

Effectiveness Of Impression Management In Improving Work Experiences Of Casual Workers

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of impression management in improving the work experiences of casual workers in a global organisation in Zimbabwe. This exploratory qualitative study involved twelve research participants who ranged in terms of age, gender, length of service and academic qualifications. Data from casual workers at the case global organization in Zimbabwe was gathered through face to face, semi-structured interviews. The majority of casual workers at the global firm in Zimbabwe reported better work experiences as a result of impression management. The study also found that impression management improves the job security of casual workers through contract renewals, promotions, and positive performance evaluations from supervisors. On the other hand, the study found that impression management is to some extent ineffective in improving the work experience of casual workers at the global organisation in Zimbabwe. Research participants in this regard, blamed impression management for problems related to overwork, emotional exhaustion, and poor image. In general, it can be argued that impression management works well to enhance the work experiences of casual workers at the case global company in Zimbabwe. The current study recommends that casual workers should be aware of when and how often they should manage their impressions and recognize under which situations it is most appropriate to do so. The study also recommends that managers should encourage their employees to manage impressions based on their genuine competencies that will benefit the organisation.

Keywords: experiences, impressions, impression management, casual worker, work.

JEL Classification: J33, J41, M10, O15

INTRODUCTION

Most non-standard workers have an innate desire to behave well and present a favourable image in the workplace, regardless of the precarious nature of their employment contracts (Johansson et al., 2023; Darmanto & Widhianto, 2023; Gonzo, 2022; Shin & Hur, 2021; Chen & Fang, 2008). Mor et al. (2023) assume that casual workers employ impression management tactics due to uncertainties associated with atypical forms of work. Moon et al. (2023) also believe that atypical workers use impression management tactics to cope with the uncertainties associated with the nature of their employment contracts. Furthermore, Bourdage et al. (2022) states that workers tend to be more optimistic about impression management if they believe that it reduces the likelihood of unfavorable employment actions and may even have an impact on the actual likelihood of losing their job. Similarly, Barry and Watson (2022) contend that casual workers often use impression management strategies to influence managers through their words and/or actions. A number of authors describe impression management as a social influence strategy used by employees that influences performance evaluations (Yu et al., 2023; Al-Shatti et al, 2021), employee selection outcomes (Moon, 2023), pay increases (Myers et al., 2021; Bartol & Martin, 2019) and promotions (Langer et al., 2020; McFarland et al.,

2023; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2018). Langer et al. (2020) also argue that workers manage impressions to appear as an important resource in the organisation. However, some studies

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have found that there are a lot of costs associated with impression management (Myers et al., 2021; Bartol & Martin, 2019; Klotz, 2018). Myers et al. (2021) argue that employees who frequently exhibit impression management behaviours feel pressured to deviate from their self-desired functioning. Some scholars have linked impression management with unfavourable consequences for workers, including social anxiety, concern about receiving a poor performance review, low self-esteem, and fear of failure (Schlenker & Leary, 2022; Leary, Kowalski & Campbell, 2021). In addition, several authors linked impression management to a range of detrimental states, including exhaustion, burnout, and stress (Klotz, 2018; Langer et al., 2020; McFarland et al., 2023). Despite the fact that researches on impression management has progressed rapidly (Vijayabanu & Therasa, 2021; Vale, 2019; Judge, & Ferris, 2020; Dondolo & Chinyamurindi, 2018), little is known about the effectiveness of impression management in enhancing work experiences of casual workers in the context of global south. The objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of impression management in enhancing work experiences of casual workers at a global organisation in Zimbabwe. The research question of the study is classified as follows:

a. How effective is impression management in improving your work experience?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impression management theories, techniques of managing impression, and challenges in managing impressions are covered in this section.

Social Power Theory

According to the Social power theory, employees with more experience of using impression management strategies have better outcomes compared to those with less experience. It was also assumed by the social power theory that impression management effectiveness can be greatly influenced by actor/influencer's personal characteristics. Political aptitude was also found to be a crucial human characteristic that affects how well impression management techniques work. Political aptitude is the capacity of an employee to understand others and successfully manage environment (Mulawkar, 2013; French, 2012). Furthermore, Levy et al. (2018) argue that those with higher political skill levels are able to create more positive impressions than those with lower ability levels.

