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IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT TACTICS OF PROTÉGÉS AND MENTORS' KNOWLEDGE-SHARING BEHAVIOR

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Given its contribution to organizational knowledge management, a mentoring program is considered to be beneficial for knowledge sharing within organizations. However, little is known about how this benefit occurs. Therefore we conducted an empirical study of protégés' impression management tactics and mentors' knowledge sharing with 209 people employed by organizations in China and obtained the following findings: (a) Protégés' mentor-focused and self-focused tactics were positively related to mentorship quality, whereas their job-focused tactics were unrelated to mentorship quality; (b) mentorship quality was positively related to the mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior, and (c) the relationship between the protégés' mentor-focused tactics and mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior was mediated by mentorship quality, as was the relationship between the protégés' self-focused tactics and mentors' behavior. The implications and limitations of the study are discussed, and directions for future research are suggested.

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Modern mentoring programs have evolved from traditional apprenticeships and have developed into an effective means of employee training and development (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Burke, McKeen, & McKenna; Gong, Chen, & Yang, 2014). An increasing number of enterprises have adopted mentoring programs. Scholars have also shown great interest in mentoring (e.g., Lee, Kim, Park & Alcazar-Bejerano, 2016; Park, Newman, Zhang, Wu, & Hooke, 2016). Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) stated that *mentors* are usually those staff members who have a certain power or status in an organization. They are in a position to give advice to, coach, or teach protégés, which, in turn, helps the latter in their career development. Ragins and Scandura (1999) argued that mentoring is an interchange and interactive process between mentors and protégés. Despite the obvious benefits of this process to the protégés' career development, the mentors can also derive some rewards from it. For example, by providing career support to protégés, mentors can form their authority, solidify their status in the organization, and earn interpersonal support from their protégés (Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2006). Moreover, by providing protégés with work experience and professional knowledge, mentors can also derive increased job satisfaction and sense of achievement (Burke et al., 1994). Swap, Leonard, Shields, and Abrams (2001) proposed that mentoring and storytelling are effective methods of organizational knowledge transfer, but few researchers have conducted an empirical examination of knowledge sharing in mentoring programs. Lankau and Scandura (2007) also suggested that in existing mentoring research, findings reported in studies on knowledge sharing have been ignored, and these form a very important aspect of mentoring research because the main purpose of mentoring programs is to help mentors and protégés learn from each other. Thus, combining the results of both knowledge-sharing research and mentoring research could enrich understanding of mentoring and contribute to knowledge-management theory.

In a mentoring program, protégés must rely on their mentors' guidance and support to improve their performance in, and fit with, the organization. Thus, protégés are likely to try and control their behavior in order to give their mentors a good impression and to gain more guidance and support from their mentors (Liu, Wang, & Wayne, 2015). This kind of behavior is called *impression management* (IM), which refers to the process by which a person uses particular tactics to influence others' perception of him/her and to impress others (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). Previous researchers have examined the effect of IM on recruitment interviews, performance evaluation, and organization citizenship behavior (Huang, Zhao, Niu, Ashford, & Lee, 2013; Roulin, Bangerter, &

Levashina, 2014), but the effect of IM in mentoring programs is yet to receive attention from researchers. Given the differences between mentors and their protégés—for example, in their individual characteristics, work habits, and personal values—the quality of the mentoring relationship may vary (Eby & Lockwood, 2005), in that the more similarities the mentor and protégé have, the higher will be the quality of the mentorship. There is also little known about whether or not protégés' IM tactics exert an impact on mentorship quality and then influence mentors' knowledge sharing. In addition, the focus in previous mentoring research has mostly been on the antecedents of mentoring provision from the mentors' perspective (Allen, Poteet, Russell, & Dobbins, 1997), rather than from the protégés' perspective. In the present study, we investigated how protégés' IM tactics would affect mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior through mentorship quality from the protégés' perspective.

