

Impressions of Competency: Tactics and a Conceptual Model

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Submitted: 25.01.2017. Final acceptance: 13.10.2017

Abstract

Purpose: The study introduces a research stream of impressions of competency (IC) within the impression management field. The need for more understanding and research on IC within the field stems from the rising levels of information processing and competency expectations at work. This shift towards knowledge-intensive processes within organizations creates an environment in which the need to be perceived as competent has become even more relevant. As a result, employees may rely on IC tactics, if the expectation is that they appear as knowledgeable, skilled, and intelligent (i.e., competent).

Methodology: The paper first includes a new typology of IC tactics that comprises impression management strategies used by individuals specifically to attain an enhanced image of competence in the workplace. Second, it provides a conceptual model and offers propositions with regards to the antecedents, effectiveness, and outcomes of IC tactics for consideration in future research.

Conclusions: The research suggests that higher social norms of displaying competency in the workplace will contribute to higher IC tactic use especially by individuals keen on self-monitoring. Furthermore, politically skilled individuals are more effective with IC tactics, which results in more desirable evaluations of performance.

Research limitations: This is a theoretical and conceptual study. It formulates propositions for further empirical research studies.

Originality: This paper introduces IC within the impression management field by identifying IC tactics and developing a conceptual model for the examination of their effectiveness in the workplace.

Keywords: impression management, competency, ingratiation, self-promotion, political skill, self-monitoring, effectiveness, performance

JEL: M19, M59, J24

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Introduction

Today's business environment is a volatile one at best. Companies face extreme competition and unforgiving economic circumstances. To keep up with rising competition amid rapidly shifting conditions in technologies, organizations push for continuous development of competencies and require that employees keep their technology skills up-to-date as well as continuously learn and demonstrate new knowledge in their fields (Baczyńska, 2015; Maurer, 2001). Scholars also attributed the emergence of an overall new work pattern in the job market, shifting toward higher levels of competency, to the rise of the knowledge economy; defined as production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that rely more on intellectual capabilities and information processing (Powell and Snellman, 2004). Within this economy, which treats knowledge as the key resource, knowledge-intensive organizations, such as Google, have grown increasingly common (Kozierkiewicz, 2016). Together, increasing competition and the knowledge economy have created a job market environment in which the need to display competency becomes ever more relevant.

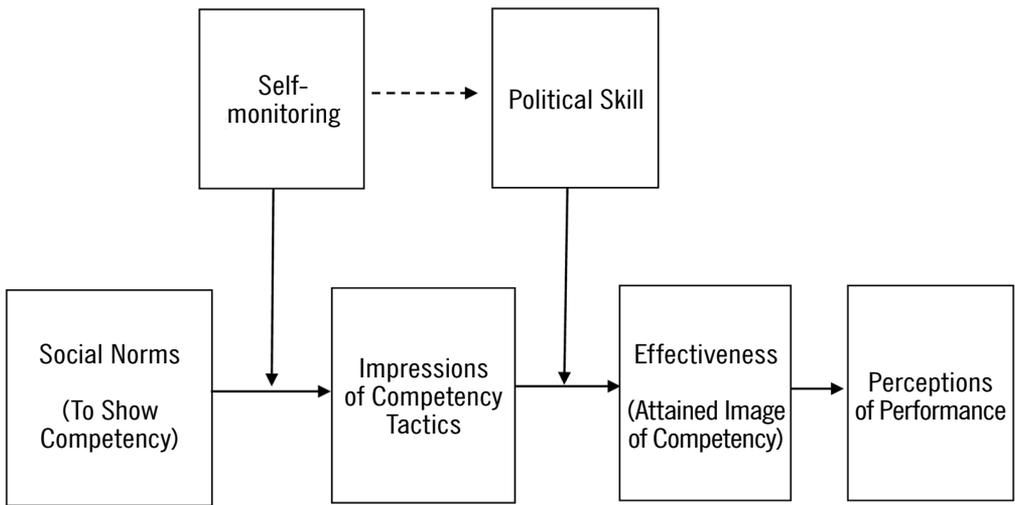
Many organizations exert pressure on their employees to appear superior, independent, and competent (Lee, 2002). They not only explicitly profess these values but also reward, promote, and hire employees who demonstrate them (e.g., Barrick, Shaffer and DeGrassi, 2009; Higgins and Judge, 2004). As a result, individuals expend considerable time and effort to project a desired image that conforms to those values and indicates a high level of competency. In doing this, individuals, competent or not, might employ impression management tactics (IC tactics) to be seen as competent. Ey (2006) defines the image of competency as being perceived by oneself or others as skilled, knowledgeable, and intelligent.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it is to develop an IC typology: a subset of behaviors within existing taxonomies of impression management tactics that specifically aims to improve the image of competency. Although some works investigate the role of self-promotion in the projecting of images of competency (e.g., Jones and Pittman, 1982; Kacmar, Harris and Nagy, 2007), we argue that we should also consider other well-known impression management tactics as the IC tactics.

