Impression Management and Cross-Cultural Adaption

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ABSTRACT. The relationship between impression management and cross-cultural adaptation was assessed. A sample of 112 individuals, 35 employees of a U.S.-based corporation and 77 undergraduate students, completed a packet of questionnaires containing M. Snyder's (1974) Self-Monitoring Scale, the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (D. L. Paulhus, 1988), the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (J. Meyers & C. Kelley, 1992), and the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory (T. M. Yellen & S. J. Mumford, 1975). The individuals' scores on two impression management measures (the Self-Monitoring Scale and the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding) were found to be significantly correlated with responses on two cross-cultural adaptability measures (the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory and the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory). The results suggest that impression management tendencies may be related to the ability to adapt cross-culturally.

THE PRESENCE OF A WORLD ECONOMY has forced individuals and groups representing various organizations, historically foreign to each other in terms of language, norms, and culture, to interact actively and communicate with each other to conduct business. These interactions are difficult, often because of ignorance of cultural standards and basic cultural aspects of routine communication. For expatriate business managers, successful interpersonal relations are thwarted through miscommunication, misperception, and misevaluation by both parties to

the interaction (Giacalone & Beard, 1994). Unsuccessful interpersonal relations strain communication between unfamiliar organizations and arouse personal suspicions between expatriates and foreign nationals. Communication impediments can pervade every facet of life for expatriates and their families, producing unhappiness in their current surroundings and hindering adjustment to the host country and its culture. As a result, expatriates can become inefficient or unproductive in the workplace, resulting in diminished career progress, psychological stress, damage to the reputation of the expatriates and their employers, and ultimately expatriate failure. Estimates have shown that between 16% and 40% of all expatriates who are sent overseas return home prematurely because of poor performance or their inability to adjust to the foreign environment (Baker & Ivancevich, 1971; Black, 1988; Dunbar & Ehrlich, 1986; Tung, 1981). The price of failure in foreign assignments can be steep financially as well as personally, ranging from $50,000 to $150,000 per failure (Copeland & Griggs, 1985; Harris & Moran, 1979; Misa & Fabricatore, 1979).

The ability to adapt to cross-cultural lifestyles and environments appears to be at the center of successful foreign assignments (Adler, 1991; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Samovar, Porter, & Jain, 1981). The communication skills of the expatriate play a major role in successful adaptation (Gudykunst, Wiseman, & Hammer, 1977; Ruben & Kealey, 1979), with effective communication skills such as listening, controlling verbal and nonverbal cues, and feedback contributing to culturally appropriate behavior and adjustment to the foreign culture. The adaptation ability, therefore, would appear to be predicated on skills, abilities, predispositions, and traits that an individual possesses prior to becoming an expatriate.

Impression management theory offers a cognitive and interpersonal framework within which to understand how individuals' abilities and predispositions prior to leaving their home country may affect expatriate adaptation via the controllability of communication (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995; Schneider, 1981). The theory posits that a basic motive of individuals, both inside and outside organizations, is to be viewed by others in a favorable manner (Goffman, 1959). Employer–employee and employee–client relationships provide the impetus for the management of impressions as a means of obtaining certain outcomes such as recognition, praise, acceptance, and profit (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989, 1991). Research has shown that effective impression management is a necessity in workplaces throughout the world (Rosenfeld et al.,1995) and can affect career progression (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989, 1991). The extent to which such behaviors are consciously or unconsciously activated or directed toward an internal or external audience has been a source of debate within the impression management literature (Giacalone & Beard, 1994). Some view impression management as a means for gaining social power through conscious and active manipulations of social interactions (Tedeschi, 1981; Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971), whereas others believe that impression manage-

ment behaviors are more automatic processes through which people facilitate interaction (Goffman, 1959).

Giacalone and Beard (1994) noted that the way impressions are established is essential for understanding expatriate failure. Cross-cultural communication problems that bring about expatriate failure may reflect an inability to create appropriate impressions on people. Often these impressions are interpreted by foreigners as an attitude toward a group or culture, making some problems of poor expatriate acculturation a reflection of the expatriate's inability to proffer culturally acceptable images. Giacalone and Beard hypothesized that individuals who, because of abilities or predispositions that predate their expatriation, are better able to identify, attend to, and control the impressions they make on others would be able to acculturate more effectively. Because they are able to create the impression that they are acting in a more culturally consistent manner, they are seen as more acceptable to members of the host culture, thereby facilitating acculturation. In part, this behavior facilitates interactions and creates a more satisfying experience for the expatriates and their foreign counterparts.

