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THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE – IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES WITHIN EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW

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The presentation of self in the most favorable light is a necessary skill in social life, as regardless the field in which we operate, the impression a person can make on others is an important and sometimes decisive aspect of interpersonal relationships or/and occupational success. The study describes the strategies used by job vacancies candidates within employment interviews and the way this influences the hiring decision, as the job interview is most often the gateway to any company, there is a strong interest manifested by social science researchers.

Keywords: *impression management, self-image, public image, social interactions, presentation, impression management strategies, self presentation.*

PREZENTAREA SINELUI ÎN VIAȚA COTIDIANĂ – STRATEGII DE MANAGEMENT AL IMPRESIILOR ÎN CADRUL INTERVIULUI DE ANGAJARE

Prezentarea propriei persoane într-o lumină cât mai favorabilă reprezintă o abilitate necesară în viața socială, deoarece, indiferent de domeniul în care activăm, impresia pe care o persoană o poate face altora este un aspect important și uneori decisiv în ceea ce privește relațiile interpersonale ori succesul ocupațional. Studiul descrie strategiile utilizate de către candidații la posturile vacante în cadrul interviului de angajare și felul în care acestea din urmă au influențat decizia de angajare, interviul de recrutare fiind, de cele mai multe ori, poarta de acces în cadrul companiilor, studiul domeniului dat fiind de interes extins pentru cercetătorii din domeniul științelor sociale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *managementul impresiilor, prezentarea sinelui, strategii de autoprezentare, imaginea de sine, interacțiuni sociale, imagine publică.*

Introduction

The sociologist Ervin Goffman was the first to see impression management as an objective field of study. He states that impression management refers to how individuals present themselves to others and their activity, how they guide and control the impression they are creating, how individuals promote their performance and abilities [1]. Impression management describes the efforts of an actor to create, maintain, protect, or modify an image held by a target audience [2]. To achieve this goal, actors use a variety of specific impression management behaviors and tactics, such as compliments, designed to create a desired image [3].

Bilbow (1996) describes discursive impression management strategies as "those linguistic, intentional or unintentional linguistic behaviors that create and maintain impressions with or without a conscious purpose." [4, p.406] Impression management is also defined as a "conscious or unconscious attempt to control the images that are projected into social interactions" [5, p.1200]. The motivation to manage the impressions of others about oneself depends on the value that the purpose for the person has and the relevance of the impressions to achieve this goal [6]. Jones (1964) argues that the more favorable the results of a person's actions towards another individual, the more tactic of insinuation will manifest that individual towards that person [7]. It is also expected that other personality factors, such as social anxiety and the need for approval, have an influence on the individual's motivation to engage in managing the impression [8] thus, impression management refers to the activity of individuals deployed to process, evaluate, and control information about an object, an event, or their own self in order to create a more favorable self-image.

As a relatively new research topic in the local context, the study of impression management dimensions is relevant from both, theoretical and empirical points of view. The theoretical significance lies in the need for a comparative analysis of classical and recent studies conducted in various countries in this field. The empirical investigation is particularly interesting from the point of view of the intercultural study of the phenomenon for identifying and comparing the impression management strategies used by individuals in different contexts and interactions in the local environment (interpersonal relationships, workplace, organizational environment or public space - strategies for managing impressions used by politicians, leaders, managers, etc.).

Managing Impressions in the Job Interview

Dipboye (1992) considered the hiring/selection interview one of the most popular procedures used in the selection process. A selection/job interview is defined by Dipboye as "a dialogue initiated by one or more people that aims to gather information and assess the qualifications of an applicant for a vacancy" [9, p.384]. Some researchers choose the term "recruitment interview" to suggest that the interview is "a bilateral process". [10] Despite the fact that after decades of research the validity and fidelity of the employment interview was questioned and some studies have shown that interviews have a low capacity to determine applicant's qualifications and future performance at work [11], employers still want to meet potential employees before hiring, thus, almost in every organization, the interview is the main tool used to make the decision to hire.

When forming impressions about another person, one of the first and most important questions that people seek to answer is whether that person has a morally good or bad character [12]. Even though Berry (1990) states that observers seem to be able to extract the cues required for impressions even from static photographs presented for 10 seconds [13], as well as Ballew & Todorov (2007) and Willis & Todorov (2006) considered that forming opinions about others occurs swiftly, based on minimal cues picked up during first encounters [14], human resources managers and recruiters should be aware of and able to identify impression management strategies through which applicants try to create favorable impressions. Some typical examples of impression management strategies used in the employment interview include verbal self-promotion, non-verbal behavior adjustment through smiling and showing an open body position or adopting the appropriate dress code of the company where the interview takes place. Kristoff-Brown *et al.* [15] found that candidates for vacant positions that are extroverts use more intensive techniques of self-promotion and non-verbal impression management in job interviews.

In this situation, interviewers have a complicated task, in a limited time, to examine the personality profile of applicants using clear and well-defined tools and to identify impression management strategies. Thus, job interviews can be a good study material for identifying impression management strategies as interviewees are aware that the information provide and the way they do this will influence the hiring decision, motivating them to present themselves in the most favorable light, possibly to improve certain aspects of the social self through justifications or explanations.