Theory and Hypotheses

Impression Management Tactics and Mentorship Quality

Wayne and Ferris (1990) described three IM tactics: supervisor-focused, self-focused, and job-focused tactics. Given that our focus in this study was on the IM tactics exhibited by protégés to influence their mentors, we adapted supervisor-focused IM tactics to become mentor-focused IM tactics. This is consistent with approach used in the previous literature (Liu et al., 2015). In many studies researchers have found that subordinates use IM tactics to maintain their image with their supervisor, in order to receive a positive performance evaluation (Huang, Zhao, Niu, Ashford, & Lee, 2014). In the mentoring context, protégés try to impress their mentor to ensure that the latter continues to like them and to provide them with guidance and support (Liu et al., 2015). Although the general purpose of IM is to shape one's own desired image, differing IM tactics may not always result in desirable outcomes (Swider, Boswell, & Zimmerman, 2011). Supervisor-focused and self-focused IM tactics of subordinates are positively related to the supervisors' evaluation of their subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior (Bolino, Varela, Bande, & Turnley, 2006) and to the provision of mentoring (Liu et al., 2015), whereas job-focused IM tactics of subordinates are negatively related to the supervisors' performance ratings (Wayne & Liden, 1995), procedural-justice evaluation (Dulebohn & Ferris, 1999), and career success (Judge & Bretz, 1994). However, no research has yet been conducted to establish whether or not protégés' IM tactics have an effect on the mentorship quality.

Mentor-focused IM tactics refer to the protégé's interpersonal attraction behavior, such as praising the achievements of the mentor or taking an interest in the mentor's personal life. These tactics are also regarded as ingratiation behavior

(Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008). Wayne and Liden (1995) found that supervisor-focused IM tactics can enhance the admiration of the supervisors by the subordinates and can increase the supervisor's perception of similarity between himself/herself and his/her subordinates. Wayne and Kacmar (1991) observed that those who display ingratiation behavior are likely to receive a more favorable performance evaluation and more job-related support than are those who do not. In the mentoring context, when protégés use mentor-focused IM tactics, mentors might feel that they are respected by their protégés. This, in turn, increases the mentors' self-esteem and their positive impression of their protégés, thereby facilitating trust between protégés and mentors (Lee & Choi, 2003). Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1a: Protégés' mentor-focused impression management tactics will be positively related to mentorship quality.

Self-focused IM tactics refer to the protégés' self-presentation behavior of being polite and acting as model employees to obtain their mentors' recognition and admiration (Bolino et al., 2006). Protégés' self-focused IM tactics can impress their mentors through behavior characterized by modesty, kindness, and diligence, which are key desirable attributes in a mentoring relationship (Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). As a result, such behaviors may increase the mentors' fondness for their protégés (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). In addition, in their interaction with their mentors, protégés may try to be respectful, or may work especially hard when mentors are watching (Bolino et al., 2006). When protégés engage frequently in self-focused IM tactics this behavior is prone to make the mentor feel respected, which, in turn, will enhance the mentor's trust in, and fondness for, the protégé. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1b: Protégés' self-focused impression management tactics will be positively related to mentorship quality.

Job-focused IM tactics constitute a type of self-promotion behavior, and are used to promote an image of competence (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). In the mentoring context, the term refers to protégés' behavior of capturing the mentor's recognition and admiration through hard work and responsible behavior, such as emphasizing their work performance or arriving early at the workplace (Liu et al., 2015). The main purpose of job-focused IM tactics is to deliver information about one's job performance to others (Bolino et al., 2006). Employees who use these tactics attempt to claim credit for positive outcomes, to disassociate themselves from negative results, or to make these results appear less serious (Liu et al., 2015), in an effort to make themselves appear more competent. However, the outcome is not always as the employees expected. The key to making supervisors recognize their subordinates' true capability level is through intensive interaction and mutual understanding (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003). Ferris, Judge, Rowland, and Fitzgibbons (1994) found that when protégés use

job-focused IM tactics they do not earn the supervisors' fondness by doing so, and this behavior does not lead to a more favorable evaluation of their performance by the supervisor. By demonstrating job-focused IM tactics, subordinates focus on the job, but not on the person (supervisor or self). Thus, the lack of interaction and communication with the supervisor means that trust and respect are not facilitated under these circumstances (Lee & Choi, 2003). The same could be true for mentors and protégés. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1c: Protégés' job-focused impression management tactics will be negatively related to mentorship quality.

Mentorship Quality and Knowledge-Sharing Behavior

Sharing information and knowledge with protégés is one of the basic approaches for mentors to provide guidance and support to help protégés' personal growth and career development (Kwan, Liu, & Yim, 2011; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). However, not all mentors are willing to share their knowledge, and we argued that the mentors' willingness to share their knowledge would be based on the quality of the mentorship with their protégés.