Undoubtedly, the processes and components particular to cross-cultural adaptation (Anderson, 1994; Black, 1988; Black & Gregerson, 1991; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Kealey, 1990; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Torbiorn, 1982; Tung, 1981, 1982; Ward & Kennedy, 1994) may involve more than impression management-related factors. However, the ability to manage impressions in one's home country can have a direct, positive effect on the ability to manage impressions and successfully adapt to new surroundings. Such people, already proficient or predisposed toward portraying themselves appropriately, may be better able and willing to read new cultural cues (Snyder, 1974) and modify their behavior accordingly. Conversely, individuals who are unable or unwilling to manage the appropriate demeanor to foreign customs and norms may give the impression of disrespect for the society. The secret to managing the "right" impressions abroad is knowing both what the "right" impressions are as well as actively incorporating those verbal and nonverbal behaviors in a manner consistent with cultural norms. Making the proper impression does not rely on the use of effective impression management techniques alone, but also on the ability and motivation to use the techniques in the service of facilitating the overall cross-cultural adaptation process (Giacalone & Beard, 1994; Rosenfeld et al., 1995).

Viewed as a measure of impression management, self-monitoring is an ability to consciously observe and regulate behaviors (Snyder, 1974, 1979). This ability to control self-presentational behaviors varies considerably among individuals, with some (known as *high self-monitors*) able to change their attitudes and behaviors according to the environment in which they find themselves. Others, who are less attentive to situational cues and who behave more consistently with their actual feelings and beliefs, are known as *low self-monitors*. Snyder's

(1974) Self-Monitoring Scale and the Self-Monitoring Scale derived by Briggs, Cheek, and Buss (1980; extraversion, other-directedness, and acting subscales) are measures for determining impression management ability, and scores on these scales may provide good indicators of those expatriates who will be effective in overseas assignments because of their ability to make the "correct" impressions on their foreign colleagues (Giacalone & Beard, 1994).

Still, self-monitoring represents but one aspect of impression management and more closely resembles a view of impression management as an insincere and hypocritical method for presenting temporary, spurious personality portraits for personal gain (Tedeschi, 1981). This perspective argues that self-monitoring is directed toward an external audience who can provide rewards. Thus, expatriates modify their behaviors to maximize career goals or facilitate their interactions with foreigners. Some researchers (Paulhus, 1984, 1988), however, have noted that individuals also may manage impressions less consciously and for an internal audience. The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1988) measures two constructs: self-deceptive enhancement (the tendency to give self-reports that are honest but positively biased) and impression management (deliberate self-presentation to an audience). Whereas individuals who score high on the impression management subscale of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding manage their impressions to an outside audience, those who score high on the self-deceptive enhancement items actually believe their overly positive self-reports (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 108), because of a lack of insight, a lack of touch with reality, or a tendency toward self-centeredness.

Much as the Self-Monitoring Scale and Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding provide measures of impression management proclivity, the cross-cultural literature has developed measures that can be administered to individuals in an attempt to predict cross-cultural adaptation as expatriates. The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (Meyers & Kelley, 1992), is designed for personal use, providing feedback regarding an individual's ability to adapt cross-culturally prior to actually going abroad. This inventory, consisting of four subscales, measures emotional resilience (self-regulation of emotions and equilibrium in a new or changing environment), flexibility–openness (enjoyment of different ways of thinking and behaving), perceptual acuity (attention to and accurate detection of various aspects of the environment), and personal autonomy (a personal system of values and beliefs and comfort with them).

A second cross-cultural measure, the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory (Yellen & Mumford, 1975), differs from the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (in its intended use), because the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory is designed as an instrument to select prospective overseas personnel. It consists of seven subscales: Sociability (congeniality or affability), Empathy (compassion or sensitivity to others), Intellectual Curiosity (inquisitiveness), Patience (diligence and persistence in activities), Adaptability (easy-going or accommodating in temperament), Acceptance (tolerance of others), and Morality (principled beliefs).

