Image, Professional Reputation, and Impression Management for Managers

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Abstract

A manager's image is important to effective performance to gain support from others toward accomplishing goals. Reputation, a key element of image along with impression management, is beneficial for influencing stakeholders and crucial for career advancement. By creating a personal brand as a portion of a professional reputation, the manager can establish uniqueness that influences others to aid in his/her career advancement.Impression management represents "in-the-moment" perceptions of those with whom a manager interacts. The manager's goal is to influence others through creating a persona that gains support for what is desired to be accomplished through face-to-face interaction. While it may be beneficial for the manager to view oneself as being "on stage," authenticity of verbal and nonverbal behaviors is paramount. "Play acting" can result in being viewed as phony which can negatively impact a reputation and be detrimental to achieving the support for the task at hand.

Keywords:image, professional reputation of managers, impression management, and influencing others

1.0 Introduction

A manager's image is composed of two elements: (1) professional reputation that represents perceptions people have based on past actions and information, and (2) in-the-moment impressions (referred to as impression management) through perceptions formed when experiencing the manager face-to-face. These two elements are intertwined in that a manager's professional reputation, as known to the person with whom interactions are taking place, can impact the perceptions of the manager's behaviors during the interactions. The impressions formed from this face-to-face interaction with a manager, as communicated to others, can become a part of her/hisfuture reputation.

1.1 Reputation

Reputation is the impressions others have of you and what they think of you professionally and personally (Brown, 2016; Komisarjevsky, 2012). Building a positive reputation can be complex in that the manager does not have complete control over its development (Men, 2011). It is important to understand that reputation is defined solely by others and not by the intentions of the manager (Warren, 2017).The professional reputation of a manager is formed based on prior actions directly observed by others through what they communicate about their perceptions of the manager's actions. A manager's reputation is developed over a considerable period of time—often years. A given individual's perception of a manager's reputation may be formed completely by communications from other people, social media, and/or traditional media and not based on any actual face-to-face contact with the manager. The importance of a manager's reputation is noted byHogan (2007) when he states, "Affection and status are granted on the basis of reputation—people hire us, fire us, marry us, loan us money, and otherwise support us based on our reputations" (p. 8). While a reputation is often developed over years, a single event can have a severe negative impact on it.

If a manager is being internally investigated by the companyfor a possible ethics violation, people may develop a strong negative reaction that tarnishes his/her reputation. Llopis (2014) recognizes the impact of a professional reputation in the context of a manager's image when stating, "Your leadership reputation is your most important valuable asset. A strong reputation makes it easier to earn respect from your peers and to advance your career goals" (p. 1).A manager's reputation is ultimately built on a foundation of character, communications, and trust. A description of these three attributes are:

1. **Character:** (a) values and how one lives these values; (b) being able to look at one's behaviors and decisions using long term thinking to consider their impacts; and (c) commitment to goals and making sure one follows through and completes them.
2. **Communications:** (a) must be open; (b) conducted in a manner that encourages input from others; (c) builds a culture that respects the viewpoints of others; (d) promotes meaningful engagements with others; (e) authentic so that the communications match one's actions; and (f) the ability to monitor one's own responses to situations so as not to be viewed as overly emotional.
3. **Trust:** (a) eliminating ambiguity through clarity of actions and words; (b) consistency of behaviors; (c) compassion through sincerely caring about others; (d) contributions through delivering the promised results; (e) competency through staying up-to-date on best practices and using evidenced-based decision-making; (f) commitment by sticking with decisions through adversity and seeing tasks through to completion; (g) connecting with people through sincerity, gratitude, and valuing others' contributions; and (h) owning up to what one does not know (Sherman, 2013; Freifield, 2011; Whitehurst, 2015).

Authenticity is critical to reputation. If the manager's behaviors are viewed as contrived and phony, reputation will be seriously damaged. At timesthere may be a fine line between a manager putting her/his best foot forward and being viewed as disingenuous. Critical to protecting a reputation is knowing where that line is and not crossing it.