According to leader–member exchange theory (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), the relationship that leaders establish with their subordinates in order to exchange resources differs in quality (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). The quality of LMX is built on mutual trust and respect, as well as on a strong sense of obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Graves & Luciano, 2013). Moreover, the higher the level of trust the greater is the likelihood of leaders sharing information/knowledge (Samadi, Wei, Wan Yusoff, 2015), of fewer interpersonal conflicts, and of more cooperation with subordinates (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Hence, based on LMX theory, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 2: Mentorship quality will be positively related to mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior.

The Mediating Role of Mentorship Quality

According to LMX theory, leaders establish different relationships based on the attributes of subordinates and the interactions that the leader has with their subordinates (Huang, Shi, Xie, & Wang, 2015). A high-quality exchange relationship requires reciprocal behavior and mutually beneficial perceptions between supervisor and subordinates (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997; Jha & Jha, 2013). Individuals tend to regard knowledge as their own significant resource (Davenport, 1997), and they are unwilling to share it with others unless there is a high-quality exchange relationship (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Based on the understanding above, and combining the previous analyses and hypotheses, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 3a: Mentorship quality will mediate the relationship between protégés' mentor-focused impression management tactics and mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior.

Hypothesis 3b: Mentorship quality will mediate the relationship between protégés' self-focused impression management tactics and mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior.

Hypothesis 3c: Mentorship quality will mediate the relationship between protégés' job-focused impression management tactics and mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior.

Method

Sample and Procedure

We collected data from members of the staff of four foreign-invested enterprises that had adopted mentoring programs in Shanghai, China. We asked the personnel in the human resources department of each enterprise to distribute survey forms randomly to protégés, which they did in line with their company procedures. To avoid common method bias, participants completed the survey on three occasions with an interval of a month between each. Participants completed the surveys at their workplace, and there was no specific designated location for doing so. At Time 1, we asked the participants to supply demographic information about themselves and their mentors, and about IM tactics, including mentor-focused, self-focused, and job-focused tactics. We distributed 280 survey forms and received 262 valid returns, an effective return rate of 93.57%. At Time 2, the participants answered items regarding the quality of mentorship with their mentors and 227 of the 262 participants returned their survey forms, an effective return rate of 86.64%. At Time 3, information on knowledge-sharing behavior was collected from the 227 participants who had returned valid response forms at Time 2. After removing 18 invalid/incomplete survey forms, we obtained 209 valid responses, an effective return rate of 92.07% from the 227 samples, or 74.64% of the original 280 people who had received survey forms at Time 1.

Among the participants, 43.5% of the protégés were men and 56.5% were women, and 56.5% of the mentors were men, and 43.5% were women. The average age of the protégés was 27.61 years (SD = 3.425, ranging from 20 to 35 years), and the average age of the mentors was 38.18 years (SD = 7.373, ranging from 25 to 58 years). In terms of education level, 7.7% of the participants had a college degree or lower academic qualification, 81.8% had a bachelor's degree, and 10.5% had a master's degree. Among the mentors, 29.2% had a college degree, 46.9% had a bachelor's degree, and 23.9% had a masters' degree or postgraduate academic qualification. Of the mentors, 80.4% were the immediate supervisors of the protégés, and 92.8% had previous mentoring experience.

Among the mentors 90.9% of them mentored their protégés at least once a week, 49.8% mentored their protégés more than three times a week, and the average period of time since the mentoring relationship had started was 16.56 months (SD = 9.521).

Measures

We translated all English-version items into Chinese and checked them with previous studies that had been conducted in Chinese to make sure the translation was equivalent. In addition, before the survey we asked researchers who were experienced in the field to review our scales to ensure the validity and reliability of all the measures in our research context. We employed 5-point Likert-type scales for all main variables, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*), to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Impression management tactics. We adopted the 17-item scale of IM tactics developed by Bolino et al. (2006), but changed the words "supervisor" and "subordinate" to "mentor" and "protégé" in the items. We retained all other content. The Cronbach's α was .784 for mentor-focused IM tactics; .769 for self-focused IM tactics; .849 for job-focused IM tactics.

