

Ethical Leadership and Impression Management in Educational Institutions

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The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between perception of ethical leadership and impression management of subordinates, in the educational institution setting. Ethical leadership is forwarded as a leadership style that leads subordinates to ethical decision making and ethical behaviors. It was hypothesized that perception of ethical leadership would lead to impression management behaviors by subordinates. The study utilized the manipulative function of impression management, which was presenting oneself in a positive light, in order to be positively evaluated by others. Using revised ethical leadership scale and impression management scale, through a survey (N=176), in private for-profit schools across Islamabad. It was found that when subordinates strongly perceived school principals as ethical leaders, it significantly increased their impression management behaviors. The effect of time spent with the supervisor was found to be insignificant. The findings suggested that the effect of ethical leadership was not always positive on subordinates' behavior. The results and their implication were discussed for better understanding of impression management behaviors in the organization, along with the limitations and future directions.

Key words: Impression management, ethical Leadership, self-presentation, self-promotion, educational Institutions

Educational institutions serve as the first steps towards moral development of students. How in these institutions, employees, particularly teachers involve themselves in impression management behaviors, becomes an important question to answer. Impression management can be defined "as those behaviors individuals employ to protect their self-images, influence the way they are perceived by significant others, or both" (Wayne & Liden, 1995, p. 232), and it is also employed to build, and maintain an image of oneself as perceived by other individuals (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 2013). Impression management behaviors can lead to positive social attention, organizational benefits, power, and access to organizational resources (Highhouse, Brooks, & Wang, 2016).

It is important to recognize the factors in an educational setting that affect impression management behavior of teachers, as teachers' behaviors implicitly provide guidance to students, about how to behave in others' presence, particularly, of superiors (e.g., principal and parents). Ball (2000) is of the view that in educational institutions, the use of control and the importance of evaluation by others leads to a certain kinds of attitudes, in promoting impression management. More so, students are close observers of teachers' actions and behaviors, and can distinguish between the authentic and inauthentic behaviors of their teachers due to the proximity.

Educational institutions are identified as the character builders of the children and youth, and for this reason, there remains a high normative pressure on teachers, from administration; in particular from principals to show socially or morally appropriate behavior. Mostly, organizational rewards and punishment are tied to both good behavior and performance on the job. This setting serves as the breeding ground of positive self-presentations and can lead to manipulative impression management behaviors. The job of a teacher

is complex and different from other jobs that have set routines. A teacher has to constantly respond to the needs of the students and that of the school administration. There are times when these two demands create conflict and ambiguity. Supervisors can either reduce conflict and or they may create expectations that are contradictory in nature, increasing the ambiguity and conflict (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Mitchell, 1990). Impression management can be used to affect leaders' liking and consequentially, performance evaluations. Previous studies have found how impression management can lead to positive performance appraisals by supervisor (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008; Ingold, Kleinmann, König, & Melchers, 2015). Thus, it may be interesting to study if subordinates engage themselves in impression management in the presence of an ethical principal in the school. Ethical leadership can be defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison 2005, p. 120). It is based on two components, 'moral person' and 'moral manager'. Moral person values honesty, is trustworthy, makes fair and principled decisions, shows care and concern about employees and society (Brown & Treviño, 2006). They pay attention to employees' problems and remain committed to personal morality. On the other hand, moral manager is proactively engaged in influencing employees' ethical behavior through deliberate and visible role modeling of ethical behaviors, and through using organizational reward and punishment, to make employees responsible for their actions (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

The interaction between a leader who is ethical and who expects ethical behavior from employees increases the normative pressure on teachers. This context can lead teachers to positive self-presentation and impression management behaviors. Thus, our study was concerned with self-promotion (e.g., appearing competent, taking credit of positive events, and accomplishments) behavior of teachers in moral terms. Thus, the objective of the study was to find out whether ethical leader (principal) contributes to the impression

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management of subordinates (teachers) in elementary, primary, and secondary for-profit schools in Islamabad.

Ethical Academic Leaders

School leaders are the powerful motivators and strongly affect the quality of education and the learning of pupils (Belchetz & Leithwood, 2007). Still, ethical problems in educational setting are being identified, where school administrators and students are involved in cheating and dishonest evaluations (Winston, 2007). Ethical leadership style has been forwarded to counter organizations' declining morality. According to the researchers (Brown et al., 2005; Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003; Treviño, Hartman, & Brown, 2000), an ethical leader is both morally inspiring and at the same time, proactively seeks to control others' morality. There has been a recent debate about the role of educational leaders as ethical leaders in diverse societies and in a society with diverse mix of people (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). The ethical code and behavior of school leaders serve as guide to an emerging society (Shapiro & Stefkovich). On the other hand, Leary and Kowalski (1990) pointed out leaders as a potential motivation for impression management, particularly, leading to self-promotion behavior of employees.

