence (Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Liden and Graen, 1980). Therefore, subordinates will generally desire to share a high-quality relationship with their supervisors and may use IM tactics, deceptive or otherwise, to achieve it (e.g., Deluga and Perry, 1994).

The LMX relationship is built through a series of interpersonal exchanges in which the parties in the relationship evaluate the ability, benevolence, and integrity of each other (Brower et al., 2000). The degree to which a subordinate demonstrates trustworthiness dictates the type of LMX relationship that forms (Liden and Maslyn, 1998). Thus, as trust is built in the relationship, the relationship is strengthened and more benefits result (Brower et al., 2000). Likewise, it would stand to reason that if the trust bond is broken (through an act such as deceptive IM) that the relationship would be weakened (Gomez and Rosen, 2001). Consistent with ego depletion theory, we expect that subordinates will be unable to effectively sustain deceptive IM in these social interactions with a supervisor (Baumeister et al., 1998) and may eventually reveal themselves to their supervisors as practitioners of deceptive IM. As a result, supervisor's ratings of LMX will be low. Thus, we predict

Hypothesis 2: Deceptive IM is negatively related to supervisor's rating of LMX.

Mediating effects of supervisor's perception of subordinate deceitfulness

In a review of influence research, Higgins et al. (2003) pointed out that most models of influence consider at least some contextual factors. Many of them include the situation (employment interview, performance appraisal, or training) (Kamcar and Carlson, 1999), supervisor's perceptions such as affect (Ferris and Judge, 1991) or liking and perceived similarity (Wayne and Liden, 1995) or recognition of the ingratiation (Treadway et al., 2007) as the mechanisms that explain the intervening processes between influence of tactics and organizational outcomes. This study's interest is in expanding upon previous models by examining how supervisor *recognition of being deceived* plays an intervening role in this process. More specifically, we examine how the perception of the supervisor regarding the deceitful nature of the subordinate mediates the relationship of deceptive IM behaviors and the supervisor's ratings of promotability and relationship quality. We will argue based on the theoretical foundations of social information processing theory that it is the supervisor's *perception* of the subordinate's deceitful nature rather than simply the subordinate engaging in deceptive IM that is critical in predicting the organizational outcomes of interest.

Deceivers run an increasing risk of getting caught with each lie told, much as gamblers' winning streaks must end at some point. While individuals tend to judge a deceiver's message as more truthful than the message actually is, individuals are also able to perceive lying with some accuracy (Kraut, 1980) suggesting that those who engage in an ongoing pattern of deception to enhance supervisor impressions will eventually be caught. Without necessarily ever becoming aware of it, the subordinate may leak a variety of cues to their supervisor unconsciously signaling their deceptive activity (Zuckerman and Driver, 1985). For instance, in a face-to-face meeting, supervisors may recognize a communicator's tone of voice, words, speech patterns, and lower body movements as cues to possible deception

(DePaulo et al., 1982). Thus, through social interactions with one another, supervisors will likely have numerous opportunities to discover their subordinates' use of deception in the conduct of impression management.

Social information processing theory suggests that when making an appraisal of a subordinate, a supervisor must rely on memory which involves mental processes in perceiving stimuli, encoding the stimuli as information and storing it in memory, and then recalling it (Bandura, 1977; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977, 1978). Individuals tend to create a generalized perception of another person on the basis of a few initial interactions and then later recall that information to evaluate the person based on that perception (Feldman, 1986). Thus, social information processing suggests that the very process by which supervisors perceive their employees is inherently subjective. In other words, subordinate evaluations are not only determined by an employee's actual performance-related behavior, but supervisor perceptions of the employee may also play a critical role in the process. For example, previous research has suggested that the same ingratiatory behavior can be interpreted differently based on the intentionality the perceiver assigns to the actor's behavior (Bolino, 1999; Ferris et al., 1995).