Compensatory Control Model

The fundamental tenet of Hockey's (1997) Compensatory control model is that workers try to cope with situations which are demanding or impose job insecurity. According to Hockey (1997), impression management behavior is one resource that might be utilized to meet organizational demands. In this situation, actively controlling impressions within the organization could be utilized to gain social support and accomplish financial objectives (Hockey, 1997). The Compensatory control model further postulates that active coping may result in stress and a decline in wellbeing, and that it is also linked to costs related to physical and psychological (fatigue). Carlson (2016), who contends that maintaining a positive impression over time can lead to pressure to live up to unrealistic expectations, has similar opinions.

Impression Management

The term "impression management" refers to an individual's attempts to establish, preserve, safeguard, or modify an image that a target audience holds (Yarmaci et al., 2022). This definition encompasses the creation of a new, desired image as well as the upkeep and protection of an existing one (Bolino et al., 2016). Several authors define impression management as actions taken by workers to influence their perceptions by managers and other employees (Yarmaci et al., 2022; Bozeman & Kacmar, 2019). The

goal of impression management is to either preserve and enhance an existing image or attempt to establish a new, desirable one (Bolino, 2016). Employees may purposefully work

to foster a specific image as part of a conscious and planned impression-making process (Myers et al., 2021); nonetheless, impression management can also be automatic or habitual (Mor et al., 2023).

Motives for Impression Management

The expectancy theory's underlying presumptions are connected to the reasons behind impression management. According to the expectation theory, workers practice impression management if they think doing so will result in a benefit like a good performance assessment (Wayne, 2023; Cheung, 2022). Impression management endeavors are unlikely; nonetheless, if employees believe their supervisor has an objective performance metric used as the basis for performance reviews (Cheung, 2022) Furthermore, Grant et al., (2019) state that the target's reaction to the actor's simulated conduct determines the success of managing impressions. It is uncommon that an actor will use impression management actions if they know that the supervisor will not consider them when evaluating performance (Bolino et al., 2018; Crant, 2019; Leary et al., 2019; Pounders et al., 2019; Mayer, 2019; Stowers, 2016). Harold (2020) posits that impression management typically happens when someone has a specific objective in mind and is thinking about how their projected image will affect that aim. The drive to maximize rewards while minimizing punishment may be a major driving force behind controlling others' perceptions (Adame & Bisel, 2016; Chen & Fang, 2018; Leary & Kowalski, 2018). By more consistently matching their public selves with their ideal selves, people may also wish to control impression in order to forge public identities (Leary & Kowalski, 2018).

Impression Management Tactics

Bolino (2016) identified five tactics of managing impressions namely self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation, and supplication. Other researchers divided the five tactics of managing impressions into assertive and defensive forms of impression management (Deshon et al., 2020; Paolilo, 2019). Self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification are the assertive forms linked to behaviors initiated by the actor (Bolino, 2018). Bolino (2018) describes self-promotion as an act of communicating one's accomplishments and abilities in an effort to appear competent. Exemplification is the act of going above and beyond what is required to come off as devoted or superior (Varela, 2016). Ingratiation is demonstrated by doing favors and utilizing flattery (Gardner, 2019). Table 1 below shows impression management tactics and category of behavior exhibited.

Table 1: Type of impression management and category of behavior

Type of impression management	Category of behavior
Self promotion	-Highlighting accomplishments
Ingratiation	-Flattering others - Opinion conformity - render favors to a target
Exemplification	-Appear to be model worker
Intimidation	-Aggression to be feared
Supplication	-Appear needy

Source: Authors' fieldwork

Implications of Impression Management

Employees may experience both benefits and costs related to impression management.

Impression management influences a positive performance evaluation which lowers an employee's sense of job insecurity (Kriska et al., 2018). A study by Proost et al., (2019) found that employees who use ingratiation in addition to self-promotion have a better chance of getting employment compared to those who merely utilize ingratiation. Another study by Daniels (2020) found that impression management can result in favorable performance evaluations and employment acquisition. Sharing the same sentiments is Bolino et al., (2018), who claim that impression management is connected to organizational decisions including staff appointments, promotions, and supervisor-subordinate likeability. More recently, Ryan (2018) found that impression management through ingratiation is effective in influencing performance ratings in the short run and is not sustainable in the long run.