Second, the paper is to provide the conceptual model to drive the scholarly inquiry and examination of the IC tactics. The model includes external and internal factors that lead individuals to employ the IC tactics and elaborates on the effectiveness of the use of the tactics on the employee performance. We conceptualize the social norms for workers to appear competent on the job as the external motivating factors and

individual differences, such as self-monitoring and political skill, used as two important internal factors that influence the IC usage. Specifically, the model proposes a moderating impact of self-monitoring on the relationship between the social norms for displaying competency and the use of the IC tactics and argues for the role of political skill in the effectiveness of the IC tactics and their impact on employee performance (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Ic Tactics

Competency Defined

Competency is a broad, multidimensional concept (Cheng, Dainty and Moore, 2005). Competency-based assessments are the basis for making key human resource decisions at both individual and organizational levels. They serve as a significant element in training and development efforts, recruitment, performance management, compensation, rewards, and business strategy (Blancero, Boroski and Dyer, 1996; Ey, 2006). Given the rising role of competency assessments in the workplace, it is important to understand what competency is and how workers' images of competency form.

There has been much work on the topic of competency which, unfortunately, has led to some confusion about the definition. Ey (2006) summarizes the existing taxonomies

of individual competencies in the literature for a seemingly endless range of qualities under the notion of competence; as, e.g., knowledge, skills, ability, attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, emotions, motives, performance. Despite such factors as motivation, scholars are particularly keen on using performance as a proxy for assessing competence on the job. That is, someone may be competent, but unwilling to perform. Other factors that may withhold competent individuals from enhancing their perceived level of performance include hurtful interpersonal dynamics, unsupportive work environment, independent evidence, personal troubles, or different goals (Ey, 2006). Vonk (1999) argues that performance cannot exceed one's abilities and informs only about the underlying ability. Although researchers often use competence and performance interchangeably, performance reflects the external outcomes of one's effort, whereas competency captures the cognitive prerequisites for satisfactory performance.

We base competency on the three dimensions from the widely-used KSA framework which capture the cognitive prerequisites for performance in the workplace (Stevens and Campion, 1994): skill, knowledge, and intelligence (cognitive ability). To achieve competency, we need knowledge to obtain skills linked to a specific task while intelligence to transfer the knowledge across tasks (McClelland, 1973). Consequently, scholars frame the image of competency in the workplace as being perceived by oneself or others as skilled, knowledgeable, and intelligent. The IC tactics could be how individuals attain their desired image of competence in the eyes of others.

Theoretical Background

To know what competency is, we must understand the theoretical explanation of when and why a person might engage in the IC tactics. Numerous theoretical perspectives within the fields of psychology and social psychology help explain the conceptual roots of impression management, such as the social influence theory (Leary, 1995; Levy, Collins and Nail, 1998), the theory of social identity (Schlenker, 1980), the self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1987), the need for belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), and the social comparison (Festinger, 1954). Three theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant in the IC context: the need for belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), social comparison (Festinger, 1954), and Leary and Kowalski's (1990) three-component model.

We may apply the need for belonging and maintaining quality relationships (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) to explain people's drive to engage in the IC tactics at work in order to reach goal-oriented and socially accepted behaviors. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that people engage in impression management to belong. That is, people have

the drive to maintain quality relationships with others and, therefore, engage in goal-directed behaviors to make an impression on others. We combine this with Festinger's social comparison theory, which contends that people assess and compare themselves with others to evaluate their own abilities and opinions against others. Furthermore, people have a drive toward uniformity. That is, when there is a discrepancy between the self and others, individuals strive to reduce that discrepancy either by changing oneself, the others, or the other's perceptions. Thus, to belong, individuals look to others for cues on such acceptable characteristics as competence. Should the actor's competence go unnoticed, the actor will engage in impression management in order to change the target's perceptions of competency.

Leary and Kowalski's (1990) three-component model of social-psychological processes of impression management includes three stages of impression formation: 1) impression monitoring: the awareness of how others view one's competence; 2) impression motivation: the desire to influence others' perception of one's competence; and 3) impression construction: the selection of a desired competency image and use of the IC tactics. Thus, the social comparison occurs in impression monitoring, and the need to belong drives our motivations to engage in impression management. Lastly, the actor needs to construct the image of competency. The above theories offer an insight into how and why people employ the IC tactics. Below, we elucidate which tactics would be effective at increasing the perception of competency and impression construction.

IC Tactics

Impression management is an essential component of human behavior in organizations, and its existence has various effects on organizational life. It refers to people's concern for attaining an overall desired public image, such as competence, likeability, attractiveness, virtue, and level of effort (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley and Gilstrap, 2008; Rosenfeld, Giacalone and Riordan, 1995). Impression management theory assumes that the basic human motive, both inside or outside organizations, is to be favorably seen by others and to avoid being viewed negatively (Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011; Goffman, 1959).

To date, research has primarily centered on the ways that people manage their impressions as seen by others (Lewis and Neighbors, 2005). Although impression management tactics relevant to the workplace involve both nonverbal and verbal types (Leary, 1995), the attention of organizational scholars has shifted toward the verbal and attitudinal tactics (Bolino, Long and Turnley, 2016; Jones and Pittman, 1982; Peeters and Lievens, 2006; Rosenfeld et al., 1995) that are strategic and purposeful in nature (Brouer, Badawy, Gallagher and Haber, 2015). There is also work that categorizes impression management

into positive and negative behaviors based on socially-accepted behaviors in which positive tactics include self-promotion and ingratiation while negative tactics consist of intimidation, supplication, and self-handicapping (Brouer et al., 2015).