Promotability

Research suggests that promotability is directly affected by characteristics such as education (Markham et al., 1987), age (Wayne et al., 1999), and performance ratings (London and Stumpf, 1983). As previously mentioned, however, beyond these more objective determinants, subjective information such as interpersonal skills, perceptions of liking, and perceptions of similarity are found to have mediational effects of IM on promotability ratings (Bray and Howard, 1980; Wayne et al., 1997). This past research would suggest that the supervisor's perception of the subordinate clearly plays a role in the supervisor's decision making.

What has not been previously considered is the role of the supervisor's perceptions about the subordinate in terms of how deceitful they believe him/her to be. Further, the deception literature has considered many factors that may impact the deception and detection process (e.g., Buller and Burgoon, 1996; Vrij, 2000; Zuckerman and Driver,

1985) but has largely ignored the impact of detection on the target's perceptions of that deception in regard to workplace outcomes. It is our contention that in a supervisor-subordinate relationship the social information regarding the subordinate gathered by the supervisor will impact this perception. Social information processing theory proposes that the social information a supervisor has is a compilation of recollections. Some of their interactions may not be recalled while in other instances the supervisor may reconstruct events or fill in information that cannot be recalled. This retrospective process shapes the supervisor's perceptions of the subordinate. Furthermore, the social context in which these interactions occur serves to focus an individual's attention on certain, more salient information (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978) such that individuals may be more likely to look for information that is salient to their perceptions of subordinate deception. In other words, individuals pay selective attention to information that supports their attitudes. When supervisors believe they have been deceived, their recollections may focus on interactions with the subordinate that validate their perceptions about being deceived. As such, those recollections may include other negative memories related to the subordinate such as poor performance, being late for work or other acts that suggest a lack of trustworthiness and thus lead to broad perceptions or judgments of low promotability. Thus, when the supervisor recognizes that they have been deceived, that information will play a role in determining promotability ratings as supervisors perceive the employee to be deceptive in nature, they are less likely to rate that employee high in promotability. Therefore, we predict

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between deceptive IM and promotability is mediated by supervisor recognition of deceptive behavior.

Relationship quality

We would expect a similar mediating relationship to exist between a supervisor's perception of a subordinate's deceitful nature and LMX or the quality of the relationship in the dyad. In other words, social information plays a role in the supervisor's perception of relationship quality (Brower et al., 2000). Festinger

(1954) theorized that individuals will compare themselves to similar others and use information gathered from those sources in order to understand and make judgments about the world. Likewise, supervisors may compare relationships they have among various subordinates. If one subordinate's behavior is indicative of deceptive IM, the supervisor may reflexively compare the relationship with that subordinate with the relationship with other subordinates who do not appear to engage in deceptive behavior. These comparisons may lead the supervisor to more harshly or negatively evaluate the relationship with the perceived deceiver. In addition, social information processing proposes that individuals play a role in crafting their environment simply by being a part of the environment (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978) and thus supervisor evaluations of the LMX relationship change to align with the perceptions of an untrustworthy subordinate who engages in deceptive IM. The supervisor's deception perceptions lead to crafting an environment that fits with those perceptions and a diminished relationship with the subordinate.

Trust research suggests that it is the perception held by the trustor that is critical rather than objective reality and IM research supports the idea that IM influences perceptions (Mayer et al., 1995; Wayne et al., 1997). If a supervisor recognizes that a subordinate engaged in deceptive IM during their interactions in order to cover up the fact that he did not fulfill his part of the social exchange, we would expect this recognition to negatively impact the supervisor's LMX rating. Most likely the recognition of deceptive IM conduct would break the bond of trust the supervisor had with the subordinate, leading to diminished relationship quality (Scandura and Pellegrini, 2008). Therefore, we predict

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between deceptive IM and supervisor LMX is mediated by supervisor recognition of deceptive behavior.