Mentorship quality. We adopted the seven-item scale developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) to measure LMX to measure mentorship quality but changed the words "supervisor" and "subordinate" to "mentor" and "protégé." Cronbach's α was .809.

Knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing was measured using the five-item scale from the study of Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee (2005). The Cronbach's α for this measure was .872.

Control variables. According to the method used in previous studies, we controlled the differences between mentors and protégés in terms of gender, age, education level, whether or not the mentors were the protégés' immediate supervisors (1 represented yes, 0 represented no), mentoring duration (in months), and frequency of mentoring (1 represented *less than once a month*, 2 represented *once a month*, 3 represented *once biweekly*, 4 represented *once a week*, 5 represented *twice a week*, and 6 represented *more than three times a week*).

Results

We evaluated the structural validity of all the variables using confirmatory factor analysis with Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998). According to the fit indices of root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the results showed that the hypothesized five-factor model (χ^2/df = 1.642, RMSEA

Table 1. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis of Study Variables*

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender difference	0.129	0.517	-										
2. Age difference	10.565	7.114	.049	-									
3. Education difference	0.148	1.093	-.060	-.076	-								
4. Supervisor or not	0.800	0.398	.054	-.150*	-.021	-							
5. Mentoring duration	16.560	9.521	.003	-.058	-.022	.035	-						
6. Mentoring frequency	5.100	1.083	-.081	-.120	-.098	-.012	.056	-					
7. Mentor-focused tactics	4.012	0.545	.002	.050	-.028	.051	.045	.050	-				
8. Self-focused tactics	4.218	0.484	-.113	.028	-.059	.079	.063	.022	.332**	-			
9. Job-focused tactics	3.825	0.560	.045	-.042	-.063	.087	.056	-.019	.424**	.391**	-		
10. Mentorship quality	4.083	0.514	-.122	.003	.072	.215**	.012	.108	.630**	.390**	.374**	-	
11. Knowledge sharing	4.195	0.465	-.155*	-.014	.110	.094	.059	.188**	.388**	.527**	.157**	.611**	-

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; $N = 209$.

= .056, GFI = .926, CFI = .964, TLI = .953) was significantly superior to the other models (four-factor, three-factor, two-factor, and one-factor models). This indicated that the data could be effectively identified by five factors.

In Table 1 the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of all the key variables are presented. As shown in the table, mentor-focused IM tactics, self-focused IM tactics, and job-focused IM tactics were positively correlated to mentorship quality and knowledge-sharing behavior. Mentorship quality and knowledge-sharing behavior were positively correlated. These results provided initial support for Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 1c, and 2.

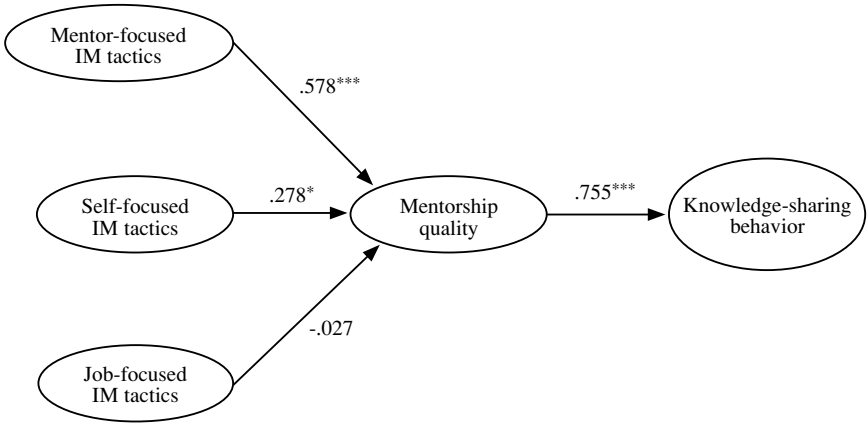

Figure 1. *Results of structural equation modeling on the effect of impression management tactics on mentorship quality and knowledge-sharing behavior.*
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. IM = impression management.
Model fit: chi-square = 266.256, *df* = 167, RMSEA = .053, CFI = .931, TLI = .920.

We performed structural equation modeling to test our hypotheses. The results are displayed in Figure 1. The protégés' IM tactics, including both mentor-focused and self-focused IM tactics, had a significant positive impact on mentorship quality, whereas job-focused IM tactics had no effect on mentorship quality. Thus, H1a and H1b were supported, whereas H1c was not supported. Mentorship quality was positively related to mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior. This result supported H2.