Present Study

If, as Giacalone and Beard (1994) have posited, a relationship exists between cross-cultural adaptation and impression management, objective measures of impression management ability (such as the Self-Monitoring Scale and Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding) in one's native environment should be predictive of cross-cultural adaption measures. Theoretically, a positive relationship should exist so that a higher ability or propensity to manage impressions should predict aspects of expatriate acculturation measured in the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory and the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory. No empirical studies have provided evidence of such a correlation; hence the present study examined this relationship. We investigated whether impression management (as measured by the Self-Monitoring Scale and Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding) is related to both a cross-cultural adaptation self-assessment measure (Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory) and a cross-cultural adaptation measure (Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory) intended as a selection procedure. Our aim was to determine whether (a) there was a correlation between the overall scores for cross-cultural and impression management measures, (b) overall impression management scores were predictive of overall cross-cultural scores, and (c) subscores of impression management and cross-cultural measures would load on the same or different factors.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 112 individuals: employees from United States based international corporations ($n = 35$) and undergraduate students enrolled in an international management course ($n = 77$).

Procedure

Participants were told that they would be participating in a psychology study on international management behaviors and were given a packet of questionnaires containing Snyder's (1974) Self-Monitoring Scale, Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding, Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory, and Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory. They were asked to read and sign a consent form and then complete the questionnaires. On completion, they returned the questionnaires to the experimenter. Responses were not identified by participants' name or other means, and the participants were assured that their responses were confidential.

We scored responses to the Self-Monitoring Scale and Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding according to the method used by the authors of the scales (Paulhus, 1988; Snyder, 1974). The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory

and Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory were likewise scored according to the method provided by the authors (Meyers & Kelley, 1992; Yellen & Mumford, 1975).

Results

Regression Analyses

The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding was the only measure that was correlated significantly with both cross-cultural measures. In particular, the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding was significantly correlated with the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory, $r(1, 96) = .2286$, $p < .05$, and to a greater degree with the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory, $r(1, 96) = .3034$, $p < .01$. The results suggested that impression management, as measured by the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding, was moderately related to cross-cultural responses. The Self-Monitoring Scale was not significantly correlated with either cross-cultural measure. Additional analyses of the Self-Monitoring Scale revealed no significant results ($p > .05$).

To test whether the correlation of responses on the impression management scale items would be greater with the cross-cultural selection measure (the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory) than with the cross-cultural self-selection measure (the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory), we performed a univariate regression analysis. The results showed that the impression management scale significantly predicted the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory ($r = .3075$, $p < .01$) scores as well as Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory scores, though with less variance explained ($r = .2117$, $p < .05$).

Regression analyses were performed to determine whether the self-deceptive enhancement scale would be less correlated than the impression management scale on both cross-cultural measures. The self-deceptive enhancement scale was more highly correlated with the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory ($r = .2935$, $p < .01$) than with the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory ($r = .0413$, $p > .05$), but the reverse was true for the impression management scale. The impression management scale was more strongly correlated with the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory ($r = .3075$, $p < .01$) than with the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory ($r = .2117$, $p < .05$).

Although the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding was correlated significantly with both cross-cultural measures, a more complex pattern emerged from a regression analysis. Whereas the impression management scale significantly correlated with both the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory and Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory, a stepwise procedure showed that the impression management scale accounted for approximately 11% of the variance in the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory, $F(1, 96) = 12.0204$, $p < .01$, and a non-significant portion of the variance in the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory.

The self-deceptive enhancement scale, however, was significantly predictive only of the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory, accounting for approximately 10% of the variance of the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory, $F(1, 96) = 11.1124$, $p < .01$. This suggested that the impression management scale was the only significant predictor of the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory, whereas the self-deceptive enhancement scale was the only significant predictor of the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory.