Method

Sample and procedure

All of the supervisors ($N = 65$) in a division of a southern state government tax collection agency

agreed to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary. To be included in the final sample, the supervisors' surveys needed to be matched to a subordinate's. We were unable to match any subordinate surveys to 6 supervisors, resulting in 59 supervisors (91%) being included in the analyses. Of these, 22 (37%) were female and 37 (63%) were male. The race of the supervisors was 66% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 20% African-American, and 4% Asian. Their average age was 42 years. The supervisors held positions that represented all managerial levels.

Each supervisor completed a two-page survey on up to five subordinates (3.16 on average) who were in their direct span of control. Supervisors were asked to write the name of the subordinate they would be rating at the top of each survey before completing it. We took this step in an effort to focus their attention on each specific subordinate as they performed the ratings. We mailed each of the subordinates named by a supervisor ($N = 325$) a survey to complete. The subordinates' surveys were coded so that they could be properly matched with the corresponding survey from their supervisor.

A total of 183 (56%) subordinates returned usable surveys for purposes of this study. Of these respondents, we only included the subordinates who had been in a relationship with their supervisor for at least 12 months in that our study focuses on the long-term relationship between supervisor and subordinate. This reduced the sample to 171. The gender composition of the subordinates was 54% male and 46% female. The race of the subordinates was 73% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, 14% African-American, 1% Asian, and 5% who selected the "Other" option. The average age of the subordinates was 42 years.

Measures from the subordinates

Deceptive impression management

Six items were used to measure the degree to which a subordinate was using deceptive IM strategies in interactions with their supervisor. We began by looking for items in existing scales that adequately tapped the construct of deceptive IM. The first two items came from the MIBOS (Kumar and Beyerlein, 1991) opinion conformity dimension and are "Show

him/her that you share his/her enthusiasm about his/her new idea even when you may not actually like it" and "Smile frequently to express enthusiasm/interest about something he/she is interested in even if you do not like it." The third item came from the Wayne and Ferris' (1990) scale and reads "Agree with your immediate supervisor's major opinions outwardly even when you disagree inwardly." The final three questions were developed for the purpose of this study and are as follows: "Make up an excuse when your supervisor is not completely satisfied with what you have done," "Describe an event to your supervisor so that it appears more positive than it really is," "Describe your actions to your boss so that you get more credit for an outcome than you deserve." The alpha reliability for these items was 0.74. They were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from *never* (1) to *almost always* (5).

Measures from the supervisors

Supervisor recognition of subordinate deceitfulness

Two items were developed to investigate the degree to which the supervisor was cognizant of the subordinate's deceptive IM behavior. The first item was "This subordinate manipulates information in order to make himself/herself look good." The second item was "This subordinate tends to exaggerate or brag about his/her accomplishments." The items were responded to on a Likert scale with *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7). The Cronbach alpha reliability for this scale was 0.81.

Promotability

Supervisors rated their subordinates' promotability with three items. These items were from Thacker and Wayne (1995) (e.g., "I believe that this subordinate will have a successful career," "If I had to select a successor for my position, it would be this employee," and "I believe that this subordinate has high potential"). Higher scores indicate higher promotability ratings with *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7). The Cronbach alpha reliability for this scale was 0.82.

Relationship quality

Supervisors provided responses to the 7-item LMX scale developed by Scandura et al. (1986) to measure

their perceptions of the quality of the relationship they had with each subordinate. A sample item from this scale is “I think that I understand this subordinate’s problems and needs.” Respondents used a scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7) to indicate their agreement with each question. The internal consistency estimate for this scale was 0.82.

Control variables

In this study, we included four control variables that have been shown to impact promotability ratings. Three of the control variables were measured from the subordinate’s perspective. The first variable, age, has been shown to align with previous research on career success (e.g., Tharenou et al., 1994). Both relationship and organizational familiarity have been identified as important to deception research (Carlson et al., 2004); to control for these, subordinates were asked to provide the month and year they began working with their current supervisor (relationship tenure) and the month and year they began working for the company (organizational tenure). These dates were converted into the closest whole number of months. Finally, one control variable was included from the supervisor’s perspective, the supervisor’s perception of the level of influence the subordinate had on them which is made up of two items (e.g., “The subordinate is often able to influence my opinions” and “I am usually receptive to any suggestions for change made by this subordinate.”). This variable was included to eliminate bias regarding the influence of the subordinate and isolate the deceptive element of the relationship which was the focus of this manuscript. All of these control variables were included to eliminate any spurious relationships and provide a more stringent test of the study’s hypotheses.