Although several authors have pointed out the possible benefits of impression management, Ashford and Cummings' (2019) research revealed that employees who use impression management bear costs such as stress, mental fatigue, and image slickness. Kriska (2018) argues that employees who manage their impressions frequently go through more stress than those who do so infrequently. Bolino et al., (2018) define stress as emotion experienced by an individual who must adjust their behavior at work from their preferred or typical pattern due to opportunities, limitations, or obligations. Emotional tiredness is another condition associated with impression management that is linked to burnout and mental exhaustion (Raymark, 2017). Some studies have linked impression management to unfavorable employee outcomes, including social anxiety, weariness, depression, worry of receiving a poor review, low self-esteem, and failure-related fear (Schlenker & Leary, 2018; Leary et al., 2019). In a similar vein, Klotz (2014) contends that having to control one's emotions in line with expectations can be taxing and is thus regarded as stressful. Additionally, Berman (2014) argues that managing one's image through different impression management practices can be risky and result in the self-promoter's dilemma.

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy

Korstjens (2017) define research philosophy as the entire set of principles, values, and measures that direct research activities. Creswell (2018) states that interpretivist research paradigm helps researchers to understand reality by utilizing participant perspectives, their distinct histories, and their experiences. The interpretivist approach was chosen by the researchers because it made it easier to explore the accounts of casual workers at the case global organisation in Zimbabwe regarding the effectiveness of impression management.

Research Approach

To conduct this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. Qualitative research, according to Sutton and Austin (2015), allows the researcher to comprehend the feelings and thoughts of research participants. The use of a qualitative research approach helped the researchers to comprehend how research participants felt about the effectiveness of impression management in improving their work experiences.

Research Setting

The study was carried out in Zimbabwe at a global organisation. The organization hires people from different places and provinces making it a multiethnic workplace. Research participants were drawn from engineering, production, and marketing departments because these departments are known for utilizing a majority of casual workers. The aforementioned departments gave research participants the experience needed to respond to the study's research question.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Study participants were chosen from a global organisation in Zimbabwe using a purposive

sampling technique. Purposive sampling method allowed the researchers to select participants who had the appropriate experience of the issue under study. Babbie (2007) argues that a smaller sample size is always preferable for qualitative studies. As a result, I chose twelve research participants from the case global firm in Zimbabwe.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the researchers followed the six steps of thematic data analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). A number of qualitative data analysis softwares like Atlas Ti, NVivo and NUD*IST were available. NVivo was used during the thematic analysis phase.

Quality Assurance

Researchers used the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to make sure the research quality is maintained. The researchers ensured credibility through extended interaction with the research participants. The data saturation principle was used to calculate sample size in order to ensure transferability. Thick description of the research process and reflexivity were observed to ensure dependability and confirmability respectively.

Ethical Considerations

Observing ethical guidelines is crucial when conducting research. Table 2 shows ways used by the researchers to observe ethical standards.

Table 2: Ethical consideration

Ethical standards	Strategies used
Informed consent	-Full consent from research participants was obtained
Confidentiality and Anonymity	-Pseudonym were assigned to each research participants
Participation	-Research participants were not forced to participate in the research -Participation in the research was voluntary
Potential for harm	-The researchers made sure that the research poses no harm to the participants

Source: Authors' fieldwork

Profiles of Research Participants

The letter "RP" was used as pseudonym for research participants who participated in the study. Research participants' profiles are summarized below.

Table 3: Participants' profiles

No.	Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Experience	Highest Qualification	Interview time
1	RP1	19	M	4months	O level certificate	11mins
2	RP2	27	M	25months	Diploma	17mins
3	RP3	21	F	9months	A level certificate	12mins
4	RP4	24	M	13months	Diploma	10mins
5	RP5	19	F	7months	O level certificate	9mins

6	RP6	30	M	23months	Bachelor's degree	15mins
7	RP7	29	M	36months	Diploma	18mins
8	RP8	33	M	31months	Bachelor's degree	22mins
9	RP9	21	F	9months	O level certificate	12mins
10	RP10	20	F	12months	A level certificate	9mins
11	RP11	27	F	14months	Diploma	16mins
12	RP12	28	M	18months	Diploma	13mins

Source: Primary data

FINDING

The study's findings relate to research question of the study set out below:

- How effective is impression management in improving your work experience?