Our study focuses on the impression management strategies used by candidates in job interviews for different positions within a company, depending on the level of the position (entry – I, middle – II, managerial – III) and activity area. Impression management strategies were analyzed based on verbal speech and non-verbal behavior of candidates during the interview using observations grid and interview recording. A total of 48 semi structured job interviews were conducted; 26 interviews were conducted with female candidates and 22 interviews with male candidates. A total of 15 persons (13 persons for entry level positions and 2 for middle level positions, 7 men and 8 women) were selected for further employment; 22 candidates did not receive job offers (18 candidates for positions of level I (entry) and 4 candidates for level II (middle) positions, 11 men and 11 women); 11 candidates (2 candidates for level III (managerial) positions, 1 candidate for second level positions and 8 candidates for first level positions, 7 women and 4 men) were invited for the second employment interview.

Vacant positions for which job interviews have been conducted differed in terms of skills and knowledge required depending on the activity area and the hierarchical level of the position in the company. Vacant positions for which were organized interviews were for technical, sales, marketing and customer support departments. The purpose of the research was to identify the main impression management strategies used by candidates in job interviews as per Bolino & Kacmar [16] and Elis & West [17] classifications and descriptions of impression management strategies.

Results and discussions

The obtained data show that the accepted candidates used 13 assertive statements and 1-2 defensive statements on average, those who have not received a job offer used 2-3 times less assertive strategies and 2-3 times more defensive strategies.

The refused candidates did not smile and didn't maintain eye contact during the interview, and those who have been invited to a second job interview used on average 10 assertive statements and 2 defensive statements but missed non-verbal behavior impression strategies (Fig.1).

Applicants for highest hierarchical positions used 2 times more assertive statements compared to those from hierarchical levels I and II; candidates hired for technical positions used fewer impression management statements compared to candidates hired on positions involving more contact with the people and customers (sales, customer service, marketing) (Fig.2).

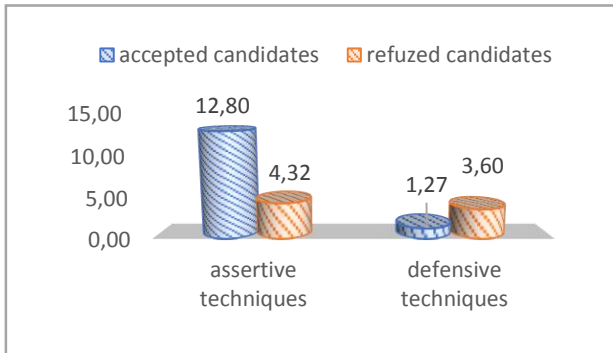


Fig.1. Assertive and defensive impression management strategies used by all candidates.

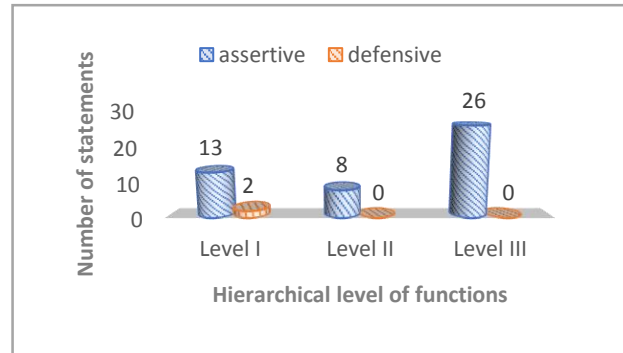


Fig.2. Assertive and defensive impression management strategies used per hierarchical levels.

Considering the obtained results, we find that candidates for higher hierarchical vacant positions use multiple assertive impression management strategies compared to those candidates who applied for entry and middle level vacancies, therefore, candidates who use assertive impression management behaviors will have more chances to receive job offers compared to those candidates who use less assertive impressions management strategies and statements during a job interview.

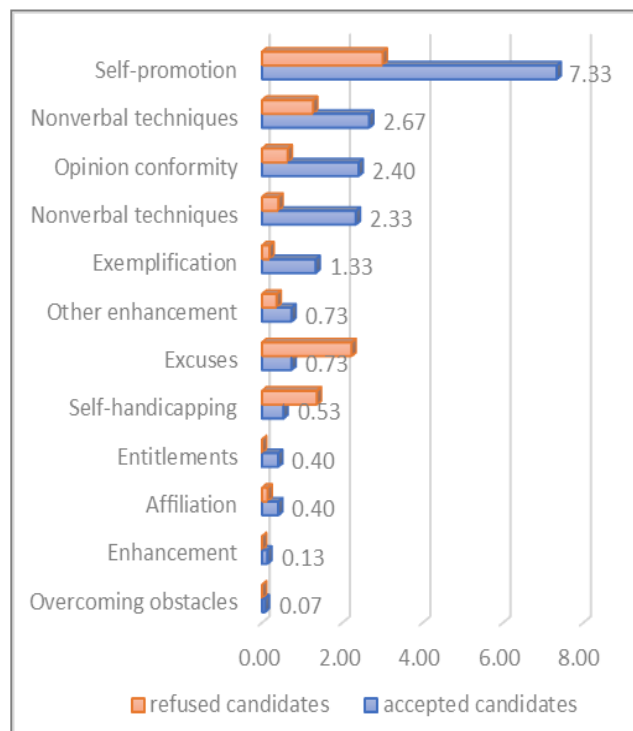


Fig.3. Impression management strategies used by applicants.