We used Mplus to demonstrate the bootstrapping method with 1,000-time iteration and 95% confidence interval. The results are shown in Table 2. The mediating effect of mentorship quality on the relationship between protégés' mentor-focused IM tactics and mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior, and between protégés' self-focused IM tactics and mentors' knowledge-sharing

behavior is prominent (i.e., 0 was not included in the lower 5% and upper 5%). By contrast, the mediating effect was not apparent on the relationship between protégés' job-focused IM tactics and mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior (i.e., 0 was included in the lower 5% and upper 5%). Thus, we concluded that H3a and H3b were supported, whereas H3c was not supported.

Table 2. *Results of Bootstrapping for Mediating Effects of Mentorship Quality on the Relationship Between Protégés' Impression Management Tactics and Knowledge-Sharing Behavior*

	Estimate	*SE*	Est./*SE*	*p*	95% Confidence interval	
					LL	UL
MF→MQ→KSB	0.437	0.109	4.022	.000	0.290	0.650
SF→MQ→KSB	0.210	0.124	1.686	.092	0.046	0.452
JF→MQ→KSB	-0.020	0.069	-0.297	.766	-0.146	0.075

Note. MF = Mentor-focused IM tactics, SF = Self-focused IM tactics, JF = Job-focused IM tactics, MQ = Mentorship Quality, KSB = Knowledge-sharing Behavior.

Discussion

In this study we linked IM and mentoring research and contributed to the fields of both mentoring and knowledge management through the following: First, existing mentoring studies have mainly been conducted in a western context and, thus, our study is a pioneering work because it represents an in-depth investigation in the Chinese context. Second, we examined mentorship quality from the protégés' perspective and analyzed protégés' IM tactics in relation to mentorship quality and mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior. Although scholars have examined the antecedents of mentorship quality in previous studies (Allen et al., 2006), only a few have adopted the IM perspective. Moreover, previous mentorship researchers have concentrated on mentors' perspective, and only a few studies have been conducted from the protégés' perspective (e.g., Lee & Jeong, 2013; Liu, Kwan, & Mao, 2012; Son & Kim, 2013). Third, we adopted LMX (Wayne & Ferris, 1990) to present mentorship quality and discussed its role as a mediator between protégés' IM tactics and mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior. Our findings contribute to the LMX research stream and provide a new direction for future mentorship quality studies.

Reasons that our hypotheses concerning protégés' job-focused tactics were not supported may be as follows: among the three types of tactic, job-focused tactics have less impact on mentorship quality, and a suppression effect (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) may be involved, because the correlations among the three tactics were significant. Furthermore, this lack of support for our hypotheses on protégés' job-focused tactics may inspire future researchers to look for possible

moderators. We conducted our research in China, and it may be that national culture is a moderator as China is a society where there are special interpersonal relationships—guanxi. For example, a worker who concentrates on his own job without interaction with others in the company will more readily be treated unfavorably in China than in a society where there the relationships are not based on guanxi.

This study has some managerial implications for mentoring programs. First, to promote mentorship quality organizations should provide opportunities for mentors and protégés to communicate frequently. Second, organizations should encourage protégés to demonstrate their willingness to learn and to seize opportunities to learn from their mentors. Organizations should also guide protégés toward being proactive in mentoring programs and demonstrating behaviors, such as respecting mentors, clarifying the mentors' expectations/requirements, and then working hard to fulfill them, thus creating a good impression with their mentors and obtaining their trust and support.

This study has some limitations. First, the survey forms were distributed only to people employed by enterprises in Shanghai, China, and only knowledge workers participated in the survey. Thus, in future studies researchers should expand the sample size and should survey other types of employees. Second, in this study we did not consider moderator variables, such as the mentors' attribution of protégés' behavior, which may affect mentorship quality and mentors' knowledge-sharing behavior. Third, in this study we collected data on all variables only from the protégés' perspective, and it might be better that data for some variables (e.g., mentorship quality) is provided by mentors. Although we tried to collect data on three separate occasions in order to avoid common method bias, possible common method bias still cannot be ruled out. We suggest future researchers collect data on the variables from multiple sources.

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