

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT TACTICS THAT ACT AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOSTER FOR EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

This research study identifies the common impression management tactics that are used at the workplace and that act as positive psychological factors. The main aim of impression management tactics is to protect, maintain or develop their image in front of other people. There are two main types of such tactics, 'preventive' and 'enhancing'. In this study we have measured the impact of five such tactics; Self promotion, favor, excuse, conformity and acclaim. Excuses are 'preventive' whereas other tactics are 'enhancing'. Data was collected from 59 employees working in L.I.C India Ltd. and Polycab India Ltd. through a structured interview. The questions for the interviews were framed in a way to understand the reason why the employees use the impression management tactics and how it helps them achieve a positive mindset. Results indicate that all of the employees use impression management tactics in their workplace. They do this to create a positive working environment in their workplace and also to make them feel good and motivated to work more.

Key words: Impression Management, Psychology, Data, Survey, Corporate

Introduction

Impression management is a conscious or subconscious attempt to influence the perception of others towards oneself. It is also known as 'self-presentation'. It is used to manage impression and create a desired perception, opinion or image about a person who uses it or for whomsoever it is directed towards.

Employees use various strategies or tactics or impression management to protect, maintain or develop their image in front of a desired person who can be the employee's superior, colleague or even a subordinate. Impression management has a profound effect on various strategic outcomes such as promotion, hiring decision, career advancement, or performance evaluation.

There are mainly two types of impression management tactics used by employees at the

workplace. The first type is ‘preventive’ which is used in order to mitigate the impact of an event damaging to a person’s image. Examples of such tactics can be excuses and apologies. The second type is ‘enhancing’ which are used to improve the image of a person in a way to show the ideal version of themselves. Examples of such tactics can be self-promotion, acclaim, conformity, etc.

In this study, we have measured the impact of five commonly used impression management tactics on employee psychology: (1) Self-promotion, (2) favour, (3) excuse, (4) conformity, and (5) acclaim.

Self-promotion is used by employees in order to showcase their skills, achievements and knowledge in order to improve their image. Employees give favour in order to get approval or acceptance from others. Excuses are used by employees in order to lessen the impact of an adverse event that may damage their image. Employees use conformity as a tactic to gain someone’s respect by agreeing with their opinion and thoughts. Lastly, acclaim is used by employees in order to acknowledge or praise others for doing their work properly or correctly.

A psychological booster is a type of activity that helps a person to boost their interest in the workplace for a healthier and efficient output. They work as a motivator for employees to do their work wholly and on time with much more enthusiasm. In other words they are the positive psychological factors in the workplace that create a good environment and feel-good factor for the employees. We can do it through studying human feelings and their behaviour while focusing on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. We can increase the employees well-being, happiness, confidence and self esteem to make them feel good and to induce positive vibes. They not only help the employees in the short run but also in the long run as they grow fond of the working environment and increase their efficiency overall. This also helps the firm to retain its employees as the environment is good for the employees growth and he/she will not leave the firm.

Review of Literature

A psychological booster is anything that results in positive psychology at the workplace. The term “positive psychology” was first coined by Abraham Maslow in his book *Motivation and Personality* (1954).

Two new branches of positive psychology emerged after this term gained attention by being the theme of former head of the American Psychological Association:

Positive organizational scholarship- This was originated by Kim Cameron and colleagues. This research field emphasizes on the positive energy created by the organization that helps it to be

resilient during periods of crisis.

Positive organizational behaviour (POB) – This was researched by Luthans and it focuses on positive psychological factors that can be measured, developed and have impact on employee attitudes, behaviours, and performance.

A few noble researchers including Luthans conducted more research on positive psychology of employees at the workplace and found 4 factors (efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience) that best meet POB criteria. They called it “psychological capital”. Psychological Capital is defined as a person’s positive psychological state of development.

Efficacy means having confidence to take challenges and put additional efforts to achieve difficult tasks. People who show self- efficacy have a stronger belief in their capabilities to control outcomes and succeed in managing challenges and difficulties than those low in self-efficacy. Optimism implies having a positive attitude about success today and in the future. People who show optimism have positive expectations about outcomes and it motivates them to go after their goals and hence deal with difficult situations. Hope means having determination towards goals and, and choosing another path towards achievement of goal if necessary. People who have a greater level of hope show better goal-directed energy and are more likely to have the capacity to find alternative ways to succeed and achieve their goals. Resilience is defined as the capability of individuals to overcome adversities and or stressful situations and work towards attaining success. People who exhibit high resilience are generally better at adapting themselves at the time of adversities or a change in the external environment.

These psychological Capital factors (hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism) have a positive relationship with the factors relating to workplace prosperity and happiness. It has further been concluded that hope, optimism and resilience are the drivers of employee’s psychology and it has a positive impact on job performance and satisfaction, organizational commitment and overall workplace happiness.