According to Leary's (1995) impression management process framework, tactics are interrelated with motives, yet relatively less research considers the specific outcome images that people desire or avoid in the workplace. Amid many efforts, various taxonomies emerge in the field's literature (Bolino et al., 2008; Jones and Pittman, 1982; Leary and Kowalski, 1990; Rosenfeld et al., 1995), but researchers disagree which tactic conveys which image. Jones and Pittman (1982) assign a single image per tactic in their seminal work on the general theory of strategic self-presentation. Jones and Pittman identify the desired and undesired image outcomes for the five main tactics: ingratiation – likable vs. sycophant; self-promotion – competent vs. conceited; exemplification – dedicated vs. feeling superior; supplication – needy vs. lazy; intimidation – intimidating vs. bossy. On the other hand, Rosenfeld et al. (1995) attribute slightly different images to different tactics: exemplification involves making others perceive actions as exemplary and model-worthy; intimidation and supplication show personal qualities such as power, friendliness, caring, and team-orientation; ingratiation increases one's likeability or attractiveness; and self-promotion creates an attribution of competency.

Self-Promotion

Literature consistently identifies only self-promotion as the direct influence on the final image of competency (Bolino et al., 2016; Giacalone and Rosefeld, 1986; Jones and Pittman, 1982; Kacmar et al., 2007; Pfeffer, Fong, Cialdini and Portnoy, 2006; Turnley and Bolino, 1999). Self-promotion includes exaggerating one's accomplishments and abilities to appear competent (Bolino et al., 2008). Self-promotion is quite common, especially when it involves important audiences or circumstances and when the self-promotional claims are unlikely to be challenged or discredited (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). In support of this, Giacalone and Rosenfeld (1986) conducted a field experiment which showed that the occurrence of self-promotion increases when the target has a higher status. Kacmar, Carlson and Bratton (2004) also find that self-promotion is especially effective in creating the attribution of competence in an ambiguous environment.

While many studies examine self-promotion as a single tactic directly leading to competency, limited research exists on IC tactics other than self-promotion. This study proposes that some tactics like self-handicapping, disclaimers, ingratiation, intimidation, and impression management, by association, also may contribute to various enhancements of one's image of competence.

Self-Handicapping and Causal Accounts

Employees may use self-handicapping defensively to boost their image of competency. It is action-oriented and involves setting up obstacles to a successful performance “to furnish oneself with an external attribution when future outcomes are uncertain” (Tice and Baumeister, 1990, p. 443). Procrastination or withholding effort for events of public image importance is a common form of self-handicapping, used to preserve one’s positive image. This may include a protective shield for the individual’s cognitive capabilities (i.e., skill, knowledge, ability) embedded within the image of competency. For example, to secure one’s perception of competency, instructors may spend insufficient time for preparing a lecture in anticipation of poorly performing in a class.

However, self-handicapping also relates to the perceptions of others. Studying a large accounting firm in New York City, Crant and Bateman (1993) showed that self-handicapping was effective in cushioning failure but not in enhancing success. Specifically, Crant and Bateman found that self-handicapping tactics not only diminish the blame that follows a failed performance but also the credit that follows a successful one. Because actors apply self-handicapping in anticipation of poor performance and they know not of the performance’s outcome, this strategy may prove a risky endeavor. Given that the assignment of credit and blame secures the observers’ impressions of actors, which results in undiminished views of the actor’s competency, this suggests that self-handicapping should be an effective way of preserving a desired image of competency, even if in mostly failed performances.

In contrast to self-handicapping, causal accounts are image-repair tactics that only *provide* excuses and justifications to reduce the negative impact of an already failed event (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). Crant and Bateman (1993) find that the use of causal accounts diminishes the observers’ assignments of blame for failure and credit for success. Offering an external cause for a failed performance results in individuals receiving less blame than they would have for offering an internal cause. Crant and Bateman explain that claiming external causes (e.g., task difficulty) is more prevalent in organizational life than offering internal accounts (e.g., alcohol use, lack of effort) because it preserves the perception of competency and follows the norms of organizational conduct. Thus, external accounts may be particularly effective in improving one’s image of competency after a failed performance.

Disclaimers

Although similar to causal accounts, disclaimers involve anticipatory excuses ahead of performance and not the remedial approach applied after an event (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). In the uncertainty of performance, disclaiming involves preemptive justifi-

cations which may include justifiable exceptions, signals of the unimportance of future behavior, renuncements of cognitive labels (e.g., “I may sound stupid but...”), appeals for a delay in judgment, and acknowledgments of negative qualities. Ward and Brenner (2006) investigated negative acknowledgment understood as the admission of an unfavorable quality: warning of a heavy foreign accent by a speaker, claims of a lack of clarity in a written paragraph, and assertion of low grades by a student. Across three studies, Ward and Brenner find a direct relationship between disclaimers and better performance evaluation ratings. Paired with Jones and Pittman’s older finding (1982) that many people may parade their ineptitude in minor areas to establish credibility for their claims of competence in crucial areas, Ward and Brenner’s study demonstrates the influence of disclaimers in making impressions of competency.

Ingratiation

Ingratiation tactics attempt to elicit the attribution of one’s likability and may also serve as an indirect way to achieve a positive image of competency. There are a variety of verbal and attitudinal ingratiation tactics such as self-enhancement, other-enhancement, favor-rendering, and opinion-conformity (Bolino et al., 2008). People tend to engage in self-enhancement by assigning favorable traits and characteristics to themselves, which certainly may include one’s cognitive capabilities and, thus, reflect a positive image of competency (Yun, Harold, Viera and Moore, 2007).