In the last decade, the field of leadership and especially ethical leadership has attracted much attention (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). Ethical leadership has found to be related to several important employee outcomes (for review see Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Treviño et al. (2003) stressed that ethical leadership highlights the prominence of the leader's moral message, building the perception of ethical leadership. This salience is established through exemplifying morally appropriate behavior, particularly new and unexpected behavior.

Impression Management Strategies

Impression management remained a highly engaging subject, which captured the imagination of management scientists (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 2013). Organizational behavior researchers studied impression management in relation with many variables such as employee ingratiation, organizational failure, career strategies, business ethics, personal space invasion, political skills, organizational politics, organizational citizenship behavior, leadership, job performance, and during job interviews (e.g., Ingold et al., 2015). Employees use variety of impression management techniques to be evaluated positively by the supervisor.

Moral impression management is a part of assertive impression management and can be understood as exemplification. Recently, Neural psychology also has demonstrated that 'faking good' comes to humans by default rather than faking bad (Farrow, Burgess, Wilkinson, & Hunter, 2015). There are multiple ways the employees use moral impression management in the organization. Leary and Kowalski (1990) argued that individuals are involved in impression management when they are evaluated by someone who controls the valued outcome. It is also found that employees use impression management to show organizational citizenship behavior (Takeuchi, Bolino, & Lin, 2015). Individuals look for events when the use of impression management is most appropriate (M. Bolino, Long, & Turnley, 2016). It is argued that organizations demand moral behavior from their employees and this demand alters the understanding of morality itself (Hosmer, 1994). Gardner and Martinko (1988) showed that how school principals used impression management by verbal self-presentation to present themselves differently to different audience. It was also found that the individuals who used impression management gained permanent positions and promotions at job (Zhao & Liden, 2011). Also, employees try to demonstrate the congruence between the values of

organizational and their personal values (Kurman, 2003; Sandal et al., 2014). Thus, individuals in organizations use different techniques to promote positive self-image

Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Impression Management

It has also been argued that self-presentation can be a result of social demands (Ziegler, MacCann, & Roberts, 2011) of socially appropriate behavior, which is expected by organizations (Jansen, König, Stadelmann, & Kleinmann, 2012). Employees behave in a socially appropriate manner as it might lead to positive appraisal of job performance, pay increments and other organizational rewards (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003), and it is found to influence supervisors' evaluation of employees (Barrick, Shaffer, & DeGrassi, 2009).

Many studies found the positive relationship between impression management and performance ratings (e.g., Sutton, Baldwin, Wood, & Hoffman, 2013). According to Attribution theory (Green & Mitchell, 1979) when impression management behaviors are successfully acted out, it positively affects supervisor attribution for that subordinate. This attribution has informative value for supervisors in the process of categorization of subordinates (Schneider, 1991). In particular, liking a subordinate may lead supervisor to rate his/her performance as positive (Sutton et al., 2013). It was also highlighted that superiors may give more resources to the liked subordinate than to the disliked subordinates, contributing to the better job performance of the liked subordinate (Feldman, 1986).

Years Spent with Supervisor and Impression Management

Research indicates that impression management behaviors affects performance appraisals in both the short run and the long run (Duarte, Goodson, & Klich, 1994) and researchers have studied both the short term effect and long term effects of impression management. According to the dyadic theory (Graen & Scandura, 1987), the relationship between subordinate and supervisor changes over time and goes through three stages: role taking, role making and role routinization. It states that impression management behaviors can influence first stage but not the later stages. Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell (1993) also pointed out that once impressions are formed, these are resistant to change. Thus, employees try hard to impress supervisors at earlier stages of a relationship, at the same time, it may be possible that impression management behaviors at earlier stages stabilizes over time and becomes a permanent and prominent characteristic of the relationship between subordinate and supervisor.

Findings of Bolino, Klotz, and Daniels (2014) revealed that impression management behaviors that promoted oneself were successful both in the short and long run, affecting supervisor's rating of the employees positively. Hence, it was hypothesized:

H₁: Stronger perception of ethical leadership positively predicts the impression management of the subordinates.

H₂: More years spent with the same supervisor positively predicts the impression management of subordinates.

Method

Participants and Procedure

First, a list of schools in Islamabad was created, through online available listings. From this list, the schools bearing even serial numbers were contacted to participate in the study. Using this meth-

od, 40 schools were contacted in total. Out of 40 schools, 25 schools showed their willingness to participate in the study. Once the positive intentions of the organizations for the study were established, the researcher distributed a survey questionnaires among employees. Out of 207 teachers who participated, 176 completed the measures (see Table 1 for demographic detail).