Hence it can be concluded that a positive psychological capital acts as a booster for behaviour at work.

Only a few researchers have analysed the impact of ‘impression management’ tactics on positive psychology.

Impression management was first researched upon by Erving Goffman (1959). The book written by him "Presentation of Self in Everyday life" (1959), reveals about self-presentation towards society. Impression management explains a key aspect of role theory: how individual actors build, support, justify, and often improve their social identities through presumptions,

surroundings, props, and scripts in a play metaphor. Impression management tries to explain the motivations behind human behaviour, performances and complex interactions.

Impression management can be seen as if individuals are actors on a stage dramatically performing for an impressionable audience. Individuals communicate with others in a way that they can develop a positive image of themselves in other people's minds in order to achieve their psychological and physiological needs. From social psychology's prospect, impression management is focused on studying how individuals present themselves to others in order to be perceived favourably by others

The tactics used by people for impression management however depends on various factors such as personal motivation, situational factors and target audience. Majority of the literature on impression management primarily focuses on impression management strategies adopted by individuals in order to be admired and show themselves as attractive. Another theory proposed by Jones and Pittman (1982) proposes that impression management tactics used by people aim to protect and maintain one's power. They put forward five tactics of impression management; Self-promotion, exemplification, Ingratiation, intimidation and supplication. People who practice impression management often successfully gain strategic advantages in many situations. People use different strategies for enhancing their image and they generally fall into two categories: efforts to improve their appeal to others (self enhancement) and efforts aimed towards making a target person feel positive (other enhancement). Self-enhancement uses specific tactics to manipulate the truth and improve one's own appeal on the other hand, Other-enhancement strategies are used to play an important role in improving the esteem of another person.

Recently, some researchers have proved that impression management tactics have indeed an impact on employee's psychology. Impression management tactics such as deception, defensive, exemplification, ingratiation, model behaviour and self-promotion influence behavioural outcomes by as much as 51.2% in which the impression management tactics impact job growth by 16.4%, the work-life balance of employees by 10.6%, and global assignment by as much as 49.3%. The results of this research study indicate that employees can create favourable impressions on their superiors in earning global jobs, (which has been ranked at the top) followed by career growth. (Cvb, C.Vijayabanu & Therasa, C. & Daisy, Anjali.,2019)

In this study, apart from the five impression management tactics, we inspect other commonly used impression management tactics like excuses, acclaim, favour and conformity used by employees at the workplace.

Hence, the objective of the current study is to analyse the relationship between impression management tactics (acclaim, favours, excuses, self promotion and conformity) and the positive

psychological behaviour of employees.

Research Methodology

In this research report, a qualitative research method has been opted. Participants have been interviewed based on a structured questionnaire. The common responses given by participants for each question have been identified as key words and they have been further analysed to establish a cause and effect relationship between impression management tactics and positive psychology.

Qualitative research is chosen because it allows for an in-depth probing of responses given by the participants and allows a researcher to understand their feelings and motivation in order to derive the conclusions of the research. The nature of the topic also makes it essential to use a qualitative method.

Participants

We have opted for a snowball sampling technique which is also known as a chain referral sampling technique. Individuals ready to share information, needs to know that the information given by him/her will be used discreetly and this kind of trust is very important in snowball sampling technique.

With the help of this technique, we got referrals from the existing participants for the research study. This technique helped us as the participants were unknown and it is tough to choose them for the research.

The people selected for the interviews are from L.I.C. India (Life Insurance Corporation), one of the biggest insurance companies in India and Polycab India Ltd. Polycab is a company incorporated in 1996. This company is engaged in the business of manufacturing and selling cables, wires and FMEG (fast moving electrical goods); which include electric fans, LED lightings, switches, solar products, etc.

A total of 59 individual interviews were conducted to the employees of L.I.C. and Polycab. The purpose of the interview was clearly stated to them. The questionnaire includes questions the selected impression management tactics by people; **Self Promotion**, whereby individuals highlight one's best qualities downplaying one's deficits in order to be seen competent by others; **Favor**, basically doing something nice for someone to gain their approval; **Excuse**, whereby individuals give explanation about any event that made the person to do something unacceptable to get their punishment; **Conformity**, basically done with an expectation to gain specific rewards or someone's approval, and **Acclaim**, basically acknowledge someone proudly and openly when

they do their work properly. The following figures show the Demographic Details of the employees:

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Variables	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	54.2 %
	Female	45.8 %
	Rather not say	-
Highest Qualification	PhD	3.4%
	Masters	45.8 %
	Bachelors	47.5%
	High School Diploma	3.4%
Age	20 – 30	33
	30 – 40	9
	40 – 50	9
	50 +	8
Work Experience	0 – 3 years	45.8 %
	3 – 5 years	11.8 %
	5 – 10 years	13.6 %
	10 + years	28.8 %

The following figure reflects the most used impression management tactics:

Table 2: Use of impression management tactics in employees

Impression Management Tactics	% of people recognized using it
Acclaim	100%
Conformity	100%
Self Promotion	98.3%
Favours	96.6%
Excuses	94.9%

The questions for the interviews have been framed in a way to understand the reason why employees use these impression management tactics and how it affects their psychology positively.