Analytic approach

We used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to test our hypotheses. HLM partitions the variance into supervisor and individual levels and allows researchers to model the effects of both individual and group level factors on individual outcomes while using those factors at the individual and group

level, respectively (Hofmann, 1997). While our study is interested only in individual level variables, HLM provides a means to control for supervisor level effects in our hierarchically nested data.

In order to test the mediated model, we used the three-step regression approach advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986). First, deceptive IM (the antecedent) must be related to the supervisor recognition of deception (the mediator). Second, deceptive IM must be related to supervisor ratings of promotability and relationship quality (the outcomes). Third, when both deceptive IM and supervisor recognition of deception are simultaneously entered into the regression equation, the relationship between deceptive IM and the outcome must be appreciably smaller than it is when deceptive IM is the sole predictor, and the mediator must remain significant. This process was conducted once for each outcome (promotability ratings and relationship quality).

Results

Table I presents means, standard deviations, and the intercorrelation matrix for the variables of interest in our study. Of particular note is that two of the strongest correlations in the table are between the control variable of supervisors’ perceptions of the level of influence the subordinate has on them and the outcome variables of promotability and relationship quality providing supporting evidence for the inclusion of this variable as a control. Interestingly, in examining the descriptive statistics, we found that a majority of the respondents engaged in some level of deception. More specifically, 90% of people in our study admit to engage in deceptive IM. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that supervisor recognition of deception (mean 2.60) is higher than people are admitting they deceive (mean 1.86). One possible explanation is that the supervisors may be acting under somewhat heightened suspicion or may view the deception more seriously than the subordinates do.

Mediation analyses: promotability ratings

The first step in our mediation analyses was to determine if the independent variable, deceptive IM,

TABLE I
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelation matrix

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Subordinate organization tenure	101.87	88.31	–						
2. Subordinate relationship tenure	33.13	22.35	0.36**	–					
3. Subordinate age	42.46	10.21	0.32**	0.12	–				
4. Supervisor perception of influence	5.04	0.88	0.01	–0.15*	–0.05	–			
5. Deceptive impression management	1.86	0.53	0.08	0.13	0.09	–0.02	–		
6. Supervisor recognition of deception	2.60	1.49	0.03	–0.07	–0.05	–0.34**	0.13	–	
7. Supervisor promotability ratings	4.89	1.19	–0.18*	–0.13	–0.19*	0.60**	–0.15*	–0.40**	–
8. Supervisor relationship quality	5.56	0.75	–0.12	–0.20**	–0.03	0.69**	–0.15*	–0.40**	0.61**

N = 171.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

TABLE II
HLM results for deceptive impression management on promotability ratings

	DV: Supervisor recognition				DV: Promotability ratings					
	Step 1: IV-Med				Step 2: IV->DV				Step 3: IV/ Med->DV	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Controls										
Subordinate organization tenure	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	–0.01**	0.00	–0.01*	0.00	–0.01*	0.00
Subordinate relationship tenure	–0.01*	0.00	–0.01**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Subordinate age	–0.02	0.00	–0.02	0.01	–0.01*	0.01	–0.01*	0.00	–0.02*	0.01
Supervisor perception of influence	–0.60***	0.12	–0.60***	0.11	0.83***	0.07	0.84***	0.07	0.75***	0.07
IV										
Deceptive impression management			0.38**	0.13			–0.23*	0.12	–0.19	0.12
Med										
Supervisor recognition									–0.13**	0.05

N = 171.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

was significantly related to our mediator, supervisor recognition of deception. With supervisor recognition of deception serving as the dependent variable, we first entered the control variables and then deceptive IM. As shown in Step 1 of Table II, deceptive IM was significantly related to supervisor recognition. Thus, the first criterion of mediation was achieved (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

The second step of mediation tests the link between the independent and dependent variables. This was tested by regressing promotability ratings

on deceptive IM. As shown in Step 2 of Table II, deceptive IM was significantly related to promotability ratings. Thus, the second criterion of mediation was achieved (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Further, this supported Hypothesis 1 which predicted that deceptive IM would negatively relate to promotability ratings.