Establishing a credible reputation "takes time, patience, and a commitment to working at building your reputation" (Whitehurst, 2015, p. 2). Managers should consider whether their influence comes from the position they hold or whether it truly comes from respect that they have earned. If it is the former, they should start working on the latter (Whitehurst, 2015). Whitehurst (2015) offers the following advice in the context of developing a credible reputation:

1. **Don't use phrases like "the boss wants it this way" or rely on hierarchical name dropping.** While that may get things done in the short term, it can curtail discussion that could provide beneficial input.
2. **Publicly recognize a great effort or contribution**. This can be a simple thank youe-mail in which you copy the whole team.
3. **Proactively ask for feedback and ideas on a specific topic.** You must respond to them all, but implement only the good ones. And don't just take the best ideas and move on; take every opportunity to reinforce the spirit of meritocracy by giving credit where it's due.
4. **Reward a high-performing member of your team with an interesting assignment, even if it is not in his/her usual area** (p. 2-3).

A proactive approach to managers developing the desired professional reputation is to pursue the concept of a personal "brand." Brand means the exceptional positive attributes of a manager that standout in comparison to others. It is others' perceptions of who the manager really is and for what she/he stands. With a personal brand,the manager is the only one who can truly manage, develop, and prompt the brand to evolve as desired.

1.2 Impression management (in-the-moment interactions)

Impression management is the process of representing oneself to others for creating the desired impression. This process includes using appearance, mannerisms, body language, and the setting to influence others with face-to-face interactions.It is an intentional goal-directed attempt to influence others. Impression management strives to establish a good first impression that becomes reality to those with whom the manager is interacting.It also includes attempting to persuade others of one's definition of the situation and the issues at hand (DeePak, 2014).

Impression management is neither inherently good nor bad. Most everyone engages in impression management on a regular basis because it is innate to social interactions. Most social situations involve two or more people attempting to persuade the other(s) regarding the definition of the situation and trying to influence to gain one'sdesired result.Goffman (1959)believes managers create impressions through two types of expressions:

1. **Expressions we give.** What one says, how one poses the situation, facial expressions, and intentionally controlling body language.
2. **Expressions we give off.** Behaviors over which one is sometimes less cognizant and are viewed as being inconsistent with what is stated because *body language* gives a different message (Goffman, 1959). A manager needs to effectively manage the expressions "we give off" so that verbal and nonverbal communications are congruent.

Goffman also advances, in the context of impression management, the concepts of front stage and back stage. *Front stage* is when managers are presenting self through a "performance" while interacting with other individuals to influence them to gain support for the topic at hand. *Back stage* is not done in the presence of the person a manager is trying to influence, but is expressed afterward in private. Back stage represents the manager's true feelings or behaviors about the situation that may differ from what was expressed in the front stage. Back stage behavior is the manager's reflections about the interaction from being on stage and expecting to behave in a particular manner (Goffman 1959).Managers must make sure they stay positive during the front stage and save criticisms for back stage reflections.Five common impression management strategies are:

1. **Ingratiation:** (a) the art of gaining acceptance and prompting others to like oneself, usually in the context of an ulterior motive; (b) opinion conformity (agreeing with others); (c) flattery; and (d) cautiously guarding what is stated (e.g., choosing words carefully).
2. **Intimidation:** (a) arousing fear in the person[s] with whom interacting; (b)controlling; (c) use of power from the position held; and (d) aggressively trying to obtain desired result.
3. **Supplication:** attempting to gain sympathy and attention by revealing faults, tribulations, and the difficulty of the situation.
4. **Self-promotion:** (a) taking credit for events; (b) making others aware of accomplishments; and (c) presenting strengths to prove competency. (If congruency does not exist between the information presented and the other person's perception of reality, this can be disastrous.)
5. **Exemplification:** (a) presenting one's moral worthiness; (b) displaying sincerity; (c) demonstrating dedication and responsibility to the issue at hand to show superiority; and (d) advocating being the "right" person for the job/task at hand (Goffman, 1959; DeePak, 2014; Bolino, Klotz, & Daniels, 2014).

2.0 Concluding Thoughts

A manager's professional reputation is paramount to credibility in his/her current position because it helps gain support and effort to accomplish goals and tasks at hand. A stellar professional reputation is critical for professional advancement. Developing a personally identifiable brand as a part of reputation makes a manager unique amongst other candidates for professional advancement. Perceptions of others created by the manager through the effective application of impression management in face-to-face interactions aid in getting people to support and help successfully complete tasks. The outcomes of successful application of impression management also contribute to positive inputs for the manager's reputation.A manager's image is a function of reputation and perceptions formulated through impression management. Through effective face-to-face interactions with others, positive perceptions help managers garner support for accomplishing goals in the present position. These positive perceptions of others will aid the manager in gaining professional reputation and, thus, be considered for advancement for future positions. Managers owe it to themselves to consciously work toward having an attractive professional image through reputation and impression management.

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