Researchers assert that, for the attribution of competency, successful ingratiation may be as significant as actual performance (Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Kacmar et al., 2004). Based on a variety of other attributes, including competency, people perceive those who are more likable more favorably than those who are less likable (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). A variety of ingratiation tactics have been found relevant to performance appraisals (Kacmar et al., 2004). For example, Higgins and Judge’s (2004) examine the role of value congruence between recruiters and candidates only to find that opinion conformity has a positive effect on the recruiter’s perception of the candidate. The effectiveness of opinion conformity refers to Byrne’s (1971) similarity-attraction theory, which states that individuals are attracted to those with whom they share something in common. By agreeing with the opinions expressed by the recruiter, candidates demonstrate shared values and beliefs, making themselves appear more attractive and, according to the halo effect, more competent (Moore, Filippou and Perrett, 2011). Thus, we will likely view positively perceived people as competent as well (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977).

Intimidation

Another way to enhance the image of competency involves the use of intimidation, which works toward increasing the perception of one’s power and status. Intimidation

means a verbally aggressive use of influence to achieve the desired outcomes (Bolino and Turnley, 1999; Bolino et al., 2016). It consists of the use of power, force, or coercion in aggressive communication with others at work to get one's way. Due to the exertion of power and status, scholars argue that the intimidation tactics have an indirect effect on one's perception as more confident and competent in the workplace. In fact, Troyer and Younts (1997) find that people view higher status employees as more competent than lower-status employees. Further, people who feel incompetent may choose to aggressively argue their point to hide their incompetence. The people around them may assume that the aggressive person is correct because of the power and status that come from using such tactics. Research on this tactic has shown mainly negative effects indicating that it is a difficult tactic to use successfully (e.g., Bolino and Turnley, 2003a).

Impression Management by Association

Another set of tactics involves impression management by association in which individuals attempt to maximize connections to favorable things and minimize associations with undesirable ones. This approach plays a role in seeking enhanced images of competency through association (Cialdini and De Nicholas, 1989). Andrews and Kacmar (2001) measured four major tactics of impression management by association, such as boasting, blurring, burying, and blaring.

Boasting utilizes associations with favorable others and can be used to help enhance one's competency image by associating publicly with a highly regarded and competent individual or publicly announcing positive connections with those individuals. Blurring also depends on the association with favorable people, but their connections might not be ideal to obtain the desired outcome and, thus, will need to be strategically communicated to be effective. For example, to improve her image of competency, a student might claim to be working with a prominent researcher. This claim becomes more effective should the student hide a personal conflict with the researcher or expose their mutual lack of respect.

Burying and blaring mean concealing or publicly minimizing connections with unfavorable people (Andrews and Kacmar, 2001). Schimel, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, O'Mahen and Arndt (2000) empirically demonstrated that people psychologically distance themselves from people exhibiting excessive behaviors to deny the characteristics that they fear in themselves, such as anger. Since people also fear to be incompetent, they may distance themselves from individuals who are perceived as incompetent.

Based on the above research, we propose an initial typology of the IC tactics. Table 1 contains a summary of selected tactics, their definitions, and how they could contribute

to achieving the desired image of competency. Where self-promotion is a direct claim of one's competency, other tactics accomplish this through indirect images. Self-handicapping, causal accounts, and disclaimers provide explanations for poor performance and, as a result, they boost evaluation and guard against undesirable images of competency. Ingratiation, including the enhancement tactics, aims to increase likeability and attractiveness and serves as a stepping stone to attain the desired image of competency. Intimidation serves to attain power and status which imply confidence and competence. Finally, impression management by association operates by leveraging the social power of connections with competent individuals and minimizing the social connection with incompetent individuals. This is not a comprehensive list but only serves as a step toward creating an extensive taxonomy of the IC tactics in the future studies.

Table 1. Typology of Impressions of Competency Tactics

Tactics	Definition	Increase Impression of Competency by
Self-promotion	"Communicate abilities and accomplishments to attempt to appear competent" (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082)	Communicating one's abilities and accomplishments
Self-handicapping	"Behave so as to provide an external explanation for poor performance" (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082)	Creating external obstacles for anticipated poor cognitive performance
Accounts	"Provide explanations for a negative event to escape disapproval; excuses and justifications are specific types of accounts" (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082)	Explaining poor cognitive performance
Disclaimers	"A form of anticipatory excuse-making" (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 85), such as hedging, credentialing, sin licenses, cognitive disclaimers, appeal for suspension.	Explaining for anticipated poor cognitive performance
Ingratiation	Reactive process of upward influence "aimed at making the person more liked and attractive to others" (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p.31)	Being liked and attractive to others indirectly increases IC
Self-enhancement	"Make their best characteristics salient to targets" (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082)	Communicating one's skills, knowledge and ability (less focus on accomplishments)
Other-enhancement	"Praising and flattering others" (p.38) to increase the targets' liking"(Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 38) including opinion-conforming and favor-rendering	Being liked indirectly increases IC
Intimidation	"Threaten or harass to attempt to appear dangerous and powerful" (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082)	Being powerful and with status

IM by Association (IMAssoc)	Utilizing “associations with positive others for impression management purposes” (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p.57)	Associating with competent others and disassociating with incompetent individuals
IMAssoc: Boasting	“Boast about their positive connections with favorable others” (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082)	Showing off connection with competent individuals
IMAssoc: Blurring	“Blur their connections with favorable others by way of strategic omissions” (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082)	Emphasizing selective connections with competent individuals
IMAssoc: Burying	“Conceal their connection with unfavorable others” (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082)	Concealing connection with incompetent individuals
IMAssoc: Blaring	“Publicly minimize their connections with unfavorable others” (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082)	Distancing oneself from incompetent individuals

Conceptual Model

In addition to the development of the IC typology and to help explore the effectiveness of IC tactics, we offer a conceptual model. The model with its propositions evaluates the role of antecedents on the use of IC tactics and examines their effectiveness on the performance outcomes. We argue that individuals, especially high self-monitors, will engage in more IC tactics to appear competent in an environment with strong social norms. Furthermore, the use of IC tactics leads to increased images of competency and performance, while their effectiveness grows in the hands of politically skilled individuals. In this section, we will detail these external and internal factors that should lead to the use of IC tactics and evaluate the role of political skills in the effectiveness and performance outcome.