The final step of mediation was tested by regressing promotability ratings on supervisor recognition of deception with deceptive IM in the equation. As shown in Step 3 of Table II, deceptive

IM is no longer significant and supervisor recognition of deception is significant. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported with full mediation.

IM is not significant and supervisor recognition of deception is significant. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported with full mediation.

Mediation analysis: relationship quality

The dependent variable of relationship quality (LMX) was tested with the same multiple step method as described above. The first condition for mediation already was established because deceptive IM and supervisor recognition of deception are the same variables used in the first model. The results for this step, also shown in Table II, are repeated in Step 1 of Table III.

The second step of mediation was tested by regressing promotability ratings on deceptive IM. As shown in Step 2 of Table III, deceptive IM was significantly related to relationship quality (LMX). Thus, the second criterion of mediation was achieved (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Furthermore, this supported Hypothesis 2 which predicted that deceptive IM would negatively relate to relationship quality.

The final step of mediation was tested by regressing relationship quality (LMX) on supervisor recognition of deception with deceptive IM in the equation. As shown in Step 3 of Table III, deceptive

Discussion

Our study was designed to blend two literatures: impression management and deceptive communication to introduce the concept of deceptive IM and investigate its practice in the workplace. Although it has always been possible for actors who use IM to employ deception, the connection between these two literatures is now more clearly made thus providing a theoretical contribution to the literature. Furthermore, we argue that this form of impression management as conceptualized and used in this study is unique in that it focuses on the impression management that occurs in a relationship that develops over time between the supervisor and subordinate. While understanding how faking or lying affect the recruitment process and hiring decisions (Levashina and Campion, 2007; Rosse et al., 1998) is important, uncovering the impact of deceptive IM in long-term hierarchical relationships is a gap that we are trying to fill. Our study indicates that these behaviors have a detrimental effect on both promotability and leader-member exchange. These findings are

TABLE III
HLM results for deceptive impression management on supervisor relationship quality (LMX)

	DV: Supervisor recognition				DV: Supervisor relationship quality					
	Step 1: IV-Med				Step 2: IV->DV				Step 3: IV/ Med->DV	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Controls										
Subordinate organization tenure	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01*	0.00	-0.01*	0.00	-0.01*	0.00
Subordinate relationship tenure	-0.01*	0.00	-0.01**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Subordinate age	-0.02	0.00	-0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Supervisor perception of influence	-0.60***	0.12	-0.60***	0.11	0.51***	0.05	0.51***	0.05	0.46***	0.05
IV										
Deceptive impression management			0.38**	0.13			-0.13*	0.06	-0.09	0.07
Med										
Supervisor recognition									-0.10**	0.03

N = 171.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

particularly significant given the implications of low LMX such as diminished commitment and higher turnover intentions (Dulac et al., 2008).

In addition to merging the impression management and deceptive communication literatures, we incorporated social information processing theory which suggested the mediating mechanism of whether the target of the deceptive IM attempts, the supervisor, recognized the deceitful nature of the subordinate. Supervisors' recognition of deception proved to be a useful mediator, as both relationships explored, deceptive IM – promotability and deceptive IM – relationship quality, were fully mediated by recognition.