The questions have also been cross checked by a Manager at L.I.C. India to know whether the questionnaire is relevant and the tactics are being used commonly so as to aid analysis.

Results

In most cases an excuse is something that individuals in the workplace use to either get relieved from a duty or to avoid a possible rebuke . On us interviewing people we found out that a majority of individuals believe that they have frequently used excuses in order to get an extension for a deadline to a task , to achieve a certain level of expectation. 39% said “ they give excuses to get extensions on their deadlines “ 20.3% replied “we give over estimations about our workload to our superiors to avoid more burden of work “, further 13.6% of the total interviewees replied stating “ we give excuses when we are not able to reach on time in order to maintain a healthy relationship with the superior.”

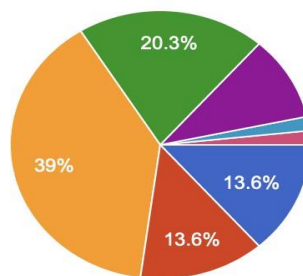


Figure 1: “Excuses used by employees”

Acclaim can be identified as public approval or as an act of expressing a very high or positive attitude towards something or someone . On being asked “what fits best under the category of acclaim , at a workplace?” About 50% of the interviewees responded saying “ when a project manager praises a team member for his/her idea, it helps in encouraging the other members of the team as well to work harder “ , following which around 35% individuals replied stating that “Proudly and openly acknowledging somebody for their work helps in boosting an individual's confidence .

Favour is known to be a gesture to do something good for others . In an attempt to understand why do individuals give favors at workplace , we asked our interviewees their motivation behind offering favours , and to this around 43% responded saying “ We offer favours to our colleagues to show them that we are friendly “ following which 27% responded as “ we sometime praise our colleagues for their accomplishments so that they would consider us to be a nice person “and about 17% replied stating “ we would change our opinion in order to please someone else and win their favour “

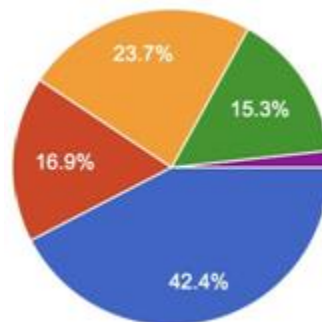


Figure 2: “ Motivation behind giving favours “

Self promotion can be referred to as an act where an individual seems to emphasize the best of its characteristics or in other words downplays his/her weakness in an attempt to make an impact . On being asked “ what is the reason behind using self promotion in a workplace ?” majority of them replied saying they did so as they wanted others to know that they are valuable to the organization , in continuation to this around 19% replied that they use self promotion to make people aware of their talent and qualifications , whereas about 15% stated that self promotion is more like a reflex to them for instances when someone is talking about his/her accomplishments , they naturally tend to end up boasting about theirs as well.

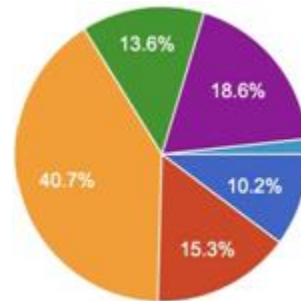


Figure 3: “The most appropriate statements that you use for self promotion”

Conformity appears to be an act of matching your behaviour with a group or sometimes with environmental norms . In an attempt to explain why people use conformity in a workplace environment we proposed a question to our interviewees asking “ why according to you is conformity being used in a workplace more often than not ?”. To this about 40% replied stating “ we sometimes agree with other person’s opinion just because we believe that we might be incorrect “ followed by 27% of the participants replying “ we sometimes agree with a person's opinion because we admire that particular person and want to gain his/her respect “ and about 17% replied stating “ we sometimes we agree with agree with our peers in an attempt to fit in within the group”.

Discussion

On analysing the responses to our question, we realised that maximum respondents use excuses in order to manage expectations. The goal in such cases appears to be one where an individual is able to put across its best work in front of the superiors which helps in maintaining a healthy relationship .

Using excuses to manage expectations appears to be one such strategy by which employees in the workplace are maintaining a positive impression .

This effectively explains that employees at the workplace believe acclaim is directly related to an employee being more productive /hard working .

It appears that acclaim is a strategy used to encourage employees at the workplace to work harder and be more productive and in some cases appears to boost an individual's confidence.

All these above responses essentially explain the point that individuals at workplace use favours as an impression management tactic to make their colleagues believe that they are amicable or friendly.