After thematic data analysis, two broad themes emerged as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
Effective	-Contract renewal -Being promoted and getting full-time job offer -Higher supervisor performance ratings
Ineffective	-Emotional exhaustion -Image slippery -Over working

Source: Primary data

Table 4 above shows subthemes that emerged during data analysis namely contract renewal, being promoted and getting full-time job, higher supervisor performance rating, emotional exhaustion, image slippery and over working. The researchers categorized sub-themes into effective and ineffective themes.

Data Frequency

The study's findings show eight research participants (n=8) indicated that impression management is effective in enhancing their experiences. However, four research participants (n=4) expressed that impression management do more harm than good when it comes to their work experiences. Table 5 below shows themes and their frequency.

Table 5: Data Frequency

Themes	Frequency
Effective	8
Ineffective	4

Source: Author's fieldwork

Theme 1: Impression Management is Effective in Improving Work Experience.

A majority of the research participants indicated that impression management improved their work experience at the case global firm in Zimbabwe. Table 6 below shows research participants' responses.

Table 6: Participants' quotes on effectiveness of impression management

Pseudonym	Quotes
RP1	'Pretending to be competent at work guarantees you contract renewal'
RP3	'If you a luck you can be promoted once you play your impression management cards properly'
RP4	'If you impress your supervisors, they can give you a permanent job.'
RP5	'Managing your image, behavior and working hard are the effective strategies to get positive performance ratings during performance evaluations'
RP6	'Basa unopihwa kakawanda ukangoratidza kuti wakamuka muka pama boss ako (If you pretend to be competent and realiable, they reward you with contract renewal)'
RP8	'Contract renewal and permanent job offers are for those who pretend to be competent and jacked up.'
RP10	'Impression management is effective in the sense that you can get positive performance evaluation and contract renewal'
RP11	'For us, impression management is effective. I try my level best to appear good and smart in front of my bosses, As I speak; my supervisor extended my contract with four months'

Source: Author's fieldwork

Theme 2: Impression Management is Ineffective in Improving Work Experiences.

The study's findings show that four of the twelve research participants indicated that impression management is ineffective in improving their lived work experiences at the transnational firm in Zimbabwe. Their related quotes are presented below.

- "Trying to portray good image behavior and impressing supervisors can lead to emotional exhaustion." (RP2);
- "Failure to portray the needed image can lead to image slippery which can lead to limited contract renewal, emotional exhaustion and high stress levels." (RP7);
- "If you want to appear to be hard-working, there is a risk of overworking yourself which is detrimental to your well being." (RP9);and
- 'Impression management if not properly managed can lead to overworking in order to impress supervisors.' (RP12).

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The goal of this study was to explore the effectiveness of impression management in improving work experiences of casual workers at the case global firm in Zimbabwe. Two themes emerged from the research participants' responses: effective and ineffective. The most mentioned theme was effective (contract renewal, obtaining a permanent job and promotion, higher supervisor performance ratings). Nevertheless, a few research participants disclosed that impression management did not enhance their experiences relating to their jobs. The sub-themes identified by participants under ineffective theme include emotional exhaustion, image slippery and over working. The following section discusses sub-themes that emerged from the study.

Contract Renewal

The study's findings show that impression management is effective in fostering contract

extension among casual workers at the case global firm in Zimbabwe. Hence, RP8 remarked: “Contract renewal and permanent job offers are for those who pretend to be competent and jacked up”. The Social power theory seconds the above mentioned issues and assumes that employees with more experience of using impression management tactics are more likely to have better outcomes such as contract renewal than those with less experience. Sharing the same sentiments, a study by Proost et al., (2019) found that employees who use ingratiation in addition to self-promotion have a higher chance of getting a contract renewal than those who merely utilize ingratiation.

Being Promoted and Landing a Full-Time Job

A number of research participants indicated that impression management results in promotions and landing a full-time job. In this regard, RP4 stated; ‘If you impress your supervisors, they can give you a permanent job’. Supporting the above viewpoints is Bolino et al., (2018), who claim that impression management is connected to organizational decisions including staff appointments, and promotions. Similarly, number of authors describe impression management as a social influence strategy used by workers which influence employee selection outcomes (Moon, 2023), pay increases (Myers et al., 2021; Bartol & Martin, 2019), and promotions (Langer et al., 2020; McFarland et al., 2023; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2018).