Interestingly, 90% of the participants in our study admit to engaging in deceptive IM. Research in interpersonally deviant behaviors finds convergence between self-reports and peer reports of these behaviors (Fox et al., 2007). Certainly, our results provide additional confirmation that deviant behavior is not only recognized by colleagues but also affects the subsequent relationship. Moreover, the apparent commonality of deceptive IM indicates that it is far from a fringe activity. Deceptive IM may be a frequently used instrument in an employee's toolkit, however poor a tool it seems to be.

In summary, our results suggest that the use of deceptive IM leads to negative results for the subordinate. In our case that meant low-promotability ratings and low-LMX scores. More specifically, we found that this deception to outcome relationship was mediated by recognition such that the greater the recognition the greater the negative consequence. Thus, with the introduction of supervisor recognition as a mediator we find that the more the actor uses deceptive IM during their relationship and interactions with the supervisor, the more likely the supervisor is to evaluate them to be a deceiver. Finally, the degree to which the supervisor recognizes the subordinate as deceptive, the worse the outcome for the subordinate.

Strengths and limitations

There are several strengths in our study that warrant mention. First, the data analyzed came from both the subordinates who enacted the deceptive IM and

the supervisors who were the target of the deceptive tactics. Collecting data from multiple sources not only more accurately captures the exchange relationships of interest, but also helps to overcome problems of common method variance. A second strength of our study is our examination of a new type of IM which incorporated a new literature (Carlson et al., 2004). While deception may be expected in the use of IM, explicitly exploring this possibility may open up a new avenue for IM research. We believe that studying the negative aspects of IM offers a more realistic context for learning about workplace deception. While the positive and negative are often alluded to in the literature (Turnley and Bolino, 2001), the explicit inclusion of deception provides an added dimension to the impression management literature. Finally, linking deceptive IM to outcomes of organizational interest as well as the mechanism through which this operates (supervisor recognition) provides greater understanding to the organizational processes through which impression management occurs.

However, our results must be interpreted while keeping in mind some of the limitations in our study. For instance, our sample was relatively small and came from just one organization that was an agency in a state government. It is possible that the relationships found may be sample specific and that the bureaucratic nature of this organization may have influenced our findings. We believe these findings would generalize to both public and the private organizations in that impression management is not unique to the public sector (Rosse et al., 1998) and thus its ramifications will most likely be similar across a variety of organizations. Only additional tests of deceptive IM using a variety of samples will be able to fully determine the veracity of this construct. Finally, some of our key measures (e.g., deceptive IM, recognition of deception) were created specifically for the purposes of this study. While our internal reliability estimates were acceptable (Nunnally, 1978), additional validity testing is warranted. Furthermore, as we introduce the concept and measure of deceptive IM, further scale development and relating this construct to other existing impression management tactics will be critical in advancing this construct in the field.

Future research

As frequently happens with empirical research, our study may have generated as many questions as it answered. First, since the mediated relationships we predicted worked so well, we can only assume that there are others. One such potential mediator may be the lie detection ability of the supervisor (Bond et al., 2005). Further, this suggests that there are additional supervisor rated outcomes that could work similarly to the way promotability and LMX did in our study. Some possibilities include performance appraisal ratings and assignment selections. Second, with the increased attention being awarded to the study of abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2001; Zellars et al., 2002), it may be interesting to explore if, how, and when supervisors employ deception. For instance, when subordinates perceive a lack of behavioral integrity (alignment between the words and deeds) from their supervisors, are they more likely to engage in deviance and less likely to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (Dineen et al., 2006)? If our findings are reciprocal, as subordinates detect their supervisors using deception, we might expect to see a similar deterioration of relationship quality and other significant negative outcomes.

While our study focused only on exploring outcomes of deceptive IM, there is also a need to explore predictors of both the detection and use of deceptive IM. Although there is ample deception research examining the detection of lies in short-term, antagonistic relationships (such as police interviews), there is less consideration of the type of long-term, collaborative relationships we are considering here. As such, it is possible that not all the “strain leakage” cues associated with traditional lying (e.g., Zuckerman and Driver, 1985) will be present in deceptive IM. Moreover, it is certainly possible that specific IM tactics will align themselves with deception more easily than others. For example, it may be easier to get away with stretching the truth about past behaviors that cannot be easily verified than it is to offer to do a favor for your supervisor, and then not come through.