External Antecedent of IC: Social Norms

Situational factors which affect the motives to engaging in impression management are the social norms that form at the organizational and group levels. Individuals accept conforming to social pressures to show competency in the workplace and justify it by the anticipated benefits that the IC bring: increased credibility (Carey and Nahavandi, 1996) and higher status and respect (Jamieson, 2004; Theriault, 2003). Once assigned and socially validated, the impressions of competency dictate how much respect and status these individuals receive from the onlookers.

Scholars consider the social norms the building blocks of organizational culture; a group-level system-oriented concept (Payne, 2000; Reichers and Schneider, 1990). Organizational culture is a common set of shared normative beliefs and understandings about the organization. Normative beliefs, also known as system norms, refer to explicit, system-sanctioned behaviors expected from members (James, James and Ashe, 1990). Social norms involve the tacit obligation to behave according to a configuration of attitudes, emotional expressions, decisions, and behaviors integral with the organizational life, which are important elements in the explanations of behavior in organizations (Jasso and Opp, 1997).

Direction, intensity, and conditionality are the key attributes of norms and culture. Direction refers to the actual content of cultural values, behavioral norms, and cognition while intensity is the strength of direction's emphasis on the content (Cooke and Rousseau, 1988), or "the extent to which members of a unit agree on the norms, values, or other culture content associated with the unit" (Rousseau, 1990, p. 181). To influence members, intensity requires a cognitive consensus among the members and a set of connections between expectations, rewards, and behaviors (Cooke and Rousseau, 1988). The conditionality attribute captures various conditions – or settings and circumstances – which motivate individuals to subscribe to the norms (Jasso and Opp, 1997). The conditionality attribute measures when and where the normative pressures and cognitive consensus apply. For example, the pressure to appear competent when interacting with clients may differ when interacting with friends or even peers in the workplace.

Scholars (Manski and Neri, 2013; Troyer and Younts, 1997) propose two types of social expectations as the key factors in guiding social interactions: first-order expectation (held by oneself) and second-order expectation (the perception of expectations held by others). Three major motives drive the expectations within social interactions: preserving status, facilitating interaction, and contributing to group performance. When a discrepancy exists between the first- and second-order expectations, the second-order expectations dominate social interactions which suggests the dominance of social norms over individuals' motives. Therefore, organizations with strong social norms motivate individuals to construct the appearance of competence (e.g., Leary and Kowalski 1990).

Competency Norms

The "social norm to show competency at work" construct (competency norms) means the collective pressure at work that dictates the normative behaviors, attitudes, and appearances of members; that is, how members should project their knowledge, skills, and intelligence (i.e., competence) in their jobs. The strength and conditionality attributes of competency norms vary among professions, groups, and organizations and

individuals may perceive them differently depending on the circumstances, but some examples include: grasping and quickly learning new material, eye contact, dress code, body language, communication style, asking the right questions, and providing socially appropriate answers.

We argue that individuals will be more likely to engage in impression management to display competency when there is a strong competency norm in the workplace. As indicated earlier, individuals want to belong, and the social context motivates them to engage in impression management (Bolino, Varela, Bande and Turnley, 2006; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Therefore, when the presence of the norm for high competency represents the social context that stimulates the use of IC tactics. Furthermore, in a situation where the norm is to display competency, individuals turn to IC tactics for acceptance and belonging in the workplace.

In preliminary support of this notion, numerous studies show that situational factors directly relate to impression management tactics (e.g., Bozeman and Kacmar, 1997; Kacmar et al., 2004). For instance, Peeters and Lievens (2006) find that different interview settings trigger different impression management tactics. Moreover, Rosenfeld et al. (1995) assert that “self-handicapping is especially likely to occur in situations where success and failure are important and people feel that their competence or self-worth is on the line” (p. 88). Moreover, McFarland, Yun, Harold, Viera, and Moore (2005) find the use of higher frequency and variety of impression management tactics in situations which emphasize interpersonal skills over knowledge. The evidence for the strength of situational factors in eliciting impression management behavior suggests that individuals may engage in the IC tactics more in work environments with high competency norms.

We argue that the strength and conditionality of competency norms influence the motivation for managing a competent public image at work or the desire to influence others’ impressions. The need to belong in an environment leads individuals to utilize impression management to show competency. Thus, we predict:

Proposition 1. The stronger the competency norms in the workplace, the more prevalent the use of IC tactics.

Internal Antecedent of IC: Dispositional Factor

Although we argue that organizations with a strong competency norm will encourage the use of IC tactics, we also must consider the dispositional factors. In contrast to

physical or other objectively assessed characteristics of individuals, dispositions are psychological and include such constructs as personality traits, needs, attitudes, preferences, and motives (Barbuto and Moss, 2006). Many studies show that it is not solely the situation that elicits impression management but also the character of the person in question (e.g., Peeters and Lievens, 2006; Kacmar et al., 2004).