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Participants (N = 176)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage%
Gender	Female	156	88.6%
	Male	18	10.2%
Age	26-Below	63	35.8%
	33-26	61	34.7%
	34- Above	52	29.5%
Education Level	Masters	116	65.9%
	Bachelors	53	30.1%
	Intermediate	2	1.1%
	MPhil, MS	5	2.8%
Level of Class Taught	Primary	95	54.0%
	Teacher		
	Secondary	44	25.0%
	Teacher		
	Preschool	37	21.0%
	Teacher		

Measures

The perception of ethical leader was measured through revised Ethical Leadership Scale (RELS), which is built on Ethical leadership Scale (ELS) (Brown et al., 2005): a ten-item scale ($\alpha = .88$). In the revised version, seven items were added to the scale along with the 10 original items of ELS, to make the scale more representative of the ethical leadership construct. The sample items included: *Provides rewards to employees for ethically good behavior*, *Conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner*, and *cannot be trusted (reverse coded)*. Each item was answered with a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1= *Strongly Agree* and 5= *Strongly Disagree*. The Cronbach

alpha value of revised ethical leadership scale was $\alpha = .93$.

The subscale of "Impression Management" of Balanced inventory of desirable responding scale (Paulhus, 1988) was used to capture social desirability. Social desirability "refers to the need for social approval and acceptance and the belief that it can be attained by means of culturally acceptable and appropriate behaviors" (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964, p. 109). In the field of ethics, impression management techniques are recognized as similar to social desirability tactics (Kacmar & Tucker, 2016). Social desirability bias is produced when the desire to be socially desirable distorts individuals' view of themselves and others (Dalton & Ortegren, 2011), but the central point of the impression management tactics is how individual appears to other individuals (Randall & Fernandes, 1991; Turnley & Bolino, 2001). The impression management in this study is measured by the sub-scale of impression management of Balanced Inventory of desirable responding (BIDR) (Paulhus, 1988). Sample items of this scale included "*I am a completely rational person*", "*I don't gossip about other people's business*". The α value of impression management scale was $\alpha = .70$.

Results

The descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables included in the study are presented in Table 2. Notably impression management had a significant positive relationship with ethical leadership ($r = .39, p < .01$).

It has been found that age, gender, and education level are also related to impression management. To check whether common method bias, which may occur due to the measurement method, has affected this study, Harman's single factor test was used. Common method variance can either inflate and deflate the relationship between study factors (Avolio, Yammarino, & Bass, 1991). To do this, both the items of ethical leadership (17 items) and impression management (19 items) were entered into an exploratory factor analysis using un-rotated principle component analysis. Common method variance is supposed to be a problem if the variance is greater than 50% (Eichhorn, 2014). The results of the analysis revealed no more than 26.2 % variance explained by one factor.

Hierarchical regression analysis results are presented in Table 3. All control variables were included in the model. There were two steps. In the first step, all control variables, and in the second step perception of ethical leadership and years spent with supervisor were entered as independent variables in the equation (see Table 3).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables (N=176)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	30.64	7.20	.279**					
2. Gender	-	-	-					
3. Education Level	-	-	-.168*	-.08				
4. Level of Class Taught	-	-	.004	.019	-.104			
5. Years spent with same supervisor	1.90	1.79	.401**	-.062	.049	-.012		
6. Ethical Leadership	80.52	18.64	-.344**	-.422**	.075	-.041	-.076	
7. Impression Management	64.62	12.13	.074	-.113	.013	-.04	.089	.388**

Note: n = 176, Dummy Variables: Gender (Female = 1, Male = 2), Education (M.S. or M.Phil. = 1, Masters = 2, Bachelors = 3, Intermediate = 4) & Level of Class Taught (Primary = 1, Secondary = 2, Elementary = 3).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

There were two models, only model 2 was significant ($F(2,164) = 18.02, p < .0005$), while model 1 ($F(4,166) = 1.14, p = .341$) was insignificant.

Table 3
Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis (N=176)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.12	.22*
Gender	-.14 [†]	.03
Education Level	.02	.01
Level of Class Taught	-.04	-.02
Years spent with same supervisor		.04
Ethical Leadership		.48***
R ²	.03	.20
Adjusted R ²	.00	.17
R ² Change	.03	.17

Note: n = 176, Dummy Variables: Gender (Female = 1, Male = 2), Education (M.S. or M.Phil = 1, Masters = 2, Bachelors = 3, Intermediate = 4) & Level of Class Taught (Primary = 1, Secondary = 2, Elementary = 3).