Also, candidates that received job offers used strong assertive impression management strategies, such as self-promotion statements, entitlements or exemplification (Fig.3). In their speech, candidates used expressions such as: "I am self-confident, I am result-oriented and want to improve, to learn more, to develop, to perform in what I do", "I am a very responsible, ambitious" - such statements occupy 90% of all the impression

management strategies and statements used by the successful candidates and only 10% were defensive statements, such as: *"I gave up because the quality of the products was bad and I had problems with customers"* or *"I gave up because it's a very high working volume and I basically didn't have time for my personal life"* so they talk about their results, their progress, their abilities and positive characteristics in order to highlight their personality, also, accepted candidates didn't actively used non-verbal techniques, they always smiled, kept eye contact with the interviewer when answered the questions, were interested and asked questions about the vacancy or working conditions in the company, answered promptly and confident to questions.

The refused candidates used almost 3 times less assertive statements and 3 times more defensive statements such as: *"I am very shy, I am afraid to do something new, I am afraid I will not be able to do it"*, *"it is difficult for me to express at the moment because I have emotions"*, *"I don't know what to say, at home I am different, now I have emotions"*. Refused candidates used defensive and assertive strategies equally, were passive in using non-verbal language, didn't smile, often looked down, kept their hands under the table and brought shoulders forward. Also, they didn't show interest in the responsibilities and didn't negotiate the salary.

Candidates coming from within the company, see the interviews as a chance to find out more detailed information about the vacancy - details that external candidates don't ask, such as: availability of training programs: *"is there any training at the beginning? to learn by myself requires time, I would consider the position only if there is training"*. Also, for internal candidates, the interview is a possibility to complain about current working conditions, the interviewers are rather seen as the responsible persons in the company who should know about work-related inconveniences, internal candidates motivate the wish to transfer to another position because at their actual job *"there are some professional issues, because of the boss there nothing will change, there are no opportunities for promotion, it is a very high workload, there is no time for personal life, it is very difficult"* Also, internal applicants make a tradition from to listing the all the transfers and promotions they faced within the company, the important people in the company with whom they have been in contact and their biggest work achievements.

Both internal and external candidates don't forget to mention important persons from the company they know, such as relatives, ex-colleagues, or neighbors, they name of the person they know, or they spoke to before the interview: *"My son works here, my brother-in-law, my brother"*. Also, a common strategy for most entry level positions candidates, is to mention that they are currently clients for this certain company or have been clients in past, and if they aren't clients now it is only because of some external factors that cannot change.

Conclusion

Three decades ago, Gardner and Martinko [18] noted the insufficient attention paid to research that addressed impression management strategies and resorted a wider review of these research. In the years that followed, the researchers intervened to remedy this situation and their efforts helped to enrich our knowledge both at the individual and organizational level and contributed to the introduction of new impression management concepts that were effectively analyzed and implemented both in theoretical and empirical researches in a wide range of interest areas. Through our study, we intend to support the research efforts in the field of impression management strategies and to identify the features that characterize impression strategies in the local context.

Based on the obtained results, we identified that impression management strategies are an important factor that contributes to interviewers' assessments in employment interviews context. We have achieved a significant difference between the number of assertive statements used by candidates who were hired and candidates who were perceived as insufficiently qualified or inappropriate for the vacant position to which they are applied. We also identified that, depending on the activity area, candidates use a different number of impression management statements, so candidates for the vacant positions in the technical field refer to fewer statements than those in the sales or customer support areas. Also, candidates for vacant positions in marketing and public relations, used twice more assertive impression management strategies than those in customer support and sales areas.

Defensive impression management strategies are likely to disadvantage candidates for vacancies, perhaps this defensive position is perceived as the incapacity of the person to deal with the tasks or activities confronting them both in the professional and personal environment, and as every employer wishes an employee who will bring profit and success to the company, those candidates who show poor results at the

interview will be perceived as poorer employees, not very prospective and considered that will not perform and in their professional activity.

It should be mentioned that not only verbal speech is able to influence interviewer's perception about the candidate, the non-verbal body language and the way of sending the message from the source also contributes to the formation of the impression and the evaluation of the candidate, this fact was well noticed to candidates who, even if, during the interview engaged in assertive discursive strategies, however they were not quite convincing because their non-verbal behavior was inconsistent with their speech, so these candidates were invited for the second job interview in order to convince the interviewers that they fit to the position.

According to this certain study, we can say that having impression management skills will significantly increase the chances of a candidate to get a job offer, still candidates experience and knowledge is not less important in order to be successful for a job interview and impression management strategies come to help the candidate to demonstrate their professionalism.

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