BOOK REVIEW

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE: RESEARCH, THEORY AND PRACTICE

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A good comprehensive book is a rare find. If you are searching endlessly for a book that has it all, this is the one that presents every bit about impression management that one must know to get by in today's world of advanced technology where everything is at our finger tips. The content covers from the most basic, that is, the meaning and nature of impression management (Chapter One), to the most complex yet a significant area that deals with the functional and dysfunctional consequences of impression management (Chapter Eleven).

This book sets out to guide readers to "the effective use of impression management, with as many strategies and tactics as feasible based on scholarly research and theory" (p. xv), which emphasises application. It is informative and readable given the simple and smooth presentation yet insightful. Each chapter provides some guidelines for having the positive or the desired impression management and practicing it. Each application is well-thought of given that the guide enables any ordinary person to attempt a constructive self-grooming. Through the theories, readers are guided to embrace a set of recommended techniques by following the suggested practical steps (p. 46) and detail explanation (pp. 47-50 on personality factors

and gender differences, pp. 48-50). Such exposure is a real life need as we continue to engage in possible networking with people around us (be it man or woman) and around the globe (the culturally diverse others) and make sense of things that are communicated between individuals in different contexts. How can we build trust if we do not create that positive impression of us daily at the workplace? If this question keeps spinning in your head, you should attempt to get hold of this book.

The recommended guidelines and practice are thorough and easily adopted if one is determined to portray a good impression of him/herself or "front-stage" performance as the well-known sociologist, Irving Goffman (1959) posited. On this subject, DuBrin (2011) remarked that, "…the most useful point of Goffman's complex analysis is that even seemingly innocuous actions might be aimed at showing a person in a favourable light" (p. 3). DuBrin also refers to Shakespeare's famous play, *As You Like It* where the world is considered a stage, and people are simply players. I find these referents relevant given that we enact various roles in day-to-day living, unconscious perhaps of the impression management we display except for instance, when we want

to impress our boss, attend a job interview or eyeing for a position. DuBrin has indeed provided readers with a well-organised framework for exploring image-making and impression management that demand our attention.

No doubt, the author has a wealth of scholarly experience given his long list of publications. I like the way he skilfully constructs the text that makes you want to read more as you flip through the pages. For sure, we desire to know how much of our daily encounters at the workplace creates such an impression as we read about negative and positive impressions of ourselves; we reflect on how that might (or might not) affect others and vice-versa. This scenario reminds me of our *social self* as argued by Mead (1934) who introduced us to the idea of symbolic interaction. We govern and are governed by our ways of conduct in the world we live in. Indeed, we are humbled by DuBrin's reminder.

This book not only provides the basic features of what makes a good impression management in the workplace but it also exposes the reader to the different realms where impressions are situated. As DuBrin rightly argued, "[w]anting to create a favourable impression on others is a basic part of human nature in both work and personal life" (p. 1).

The book unfolds the different layers of the self and the social expectations of it through an understanding of the origins of the modern study of impression management, and the rationale behind it (Chapter One). It then introduces us to the cybernetic model of impression management in which desired goals and social identities are enacted with feedbacks (Chapter Two). The author then explains the individual differences within an organisational culture which can create negative and positive relations affecting the moral direction of impression management (Chapter Three). Trustworthiness, low and high Machiavellian tendencies and gender differences are explored as the author informs us of how these can influence human interaction thus enhance good (or bad) impression management within an organisation.

The following chapters (Chapters Four and Five) emphasise self presentation and its various approaches; at the superficial and substantive levels. Up to this point, the author reminds us of "the popular taxonomy of impression management" developed by Jones and Pitman which include "self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation and supplication" (p. 60). The much complex subject about self and behaviour has been toned down to a much readable presentation through the easy-to-digest headings, for instance, how to avoid "unfavourable self-presentation" and the importance of "clothing, dress, and appearance" (p. 81). The reader is also informed of the various strategies of managing an impression, for instance, through "enhancement of others" (p. 101). The lesson that I take away here is to make others *feel good* about themselves through our efforts including ingratiation, injecting humour in daily communication and through observing political correctness. Flattery is also discussed but the author cautions us to use it sparingly.

The rest of the chapters expose us to self-protection techniques, job search and performance evaluation tips as well as impression management for leaders and

organisations (Chapter 7-10). The latter offers tips on the importance of building good image and reputation, the need to spin impression management towards projecting a strong positive image of an organisation through its corporate social responsibility. These key factors are discussed at length thus providing useful cues to organisations who want to make a difference to their corporate images while contributing in earnest to the well-being of the public.

This text is largely written with the western workplace in mind. One would have expected some reference to cross-cultural contexts, given the long standing interest in intercultural communication in the works by Brislin (1981), Hofstede (e.g.,2001) and Ting-Toomey (1999). Face saving strategy (Ting-Toomey, 1994) for instance, is one of the important elements (not to be ignored) in the Asian culture. In Malaysia, Asma (e.g.,1996), Smith (2000), Yusoff (2009) and others have touched on the topic, indicating the need for a more inclusive and nuanced treatment of impression management. With increasing globalisation and transborder exchanges, it seems less than instructive to present the workplace as confined to the western Anglo-Saxon world. Surely the Japanese, Chinese and Muslim workplaces have evolved under the influence of both cosmopolitan traits as well as traditional values, so that such concepts as the Alpha personality traits may earn a worker a diametrically opposite worth in the non-Western setting. This imbalance in treatment nonetheless, does not diminish the importance of this volume, at least in offering a useful conceptual framework for examining impression management in all contexts. Indeed the book itself can be used as another illustration of 'worldmaking' or impression management at the global scale. The book concludes with a discussion and summary of successful outcomes such as career advancement, and setbacks in impression management such as emotional labour and distress, followed by a glossary of key terms that a reader can refer to for further understanding. With that said, I strongly recommend any one to read this book to reflect more on our performance in daily situations and to understand how our actions can (or cannot) affect people around us.

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