For instance, in an interview setting, Peeters and Lievens (2006) find that the interaction of situational antecedents and individual differences – including self-monitoring, self-efficacy, the locus of control, and the Big Five – impacts the effectiveness of verbal and non-verbal impression management tactics. Additionally, Kacmar et al. (2004) incorporate the influence of both situational factors and dispositional characteristics on ingratiation behaviors. That is, Kacmar et al. declare that role ambiguity and leader-member exchange along with self-esteem, need for power, shyness, and locus of control impact other-enhancing, opinion conformity, favor rendering, and self-promotion. The authors report that the interaction of situational and dispositional factors contributes to different ingratiation behaviors at work.

Essentially, individuals perceive and interpret the work environment through personal factors before translating them into motivational forces for action (Vroom, 1964). Thus, interactions between the dispositional and situational factors appear to be motivational determinants of action. In the realm of impression management and job performance research, many studies (e.g., Peeters and Lievens, 2006) combine the dispositional-situational perspective and examine the interaction between situational antecedents and personal dispositions because these two variables together help explain the significant additional variance beyond simply examining one or the other alone (Kacmar, et al., 2004). Although many individual factors may play a role in the IC tactics, we focus on self-monitoring.

Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring seems of great importance to IC because scholars describe it as a dispositional factor of attention to the behaviors of others in order to obtain clues for one's impression management (Bolino et al., 2008; Snyder, 1974). People with a high degree of self-monitoring tend to change their attitudes, perspectives, and behaviors to suit different social situations (Snyder and Gangestad, 1982; 1986).

Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory and the work of Leary and Kowalski (1990) explains the role of self-monitoring in impression management. Leary and Kowalski (1990) argued that, before an individual can use impression management, one needs to know how others perceive them. High self-monitors actively examine the impres-

sions of others to determine their behavior. Furthermore, as Festinger (1954) detailed, people desire to compare themselves with others and reduce discrepancies. In situations with high competency norms, self-monitors will be more likely to recognize these norms and the behaviors of others that display these norms. Moreover, because they are good at adapting their behaviors to the situation, they will use IC tactics to display similar competence to those around them.

In support of this, most findings suggest that self-monitoring relates positively to the use of impression management tactics. High self-monitors tend to engage in impression management more frequently and effectively. Similarly, Higgins and Judge (2004) find self-monitoring positively correlated with ingratiation and self-promotion. Moreover, self-monitoring was also found to be an antecedent of tactics focused on competency, such as self-promotion (Bolino and Turnley, 2003b). Hewlin (2003) finds that facades of conformity – the fake embracement of organizational values – occur more frequently among high self-monitors who strive to achieve desirable awards. In contrast, Turnley and Bolino (2001) reveal that the use of tactics close to intimidation is more successful when conducted by low self-monitors.

Together, research suggests that self-monitoring reflects high sensitivity to social cues, which also should involve sensitivity to competency norms in organizational settings. We argue that there is an interaction between the degree of competency norms at work and self-monitoring on the choice and effectiveness of IC tactics. In organizational settings with high competency norms, high self-monitors will be even more effective in using IC tactics to display competency than low self-monitors.

Therefore, we propose that:

Proposition 2. Self-monitoring moderates the relationship between the competency norms and the use of IC tactics such that the positive relationship will be strongest for those with high self-monitoring and weakest for those with low self-monitoring.

IC Effectiveness

The main reason for engaging in IC tactics is to enhance one's perceived competence. One way to measure the effectiveness of IC tactics is to rate the perception of one's image of competency by others (Cheng et al., 2005; Schlenker, 1980). This rating would measure how others perceive the actors' image of competency in an overall rating of their skill, ability, and knowledge on a job.

In inferring cognitive competence with limited evidence, people rely on impression management behavior and attitudes as well as on other available situational cues. These may include appearance, individual status characteristics, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomics, as well as personal attributes such as personality, likes, and dislikes (Foschi, 2000). Although we argue that the use of IC tactics may be effective in improving one's competency image, the IC tactics alone do not ensure success.

Much research on impression management and influence examines tactics (e.g., Tsai, Chen and Chiu, 2005) with increased interest in their effectiveness (e.g., Ferris et al., 2007). The examples of studies on measuring tactic effectiveness related to the interview setting include verbal and non-verbal tactics (Peeters and Lievens, 2006), assessment center settings (McFarland et al., 2005), and structured type interviews (Van Iddekinge, McFarland and Raymark, 2007).

Ingratiation and self-promotion have been found effective during the interview process because they encourage both verbal and nonverbal behaviors that help the interviewer evaluate the interviewee's character (Bolino, Klotz and Daniels, 2014). Self-promotion tactics are effective because interviewers have no data to stack against the interviewee's claims of competence. Except for self-promotion, less research examined the effectiveness of other tactics in different workplace scenarios (Harris et al., 2007).

Furthermore, many researchers believe that what affects the success of IC tactics is the style of the execution of influence (e.g., Liden and Mitchell, 1989) and the unnoticeability of ulterior motives (Ham and Vonk, 2011; Jones, 1990). For example, bystanders reacted negatively to conformity and other ingratiation tactics especially when one used such tactics obviously or excessively and there was a large power discrepancy between the actor and target (Jones and Pittman, 1982). Examples like this one highlight how the context, including the individual's capabilities and motives, may affect the execution and success of IC tactics. Ferris and his colleagues (2007) argue that certain personality traits make individuals better at influencing others at work. Scholars associate one such trait with impression management and relate it to the IC tactics in organizational settings – it is the political skill.