Higher Supervisor Performance Ratings

Some participants indicated that impression management is effective in influencing positive supervisor performance evaluations. These participants indicated that positive supervisor performance ratings are used for promotion and contract extensions. Supporting the above viewpoints is RP5, who has this to say; ‘Managing your image, behavior and working hard are the effective strategies to get positive performance ratings during performance evaluations’. The perspectives of RP5 are in line with the expectancy theory. The expectancy theory assumes that employees are more likely to practice impression management if they think doing so will result in a benefit like a good performance assessment (Wayne, 2023; Cheung, 2022). In addition, a study by Daniels (2020) found that impression management can result in favorable performance evaluations and employment acquisition.

Risk of Emotional Exhaustion and Image Slippery

Impression management is linked to emotional exhaustion; hence, some other research participants asserted that impression management is not effective in improving their work experiences. In this regard, RP2 said: “Trying to portray good image behavior and impressing supervisors can lead to emotional exhaustion.” Sharing the same viewpoints is RP7 who has this to say; “Failure to portray the needed image can lead to image slippery which can lead to limited contract renewal, emotional exhaustion and high stress levels.” RP2’s quote aligns with compensatory control model which if not properly managed, impression management may result in stress and a decline in wellbeing, linked to costs related to physical and psychological (fatigue). In addition, a number of academics have linked impression management with unfavorable consequences for workers, including social anxiety, worry of receiving a poor performance review, low self-esteem, and fear of failing (Schlenker & Leary, 2022; Leary, Kowalski & Campbell, 2021).

Over Working

The study's findings show that if not properly administered, impression management can lead to over working. Hence, RP12 stated: ‘Impression management if not properly managed can lead to overworking to impress supervisors.’ Sharing the same sentiments is Klotz (2014), who contends that having to control one's emotions in line with expectations can be taxing and is thus regarded as stressful. Additionally, Berman (2014) argues that managing one's image through different impression management practices can be risky and result in overworking.

Contribution of Study

This study adds value to the disciplines of human resource management theoretically, methodologically, and practically. Extensive research on impression management has been conducted developed nations. However, little is known about the effectiveness of impression management in improving the work experiences of casual workers in a developing nation like Zimbabwe. From the perspective of developing nation, the current study is unique in that it has provided distinctive theoretical contributions, new themes and concepts concerning the effectiveness of impression management in improving work experiences of casual workers. Methodologically, it appears that most research on impression management has been carried out in the global north using quantitative techniques. The use of a qualitative research technique in this study provides new and different insights into how impression management might enhance the experiences of casual workers. Practically, the study would help a number of organizations and human resource actors. Human resource professionals would benefit from this study by becoming aware of impression management practices utilized by workers and may dissuade workers from exhibiting impressions that could be detrimental to the company. For employees, this study will make them aware that engaging in impression management in some cases will lead to mental exhaustion, consume their self-control resources, thus weakening their self-control ability. It is also anticipated that the data gathered from this study will make casual workers to be aware of the impression management behaviors which may destroy the positive image created by previous impression management.

Limitations and Direction of Future Studies

We understand that there were significant limitations to this study; therefore, care should be taken when interpreting the results. The study's sample size was limited to only twelve casual workers. A bigger sample size could have yielded different results and shown additional information. Our specific research site of one global firm in Zimbabwe raises questions regarding generalization of the research findings to other global firms in Zimbabwe. Current and prospective scholars in the subject area should conduct comparable studies in Zimbabwe with other organizations that were not sampled in this study. Future studies on impression management should also place a strong emphasis on the effectiveness of impression management on other forms of work contracts.

CONCLUSION

The prevalent of impression management is anchored on its effectiveness in improving the work experiences of atypical workers. The study's results show that many casual employees' lived work experiences were improved at the global organization in Zimbabwe due to impression management. In general, engaging in impression management lessen job insecurity. However, a few research participants blamed impression management for problems related to emotional exhaustion, image slippery and over working. Overall, it can be claimed that impression management is effective in improving work experiences of many casual workers at the case global organisation in Zimbabwe. Organizations are therefore recommended to encourage workers to build impressions around their genuine competencies which are beneficial to the organization. The study also recommends casual workers to properly manage their impressions because if not properly managed, impression management may lead to mental exhaustion, over-working, and image slippery.

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Author's Contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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