*** $p < 0.005$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, [†] $p < 0.1$

The beta coefficient of age ($\beta = 0.22, p < .05$) and of ethical leadership ($\beta = 0.48, p < .0005$) in Model 2 showed that both of these variables made a unique contribution in explaining dependent variable. Ethical leadership had the strongest contribution. In Model 1, gender also contributed towards explaining impression management, but its effect was eroded once ethical leadership was entered into the equation. The value of the Part correlation coefficient of ethical leadership was .417 and of years spent with the same supervisor was 0.036. Squaring the Part correlation coefficients revealed that ethical leadership contributed 17.4% variance in the explanation of impression management, while years spent with the same supervisor contributed 0.13% variance towards impression management.

Also, to further study the effect of time on impression management, the variable of years spent with the same supervisor was divided into three classes of equal percentiles. It divided the variable into three groups; those who spent less than one year with the supervisor, almost two years with the same supervisor and more than two years with the same supervisor. ANOVA result was not significant $F(2,173) = 1.46, p = .23$. The mean scores of three groups revealed that those who spent more than two years ($M = 67.69, SD = 14.56$) had higher scores on impression management than the group which spent less than one year ($M = 63.85, SD = 12.29$) and which spent almost two years ($M = 63.76, SD = 9.89$), but the difference was not statistically significant.

Discussion

The stronger perception of ethical leadership was found to predict impression management behaviors positively. These effects existed only for teachers who perceived their leaders as ethical. Previously, leaders were found to motivate employees towards self-promotion (Bolino et al., 2016). This study added to

the research on impression management by showing that employees were also involved in moral impression management when presented with the ethical role model.

The reason why number of years spent with supervisor did not significantly predict impression management could be explained through the mechanism of moral reproach. Stouten, van Dijke, Mayer, De Cremer, and Euwema (2013) found that the stronger perception of leadership led to decreasing organizational citizenship behavior over time. As the upward social comparison increases, individual may perceive that the moral other is passing judgment on their behavior. Being morally inferior in comparison to ethical leader, individuals feel moral indignation, which leads to resentment, trivialization of and suspicion towards the moral other (Monin, 2007). This might be the reason why impression management behavior regresses over time.

It was also found that gender has slightly negative effect on impression management, showing that women were slightly more prone to impression management even when the effect of perceived ethical leadership was controlled. When ethical leader was introduced, the difference between genders was not found, but at the same time, age was found to be positively related to impression management, which showed the older employees were more careful about the appropriateness of their image in a socially desirable way.

Implications of the Study

This study is significant as it adds to the research on impression management. It shows that employees take cues from the role model about which kinds of behaviors are seen as desirable and then involves themselves in moral impression management. Thus, this study informs ethical academic leaders about the possible negative effect of the expectations of moral behavior from teachers. Though, ethical academic leaders provide example and present themselves as a role model, this role modeling can heightens the need for moral impression management. Impression management in academia is problematic as it increases in short term and may lead to moral reproach over time. This study highlights the complexity of exercising ethical leadership and how impression management undermines the value of honesty in the academic context.

The findings of this study throw a caution for academic leadership, as what they are trying to establish may not be taking place, but rather replaced by an image of a moral self, devoid of intrinsic moral desires. Leaders should share and seek meaningful information about employees and should develop resistance towards impression management behaviors, in order to protect the value of integrity and to avoid multiple kinds of biases in the organization, both at the end of leadership and subordinates. Teachers, on the other hand, should strive to achieve moral standards through intrinsic motivation, and should try to keep their integrity intact in the organization.

Limitations and Future Direction

One of the major limitations of the study was the small sample size, which affected the power to detect significant effects. In future, a larger sample should be drawn to study these relationships. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study. The longitudinal study would have led to more insightful findings. For this reason, future research should study long term

relationship between ethical leadership, impression management, social comparison, and moral reproach. It would be particularly important to see how newly hired employees as compared to older employees engage themselves in the impression management behaviors. The relationships between impression management and performance evaluation by supervisors, teachers' impression management behavior and students' integrity should also be studied. The integrity of teachers and academic leaders should also be studied to see when and at what point, integrity is compromised by using moral impression management behaviors. It would also be interesting to study the perceived moral self and impression management behaviors of teachers.

Conclusion

It was found that perceived ethical leadership was significantly related to impression management behaviors of teachers. Higher the teachers scored on the perception of their principals as ethical, more they were engaged in impression management behaviors. The effect of time was not significant but it led us to better understand the complexity of ethical leadership style. This study paves the way for understanding impression management in relation to the moral leadership particularly in the context of educational institutions and identify the need to find other variables that contribute to this relationship.

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