Political Skill

Political skill is an individual's knowledge of the work situation and the ability to use that knowledge to influence others to behave in a manner that augments one's personal and organizational goals (Ferris et al., 2005). The politically skilled can understand work situations and people's behaviors in those situations (Ferris et al., 2007). These individuals also possess interpersonal influence which involves the ability to influence

others subtly and change their behavior in work situations (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2007).

Although at first glance, the political skill may seem similar to self-monitoring, they are two distinct constructs (Ferris et al., 2005). In fact, Ferris et al. examine both self-monitoring and political skill to find significant correlations between social astuteness and self-monitoring in only two samples ($r = .32$ and $.37$). These correlations were to be expected because both self-monitoring and political skill are measures of social effectiveness, but they are not so high as to indicate redundancy between the two constructs. More recently, Ferris et al. argued that self-monitoring is an antecedent of political skill (Ferris et al., 2007). Therefore, we do acknowledge this relationship with a dotted line connecting the two in our theoretical model (see Figure 1). We argue, however, that self-monitors will be more likely to engage in the IC tactics while the politically skilled will be more apt at using various tactics.

Brouer (2005; 2007) used Liden and Mitchell's (1989) model of risk assessment to explain how the politically skilled can utilize prosocial influence tactics (i.e., ingratiation and exemplification) to encourage high-quality relationships with their supervisors. The same theory and logic may explain how the politically skilled can effectively employ IC tactics. Essentially, Liden and Mitchell (1989) argue that individuals decide whom to influence and what tactics to use by assessing the risk associated with the attempt. The first step in the risk assessment process is to identify the cause for influence, followed by evaluating the cost/benefit ratio and the receptiveness of the audience and the environment (Liden and Mitchell, 1989).

Politically skilled individuals are better able to assess the risk associated with using impression management to convey images of competency (Brouer 2005; 2007). Because of their social astuteness, the politically skilled recognize the need to appear competent. Further, they can assess the situation to determine which IC tactics are appropriate. In this assessment, because of their ability to understand others and the environment, the politically skilled can identify the most appropriate and effective tactics of impression management and adjust their use to the tactic that will succeed in making them appear competent (Ferris et al., 2005). For instance, in a work situation where everyone works together, and there is no norm of self-promotion, the politically skilled will understand that this tactic is not appropriate and select a different tactic, such as ingratiation.

Finally, it may cost the politically skilled if their target notices the ulterior motive; in this situation, the former must apply apparent sincerity for the successful use of IC tactics. People perceive the politically skilled as genuine (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et

al., 2007) and sincere. This enables the individual to use IC tactics without detection (Brouer, 2005; 2007), thus increasing effectiveness and success. In support of this, Harris et al. (2007) find that influence tactics correlate positively with performance evaluations of politically skilled subordinates.

In summary, highly politically skilled individuals can utilize their social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity to assess the risk of implementing a particular IC tactic accurately. Because of this, they can choose the IC tactic that will best work in the situation, thus increasing their chances to achieve the desired image of competency. Thus, we predict that:

Proposition 3. Political skill moderates the relationship between IC tactics and IC effectiveness so that the positive relationship between the IC tactics and IC effectiveness will be stronger for those with high political skill and weaker for those with low political skill.

Perceptions of Performance

Many studies associate the use of impression management and employee performance ratings in the workplace (Barrick, Shaffer and DeGrassi, 2009; Wayne and Kacmar, 1991). For instance, employees more driven to enhance their self-image display higher levels of job performance behaviors (Yun et al., 2007). Wayne and Kacmar (1991) evidence a positive relationship between impression management and performance evaluations. Adkins, Russel and Werbel (1994) find that individual's ability to successfully use impression management tactics to align their values with that of the recruiter and the company affects an individual's perceived performance level in an interview. This perceived value congruence, a form of opinion conformity tactic of impression management, relates to the individual's performance and tenure during the interview process.

Self-promotion is instrumental for making competent impressions but what can affect social and work outcomes is the adequacy of its use. Rudman (1998) finds that self-promotion used by women can backfire and trigger social reprisals. In the context of female evaluators, for example, self-promotion leads to higher competence ratings but reduces social attraction and hireability potential.

Van Iddekinge et al. (2007) discovers partial mediating effects of defensive and assertive tactics on the relationship between impression management antecedents and structured interview performance. Individual's perceived social skills, such as the ability to effectively influence others, are one of the most important determinants of success

in interviews and an indicator of professional success (Baczyńska, 2015). In employee selection decisions, ingratiation leads to significantly higher applicant ratings (Arup, Toh and Pichler, 2006). Thus, we propose that:

Proposition 4. IC effectiveness positively relates to perceptions of performance.

Discussion

Despite an overall increase of competency levels in the workforce and the proliferation of social pressures to appear competent, organizational research has not devoted sufficient attention to addressing images of competency in organizational life. Impression management research has embraced behavioral and attitudinal strategies across various taxonomies (Bolino et al., 2016; Rosenfeld et al., 1995), but it has not systematically focused on a singular outcome image such as competency or likability, contributing to a lack of classification of tactics which enhance the competency image. Therefore, this paper identifies a variety of IC tactics and proposes an initial model to examine their antecedents, effectiveness, and impact on performance.