Factor Analysis

To determine whether the diverse subscales of impression management and cross-cultural measures loaded onto the same factors, we conducted a factor analysis with varimax rotation using all of the impression management and cross-cultural subscales. This analysis produced four factors that accounted for 65.3% of the variance. The first factor to emerge, labeled *Openness* because it addressed a general sensitivity to others, consisted of the intellectual curiosity, flexibility–openness, empathy, acceptance, sociability, adaptability, personal acuity, emotional resilience, and morality subscales. The second factor, labeled *Impression Management Activity*, included the extraversion and acting subscales of the Self-Monitoring Scale. The third factor was labeled *Self-Oriented Impression Management* because the self-deceptive enhancement scale and impression management scale (loading positively) as well as the negative loading of the other-directedness subscale reflected a concern with self or self-gain. The fourth and final factor that emerged was labeled *Reaction to Personal Constraint* because the subscales focused on personal impact factors, consisting of the personal autonomy (loading positively) and patience (loading negatively) subscales. Table 1 summarizes the factor loadings.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to determine whether the hypothesized relationship between impression management ability–use and cross-cultural adaptation could be empirically determined by using measures of both concepts. Overall, the results provided some support for this hypothesized relationship. Because both impression management and self-deceptive enhancement were predictive of one of the cross-cultural measures, it appears that impression management was operative in cross-cultural adaptation measures.

The question remains as to whether the relationship is one that assists in the prediction of adaptation to foreign societies, or whether it is a case of impression management biasing cross-cultural assessment (see Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1991). Because the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory is designed to be used by organizations to select employees who fit the profile of successful adjusters, one might expect respondents to intentionally answer in ways they believe create

TABLE 1
Varimax Rotated Factor Loadings and Eigenvalues for All Subscales

Factor and subscale	Eigenvalue	Cumulative variance (%)	Loading
Openness	5.38447	33.7	
Intellectual Curiosity			.86545
Flexibility–Openness			.85200
Empathy			.79099
Acceptance			.78532
Sociability			.73624
Adaptability			.68220
Personal Acuity			.67994
Emotional Resilience			.56387
Morality			.51903
Impression Management Activity	2.16499	47.2	
Extraversion			.84468
Acting			.83999
Self-Oriented Impression Management	1.70497	57.8	
Self-Deceptive Enhancement			.73608
Other Directedness			−.63079
Impression Management			.53670
Reaction to Constraint	1.19138	65.3	
Personal Autonomy			.67828
Patience			−.65911

favorable impressions on those doing the selecting; indeed, this seems to be the case. The direction of significant relationships suggests that successful adaptation to foreign environments was related to impression management ability. A surface reading of the data indicates that high impression managers may augment their responses more on the selection instrument than on the self-selection instrument because they know others will view their responses. However, because participants completed questionnaires knowing that their responses were for research purposes alone (and hence, had no bearing on them), the differential goals of the cross-cultural measures (selection vs. self-assessment) should have had no relationship to impression management based bias. These distinct differences could be due to the susceptibility of the instrument itself to general impression management concerns, ultimately leading to biased responding.

Because impression management and cross-cultural measures loaded onto different factors, the presence of four factors suggests that the impression management instruments used in this study were measuring two different concepts. The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory and Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory assess a general concept called *Openness* and to a lesser extent, a concept

called *Reaction to Constraint*. The results suggest that the cross-cultural adaptation and impression management subscales are tapping into distinct concepts; however, the results of the regression analyses do indicate a moderately predictive relationship. Together, the results point to the need for further inquiry into whether the statistical significance reflects impression management prediction of cross-cultural adaptation or whether impression management is a measurement contaminant often seen in impression management studies (see Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1991). Moreover, if impression management is predictive of adaptation, such measures alone could not be used, because the predictive power of both the impression management scale and self-deceptive enhancement scale in terms of the Cross-Cultural Interaction Inventory and Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory is moderate, though significant. Researchers should determine whether impression management and cross-cultural adaptation measures, when used in conjunction, provide greater predictive utility to practitioners.

Overall, the results suggest that impression management was related to cross-cultural adaptation predictors. Inherent limitations to this exploratory study certainly would preclude any further definitive conclusions. Future studies, which focus on a field sample of workers and their families going abroad, should be conducted to capitalize on their realistic concerns for choosing to move, stay, and succeed abroad. Such studies might follow these individuals longitudinally and determine whether the impression management measures can predict length of stay, quality of the international experience, productivity, or satisfaction. Thus, whether impression management is a predictor of the ability to function and perform effectively cross-culturally remains to be examined.

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