On analysing the responses given by our interviewees we could understand that , self promotion

being an act where individuals try to emphasize over their characteristics , achievement etc , is used as an impression management tool to prove that an individual is of use to the organization (*here*) and in turn this makes them believe that they are being valued and as we draw a linkage between past studies conducted on this parameter it appears that self promotion has always been used to achieve an attribution of confidence and to be seen as competent by individuals .

The above responses clearly explain that because people usually tend to associate themselves with a group of people and in an attempt to avoid embarrassment among the group members a lot of them end up agreeing to things which they are not aware of just because they don't want to be proven incorrect.

Thus with this we can conclude that conformity is a tactic which gets used in the workplace environment to avoid embarrassment.

After an in depth analysis of every parameter we could effectively draw out certain inferences such as 94.9% of individuals at workplace give excuses to manage their impression such as , to get extensions on their deadlines in an attempt to be able to meet their expectations , this proves that when an individual is able to meet his/her expectations it in effectively acts as a psychological booster for them , moving ahead we realised that 100% of the participants used acclaim as a tactic , and majority of them believed that their manager praising somebody for his/her idea in some way or the other motivates the entire team and this acts as a booster for them in the workplace environment . Going ahead with our study we found out that 96 % of them used favours to maintain a good impression at workplace to which about 43% people believed that they offer favours to their colleagues because they want people to know that they are friendly and when people know that you are amicable and someone who can be approached during times uncertain it automatically acts as a psychological booster. Everybody desires to be one such individual that the organization believes is a gem to them and with our study we found out that 98% of the participants use self promotion , and to ensure that a lot of people in the workplace environment used self promotion to ensure the same , participants replied stating “ we use self promotion because we want the organization to know that we are of valuable to them “.

A lot of us believe that falling in compliance to the norms of a particular group or environment that we are associated with is something that helps us satisfy ourselves psychologically that we belong to this group , we are a part of this group and we fit in, our understanding was reinforced when about 40 % of the interviewees replied that they would agree with the other person's opinion just because they don't want to be proven incorrect and some way avoid the embarrassment attached with it , and to our finding almost 100 % of the participants used conformity to manage what people perceive about them in a workplace .

Conclusion

The aim of the study conducted by us was to find out about the impression management tactics that are used by the employees in an organization that act as psychological boosters for them. Psychological boosters are the positive relationships in the workplace that create a good environment and feel-good factor for the employees. Impression management also known as self-presentation is a conscious or a subconscious way in which an individual tries to control how he presents himself in front of other people. We found 5 major tactics that were excuses, acclaim, favours, self-promotion and conformity.

We found out that the most commonly used booster was acclaim with all the employees using it in the organization. Acclaim is applauding/praising someone publicly for the work to show a positive attitude towards them. Acclaim was used by all the employees as a psychological booster in their workplace. Half the people said that when a manager praises a team member for his/her idea, it helps the other members of the team as well to work harder in order to get the appraisal of the manager the next time as all people crave appraisal from their superior and therefore get motivated to do more for the organization to get recognized. Close to half of the interviewees also said that proudly and openly acknowledging somebody for their work helps in boosting their confidence. When someone acknowledges them they feel good about themselves and the work they do hence spreading positive vibes in the workplace.

Another tactic that was used by all the employees was conformity. Conformity is the change in behaviour of a person on the basis of matching your behaviour with others to fit in the social norms of the society. A little less than half the employees think that they conform with others because they think that they might be incorrect and the other person might be correct. This happens because some employees are not entirely sure about the outcome of the activity that they are doing or what they are answering and so they conform with others as they think if they are wrong they will have to face embarrassment. Another close response was that the person respects and admires a person and therefore goes with the decision made by that person.

Excuses was the tactic that was used the least out of all the tactics at 94.9%. Excuse is a reason or explanation that is given to get relieved from a duty or to avoid a possible rebuke. Majority of people who give excuses do it to get an extension for the work that they have in hand so as to achieve a certain level of expectation. If a person takes an extension/makes an excuse the person is able to finish the work hence feeling a sense of accomplishment. Also if a person makes an excuse his relationship with his superior will also stay very good as he will not be the person who is known for not doing the work every time.

Based on the research conducted about 95% of employees use all five impression management

tactics as psychological boosters in their workplace. They do this to create a positive working environment in their workplace and also to make them feel good and motivated to work more. Psychological boosters don't just help the employees it also helps the company to grow as there is a very healthy and happy working environment so the employees work even more efficiently and effectively.

Limitations

The data collected in the study was done in a short amount of time and hence the sample size taken is small. There was very little research done on the selected topic so it was difficult to find and secondary data to complement our research. Future researches can be done across a more culturally diverse workforce, age group, nationalities and geographical locations. It can also be done for other job profiles like sports, media, engineering, sales, etc.

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