The typology of IC tactics is new to the field as it focuses solely on the image of competency. This study gathers thirteen IC tactics in Table 1 and describe their impact on one's competency image. This approach introduces an indirect way of identifying tactics that are used to convey one outcome image by means of achieving another image first. For example, used directly, ingratiation projects the image of likeability but, indirectly, it also gives the impression of competence. This new approach enables us to distinguish between direct and indirect impression management tactics to attain a particular image. Self-promotion is an example of a direct strategy while other IC tactics, such as intimidation and impression management by association, are indirect strategies for attaining the image of competency.

When discussing the effectiveness of the use of IC, it is important to note that aggressive or inappropriate attempts to use the IC tactics run the risk of backfiring. For example, aggressive self-promotion may make others feel resentful or jealous (Rosenfeld et al., 1995) and lead to negative perception as self-promotion (Pfeffer et al., 2006). Furthermore, only when appropriately used, negative acknowledgments (a form of accounts) can effectively temper unfavorable evaluation (Ward and Brenner, 2006). Additionally, improper use of the IC tactics may cause others to respond with counter-IC tactics. Intimidation was shown to lead to ingratiation, and the use of self-promotion sometimes evoked responses of supplication or exemplification (Jones and Pittman, 1982).

Implications for Practice

Although this study draws attention to an important concept for practitioners and provides a conceptual roadmap for studying IC, significant contributions to the practitioner field will arise from empirical testing of the proposed model alongside the investigation of IC tactics at work.

This and future work should contribute to the practice threefold. First, it should identify the IC tactics that specifically address competency images in the workplace and provide an understanding of the effectiveness of the tactics and their impact on performance. As a result of providing more insight about IC behaviors, practitioners will likely include IC tactics to enrich their training programs, performance evaluations, and assignments of promotion.

Second, the investigation should give insight to organizations about the implications of work pressures for showing competency on individuals' behavioral response and performance. With the onslaught of initiatives on definition, acquisition, development, and endurance of human competence (McLagan, 1997), organizations still primarily devote resources to defining competency requirements in terms of skills and abilities per job type. While typical human resource department functions exemplify such case (Ey, 2006), scant organizational efforts aim towards managing impressions and social norms that dictate the IC usage in the workplace. The management of the norms of IC tactics may necessitate strategic organization development efforts in acknowledging, confronting, and re-creating IC norms on different levels throughout the enterprise.

Third, the examination of self-monitoring and political skill attributes develops organizational knowledge and reflects the complexity of the IC phenomenon in a more complex manner. We argue that high self-monitors engage in more IC tactics and the politically skilled are more adept at using the various tactics. These findings lead to important implications for HR practitioners when assessing candidate's competency levels and managing the images of competency in organizations.

Directions for Future Research

This study provides numerous directions for future research. The proposed typology serves as the initial step to investigate the IC tactics and seeks to encourage researchers to examine these and other types of tactics, beyond the verbal and attitudinal approaches, which will form an extensive IC typology. The article provides a conceptual framework

for future empirical testing of the IC phenomenon that involves tactics, antecedents, and outcomes.

Furthermore, this work should interest health researchers and practitioners who measure respondents' attractiveness as part of the effectiveness of the IC tactics. The meta-analysis study by Jackson, Hunter and Hodge (1995), regarding the relationship between physical attractiveness and intellectual competence, finds that many perceive attractive people as more competent than less attractive people. The effect is stronger for explicit information about competence than for implicit content, which was also more relevant for males than females.

The author has primarily examined the IC tactics in organizational settings (Jones and Pittman, 1982; Kacmar et al., 2004; Rosenfeld et al., 1995) from the rational perspective without reflecting on their irrational or emotional potential. Future research should not limit itself to the rationally-defined behavioral tactics but also embrace the emotional component in individual responses and IC tactics; for instance, examine emotional regulation as an IC tactic and explore the role of feelings of incompetency in IC efforts.

Moreover, there is yet no research on the impact of IC on decision making and errors in the medical field, even though medical errors kill more than 250,000 patients a year in the USA (Makary and Daniel, 2016). So far, scholars partially attribute serious medical malpractice to poor management and organizational culture of silence which discourages reporting errors (Roach, 2000). When individuals refrain from reporting errors to preserve impressions of competency, it implies negative consequences of social pressures on the organizational outcomes. No research systemically examined the potential causes of mistakes with regards to the IC behavior.

Lastly, the need for IC at work and its increased use may stress employees. Stress occurs with a threat, loss, or depletion of valued resources (Harris et al., 2007). According to the theory of conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989), people protect acquired resources, such as the socioeconomic status or self-esteem. Stressors like pressure to impress with competency may threaten the loss of self-esteem and lead to undesired cognitive, behavioral, and affective responses in the form of perceived strain, depression, and anxiety (Beehr, 1995).

Mayes and Ganster's study (1988) on the role of stressors and commitment concludes that engagement in political behavior may serve as a coping strategy in response to work stress. Organizational scholars (Ferris and Judge, 1991; Ferris, Russ and Fandt,

1989) attribute stressful workplace conditions like ambiguity to the use of influence tactics. Although prevalent in organizational life, both stress and IC deserve more focused research for us to better understand how people cope with work situations with high expectations of competency and the use IC tactics. Gender studies may particularly focus on the exploration of differences in coping mechanisms between men and women.

In summary, the impressions of competency embrace an important aspect of organizational life and present ample opportunity for scholarly exploration. The paper creates an important new research stream within the field of impression management by introducing a new IC typology and offering a conceptual framework as direction for empirical tests in future research.

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