Regarding the use of deceptive IM, our results present a somewhat confusing picture of subordinate activity: deception is widely practiced but is often detected by supervisors and is of no value to the

subordinate (backfiring at least for relationship quality and promotability). So, why do they do it? Do subordinates use deceptive IM as a preventative step to avoid expected negative repercussions (Lalwani et al., 2009)? Or in hopes of achieving future benefits? The findings regarding the use of impression management tactics in relation to positive supervisory ratings of subordinate job performance have been inconsistent (e.g., Bolino and Turnley, 2003; Bolino et al., 2006). The present study may help explain this inconsistency by drawing attention to the important role of deception in the conduct of impression management.

Uncovering the motivations of the subordinate to engage in deceptive IM may be key in explaining this apparently self-destructive behavior. Subordinates may be overconfident in their ability to outwit their supervisors and avoid detection and related outcomes (Jones, 1991). Alternatively, it may be that these behaviors are performed unconsciously or as part of a cultural norm. For instance, social consensus and the likelihood that an action will have the desired effect are important drivers of unethical intentions (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). It is also conceivable that subordinates do not view this behavior as unethical or deserving of the negative outcomes we have identified.

Implications for theory and organizational practice

This research has important theoretical implications. The study’s findings support our theory that *perceptions* of deceptive IM that drive subordinate outcomes. Interestingly, the supervisor reports of perceived deceptive IM are higher on average than subordinate reports of their own such behavior. This opens the door for theories that could help explain what additional factors engender elevated supervisor perceptions of subordinate deceptive IM and the process by which these perceptions develop.

Research in leader–member exchange finds that a positive relationship with one’s supervisor leads to a number of similarly positive outcomes for the organizations such as diminished turnover intentions (Dulac et al., 2008) and improved job performance (Erdogan and Enders, 2007). Our study finds that, instead of resulting in positive outcomes, deceptive IM actually leads to harm at least for the subordinate.

There are several approaches that organizations might take to prevent or perhaps limit these detrimental effects on both relationship quality and promotability. First, organizations should be proactive in setting expectations about the types of behaviors that are acceptable in the workplace and specifically highlight the importance of honesty and forthrightness. Creating a culture of that is intolerant of deceptive IM would help deter these activities by making them non-normative. Second, managers can also limit the performance of deceptive IM through their organizations' human resources practices. Those scoring high on integrity tests are characterized as honest and trustworthy (Sackett and Wanek, 1996) and are less likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors (Marcus et al., 2007). It would make sense then for those involved in the hiring processes to use integrity tests to help identify candidates with who may be predisposed to engage in deceptive IM.

Interestingly, the negative relationships between organization tenure and promotability ratings and between relationship tenure and relationship quality suggest that supervisors have a better opinion of subordinates with whom they have work with for the least amount of time. This suggests that there may be an availability effect in that the longer a subordinate works with a supervisor, the more likely they are to bring problems to the supervisor or that there will be conflict in the supervisor-subordinate relationship. It may be that there is a "honeymoon period" in the supervisor-subordinate relationship in which the positive interactions and events are emphasized and negative interactions or weaknesses are overlooked.

The use of deception in the conduct of impression management, or deceptive IM, plays a significant role in the supervisor-subordinate relationship. As supervisors interact with subordinates, opportunities for deceptions to be detected multiply and desired impressions grow increasingly difficult for the subordinate to maintain through the course of the ongoing supervisor-subordinate relationship. As the supervisor recognizes this deception, it leads to unwanted organizational consequences for the subordinate. While there is much more to do in this area, this study offers a foundation for combining the deception and impression management literatures. In conclusion, this research supports the contention

that it doesn't pay to deceive in long-term relationships as measured by promotability and relationship quality.

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